

Devotional Gathering: Love in Marriage

Introduction

Love is a powerful force of attraction between you and God and between you and other people. Love for each other, grounded in your mutual love for God, is the emotional magnetic force that helps to keep you together as a couple. In spite of daily annoyances or major difficulties, this love can powerfully connect you. It lights your faces as you look at one another and sustains you through the building of your friendship and relationship. It enriches your marriage and grows as your family expands.

Love provides a bridge during difficult times—both within and outside the family—and generates joy and happiness in your union and your life. With love, you fundamentally put one another's well-being first and sacrifice on behalf of each other. A happy marriage without love is virtually impossible. Love pulls you away from being self-centered and keeps you connected to your spouse, even when life is difficult.

True love allows you to see one another, accept each other, forgive whatever faults and weaknesses are naturally there, and love the real person. If your initial attraction deepens, mutual love and appreciation of one another's characters, souls, minds, and hearts will become the foundation for an eternal relationship.

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

Quotations

1. He is God!

O peerless Lord! In Thine almighty wisdom Thou hast enjoined marriage upon the peoples, that the generations of men may succeed one another in this contingent world, and that ever, so long as the world shall last, they may busy themselves at the Threshold of Thy oneness with servitude and worship, with salutation, adoration and praise. . . . Wherefore, wed Thou in the heaven of Thy mercy these two birds of the nest of Thy love, and make them the means of attracting perpetual grace; that from the union of these two seas of love a wave of tenderness may surge and cast the pearls of pure and goodly issue on the shore of life. . . .

O Thou kind Lord! Make Thou this marriage to bring forth coral and pearls. Thou art verily the All-Powerful, the Most Great, the Ever-Forgiving. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Bahá’í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 118)

2. What a power is love! It is the most wonderful, the greatest of all living powers. Love gives life to the lifeless. Love lights a flame in the heart that is cold. Love brings hope to the hopeless and gladdens the hearts of the sorrowful.

In the world of existence there is indeed no greater power than the power of love. When the heart of man is aglow with the flame of love, he is ready to sacrifice all—even his life. In the Gospel it is said God is love. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Paris Talks*, pp. 179-181)

3. Know thou of a certainty that Love is the secret of God's holy Dispensation, the manifestation of the All Merciful, the fountain of spiritual outpourings. Love is heaven's kindly light, the Holy Spirit's eternal breath that vivifieth the human soul. Love is the cause of God's revelation unto man, the vital bond inherent, in accordance with the divine creation, in the realities of things. Love is the one means that ensureth true felicity both in this world and the next. Love is the light that guideth in darkness, the living link that uniteth God with man, that assureth the progress of every illumined soul. Love is the most great law that ruleth this mighty and heavenly cycle, the unique power that bindeth together the divers elements of this material world, the supreme magnetic force that directeth the movements of the spheres in the celestial realms. Love revealeth with unfailing and limitless power the mysteries latent in the universe. Love is the spirit of life unto the adorned body of mankind, the establisher of true civilization in this mortal world, and the shedder of imperishable glory upon every high-aiming race and nation. (*Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 27)

4. The love of God has brought us together, and this is the best of means and motive. Every other bond of friendship is limited in effectiveness, but fellowship based upon the love of God is unlimited, everlasting, divine and radiant. (*Abdu'l-Bahá: Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 442)

5. It is He Who created you from a single person, and made his mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her in love. (*The Qur'án*, 7:189)

6. In short, whatsoever thing is arranged in harmony and with love and purity of motive, its result is light, and should the least trace of estrangement prevail the result shall be darkness upon darkness.... (*Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 88)

7. ...The love which exists between the hearts of believers is prompted by the ideal of the unity of spirits. This love is attained through the knowledge of God, so that men see the Divine Love reflected in the heart. Each sees in the other the Beauty of God reflected in the soul, and finding this point of similarity, they are attracted to one another in love. This love will make all men the waves of one sea, this love will make them all the stars of one heaven and the fruits of one tree. This love will bring the realization of true accord, the foundation of real unity.
 But the love which sometimes exists between friends is not (true) love, because it is subject to transmutation; this is merely fascination. As the breeze blows, the slender trees yield. If the wind is in the East the tree leans to the West, and if the wind turns to the West the tree leans to the East. This kind of love is originated by the accidental conditions of life. This is not love, it is merely acquaintanceship; it is subject to change.
 Today you will see two souls apparently in close friendship; tomorrow all this may be changed. Yesterday they were ready to die for one another, today they shun one another's society! This is not love; it is the yielding of the hearts to the accidents of life. When that which has caused this "love" to exist passes, the love passes also; this is not in reality love. (*Abdu'l-Bahá: Paris Talks*, pp. 179-181)

8. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ...Love never fails... (*The Bible: 1 Corinthians 13:4, 5, 8*)

9. Love and fellowship are absolutely needful to win the good pleasure of God, which is the goal of all human attainment. We must be united. We must love each other. We must ever praise each other. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 410)
10. Glorified art Thou, O Lord my God! I give Thee thanks inasmuch as Thou hast called me into being in Thy days, and infused into me Thy love and Thy knowledge. I beseech Thee, by Thy name whereby the goodly pearls of Thy wisdom and Thine utterance were brought forth out of the treasuries of the hearts of such of Thy servants as are nigh unto Thee, and through which the Daystar of Thy name, the Compassionate, hath shed its radiance upon all that are in Thy heaven and on Thy earth, to supply me, by Thy grace and bounty, with Thy wondrous and hidden bounties.

