



**Core Curriculum for
Spiritual Education
and Training**

INTRODUCTORY SESSION Birds of the Nest of Love	p. 3
SESSION ONE Self-Knowledge: Foundation for Marriage	p. 15
SESSION TWO True Spiritual Consultation	p. 25
SESSION THREE Practicing Consultation	p. 33
SESSION FOUR A Chaste and Holy Life	p. 39
SESSION FIVE Overcoming Difficulties	p. 49
SESSION SIX A Divinely Ordained Institution	p. 65
SESSION SEVEN Preserving Marriage	p. 85
SESSION EIGHT Equality in Marriage	p. 95
SESSION NINE Family Life and Childrearing	p. 107
Evaluation	p. 119
Letters for Research	p. 121
Journal Pages	p. 133

**Spiritual
Foundations
for
Marriage
and
Family Life**

A Course for Couples

**National Bahá'í
Education
Task Force**

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Bahá'ís of the United States

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PREFACE



The purpose of this course, Spiritual Foundations for Marriage and Family Life, is to foster loving and unified marriages and families. It provides a process for exploring the basic principles of spiritual education expressed in the compilation *Foundations for a Spiritual Education*, and applying these spiritual principles to the sacred institution of marriage. The course begins with exploration of self-knowledge as the foundation for marriage, and then through subsequent sessions builds systematic understanding of the spiritual importance of marriage for the development of family and community life.

This course is based on writings of Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), founder of the Bahá'í Faith; 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1922), His Son and appointed Interpreter; Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), the appointed Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith; and the Universal House of Justice, the internationally elected governing council of the Bahá'í Faith. These writings form the “core” at the heart of this course. In an age of vast social change, these writings apply eternal truths to the challenges of this age, and inspire a vision of unified families that nurture children who, in turn, contribute their talents to the creation of a unified, peaceful, and prosperous world.

The learning activities in this course assist couples to study these writings and apply them to the everyday challenges of family life in the 21st century. This grassroots effort engages course participants and facilitators alike in the great drama of our own lives, and the lives of our children, our families, and our communities.

A companion course for individuals is designed for youth, young adults, and others interested in exploring the spiritual foundation for happy marriages and enduring families. The Core Curriculum also includes a wealth of spiritual education materials for children and youth, teachers, parents, and others interested in building a better world. The Core Curriculum website www.core-curriculum.org provides an overview of all these materials.

The Core Curriculum Marriage and Family Life Program was first introduced in 1995 as part of the comprehensive Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education, a process of community development through the spiritual education of children, youth, and families. Now published in workbook format, the Core Curriculum Marriage and Family Life Program continues to incorporate the new learning gained from more and more study groups striving together to fulfill their sacred trust as participants in a new kind of marriage. After completing this course, we encourage couples to continue their study of the process and practice for building a spiritual home in the Spiritual Parenting Program, and to consider training as facilitators to share this process of continuous striving with others.

The National Bahá'í Education Task Force

January 2006

Begin your session with sweet devotions, using the prayers and writings BIRDS OF THE NEST OF LOVE, and the passage often referred to as “The Marriage Tablet”. Be sure to include music, either sung or recorded.

BIRDS OF THE NEST OF LOVE

1 He is God! O peerless Lord! In Thine almighty wisdom Thou hast enjoined marriage upon the peoples, that the generations of men may succeed one another in this contingent world, and that ever, so long as the world shall last, they may busy themselves at the Threshold of Thy oneness with servitude and worship, with salutation, adoration and praise. “I have not created spirits and men, but that they should worship me.” 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. “He hath let loose the two seas, that they meet each other: Between them is a barrier which they overpass not. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will ye deny? From each He bringeth up greater and lesser pearls.”

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 EDITION), PP. 105–06

2 O ye my two beloved children! 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 honoured 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.

Upon ye be the Glory of the Most Glorious.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, P. 120

3 In this glorious 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 a 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, *COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOLUME 1, P. 397

4 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 favour 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.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P. 122



The bond that unites hearts most perfectly is loyalty. True lovers once united must show forth the utmost faithfulness one to another. You must dedicate your knowledge, your talents, your fortunes, your titles, your bodies and your spirits to God, to Bahá'u'lláh and to each other.

Let your hearts be spacious, as spacious as the universe of God!

