

Devotional Gathering: Marriage and Family Life

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.

Marriage is a union of your souls, hearts, minds, and bodies—you are not the same people afterward. With the foundation of marriage, you then create or adopt children, welcome stepchildren, and form a family. The quality of the marriage is the greatest support and gift that couples give to their children. The marriage provides the stability and security that assists children to have the confidence to excel in their schooling and lives and to serve others.

Creating a marriage and family is a process that 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. Couple and family consultations that include prayer on a wide range of topics will help your family to make decisions based on spiritual principles and progress in unity.

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

Musical Version of the following prayer if available; otherwise, please play another piece of music, and the prayer can be said as part of the prayers and quotations below.

Glory be unto Thee, O my God! Verily, this Thy servant and this Thy maidservant have gathered under the shadow of Thy mercy and they are united through Thy favor and generosity. O Lord! Assist them in this Thy world and Thy kingdom and destine for them every good through Thy bounty and grace. O Lord! Confirm them in Thy servitude and assist them in Thy service. Suffer them to become the signs of Thy Name in Thy world and protect them through Thy bestowals which are inexhaustible in this world and the world to come. O Lord! They are supplicating the kingdom of Thy mercifulness and invoking the realm of Thy singleness. Verily, they are married in obedience to Thy command. Cause them to become the signs of harmony and unity until the end of time. Verily, Thou art the Omnipotent, the Omnipresent and the Almighty!

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Bahá'í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 120)

Prayers and Quotations

O my God! O my God! Unite the hearts of Thy servants, and reveal to them Thy great purpose. May they follow Thy commandments and abide in Thy law. Help them, O God, in their endeavor, and grant them strength to serve Thee. O God! Leave them not to themselves, but guide their steps by the light of Thy knowledge, and cheer their hearts by Thy love. Verily, Thou art their Helper and their Lord.

(Bahá'u'lláh: *Bahá'í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 238)

O Lord! I am a child; enable me to grow beneath the shadow of Thy loving-kindness. I am a tender plant; cause me to be nurtured through the outpourings of the clouds of Thy bounty. I am a sapling of the garden of love; make me into a fruitful tree.

Thou art the Mighty and the Powerful, and Thou art the All-Loving, the All Knowing, the All-Seeing. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Bahá’í Prayers* (US 2002), pp. 31-32)

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)

...[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)

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)

Music

My home is the home of peace. My home is the home of joy and delight. My home is the home of laughter and exultation. Whosoever enters through the portals of this home, must go out with gladsome heart. This is the home of light; whosoever enters here must become illumined. This is the home of knowledge: the one who enters it must receive knowledge. This is the home of love: those who come in must learn the lessons of love; thus may they know how to love each other. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Family Worship*, p. 53; “Star of the West”, Vol. 9, No. 3, p. 40)

The parents must exert every effort to rear their offspring to be religious, for should the children not attain this greatest of adornments, they will not obey their parents, which in a certain sense means that they will not obey God. Indeed, such children will show no consideration to anyone, and will do exactly as they please. (Bahá’u’lláh, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 228)

Ye should consider the question of goodly character as of the first importance. It is incumbent upon every father and mother to counsel their children over a long period, and guide them unto those things which lead to everlasting honor. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, #108)

According to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh the family, being a human unit, must be educated according to the rules of sanctity. All the virtues must be taught the family. The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one, the honor of all.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 168)

O God! Educate these children. These children are the plants of Thy orchard, the flowers of Thy meadow, the roses of Thy garden. Let Thy rain fall upon them; let the Sun of Reality shine upon them with Thy love. Let Thy breeze refresh them in order that they may be trained, grow and develop, and appear in the utmost beauty. Thou art the Giver. Thou art the Compassionate. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Bahá’í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 28)

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 Thy 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)

Music

Note: The children may wish to leave for other activities at this point.

Skill-Building: **Affirming Character Qualities by Using Character Quality Language**

(Note: This tool is similar to the Language of the Virtues from The Virtues Project (www.virtuesproject.com); *The Family Virtues Guide*)

Using positive words and tone of voice builds love, respect, and confidence in one another and in the stability of your relationship. It is wise to begin this practice from the earliest days of your relationship and marriage so that it becomes a long-term practice, but it is never too late to start. A positive interaction can include greeting one another warmly after you have been apart, perhaps hugging or kissing at the same time. Saying, “I love you” is also affirming. However, speaking positively about one another’s character is especially vital in your day-to-day interactions and when you speak about each other to others. Of course, this means your actions toward one another sincerely reflect character strengths!

