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Empowering people to create happy, lasting, character-based marriages—the foundation of a prosperous, unified world

Workshop: The Blessing of Strong, Happy Marriages

Sponsored by:

“The Spiritual Assembly should always be concerned that the believers in its community are being deepened in their understanding of the Bahá’í concept of marriage, especially the young people, so that the very thought of divorce will be abhorrent to them.” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, #1304)

Presenter:

Potential Schedule: (Request Word file so that you can edit this as needed. Request consultation on content as needed.)

3:00-3:30 p.m.	Welcoming; Music; Devotions
3:30-4:00 p.m.	Bahá’í Marriage and Bahá’í Marriage Laws
4:00-5:00 p.m.	Character as a Foundation of Marriage
5:00-6:00 p.m.	Pot-Luck Meal
6:00-7:00 p.m.	Dating, Courting, and Chastity
7:00-7:30 p.m.	The Process of Parental Consent
7:30-8:00 p.m.	Wrap-up and Unity-Building Activity

“Careful preparation for marriage is an essential first step in the preservation of Bahá’í marriage.”
 (Introduction to *Preserving Bahá’í Marriages* compilation, item 3)

Why Is Bahá'í Marriage Important?

- **Marriage is a foundational element for all human society**

“The Bahá'í Teachings do not only encourage marital life, considering it the natural and normal way of existence for every sane, healthy and socially-conscious and responsible person, but raise marriage to the status of a divine institution, its chief and sacred purpose being the perpetuation of the human race—which is the very flower of the entire creation—and its elevation to the true station destined for it by God.” (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Preserving Bahá'í Marriages”, p. 446)

- **Marital and family unity among the Bahá'ís builds credibility for their message to the world; seriously courting a partner and maintaining marriages are part of an individual's and couple's service to God**

“...[I]f the friends are not able to maintain harmony within their families, on what other basis do they hope to demonstrate to a skeptical world the efficacy of the pre-eminent character of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh? What possible influence could they hope to exert on the development of nations and the establishment of world peace?” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 222)

- **Marriage is the place for sex and having children**

“The proper use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is precisely for this purpose that the institution of marriage has been established.” (Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 344)

“...[T]he primary purpose of marriage is the procreation of children. A couple who are physically incapable of having children may, of course, marry, since the procreation of children is not the *only* purpose of marriage. However, it would be contrary to the spirit of the Teachings for a couple to decide voluntarily never to have any children.” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 380)

“...[T]he importance of marriage lieth in the bringing up of a richly blessed family, so that with entire gladness they may, even as candles, illuminate the world.” (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 120)

- **Married couples benefit from living in friendship, unity, and harmony**

“...[T]he life of a married couple should [be] a life full of joy and spiritual delight, a life of unity and concord, a friendship both mental and physical.” (‘Abdu'l-Bahá: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I*, “Family Life”, p. 397)

“...[T]he union must be a true relationship, a spiritual coming together as well as a physical one, so that throughout every phase of life, and in all the worlds of God, their union will endure; for this real oneness is a gleaming out of the love of God.” (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 117)

Friendship

There is a connection between the friendship aspect of marriage and the process of neighborhood community building:

- The Universal House of Justice is asking us to “...establish ties of friendship, on the basis of shared understanding, with those previously regarded as strangers” (UHJ, Ridván 2010, para 3) and also to “enter into meaningful and distinctive conversation” with people. (UHJ, December 28, 2010)
- Genuine friendships lead to spiritual transformation: “To the extent that the conversation continues beyond the initial encounter and veritable friendships are formed, a direct teaching effort of this kind can become a catalyst for an enduring process of spiritual transformation.” (Ridván 2010, para. 4)

Discussion Questions:

1. How can the following qualities of excellent friendships benefit couples before and after marriage?
2. How can couples maintain their friendship after marriage?
3. How can strong, happy couple friendships and marriages benefit neighborhoods and the community?

