

Marriage Can Be Forever— Preparation Counts!

Walking a Path to a Spiritually-Based Marriage, A Workbook

**Quotations from Beginnings of Chapters and
from “Quotations for Guidance” Only**

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CHAPTER 1

Life Partners: Preparation and Marriage

Quotations for Guidance

1) 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 [*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*]. 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)

2) Since the consent of both parties is required in the Book of God, and since, before maturity, their consent or lack of it cannot be ascertained, marriage is therefore conditional upon reaching the age of maturity [age 15], and is not permissible before that time.

(*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Questions and Answers, p. 134)

3) The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice, is for man to free himself from idle fancy and imitation, discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye. (Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 156)

4) 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)

5) 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)

6) The Bahá’í youth...should be advised, nay even encouraged, to contract marriage while still young and in full possession of their physical vigor. Economic factors, no doubt, are often a serious hindrance to early marriage, but in most cases are only an excuse, and as such should not be overstressed. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, “A Chaste and Holy Life”*, p. 56)

7) 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)

8) I wish to assure you, in particular, of his supplications for your guidance in connection with your proposed plan to unite in marriage with.... May the Beloved help you in forming the right decision, and spare you the anxiety and suffering which too hasty action in such matters inevitably produces. You should give this question, which is of such vital concern to your future, the full consideration it deserves, and examine all its aspects carefully and dispassionately. The final decision rests with you and... [the proposed partner]. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Preserving Bahá’í Marriages”, p. 445)

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

10) 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*, p. 390-391)

CHAPTER 2

A Broad View: The Purposes of Life

Quotations for Guidance

1) I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth.

There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Bahá'í Prayers* (US 2002), “Short Obligatory Prayer,” p. 4)

2) Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation.... Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 65)

3) Glory be to Thee, O God, for Thy manifestation of love to mankind! (Bahá'u'lláh: *Bahá'í Prayers* (UK), pp. 60-61)

4) All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 215)

5) The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct. (Bahá'u'lláh, cited in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 24-25)

6) Compare the nations of the world to the members of a family. A family is a nation in miniature. Simply enlarge the circle of the household, and you have the nation. Enlarge the circle of nations and you have all humanity. The family are the happenings in the life of the nation.... [and] nations are but an aggregate of families.... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 222)

7) ...[I]n this world he must prepare himself for the life beyond. That which he needs in the world of the Kingdom must be obtained here. Just as he prepared himself in the world of the matrix by acquiring forces necessary in this sphere of existence, so, likewise, the indispensable forces of the divine existence must be potentially attained in this world.

What is he in need of in the Kingdom which transcends the life and limitation of this mortal sphere? That world beyond is a world of sanctity and radiance; therefore, it is necessary that in this world he should acquire these divine attributes. In that world there is need of spirituality, faith, assurance, the knowledge and love of God. These he must attain in this world so that after his ascension from the earthly to the heavenly Kingdom he shall find all that is needful in that eternal life ready for him.

That divine world is manifestly a world of lights; therefore, man has need of illumination here. That is a world of love; the love of God is essential. It is a world of perfections; virtues, or perfections, must be acquired. That world is vivified by the breaths of the Holy Spirit; in this world we must seek them. That is the Kingdom of everlasting life; it must be attained during this vanishing existence.

By what means can man acquire these things? How shall he obtain these merciful gifts and powers? First, through the knowledge of God. Second, through the love of God. Third, through faith. Fourth, through philanthropic deeds. Fifth, through self-sacrifice. Sixth, through severance from this world. Seventh, through sanctity and holiness. Unless he acquires these forces and attains to these requirements, he will

surely be deprived of the life that is eternal. But if he possesses the knowledge of God, becomes ignited through the fire of the love of God, witnesses the great and mighty signs of the Kingdom, becomes the cause of love among mankind and lives in the utmost state of sanctity and holiness, he shall surely attain to second birth, be baptized by the Holy Spirit and enjoy everlasting existence.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 226)

CHAPTER 3

Making Decisions: The Tool of Consultation

“Consultation is a method for finding out the truth, solving problems, deciding on the best course of action, preventing difficulties, and generating new ideas and plans. It is a tool for equitably sharing power and decision-making between two or more people.”

~ Khalil A. Khavari and Sue Williston Khavari,
Creating a Successful Family, p. 68

“Consultation is one of the greatest bounties given to man. It is an art, a key which can unlock the mysteries of life and open the door to answers to the most perplexing questions—questions of intimate and personal concern, or questions of worldwide significance. It is a major tool for the coming-of-age of the human race, a fundamental element in the bringing into being of a new world civilization.”

~ John E. Kolstoe, *Consultation*,
A Universal Lamp of Guidance, p. 5

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) In all things it is necessary to consult...inasmuch as it is and will always be a cause of awareness and of awakening and a source of good and well-being. (Bahá'u'lláh: *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, “Consultation”, p. 93)
- 2) Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmutheth conjecture into certitude. It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation. (Bahá'u'lláh: *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, “Consultation”, p. 93)
- 3) Settle all things, both great and small, by consultation. Without prior consultation, take no important step in your own personal affairs. Concern yourselves with one another. Help along one another’s projects and plans. Grieve over one another. Let none in the whole country go in need. Befriend one another until ye become as a single body, one and all.... (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 178-179)
- 4) ...[C]onsultation is of vital importance, but spiritual conference and not the mere voicing of personal views is intended. ... Antagonism and contradiction are unfortunate and always destructive to truth. ... [C]onsultation must have for its object the investigation of truth. He who expresses an opinion should not voice it as correct and right but set it forth as a contribution to the consensus of opinion, for the light of reality becomes apparent when two opinions coincide. A spark is produced when flint and steel come together. Man should weigh his opinions with the utmost serenity, calmness and composure. Before expressing his own views he should carefully consider the views already advanced by others. If he finds that a previously expressed opinion is more true and worthy, he should accept it immediately and not willfully

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hold to an opinion of his own. By this excellent method he endeavors to arrive at unity and truth. Opposition and division are deplorable. ... [T]rue consultation is spiritual conference in the attitude and atmosphere of love. Members must love each other in the spirit of fellowship in order that good results may be forthcoming. Love and fellowship are the foundation. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 72-73)

5) The prime requisites for them that take counsel together [Spiritual Assemblies] are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrances, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 87)

6) The question of consultation is of the utmost importance, and is one of the most potent instruments conducive to the tranquility and felicity of the people. For example, when a believer is uncertain about his affairs, or when he seeketh to pursue a project or trade, the friends should gather together and devise a solution for him. He, in his turn, should act accordingly. Likewise in larger issues, when a problem ariseth, or a difficulty occurreth, the wise should gather, consult, and devise a solution. They should then rely upon the one true God, and surrender to His Providence, in whatever way it may be revealed, for divine confirmations will undoubtedly assist. Consultation, therefore, is one of the explicit ordinances of the Lord of mankind [Bahá’u’lláh]. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, “Consultation”*, pp. 96-97)

7) ...[T]hey must, when coming together, turn their faces to the Kingdom on high and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one’s views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 88)

8) In order to find truth we must give up our prejudices, our own small trivial notions; an open receptive mind is essential. If our chalice is full of self, there is no room in it for the water of life. The fact that we imagine ourselves to be right and everybody else wrong is the greatest of all obstacles in the path towards unity, and unity is necessary if we would reach truth, for truth is *one*. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Paris Talks*, p. 136)

9) 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 is present. (Universal House of Justice: An unpublished letter January 24, 1993, to an individual)

10) The second principle is that of detachment in consultation. The members of an Assembly must learn to express their views frankly, calmly, without passion or rancor. They must also learn to listen to the opinions of their fellow members without taking offense or belittling the views of another. Bahá’í consultation is not an easy process. It requires love, kindness, moral courage and humility. Thus no member should ever allow himself to be prevented from expressing frankly his view because it may offend a fellow member; and, realizing this, no member should take offense at another member’s statements. (Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 179-180)

11) [When asked about specific rules of conduct to govern the relationship between husbands and wives]...[F]or 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: *Compilations of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Preserving Bahá’í Marriages”, p. 456)

12) In any group, however loving the consultation, there are nevertheless points on which, from time to time, agreement cannot be reached. In a Spiritual Assembly this dilemma is resolved by a majority vote. There can, however, be no majority where only two parties are involved, as in the case of a husband and wife. There are, therefore, times when a wife should defer to her husband, and times when a husband should defer to his wife, but neither should ever unjustly dominate the other. In short, the relationship between husband and wife should be as held forth in the prayer revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá which is often read at Bahá’í weddings: “Verily they are married in obedience to Thy command. Cause them to become the signs of harmony and unity until the end of time.” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 225, quoting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 107)

CHAPTER 4

Looking Ahead: Exploring Expectations

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) This gift [of understanding] giveth man the power to discern the truth in all things, leadeth him to that which is right, and helpeth him to discover the secrets of creation. Next in rank, is the power of vision, the chief instrument whereby his understanding can function. The senses of hearing, of the heart, and the like, are similarly to be reckoned among the gifts with which the human body is endowed. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 194)
- 2) Beautify your tongues, O people, with truthfulness, and adorn your souls with the ornament of honesty. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 297)
- 3) We cherish the hope that this people will henceforth shield themselves from vain hopes and idle fancies.... (Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 69-70)
- 4) Set your faces towards unity, and let the radiance of its light shine upon you. Gather ye together, and for the sake of God resolve to root out whatever is the source of contention amongst you.... Arise and, armed with the power of faith, shatter to pieces the gods of your vain imaginings, the sowers of dissension amongst you. Cleave unto that which draweth you together and uniteth you. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 217-218)
- 5) O God! Refresh and gladden my spirit. Purify my heart. Illumine my powers. I lay all my affairs in Thy hand. Thou art my Guide and my Refuge. I will no longer be sorrowful and grieved; I will be a happy and joyful being. O God! I will no longer be full of anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass me. I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life.
O God! Thou art more friend to me than I am to myself. I dedicate myself to Thee, O Lord. ('Abdu'l-Bahá: *Bahá'í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 174-175)
- 6) ...[It is] incumbent upon all to investigate reality. What does it mean to investigate reality? It means that man must forget all hearsay and examine truth himself, for he does not know whether statements he hears are in accordance with reality or not. Wherever he finds truth or reality, he must hold to it, forsaking, discarding all else; for outside of reality there is naught but superstition and imagination. ('Abdu'l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 62)
- 7) He does not want the friends to be fearful, or to dwell upon the unpleasant possibilities of the future.... (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *The Light of Divine Guidance*, p. 299)

CHAPTER 5

Moving On: Learning from Relationships

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) O ye that have eyes to see! The past is the mirror of the future. Gaze ye therein and be apprised thereof.... (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tabernacle of Unity*, p. 10)
- 2) He hath known God who hath known himself. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 178)
- 3) O Son of Being! Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds. (Bahá'u'lláh: *The Hidden Words*, from the Arabic, No. 31)
- 4) No man shall attain the shores of the ocean of true understanding except he be detached from all that is in heaven and on earth. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 3)
- 5) ...[It is] incumbent upon all to investigate reality. What does it mean to investigate reality? It means that man must forget all hearsay and examine truth himself, for he does not know whether statements he hears are in accordance with reality or not. Wherever he finds truth or reality, he must hold to it, forsaking, discarding all else; for outside of reality there is naught but superstition and imagination. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 62)
- 6) [To the Muslims in Iran...] The first attribute of perfection is learning and the cultural attainments of the mind, and this eminent station is achieved when the individual combines in himself a thorough knowledge of those complex and transcendental realities pertaining to God, of the fundamental truths of Qur’anic political and religious law, of the contents of the sacred Scriptures of other faiths, and of those regulations and procedures which would contribute to the progress and civilization of this distinguished country. He should in addition be informed as to the laws and principles, the customs, conditions and manners, and the material and moral virtues characterizing the statecraft of other nations, and should be well versed in all the useful branches of learning of the day, and study the historical records of bygone governments and peoples. For if a learned individual has no knowledge of the sacred Scriptures and the entire field of divine and natural science, of religious jurisprudence and the arts of government and the varied learning of the time and the great events of history, he might prove unequal to an emergency, and this is inconsistent with the necessary qualification of comprehensive knowledge. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, pp. 35-36)

CHAPTER 6

Your Focus: Knowing and Growing Character

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) The light of a good character surpasseth the light of the sun and the radiance thereof. Whoso attaineth unto it is accounted as a jewel among men. The glory and the upliftment of the world must needs depend upon it. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 36)
- 2) Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 259)
- 3) ...man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 35)
- 4) Let there be naught in your demeanor of which sound and upright minds would disapprove, and make not yourselves the playthings of the ignorant. Well is it with him who hath adorned himself with the vesture of seemly conduct and a praiseworthy character. He is assuredly reckoned with those who aid their Lord through distinctive and outstanding deeds. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 77)
- 5) Walk not with the ungodly and seek not fellowship with him, for such companionship turneth the radiance of the heart into infernal fire. (Bahá'u'lláh: *The Hidden Words*, from the Persian, No. 57)
- 6) Commit not that which defileth the limpid stream of love or destroyeth the sweet fragrance of friendship. By the righteousness of the Lord! Ye were created to show love one to another and not perversity and rancor. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*: p. 138)
- 7) If any differences arise amongst you, behold Me standing before your face, and overlook the faults of one another for My name's sake and as a token of your love for My manifest and resplendent Cause. We love to see you at all times consorting in amity and concord within the paradise of My good-pleasure, and to inhale from your acts the fragrance of friendliness and unity, of loving-kindness and fellowship. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*: pp. 315-316)
- 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.... (‘Abdu'l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 118)
- 9) God has given man the eye of investigation by which he may see and recognize truth.... Man is not intended to see through the eyes of another, hear through another's ears nor comprehend with another's brain. Each human creature has individual endowment, power and responsibility in the creative plan of God. Therefore, depend upon your own reason and judgment and adhere to the outcome of your own investigation.... (‘Abdu'l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 293)
- 10) My purpose is to explain to you that it is your duty to guard the religion of God so that none shall be able to assail it outwardly or inwardly. If you find harmful teachings are being set forth by some individual, no matter who that individual be, even though he should be my own son, know, verily, that I am completely severed from him. If anyone speaks against the Covenant [of Bahá'u'lláh], even though he should be my son, know that I am opposed to him. Those who speak falsehoods, who covet worldly things and seek to accumulate the riches of this earth are not of me. But when you find a person living up to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, following the precepts of *The Hidden Words*, know that he belongs to Bahá'u'lláh; and, verily, I

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proclaim that he is of me. If, on the other hand, you see anyone whose deeds and conduct are contrary to and not in conformity with the good pleasure of the Blessed Perfection [Bahá'u'lláh] and against the spirit of *The Hidden Words*, let that be your standard and criterion of judgment against him, for know that I am altogether severed from him no matter who he may be. This is the truth. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 456-457)

11) Strive ye then with all your heart to treat compassionately all humankind—except for those who have some selfish, private motive, or some disease of the soul. Kindness cannot be shown the tyrant, the deceiver, or the thief, because, far from awakening them to the error of their ways, it maketh them to continue in their perversity as before. No matter how much kindness ye may expend upon the liar, he will but lie the more, for he believeth you to be deceived, while ye understand him but too well, and only remain silent out of your extreme compassion. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*: p. 158)

12) In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone. Signs of both these natures are to be found in men. In his material aspect he expresses untruth, cruelty and injustice; all these are the outcome of his lower nature. The attributes of his Divine nature are shown forth in love, mercy, kindness, truth and justice, one and all being expressions of his higher nature. Every good habit, every noble quality belongs to man’s spiritual nature, whereas all his imperfections and sinful actions are born of his material nature. If a man’s Divine nature dominates his human nature, we have a saint. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 60)

13) Love and kindness have far greater influence than punishment upon the improvement of human character. (Shoghi Effendi: *Compilations of Compilations, Vol. I*, “Bahá’í Education”, pp. 300-301)

14) In order to achieve this cordial unity one of the first essentials insisted on by Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is that we resist the natural tendency to let our attention dwell on the faults and failings of others rather than on our own. Each of us is responsible for one life only, and that is our own. Each of us is immeasurably far from being “perfect as our heavenly father is perfect” and the task of perfecting our own life and character is one that requires all our attention, our will-power and energy. (Shoghi Effendi: *Living the Life*, pp. 3-4)

15) He [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] is...the perfect Exemplar of His teachings...the embodiment of every Bahá’í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá’í virtue.... (Shoghi Effendi, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I*, “The Covenant”, pp. 117-118)

16) Which of the blessings am I to recount, which in her [Bahíyyih Khánum, Bahá'u'lláh's daughter] unflinching solicitude she showered upon me... [S]he was the living symbol of many an attribute I had learned to admire in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. She was to me a continual reminder of His inspiring personality, of His calm resignation, of His munificence and magnanimity. To me she was an incarnation of His winsome graciousness, of His all-encompassing tenderness and love.

...[I]n Tablets, which stand as eternal testimonies to the beauty of her character, Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá have paid touching tributes...that proclaim her as an example to their followers, and as an object worthy of the admiration of all mankind. (Shoghi Effendi, *Bahíyyih Khánum*, pp. 42-43)

17) There is a difference between character and faith; it is often very hard to accept this fact and put up with it, but the fact remains that a person may believe in and love [the Bahá’í Faith]—even to being ready to die for it—and yet not have a good personal character, or possess traits at variance with the teachings. We should try to change, to let the Power of God help recreate us and make us true Bahá’ís in deed as well as in belief. But sometimes the process is slow, sometimes it never happens because the individual does not try hard enough. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 440)

18) [First of three great fields of service for young Bahá’ís; the others are teaching and education/career preparation] First, the foundation of all their other accomplishments is their study of the teachings, the spiritualization of their lives and the forming of their characters in accordance with the standards of

Bahá'u'lláh. As the moral standards of the people around us collapse and decay...Bahá'ís must increasingly stand out as pillars of righteousness and forbearance. The life of a Bahá'í will be characterized by truthfulness and decency; he will walk uprightly among his fellowmen, dependent upon none save God, yet linked by bonds of love and brotherhood with all mankind; he will be entirely detached from the loose standards, the decadent theories, the frenetic experimentation, the desperation of present-day society, will look upon his neighbors with a bright and friendly face and be a beacon light and haven for all those who would emulate his strength of character and assurance of soul. (Universal House of Justice, *Messages 1963 to 1986*, Message to the Bahá'í Youth of the World, pp. 93-94)

19) There are...innumerable examples of individuals who have been able to effect drastic and enduring changes in their behavior, through drawing on the spiritual powers available by the bounty of God. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, "Preserving Bahá'í Marriages", p. 459)

20) A couple should study each other's character and spend time getting to know each other before they decide to marry, and when they do marry it should be with the intention of establishing an eternal bond. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 380)

CHAPTER 7

What You Want: A Great Marriage Partner

The Valley of Knowledge

“There was once a lover who had sighed for long years in separation from his beloved, and wasted in the fire of remoteness. From the rule of love, his heart was empty of patience, and his body weary of his spirit; he reckoned life without her as a mockery, and time consumed him away. How many a day he found no rest in longing for her; how many a night the pain of her kept him from sleep; his body was worn to a sigh, his heart’s wound had turned him to a cry of sorrow. He had given a thousand lives for one taste of the cup of her presence, but it availed him not. The doctors knew no cure for him, and companions avoided his company; yea, physicians have no medicine for one sick of love, unless the favor of the beloved one deliver him.

