

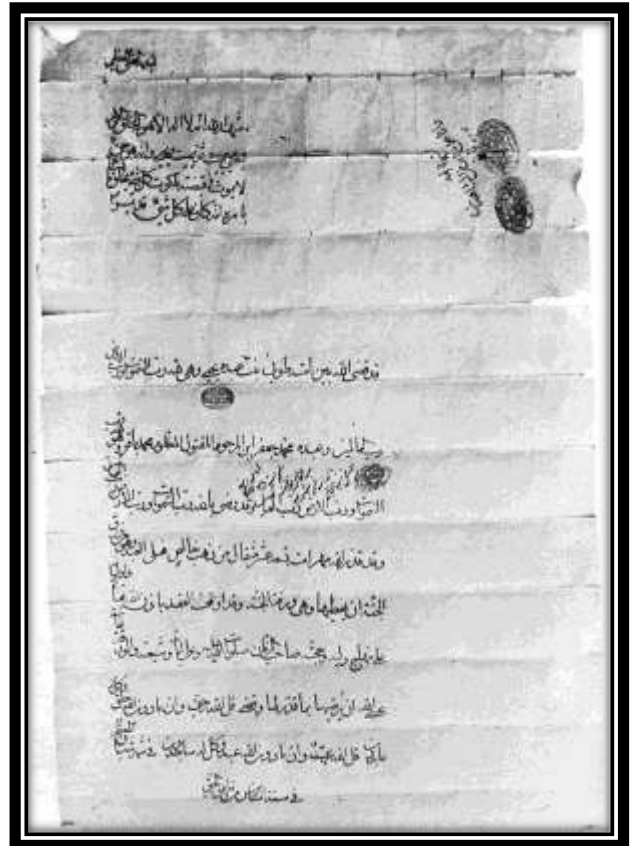
# Bahá'í Marriage Laws

## INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

The Bahá'í Faith, like all religions, has specific laws regarding marriage. The institutions of the Faith enforce these particular laws. The Bahá'í marriage laws may initially appear uncomplicated, yet they can sometimes be difficult to observe, depending on one's circumstances. However challenging the laws may seem in some cases, the believers are required to observe them. These marriage laws are not only binding but also have undeniable benefits for all involved when wholeheartedly followed.

Every Manifestation of God reveals spiritual teachings to humanity that will be of benefit to personal spiritual development and to the progress of society as a whole. The Bahá'í Faith acknowledges that some teachings may not be well understood initially. It teaches that God knows best, whether we fully understand it or not, and that when He is faithfully obeyed, the outcomes will always be most favorable for all.

This study provides the believer with an opportunity to become fully aware of, and faithfully committed to, the Bahá'í laws of marriage.



First marriage certificate of the new Dispensation, written by Siyyid Yahyáy-i-Dárábí, Vahid, for his daughter

## OBJECTIVE: *A look to the horizon...*

### Facilitator

Review the following objective with the participants:

The objective of this study is to understand the fundamental verities or basic truths regarding the Bahá'í marriage laws and the necessity to abide by them.

## THE STUDY PROCESS: *Attaining the water of life...*

### Facilitator

Review the following study process with the participants. Then study the numbered quotations that follow, one at a time as described below.

1. **READING:** *A drink from the cup of guidance...*
  - A. **Read the quotation** out loud in its entirety.
2. **CONFIRMING MEANING:** *A spray from the fountain of light...*

To better understand certain words used in the quotation, take turns with the following:

  - A. Each participant **choose a word** from the quotation and **state it** for the whole group to hear. (Like a fun game – pick a word!) Then...
  - B. Read out loud the sentence that contains the **word** you selected, **while substituting for that word**, its given phrase, definition, or synonym from the boxes below the quotation.
  - C. Repeat A and B above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words.
3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Mining the gems of truth...*
  - A. **Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.
  - B. Take turns **stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about **Bahá'í marriage laws or the necessity to abide by them**.

## QUOTATIONS: *Within the meadows of Thy nearness...*

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. He saith, great is His glory: "Marry, O people, that from you may appear he who will remember Me amongst My servants; this is one of My commandments unto you; obey it as an assistance to yourselves."* —Bahá'u'lláh

*Bahá'í Prayers*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 105.