Brainstorm: What are some of the qualities of excellent friendships? (Some ideas are below)

Qualities of Excellent Friendships
1. Good communication; ability to share honestly about positive and difficult matters
2. Acknowledgement and affirmation of positive qualities in each other
3. Enjoyment of quiet, peaceful time together
4. Play, fun, and laughter
5. Acceptance; allowing both partners to be themselves
6. Support and appropriate sympathy, empathy, and help during difficulties
7. Enthusiasm for individual and shared achievements
8. Loving, spiritual connection
9. Encouragement
10. Loyalty
11. Trust that shared information will kept confidential and not used hurtfully
12. Reliability; trustworthiness
13. Willingness to suspend judgment and avoid jumping to conclusions
14. Common experiences and bonding memories
15. Shared goals
16. Ability to work together on projects
17. Agreed-upon boundaries and expectations
18. Shared interests
19. Willingness to learn together
20. Ability to disagree peacefully and constructively
21. Shared values
22. Ability to reconnect easily after being apart
23. Motivational feedback or nudging that constructively influences the other to grow
24. Attitude of forgiveness and willingness to grant another chance
25. Respectfulness and equality

Bahá'í Marriage Laws

“And when He [God] desired to manifest grace and beneficence to men, and to set the world in order, He revealed observances and created laws; among them He established the law of marriage, made it as a fortress for well-being and salvation, and enjoined it upon us in that which was sent down out of the heaven of sanctity in His Most Holy Book. He saith, great is His glory: ‘Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants. This is My bidding unto you; hold fast to it as an assistance to yourselves.’” (Bahá'u'lláh: *Bahá'í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 118)

“...[E]ntering into a marriage is a step that has tremendous implications for a whole range of people beyond the couple themselves, both in this life and in the next. The laws of the Faith are established on very sound foundations, and obedience to them is not only important for the proper development of society, but also for the attainment of true personal happiness.” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an N.S.A.: August 10, 2000)

Discussion Questions:

1. How do laws benefit us? How does the law of marriage benefit us?
2. What are some practical examples of ways that marriage contributes to well-being?
3. What are some practical examples of ways that marriage contributes to salvation (the well-being and future of your souls)?

Aspects of Bahá'í Marriage Law to Obey

- Couple freely chooses each other as partners
- Couples practice chastity
- Parents consent to the marriage
- Engagement is 95 days maximum (Applies to some, but not all; encouraged for all others; see Assembly for specifics for your case)
- The Spiritual Assembly approves two witnesses, usually chosen by the couple
- There must be a Bahá'í ceremony that includes both parties saying the vow, "We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God." (Bahá'u'lláh)
- The marriage must be recognized by or conducted by civil authorities and be legal

Discussion Question: How does the marriage vow apply to real circumstances in marriage?

Character as a Foundation for Marriage

"Bahá'í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart. Each must, however, exercise the utmost care to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the other, that the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever. Their purpose must be this: to become loving companions and comrades and at one with each other for time and eternity...." (Abdu'l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 118)

"...[T]he most hateful characteristic of man is fault-finding. One must expose the praiseworthy qualities of the souls and not their evil attributes. The friends must overlook their shortcomings and faults and speak only of their virtues and not their defects." (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Lights of Guidance*, #312)

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you understand the phrase "thoroughly acquainted with the character" as balanced with the guidance in the second quotation? Is marriage preparation a time when you assess both the character strengths and weaknesses of a partner and their potential effect on the marriage, or is it better to ignore character problems?
2. What is the purpose and value of knowing one's own character and that of a potential marriage partner?
3. What activities are most valuable to learn how a partner consistently behaves with you and with others? Why would you want to know how he/she behaves with others?
4. How would you tell the difference between a character strength and a weak character quality?

John M. Gottman, Ph.D., and his team at the Relationship Research Institute in Seattle, Washington, have discovered a number of couple communication behaviors that warn of a conflicted couple. The warning signs are:

1. Starting interactions negatively and harshly
2. **Criticizing your partner's character (character attack)**
3. Showing contempt for your partner (sneering, mocking, being superior)
4. Reacting defensively to your partner (a form of blame)
5. Shutting your partner out and avoiding communication (stonewalling)
6. Experiencing a flood of strong physical responses to your partner's negativity, such as increased heart rate, blood pressure, or sweating

(John M. Gottman, Ph.D. and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work*)

Worksheet: Assessing Your Character Qualities

(Note: The assessment process with a partner is similar.)

Workshop Instructions: Choose 5 character qualities and assess them in yourself. Plan to continue the assessment on your own at home.

Purpose: To gain greater understanding of your own strengths of character and growth areas that need improvement, so you are empowered to prepare to be an excellent partner in a relationship or marriage.

Note: Go through this content slowly, carefully, and with reflection to increase your knowledge of yourself.