“At last, the tree of his longing yielded the fruit of despair, and the fire of his hope fell to ashes. Then one night he could live no more, and he went out of his house and made for the marketplace. On a sudden, a watchman followed after him. He broke into a run, with the watchman following; then other watchmen came together, and barred every passage to the weary one. And the wretched one cried from his heart, and ran here and there, and moaned to himself: ‘Surely this watchman is ‘Izrá’íl, my angel of death, following so fast upon me; or he is a tyrant of men, seeking to harm me.’ His feet carried him on, the one bleeding with the arrow of love, and his heart lamented. Then he came to a garden wall, and with untold pain he scaled it, for it proved very high; and forgetting his life, he threw himself down to the garden.

“And there he beheld his beloved with a lamp in her hand, searching for a ring she had lost. When the heart-surrendered lover looked on his ravishing love, he drew a great breath and raised up his hands in prayer, crying: ‘O God! Give Thou glory to the watchman, and riches and long life. For the watchman was Gabriel, guiding this poor one; or he was Isráfil, bringing life to this wretched one!’

“Indeed, his words were true, for he had found many a secret justice in this seeming tyranny of the watchman, and seen how many a mercy lay hid behind the veil. Out of wrath, the guard had led him who was athirst in love’s desert to the sea of his loved one, and lit up the dark night of absence with the light of reunion. He had driven one who was afar, into the garden of nearness, had guided an ailing soul to the heart’s physician.

“Now if the lover could have looked ahead, he would have blessed the watchman at the start, and prayed on his behalf, and he would have seen that tyranny as justice; but since the end was veiled to him, he moaned and made his plaint in the beginning. Yet those who journey in the garden land of knowledge, because they see the end in the beginning, see peace in war and friendliness in anger.”

~ Bahá’u’lláh, *Seven Valleys and Four Valleys*, pp. 13-15

Quotations for Guidance

1) The diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord. If you meet those of a different race and color from yourself, do not mistrust them, and withdraw yourself into your shell of conventionality, but rather be glad and show them kindness. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 527)

2) ...[C]onsider how the cause of the welfare, happiness, joy and comfort of humankind are amity and union, whereas dissension and discord are most conducive to hardship, humiliation, agitation and failure. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 287)

3) ...[T]he honor of the human kingdom is the attainment of spiritual happiness in the human world, the acquisition of the knowledge and love of God. The honor allotted to man is the acquisition of the supreme

virtues of the human world. This is his real happiness and felicity. But if material happiness and spiritual felicity be conjoined, it will be “delight upon delight,” as the Arabs say. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 166)

4) Every imperfect soul is self-centered and thinketh only of his own good. But as his thoughts expand a little he will begin to think of the welfare and comfort of his family. If his ideas still more widen, his concern will be the felicity of his fellow citizens; and if still they widen, he will be thinking of the glory of his land and of his race. But when ideas and views reach the utmost degree of expansion and attain the stage of perfection, then will he be interested in the exaltation of humankind. He will then be the well-wisher of all men and the seeker of the weal and prosperity of all lands. This is indicative of perfection. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 69)

5) Persevere in your efforts, let not obstacles damp your zeal and determination and rest assured that the Power of God which is reinforcing your efforts will in the end triumph and enable you to fulfill your cherished desire. (Shoghi Effendi: *Arohanni: Letters to New Zealand*, p. 25)

6) Systematic, well-conceived, carefully coordinated plans. . . . (Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, p. 80)

7) Armed with the strength of action and the cooperation of the individual believers composing it, the community as a whole should endeavor to establish greater stability in the patterns of its development, locally and nationally, through sound, systematic planning and execution of its work and this in striking contrast to the short-lived enthusiasms and frenetic superficialities so characteristic of present-day American life. (Universal House of Justice, *Developing Distinctive Baha’i Communities*, 3.17)

8) There is no teaching in the Bahá’í Faith that “soul mates” exist. What is meant is that marriage should lead to a profound friendship of spirit, which will endure in the next world, where there is no sex, and no giving and taking in marriage; just the way we should establish with our parents, our children, our brothers and sisters and friends a deep spiritual bond which will be everlasting, and not merely physical bonds of human relationship. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 206)

9) There is nothing against a person remarrying, the implication of unity in marriage being meant as a spiritual bond which will be everlasting, and not a sexual thing. . . .

It is suggested that Bahá’í marriage does not automatically “lead to a profound friendship of spirit, which will endure in the next world”. Further, it would appear that the possibility of such an enduring “friendship” is not limited to the relationship between husband and wife. Rather, it is dependent on the nurturance and development of “a deep spiritual bond”, which transcends the “merely physical bonds of human relationship” and is conditional on the establishment of “unity” in the particular relationship. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 7-6-94; Baha’i Library Online, <http://bahai-library.com>)

CHAPTER 8

I Like You: Being Friends

“If you pair a relationship with a friendship that has provided you with mutual support and understanding, and you decide at some point to marry, the foundation of your marriage is likely to be much stronger. You will already have had the practice of being companions, confiding in each other, supporting and helping each other through difficulties, sharing your joys, and turning to each other for fun and relaxation.”

~ Susanne Alexander, with John S. Miller,
Can We Dance? Learning the Steps for a Fulfilling Relationship, p. 186

“True friendship is a firm foundation for marriage that will see you through its joys and challenges. You will have many opportunities to deepen and develop it as your marriage progresses. It strengthens when you confide in one another, parent together, support one another through difficulties, share joys, and participate in fun and relaxation. Marriage is very much about companionship and is in many ways one long conversation and relationship with a close friend. Ideally, you will be closer to your spouse than to any other human being.”

~ Susanne Alexander, with Craig A. Farnsworth and John S. Miller,
Pure Gold: Encouraging Character Qualities in Marriage (2nd ed.), p. 23

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) Do not be content with showing friendship in words alone, let your heart burn with loving kindness for all who may cross your path. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Paris Talks*, p. 16)
- 2) ...[M]an and woman should truly be friends, and should be in sympathy with one another. Their understanding should have a basis in reality and not be based upon passion and desire.... (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Sexuality, Relationships and Spiritual Growth*, p. 121)
- 3) In this glorious [Bahá’í] Cause the 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. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, “Family Life”*, p. 397)
- 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)

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- 5) You must love your friend better than yourself; yes, be willing to sacrifice yourself. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 218)
- 6) ...[M]arriage should lead to a profound friendship of spirit.... (Shoghi Effendi: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Preserving Bahá’í Marriages”, p. 452)

CHAPTER 9

An Initial Step: Do You Want to Date?

Quotations for Guidance

1) Ye were created to show love one to another.... (Bahá'u'lláh: *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 138)

2) A chaste and holy life must be made the controlling principle in the behavior and conduct of all Bahá'ís, both in their social relations with the members of their own community, and in their contact with the world at large. ... It must be upheld, in all its integrity and implications, in every phase of the life of those who fill the ranks of that Faith, whether in their homes, their travels, their clubs, their societies, their entertainments, their schools, and their universities. ... It must be closely and continually identified with the mission of the Bahá'í Youth, both as an element in the life of the Bahá'í community, and as a factor in the future progress and orientation of the youth of their own country.

Such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations. It demands daily vigilance in the control of one's carnal desires and corrupt inclinations. It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures. It requires total abstinence from all alcoholic drinks, from opium, and from similar habit-forming drugs. It condemns the prostitution of art and of literature, the practices of nudism and of companionate marriage, infidelity in marital relationships, and all manner of promiscuity, of easy familiarity, and of sexual vices. It can tolerate no compromise with the theories, the standards, the habits, and the excesses of a decadent age. Nay rather it seeks to demonstrate, through the dynamic force of its example, the pernicious character of such theories, the falsity of such standards, the hollowness of such claims, the perversity of such habits, and the sacrilegious character of such excesses.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 25)

3) In the teachings there is nothing against dancing, but the friends should remember that the standard of Bahá'u'lláh is modesty and chastity. The atmosphere of modern dance halls, where so much smoking and drinking and promiscuity goes on, is very bad, but decent dances are not harmful in themselves. There is certainly no harm in classical dancing or learning dancing in school. There is also no harm in taking part in dramas. Likewise in cinema acting. The harmful thing, nowadays, is not the art itself but the unfortunate corruption which often surrounds these arts. As Bahá'ís we need to avoid none of the arts, but acts and the atmosphere that sometimes go with these professions we should avoid. (Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 98-99)

4) What Bahá'u'lláh means by chastity certainly does not include the kissing that goes on in modern society. It is detrimental to the morals of young people, and often leads them to go too far, or arouses appetites which they cannot perhaps at the time satisfy legitimately through marriage, and the suppression of which is a strain on them.

The Bahá'í standard is very high, more particularly when compared with the thoroughly rotten morals of the present world. But this standard of ours will produce healthier, happier, nobler people, and induce stabler marriages. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 360)

5) The pilgrim's note [generally, unauthenticated recollections from an in-person meeting with 'Abdu'l-Bahá] reports the Master as saying: "Women and men must not embrace each other when not married, or not about to be married. They must not kiss each other... If they wish to greet each other, or comfort each other, they may take each other by the hand." In a letter to an individual written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi it is said: "The Master's words to..., which you quoted, can certainly be taken as the true spirit of the teachings on the subject of sex. We must strive to achieve this exalted standard." (The Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 439-440)

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6) ...[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: An unpublished letter February 5, 1992, to an individual)

7) As you know, in the *Advent of Divine Justice* [Shoghi Effendi] has stated the principles of Bahá'í conduct which apply and he has condemned easy familiarity and frivolous conduct. Certainly the practice of indiscriminate kissing and embracing involving unrelated people of opposite sexes is not desirable and is discouraged. Particularly in these days when restraints are being abolished one by one, the Bahá'ís should make great efforts to uphold, in their personal lives and in their relationships to each other, the standards of conduct set forth in the teachings. The following extract from a letter written by the Universal House of Justice outlines the responsibility of the individual in determining how the Bahá'í standards apply to daily life, and the means by which this is accomplished:

It is neither possible nor desirable for the Universal House of Justice to set forth a set of rules covering every situation. Rather is it the task of the individual believer to determine, according to his own prayerful understanding of the Writings, precisely what his course of conduct should be in relation to situations which he encounters in his daily life. If he is to fulfill his true mission in life as a follower of the Blessed Perfection, he will pattern his life according to the Teachings. The believer cannot attain this objective merely by living according to a set of rigid regulations. When his life is oriented toward service to Bahá'u'lláh, and when every conscious act is performed within this frame of reference, he will not fail to achieve the true purpose of his life.

Therefore, every believer must continually study the sacred Writings and the instructions of [Shoghi Effendi], striving always to attain a new and better understanding of their import to him and to his society. He should pray fervently for Divine Guidance, wisdom and strength to do what is pleasing to God, and to serve Him at all times and to the best of his ability.

It is not surprising that serious-minded Bahá'í youth growing up in a bewildering moral environment are asking for specific guidance on the matter of proper conduct in friendship between boys and girls, men and women. It is also not surprising that their parents and other adult advisors are themselves sometimes confused on the issues that arise as they find old standards are changing and new patterns of behavior are developing in society which are unsettling, possibly even frightening to them. The primary protection for the friends in these matters, both young and old alike, is to continue to deepen, truly deepen, in the Teachings so that their behavior more readily conforms to the high standards of the [Bahá'í] Faith.... (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: An unpublished letter February 5, 1992, to an individual)

8) ...[In] *The Advent of Divine Justice* [Shoghi Effendi] is describing the requirements not only of chastity, but of “a chaste and holy life”—both the adjectives are important. One of the signs of a decadent society, a sign which is very evident in the world today, is an almost frenetic devotion to pleasure and diversion, an insatiable thirst for amusement, a fanatical devotion to games and sport, a reluctance to treat any matter seriously, and a scornful, derisory attitude towards virtue and solid worth. Abandonment of “a frivolous conduct” does not imply that a Bahá'í must be sour-faced or perpetually solemn. Humor, happiness, joy are characteristics of a true Bahá'í life. Frivolity palls and eventually leads to boredom and emptiness, but true

happiness and joy and humor that are parts of a balanced life that includes serious thought, compassion and humble servitude to God, are characteristics that enrich life and add to its radiance.

Shoghi Effendi's choice of words was always significant, and each one is important in understanding his guidance. In this particular passage, he does not forbid "trivial" pleasures, but he does warn against "excessive attachment" to them and indicates that they can often be "misdirected." One is reminded of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's caution that we should not let a pastime become a waste of time. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, "A Chaste and Holy Life"*, p. 54)

CHAPTER 10

Becoming Serious: Courting One Another

Quotations for Guidance

1) ...[T]hey [a courting couple] must show forth the utmost attention and become informed of one another's character and the firm covenant made between each other must become an eternal binding, and their intentions must be everlasting affinity, friendship, unity and life. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, Vol. 2, p. 325)

2) [Below 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: An unpublished letter August 28, 1994, to an individual)

CHAPTER 11

Promising Forever: Making Commitments

“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.

“I have learned a deep respect for one of Goethe’s couplets:

““Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.””

~ 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.”

~ Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *Prescription for Living* (1950 edition), p. 39

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) ...say not that which thou doest not. (Bahá'u'lláh: *The Hidden Words*, from the Arabic, No. 29)
- 2) He should not...promise that which he doth not fulfill. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Babá'u'lláh*, p. 266)
- 3) 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)
- 4) 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)

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5) 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)

CHAPTER 12

A Positive Choice: Chastity Before Marriage

“Chastity—one of the rarest of all moral gems in the world to-day—means to conserve your personal sex powers, so intimate in nature, capable of conferring so much beauty on your life, for their proper expression which is with your life partner, your mate, the one who with you will share home, children and all the glad and sad burdens of living. The decency, the spiritual cleanliness of marriage, the essential humanness of it, are enhanced a thousandfold by chastity on the part of both men and women, previous to their unions. Their chances of successful marriage are also far greater, for they will then share with each other, in every way, the new life they have embarked upon. Comparisons will not be drawn, over-emphasized appetites on the part of one or the other will not have been cultivated which might mar it, and above all, they will have put sex into its proper place, where instead of stampeding the emotional nature of the individual (as it does at present to so marked a degree), it will fulfill its natural function in rounding out life and contributing to its normality and healthfulness.”

~ Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *Prescription for Living* (1978 edition), pp. 88-89

“The try and see attitude has no place in marriage. ... Marriage should not be entered into with the idea of ‘til divorce us do part.

“...[C]ohabitation, trial marriages, and other forms of pre-marriage intimacy are bad ideas to begin with. They have a large element of hesitancy, trepidation, and leaving an escape hatch. Marriage is a total commitment and that is the only way that it is going to be successful.”

~ Khalil A. Khavari and Sue Williston Khavari, *Together Forever*, p. 12

Quotations for Guidance

1) He is not to be numbered with the people of Bahá who followeth his mundane desires, or fixeth his heart on things of the earth. He is My true follower who, if he come to a valley of pure gold, will pass straight through it aloof as a cloud, and will neither turn back, nor pause. Such a man is, assuredly, of Me. From his garment the Concourse on high can inhale the fragrance of sanctity.... And if he met the fairest and most comely of women, he would not feel his heart seduced by the least shadow of desire for her beauty. Such an one, indeed, is the creation of spotless chastity. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 118)

2) One speck of chastity is greater than a hundred thousand years of worship and a sea of knowledge. (A newly translated extract from an unpublished Tablet by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in a letter dated November 26, 2003, from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’í community in Iran)

3) ...[M]an’s supreme honor and real happiness lie in self-respect, in high resolves and noble purposes, in integrity and moral quality, in immaculacy of mind. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 19)

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4) Such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations. It demands daily vigilance in the control of one's carnal desires and corrupt inclinations. It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures. It requires total abstinence from all alcoholic drinks, from opium, and from similar habit-forming drugs. It condemns the prostitution of art and of literature, the practices of nudism and of companionate marriage, infidelity in marital relationships, and all manner of promiscuity, of easy familiarity, and of sexual vices. It can tolerate no compromise with the theories, the standards, the habits, and the excesses of a decadent age. Nay rather it seeks to demonstrate, through the dynamic force of its example, the pernicious character of such theories, the falsity of such standards, the hollowness of such claims, the perversity of such habits, and the sacrilegious character of such excesses. (Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 25)

5) What Bahá'u'lláh means by chastity certainly does not include the kissing that goes on in modern society. It is detrimental to the morals of young people, and often leads them to go too far, or arouses appetites which they cannot perhaps at the time satisfy legitimately through marriage, and the suppression of which is a strain on them.

The Bahá'í standard is very high, more particularly when compared with the thoroughly rotten morals of the present world. But this standard of ours will produce healthier, happier, nobler people, and induce stabler marriages. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 360)

6) ...the Bahá'í conception of sex is based on the belief that chastity should be strictly practiced by both sexes, not only because it is in itself highly commendable ethically, but also due to its being the only way to a happy and successful marital life. (Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 344-345)

7) The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse, but condemns its illegitimate and improper expressions such as free love, companionate marriage and others, all of which it considers positively harmful to man and to the society in which he lives. 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. The Bahá'ís do not believe in the suppression of the sex impulse but in its regulation and control. (Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 344)

8) It must be remembered, however, that the maintenance of such a high standard of moral conduct is not to be associated or confused with any form of asceticism, or of excessive and bigoted puritanism. The standard inculcated by Bahá'u'lláh, seeks, under no circumstances, to deny anyone the legitimate right and privilege to derive the fullest advantage and benefit from the manifold joys, beauties, and pleasures with which the world has been so plentifully enriched by an All-Loving Creator. (Shoghi Effendi: *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 28)

9) The Bahá'í youth should, on the one hand, be taught the lesson of self-control which, when exercised, undoubtedly has a salutary effect on the development of character and of personality in general, and on the other should be advised, nay even encouraged, to contract marriage while still young and in full possession of their physical vigor. Economic factors, no doubt, are often a serious hindrance to early marriage, but in most cases are only an excuse, and as such should not be overstressed. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, "A Chaste and Holy Life"*, p. 56)

10) As regards flagrantly immoral relationships, such as a man living with a mistress, this should be brought to his attention in a loving manner, and he should be urged to either marry the woman if he is free to do so, or to give up this conduct, so detrimental to the [Bahá'í] Faith and to his own spiritual progress. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 381)

11) No matter how devoted and fine the love may be between people of the same sex, to let it find expression in sexual acts is wrong. To say that it is ideal is no excuse. Immorality of every sort is really forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh, and homosexual relationships He looks upon as such, besides being against nature.

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To be afflicted this way is a great burden to a conscientious soul. But through the advice and help of doctors, through a strong and determined effort, and through prayer, a soul can overcome this.... (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 223)

12) ...[T]he whole matter of sex and the problems related to it have assumed far too great an importance in the thinking of present-day society.