**appear:** stand present  
**assistance:** aid and help  
**beneficence:** [His] qualities of goodness and kindness  
**commandments:** authoritative commands or orders  
**enjoined:** as an order or command imposed  
**established:** originated and made permanent  
**fortress:** place made strong and safe  
**grace:** special favors of affection  
**heaven:** "By 'heaven' is meant the heaven of divine Revelation..."—Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1950, 1970 printing), p. 44.  
**law(s):** rule(s) of conduct to be enforced by authority  
**manifest:** clearly show  
**marriage:** joining two persons of the opposite sex in a special kind of religious, social, and legal institutional relationship, for the purpose of ☞

founding and maintaining a family  
**marry:** enter into marriage  
**men:** the people  
**Most Holy Book:** book of laws of Bahá'u'lláh, titled *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* or *The Most Holy Book*  
**obey:** carry out or submit to the instruction or order of  
**observances:** rules, laws, and practices of a religious order to be followed and kept  
**order:** a harmonious arrangement  
**remember:** be continually thoughtful or regardful of  
**revealed:** made known through His Manifestation  
**salvation:** spiritual rescue and safety from the consequences of sin, danger, evil, difficulty, or destruction  
**sanctity:** sacredness; holiness  
**well-being:** a state of physical and moral wellness and happiness

2. ...marriage 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 rancour should arise amongst them. And in this We have yet other purposes. Thus hath Our commandment been ordained. —Bahá'u'lláh

*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), par. 65, p. 42.

**amidst**: surrounding or encompassing  
**commandment**: authoritative command or order  
**conditioned it**: established an essential requirement  
**consent**: agreement in opinion and sentiment  
**dependent**: subject to or conditioned  
**enmity**: bitter attitudes or feelings of hatred or ill-will, often concealed  
**harmony**: complementary and pleasant agreement  
**lest**: for fear that  
**love**: warm-hearted affection, compassion, and concern for the good of all  
**marriage**: the joining of two persons of the opposite sex in a special kind of religious, social, and legal institutional relationship, for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family  
**ordained**: established and enacted

**Our**: used by one in authority to denote himself  
**parents**: "...living natural parents of the two individuals who are being married..."—Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1973) no. 122, p. 45.  
**parties**: persons considering to be husband and wife  
**permission**: formal consent or given authorization  
**purposes**: specific reasons or intentions  
**rancour**: deep-seated and continuing bitter hatred or ill-will  
**unity**: a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and strife  
**We**: used by one in authority to denote himself

3. ...The only requirement [for a Bahá'í marriage ceremony], however, is that the bride and groom, before two witnesses, must state "*We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God.*" These two witnesses may be chosen by the couple or by the Spiritual Assembly, but must in any case be acceptable to the Assembly. —The Universal House of Justice

Cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 1296, p. 388.

**abide by**: accept as valid, conform to, and act in accordance with  
**acceptable**: capable or worthy of being received with favor and approval  
**before**: in the presence or company of  
**requirement**: essential needed

**Spiritual Assembly**: local Administrative Body of the Bahá'í community  
**state**: express by saying  
**verily**: in very truth  
**Will of God**: that sent down in the Revelation of God  
**witnesses**: persons to furnish evidence or proof

4. Bahá'u'lláh has clearly stated the consent of all living 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. —written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Cited in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 92, p. 207.

**applies**: is in effect or operation  
**consent**: expressed agreement or approval  
**eternal**: continually existing and everlasting  
**gratitude**: feeling of thankful appreciation for favors or benefits received  
**knit**: draw together firmly [and]  
**law**: rule of conduct established and enforced by authority  
**marriage**: joining of two persons of the opposite sex in a special kind of religious, social, and legal institutional relationship, for the purpose ↗

of founding and maintaining a family  
**parents**: "...natural parents of the two individuals who are being married..."—Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1973) no. 122, p. 45.  
**required**: decreed as essential and necessary  
**respect**: high and special regard or consideration  
**social fabric**: structure and framework of human relationships  
**strengthen**: make strong and durable  
**ties**: bonds of union and affection

5. Sex relationships of any form, outside marriage, are not permissible.... The proper use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is precisely for this very purpose that the institution of marriage has been established.

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

“A Chaste and Holy Life”, In *The Compilation of Compilations: Prepared by the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1990*, (Maryborough: Bahá’í Publications Australia, 1991), vol. I, no. 145, p. 56.