Full Worksheet Instructions:

- A) Place a number to the right of each character quality in the Rating column (you may wish to use a pencil), using the following assessment scale from 1 to 6:
- 1 ~ You are very weak at practicing the quality, and your words and actions are resulting in negative outcomes.
 - 2 ~ You are somewhat ineffective at practicing the quality, and your words and actions result in negative outcomes.
 - 3 ~ You are familiar with the quality, know quite well how to practice it, but you sometimes struggle to do so effectively.
 - 4 ~ You are practicing the quality effectively, but not consistently, and your words and actions usually result in positive outcomes.
 - 5 ~ You have the quality as a strength, but you frequently misuse it.*
 - 6 ~ You are consistently practicing the quality effectively, and your words and actions result in positive outcomes.
- B) Put a check mark (✓) next to those qualities on the worksheet that are clearly strengths (rated 4-6).
- C) Put an ✕ next to the qualities that are too weak to practice effectively in a relationship (rated 1-3).
- D) Circle the four qualities that you now want to focus initially on developing in yourself. The qualities that you rated 1s, 2s, or 3s will be good choices for these four qualities.

Character Quality	Rating	✓ or ✕	Character Quality	Rating	✓ or ✕
Acceptance			Courtesy		
Assertiveness			Creativity		
Beauty			Detachment		
Caring			Discernment		
Chastity			Encouragement		
Commitment			Enthusiasm		
Compassion			Equality		
Confidence			Excellence		
Contentment			Faithfulness		
Cooperation			Flexibility		
Courage			Forgiveness		

*A misuse occurs when someone has a *strength* but applies it at the wrong time or place, with the wrong person, or immoderately/to excess and causes harm with it. The quality needs to be moderated or another quality applied to balance it. Example: Being overly helpful, irritating the recipient; this could be balanced with respect, where the recipient is asked first if he/she wants or would benefit from help.

Character Quality	Rating	✓ or ✗	Character Quality	Rating	✓ or ✗
Fortitude			Purity		
Friendliness			Purposefulness		
Generosity			Resilience		
Gentleness			Respect		
Helpfulness			Responsibility		
Honesty			Self-Discipline		
Humility			Service		
Idealism			Sincerity		
Integrity			Spirituality		
Joyfulness			Tactfulness		
Justice			Thankfulness		
Kindness			Thoughtfulness		
Love			Thriftiness		
Loyalty			Trustworthiness		
Mercy			Truthfulness		
Moderation			Unity		
Patience			Wisdom		
Peacefulness			Other:		
Perseverance			Other:		

Reflection:

1. What strong positive character qualities in me will be particular relationship strengths?

2. What character-related concerns do I see in myself?

3. What character strengths and resources will help me with addressing these concerns?

4. What unresolved issues from my past are now visible?

Workshop Discussion: What else did you discover about the importance of character through doing this activity?

Dating, Courting, and Chastity

“...[T]here is nothing in the Bahá’í Writings which relates specifically to the so-called dating practices prevalent in some parts of the world, where two unmarried people of the opposite sex participate together in a social activity. In general, Bahá’ís who are planning to involve themselves in this form of behavior should become well aware of the Bahá’í Teachings on chastity and, with these in mind, should scrupulously avoid any actions which would arouse passions which might well tempt them to violate these Teachings. In deciding which acts are permissible in the light of these considerations, the youth should use their own judgment, giving due consideration to the advice of their parents, taking account of the prevailing customs of the society in which they live, and prayerfully following the guidance of their conscience. It is the sacred duty of parents to instill in their children the exalted Bahá’í standard of moral conduct, and the importance of adherence to this standard cannot be over-emphasized as a basis for true happiness and for successful marriage.” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: February 5, 1992, to an individual)

The following is a letter written by the Universal House of Justice in response to an inquiry from a father about his sons:

“As you know, courtship practices differ greatly from one culture to another, and it is not yet known what pattern of courtship will emerge in the future when society has been more influenced by Bahá’í Teachings. However, there is no indication that it will resemble the practices extant in existing cultures.... In this interim period, the friends are encouraged to make great efforts to live in conformity with the Teachings and to gradually forge a new pattern of behavior, more in keeping with the spirit of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation. In this context, we offer the following comments.

“Although a Bahá’í may, if he chooses, seek his parents’ advice on the choice of a partner, and although Bahá’í parents may give such advice if asked, it is clear from the Teachings that parents do not have the right to interfere in their children’s actual choice of a prospective partner until approached for their consent to marry. Therefore, when discussing the issue of courtship with your sons, it would be best to discuss it on the level of principle without reference to individuals.