Masturbation is clearly not a proper use of the sex instinct, as this is understood in the Faith. Moreover it involves, as you have pointed out, mental fantasies, while Bahá'u'lláh, in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, has exhorted us not to indulge our passions and in one of His well-known Tablets ‘Abdu'l-Bahá encourages us to keep our “secret thoughts pure”. Of course many wayward thoughts come involuntarily to the mind and these are merely a result of weakness and are not blameworthy unless they become fixed or even worse, are expressed in improper acts. (Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 364)

13) The Bahá'í Teachings do not contemplate any form of “trial marriage.” A couple should study each other's character and spend time getting to know each other before they decide to marry, and when they do marry it should be with the intention of establishing an eternal bond. They should realize, moreover, that the primary purpose of marriage is the procreation of children. (Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 380)

14) Chastity in no way implies withdrawal from human relationships. It liberates people from the tyranny of the ubiquity of sex. A person who is in control of his sexual impulses is enabled to have profound and enduring friendships with many people, both men and women, without ever sully that unique and priceless bond that should unite [husband] and wife. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, “A Chaste and Holy Life”*, p. 51)

15) [Sex is]...a subject that needs to be placed in its proper context of the spiritual and emotional development of individuals, the nature of the family and the purpose of human life.... (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 358)

16) As to chastity, this is one of the most challenging concepts to get across in this very permissive age, but Bahá'ís must make the utmost effort to uphold Bahá'í standards, no matter how difficult they may seem at first. Such efforts will be made easier if the youth will understand that the laws and standards of the Faith are meant to free them from untold spiritual and moral difficulties in the same way that a proper appreciation of the laws of nature enables one to live in harmony with the forces of the planet. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 362-363)

17) ...[T]he Cause of God will derive immense benefit when it observed that the Bahá'ís, and particularly Bahá'í youth, stand out against the laxity and depravity of the permissive society, that the exalted standards of conduct which they strive to uphold are firmly rooted in spiritual principles, giving them confidence, self-respect and true happiness. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 358-359)

CHAPTER 13

The Goal: A Strong, Eternal Marriage

“Marriage must be viewed in its correct relation to the individual and to the community at large. You will never get the most out of anything unless you understand its proper function. Marriage should be looked forward to, primarily, for the lifelong comradeship it provides. It is likely that your life partner is going to outlast all your other intimate relationships. Your parents will most probably die before you do, your children will grow up and make lives for themselves, your brothers and sisters and friends will have their own intimate relationships in life which will perforce have to take first place. But your partner, your wife or husband, will be there with you always. Joys and sorrows will have to be shared, the home, the children, the income, to a great extent your interests and diversions, will be a common holding. Before you marry you have to realize this, you have to ponder whether you two can go through all that together satisfactorily.

“Do not expect too much of marriage, or too little. ... Your union cannot produce more than you two contribute to it. If you are full of imperfections, intolerant, impatient, exacting, dictatorial, suspicious, short-tempered, selfish, do not imagine that these characteristics are going to make your marriage happy or that by changing your partner a new union will be more successful! Marriage, like all our other relationships in life, is a process which, among other things, serves to grind the sharp edges off us. The grinding often hurts, the adjustment to another person’s character is difficult at first, that is why love is needed here more than in any other relationship. Love, being essentially a divine force, binds; it leaps like a spark the gaps between people’s thoughts and conflicting desires, between perhaps widely different temperaments. It heals the wounds we all inflict on each other whether inadvertently or in moments of rage, jealousy or spite. To the influence of love in marriage is gradually added another powerful catalyst: habit. The common home, the daily association, produces a common framework, and habit, one of the most powerful forces in life, begins to knit husband and wife together. It acts as a wonderful stabilizer; if love is allowed to fail, habit itself may be strong enough to preserve the union.”

~ Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *Prescription for Living* (1978 edition), pp. 87-88

Quotations for Guidance

1) 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)

2) Know thou that polygamy is not permitted under the law of God, for contentment with one wife hath been clearly stipulated. Taking a second wife is made dependent upon equity and justice being upheld between the two wives, under all conditions. However, observance of justice and equity towards two wives is utterly impossible. The fact that bigamy has been made dependent upon an impossible condition is clear proof of its absolute prohibition. Therefore it is not permissible for a man to have more than one wife. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Notes), p. 206)

3) Since the consent of both parties is required in the Book of God, and since, before maturity, their consent or lack of it cannot be ascertained, marriage is therefore conditional upon reaching the age of maturity [age 15], and is not permissible before that time. (*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Questions and Answers, p. 134)

4) ...[M]arriage should lead to a profound friendship of spirit, which will endure in the next world, where there is no sex, and no giving and taking in marriage; just the way we should establish with our parents, our children, our brothers and sisters and friends a deep spiritual bond which will be everlasting, and not merely physical bonds of human relationship. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 206)

5) Wherever there is a Bahá’í family, those concerned should by all means do all they can to preserve it, because divorce is strongly condemned in the Teachings, whereas harmony, unity and love are held up as the highest ideals in human relationships. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I*, “Divorce”, p. 244)

6) There is nothing more beautiful than to have young Bahá’ís marry and found truly Bahá’í homes, the type Bahá’u’lláh wishes them to be. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 221)

7) He realizes your desire to get married is quite a natural one, and he will pray that God will assist you to find a suitable companion with whom you can be truly happy and united in the service of the [Bahá’í] Faith. Bahá’u’lláh has urged marriage upon all people as the natural and rightful way of life. He has also, however, placed strong emphasis on its spiritual nature, which, while in no way precluding a normal physical life, is the most essential aspect of marriage. That two people should live their lives in love and harmony is of far greater importance than that they should be consumed with passion for each other. The one is a great rock of strength on which to lean in time of need; the other a purely temporary thing which may at any time die out. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 380)

8) The Bahá’í youth...should be advised, nay even encouraged, to contract marriage while still young and in full possession of their physical vigor. Economic factors, no doubt, are often a serious hindrance to early marriage, but in most cases are only an excuse, and as such should not be overstressed. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I*, “A Chaste and Holy Life”, p. 56)

9) ...[I]mplicit faith in our intuitive powers is unwise, but through daily prayer and sustained effort one can discover, though not always and fully, God’s will intuitively. Under no circumstances, however, can a person be absolutely certain that he is recognizing God’s will, through the exercise of his intuition. It often happens that the latter results in completely misrepresenting the truth, and thus becomes a source of error rather than of guidance. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 29, 1938, unpublished; “Understanding Tests” letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 17, 1989)

10) Patient, prayerful and self-sacrificing effort is required in order to preserve marital and family life. In this regard Shoghi Effendi called upon couples to “take constructive action” and not allow a deteriorating situation to get worse.... (Universal House of Justice, introduction to the *Preserving Bahá’í Marriages* compilation, section 3.1)

11) God has endowed human beings with more than one way of receiving guidance in the decisions we have to make, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has explained. There are the Holy Writings, in which are clear directions for the way in which we should live; if an inner voice prompts us to act contrary to the explicit teachings we can be sure that, far from being an inspiration from God, that inner voice is the expression of our own lower nature, and should be disregarded. There is also the gift of intelligence and good judgment—the faculty which distinguishes man from the animal kingdom; God intends us to use the faculty, which can be a powerful instrument for distinguishing between true inspirations and vain imaginings. There is the power of prayer through which we strive to purify our motives, to seek the Will of God and to implore His guidance and assistance. There is also the law of consultation, one of the distinguishing features of this great Revelation. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, November 29, 1982, unpublished; “Understanding Tests” letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 17, 1989)

12) ...[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)

13) 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)

CHAPTER 14

In Harmony: Compatibility and Unity

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 288)
- 2) Turn your faces from the darkness of estrangement to the effulgent light of the daystar of unity. This is that which above all else will benefit the peoples of the earth. O Friend! Upon the tree of utterance there hath never been, or shall there ever be, a fairer leaf, and beneath the ocean of knowledge no pearl more wondrous can ever be found. (Bahá'u'lláh: *The Tabernacle of Unity*, p. 7)
- 3) The first [teaching of Bahá'u'lláh] is the independent investigation of truth.... (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 248)
- 4) 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)
- 5) As for the question regarding marriage under the Law of God: first thou must choose one who is pleasing to thee.... (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 118)
- 6) ...[I]f woman be fully educated and granted her rights, she will attain the capacity for wonderful accomplishments and prove herself the equal of man. She is the coadjutor* of man, his complement and helpmeet. Both are human; both are endowed with potentialities of intelligence and embody the virtues of humanity. In all human powers and functions they are partners and coequals. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 136) [*definition: coworker]
- 7) The world of humanity consists of two parts: male and female. Each is the complement of the other. Therefore, if one is defective, the other will necessarily be incomplete, and perfection cannot be attained. There is a right hand and a left hand in the human body, functionally equal in service and administration. If either proves defective, the defect will naturally extend to the other by involving the completeness of the whole; for accomplishment is not normal unless both are perfect. If we say one hand is deficient, we prove the inability and incapacity of the other; for single-handed there is no full accomplishment. Just as physical accomplishment is complete with two hands, so man and woman, the two parts the social body, must be perfect. It is not natural that either should remain undeveloped; and until both are perfected, the happiness of the human world will not be realized. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 134)
- 8) The love between husband and wife should not be purely physical, nay rather it must be spiritual and heavenly. These two souls should be considered as one soul. How difficult it would be to divide a single soul! Nay, great would be the difficulty! ... [T]he foundation of the Kingdom of God is based upon harmony and love, oneness, relationship and union, not upon differences, especially between husband and wife. If one of these two become the cause of divorce, that one will unquestionably fall into great difficulties, will become the victim of formidable calamities and experience deep remorse. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 391-392)
- 9) ...[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. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, “Family Life”*, p. 397)
- 10) Endeavor ye as much as possible that differences may not arise in the affairs; let not every insignificant matter become the cause of disagreement. If such conditions exist the end will be complete dispersion. The believers and maid-servants of the Merciful must all consider how to produce harmony, so that the unity of

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the human world may be realized, not that every wholly unimportant subject becomes conducive to differences of opinion. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in *Principles of Bahá’í Administration*, p. 48)

11) The diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 53)

12) 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)

13) I wish to assure you, in particular, of his supplications for your guidance in connection with your proposed plan to unite in marriage with.... May the Beloved help you in forming the right decision, and spare you the anxiety and suffering which too hasty action in such matters inevitably produces. You should give this question, which is of such vital concern to your future, the full consideration it deserves, and examine all its aspects carefully and dispassionately. The final decision rests with you and... [the proposed partner]. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Preserving Bahá’í Marriages”, p. 445)

14) The Master said guidance was when the doors opened after we tried. We can pray, ask to do God’s will only, try hard, and then if we find our plan is not working out, assume it is not the right one, at least for the moment. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 29, 1952, unpublished; “Understanding Tests” letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 17, 1989)

CHAPTER 15

Powerful Attraction: Your Love for One Another

“Contrary to popular opinion, love is rarely a thunderbolt out of the sky. It is, rather, a hundred thousand million tiny raindrops that fill us up and sweep us out to the ocean. It is the result of small, repeating positive interactions. It is knowledge born of consistent contact. It is a flame that must be fed tiny twigs before being given sturdy sticks or large logs.”

~ Justice St. Rain, *Falling into Grace*, p. 112

“Maybe one way to begin to know and love God is to begin to know about His love for us. Maybe we can find clues about how to love Him and other people by His example. ... God’s creation for us has no trace of stinginess, smugness, or the miserliness of spirit we sometimes call sophistication. Niagara Falls. Autumn. Red hair in bright sun. Apple blossom explosions. The ocean. Nothing held back, no polite hesitation, no gray with a touch of mauve world. Everything vibrant and alive and ready and open to grab with both arms and never run out. ... What if I simply just plain love you hard and often and more than I have to, even when you act cruddy or you’re different? What if everybody did? What if we stopped grudging the small kindnesses and gentle favors, stopped keeping track of who did what last to whom, threw out the lists, just let go of the whole mess?? Looking at God’s gifts, I feel the courage to try.”

~ Deb Cunningham, from the essay, “Maybe”

Quotations for Guidance

1) SON OF MAN! I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life. (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, from the Arabic, No. 4)

2) SON OF BEING! Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant. (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, from the Arabic, No. 5)

3) O ye beloved of the Lord! Commit not that which defileth the limpid stream of love or destroyeth the sweet fragrance of friendship. By the righteousness of the Lord! Ye were created to show love one to another and not perversity and rancor. Take pride not in love for yourselves but in love for your fellow-creatures. Glory not in love for your country, but in love for all mankind. Let your eye be chaste, your hand faithful, your tongue truthful and your heart enlightened. ...[L]et your adorning be forgiveness and mercy and that which cheereth the hearts of the well-favored of God. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 138-139)

4) ...[I]n the world of humanity the greatest king and sovereign is love. If love were extinguished, the power of attraction dispelled, the affinity of human hearts destroyed, the phenomena of human life would disappear. (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, pp. 88-89)

5) 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.

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There are four kinds of love. The first is the love that flows from God to man; it consists of the inexhaustible graces, the Divine effulgence and heavenly illumination. Through this love the world of being receives life. Through this love man is endowed with physical existence, until, through the breath of the Holy Spirit—this same love—he receives eternal life and becomes the image of the Living God. This love is the origin of all the love in the world of creation.

The second is the love that flows from man to God. This is faith, attraction to the Divine, enkindlement, progress, entrance into the Kingdom of God, receiving the Bounties of God, illumination with the lights of the Kingdom. This love is the origin of all philanthropy; this love causes the hearts of men to reflect the rays of the Sun of Reality.

The third is the love of God towards the Self or Identity of God. This is the transfiguration of His Beauty, the reflection of Himself in the mirror of His Creation. This is the reality of love, the Ancient Love, the Eternal Love. Through one ray of this Love all other love exists.

The fourth is the love of man for man. 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)

6) The Kingdom of God is founded upon equity and justice, and also upon mercy, compassion, and kindness to every living soul. Strive ye then with all your heart to treat compassionately all humankind—except for those who have some selfish, private motive, or some disease of the soul. Kindness cannot be shown the tyrant, the deceiver, or the thief, because, far from awakening them to the error of their ways, it maketh them to continue in their perversity as before. No matter how much kindness ye may expend upon the liar, he will but lie the more, for he believeth you to be deceived, while ye understand him but too well, and only remain silent out of your extreme compassion. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 158)

7) 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)

8) ...[W]ed 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), pp. 119-120)

9) There are qualities in everyone which we can appreciate and admire, and for which we can love them; and perhaps, if you determine to think only of these qualities which your husband possesses, this will help to improve the situation.... You should turn your thoughts away from the things which upset you, and constantly pray to Bahá’u’lláh to help you. Then you will find how that pure love, enkindled by God, which burns in the soul when we read and study the Teachings, will warm and heal, more than anything else. Each of us is responsible for one life only, and that is our own. Each of us is immeasurably far from being “perfect as our heavenly father is perfect” and the task of perfecting our own life and character is one that requires all our attention, our will-power and energy.... (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Preserving Bahá’í Marriages”, p. 455)

10) ...[W]here “inharmony and unhappiness” had arisen in a couple’s home, they were counseled to devote more of their time to teaching the [Bahá’í] Cause and “to pray together that Bahá’u’lláh may give you a real and lasting love for each other.” (Universal House of Justice, quoting on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, introduction to the *Preserving Bahá’í Marriages* compilation, section 3.8)

CHAPTER 16

Focus on God: Your Spiritual Life Together

“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, p. 763

“One of the qualities of the soul is its deep-felt desire to belong, to belong to somebody—ultimately, of course, to God. We are not islands and it is definitely not good for a person to be alone. By nurturing our spiritual bonds, we feel we belong to one another and can face any storm.”

~ Mehri Sefidvash, *Coral and Pearls*, p. 57

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths. (Bahá’u’lláh: *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 85)
- 2) Bahá’u’lláh promulgated the fundamental oneness of religion. He taught that reality is one and not multiple, that it underlies all divine precepts and that the foundations of the religions are, therefore, the same. Certain forms and imitations have gradually arisen. As these vary, they cause differences among religionists. If we set aside these imitations and seek the fundamental reality underlying our beliefs, we reach a basis of agreement because it is one and not multiple. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 175)
- 3) 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)
- 4) The love between husband and wife should not be purely physical, nay rather it must be spiritual and heavenly. These two souls should be considered as one soul. How difficult it would be to divide a single soul! Nay, great would be the difficulty! (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 391)
- 5) 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)

6) Remembrance of God is like the rain and dew which bestow freshness and grace on flowers and hyacinths, revive them and cause them to acquire fragrance, redolence and renewed charm. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Compilations of Compilations, Vol. II*, p. 232)

7) Chant the Words of God and, pondering over their meaning, transform them into actions! (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Compilations of Compilations, Vol. II*, p. 233)

8) Know thou, verily, it is becoming in a weak one to supplicate to the Strong One, and it behooveth a seeker of bounty to beseech the Glorious Bountiful One. When one supplicates to his Lord, turns to Him and seeks bounty from His Ocean, this supplication brings light to his heart, illumination to his sight, life to his soul and exaltation to his being. ... By these attractions one’s ability and capacity increase. When the vessel is enlarged the water increases, and when the thirst grows the bounty of the cloud becomes agreeable to the taste of man. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Compilations of Compilations, Vol. II*, p. 235)

9) As to the Nineteen Day Feast, it rejoiceth mind and heart. If this feast be held in the proper fashion, the friends will, once in nineteen days, find themselves spiritually restored, and endued with a power that is not of this world. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 91)

10) It seems to him that just as you leave your husband free to believe or not to believe in whatever pleases him, he should accord you the same rudimentary privilege. Surely the right to worship God in the way one believes to be right is the greatest fundamental freedom in the world? On the other hand no one should force one’s own convictions on another and if Mr. ... objects to your Bahá’í affiliation you should carry on your activities not secretly, but not in such a way as to force him to be constantly conscious of them. In other words, you should, for his sake, sometimes forgo the pleasure of attending a Feast or meeting if there is something he wants you to do with him. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 224)

11) Bahá’u’lláh has stated quite clearly in His Writings the essential requisites for our spiritual growth, and these are stressed again and again by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Talks and Tablets. One can summarize them briefly in this way:

1. The recital each day of one of the Obligatory Prayers with pure-hearted devotion.
2. The regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures, specifically at least each morning and evening, with reverence, attention and thought.
3. Prayerful meditation on the Teachings, so that we may understand them more deeply, fulfill them more faithfully, and convey them more accurately to others.
4. Striving every day to bring our behavior more into accord with the high standards that are set forth in the Teachings.
5. Teaching the Cause of God.
6. Selfless service in the work of the Cause and in the carrying on of our trade or profession.

(Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 540)

CHAPTER 17

A Big Happy Family: You Will All Verily Be Related

“After a couple [marries] the relationships they form with their respective in-laws may well determine the health and harmony of their own marriage. All good relationships depend on good communication and this is particularly true of the relationship we have with our in-laws. It is worth spending time developing good communications with our in-laws and giving our relationship with them much attention. Each partner must develop respect for the parents and family members of his spouse. Such mutual respect for parents and relatives, of course, should not go beyond certain limits, such as accepting interference in the way we as a couple live our lives.”