Allow no trace of jealousy to creep between you, for jealousy, like unto poison, vitiates the very essence of love. Let not the ephemeral incidents and accidents of this changeful life cause a rift between you. When differences present themselves, take counsel together in secret, lest others magnify a speck into a mountain. Harbour not in your hearts any grievance; but rather explain its nature to each other with such frankness and understanding that it will disappear, leaving no remembrance. Choose fellowship and amity and turn away from jealousy and hypocrisy.

Your thoughts must be lofty, your ideals luminous, your minds spiritual, so that your souls may become a dawning-place for the Sun of Reality. Let your hearts be like unto two pure mirrors reflecting the stars of the heaven of love and beauty.

Together make mention of noble aspirations and heavenly concepts. Let there be no secrets one from another. Make your home a haven of rest and peace. Be hospitable, and let the doors of your house be open to the faces of friends and strangers. Welcome every guest with radiant grace and let each feel that it is his own home.

No mortal can conceive the union and harmony which God has destined for man and wife. Nourish continually the tree of your union with love and affection, so that it will remain ever green and verdant throughout all seasons and bring forth luscious fruits for the healing of nations.

O beloved of God, may your home be a vision of the paradise of Abhá so that whosoever enters there may feel the essence of purity and harmony, and cry out from the heart: 'Here is the home of love! Here is the palace of love! Here is the nest of love! Here is the garden of love!'

Be like two sweet-singing birds perched upon the highest branches of the tree of life, filling the air with songs of love and rapture. Lay the foundation of your affection in the very centre of your spiritual being, at the very heart of your consciousness, and let it not be shaken by adverse winds.

And when God gives you sweet and lovely children, consecrate yourselves to their instruction and guidance, so that they may become imperishable flowers of the divine rose-garden, nightingales of the ideal

paradise, servants of the world of humanity, and the fruit of the tree of your life.

Live in such harmony that others may take your lives for an example and may say one to another: "Look how they live like two doves in one nest, in perfect love, affinity and union. It is as though from all eternity God had kneaded the very essence of their beings for the love of one another."

Attain the ideal love that God has destined for you, so that you may become partakers of eternal life forthwith. Quaff deeply from the fountain of truth, and dwell all the days of your life in a paradise of glory, gathering immortal flowers from the garden of divine mysteries.

Be to each other as heavenly lovers and divine beloved ones dwelling in a paradise of love. Build your nest on the leafy branches of the tree of love. Soar into the clear atmosphere of love. Sail upon the shoreless sea of love. Walk in the eternal rose-garden of love. Bathe in the shining rays of the sun of love. Be firm and steadfast in the path of love. Perfume your nostrils with the fragrance from the flowers of love. Attune your ears to the soul-entrancing melodies of love. Let your aims be as generous as the banquets of love, and your words as a string of white pearls from the ocean of love. Drink deeply of the elixir of love, so that you may live continually in the reality of Divine Love.

ATTRIBUTED TO 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

With regard to your question concerning the so-called Marriage Tablet—this is not a Tablet, but a talk ascribed to the Master by Mirza Ahmad Sohrab. It was given some time in December, 1918 about Sohrab's marriage. It cannot be regarded as Bahá'í scripture as "nothing can be considered as scripture for which we do not have an original text," as the beloved Guardian pointed out. The friends may use this talk, but it is not to be considered as scripture.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *LIGHTS OF GUIDANCE*, PP. 386–87

Welcome and Introductions

Welcome to the Core Curriculum Marriage and Family Life Program.

We hope that the time we spend together in this course will both be enjoyable and provide a practical forum for us all to work together to become better partners and parents by increasing our understanding of the sacred roles of husband and wife, perceiving the spiritual reality of marriage as the bedrock of growing communities, and by practicing some skills to strengthen family bonds, solve problems, strengthen marriages, and bring joy to all our hearts.

Naturally, this course is appropriate for newly-married couples as well as those who have enjoyed this “fortress for well-being” for years.

If you have not already done so, please begin the session with a short devotional program.

Then, in an activity led by your facilitators, introduce yourself to the rest of the course participants.

Process the Activity:

Consider the readings at the beginning of this session, BIRDS OF THE NEST OF LOVE. How does the image of birds in these writings aid our spiritual understanding of the concept of marriage?

