

What Are the Bahá'í Teachings on Marriage and Family?

Our world suffers from a desperate sense of separation and a scarcity of love. The highest rates of murder and assault are found among friends and family members. Today, parents and children spend little time together. This prophecy from Micah describes the trends of our time:

For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies are the members of his own household. Micah 7:6

Bahá'u'lláh has declared the dawning of the age of peace and oneness between all members of the human race, including family members. He has come to turn the hearts of parents and children towards each other. This, too, has been prophesied:

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers. Malachi 4:5-6

A good family starts with a good marriage. Bahá'í teachings describe

marriage as a divine institution, a fundamental feature of the design of creation. It will never be outmoded, for it reflects the very purpose for which God created the universe.

The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence.¹ Bahá'u'lláh

Marriage is a sacred pledge not only between a man and a woman, but also between a couple and God. It is not a contract for convenience but a covenant between two lovers of God who decide to become one physically and spiritually. This awareness elevates marriage from the physical plane to the spiritual. According to Bahá'í principles, those united by the marriage bond should not base their relationship on convenience or personal needs and desires, but on the Will of God. An evidence of this is the Bahá'í marriage vow, which reads, "We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God." The spiritual bond formed on earth should endure for all eternity.

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 [Bahá'ís], however, marriage must be a union of the body and of the spirit as well...² 'Abdu'l-Bahá

In a letter addressed to two Bahá'ís who planned to get married, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote:

O ye two believers in God! 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. But if they do other than this, they will live out their lives in great bitterness, longing at every moment for death, and will be shamefaced in the heavenly realm.

Strive, then, to abide, heart and soul, with each other as two doves in the nest, for this is to be blessed in both worlds.³

Love in Bahá'í marriage is not based simply on physical attraction but on attraction to God.

Real love is impossible unless one turns his face towards God and be attracted to His Beauty.⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá

If we love people, including our family, for the sake of God and not for their assets, our love remains unshakable, even in times of trouble:

You will never become angry or impatient if you love them for the sake of God...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.⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahá

The attribute that links our soul with God—loyalty or faithfulness—must also link the lovers to each other in marriage. The most evident and essential sign of loyalty is chastity.⁶

The brightness of the light of chastity sheddeth its illumination upon the worlds of the spirit, and its fragrance is wafted even unto the Most Exalted Paradise...⁷ Bahá'u'lláh

Let your eye be chaste, your hand faithful, your tongue truthful and your heart enlightened.⁸ Bahá'u'lláh

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, offers this clear guidance on the "proper use of the sex instinct:"

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. The Bahá'ís do not believe in the suppression of the sex impulse but in its regulation and control.⁹

Bahá'u'lláh declares:

And if he [My true follower] 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 a soul indeed is the creation of spotless chastity. Thus instructeth you the Pen of the Ancient of Days, as bidden by your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful.¹⁰

In the Bahá'í Faith, the education of children is given the highest priority:

The education and training of children is among the most meritorious acts of humankind and draweth down the grace and favor of the All-Merciful, for education is the indispensable foundation of all human excellence...¹¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá

If, in this momentous task, a mighty effort be exerted, the world of humanity will...shed the fairest light. Then will this darksome place grow luminous, and this abode of earth turn into Heaven.¹² 'Abdu'l-Bahá

You must attach the greatest importance to the education of children, for this is the foundation of the Law of God, and the bedrock of the edifice of His Faith.¹³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá

The instruction of these children is even as the work of a loving gardener who tendeth his young plants in the flowering fields of the All-Glorious. There is no doubt that it will yield the desired results...the little children must needs be made

aware in their very heart and soul that "Bahá'í" is not just a name but a truth. Every child must be trained in the things of the spirit, so that he may embody all the virtues and become a source of glory to the Cause of God. Otherwise, the mere word "Bahá'í," if it yield no fruit, will come to nothing.

Strive then to the best of thine ability to let these children know that a Bahá'í is one who embodieth all the perfections...¹⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá

1. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 70.
2. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 117.
3. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 122.
4. *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 364.
5. Paine, Mabel Hyde. *The Divine Art of Living*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1956, pp. 115-116.
6. *A Fortress For Well-Being*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1973, p. 15.
7. Shoghi Effendi. *The Advent of Divine Justice*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984, p. 27.
8. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 138.
9. *A Fortress For Well-Being*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1973, p. 16.
10. *A Fortress For Well-Being*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1973, p. 18.
11. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 129.

12. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 130.

13. *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1, p. 269.

14. *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1, pp. 266-267.



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