These are the earliest days of my life, O my God, which Thou hast linked with Thine own days. Now that Thou hast conferred upon me so great an honor, withhold not from me the things Thou hast ordained for Thy chosen ones.

I am, O my God, but a tiny seed which Thou hast sown in the soil of Thy love, and caused to spring forth by the hand of Thy bounty. This seed craveth, therefore, in its inmost being, for the waters of Thy mercy and the living fountain of Thy grace. Send down upon it, from the heaven of Thy loving-kindness, that which will enable it to flourish beneath Thy shadow and within the borders of Thy court. Thou art He Who watereth the hearts of all that have recognized Thee from Thy plenteous stream and the fountain of Thy living waters.

Praised be God, the Lord of the worlds. (Bahá’u’lláh: *Bahá’i Prayers* (US 2002), p. 171)

Reflection and Discussion

1. How does the love of God affect the love between two people?
2. How can you increase affinity and attraction between hearts?
3. If one person is loving and the other is not, what occurs in the relationship?
4. What words and actions would demonstrate selfless love?
5. How do you know if you are feeling lasting love or simply a passing attraction?
6. Why is love important in marriage?

Skill-Building: Identifying Your Love Languages

(Adapted from *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate*, Northfield Publishing, copyright © 1992, 1995, 2004; and *The Five Love Languages for Singles*, Northfield Publishing, copyright © 2004, by Gary Chapman. Used with permission.)

The more a couple speaks and acts lovingly toward one another, the more love they each will feel for the other, and the more happiness both will experience. One of the most prolific and popular authors on this topic is Dr. Gary Chapman. He says, “If we learn to express love in the other person’s love language, they will feel loved. And if that person reciprocates by speaking our love language, they will meet our emotional need for love. There are five primary love languages. We can receive love through all five, but if we don’t receive our primary love language, we will not feel loved even though the person is speaking the other four. However, if they speak our primary love language sufficiently, then the other four provide icing on the cake.” Receiving love messages in a “Language” that works for you helps with keeping your “love

tank” full. If you are not receiving love in the way that is most important to you, particularly from a relationship partner or spouse, you may begin questioning whether those close to you truly love you.

For example, if you most feel loved when someone gives you a gift and you never receive one, then you may begin questioning others’ feelings toward you. If someone you love needs regular quality time when he/she feels that you are really listening, and you express love with gifts instead, he/she will not be convinced of your love. Failure to communicate in a person’s preferred Love Language can cause gradual erosion in a relationship.

Listed below are the primary Love Languages and a description of actions that can express love effectively in each. Identify the Language that is most important to you and ask those you care about to tell you which they prefer. You may want to practice all of them, but focus especially on whatever Language speaks most clearly to the other person.

1. **Words of Affirmation:** verbal compliments; words of appreciation, praise, and encouragement; kind words; expressions of appreciation for the other’s positive actions and qualities
2. **Gifts:** tangible objects freely offered; gifts of any size, shape, color, or price; gifts that indicate thoughtfulness; visual symbols of love with no strings attached and no attempt to cover up a failure; unexpected gifts, not just on special occasions
3. **Acts of Service:** things done willingly for the other; offers of helpfulness; timely and positive response to requests (not demands) of the other; acts of kindness; favors done with a loving attitude (not fear, guilt, or resentment); acts that reflect equality and partnership
4. **Quality Time:** being available; doing something enjoyable and interactive together; giving uninterrupted, undivided, and focused attention; participating in quality conversation in which both talk and listen; creating memorable moments; intimate revealing of self
5. **Physical Touch:** loving (never abusive) physical contact at appropriate times and places; tender hugs, touches, or pats on the arm, shoulder, or back; back or foot rubs or massages; kissing; holding hands; holding while comforting; intimate touch and sex only within the covenant of marriage with your marriage partner

How to Identify Your Love Languages

It is wonderful if you can use all five of these Languages in your relationship and marriage (except for cautions about how you use the physical touch Love Language before marriage, of course). However, at times in life you may be very busy, with time and energy in short supply. When this occurs, it is especially important that you focus what time you do have on giving your partner’s/spouse’s primary Love Language to him/her. For this reason, you will find it helpful to identify the primary love language that works best for each other. Here are some ways you can determine what your primary love language is:

- Observe your own behavior so that you notice how you typically express love and appreciation to others; 75 percent of people express what they most want to receive
- Observe what you most often request of others; your requests reveal your heart and what would make you feel loved
- Make notes of your own complaints about what you do not receive
- Ask yourself what your partner (or spouse) says and does that cause you to have a positive response

If you want to determine the love language of someone else, the method is similar:

- Observe their expressions, complaints, and requests
- Ask questions
- Experiment with offering various expressions of love and observe and listen to the responses

Note: Two categories of people typically struggle to discover their primary Love Language. The first consists of individuals who have always felt loved and who received all five Love Languages from their parents; the other is composed of individuals who have never felt loved, especially from their parents.

Complete the following questions individually: [Note: If you do not currently have a partner or spouse, then think of a close friend or family member.]

1. Which Love Language most effectively communicates to me that my partner/spouse loves me? Which is the next most effective?

Primary: _____

Secondary: _____

2. What do I think are the primary and secondary Love Languages of my partner/spouse?

Primary: _____

Secondary: _____

3. Which Love Language is most comfortable for me to use? Which one do I use most often?

Does it match what I identified as the primary Language of my partner/spouse? _____