Overview of the Marriage and Family Life Program

Purpose:

To become aware of the purpose, processes and historical development of the Core Curriculum Spiritual Marriage and Family Life Program.

This Core Curriculum Spiritual Marriage and Family Life Program takes inspiration from the following quotations:

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 raises 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

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *LIGHTS OF GUIDANCE*, 376–77, NO. 1262

Training of the friends and their striving, through serious individual study, to acquire knowledge of the Faith, to apply its principles and administer its affairs, are indispensable to developing the human resource necessary to the progress of the Cause. But knowledge alone is not adequate; it is vital that training be given in a manner that inspires love and devotion, fosters firmness in the Covenant, prompts the individual to active participation in the work of the Cause and to taking sound initiatives in the promotion of its interests.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, RIDVÁN 150 B.E.

Developed through an ongoing collaborative process of participants sharing their hopes and experiences with the National Bahá'í Education Task Force, the Core Curriculum Spiritual Marriage and Family Life Program provides a structured format for studying the Bahá'í writings that can assist couples of every background to fulfill their responsibilities in creating and maintaining their marriages as fortresses for well-being. Through a variety of learning activities we will:

- Explore the Bahá'í writings as a strong foundation of guidance and inspiration for our roles as husbands and wives.
- Learn practical steps for implementing the guidance in the Bahá'í writings to foster strong and loving families.
- Establish our own community network to provide support and encouragement for each other.
- Realize that parents, teachers, and all community members collaborate to support the ongoing growth and development of marriages, families, and children.

During our sessions we'll explore together a number of our questions, needs, hopes, and plans through a systematic study of the following topics:

Marriage and Family Life, a Course for Couples

Introductory Session: Birds of the Nest of Love

1. Self-Knowledge: The Foundation for Marriage
2. True Spiritual Consultation
3. Practicing Consultation
4. The Power of Love
5. Overcoming Difficulties in Marriage
6. The Purpose of Marriage
7. Preserving Marriage
8. Equality in Marriage
9. Family Life and Childrearing

A Word of Caution

It should be noted that facilitators of the Core Curriculum Marriage and Family Life Program are not marriage and family therapists. The purpose of this course is to provide opportunities to strengthen relationships and deepen commitment between marriage partners. Couples who are experiencing serious difficulties in their marriage may choose to seek professional counsel in addition to this course.

Historical Overview of the Development of the Core Curriculum

Purpose:

Appreciate the comprehensive nature of the Core Curriculum project and its evolution from extensive research in the Bahá'í writings and the ongoing experiences of the friends.

History, current status, and future direction of the project

The National Bahá'í Education Task Force, working under the supervision of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, oversees the ongoing development and evolution of the Core Curriculum for spiritual education and training. The brief timeline on the following page provides an overview of the evolution of the Core Curriculum.

A few further points relating to the development of the Core Curriculum bear mentioning at this time:

- The Education Task Force recognizes the significant contributions of many educators who have served the field of spiritual education and training since the very beginning of the Bahá'í Faith. We all stand on the shoulders of these giants.
- As a living curriculum, these spiritual education and training programs originate in study of the writings of the Bahá'í Faith and become increasingly effective in response to the experiences of the friends everywhere.
- The purpose of the comprehensive, sequential spiritual education curriculum for children and junior youth is to raise up consecrated, knowledgeable servants of God and humanity.
- The purpose of the Core Curriculum Training Programs for Community Development is to build patterns of community life that “welcome all with the light of oneness,”¹ foster vibrant, unified families, and “ensure that the vision of the community fully embraces its younger members.”² These programs address specific needs of Bahá'ís and seekers alike. This Spiritual Foundations for Marriage and Family Life Program is one of the Core Curriculum training programs for community development. Other community development programs include courses for parents, spiritual education teachers, youth, and training to promote race unity and the equality of women and men.
- The purpose of the Fundamental Verities Sequence of Courses is to explore some of the basic teachings of the Bahá'í Faith and cultivate individuals' capacities for service to humanity, “according to their God-given talents and capacities.”³

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 37

² Universal House of Justice, November 26, 1999

³ Universal House of Justice, December 26, 1995

The Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education and Training

Historical Development

1988–1993

National Bahá'í Education Committee appointed by the United States National Spiritual Assembly to develop resources for spiritual education, and for a comprehensive Bahá'í curriculum for children