~ Mehri Sefidvash, *Coral and Pearls*, pp. 70-71

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) The fruits of the tree of existence are trustworthiness, loyalty, truthfulness and purity. After the recognition of the oneness of the Lord, exalted be He, the most important of all duties is to have due regard for the rights of one’s parents. This matter hath been mentioned in all the Books of God. (Bahá’u’lláh, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 228)
- 2) If thou wouldst show kindness and consideration to thy parents so that they may feel generally pleased, this would also please Me, for parents must be highly respected and it is essential that they feel contented, provided they deter thee not from gaining access to the Threshold of the Almighty, nor keep thee back from walking in the way of the Kingdom. Indeed it behoveth them to encourage and spur thee on in this direction. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 229)
- 3) If love and agreement are manifest in a single family, that family will advance, become illumined and spiritual. . . . (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 144-145)
- 4) ...[T]he 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. . . . 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: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 168)
- 5) When you love a member of your family..., let it be with a ray of the Infinite Love! Let it be in God, and for God! Wherever you find the attributes of God love that person.... (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Paris Talks*, p. 38)
- 6) Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world. Their concerns are in order, they

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enjoy comfort and tranquility, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but addeth to its stature and its lasting honor, as day succeedeth day. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 279)

7) He will pray for your husband and son and your daughter-in-law, that, through drawing near to Bahá’u’lláh, they may be united and uplifted into a happier and more harmonious atmosphere, for the [Bahá’í] Cause can heal friction if people will let it and make the effort themselves as well. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, “Divorce”*, p. 243)

8) Regarding your other question concerning the strained relationship between you and your mother-in-law and what you can do to alleviate the situation, we feel you should, with the help and consultation of your husband, persevere in your efforts to achieve unity in the family. From your description of the unfriendly attitude your mother-in-law displays toward you it is clear that you will not have an easy task. However, the important thing is that you, as a Bahá’í, are aware of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s admonition to concentrate on an individual’s good qualities and that this approach to your mother-in-law can strengthen you in your resolve to achieve unity. And furthermore, perseverance in prayer will give you the strength to continue your efforts. (Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 221)

9) ...[T]he aim of the Bahá’ís should be to foster family unity. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 154)

10) ...[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)

CHAPTER 18

An Even Bigger Family: Being an Intercultural Couple

“The soul is endowed with the potential for growth, or continual positive change. As the soul—which is our reality and the animating force of all human beings—develops, it becomes aware of realities that remain hidden to those who reject the notion of a soul or neglect its development. One of those realities is the oneness of humankind. Once that reality is discovered, there is no going back....”

~ Reginald Newkirk and Nathan Rutstein, *Racial Healing*, p. 127

“While all things are interrelated, every living thing is different. This paradoxical aspect of reality manifests itself in the principle of unity in diversity. In nature, no two things are exactly alike, yet they all stem from the same reality. Every cell in our body is unique, as is each snowflake, each rose of the same color. Within a litter of puppies, each puppy has its own temperament, coloring, and size. No two human beings, including identical twins, have an identical set of fingerprints. None of a tree’s branches, twigs, leaves, blossoms, or fruits are exactly alike, yet they are all a part of the whole, tied to one set of roots, which are tied to the soil, as well as the Sun and the rain, the source of their nutrients.”

~ Ibid, p. 142

Quotations for Guidance

1) Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth. ... It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 250)

2) O CHILDREN OF MEN! Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest. Such is My counsel to you, O concourse of light! Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory. (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, from the Arabic, No. 68)

3) O well-beloved ones! The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tabernacle of Unity*, p. 40)

4) In fact numerous points of partnership and agreement exist between the two races; whereas the one point of distinction is that of color. Shall this, the least of all distinctions, be allowed to separate you as races and individuals? ... But there is need of a superior power to overcome human prejudices, a power which nothing in the world of mankind can withstand and which will overshadow the effect of all other forces at work in human conditions. That irresistible power is the love of God. It is my hope and prayer that it may destroy the prejudice of this one point of distinction between you and unite you all permanently under its hallowed protection. Bahá'u'lláh has proclaimed the oneness of the world of humanity. He has caused various nations and divergent creeds to unite. He has declared that difference of race and color is like the variegated beauty of flowers in a garden. If you enter a garden, you will see yellow, white, blue, red flowers in profusion and beauty—each radiant within itself and although different from the others, lending its own charm to them. Racial difference in the human kingdom is similar. If all the flowers in a garden were of the same color, the effect would be monotonous and wearying to the eye.

Therefore, Bahá'u'lláh hath said that the various races of humankind lend a composite harmony and beauty of color to the whole. Let all associate, therefore, in this great human garden even as flowers grow and blend together side by side without discord or disagreement between them. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 68-69)

5) The divine friends must be attracted to and enamored of each other and ever be ready and willing to sacrifice their own lives for each other. Should one soul from amongst the believers meet another, it must be as though a thirsty one with parched lips has reached to the fountain of the water of life, or a lover has met his true beloved. For one of the greatest divine wisdoms regarding the appearance of the holy Manifestations is this: The souls may come to know each other and become intimate with each other; the power of the love of God may make all of them the waves of one sea, the flowers of one rose garden, and the stars of one heaven. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, p. 52)

6) Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world. Their concerns are in order, they enjoy comfort and tranquility, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but addeth to its stature and its lasting honor, as day succeedeth day. And if we widen out the sphere of unity a little to include the inhabitants of a village who seek to be loving and united, who associate with and are kind to one another, what great advances they will be seen to make, how secure and protected they will be. Then let us widen out the sphere a little more, let us take the inhabitants of a city, all of them together: if they establish the strongest bonds of unity among themselves, how far they will progress, even in a brief period and what power they will exert. And if the sphere of unity be still further widened out, that is, if the inhabitants of a whole country develop peaceable hearts, and if with all their hearts and souls they yearn to cooperate with one another and to live in unity, and if they become kind and loving to one another, that country will achieve undying joy and lasting glory. Peace will it have, and plenty, and vast wealth. ...

Wherefore, O ye beloved of the Lord, bestir yourselves, do all in your power to be as one, to live in peace, each with the others: for ye are all the drops from but one ocean, the foliage of one tree, the pearls from a single shell, the flowers and sweet herbs from the same one garden. And achieving that, strive ye to unite the hearts of those who follow other faiths.

For one another must ye give up even life itself. To every human being must ye be infinitely kind. Call none a stranger; think none to be your foe. Be ye as if all men were your close kin and honored friends. Walk ye in such wise that this fleeting world will change into a splendor and this dismal heap of dust become a palace of delights. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 279-280)

7) Regarding the solution of the racial problem; the believers should of course realize that the principle of the oneness of mankind which is the cornerstone of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh is wholly incompatible with all forms of racial prejudice. Loyalty to this foundation principle of the Faith is the paramount duty of every believer and should be therefore whole-hearted and unqualified. For a Bahá'í racial prejudice, in all its forms,

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is simply a negation of faith, an attitude wholly incompatible with the very spirit and actual teachings of the [Bahá'í] Cause.

But while the friends should faithfully and courageously uphold this Bahá'í principle of the essential unity of all human races, yet in the methods they adopt for its application and further realization on the social plane they should act with tact, wisdom and moderation. (Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 533)

8) ...[Y]our statement to the effect that the principle of oneness of mankind prevents any true Bahá'í from regarding race itself as a bar to union is in complete accord with the Teachings of the Faith on this point. For both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá never disapproved of the idea of inter-racial marriage, nor discouraged it. The Bahá'í Teachings, indeed, by their very nature transcend all limitations imposed by race.... (Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 386)

CHAPTER 19

True Partnership: Equality in Marriage

“Equality is a form of balance in our marriage where we respect one another as partners. We support and encourage one another, which assists us to develop ourselves to our fullest capacity. Both of us have the opportunity to seek education and employment. We are equally responsible for contributing to our family and community, and we respect one another’s efforts. Equality does not mean we make the same choices or that our roles are identical. We stay aware of gender traditions and stereotypes, and we avoid making choices based on them without careful thought. Together we work out our responsibilities, and we do not treat the other as superior or inferior. We do not give one another unwelcome assistance or advice. We consult together and reach mutual decisions about our lives, marriage, family, and work. We carefully listen to one another’s point of view. Each of us has a body, mind, heart, and soul worthy of equal respect.”

~ Susanne Alexander, with Craig A. Farnsworth and John S. Miller,
Pure Gold: Encouraging Character Qualities in Marriage (2nd ed.), p. 166

“The full measure of intimacy in marriage requires
husbands and wives to be equals.”

~ Blaine J. Fowers, Ph.D.,
Beyond the Myth of Marital Happiness, p. 185

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God. ... Verily God created women for men, and men for women. (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, "Women"*, p. 379)
- 2) Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words, Arabic No. 68*)
- 3) The world of humanity has two wings—one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible. Not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they ought to be. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 302)
- 4) ...[W]omen are accounted the same as men, and God hath created all humankind in His own image, and after His own likeness. That is, men and women alike are the revealers of His names and attributes, and

from the spiritual viewpoint there is no difference between them. Whosoever draweth nearer to God, that one is the most favored, whether man or woman. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 79-80)

5) The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals, or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Women”, p. 369)

6) As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 133)

7) Woman’s lack of progress and proficiency has been due to her need of equal education and opportunity. Had she been allowed this equality, there is no doubt she would be the counterpart of man in ability and capacity. The happiness of mankind will be realized when women and men coordinate and advance equally, for each is the complement and helpmeet of the other. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 182)

8) Divine Justice demands that the rights of both sexes should be equally respected since neither is superior to the other.... Dignity before God depends, not on sex, but on purity and luminosity of heart. Human virtues belong equally to all! (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 162)

9) In the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh, women are advancing side by side with men. There is no area or instance where they will lag behind: they have equal rights with men, and will enter, in the future, into all branches of the administration of society. Such will be their elevation that, in every area of endeavor, they will occupy the highest levels in the human world. Rest thou assured. Look not upon their present state. In future, the world of womankind will shine with lustrous brilliance, for such is the will and purpose of Bahá’u’lláh. At the time of elections the right to vote is the inalienable right of women, and the entrance of women into all human departments is an irrefutable and incontrovertible question. No soul can retard or prevent it. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Women”, p. 367)

10) Equality between men and women does not, indeed physiologically it cannot, mean identity of functions. In some things women excel men, for others men are better fitted than women, while in very many things the difference of sex is of no effect at all. The differences of function are most apparent in family life. The capacity for motherhood has many far-reaching implications which are recognized in Bahá’í Law. For example, when it is not possible to educate all one’s children, daughters receive preference over sons, as mothers are the first educators of the next generation. Again, for physiological reasons, women are granted certain exemptions from fasting that are not applicable to men. (Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Women”, p. 370)

11) The equality of men and women is not, at the present time, universally applied. In those areas where traditional inequality still hampers its progress we must take the lead in practicing this Bahá’í principle. Bahá’í women and girls must be encouraged to take part in the social, spiritual and administrative activities of their communities. (Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance* (Ridván message 1984), p. 619)

12) This principle [of the equality of the sexes] is far more than the enunciation of admirable ideals; it has profound implications in all aspects of human relations and must be an integral element of Bahá’í domestic and community life. The application of this principle gives rise to changes in habits and practices which have prevailed for many centuries. (Universal House of Justice: An unpublished letter January 24, 1993, to an individual)

13) The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged pre-requisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an

injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge. (Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 618)

14) No Bahá'í husband should ever beat his wife, or subject her to any form of cruel treatment; to do so would be an unacceptable abuse of the marriage relationship and contrary to the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

The lack of spiritual values in society leads to a debasement of the attitudes which should govern the relationship between the sexes, with women being treated as no more than objects for sexual gratification and being denied the respect and courtesy to which all human beings are entitled. (The Universal House of Justice, 1992, "Violence and Sexual Abuse of Women and Children")

15) It is also evident from Bahá'í teachings that no husband should subject his wife to abuse of any kind, and that such a reprehensible action is the antithesis of the relationship of mutual respect and equality enjoined by the Bahá'í writings—a relationship governed by the principles of consultation and devoid of the use of force to compel obedience to one's will. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, "Preserving Bahá'í Marriages", p. 458)

16) ...[T]here is a much wider sphere of relationships between men and women than in the home, and this too we should consider in the context of Bahá'í society, not in that of past or present social norms. For example, although the mother is the first educator of the child, and the most important formative influence in his development, the father also has the responsibility of educating his children, and this responsibility is so weighty that Bahá'u'lláh has stated that a father who fails to exercise it forfeits his rights of fatherhood. Similarly, although the primary responsibility for supporting the family financially is placed upon the husband, this does not by any means imply that the place of woman is confined to the home.... (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, "Women", p. 385)

17) Bahá'í men have the opportunity to demonstrate to the world around them a new approach to the relationship between the sexes, where aggression and the use of force are eliminated and replaced by cooperation and consultation. The Universal House of Justice has pointed out in response to questions addressed to it that, in a marriage relationship, neither husband nor wife should ever unjustly dominate the other, and that there are times when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other, if agreement cannot be reached through consultation; each couple should determine exactly under what circumstances such deference is to take place. (On behalf of The Universal House of Justice, 1992, "Violence and Sexual Abuse of Women and Children")

18) The principle of the equality between women and men, like the other teachings of the Faith, can be effectively and universally established among the friends when it is pursued in conjunction with all the other aspects of Bahá'í life. Change is an evolutionary process requiring patience with one's self and others, loving education and the passage of time as the believers deepen their knowledge of the principles of the Faith, gradually discard long-held traditional attitudes and progressively conform their lives to the unifying teachings of the [Bahá'í] Cause. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 620)

19) ...[M]en and women have basic and distinct qualities. The solution provided in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is not...for men to become women, and for women to become men. 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave us the key to the problem when He taught that the qualities and functions of men and women "complement" each other. He further elucidated this point when He said that the "new age" will be "an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more properly balanced. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, "Women", p. 371-372)

20) The House of Justice has...stated that, to use the human temple as the example, if the husband is the head, the wife can well be regarded as the heart of the family. When the husband and the wife work

cooperatively and complementarily, the well-being, health and proper functioning of the unit can be ensured. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, June 24, 1985, to an individual)

21) ...the family is likened to a special kind of community and the term “head” used in such a context, does not confer superiority upon the husband, nor does it give him special rights to undermine the rights of the other members of his family. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, May 16, 1982, to an individual)

CHAPTER 20

Our Interactions: Personality, Attitudes, and Behavior

“We learn from science that adaptability is the basis of survival. Those who are unwilling to adapt and change their behavior or consider compromise a sign of weakness do not understand that there is a world of difference between giving way to another person because we are forced to do so, or because we are threatened, and giving way because we want to, or out of affection. Indeed, such flexibility, far from being a weakness, is a sign of great strength of mind. Between people who love each other, giving is very important. What we think we are losing in power, control or self-affirmation, we are in fact recovering in maturity, wisdom and serenity.”

~ Mehri Sefidvash, *Coral and Pearls*, p. 10

“Nearly all of us have had the experience of a situation in which there was a lot of tension or people’s nerves were frayed and a shared laugh was enough to make the atmosphere warm and joyful again. All too often we underestimate the importance of a smile, an embrace, a kind word, a sincere compliment or the giving of one’s attention. It is precisely the small things that can change difficult moments into special ones.”

~ Ibid, pp. 11-12

Quotations for Guidance

1) Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer to the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to the countenance of truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the tree of humility. We pray God to protect thee from the heat of jealousy and the cold of hatred. He verily is nigh, ready to answer. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 93-94)

- 2) Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men. This can best be achieved through pure and holy deeds, through a virtuous life and a goodly behavior. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 93-94)
- 3) ...their attitude toward all men is that of goodwill and loving-kindness.... (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 402)
- 4) Today the confirmations of the Kingdom of Abhá [heaven] are with those who renounce themselves, forget their own opinions, cast aside personalities and are thinking of the welfare of others. Whosoever has lost himself has found the universe and the inhabitants thereof. Whosoever is occupied with himself is wandering in the desert of heedlessness and regret. The “master-key” to self-mastery is self-forgetting. The road to the palace of life is through the path of renunciation. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in *The Universal House of Justice*, 12-2-85, “Child Abuse, Psychology and Knowledge of Self”)
- 5) A chaste and holy life must be made the controlling principle in the behavior and conduct of all Bahá’ís, both in their social relations with the members of their own community, and in their contact with the world at large. (Shoghi Effendi: *Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 29)
- 6) [Referring to Bahíyyih Khánúm, Bahá’u’lláh’s daughter] How staunch was her faith, how calm her demeanor, how forgiving her attitude, how severe her trials.... (Shoghi Effendi: *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 189)
- 7) Whenever the grasp of ... fundamentals is weak, the friends are almost sure to pay undue attention to secondary procedures, to quibble over details, to lose themselves in personalities, and to founder in a sea of unnecessary inharmony. This has nothing to do with their devotion, their loyalty, their zeal, their eagerness to serve. It is merely a question of not having received...a strong enough education.... (Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 566)
- 8) There is only one remedy for this: to study the administration, to obey the Assemblies, and each believer seek to perfect his *own* character as a Bahá’í. We can never exert the influence over others which we can exert over ourselves. If we are better, if we show love, patience, and understanding of the weakness of others, if we seek to never criticize but rather encourage, others will do likewise, and we can really help the [Bahá’í] Cause through our example and spiritual strength. The Bahá’ís everywhere when the administration is first established, find it very difficult to adjust themselves. They have to learn to obey, even when the Assembly may be wrong, for the sake of *unity*. They have to sacrifice their personalities, to a certain extent, in order that the Community life may grow and develop as a whole. These things are difficult, but we must realize that they will lead us to a very much greater, more perfect, way of life when the [Bahá’í] Faith is properly established according to the administration. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 83)
- 9) He is sorry to hear your little boy is not developing satisfactorily; very few children are really bad. They do, however, sometimes have complicated personalities and need very wise handling to enable them to grow into normal, moral, happy adults. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 151)
- 10) Different personalities and...types of individuals need different methods of approach. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Guidelines for Teaching”, p. 308)
- 11) The Bahá’ís must learn to forget personalities and to overcome the desire—so natural in people—to take sides and fight about it. They must also learn to really make use of the great principle of consultation. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance* p. 246)
- 12) The Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh are so great, and deal with so many aspects of both the inner life of man and his communal life, that it takes years to really plumb them to the depths. He has brought spiritual food for the soul of the individual, to help each one to find himself and become a finer and better developed personality; and also He has brought the laws and principles needed to enable all men to live in harmony together in a great, united world. The Guardian hopes you, together with [name removed]..., will do all in

your power to help the believers to understand both aspects of the teachings, and to develop both as individuals and as a community, an ever higher, finer, way of life. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 570)

CHAPTER 21

Minds and Hearts: Communicating with One Another

“Communicating is giving of ourselves, which is all that we are. Communication is the link necessary to integrate two persons with separate identities into a marriage. The kinds of communication that nourish a marriage are listening with understanding, appreciating and affirming your partner, making requests for what you want, making and keeping promises, and expressing your feelings. These communications will increase intimacy and develop a partnership that will bring out the best in each person.