**established:** originated and its permanent existence secured  
**form:** manner of expression or behavior  
**instinct:** natural or inborn tendency to behave in a certain way  
**institution:** established social structure authorized and maintained through prescribed rules and agencies  
**marriage:** the joining of two persons of the opposite sex in a special kind of religious, social, and legal institutional relationship, for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family

**outside:** beyond the confines [of the institution of]  
**permissible:** acceptable or allowable  
**precisely:** exactly and without vagueness  
**proper:** suited to its specific purpose; conformity to appropriate standards [in]  
**purpose:** main reason for existing  
**relationships:** in association or interaction with another  
**right:** privilege to which one is entitled by authority  
**sex:** anything connected with sexual gratification

6. When someone who is already a Bahá’í knowingly violates Bahá’í marriage law he is subject to loss of his voting rights.

—The Universal House of Justice

Cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 1279, p. 384.

**knowingly:** while having knowledge [of it]  
**law:** rules of conduct established and enforced by authority  
**subject:** being open or susceptible  
**violates:** disregards or fails to keep or observe

**voting rights:** A Bahá’í can receive sanctions from Bahá’í institutions, which include deprivation of the sacred right to vote in Bahá’í elections, for knowingly disobeying certain Bahá’í Laws.

7. The believers should well know that whereas Bahá’u’lláh has not made marriage a binding obligation, He has nevertheless attributed to it such spiritual and social significance as no individual believer, under normal circumstances, can well be justified in disregarding it. In fact, in His Book of Laws (the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*) He emphatically stresses its importance, and defines its essential purpose, namely the procreation of children and their training in the Religion of God, that they may know and adore Him, and mention and praise His Name.

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

“Preserving Bahá’í Marriages.” In *The Compilation of Compilations: Prepared by the Universal House of Justice 1963-1990*, (Maryborough: Bahá’í Publications Australia, 1991), vol. II, no. 2318, pp. 447-48.

**adore:** with profound reverence, worship  
**attributed:** given credit or ascribed  
**binding:** required; obligatory  
**circumstances:** accompanying events and conditions  
**defines:** makes distinct and clear  
**disregarding:** intentionally neglecting or ignoring  
**emphatically:** with emphasis and significance  
**essential:** most important and necessary  
**justified:** shown or proven to be just, right, or reasonable  
**Laws:** the rules of conduct established and enforced by authority  
**marriage:** the joining of two persons of the opposite sex in a special kind of religious, social, and legal institutional relationship for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family

**obligation:** moral duty to a binding agreement or covenant  
**procreation:** bringing into existence  
**purpose:** reason for existing  
**significance:** qualities of importance  
**social:** pertaining to the structure and organization of society  
**spiritual:** that which vitally affects the eternal soul  
**stresses:** accents; distinguishes  
**training:** learning of skills and proficiencies through instruction and guidance

8. *Such are the laws which God hath enjoined upon you, such His commandments prescribed unto you in His Holy Tablet; obey them with joy and gladness, for this is best for you, did ye but know.*

—Bahá'u'lláh

*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), par. 148, p. 73.

**best:** the most good, the most advantageous, and the most beneficial  
**commandments:** authoritative commands or orders  
**enjoined:** imposed as an order or command  
**gladness:** happiness and willingness

**joy:** feelings of pleasure and delight  
**laws:** rules of conduct established and enforced by authority  
**obey:** carry out or submit to  
**prescribed:** laid down as something beneficial  
**Tablet:** divinely revealed Scripture

### SHARING EXERCISE: *A breath from the spirit of inspiration...*

#### Facilitator

Ask the participants to complete the statements below. When everyone has finished, have each person share, in a round, one thing that was outstanding or inspiring and what spiritual feelings it enkindled. Please remind everyone not to remark on the comments of others.

One thing from the quotations that was outstanding or inspiring to me was \_\_\_\_\_

It made me feel \_\_\_\_\_

I felt this way because \_\_\_\_\_

### SOME QUESTIONS: *A cup from the showers of confirmation...*

#### Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. They can usually find answers in the quotations just studied or in the introduction. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers.