Sacred Writings systematically reviewed for themes that pertain to education

Educational material assessment process developed, which assesses over 300 existing materials

Collaboration with other National Education Committees, Continental Counselors, Representatives of the Trustees of Huqúqu'lláh and agencies and committees of the National Spiritual Assembly

1990 Core Curriculum key concepts elaborated, including:

a) Child Development Centered Community

b) Roles of parents, teachers and the Local Spiritual Assemblies

c) Content and Process of Bahá'í Spiritual Education
(Knowledge, Wisdom, Spiritual Perception and Eloquent Speech)

Strands on the Central Figures, the Principle of Oneness, the Administrative Order identified

1991 National Spiritual Assembly establishes National Teacher Training Center at Louhelen Bahá'í School

1992 First trainers' training session held at the National Teacher Training Center

Local teacher training sessions begin throughout North America

First Parenting Facilitator Training held at the National Teacher Training Center

1993–1996

First Race Unity Trainer Training at the National Teacher Training Center

National Spiritual Assembly publishes *Foundations for a Spiritual Education*

First Marriage and Family Life Facilitator Training held at the National Teacher Training Center

First International Teacher Trainer Workshop held at the National Teacher Training Center

1996–2001

Fundamental Verities Sequence of Courses released

Scope and Sequence Documents prepared for spiritual education of children and junior youth

First Equality Trainer Training

First Youth Empowerment Facilitator Training

Teacher Development Workshops created

2001–2006

The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh, Volumes One, Two, and Three storybooks published

The Central Figures: The Báb, Volumes One, Two, and Three storybooks published

Bahá'u'lláh Lesson Planning Guides, Levels One, Two, Three published

'Abdu'l-Bahá Lesson Planning Guides, Levels One, Two, Three published

Principle of Oneness Lesson Planning Guides, Levels One, Two, Three published

The Báb Lesson Planning Guides, Levels One, Two, Three published

Teacher Trainer trainings held throughout the United States, and in Europe, Asia, and the Pacific

Fundamental Verities sequence of courses revised, expanded, and published in book form

The National Spiritual Assembly gives the National Teacher Training Center a new name:

The National Children's Education and Resource Center

Core Curriculum Teacher Training, Teacher Development Workshops, Spiritual Parenting Courses One and Two, Youth Empowerment, and Marriage and Family Life published in workbook form.

The Core Curriculum Learning Model

Purpose:

Become familiar with the guiding quotation for the Core Curriculum.

This Marriage and Family Life course assists us to learn some very practical skills for stronger relationships. As a first step, let's explore the learning model that we will use to learn throughout the course. This learning model is organized in accordance with the following statement of Bahá'u'lláh:

Strain every nerve to acquire both inner and outer perfections, for the fruit of the human tree hath ever been and will ever be perfections both within and without. It is not desirable that a man be left without knowledge or skills, for he is then but a barren tree. Then, so much as capacity and capability allow, ye needs must deck the tree of being with fruits such as knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception, and eloquent speech.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, REV. ED. 1999, NO. 9, P. 3

While it is not possible to fully define the meaning of these words, a learning process inspired by this statement of Bahá'u'lláh can assist us to internalize spiritual principles and translate them into action in our own lives.

Let's look together at some possible meanings for some of the words used in this quotation. We recognize that these words can have many meanings. At the same time, these many meanings include the following:

KNOWLEDGE (*I Know*)

To gain **information** about facts, spiritual principles, or sacred writings on a topic.

WISDOM (*I Understand*)

To gain **deeper understanding** of facts, principles, or writings through consultation and reflection.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION (*I Perceive*)

To **reflect on the application** of facts, principles, or writings in one's own life and one's service to others.

ELOQUENT SPEECH (*I Teach, I Serve*)

To **articulate** or **demonstrate**, through words and deeds, understanding and application of facts, principles, and writings.

Read aloud the words of Bahá'u'lláh again, then briefly discuss the following questions:

- How does this quotation assist us to understand the role of volition in the learning process?
- How does it assist us to appreciate human diversity?
- How does it assist us to understand the importance of spiritual education and training?

- What are some inner and outer perfections that might be important for marriage partners?