~ Sandra Gray Bender, Ph.D., *Recreating Marriage with the Same Old Spouse*, p. 87

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) Consort with all men...in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship. If ye be aware of a certain truth, if ye possess a jewel, of which others are deprived, share it with them in a language of utmost kindness and good-will. If it be accepted, if it fulfill its purpose, your object is attained. If any one should refuse it, leave him unto himself, and beseech God to guide him. Beware lest ye deal unkindly with him. A kindly tongue is the lodestone of the hearts of men. It is the bread of the spirit, it clotheth the words with meaning, it is the fountain of the light of wisdom and understanding.... (Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 289)
- 2) Settle all things, both great and small, by consultation. Without prior consultation, take no important step in your own personal affairs. Concern yourselves with one another. Help along one another's projects and plans. Grieve over one another. Let none in the whole country go in need. Befriend one another until ye become as a single body, one and all.... (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 179)
- 3) ...[C]onsultation must have for its object the investigation of truth. He who expresses an opinion should not voice it as correct and right but set it forth as a contribution to the consensus of opinion, for the light of reality becomes apparent when two opinions coincide. A spark is produced when flint and steel come together. Man should weigh his opinions with the utmost serenity, calmness and composure. Before expressing his own views he should carefully consider the views already advanced by others. If he finds that a previously expressed opinion is more true and worthy, he should accept it immediately and not willfully hold to an opinion of his own. By this excellent method he endeavors to arrive at unity and truth. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 72)
- 4) Be in perfect unity. ... Love the creatures for the sake of God and not for themselves. You will never become angry or impatient if you love them for the sake of God. Humanity is not perfect. There are imperfections in every human being, and you will always become unhappy if you look toward the people themselves. But if you look toward God, you will love them and be kind to them, for the world of God is the world of perfection and complete mercy. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 93)
- 5) The sea of the unity of mankind is lifting up its waves with joy, for there is real communication between the hearts and minds of men. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London*, p. 19)
- 6) God has endowed man with reason that he may perceive what is true. If we insist that such and such a subject is not to be reasoned out and tested according to the established logical modes of the intellect, what is the use of the reason which God has given man? The eye is the organ of sense by which we view the

world of outer phenomena; hearing is the faculty for distinguishing sounds; taste senses the properties of objects, such as bitter, sweet; smell detects and differentiates odors; touch reveals attributes of matter and perfects our communication with the outer world; yet after all, the circle and range of perception by the five senses is exceedingly limited. But the intellectual faculty of man is unlimited in its sphere of action. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 63)

- 7) An assumption...must be supported by the facts. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I*, “Bahá’í Education”, p. 257)
- 8) They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one’s views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. (Shoghi Effendi: *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 22)
- 9) In any group, however loving the consultation, there are nevertheless points on which, from time to time, agreement cannot be reached. In a Spiritual Assembly this dilemma is resolved by a majority vote. There can, however, be no majority where only two parties are involved, as in the case of a husband and wife. There are, therefore, times when a wife should defer to her husband, and times when a husband should defer to his wife, but neither should ever unjustly dominate the other. In short, the relationship between husband and wife should be as held forth in the prayer revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá which is often read at Bahá’í weddings: “Verily they are married in obedience to Thy command. Cause them to become the signs of harmony and unity until the end of time.” (Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 226-227)
- 10) Once a decision has been reached, all members of the consultative body, having had the opportunity fully to state their views, agree wholeheartedly to support the outcome. What if the minority view is right? “If they agree upon a subject,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has explained, “even though it be wrong, it is better than to disagree, and be in the right, for this difference will produce the demolition of the divine foundation. Though one of the parties may be in the right and they disagree, that will be the cause of a thousand wrongs, but if they agree and both parties are in the wrong, as it is in unity, the truth will be revealed and the wrong made right.” (The Universal House of Justice, December 29, 1988, “Individual Rights and Freedoms”, p. 13)
- 11) Also relevant to what is said, and how, is when it is said. For speech, as for so many other things, there is a season. Bahá’u’lláh reinforces this understanding by drawing attention to the maxim that “Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it.” (The Universal House of Justice, December 29, 1988, “Individual Rights and Freedoms”, pp. 12-13)
- 12) [When asked about specific rules of conduct to govern the relationship between husbands and wives]...[F]or 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: *Compilations of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Preserving Bahá’í Marriages”, p. 456)

CHAPTER 22

Doing It Better: Improving Communication Skills

“A good marriage thrives on unity—
not on who is right and who is wrong.”

~ Khalil A. Khavari, Ph.D. and Sue Williston Khavari, M.A., *Together Forever*, p. 193

“If we have a relationship based on love, we can be open and honest with our partner without fear of being judged and knowing that support will be extended to us. We are sure that our partner is our best friend and will, whatever happens, always help us. Where there is love in our relationship, we can allow ourselves certain liberties: the liberty to get angry now and again, or even to lose control without fearing that a permanent scar will be left; the liberty to be imperfect; the liberty to make a fool of ourselves without losing the respect of our partner; the liberty to change and to grow and also to make mistakes without fearing that we will be abandoned at our moment of greatest need or that we may be subjected to a barrage of recriminations and judgments, the worst of which is undoubtedly ‘I told you so!’

“We need support particularly when the worst side of our character is exposed to our partner. It is just at this time that the acceptance and affection of our partner become the mainstays of our life. To preserve our personal dignity, we all need to feel the warmth and approval of someone we love and respect.”

~ Mehri Sefidvash, *Coral and Pearls*, pp. 41-42

Quotations for Guidance

1) He must never seek to exalt himself above any one, must wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vain-glory, must cling unto patience and resignation, observe silence and refrain from idle talk. For the tongue is a smoldering fire, and excess of speech a deadly poison. Material fire consumeth the body, whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart and soul. The force of the former lasteth but for a time, whilst the effects of the latter endureth a century.

That seeker should, also, regard backbiting as grievous error, and keep himself aloof from its dominion, inasmuch as backbiting quencheth the light of the heart, and extinguisheth the life of the soul. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 264-265)

2) If any soul speak ill of an absent one, the only result will clearly be this: he will dampen the zeal of the friends and tend to make them indifferent. For backbiting is divisive.... If any individual should speak ill of

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one who is absent, it is incumbent on his hearers, in a spiritual and friendly manner, to stop him, and say in effect: would this detraction serve any useful purpose? Would it please [Bahá'u'lláh], contribute to the lasting honor of the friends, promote the [Bahá'í] Faith, support the Covenant [of Bahá'u'lláh], or be of any possible benefit to any soul? No, never! On the contrary, it would make the dust to settle so thickly on the heart that the ears would hear no more, and the eyes would no longer behold the light of truth.

If, however, a person setteth about speaking well of another, opening his lips to praise another, he will touch an answering chord in his hearers and they will be stirred up by the breathings of God. Their hearts and souls will rejoice.... (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 230-231)

3) Consider that the worst of qualities and most odious of attributes, which is the foundation of all evil, is lying. No worse or more blameworthy quality than this can be imagined to exist; it is the destroyer of all human perfections and the cause of innumerable vices. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Some Answered Questions*, p. 215)

4) O ye beloved of the Lord! In this sacred Dispensation, conflict and contention are in no wise permitted. Every aggressor deprives himself of God’s grace. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Will and Testament*, p. 13)

5) Never speak disparagingly of others, but praise without distinction. ... Let not your heart be offended with anyone. If some one commits an error and wrong toward you, you must instantly forgive him. Do not complain of others. Refrain from reprimanding them, and if you wish to give admonition or advice, let it be offered in such a way that it will not burden the bearer. Turn all your thoughts toward bringing joy to hearts. Beware! Beware! lest ye offend any heart. Assist the world of humanity as much as possible. Be the source of consolation to every sad one, assist every weak one, be helpful to every indigent one, care for every sick one, be the cause of glorification to every lowly one, and shelter those who are overshadowed by fear.

In brief, let each one of you be as a lamp shining forth with the light of the virtues of the world of humanity. Be trustworthy, sincere, affectionate and replete with chastity. Be illumined, be spiritual, be divine, be glorious, be quickened of God, be a Bahá'í. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 453)

6) ...[T]ake counsel together in such wise that no occasion for ill-feeling or discord may arise. This can be attained when every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument. Should anyone oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed. The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 87)

7) We can never exert the influence over others which we can exert over ourselves. If we are better, if we show love, patience, and understanding of the weakness of others, if we seek to never criticize but rather encourage, others will do likewise.... (Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 83)

8) The use of force by the physically strong against the weak, as a means of imposing one’s will and fulfilling one’s desires, is a flagrant transgression of the Bahá'í Teachings. There can be no justification for anyone compelling another, through the use of force or through the threat of violence, to do that to which the other person is not inclined. (Universal House of Justice: *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 15.26)

9) Speech is a powerful phenomenon. Its freedom is both to be extolled and feared. It calls for an acute exercise of judgment, since both the limitation of speech and the excess of it can lead to dire consequences. Thus there exist in the system of Bahá'u'lláh checks and balances necessary to the beneficial uses of this freedom in the onward development of society. A careful examination of the principles of Bahá'í consultation and the formal and informal arrangements for employing them offer new insights into the dynamics of freedom of expression. (The Universal House of Justice, December 29, 1988, “Individual Rights and Freedoms”, p. 13)

10) Content, volume, style, tact, wisdom, timeliness are among the critical factors in determining the effects of speech for good or evil. Consequently, the friends need ever to be conscious of the significance of this activity which so distinguishes human beings from other forms of life, and they must exercise it judiciously.

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Their efforts at such discipline will give birth to an etiquette of expression worthy of the approaching maturity of the human race. Just as this discipline applies to the spoken word, it applies equally to the written word.... (The Universal House of Justice, December 29, 1988, "Individual Rights and Freedoms", p. 16)

CHAPTER 23

Abundance of Feelings: Expressing Emotions

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) We have created you from one tree and have caused you to be as the leaves and fruit of the same tree, that haply ye may become a source of comfort to one another. (The Báb: *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 129)
- 2) Then, with radiance and joy, celebrate therein the praise of your Lord, the Most Compassionate. Verily, by His remembrance the eye is cheered and the heart is filled with light. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Kítáb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 29-30)
- 3) Conflict and contention are categorically forbidden in His Book. This is a decree of God in this Most Great Revelation. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 221)
- 4) Jealousy consumeth the body and anger doth burn the liver: avoid these two as you would a lion. (Bahá'u'lláh: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I*, “Health, Healing, Nutrition and Related Matters”, p. 460)
- 5) When man’s soul is rarified and cleansed, spiritual links are established, and from these bonds sensations felt by the heart are produced. The human heart resembleth a mirror. When this is purified, human hearts are attuned and reflect one another, and thus spiritual emotions are generated. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 108)
- 6) I charge you all that each one of you concentrate all the thoughts of your heart on love and unity. When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love. Thoughts of war bring destruction to all harmony, well-being, restfulness and content.
Thoughts of love are constructive of brotherhood, peace, friendship, and happiness. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 29)
- 7) Joy gives us wings! In times of joy our strength is more vital, our intellect keener, and our understanding less clouded. We seem better able to cope with the world and to find our sphere of usefulness. But when sadness visits us we become weak, our strength leaves us, our comprehension is dim and our intelligence veiled. The actualities of life seem to elude our grasp, the eyes of our spirits fail to discover the sacred mysteries, and we become even as dead beings.
There is no human being untouched by these two influences; but all the sorrow and the grief that exist come from the world of matter—the spiritual world bestows only the joy! (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Paris Talks*, pp. 109-110)
- 8) When you notice that a stage has been reached when enmity and threats are about to occur, you should immediately postpone discussion of the subject, until wranglings, disputations, and loud talk vanish, and a propitious time is at hand. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I*, “Consultation”, p. 98)
- 9) Even as the clouds let us shed down tears, and as the lightning flashes let us laugh at our courings through east and west. By day, by night, let us think but of spreading the sweet savors of God. Let us not keep on forever with our fancies and illusions, with our analyzing and interpreting and circulating of complex dubieties. Let us put aside all thoughts of self; let us close our eyes to all on earth, let us neither make known our sufferings nor complain of our wrongs. Rather let us become oblivious of our own selves, and drinking down the wine of heavenly grace, let us cry out our joy, and lose ourselves in the beauty of the All-Glorious. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 236)
- 10) Man possesses two kinds of susceptibilities: the natural emotions, which are like dust upon the mirror, and spiritual susceptibilities, which are merciful and heavenly characteristics.

There is a power which purifies the mirror from dust and transforms its reflection into intense brilliancy and radiance so that spiritual susceptibilities may chasten the hearts and heavenly bestowals sanctify them. What is the dust which obscures the mirror? It is attachment to the world, avarice, envy, love of luxury and

comfort, haughtiness and self-desire; this is the dust which prevents reflection of the rays of the Sun of Reality in the mirror. The natural emotions are blameworthy and are like rust which deprives the heart of the bounties of God. But sincerity, justice, humility, severance, and love for the believers of God will purify the mirror and make it radiant with reflected rays from the Sun of Truth. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 244)

11) O God! Make our souls dependent upon the Verses of Thy Divine Unity, our hearts cheered with the outpourings of Thy Grace, that we may unite even as the waves of one sea and become merged together as the rays of Thine effulgent Light; that our thoughts, our views, our feelings may become as one reality, manifesting the spirit of union throughout the world. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 301)

12) Our appetites and inclinations are strongly influenced by the condition of our physical makeup, and our bodies are in varying degrees of health, depending on factors such as heredity, environment, nourishment and our own treatment of them. Genetic variations occur, producing conditions which can create problems for the individual. Some conditions are of an emotional or psychological nature, producing such imbalances as quickness to anger, recklessness, timorousness, and so forth; others involve purely physical characteristics, resulting not only in unusual capacities but also in handicaps or diseases of various kinds.

Whether deficiencies are inborn or are acquired, our purpose in this life is to overcome them and to train ourselves in accordance with the pattern that is revealed to us in the divine Teachings. (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, Sept. 11, 1995; published in “The American Bahá’í”, Nov. 23, 1995, p. 11)

13) ...Shoghi Effendi, in a letter dated 5 July 1947 written on his behalf, makes the following statement...:

“...We believe in balance in all things; we believe in moderation in all things—we must not be too emotional, nor cut and dried and lacking in feeling, we must not be so liberal as to cease to preserve the character and unity of our Bahá’í system, nor fanatical and dogmatic.”

Concerning the open expression of feelings during consultation, clearly the expression of feelings and the emotional tone of the interaction make an important contribution to the consultative process. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Issues Concerning Community Functioning* (Australia 1993), pp. 11-12)

CHAPTER 24

A Personal Discussion: Intimacy and Sex

“It is important to acknowledge that God could have arranged the whole reproduction thing any way He wanted: a hidden button, a super-secret handshake, or some unique facial exchange that brought about conception. Really, He could have. But instead, He designed sex. He must have had a good reason, but what is it? The answer, in short, is that God wanted sex to be a lot more than just a really fun thing for wives and husbands to do together. And He wanted it to be more than an extremely enjoyable way to populate the planet. He had a far loftier goal in mind. God designed marital sex to be an encounter with the divine. Sexual intimacy, with all of its overwhelming emotions and heart-pounding sensations, was never intended to be experienced solely in the emotional and physical realms. Rather, it is to be a spiritual, even mystical, experience in which two bodies become one. God is present in a very real way every time this happens.

“Sex really is holy. It’s a sacred place shared in the intimacy of marriage.”

~ Tim Alan Gardner, *Sacred Sex, A Spiritual Celebration of Oneness in Marriage*, pp. 4-5

Quotations for Guidance

1) The Lord, peerless is He, hath made woman and man to abide with each other in the closest companionship, and to be even as a single soul. They are two helpmates, two intimate friends, who should be concerned about the welfare of each other.

If they live thus, they will pass through this world with perfect contentment, bliss, and peace of heart, and become the object of divine grace and favor in the Kingdom of heaven. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 122)

2) 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)

3) The Bahá’í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse.... 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)

4) ...the Bahá’í conception of sex is based on the belief that chastity should be strictly practiced by both sexes, not only because it is in itself highly commendable ethically, but also due to its being the only way to a happy and successful marital life. Sex relationships of any form, outside marriage, are not permissible therefore.... (Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 344-345)

5) The standard inculcated by Bahá’u’lláh, seeks, under no circumstances, to deny anyone the legitimate right and privilege to derive the fullest advantage and benefit from the manifold joys, beauties, and pleasures with which the world has been so plentifully enriched by an All-Loving Creator. (Shoghi Effendi: *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 28)

6) Individual believers called upon to make such a decision [about birth control] must be guided by the Bahá’í principles involved, the best professional advice available to them and their own consciences. In

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arriving at a decision the parties must also take into consideration the availability, reliability and reversibility of all contraceptive methods. (Universal House of Justice, Teach Canada Supplement Issue No. 6, December 1989, p. 6)

7) “Sensuality” covers a wide range of meanings, all related to the pleasures to be obtained from the physical senses or sensations. Again, it is the extremes of this quality that are reprehensible. To renounce all sensual pleasures, or even to go beyond this and to inflict pain upon oneself falls in the region of asceticism, which the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* prohibits. On the other hand, to be self-indulgent in regard to food, drink, and sexual enjoyment, giving oneself up to the gratification of one’s appetites, becomes the licentiousness which is, likewise, forbidden in the Faith. As in the case of passion, individuals vary in the sensuality of their natures; some may need to restrain this quality, others may need to foster a greater warmth of feeling.

...How are a young couple, brought up to behave in the strictly moral ways explained in the Bahá’í teachings, to overcome the reticence which will exist between them, even though they will be free of the old attitude that sex is despicable?

Undoubtedly each couple will approach the matter differently, in accordance with the characters of the two people involved, but it is certainly here that passion and sensuality can play an important role, if accepted as normal qualities of a human being and if properly controlled and balanced by the reason and will. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Sexuality, Relationships and Spiritual Growth*, p. 137)

8) [When asked whether sodomy included oral sex, this was the response from the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice.] In seeking clarification of Bahá’u’lláh’s prohibition against sodomy, you should note that whatever the connotations of the word “sodomy” in the English language, the term used in Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings, namely, “lavát”, merely means anal copulation by a male with another male or with a woman. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, letter to an individual, September 11, 2006)

9) ...[T]he Teachings state that the soul appears at conception, and that therefore it would be improper to use [a birth control] method, the effect of which would be to produce an abortion after the conception has taken place. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 344)

10) The Bahá’í teachings on sexual morality center on marriage and the family as the bedrock of the whole structure of human society and are designed to protect and strengthen that divine institution. Bahá’í law thus restricts permissible sexual intercourse to that between a man and the woman to whom he is married. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice; *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 223)

CHAPTER 25

Family Time: Children and Marriage

“The purpose of marriage is children, and yet in our modern world, especially in the busy life of big cities, this fact is rapidly being lost sight of. ... It is our nature to have children. It is not only good for us physically to have children and necessary for society that we do so, but it is a spiritual blessing for us as well. To have created a new life, a life like yourself, springing from you, dependent on you, calls forth a whole gamut of new emotions from the human heart. Dead indeed the heart of the man that does not beat faster at the touch of the hand of his baby! It tears away some of the selfishness with which we are always overburdened. It brings a new, keen interest into life, a new sense of responsibility. It makes a man think more of himself and more of his honor. It calls forth a new kind of love, a love that perforce must give and be patient and self-denying. In fact to have a child can and should be a self-purification for the parents. It adds a zest to life; here is a very demanding task, this new human must be provided for, helped, trained, educated. It binds the mother and father closer, renews the springs of their love, puts out green leaves on the marriage tree.”

~ Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *Prescription for Living* (1978 edition), pp. 90-91

Quotations for Guidance

Note: There are extensive Bahá'í quotations on the education and rearing of children, far beyond this brief selection. You may find it beneficial to study them together. Some of the quotations in Chapter 24 about sex may also apply to this chapter.

