

Devotional Gathering: Marriage

Introduction

From a Bahá'í perspective, and that of many other faiths, marriage is intended to be an eternal, spiritual union between two people who love God, each other, and are attracted to and pleasing to one another.

A new and wonderful creation results when a marriage occurs. As explained by Bahá'í Rosemary Sala, “Out of the fusion of two souls a third subtle entity is born. Though invisible and intangible on earth it is the composite soul of true lovers. The progress of one mysteriously influences the other, they become the tutors of each other’s soul. Distance or death, being physical forces, cannot cause its disintegration.” (Rosemary Sala, *The Bahá'í World, Volume 7*, “Marriage in the Bahá'í Faith”, p. 763)

Marriage is a union of your souls, hearts, minds, and bodies—you are not the same people afterward. Your union creates outcomes (and often children!) that did not and could not exist before you married.

Creating a marriage is not necessarily easy, smooth, or comfortable. There are many adjustments along the way. Your commitment to God, loving each other, praying together, and encouraging one another, can all help and sustain you through the adjustments.

Marriage is the foundation for families, and families are the foundation for society, so happy marriages and families are vitally important for the well-being of humanity.

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

Quotations

1. O my God! O my God! Verily, I invoke Thee and supplicate before Thy threshold, asking Thee that all Thy mercies may descend upon these souls. Specialize them for Thy favor and Thy truth.
 O Lord! Unite and bind together the hearts, join in accord all the souls, and exhilarate the spirits through the signs of Thy sanctity and oneness. O Lord! Make these faces radiant through the light of Thy oneness. Strengthen the loins of Thy servants in the service of Thy kingdom.
 O Lord, Thou possessor of infinite mercy! O Lord of forgiveness and pardon! Forgive our sins, pardon our shortcomings, and cause us to turn to the kingdom of Thy clemency, invoking the kingdom of might and power, humble at Thy shrine and submissive before the glory of Thine evidences.
 O Lord God! Make us as waves of the sea, as flowers of the garden, united, agreed through the bounties of Thy love. O Lord! Dilate the breasts through the signs of Thy oneness, and make all mankind as stars shining from the same height of glory, as perfect fruits growing upon Thy tree of life.
 Verily, Thou art the Almighty, the Self-Subsistent, the Giver, the Forgiving, the Pardoner, the Omniscient, the One Creator. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Bahá'í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 238)

2. 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)

3. ...[T]he life of a married couple should resemble the life of the angels in heaven—a life full of joy and spiritual delight, a life of unity and concord, a friendship both mental and physical. The home should be orderly and well-organized. Their ideas and thoughts should be like the rays of the sun of truth and the radiance of the brilliant stars in the heavens. Even as two birds they should warble melodies upon the branches of the tree of fellowship and harmony. They should always be elated with joy and gladness and be a source of happiness to the hearts of others. They should set an example to their fellow-men, manifest true and sincere love towards each other and educate their children in such a manner as to blazon the fame and glory of their family. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 220-221)

4. Marriage, among the mass of the people, is a physical bond, and this union can only be temporary, since it is foredoomed to a physical separation at the close.

Among the people of Bahá, however, marriage must be a union of the body and of the spirit as well, for here both husband and wife are aglow with the same wine, both are enamored of the same matchless Face, both live and move through the same spirit, both are illumined by the same glory. This connection between them is a spiritual one, hence it is a bond that will abide forever. Likewise do they enjoy strong and lasting ties in the physical world as well, for if the marriage is based both on the spirit and the body, that union is a true one, hence it will endure. If, however, the bond is physical and nothing more, it is sure to be only temporary, and must inexorably end in separation.

When, therefore, the people of Bahá undertake to marry, the 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)

5. 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)

6. Bahá’ís should be profoundly aware of the sanctity of marriage and should strive to make their marriages an eternal bond of unity and harmony. This requires effort and sacrifice and wisdom and self-abnegation. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 391)

7. The news of your union, as soon as it reached me, imparted infinite joy and gratitude. Praise be to God, those two faithful birds have sought shelter in one nest. I beseech God that He may enable them to raise an honored family, for the 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. For the enlightenment of the world dependeth upon the existence of man. If man did not exist in this world, it would have been like a tree without fruit. My hope is that you both may become even as one tree, and may, through the outpourings of the cloud of loving-kindness, acquire freshness and charm, and may blossom and yield fruit, so that your line may eternally endure. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 120)
8. 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....
- The true marriage of Bahá’ís is this, that husband and wife should be united both physically and spiritually, that they may ever improve the spiritual life of each other, and may enjoy everlasting unity throughout all the worlds of God. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 118)
9. O my Lord, O my Lord! These two bright orbs are wedded in Thy love, conjoined in servitude to Thy Holy Threshold, united in ministering to Thy Cause. Make Thou this marriage to be as threading lights of Thine abounding grace, O my Lord, the All-Merciful, and luminous rays of Thy bestowals, O Thou the Beneficent, the Ever-Giving, that there may branch out from this great tree boughs that will grow green and flourishing through the gifts that rain down from Thy clouds of grace. Verily Thou art the Generous, verily Thou art the Almighty, verily Thou art the Compassionate, the All-Merciful. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Bahá’í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 121)

Reflection and Discussion

1. In what ways do you think marriage is like a “fortress for well-being and salvation”?
2. What are some of the purposes of marriage?
3. What indicators could tell a married couple that they have a strong spiritual union? A strong physical one?
4. What is the significance of marriage being a “divine institution”?
5. Why is it important to keep your marriage strong?
6. What aspects of marriage are eternal?
7. What words and actions would demonstrate “sacrifice,” “wisdom,” and “self-abnegation”?

Skill-Building: Building Connection Through Memories

It can be a positive relationship practice to create and record positive courtship and marital memories. As couples experience challenges in their marriage, focusing consciously on positive memories and bringing appropriate behavior and practices from the past into the present can help.

(Source: Dr. John M. Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, p. 42)

Heart Activity: Please write on a heart shape a positive memory from your relationship or marriage that you are comfortable sharing with the group. If you are not currently in a relationship, please share a story from a previous relationship.