The learning objectives for each session in this, and all other Core Curriculum training programs, are organized around this learning framework. The book *Foundations for a Spiritual Education* provides more information about the Core Curriculum learning model, which is used throughout the broad range of spiritual education and training programs available from the United States National Spiritual Assembly.

Exploring the Core Curriculum Learning Model

Recall our exploration of birds in our introduction activity earlier. Then identify as a group which parts of this activity assist us to gain:

Knowledge _____

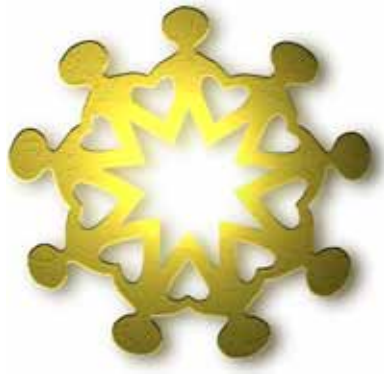
Wisdom _____

Spiritual Perception _____

Eloquent Speech _____

Closing

Conclude the session with sweet devotions and uplifting music. Include prayers on marriage and spiritual growth.



**Core Curriculum for
Spiritual Education
and Training**

- Know Your Own Self
- Self Has Two Natures
- Call Yourself into Account

**Spiritual
Foundations
for
Marriage
and
Family Life**

A Course for Couples

SESSION ONE

**Self-Knowledge:
Foundation for Marriage**

Themes

Begin this session by reading the following quotations that highlight the themes for this workshop:

. . . 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

Self has really two meanings, or is used in two senses, in the Bahá'í writings; one is self, the identity of the individual created by God. This is the self mentioned in such passages as "he hath known God who hath known himself etc." The other self is the ego, the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature that can develop into a monster of selfishness, brutality, lust and so on. It is this self we must struggle against, or this side of our natures, in order to strengthen and free the spirit within us and help it to attain perfection.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE SECRET OF DIVINE CIVILIZATION*, PP. 34-35

Learning Objectives

Read aloud the learning objectives and agenda for this session.

KNOWLEDGE

- To study the writings on knowing our own selves.

WISDOM

- To understand that human beings have a dual nature.
- To understand that we must call ourselves into account daily.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- To perceive the link between self-knowledge and marriage.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- To demonstrate an understanding of our true selves.

1. Organize yourselves into several small groups, perhaps with couples in the same group.
2. In your small groups carefully read aloud twice the two quotations below, focusing your attention on the meaning of the words and phrases. Through group discussion, explore the meaning of these words and phrases.

. . . 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

Could ye apprehend with what wonders of My munificence and bounty I have willed to entrust your souls, ye would, of a truth, rid yourselves of attachment to all created things, and would gain a true knowledge of your own selves—a knowledge which is the same as the comprehension of Mine own Being.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, PP. 326-27

3. Still in your small groups discuss these focus questions:
 - How can we know our own selves?
 - How can we recognize the things that keep us on the path of our higher natures?
4. Using the art materials provided, select one of the quotations in your small group and together create an artistic representation of the meaning of the quotation, based on your discussion.
5. Then display your work as in an art gallery where you can view and discuss all artistic renderings.
6. After viewing all artwork, gather again in the whole group. Invite one member from each group to share the insights represented in their “work of art.”

Purpose:

Become familiar with the Bahá'í writings on the importance of knowing your own self as the foundation of marriage.

Self Has Two Natures

Purpose:

Become familiar with the Bahá'í writings on the two natures of man.

1. Invite a member of your group to eloquently read the following quotation:

Self has really two meanings . . . one is self, the identity of the individual created by God. . . . The other self is the ego, the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature. . . . It is this self we must struggle against, or this side of our natures, in order to strengthen and free the spirit within us and help it to attain perfection.

Self-sacrifice means to subordinate this lower nature and its desires to the more godly and noble side of ourselves. . . .

Then He purifies and glorifies our true self until it becomes a shining and wonderful reality.