“In the context of the society in which your family now lives, a society in which materialism, self-centeredness and failing marriages are all too common, your sons may well feel that it is wise to have a long period of courtship in which the prospective partners spend much time together and become thoroughly acquainted with each other’s character, background and family. This practice does not in itself contradict Bahá’í law and, as it is not unacceptable in ... [country name removed], it appears to be a viable option. As you are aware, Bahá’u’lláh ordained that Bahá’í engagement should not exceed 95 days, and, although this law has not yet been applied universally, it highlights the desirability of marrying quickly once the decision to marry has been firmly taken and parental consent obtained. However, in a relationship in which such a decision has not been taken and in which the law of chastity is strictly observed, there is no objection, in principle, to a prolonged friendship in which the two individuals entertain the possibility of marrying each other at some time in the future.

“You have mentioned that your sons like to invite their girlfriends to spend a lot of time with the family and that you are not entirely happy with this situation. Each family member has rights which should be respected, and if you wish to have some time in your home without the presence of non-family members, the other members of your family should take this seriously into consideration. However, we hasten to point out to you that the situation which you describe, in which your sons wish their friends to be involved with your family, is much more in line with the Teachings than the common pattern in Western countries in which many youth virtually exclude their parents from interacting with their peers, sometimes distancing themselves from their families in order to have the freedom to engage in frivolous and even unchaste behavior....” (Universal House of Justice: August 28, 1994, to an individual)

Chastity

“One speck of chastity is greater than a hundred thousand years of worship and a sea of knowledge.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in a letter November 26, 2003, to the Bahá’ís of Iran from the Universal House of Justice)

Chastity is maintaining sexual purity and reserving sexual attraction, responses, and intimacy as a special and respectful gift to share with a marriage partner.

Someone practices Chastity effectively when he/she:

- Moderates and restrains the power of attraction to others, channeling it appropriately with a chosen partner; avoids inappropriate flirting or contact in person or through electronic media
- Regards sexual intercourse as a spiritual act of unity that is only consummated within marriage
- Releases passion appropriately with his/her spouse, understanding what is sexually pleasurable to him/her and meeting his/her needs as much as possible as well as his/her own
- Abstains from sexually and physically arousing and intimate acts before marriage or outside of marriage with someone other than his/her spouse
- Speaks, dresses, and moves modestly to avoid inviting inappropriate attention, touch, and sexual attraction; respects appropriate privacy
- Strives to keep his/her mind from holding onto sexual thoughts and also to control his/her sexual desires and impulses, other than appropriate ones related to his/her spouse
- Avoids substances such as alcohol, drugs, or certain situations because they may reduce his/her sexual inhibitions
- Chooses respectful entertainment and activities for others and himself/herself; avoids telling or listening to jokes or stories with sexual content
- Builds and maintains strong platonic friendships with both men and women, keeping appropriate boundaries and avoiding sexual innuendos, domination, or seduction
- Treats the bodies, minds, hearts, and souls of others with equality, respect, and gentleness
- Fills his/her life with worthwhile purposes and service, placing less focus, emphasis, and importance on sex, especially prior to marriage

Someone needs to strengthen Chastity when he/she:

- Has sex outside of marriage, which can threaten health, well-being, jobs, or family unity
- Sees sex as the primary way to achieve happiness or to have a relationship
- Acts in a sexually seductive manner or engages in arousing or sexual touch outside of marriage
- Values a partner’s physical attributes more than his or her character qualities; views anyone as a sex object instead of as a whole person
- Views sex as a game, spectator sport, diversion, opportunity for conquest, imposition of power, something to brag about, way to become acquainted, or as a means of self-centered relaxation
- Pursues pleasure through sexually stimulating entertainment or activities with others besides a spouse (in person or through electronic media)
- Engages in excessive sexual fantasies, particularly about a non-marriage partner; views or participates in pornography; excessively masturbates; or becomes addicted to sexual pleasure
- Abuses others sexually by forceful or manipulative behavior, threats, or violence

Someone misuses the strength of Chastity when he/she:

- Rejects or disparages his/her own natural sexuality and sensuality or that of others, acting as if sex is something dirty or wrong rather than a spiritual gift contributing to the unique bond that unites a married couple
- Fails to communicate affectionate feelings to a partner/spouse both verbally and physically
- Judges, condemns, gossips, or backbites about the sexual activities of others or himself/herself

Excerpt from the books *Becoming an Excellent Person: Preparing Your Character for Dating, Courtship, and Marriage* and *Becoming Character Partners: Observing and Understanding Your Partner's Qualities*

What Is Consultative Decision-Making?

