

Devotional Gathering: Commitment

Introduction

Commitment is making a reasonable promise or binding agreement to yourself, to your partner, or to others and then fulfilling that agreement through action. It requires confidence and maturity to sacrifice other choices that you could make instead. Before making a promise or commitment, it is wise to think through the implications of keeping it and your ability to fulfill it.

In spiritual terms, a promise or commitment is often referred to as a covenant. God has made a Covenant with humanity to provide us with spiritual guidance through a never-ending flow of inspired Teachers, Prophets, and Messengers. Within that larger framework, there are other spiritual covenants. One includes the promise from those Messengers to give us what we need in order to live our lives—principles such as the Golden Rule and laws to guide us in positive paths. Our part of this covenant is to follow the laws and guidance given to us.

Another spiritual covenant is between a couple and God to establish a marriage and family. He is there to help. Courting couples get to know one another's character. When they are sure that marriage is a wise choice, they create a "binding covenant" and a "most sacred and binding tie" between them to stay married for all eternity. It is a commitment to love and stay bonded forever. This is not a commitment to make lightly or without careful preparation. At the same time, marriage is a commitment that one *can* make successfully. A successful marriage commitment requires prayer, meditation, consultation, friendship, love, family support, flexibility, knowledge, skills, and effort.

Here are some thoughts from marriage researchers:

...[C]ommitment means making hard choices among alternatives. Many people do not want to give up one option in order to have another, though they will have neither if they do not make a choice. But choices and priorities are intertwined with commitment.

~ Scott M. Stanley, *The Power of Commitment*, p. 55

Many of the mistakes couples commonly make stem directly from the partners' failure to be mindful of their commitment every day; a marriage can't thrive if the partners see commitment just as something they promised on their wedding day.

~ Howard J. Markman, Scott M. Stanley, Susan L. Blumberg,
Fighting for Your Marriage, p. 321

Musical selections are wonderful for touching people's hearts, and you are encouraged to use them whenever appropriate.

Quotations

1. O compassionate God! Thanks be to Thee for Thou hast awakened and made me conscious. Thou hast given me a seeing eye and favored me with a hearing ear, hast led me to Thy kingdom and guided me to Thy path. Thou hast shown me the right way and caused me to enter the ark of deliverance. O God! Keep me steadfast and make me firm and staunch. Protect me from violent tests, and preserve and shelter me in the strongly fortified fortress of Thy Covenant and Testament. Thou art the Powerful. Thou art the Seeing. Thou art the Hearing.
 O Thou the Compassionate God. Bestow upon me a heart which, like unto glass, may be illumined with the light of Thy love, and confer upon me thoughts which may change this world into a rose garden through the outpourings of heavenly grace.
 Thou art the Compassionate, the Merciful. Thou art the Great Beneficent God. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Bahá’í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 71)
2. He should not...promise that which he doth not fulfill. (Bahá’u’lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 266)
3. ...[S]ay not that which thou doest not. (Bahá’u’lláh: *The Hidden Words*, from the Arabic, No. 29)
4. Let your eye be chaste, your hand faithful, your tongue truthful and your heart enlightened. (Bahá’u’lláh: *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 138-139)
5. 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)
6. In all matters, great or small, word must be the complement of deed, and deed the companion of word: each must supplement, support and reinforce the other. (Shoghi Effendi: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Trustworthiness”, p. 346)
7. Chastity implies both before and after marriage an unsullied, chaste sex life. Before marriage absolutely chaste, after marriage absolutely faithful to one's chosen companion. Faithful in all sexual acts, faithful in word and in deed. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 360)

8. There is no doubt about it that the believers in America, probably unconsciously influenced by the extremely lax morals prevalent and the flippant attitude towards divorce which seems to be increasingly prevailing, do not take divorce seriously enough and do not seem to grasp the fact that although Bahá'u'lláh has permitted it, He has only permitted it as a last resort and *strongly condemns it*.

The presence of children, as a factor in divorce, cannot be ignored, for surely it places an even greater weight of moral responsibility on the [husband] and wife in considering such a step. Divorce under such circumstances no longer just concerns them and their desires and feelings but also concerns the children's entire future and their own attitude towards marriage. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, "Preserving Bahá'í Marriages"*, p. 450)

9. O Lord! In this Most Great Dispensation Thou dost accept the intercession of children in behalf of their parents. This is one of the special infinite bestowals of this Dispensation. Therefore, O Thou kind Lord, accept the request of this Thy servant at the threshold of Thy singleness and submerge his father in the ocean of Thy grace, because this son hath arisen to render Thee service and is exerting effort at all times in the pathway of Thy love, Verily, Thou art the Giver, the Forgiver and the Kind! (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Bahá'í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 64)

Reflection and Discussion

1. What is the connection between making and keeping promises and making a commitment?
2. What does honoring or giving your “word” or making a “promise” mean to you?
3. What are the implications of a “binding covenant”?
4. What is the connection between trust and commitment?
5. What is the connection between commitment and divorce?
6. What actions would a married couple need to take, and what spiritual principles would they need to follow, to nurture their marriage and to avoid divorce?

Skill-Building: Strengthening the Ability to Make a Commitment

Take a few moments to reflect on times when you struggled to make a commitment. How did you feel when you were not acting or moving forward? What was in your way? When was a time that you successfully made a commitment? What happened when you made your decision to act? What were the outcomes of fulfilling the commitment? Think of a story to share with the group.

Read the following two quotations:

“Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues

from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way. (W. H. Murray, *The Scottish Himalayan Expedition*, pp. 6, 7)

“The moment you believe you can do something, power seems to stream into you; the moment you believe you cannot do it, you have lost more than half the battle, you seem to be drained of the force necessary to do it.” (Ruhíyyih Rabbani, *Prescription for Living* (1950 edition), p. 39)

What are your thoughts about what these authors say about commitment?

Optional Activity:

If you were to write a wedding vow right now, what would be the most important things you would promise?