FROM A LETTER WRITTEN ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI TO AN INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER, DECEMBER 10, 1947, *LIGHTS OF GUIDANCE*, PP. 113–14

2. As we've learned, the Bahá'í writings tell us that we have two selves, the spiritual or higher self and the material or lower self, and our main task in life is to overcome our lower selves and turn ourselves to God, and express God's teachings in our daily lives.
3. Read aloud the story of *LUA AND THE POISON IVY* on the following page.
4. After enjoying the story, discuss:
 - How was Lua Getsinger able to overcome her lower self?
 - What are some examples of times when you or someone you know conquered the lower self and followed the divine plan?
5. Conclude this activity by reading the following quotation:

The more we search for ourselves, the less likely we are to find ourselves; and the more we search for God, and to serve our fellow-men, the more profoundly will we become acquainted with ourselves, and the more inwardly assured. This is one of the great spiritual laws of life.

FROM A LETTER WRITTEN ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI TO AN INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER, FEB 18, 1954, IN *LIGHTS OF GUIDANCE*, PP. 114–15

Process the Activity:

Turn to the journal pages in the back of this book and record your reflections on the question: How does service to my marriage partner enable me to become more profoundly acquainted with myself?

LUA AND THE POISON IVY

Lua, too, went off alone, an exceedingly naughty purpose in her mind. The Master [‘Abdu’l-Bahá, while visiting the United States in 1912] had just told her that she must leave very soon for California. So now she deliberately walked in poison ivy, walked back and forth till her feet were thoroughly poisoned. “Now, Julie,” she said (when the deed was done) “He can’t send me to California.”

. . . That night our Beloved Lord returned to New York. The next morning early I flew up to see Him, but He sent me at once to Lua, who was staying with Georgie Ralston in a hotel nearby.

She was in bed, her feet terribly swollen from the poison ivy.

“Look at me, Julie,” she said. “Look at my feet. Oh, please go right back to the Master and tell Him about them and say: ‘How can Lua travel now?’”

I did it, returned to the Master’s house, found Him in His room and put Lua’s question to Him. He laughed, then crossed the room to a table on which stood a bowl of fruit, and, selecting an apple and a pomegranate, gave them to me.

“Take these to Lua,” He said. “Tell her to eat them and she will be cured. Spend the day with her, Juliet.”

Oh precious Lua—strange mixture of disobedience and obedience—and all from love! I shall never forget her, seizing first the apple, then the pomegranate and gravely chewing them all the way through till not even a pomegranate seed was left: thoroughly eating her cure, which was certain to send her to California.

In the late afternoon we were happily surprised by a visit from the Master Himself. He drew back the sheet and looked at Lua’s feet, which by that time were beautifully slim. Then He burst out laughing.

“See,” He said, “I have cured Lua with an apple and a pomegranate.”

But Lua revolted again. There was one more thing she could try, and she tried it. The Master had asked me to paint her portrait and I had already had one sitting. The following day, at the Master’s house, she drew me aside.

“Please, Julie, do something else for me. Go to the Master, now, and say: ‘If Lua is in California, how can I paint her?’”

I went straight to His room with Valíyu’lláh Khán to translate. “My Lord,” I said, “You have commanded me to paint Lua. If she is in California and I here, how can I do it? The portrait is begun; how can I finish it?”

Again the Master burst out laughing, for this of course was too transparent.

“In a year,” He said, “Lua will join Me in Egypt. She will stay in New York a few days on her way to Me and you can paint her then, Juliet.”

So poor Lua had to go to California. There was no way out for her.

. . . We never dreamed how soon He would be with her there.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá journeyed to California, arriving in San Francisco on 1 October 1912. Lua made the arrangements for his visit.

The Foundation for Marriage

Purpose:

To perceive that understanding ourselves is the foundation for marriage.

1. Play beautiful background music and read the following quotation aloud:

O Son of Spirit! I created thee rich, why dost thou bring thyself down to poverty? Noble I made thee, wherewith dost thou abase thyself? Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being, why seekest thou enlightenment from anyone beside Me? Out of the clay of love I molded thee, how dost thou busy thyself with another? Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC NO. 13

2. In the whole group, discuss the question:
 - Where do we find our true selves?

Record your responses on chart paper.

3. Consider memorizing the quotation as a group.

Process the Activity

Discuss: Why is self-understanding such an important foundation for a spiritual marriage?