- 1) That which is of paramount importance for the children, that which must precede all else, is to teach them the oneness of God and the laws of God. For lacking this, the fear of God cannot be inculcated, and lacking the fear of God an infinity of odious and abominable actions will spring up, and sentiments will be uttered that transgress all bounds.... 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: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I*, “Bahá'í Education”, p. 248)
- 2) Unto every father hath been enjoined the instruction of his son and daughter in the art of reading and writing.... (Bahá'u'lláh: *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 37)
- 3) He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My Glory, My loving-kindness, My Mercy, that have compassed the world. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 37)

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- 4) Thus the husband and wife are brought into affinity, are united and harmonized, even as though they were one person. Through their mutual union, companionship and love great results are produced in the world, both material and spiritual. The spiritual result is the appearance of divine bounties. The material result is the children who are born in the cradle of love of God, who are nurtured by the breast of the knowledge of God, and who are brought up in the bosom of the gift of God, and who are fostered in the lap of the training of God. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, Vol. 3, pp. 605-606)
- 5) It is highly important for man to raise a family. So long as he is young, because of youthful self-complacency, he does not realize its significance, but this will be a source of regret when he grows old... (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 219)
- 6) Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him, and use means based on reason, even a slight verbal chastisement should this be necessary. It is not, however, permissible to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child’s character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 125)
- 7) Mothers are the first educators of children, who establish virtues in the child’s inner nature. They encourage the child to acquire perfections and goodly manners, warn him against unbecoming qualities, and encourage him to show forth resolve, firmness, and endurance under hardship, and to advance on the high road to progress. Due regard for the education of girls is, therefore, necessary. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, “Women”, p. 374)
- 8) While the children are yet in their infancy feed them from the breast of heavenly grace, foster them in the cradle of all excellence, rear them in the embrace of bounty. Give them the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art. Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 129)
- 9) The basic principle of the Cause is independent investigation of truth. This applies to us as much as to our children. They should be free to choose for themselves any religion they wish. To promise that they will belong to a certain Faith and not to another is therefore not only contrary to our precepts, but is also a futile promise to give. How can we make the future generation think as we do or follow our dictates. God has made them free. All that we can do is to open their eyes and tell them of what we think to be the truth. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 156)
- 10) The task of bringing up a Bahá’í child, as emphasized time and again in Bahá’í writings, is the chief responsibility of the mother, whose unique privilege is indeed to create in her home such conditions as would be most conducive to both his material and spiritual welfare and advancement. The training which a child first receives through his mother constitutes the strongest foundation for his future development, and it should therefore be the paramount concern of your wife...to endeavor from now imparting to her newborn son such spiritual training as would enable him later on to fully assume and adequately discharge all the responsibilities and duties of Bahá’í life. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, “Bahá’í Education”, pp. 303-304)
- 11) Regarding your question of whether you should have more children or not: [Shoghi Effendi] feels that this is a matter for you and your husband to decide. However, we must always bear in mind that God will protect His own, and that the Bahá’í children are the future servants of mankind who will help to carry the world forward into the glorious New Order which Bahá’u’lláh has prepared for it in this day of days. We should not face the future with fear, but with glad and assured hearts. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, “Teach Canada Supplement,” Issue No. 6, December 1989, p. 6)
- 12) ...Bahá’í education, just like any other system of education is based on the assumption that there are certain natural deficiencies in every child, no matter how gifted, which his educators, whether his parents, school masters, or his spiritual guides and preceptors should endeavor to remedy. Discipline of some sort,

whether physical, moral or intellectual, is indeed indispensable, and no training can be said to be complete and fruitful if it disregards this element.

The child when born is far from being perfect. It is not only helpless, but actually is imperfect, and even is naturally inclined towards evil. He should be trained, his natural inclinations harmonized, adjusted and controlled, and if necessary suppressed or regulated, so as to insure his healthy physical and moral development. Bahá'í parents cannot simply adopt an attitude of non resistance towards their children, particularly those who are unruly and violent by nature. It is not even sufficient that they should pray on their behalf. Rather they should endeavor to inculcate, gently and patiently, into their youthful minds such principles of moral conduct and initiate them into the principles and teachings of the Cause with such tactful and loving care as would enable them to become “true sons of God” and develop into loyal and intelligent citizens of His Kingdom. This is the high purpose which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has clearly defined as the chief goal of every education. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 152)

13) It is difficult to imagine a more reprehensible perversion of human conduct than the sexual abuse of children, which finds its most debased form in incest.... A parent who is aware that the marriage partner is subjecting a child to such sexual abuse should not remain silent, but must take all necessary measures, with the assistance of the Spiritual Assembly or civil authorities if necessary, to bring about an immediate cessation of such grossly immoral behavior, and to promote healing and therapy. (Universal House of Justice: *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 15.27)

14) Bahá'u'lláh has placed great emphasis on the duties of parents toward their children, and He has urged children to have gratitude in their hearts for their parents, whose good pleasure they should strive to win as a means of pleasing God Himself. However, He has indicated that under certain circumstances, the parents could be deprived of the right of parenthood as a consequence of their actions. The Universal House of Justice has the right to legislate on this matter. It has decided for the present that all cases should be referred to it in which the conduct or character of a parent appears to render him unworthy of having such parental rights as that of giving consent to marriage. Such questions could arise, for example, when a parent has committed incest, or when the child was conceived as a consequence of rape, and also when a parent consciously fails to protect the child from flagrant sexual abuse. (The Universal House of Justice, “Violence and Sexual Abuse of Women and Children”, 1992)

15) There is nothing in the Sacred Writings specifically on the subjects of birth control, abortion or sterilization, but Bahá'u'lláh did state that the primary purpose of marriage was the procreation of children.... This does not imply that a couple are obliged to have as many children as they can; the Guardian's secretary clearly stated on his behalf, in answer to an enquiry, that it was for the husband and wife to decide how many children they would have. A decision to have no children at all would vitiate the primary purpose of marriage unless, of course, there were some medical reason why such a decision would be required.

You and your husband, therefore, should have no feeling that you are obliged to add to your already large family. This is a matter entirely for you to decide, and there are many methods of preventing conception, including self-discipline and restraint, to which you can have recourse. Sterilization, however, would be a more far-reaching action than any of these, with implications and results beyond those necessary for the immediate purpose of limiting the size of your family, and is not permissible in Bahá'í law except in rare instances where it is necessary for a medical reason. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 346-347)

16) They should realize, moreover, that the 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. 379)

17) That the first teacher of the child is the mother should not be startling, for the primary orientation of the infant is to its mother. This provision of nature in no way minimizes the role of the father in the Bahá'í family. ...[E]quality of status does not mean identity of function. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, "Women"*, p. 383)

18) With regard to your question whether mothers should work outside the home, it is helpful to consider the matter from the perspective of the concept of a Bahá'í family. This concept is based on the principle that the man has primary responsibility for the financial support of the family, and the woman is the chief and primary educator of the children. This by no means implies that these functions are inflexibly fixed and cannot be changed and adjusted to suit particular family situations, nor does it mean that the place of the woman is confined to the home. Rather, while primary responsibility is assigned, it is anticipated that fathers would play a significant role in the education of the children and women could also be breadwinners. As you rightly indicated, 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged women to "participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world." (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 626)

CHAPTER 26

On the Go: Service and Time Choices

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action. ... That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. ... Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 250)
- 2) Vie ye with each other in the service of God and of His Cause. This is indeed what profiteth you in this world, and in that which is to come. (Baha'u'llah, *Ministry of the Custodians*, p. 123)
- 3) ...all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity. This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer. ('Abdu'l-Bahá: *Paris Talks*, pp. 176-177)
- 4) Thou canst take unto thyself a husband and at the same time serve the Cause of God; the one doth not preclude the other. Know thou the value of these days; let not this chance escape thee. Beg thou God to make thee a lighted candle, so that thou mayest guide a great multitude through this darksome world. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 100)
- 5) Therefore, order your lives in accordance with the first principle of the divine teaching, which is love. Service to humanity is service to God. Let the love and light of the Kingdom radiate through you until all who look upon you shall be illumined by its reflection. ('Abdu'l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 8)
- 6) Wherefore, rest ye neither day nor night and seek no ease. Tell ye the secrets of servitude, follow the pathway of service, till ye attain the promised succor that cometh from the realms of God. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 271)
- 7) If the friends always waited until they were fully qualified to do any particular task, the work of the Cause would be almost at a standstill! But the very act of striving to serve, however unworthy one may feel, attracts the blessings of God and enables one to become more fitted for the task. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, "The Power of Divine Assistance"*, p. 222)
- 8) ...you should not neglect your health, but consider it the means which enables you to serve. It—the body—is like a horse which carries the personality and spirit, and as such should be well cared for so it can do its work! You should certainly safeguard your nerves, and force yourself to take time, and not only for prayer and meditation, but for real rest and relaxation. We don't have to pray and meditate for hours in order to be spiritual. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, "Prayer, Meditation and the Devotional Attitude"*, p. 242)
- 9) A healthy social life and Bahá'í work can go hand in hand, but not always in times of crisis, such as these days...when great sacrifice can alone meet the demands of the situation. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community*, p. 457)
- 10) Surely Shoghi Effendi would like to see you and the other friends give their whole time and energy to the Cause, for we are in great need for competent workers, but the home is an institution that Bahá'u'lláh has come to strengthen and not to weaken. Many unfortunate things have happened in Bahá'í homes just for neglecting this point. Serve the Cause but also remember your duties towards your home. It is for you to find the balance and see that neither makes you neglect the other. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 220)
- 11) Under ordinary circumstances, non-Bahá'ís as well as Bahá'ís have to make many choices in life between what they consider their duty and what might lead to a more ideal personal state for them. Prayerfully,

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wisely and conscientiously, individuals must settle these matters for themselves. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly, November 9, 1956, unpublished)

12) The words, the deeds, the attitudes, the lack of prejudice, the nobility of character, the high sense of service to others—in a word, those qualities and actions which distinguish a Bahá'í must unfailingly characterize their inner life and outer behavior, and their interactions.... (Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 637)

13) Shoghi Effendi described “service” as “the true basis” of family unity and called upon the family members to “arise with renewed effort to teach the Faith”. The Guardian’s secretary writing on his behalf to one couple who had “jointly undertaken a most successful teaching tour” stated: “This bond of common service to the Cause which is so closely uniting your hearts...has proved such an effective solution of your personal problems.” And the hope was expressed that this “bond” would be “further cemented by the passing of years” and through the couple’s “increased and joint participation in the teaching work”. (Universal House of Justice, introduction to *Preserving Bahá'í Marriages*, section 3.8)

14) ...[T]he unity of your family should take priority over any other consideration. Bahá'u'lláh came to bring unity to the world, and a fundamental unity is that of the family. Therefore, we must believe that the Faith is intended to strengthen the family, not weaken it. For example, service to the [Bahá'í] Cause should not produce neglect of the family. It is important for you to arrange your time so that your family life is harmonious and your household receives the attention it requires. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Preserving Bahá'í Marriages”, p. 453)

15) ...[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)

CHAPTER 27

Money In and Out: Earning, Budgeting, and Spending

“This marvelous capacity we have to do, to produce, is at once the spring of our health and, to a great extent, our happiness in life. Nothing can convey so solid a feeling of satisfaction in this world as something we have accomplished. A job well done, be it making a pie or writing a book or building a bridge, can produce a degree of contentment, a sense of buoyancy and fulfillment, that practically nothing else can. ... Because work is necessary for us, it sets the very essence of our being in circulation, and just as the blood performs so many services in our body essential to health, such as carrying away impurities, re-oxygenizing itself in the lungs, bringing food to the tissues, so work seems to give tone to our whole machine, exhilarates us, and calls forth a new flow of energy.”

~ Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *Prescription for Living* (1978 edition), p. 109

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) It is incumbent upon each one of you to engage in some occupation—such as a craft, a trade or the like. We have exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship of the one true God. ... Waste not your hours in idleness and sloth, but occupy yourselves with what will profit you and others. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 30)
- 2) ...[M]an should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty. Having attained the stage of fulfillment and reached his maturity, man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy in the estimation of men of wisdom, and especially in the eyes of servants who dedicate themselves to the education of the world and to the edification of its peoples. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 35)
- 3) The beginning of magnanimity is when man expendeth his wealth on himself, on his family and on the poor among his brethren in his Faith. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 156)
- 4) They must show forth such trustworthiness, such truthfulness and perseverance, such deeds and character that all mankind may profit by their example. (Bahá'u'lláh: *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 23)
- 5) Should a man wish to adorn himself with the ornaments of the earth, to wear its apparels, or partake of the benefits it can bestow, no harm can befall him, if he alloweth nothing whatever to intervene between him and God, for God hath ordained every good thing, whether created in the heavens or in the earth, for such of His servants as truly believe in Him. Eat ye, O people, of the good things which God hath allowed you, and deprive not yourselves from His wondrous bounties. Render thanks and praise unto Him, and be of them that are truly thankful. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 276)
- 6) Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual's own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 24)

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- 7) ...[M]an's supreme honor and real happiness lie in self-respect, in high resolves and noble purposes, in integrity and moral quality, in immaculacy of mind. They have... imagined that their greatness consists in the accumulation, by whatever means may offer, of worldly goods. ('Abdu'l-Bahá: *Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 19)
- 8) All the friends of God...should contribute to the extent possible, however modest their offering may be. God doth not burden a soul beyond its capacity. Such contributions must come from all centers and all believers.... O Friends of God! Be ye assured that in place of these contributions, your agriculture, your industry, and your commerce will be blessed by manifold increases, with goodly gifts and bestowals. He who cometh with one goodly deed will receive a tenfold reward. There is no doubt that the living Lord will abundantly confirm those who expend their wealth in His path. ('Abdu'l-Bahá: *Bahá'í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 84)
- 9) In one of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh says that the highest form of detachment in this day is to be occupied with some profession and be self-supporting. A good Bahá'í, therefore, is the one who so arranges his life as to devote time both to his material needs and also to the service of the Cause. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, February 26, 1933, unpublished; "Understanding Tests" letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 17, 1989)
- 10) There is, however, and should always be, a limit to...self-sacrifice. We should learn to give and be careful not to give [to the Bahá'í Funds] to such an extent that our own development and growth may be severely hampered. We have to carefully and wisely divide our resources in such a way as to ensure the fair and equal development of our entire personality. Excess has always been a source of trouble. Moderation should be, therefore, our guide in all we do, whether in our personal or collective work. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 1, 1933, unpublished; "Understanding Tests" letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 17, 1989)
- 11) We cannot possibly say that because a person also has many virtues, faults as grave as lying and dishonorable conduct regarding money, can be overlooked! (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Arohanui: Letters from Shoghi Effendi to New Zealand*, p. 52)
- 12) Even though Shoghi Effendi would urge every believer to sacrifice as much as possible for the sake of contributing towards the fund..., yet he would discourage the friends to incur debts for that purpose. We are asked to give what we have, not what we do not possess, especially if such an act causes suffering to others. In such matters we should use judgment and wisdom and take into our confidence other devoted Bahá'ís. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 10.14)
- 13) You ask about the admonition that everyone must work, and want to know if this means that you, a wife and mother, must work for a livelihood as your husband does. ... [T]he directive [from Bahá'u'lláh] is for the friends to be engaged in an occupation which will be of benefit to mankind. Homemaking is a highly honorable and responsible work of fundamental importance for mankind. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 626-627)
- 13) With regard to your question whether mothers should work outside the home, it is helpful to consider the matter from the perspective of the concept of a Bahá'í family. This concept is based on the principle that the man has primary responsibility for the financial support of the family, and the woman is the chief and primary educator of the children. This by no means implies that these functions are inflexibly fixed and cannot be changed and adjusted to suit particular family situations, nor does it mean that the place of the woman is confined to the home. Rather, while primary responsibility is assigned, it is anticipated that fathers would play a significant role in the education of the children and women could also be breadwinners. As you rightly indicated, 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged women to "participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world." (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 626)

CHAPTER 28

A Blend of Lives: Creating a Home

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) 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.... (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, “Family Life”*, p. 397)
- 2) The home should be orderly and well-organized. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 219)
- 3) All Art is a gift of the Holy Spirit. When this light shines through the mind of a musician, it manifests itself in beautiful harmonies. Again, shining through the mind of a poet, it is seen in fine poetry and poetic prose. When the Light of the Sun of Truth inspires the mind of a painter, he produces marvelous pictures. These gifts are fulfilling their highest purpose, when showing forth the praise of God. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Walking Together on a Path of Service*, p. 112)
- 4) It is natural for the heart and spirit to take pleasure and enjoyment in all things that show forth symmetry, harmony, and perfection. For instance: a beautiful house, a well designed garden, a symmetrical line, a graceful motion, a well written book, pleasing garments—in fact, all things that have in themselves grace or beauty are pleasing to the heart and spirit—therefore, it is most certain that a true voice causes deep pleasure. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Walking Together on a Path of Service*, p. 113)
- 5) ...[M]elodies, though they are material, are connected with the spiritual, therefore, they produce a great effect. A certain kind of melody makes the spirit happy.... (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, “Music”*, p. 79)
- 6) Therefore...set to music the verses and the divine words so that they may be sung with soul-stirring melody...that the hearts of the listeners may become tumultuous and rise towards the Kingdom of Abhá [heaven] in supplication and prayer. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, “Music”*, p. 74)
- 7) ...[I]n every aspect of life, purity and holiness, cleanliness and refinement, exalt the human condition and further the development of man’s inner reality. Even in the physical realm, cleanliness will conduce to spirituality, as the Holy Writings clearly state. And although bodily cleanliness is a physical thing, it hath, nevertheless, a powerful influence on the life of the spirit. ... [P]hysical cleanliness doth also exert its effect upon the human soul.
Observe how pleasing is cleanliness in the sight of God, and how specifically it is emphasized in the Holy Books of the Prophets; for the Scriptures forbid the eating or the use of any unclean thing. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 146-147)
- 8) ...[M]an [human beings] cannot live singly and alone. He is in need of continuous cooperation and mutual help. ... [H]e is in need of cooperation and reciprocity. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 38)
- 9) But to blessed animals [those that are not harmful] the utmost kindness must be shown, the more the better. Tenderness and loving-kindness are basic principles of God’s heavenly Kingdom. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 160)
- 10) ...the young Bahá’ís in every city should make a point of keeping in touch with local youth activities and clubs.... Above all they should set a high example to them; chastity, politeness, friendliness, hospitality, joyous optimism about the ultimate future happiness and well being of mankind.... (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 629)