Consultative decision-making or consultation is a form of full and equal discussion between you, usually aimed at arriving at a decision about something. You focus on a common goal—what is best to do. You will use consultation to explore your thoughts, feelings, and goals. It will assist you in clarifying situations, resolving disagreements, and making decisions about actions to take. It assists you in sharing your points of view and finding solutions that work, without blaming, arguing, or telling one another what to do. Well-developed consultation skills are part of what can help couples avoid negative patterns. Couples who are skillful at consulting together are equipped to create a relationship or marriage without highly destructive conflict.

“Consultation has been ordained by Bahá’u’lláh as the means by which agreement is to be reached and a collective course of action defined. It is applicable to the marriage partners and within the family, and indeed in all areas where believers participate in mutual decision-making. It requires all participants to express their opinions with absolute freedom and without apprehension that they will be censured and/or their views belittled; these prerequisites for success are unattainable if the fear of violence or abuse are present.” (From a letter written on behalf of The Universal House of Justice to an individual believer: January 24, 1993)

[In response to an inquiry about specific rules of conduct to govern the relationship between husbands and wives] “...for example, the principle that the rights of each and all in the family unit must be upheld, and the advice that loving consultation should be the keynote, that all matters must be settled in harmony and love, and that there are times when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other. Exactly under what circumstances such deference should take place is a matter for each couple to determine. If, God forbid, they fail to agree, and their disagreement leads to estrangement, they should seek counsel from those they trust and in whose sincerity and sound judgment they have confidence, in order to preserve and strengthen their ties as a united family.” (On Behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Preserving Bahá’í Marriages”, p. 456)

Discussion Questions:

1. How can consultation be used before marriage?
2. How can consultation build unity between a married couple?

Parental Consent

There are many quotations that relate to the subject of parental consent. Below is a small selection to illustrate key principles. If you are going through consent either as a couple or as parents, it would be wise to seek out and study the broader range of guidance. Likewise, the Universal House of Justice often updates its guidance on this topic. Families facing unusual circumstances, such as adoption, difficulty in finding a parent, the status of the parent's rights to give consent (such as in the case of child abuse), should all be referred to the local Spiritual Assembly, which may need to seek guidance from other institutions.

Purpose of Consent

“...[M]arriage is dependent upon the consent of both parties. Desiring to establish love, unity and harmony amidst Our servants, We have conditioned it, once the couple's wish is known, upon the permission of their parents, lest enmity and rancor should arise amongst them.” (Bahá'u'lláh: *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 42)

“Bahá'u'lláh has clearly stated the consent of all living [birth/natural] parents is required for a Bahá'í marriage. This applies whether the parents are Bahá'ís or non-Bahá'ís, divorced for years or not. This great law He has laid down to strengthen the social fabric, to knit closer the ties of the home, to place a certain gratitude and respect in the hearts of the children for those who have given them life and sent their souls out on the eternal journey towards their Creator.” (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Notes, p. 207)

Discussion Question: What are some of the purposes of parental consent?

Responsibilities of Parents

“Bahá'í law places the responsibility for ascertaining knowledge of the character of those entering into the marriage contract on the two parties involved, and on the parents, who must give consent to the marriage.” (Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, #1231)

“There is nothing in the Writings, however, which requires a couple to get married once they have consent from all parents; they are quite free to change their minds. Likewise, if a parent changes his or her mind, he or she can withdraw his or her permission at any time before the marriage takes place, in which case the couple cannot get married.” (Universal House of Justice: *Consent of Parents*, p. 40)

“You will note that the aspect of protecting the child from making the wrong decision is not mentioned in any...quotations as a reason for the law, although it may well play a part in the parents' decision as they have the obligation to consider the welfare and happiness of their children at all times. However limited our understanding of this and other laws given us by Bahá'u'lláh, we are assured that the divine blessings await those who place their reliance in Him and obey His commandments.” (Universal House of Justice, *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 16.7)

Discussion Questions:

1. What length of time could it take for consent to occur?
2. In what ways is consent more like a process than an event?
3. What could cause a couple to change their minds about marrying or parents to withdraw consent?
4. Are parents responsible for the outcome of the marriage? How could fear of this responsibility and possible marital outcomes interfere with effectively considering consent?