Like many people, you may find it easier to spot someone doing something *wrong* than to spot someone doing something *right*. Marriage research clearly demonstrates that couples who regularly attack each other’s character destroy their marriages. Dr. John Gottman says, “By simply reminding yourself of your spouse’s positive qualities—even as you grapple with each other’s flaws—you can prevent a happy marriage from deteriorating.” (John Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, p. 65)

Do not take each other for granted or think that your partner does not need encouragement for something you think they are obligated to do or responsible for doing. It takes practice to look consciously for one another’s positive actions, but it is very affirming for both of you when you do. The more genuinely positive thoughts and words you can generate about one another, the more you are likely to avoid destructive conflict. Most people typically feel a great sense of satisfaction when someone notices the good job they have done or the effort they put into doing something. You need to be able to count on one another for positive affirmation and encouragement, especially on difficult days.

It will help you to learn about and strengthen each other’s character when you use *Character Quality Language* to affirm specific qualities in each other. This practice also builds love, appreciation, and happiness between you, particularly when you are specific and sincere. Here are some simple examples:

- “Thank you for being (Helpful, Flexible, Truthful...)”
- “I appreciate your (Courage, Respect, Faithfulness...)”
- “I love how (Accepting, Enthusiastic, Encouraging...) you are!”

Your character affirmations become even more powerful when you include specifics about your partner’s words or actions. Consider these examples:

- “Your Patience in working with my Dad on the car in the garage yesterday and how Helpful you were to him really touched my heart.”
- “It was great watching you be so Enthusiastic at our son’s soccer game this morning. Thank you for being so Flexible about the change in starting time.”
- “Thank you for picking me up even though you do not like driving in downtown traffic. It was very Thoughtful of you...my day was hectic with deadlines, and I could not leave early to meet you at home.”

Using Character Quality Language will help you to strengthen and keep practicing these qualities. Having someone notice your use of a quality encourages your continued use.

Character Quality Language is also a key tool for parents in helping children learn about and strengthen specific qualities. For example, you can say, “Please be Patient” instead of, “Oh, just hold on a minute!”, and it helps the child (and you) with learning Patience. Learning the names of the character qualities and highlighting them in your children builds their self-respect. Then you can say, “Thank you for being Caring to your little sister today when she was sad” instead of “You were nice to your sister today.” If the children see you affirming these qualities in each other, this will also give them Confidence in your marriage.

Practice: Turn to the person next to you and acknowledge them for practicing a character quality from the list below sometime recently. Be as specific as you can about the actions the other person took. Take turns with doing the acknowledgements until you both feel comfortable with using Character Quality Language.

| | | | |
|---------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Acceptance | Encouragement | Integrity | Responsibility |
| Assertiveness | Enthusiasm | Joyfulness | Self-Discipline |
| Beauty | Equality | Justice | Service |
| Caring | Excellence | Kindness | Sincerity |
| Chastity | Faithfulness | Love | Spirituality |
| Commitment | Flexibility | Loyalty | Tactfulness |
| Compassion | Forgiveness | Mercy | Thankfulness |
| Confidence | Fortitude | Moderation | Thoughtfulness |
| Contentment | Friendliness | Patience | Thriftiness |
| Cooperation | Generosity | Peacefulness | Trustworthiness |
| Courage | Gentleness | Perseverance | Truthfulness |
| Courtesy | Helpfulness | Purity | Unity |
| Creativity | Honesty | Purposefulness | Wisdom |
| Detachment | Humility | Resilience | |
| Discernment | Idealism | Respect | |

Reflection and Discussion

1. How did we feel when using Character Quality Language?
2. Which qualities of character are most important for us to practice with each other in our marriage? What would help us strengthen these?
3. Which qualities of character are most important for us to help our children to practice? What would help them to strengthen these qualities?
4. What are some ways that we keep our marriage strong, happy, and unified? What new ways are we committed to practicing?
5. What are some ways that we keep our family strong, happy, and unified? What new ways are we committed to practicing?

Character Resources from Marriage Transformation® for Individuals and Married Couples:

- *Pure Gold: Encouraging Character Qualities in Marriage*
- *Becoming an Excellent Person: Preparing Your Character for Dating, Courtship, and Marriage*
- *Becoming Character Partners: Observing and Understanding Your Partner's Qualities*
- *Can We Dance?: Learning the Steps for a Fulfilling Relationship*
- *Marriage Can Be Forever—Preparation Counts!* (Chapter 6)