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CHAPTER 29

Rocks on the Path: Responding to Tough Stuff

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 285)
- 2) The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 168)
- 3) The friends of God must be adorned with the ornament of justice, equality, kindness and love. As they do not allow themselves to be the object of cruelty and transgression, in like manner they should not allow such tyranny to visit the handmaidens of God.... (Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by the Universal House of Justice: An unpublished letter January 24, 1993, to an individual)
- 4) Be thou not sad, neither be thou unhappy...the divine tests are...conducive to the life of the soul and the heart. The more often the pure gold is thrown into the furnace of test, the greater will become its purity and brilliancy and it will acquire a new splendor and brightness. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Vol. 2*, pp. 302-303)
- 5) ...[O]bligatory prayer and fasting produce awareness and awakening in man, and are conducive to his protection and preservation from tests. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*, Section 2, VII)
- 6) There are two ways of healing sickness, material means and spiritual means. The first is by the treatment of physicians; the second consisteth in prayers offered by the spiritual ones to God and in turning to Him. Both means should be used and practiced.
 Illnesses which occur by reason of physical causes should be treated by doctors with medical remedies; those which are due to spiritual causes disappear through spiritual means. Thus an illness caused by affliction, fear, nervous impressions, will be healed more effectively by spiritual rather than by physical treatment. Hence, both kinds of treatment should be followed; they are not contradictory. Therefore thou shouldst also accept physical remedies inasmuch as these too have come from the mercy and favor of God, Who hath revealed and made manifest medical science so that His servants may profit from this kind of treatment also. Thou shouldst give equal attention to spiritual treatments, for they produce marvelous effects. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 151-152)
- 7) The more one is severed from the world, from desires, from human affairs, and conditions, the more impervious does one become to the tests of God. Tests are a means by which a soul is measured as to its fitness, and proven out by its own acts. God knows its fitness beforehand, and also its unpreparedness, but man, with an ego, would not believe himself unfit unless proof were given him. Consequently his susceptibility to evil is proven to him when he falls into the tests, and the tests are continued until the soul realizes its own unfitness, then remorse and regret tend to root out the weakness.
 The same test comes again in greater degree, until it is shown that a former weakness has become a strength, and the power to overcome evil has been established. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Star of the West”, Vol. 6, No. 6; “Understanding Tests” letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 17, 1989)
- 8) The mind and spirit of man advance when he is tried by suffering. The more the ground is ploughed the better the seed will grow, the better the harvest will be. Just as the plough furrows the earth deeply, purifying it of weeds and thistles, so suffering and tribulation free man from the petty affairs of this worldly life until he arrives at a state of complete detachment. His attitude in this world will be that of divine

happiness. Man is, so to speak, unripe: the heat of the fire of suffering will mature him. Look back to the times past and you will find that the greatest men have suffered most. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Paris Talks*, p. 178)

9) If some one commits an error and wrong toward you, you must instantly forgive him. Do not complain of others. Refrain from reprimanding them, and if you wish to give admonition or advice, let it be offered in such a way that it will not burden the bearer. Turn all your thoughts toward bringing joy to hearts. Beware! Beware! lest ye offend any heart. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 453)

10) ...[S]uffering, although an inescapable reality, can nevertheless be utilized as a means for the attainment of happiness. ... Suffering is both a reminder and a guide. It stimulates us to better adapt ourselves to our environmental conditions, and thus leads the way to self-improvement. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, May 29, 1935, unpublished; “Understanding Tests” letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 17, 1989)

11) I rejoice and am filled with gratitude, pride and happiness to realize that the Faith itself has survived this fiery test, and has demonstrated its resilience, its vitality and incorruptibility after so crucial a period of stress, of suffering and danger. (Shoghi Effendi, *The Light of Divine Guidance, Vol. I*, pp. 103-104)

12) A greater degree of love will produce a greater unity, because it enables people to bear with each other, to be patient and forgiving. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Living the Life”, pp. 12-13)

13) There are two factors, God’s Will and our free will: we are not puppets, if we make mistakes we have to pay for them. ... [T]here are calamities for testing and for punishment—there are also accidents, plain cause and effect! (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, March 19, 1945, unpublished; “Understanding Tests” letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 17, 1989)

14) It is not sufficient to pray diligently for guidance, but this prayer must be followed by meditation as to the best methods of action and then action itself. Even if the action should not immediately produce results, or perhaps not be entirely correct, that does not make so much difference, because prayers can only be answered through action and if someone’s action is wrong, God can use that method of showing the pathway which is right. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 461)

15) No Bahá’í husband should ever beat his wife, or subject her to any form of cruel treatment; to do so would be an unacceptable abuse of the marriage relationship and contrary to the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. ... If a Bahá’í woman suffers abuse or is subjected to rape by her husband, she has the right to turn to the Spiritual Assembly for assistance and counsel, or to seek legal protection. Such abuse would gravely jeopardize the continuation of the marriage, and could well lead to a condition of irreconcilable antipathy. (Universal House of Justice: An unpublished letter January 24, 1993, to an individual believer)

16) ...[T]here is no objection to Bahá’ís being members of Alcoholics Anonymous, which is an association that does a great deal of good in assisting alcoholics to overcome their lamentable condition. The sharing of experience which the members undertake does not conflict with the Bahá’í prohibition on the confession of sins; it is more in the nature of the therapeutic relationship between a patient and a psychiatrist. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Issues Concerning Community Functioning* (Australia), p. 11)

17) Consultation is to be used not only in the functioning of the Administrative Order, but is also available for the individual in solving his own problems; he may consult with his Assembly, with his family and with his friends. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, November 29, 1982, unpublished; “Understanding Tests” letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 17, 1989)

18) 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)

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CHAPTER 30

Setting Priorities: Your Marriage Commitments

The Bride of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

“My brother and I used to stand at a window and watch [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] swimming; such a strong and graceful swimmer. Every afternoon about five o’clock the wife of Mírzá Músá [Bahá’u’lláh’s brother] would go with me to visit Bahá’u’lláh. I cannot describe the wonder and gladness and happiness of being in His presence. My soul was wrapt in an ecstasy of utter joy, and seemed to float in a celestial atmosphere of peace and loving-kindness.

“Many beautiful daughters were offered from time to time by parents anxious that their child should have the honor of becoming the wife of [‘Abdu’l-Bahá]. He refused to consider any of them, until I arrived; we met each other once, and our marriage was arranged....

“Bahá’u’lláh spoke wonderful words to me:

Oh Munírih! Oh my Leaf! I have destined you for the wife of [‘Abdu’l-Bahá]. This is the bounty of God to you. In earth or in heaven there is no greater gift. Many have come, but We have rejected them and chosen you. Oh Munírih! Be worthy of Him, and of Our generosity to you.

“Bahá’u’lláh chanted the prayers [at the wedding].

“Oh the spiritual happiness which enfolded us! It cannot be described in earthly words.

The chanting ended, the guests left us. I was the wife of my Beloved. How wonderful and noble He was in His beauty. I adored Him. I recognized His greatness, and thanked God for bringing me to Him.

“It is impossible to put into words the delight of being with [‘Abdu’l-Bahá]; I seemed to be in a glorious realm of sacred happiness whilst in His company.

“...then, in the youth of His beauty and manly vigor, with His unfailing love, His kindness, His cheerfulness, His sense of humor, His untiring consideration for everybody, He was marvelous, without equal, surely in all the earth!

“For fifty years my beloved and I were together...years [that] fled by in an atmosphere of love and joy and the perfection of that Peace which passeth all understanding, in the radiant light of which I await the day when I shall be called to join Him, in the celestial garden of transfiguration.”

~ Munírih Khánúm, *The Chosen Highway*, pp. 87-90

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) Words must be supported by deeds, for deeds are the true test of words. (Bahá’u’lláh: *The Tabernacle of Unity*, p. 8)
- 2) Utterance must needs possess penetrating power. For if bereft of this quality it would fail to exert influence. And this penetrating influence dependeth on the spirit being pure and the heart stainless. Likewise it needeth moderation, without which the hearer would be unable to bear it, rather he would manifest opposition from the very outset. And moderation will be obtained by blending utterance with the tokens of divine wisdom which are recorded in the sacred Books and Tablets. Thus when the essence of one’s utterance is endowed with these two requisites it will prove highly effective and will be the prime factor in transforming the souls of men. (Bahá’u’lláh: *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 198-199)
- 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

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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) 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)

5) 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: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 168)

6) Every created thing in the contingent world is made up of many and varied atoms, and its existence is dependent on the composition of these. In other words, through the divine creative power a conjunction of simple elements taketh place so that from this composition a distinct organism is produced. The existence of all things is based upon this principle. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 289)

7) ...[T]he House of Justice feels it most essential for your husband and you to understand that marriage can be a source of well-being, conveying a sense of security and spiritual happiness. However, it is not something that just happens. For marriage to become a haven of contentment it requires the cooperation of the marriage partners themselves, and the assistance of their families.... (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, “Women”*, p. 384)

8) Family consultation employing full and frank discussion, and animated by awareness of the need for moderation and balance, can be the panacea for domestic conflict. Wives should not attempt to dominate their husbands, nor husbands their wives... (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, “Women”*, p. 383)

9) It should also be borne in mind that Bahá’u’lláh envisages the possibility for specific conditions to be laid down and agreed upon by the parties prior to their marriage. This means that in addition to the spiritual covenant the parties become committed to, they are permitted by the Author of our Faith to enter into a form of contract, if they choose, with defined conditions and provisions binding on both parties. In one of these cases..., for example, that of a wife who is found by her husband not to have been a virgin, the dissolution of the marriage can be demanded only “if the marriage has been conditioned on virginity”; presumably, therefore, if the wife wishes to exercise such a right in respect to the husband, she would have to include a condition as to his virginity in the marriage contract. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, July 9, 1996)

10) ...[T]he human race is now endowed with the means needed to realize the visionary goals summoned up by a steadily maturing consciousness. (Commissioned by the Universal House of Justice, *Who is Writing the Future*, para. 50)

CHAPTER 31

The Choice: To Marry...or Not to Marry

Love's Philosophy

The fountains mingle with the river,
 And the rivers with the ocean;
 The winds of heaven mix forever,
 With a sweet emotion;
 Nothing in the world is single;
 All things by a law divine
 In one another's being mingle:—
 Why not I with thine?

~ Percy Bysshe Shelley

Reaching a Decision [to Marry]

- First Step** Pray and meditate about it. Use the prayers of the Manifestations [Prophets and Messengers of God] as they have the greatest power. Then remain in the silence of contemplation for a few minutes.
- Second Step** Arrive at a decision and hold this. This decision is usually born during the contemplation. It may seem almost impossible of accomplishment but if it seems to be as answer to a prayer or a way of solving the problem, then immediately take the next step.
- Third Step** Have determination to carry the decision through. Many fail here. The decision, budding into determination, is blighted and instead becomes a wish or a vague longing. When determination is born, immediately take the next step.
- Fourth Step** Have faith and confidence that the power will flow through you, the right way will appear, the door will open, the right thought, the right message, the right principle or the right book will be given you. Have confidence, and the right thing will come to your need. Then, as you rise from prayer, take at once the fifth step.
- Fifth Step** Then, he said, lastly, ACT; Act as though it had all been answered. Then act with tireless, ceaseless energy. And as you act, you, yourself, will become a magnet, which will attract more power to your being, until you become an unobstructed channel for the Divine power to flow through you. Many pray but do not remain for the last half of the first step. Some who meditate arrive at a decision, but fail to hold it. Few have the determination to carry the decision through, still fewer have the confidence that the right thing will come to their need. But how many remember to act as though it had all been answered? How true are those words—"Greater than the prayer is the spirit in which it is uttered" and greater than the way it is uttered is the spirit in which it is carried out.

~ Attributed to Shoghi Effendi: *Principles of Bahá'í Administration*, p. 90

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) Since the consent of both parties is required..., and since, before maturity, their consent or lack of it cannot be ascertained, marriage is therefore conditional upon reaching the age of maturity [age 15], and is not permissible before that time. (*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Questions and Answers, p. 134)
- 2) As for the question regarding marriage under the Law of God: first thou must choose one who is pleasing to thee, and then the matter is subject to the consent of father and mother. Before thou makest thy choice, they have no right to interfere. ('Abdu'l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 118)
- 3) The Bahá'í youth...should be advised, nay even encouraged, to contract marriage while still young and in full possession of their physical vigor. Economic factors, no doubt, are often a serious hindrance to early marriage, but in most cases are only an excuse, and as such should not be overstressed. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, "A Chaste and Holy Life"*, p. 56)
- 4) ...[I]mplicit faith in our intuitive powers is unwise, but through daily prayer and sustained effort one can discover, though not always and fully, God's will intuitively. Under no circumstances, however, can a person be absolutely certain that he is recognizing God's will, through the exercise of his intuition. It often happens that the latter results in completely misrepresenting the truth, and thus becomes a source of error rather than of guidance. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 29, 1938, unpublished; "Understanding Tests" letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 17, 1989)
- 5) ['Abdu'l-Bahá]...said when we feel we should do a thing and then make every effort, and the doors open, this is guidance. If, in spite of all we do, the doors remain closed, it cannot be guidance, generally speaking. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 29, 1938, unpublished; "Understanding Tests" letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 17, 1989)
- 6) It is not sufficient to pray diligently for guidance, but this prayer must be followed by meditation as to the best methods of action and then action itself. Even if the action should not immediately produce results, or perhaps not be entirely correct, that does not make so much difference, because prayers can only be answered through action and if someone's action is wrong, God can use that method of showing the pathway which is right. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 461)
- 7) This principle [of the equality of women and men] is far more than the enunciation of admirable ideals; it has profound implications in all aspects of human relations and must be an integral element of Bahá'í domestic and community life. The application of this principle gives rise to changes in habits and practices which have prevailed for many centuries. An example of this is found in the response provided on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a question whether the traditional practice whereby the man proposes marriage to the woman is altered by the Bahá'í Teachings to permit the woman to issue a marriage proposal to the man; the response is, "[Shoghi Effendi]... wishes to state that there is absolute equality between the two, and that no distinction of preference is permitted...." (Universal House of Justice: An unpublished letter January 24, 1993, to an individual)
- 8) God has endowed human beings with more than one way of receiving guidance in the decisions we have to make, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained. There are the Holy Writings, in which are clear directions for the way in which we should live; if an inner voice prompts us to act contrary to the explicit teachings we can be sure that, far from being an inspiration from God, that inner voice is the expression of our own lower nature, and should be disregarded. There is also the gift of intelligence and good judgment—the faculty which distinguishes man from the animal kingdom; God intends us to use the faculty, which can be a powerful instrument for distinguishing between true inspirations and vain imaginings. There is the power of prayer through which we strive to purify our motives, to seek the Will of God and to implore His guidance and assistance. There is also the law of consultation, one of the distinguishing features of this great Revelation. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, November 29, 1982, unpublished; "Understanding Tests" letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 17, 1989)

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CHAPTER 32

To Our Parents: Seeking Consent

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) ...[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. And in this We have yet other purposes. Thus hath Our commandment been ordained. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 42)
- 2) Beautify your tongues, O people, with truthfulness, and adorn your souls with the ornament of honesty. Beware, O people, that ye deal not treacherously with any one. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 297)
- 3) Show honor to your parents and pay homage to them. This will cause blessings to descend upon you from the clouds of the bounty of your Lord, the Exalted, the Great. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 229)
- 4) Regarding your question of applying the sanction of suspension of voting rights to people who marry without the consent of parents, this should be done from now on. The law of the *Aqdas* is explicit and not open to any ambiguity at all. As long as the parents are alive, the consent must be obtained; it is not conditioned on their relationship to their children. If the whereabouts of the parents is not known legally, in other words, if they are legally dead, then it is not necessary for the children to obtain their consent, obviously. It is not a question of the child not knowing the present whereabouts of its parents, it is a question of a legal thing—if the parents are alive, they must be asked. (Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to Canada*, p. 241)
- 5) 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)
- 6) We Bahá'ís must realize that in present-day society the exact opposite process is taking place: young people care less and less for their parents' wishes, divorce is considered a natural right, and obtained on the flimsiest and most unwarrantable and shabby pretexts. People separated from each other, especially if one of them has had full custody of the children, are only too willing to belittle the importance of the partner in marriage also responsible as a parent for bringing those children into this world. The Bahá'ís must, through rigid adherence to the Bahá'í laws and teachings, combat these corrosive forces which are so rapidly destroying home life and the beauty of family relationships, and tearing down the moral structure of society. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 370)
- 7) About the consent of parents for marriage: this is required before and also after the man or woman is twenty-one years of age. It is also required in the event of a second marriage, after the dissolution of the first whether through death or through divorce. The parental consent is also a binding obligation irrespective of whether the parents are Bahá'ís or not, whether they are friendly or opposed to the [Bahá'í] Cause. In the event of the death of both parents, the consent of a guardian is not required. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *Compilation on the Consent of Parents to Marriage* by the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Center)
- 8) In many cases of breach of marriage laws the believers apparently look upon the law requiring consent of parents before marriage as a mere administrative regulation, and do not seem to realize that this is a law of great importance affecting the very foundations of human society. Moreover they seem not to appreciate

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that in the Bahá'í Faith the spiritual and administrative aspects are complementary and that the social laws of the Faith are as binding as the purely spiritual ones. (Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 369)

9) The House of Justice is very pleased to learn of the progress you are making in recovering from the difficulties of the past, and is delighted by your wholehearted and enthusiastic commitment to the practice of the Teachings and your involvement in Bahá'í community activities. It is confident that, with the passage of time, you will proceed from strength to strength, and that your earnest endeavors will be reinforced by the spiritual potencies of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Turning now to the questions you have raised, the House of Justice has decided that when a Bahá'í has suffered sexual abuse such as incest from a parent, that believer is free to approach the National Spiritual Assembly for a determination that such an action warrants deprivation of the right of the parent to give consent to marriage. At present such matters have to be referred by a National Assembly to the Universal House of Justice on a case by case basis. (Universal House of Justice to an individual, December 22, 1992)

10) When a child is adopted and, either by civil law or by the contract of adoption, the natural parents renounce all their rights and privileges toward that child, the consent of the natural parents is not required under Bahá'í law for the marriage of the child. (Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, 1-10-93)

11) ...[A]lthough such a civil law [see previous quotation] removes the obligation of the child to obtain the consent of natural parents for marriage, a child who earnestly wishes to locate his or her natural parents should not be discouraged from doing so. This desire is often motivated by the spirit of the law of Bahá'u'lláh requiring consent.... Such a renewal of contact, although at times painful and difficult, can lead to a healing beneficial to all concerned.

All cases where the question of disownment is not specifically covered by civil law...should continue to be referred to the Universal House of Justice. (Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, 2-1-93 in clarification of letter of 1-10-93)

12) If the father should be found but it is determined and certified that he is mentally incapable of giving consent, then obviously no consent is necessary. (Universal House of Justice, *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 16.17)

13) It has become clear, from a number of experiences, that [parents from certain religious denominations] have a particular difficulty in giving consent to the marriage of their children. Some face a problem of conscience in that they feel they cannot take the positive step of consenting to a marriage which involves the ceremony of a religion other than their own, even though they may have no objection at all to their child's choice of marriage partner. ...However, [this father] holds to the principle that his daughter, as a mature person, is free to marry whomsoever she chooses. It is not that he opposes the proposed match, but merely that he refuses on principle to consent to it. If the Spiritual Assembly is satisfied that this is so, it may consider this as adequate for the purpose of the Bahá'í law. It does not need to have such a statement in writing, provided that it is satisfied from the testimony of reliable witnesses that this is, indeed [the father's] attitude.