Reasons for Refusing Consent

“...[T]he principle of the oneness of mankind prevents any true Bahá’í from regarding race itself as a bar to union... For both Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá never disapproved of the idea of interracial marriage, nor discouraged it. The Bahá’í Teachings, indeed, by their very nature transcend all limitations imposed by race....” (Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 39)

“The validity of a Bahá’í marriage is dependent upon the free and full consent of all four parents. The freedom of the parents in the exercise of this right is unrestricted and unconditioned. They may refuse their consent on any ground, and they are responsible for their decision to God alone.” (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Preserving Bahá’í Marriages”, p. 444)

“It is perfectly true that Bahá’u’lláh’s statement that the consent of all living parents is required for marriage places a grave responsibility on each parent. When the parents are Bahá’ís they should, of course, act objectively in withholding or granting their approval. They cannot evade this responsibility by merely acquiescing in their child’s wish, nor should they be swayed by prejudice; but, whether they be Bahá’í or non-Bahá’í, the parents’ decision is binding, whatever the reason that may have motivated it. Children must recognize and understand that this act of consenting is the duty of a parent. They must have respect in their hearts for those who have given them life, and whose good pleasure they must at all times strive to win.” (Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, #1237)

Discussion Questions:

1. What could be reasons that parents might refuse consent?
2. Do the parents have to give their reasons to the couple?
3. What could be the outcome of parents refusing to share their reasons?

Involving the Spiritual Assembly

“Bahá’ís who cannot marry because of lack of consent of one or more parents could consult with their Local Spiritual Assembly, to see whether it may suggest a way to change the attitude of any of the parents involved. The believers, when faced with such problems, should put their trust in Bahá’u’lláh, devote more time to the service, the teaching and the promotion of His Faith, be absolutely faithful to His injunctions on the observance of an unsullied, chaste life, and rely upon Him to open the way and remove the obstacle, or make known His will.” (Universal House of Justice: *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 16.15)

“The Universal House of Justice will offer ardent prayers in the Holy Shrines that your parents’ hearts may be inspired and enlightened to see and consider the best interests of their daughter. It may be helpful in this regard to ask the assistance of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the area where your parents live, or of some wise and mature Bahá’ís to meet with your parents and gradually familiarize them with the tenets of the [Bahá’í] Faith and remove the misconceptions they have... You are strongly advised by the House of Justice to continue your loving attitude towards your parents and be assured that your dutiful obedience to your parents will attract Bahá’u’lláh’s blessings and will ensure your future happiness.” (Universal House of Justice: *Consent of Parents*, p. 39)

Note: There are grave spiritual consequences if a Bahá’í chooses to disobey Bahá’í law and proceed with marriage without consent. If a Bahá’í marriage does not happen, and only a civil one or one of another faith occurs, the Bahá’í community and institutions do not regard the couple as married. Breaking the marriage law can also result in the sanction of a Bahá’í losing his or her administrative rights, which can exclude the person from such activities as voting in elections, serving on administrative bodies, attending the 19-Day Feast, and giving to the Bahá’í Fund. The individual(s) would then have to consult with the Spiritual Assemblies at the local and national level about remedying this spiritually painful situation. You may be able

to feel almost instant willingness to accept and obey this law. Alternatively, it may take prayer, meditation, consultation, and the passage of time before you reach acceptance and a full willingness to observe the laws.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the roles of the Spiritual Assembly related to consent?
2. What would be the best ways for a couple who has been refused consent to behave in response?

Unity Building Activity

Resources for Couples Having Marriage Difficulties

Marriage education helps couples build capacity and strengths and equips people to be successful in their roles as marriage partners. The following websites are potential resources for you:

- www.marriagetransformation.com
- www.bahaimarriage.net
- www.smartmarriages.com
- www.healthymarriageinfo.org

Marriage Counseling

“Consultation is...available for the individual in solving his own problems; he may consult with his Assembly, with his family and with his friends.” (“Understanding Tests” letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 17, 1989; complete letter available at www.bahaimarriage.net/resources.net)

“Neither you nor your husband should hesitate to continue consulting professional marriage counselors, individually and together if possible, and also to take advantage of the supportive counseling which can come from wise and mature friends. Non-Bahá’í counseling can be useful but it is usually necessary to temper it with Bahá’í insight.” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Preserving Bahá’í Marriages”, p. 455)