1. “The only compulsory part of a Bahá'í wedding [ceremony] is the pledge of marriage, the phrase to be spoken separately by the Bride and Bridegroom in turn, in the presence of Assembly witnesses.”<sup>1</sup> What is that pledge? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Of the following, which five do you think are true regarding Bahá'í marriages? (answers are not found in the quotations or introduction)
  - a. If a Bahá'í has lost their voting rights, they cannot have a Bahá'í wedding until those rights have been restored.
  - b. Polygamy is not permitted for Bahá'ís.
  - c. If one individual being married is not a Bahá'í, that person *does not* need parental consent.
  - d. Both individuals must be at least fifteen to have a Bahá'í marriage.
  - e. All Bahá'ís are obligated to marry.
  - f. The Bahá'í ceremony should not be held in the place of worship of another religion.
  - g. Forms of the marriage of other religions should not be added to the simple Bahá'í ceremony.

Continued on next page...

<sup>1</sup> The Universal House of Justice, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 1279, p. 384.

3. Before a Local Spiritual Assembly can grant permission for a Bahá'í marriage the couple must acquire permission to marry from \_\_\_\_\_
4. Disobedience to the Bahá'í laws of marriage is detrimental for several reasons. What reasons can you think of? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Which four of the following elements are necessary for a Bahá'í marriage?
  - a. consent of all living biological parents of the couple
  - b. agreement by the couple to live in a fortress
  - c. a Bahá'í marriage ceremony with witnesses approved by a Local Spiritual Assembly
  - d. consent of the couple
  - e. the recital by both the bride and groom of the marriage pledge stipulated by Bahá'u'lláh
6. Once a couple decides to marry, they should notify a Local Spiritual Assembly immediately.
  - true Explain why or why not. \_\_\_\_\_
  - false \_\_\_\_\_
7. If a person knowingly violates the Bahá'í marriage laws, the sanctions may include the following restrictions and limitations: cannot attend events for Bahá'ís only, like Feast or Convention; cannot vote in Bahá'í elections or contribute to the Fund; cannot serve on a Bahá'í institution or committee, and cannot represent the Faith as a teacher. Is there any condition that could arise in which you would be justified in knowingly disobeying Bahá'í marriage laws? Explain. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. The two main purposes of marriage identified in this study are to contain “the proper use of the sex instinct” and for “the procreation of children and their training in the Religion of God.” Therefore, Bahá'ís cannot have same sex marriages.
  - true
  - false

**APPLICATION: Showing forth divine light...**

**Facilitator**

Read through #1 together and proceed as stated. Then take time for the participants to write out their individual plans for action in #2. (these are not shared) When everyone has finished, move on to the closing reading.

**1. IMAGINING THE POSSIBILITIES:** *Visions of radiant lights...*  
**Bahá'u'lláh wrote:** “It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action....” Imagine how the Bahá'í Teachings in this study class could be translated into reality and action. Take turns sharing the possibilities. Begin your statements with: “**One could**....” Suggest as many ideas as you want.

**2. DECIDING ACTION:** *Mirroring forth a beam of light...*  
 From your experience in this study class on “Bahá'í Marriage Laws,” describe what **you** are inspired to put into reality and action. **I will make conscious efforts to...** \_\_\_\_\_

**My next step will be...** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

## CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song...*

### A letter from `Abdu'l-Bahá.

O thou dear handmaid of God! Thy letter hath been received, and its contents were noted.

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 enamoured 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.

In the same way, when any souls grow to be true believers, they will attain a spiritual relationship with one another, and show forth a tenderness which is not of this world. They will, all of them, become elated from a draught of divine love, and that union of theirs, that connection, will also abide forever. Souls, that is, who will consign their own selves to oblivion, strip from themselves the defects of humankind, and unchain themselves from human bondage, will beyond any doubt be illumined with the heavenly splendours of oneness, and will all attain unto real union in the world that dieth not.

—`Abdu'l-Bahá

*Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), no. 84, pp. 117-18.

## ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...*

1. "We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God."
2. a, b, d, f, and g
3. their living natural (biological) parents
4. it could create rancour and enmity; loss of well-being and salvation; weaken the social fabric; weaken the ties of the home; reduce the gratitude of children for their parents; the personal loss of many sacred Bahá'í rights and privileges
5. a, c, d, and e
6. true—so parental permission can be verified, witnesses approved, and guidance given in other matters related to the wedding and marriage
7. There are none. (See quotation #8, "This is best for you, did ye but know.")
8. true

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