One must distinguish here between a father who tells his child that she is free to marry whomsoever she wishes, thereby merely reluctantly accepting a fact of civil law that he is powerless to overrule, and a father who utters the same words, meaning that he, on principle, upholds that his daughter is free in this way. The former would not be acceptable as consent in Bahá'í law, the latter would be. (The Universal House of Justice to two individuals, April, 15, 1985)

14) ...[S]ometimes a parent adopts the point of view that the child is an adult, free to marry whomever he or she wishes, and the parent sees no reason for being asked for consent. Such an attitude, if clearly established, is tantamount to the parent's renunciation of the right to give or withhold consent, and can be accepted by the Assembly as freeing the child from the requirement to obtain consent from that parent. Another possibility is that the parents state that they have such confidence in their children that they have

given them general consent to marry whomsoever they wish; in this instance, such general consent would suffice to satisfy the requirements for Bahá'í marriage. [Additional clarification of this guidance, March 14, 1994: It seems unlikely that Bahá'í parents would feel it inappropriate for their children to seek parental consent to marry. If such a situation were to arise, then it would seem that some deepening on Bahá'í laws related to marriage would be required.] (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, October 16, 1991; "Bahá'í Canada", 'Alá', B.E. 151, p. 13)

15) It seems clear that Miss ... has a slender connection with her genetic father. Nevertheless, despite his long absence and his lack of any relationship with either mother or daughter, Miss ... is obligated to make every effort, however discreetly carried out, to ascertain his whereabouts, including such steps [as] contacting persons, firms or agencies, and even advertising in newspapers if necessary. The Local or National Assembly may offer its assistance to the couple, if needed. When the Assembly is satisfied that every reasonable avenue of search has been exhausted without discovering the missing parent, the Assembly may permit the marriage to take place. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 372-373)

16) ...[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 a National Spiritual Assembly: August 10, 2000)

CHAPTER 33

Parental Choice: Deciding Consent

“Unity is consciously looking for points of harmony and commonality between people. We bring people together in love, commitment, and cooperation. We focus on finding points of agreement between us. We regard disunity as destructive to our relationship. We build unity through using the character qualities effectively with one another. We draw on one another’s strengths and abilities. We use consultation as an important tool to understand our differences and reach a unified decision. We recognize that the success of our marriage is more important than the attainment of one person’s goals at the expense of the other. The unity of our marriage is a vital and stable foundation for our children and other family members. It is a force that connects us to people everywhere. It is the bond that keeps our marriage intact, strong, and thriving.”

~ Susanne Alexander, with Craig A. Farnsworth and John S. Miller,
Pure Gold: Encouraging Character Qualities in Marriage (2nd ed.), p. 240

Quotations for Guidance

Note: Many of the quotations that are in Chapters 32 and 34 also apply to parental consent, so you may find it helpful to refer to those as well.

- 1) ...[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*, para. 65)
- 2) ...The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. (Bahá’u’lláh: *The Hidden Words*, from the Arabic, No. 2)
- 3) As to the question of marriage, according to the law of God: First you must select one, and then it depends upon the consent of the father and mother. Before your selection they have no right of interference. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Abbas*, Vol. 3, p. 563)
- 4) ...[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)
- 5) 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

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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)

6) 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*, pp. 369-370)

7) The freedom of the parents in giving or refusing consent to the marriage of their children is unrestricted and unconditioned. The parents' responsibility in this regard is based on their conscience and they are answerable to God. This is not to say that there may not be cases when they give consent reluctantly; this is something that the parents themselves would know, in the same way that the children know that they have pressured their parents to grant permission because of certain considerations. Therefore, it is not correct to say that when parents give their consent to the marriage of their children, it is necessarily wholehearted. On the other hand, some parents may be persuaded by their children to give their wholehearted consent after their initial reluctance to do so. (Universal House of Justice: *Consent of Parents*, p. 37)

8) 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*, p. 368)

9) It is preferable that consent of parents be given in writing. However, oral consent is permissible under conditions acceptable to the Assembly. (Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Mexico, unpublished, February 16, 1965)

10) 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)

11) ...[T]he unity of your family need not be imperiled because your adopted children when ready for marriage must obtain consent of their natural [birth] parents. Just as love for one person need not reduce the love one bears to another, so unity with the adoptive parents need not destroy nor reduce the unity a child may have with its natural parents, or vice versa. The characters and attitudes of the individuals concerned will have an effect upon this.

You also state that unless there is a broader concept of the meaning of "natural parent", you feel the law creates disharmony. ...[T]he following extract from a letter written on behalf of...[Shoghi Effendi]...refers to the special significance of the relationship between children and their natural parents.

"Bahá'u'lláh has clearly stated the consent of all living parents is required for Bahá'í marriage... 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 children for those who have given them life and sent their souls out on the eternal journey towards their Creator."

In short, love for the foster parents and unity with their home should not exclude love for a child's natural parents, although it is likely a child will become very much more a part of the home in which he lives and grows up.

Of course, wherever the law of the land or the Agreement of Adoption prohibits future contact between an adopted child and its natural parents, the Bahá'í Law does not require the child to seek the consent of

those parents to its marriage. However, children may very well wish to obtain the consent of their foster parents although not obliged to do so. (Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 374)

12) 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)

13) There should be a spirit of mutual respect and consideration between parents and children, in which the children turn to their parents for advice and direction, and the parents train and nurture their offspring. The fruit of this relationship is that the children grow into adulthood with their powers of discrimination and judgment refined, so that they can steer the course of their lives in a manner most conducive to their welfare.

Within the framework of this mutual respect, the parents are called upon to show wisdom and discretion when their offspring are developing friendships which might ultimately lead to marriage. They should consider carefully the circumstances under which advice should be given, and conditions under which their intervention would be construed as interference.

For their part, the offspring should recognize that their parents are deeply interested in their welfare, and that the views of the parents warrant respect and careful consideration. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Consent of Parents*, p. 27)

CHAPTER 34

When the Answer is “No”: Consent Denied

Quotations for Guidance

Note: Many of the quotations that are in Chapters 32 and 33 also apply to this chapter, so you may wish to refer to those as well. It may also be helpful to you to revisit Chapter 29 on responding to tests and difficulties.

1) ...[L]oving-kindness to one’s parents hath been linked to recognition of the one true God! (Bahá’u’lláh: *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Questions and Answers, p. 139)

2) O ye peoples of the world! Know assuredly that My commandments are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures. ... Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty. ... Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power. (Baha’u’llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah*, p. 332)

3) Make me ready, in all circumstances, O my Lord, to serve Thee and to set myself towards the adored sanctuary of Thy Revelation and of Thy Beauty. If it be Thy pleasure, make me to grow as a tender herb in the meadows of Thy grace, that the gentle winds of Thy will may stir me up and bend me into conformity with Thy pleasure, in such wise that my movement and my stillness may be wholly directed by Thee. (Bahá’u’lláh: *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 240)

4) It is surely a very unfortunate case when the parents and children differ on some grave issues of life such as marriage, but the best way is not to flout each other’s opinion nor to discuss it in a charged atmosphere but rather try to settle it in an amicable way. (Shoghi Effendi: *Bahá’í Marriage and Family Life*, p. 23)

5) 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)

6) In considering the effect of obedience to the laws on individual lives, one must remember that the purpose of this life is to prepare the soul for the next. Here one must learn to control and direct one’s animal impulses, not to be a slave to them. Life in this world is a succession of tests and achievements, of falling short and of making new spiritual advances. Sometimes the course may seem very hard, but one can witness, again and again, that the soul who steadfastly obeys the law of Bahá’u’lláh, however hard it may seem, grows spiritually, while the one who compromises with the law for the sake of his own apparent happiness is seen to have been following a chimera: he does not attain the happiness he sought, he retards his spiritual advance and often brings new problems upon himself.

To give one very obvious example: the Bahá’í law requiring consent of parents to marriage. All too often nowadays such consent is withheld by non-Bahá’í parents for reasons of bigotry or racial prejudice; yet we have seen again and again the profound effect on those very parents of the firmness of the children in the Bahá’í law, to the extent that not only is the consent ultimately given in many cases, but the character of the parents can be affected and their relationship with their child greatly strengthened.

Thus, by upholding Bahá’í law in the face of all difficulties we not only strengthen our own characters but influence those around us. (The Universal House of Justice, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968-1973*, pp. 106-107)

7) 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

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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)

8) As to whether you may continue indefinitely to seek your parents' consent, there is nothing in the law of Bahá'u'lláh to prevent this, but no engagement should be announced until consent has been obtained. (Universal House of Justice: *Consent of Parents*, p. 54)

9) ...[C]onsent of parents must be obtained in all cases before marriage can take place. Obedience to the laws of Bahá'u'lláh will necessarily impose hardships in individual cases. No one should expect, upon becoming a Bahá'í, that his faith will not be tested, and to our finite understanding of such matters these tests may occasionally seem unbearable. But we are aware of the assurance which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has given the believers that they will never be called upon to meet a test greater than their capacity to endure. It therefore becomes a matter of demonstration of the depth of one's faith when he is faced with a divine command the wisdom and rationale of which he cannot at that time understand. (Universal House of Justice: *Bahá'í Marriage and Family Life*, 24.78)

10) 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)

11) ...[C]onsent to marriage is all that is required from a parent. It is not necessary that the parents consent to a Bahá'í ceremony. However, if the reason that the parent refuses to give consent is the fact that the parties propose to have a Bahá'í ceremony, then the marriage cannot take place. (Universal House of Justice, *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 16.9)

12) While the House of Justice deeply sympathizes with the difficult situation facing Mr. ... and well understands your earnest and sincere desire to be of assistance to him, the free consent of parents is necessary and binding, regardless of the reason which the decision to withhold consent is based on. As you are undoubtedly aware, entering 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 a National Spiritual Assembly: August 10, 2000)

CHAPTER 35

It Is Almost Time: Tasks During Engagement

“When we are engaged, we tend to be very active. We look after ourselves and take care of our physical appearance. We make sure we always appear before our partner in the best possible way. We watch what we say and control our actions. We try to make up quarrels before parting so that no unpleasantness remains. It is easy for us to apologize to one another and make our peace. We each court the other and think that he or she is the most important thing in our lives. We live for the moment when we can see each other, embrace, speak and just be together. Even the smallest things done or experienced together are magical, acquire special meanings and evoke particular emotions such that a simple walk becomes a magnificent adventure. Afterwards we recall all the details and secretly relive every moment...It is amazing how much attention we pay and how actively we participate in what is going on when we are in the company of the person we love!

“I am not suggesting that when we marry we can continue to dedicate the same level of attention to each other as the years go by, but we can at least make an effort not to take our relationships for granted and not to fall into the dullness of habit. It is important to make this effort so that our partner can be again for us a truly special person, not “just” a husband or a wife, the father or the mother of our children, but the person with whom we wish to share our significant moments. We should consciously reaffirm the choice we made at the beginning of the relationship and not simply take it for granted or put up with it because at this point we have to make do.

“Love should be renewed every day....”

~ Mehri Sefidvash, *Coral and Pearls*, pp. 2-3

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) It is unlawful to become engaged to a girl [or boy] before she [or he] reaches the age of maturity [15 years old]. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 150)
- 2) ...Bahá'í engagement is the perfect communication and the entire consent of both parties. However, they must show forth the utmost attention and become informed of one another's character and the firm covenant made between each other must become an eternal binding, and their intentions must be everlasting affinity, friendship, unity and life. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, Vol. 2, p. 325)
- 3) The pledge of marriage, the verse to be spoken individually by the bride and the bridegroom in the presence of at least two witnesses acceptable to the Spiritual Assembly is, as stipulated in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book): “We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God.” (*Bahá'í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 117)
- 4) 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. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Bahá'í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 119)
- 5) The Laws of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* regarding the period of engagement have not been made applicable to believers in the West, and therefore there is no requirement that the parties to a marriage obtain consent of

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the parents before announcing their engagement. However, there is no objection to informing the believers that it would be wise for them to do so in order to avoid later embarrassment if consents are withheld. (Universal House of Justice: *Consent of Parents*, p. 54)

6) When a marriage is planned, the Assembly should ask to be informed far enough in advance so that it can review and approve the parental consent and ensure that arrangements for the Bahá'í ceremony are in conformity with Bahá'í principles and the requirements of civil law. If difficulties arise in obtaining consent, the Assembly should lend whatever help it can.

These two witnesses may be chosen by the couple or by the Spiritual Assembly, but must in any case be acceptable to the Assembly; they may be its chairman and secretary, or two members of the Assembly, or two other people, Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í, or any combination of these. . . .

The witnesses can be any two trustworthy people whose testimony is acceptable to the Spiritual Assembly under whose jurisdiction the marriage is performed. (Universal House of Justice, *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 16.5)

7) In considering the acceptability of the witnesses the Assembly must be satisfied as to their reliability. Pertinent to this is the reply given by Bahá'u'lláh when asked for a definition of the qualifications of those who may be called upon to give testimony or bear witness. His reply was that a witness must be of “good reputation among men,” and “the testimony of followers of any faith is acceptable to God.” (Universal House of Justice, *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, 16.5)

8) ...[T]he law of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* that the lapse of time between engagement and marriage should not exceed ninety-five days is binding on Persian believers wherever they reside, if both parties are Persian. This law is not applicable, however, if one of the parties is a Western believer. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 376)

9) Bahá'u'lláh came to bring unity to the world, and a fundamental unity is that of the family. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, “Preserving Bahá'í Marriages”, p. 453)

CHAPTER 36

The Big Day: Creating Your Marriage Ceremony

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) 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)
- 2) Bahá’u’lláh has drawn the circle of unity, He has made a design for the uniting of all the peoples, and for the gathering of them all under the shelter of the tent of universal unity. This is the work of the Divine Bounty, and we must all strive with heart and soul until we have the reality of unity in our midst, and as we work, so will strength be given unto us. Leave all thought of self, and strive only to be obedient and submissive to the Will of God. In this way only shall we become citizens of the Kingdom of God, and attain unto life everlasting. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Paris Talks*, p. 54)
- 3) The obligation of the Spiritual Assembly is to ascertain that all requirements of civil and Bahá’í law have been complied with, and, having done so, the Assembly may neither refuse to perform the marriage ceremony nor delay it. (Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 368)
- 4) An Assembly ... should always exercise great care not to restrict the individual’s freedom of action unnecessarily. Normally the size of the wedding celebration, the place in which it is to be held and who is to be invited are all left entirely to the discretion of the bride and groom.... (Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 387)
- 5) Although those married in a civil or religious ceremony before becoming Bahá’ís are accepted as married under Bahá’í law, persons wishing to marry after they become Bahá’ís must have a Bahá’í ceremony and are indeed not regarded as married unless they have met the requirements of Bahá’í law. (Universal House of Justice to the N.S.A. of the United States, unpublished, May 22, 1967)
- 6) As to cases involving another ceremony in addition to the Bahá’í one, the friends should bear in mind that according to Bahá’í Law the consummation of the marriage must take place within twenty-four hours of the Bahá’í marriage ceremony. If other marriage ceremonies are to be held in addition to the Bahá’í one, all the ceremonies must precede consummation of the marriage and, together with the consummation fall within one twenty-four hour period. Naturally any requirements of civil law as to the order in which the ceremonies should be held must be observed. (Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 389-390)
- 7) As to the holding of the Bahá’í and civil marriage ceremonies on the same day, as the consummation of the marriage should not take place until both ceremonies have been held, a night should not intervene between the two ceremonies. (Universal House of Justice, *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 16.20)
- 8) When two Bahá’ís are marrying, the wedding ceremony should not be held in the place of worship of another religion, nor should the forms of the marriage of other religions be added to the simple Bahá’í ceremony.

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When a Bahá'í is marrying a non-Bahá'í, and the religious wedding ceremony of the non-Bahá'í partner is to be held in addition to the Bahá'í ceremony, both ceremonies may, if requested, be held in the place of worship of the other religion provided that:

- a. Equal respect is accorded to both ceremonies. In other words, the Bahá'í ceremony, which is basically so simple, should not be regarded as a mere formal adjunct to the ceremony of the other religion.
- b. The two ceremonies are clearly distinct. In other words, they should not be commingled into one combined ceremony. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 389)

9) When the consent of the parents is obtained, the only other requirement for the ceremony is the recitation by both parties in the presence of two witnesses of the specifically revealed verse: “We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God.” The following quotations from letters written ...[on behalf of Shoghi Effendi] indicate the desirability of the Bahá'í marriage ceremony being simple:

- a. “There is no ritual, according to the *Aqdas* [*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*], and ...[Shoghi Effendi] is very anxious that none should be introduced at present and no general form accepted. He believes the ceremony should be as simple as possible....”
- b. “The only compulsory part of a Bahá'í wedding is the pledge of marriage, the phrase to be spoken separately by the Bride and Bridegroom in turn, in the presence of Assembly witnesses.” (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 387-388)

10) If it is known beforehand that a believer is violating such laws [of marriage], it would be inappropriate for the friends to attend the ceremony. This is out of respect for Bahá'í Law. However, if without realizing the situation believers find themselves in attendance at a ceremony in the course of which it is apparent that such a violation is occurring, they should not make an issue of it. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 387)

CHAPTER 37

An Adventure: The First Year Together

Quotations for Guidance

- 1) Strive, therefore, to create love in the hearts in order that they may become glowing and radiant. When that love is shining, it will permeate other hearts even as this electric light illumines its surroundings. When the love of God is established, everything else will be realized. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 239)
- 2) Never speak disparagingly of others, but praise without distinction. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 453)
- 3) May spiritual brotherhood cause rebirth and regeneration, for its creative quickening emanates from the breaths of the Holy Spirit and is founded by the power of God. Surely that which is founded through the divine power of the Holy Spirit is permanent in its potency and lasting in its effect. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 130)
- 4) In this glorious [Bahá’í] Cause the 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)
- 5) 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: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 168)
- 6) As to thy respected husband: it is incumbent upon thee to treat him with great kindness, to consider his wishes and be conciliatory with him at all times, till he seeth that because thou hast directed thyself toward the Kingdom of God, thy tenderness for him and thy love for God have but increased, as well as thy concern for his wishes under all conditions. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 122)
- 7) You should at all times fix your gaze on the promise of Bahá’u’lláh, put your whole trust in His creative Word, recall the past and manifold evidences of His all-encompassing and resistless power and arise to become worthy and exemplary recipients of His all-sustaining grace and blessings. (Shoghi Effendi: *Dawn of a New Day*, p. 90)
- 8) The House of Justice is distressed to learn that you and your husband are continuing to experience marital difficulties. It has frequently advised believers in such situations to turn to the Spiritual Assemblies for advice and counsel, and to follow this advice in their efforts to preserve the unity of their marital relationship. It has been found useful in many instances to also seek the assistance of competent professional marriage counselors, who can provide useful insights and guidance in the use of constructive measures to bring about a greater degree of unity. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, “Preserving Bahá’í Marriages”*, p. 459)

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9) ...[T]he House of Justice feels it most essential for your husband and you to understand that marriage can be a source of well-being, conveying a sense of security and spiritual happiness. However, it is not something that just happens. For marriage to become a haven of contentment it requires the cooperation of the marriage partners themselves, and the assistance of their families.... (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, "Women"*, p. 384)

10) Family consultation employing full and frank discussion, and animated by awareness of the need for moderation and balance, can be the panacea for domestic conflict. Wives should not attempt to dominate their husbands, nor husbands their wives... (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, "Women"*, p. 383)