Call Yourself to Account

1. Read aloud the following quotations to introduce this activity:

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*, ARABIC NO. 31

. . . Every day, in the morning when arising one should compare today with yesterday and see in what condition you are. If you see your belief is stronger and your heart more occupied with God and your love increased and your freedom from the world greater then thank God and ask for the increase of these qualities. You must begin to pray and repent for all that you have done which is wrong and you must implore and ask for help and assistance that you may become better than yesterday so that you may continue to make progress.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *STAR OF THE WEST*, VOL. 6, P. 68

2. Re-read the quotations silently and reflect on them for a moment.
3. On the following page you will find some GUIDELINES FOR SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION as outlined by the Universal House of Justice. Using these guidelines as a model, individually develop a plan of action for how you will personally call yourself to account each day. Your plan should be specific and in writing. You may do this using the MY PERSONAL PLAN form on p. xxx. You also may enjoy listening to quiet music while working on this plan.
4. After allowing time to work on your plan, consider sharing highlights of your plan with each other, as desired.

Purpose:

To develop an individual plan that includes calling oneself to account daily.

GUIDELINES FOR SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION



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 behaviour
more into accordance with the high standards
that are set forth in the Teachings.

5

Teaching the Cause of God.

6

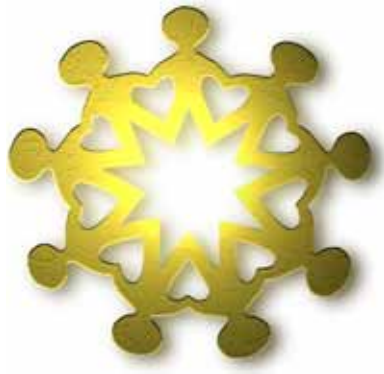
Selfless service in the work of the Cause
and in the carrying on of our trade or profession.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE,
TO A NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY,
LIGHTS OF GUIDANCE, P. 541



Closing

Conclude the session with sweet devotions and uplifting music. Include prayers for marriage and spiritual growth.



**Core Curriculum for
Spiritual Education
and Training**

- True Spiritual Consultation
- The Nature of Consultation

**Spiritual
Foundations
for
Marriage
and
Family Life**

A Course for Couples

SESSION 2

True Spiritual Consultation

Devotions

Begin your session with prayers and music. Then read together the theme quotations and learning objectives for this session.

Themes

The Great Being saith: 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

The prime requisites for them that take counsel together 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. Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Bahá shall be vouchsafed to them.... The members thereof must take 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 any one 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, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 1, P. 95

Learning Objectives

KNOWLEDGE

- To study the Writings on the process of consultation

WISDOM

- To understand the purpose of consultation

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- To discern the need to use the process of consultation in one's daily life.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- To demonstrate the use of consultation to resolve conflicts, solve problems, and make decisions.

True Spiritual Consultation

1. While playing relaxing music softly in the background, read aloud the excerpt on the following page of a talk from *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. If desired, close your eyes and visualize the scene as you listen.
2. After you have heard the story, briefly discuss the following questions:
 - Why did ‘Abdu’l-Bahá call this “true spiritual consultation?”
 - What were some of the qualities of the disciples who were holding council?
 - What was the atmosphere surrounding their consultation?
 - What can you glean as some of the guiding principles of this consultation?

Purpose:

Become familiar with some Bahá’í writings that illustrate spiritual consultation.

Reflect on the qualities of consultation and why these qualities are so important.

TRUE SPIRITUAL CONSULTATION

The most memorable instance of spiritual consultation was the meeting of the disciples of Jesus Christ upon the mount after His ascension. They said "His Holiness Jesus Christ has been crucified and we have no longer association and intercourse with Him in His physical body; therefore we must be loyal and faithful to Him, we must be grateful and appreciate Him, for He has raised us from the dead, He made us wise, He has given us eternal life. What shall we do to be faithful to Him?" And so they held council. One of them said "We must detach ourselves from the chains and fetters of the world; otherwise we cannot be faithful." The others replied, "That is so." Another said "Either we must be married and faithful to our wives and children or serve our Lord free from these ties. We cannot be occupied with the care and provision for families and at the same time herald the kingdom in the wilderness. Therefore let those who are unmarried remain so, and those who have married provide means of sustenance and comfort for their families and then go forth to spread the message of glad-tidings." There were no dissenting voices; all agreed, saying, "That is right." A third disciple said, "To perform worthy deeds in the kingdom we must be further self-sacrificing. From now on we should forgo ease and bodily comfort, accept every difficulty, forget self and teach the Cause of God." This found acceptance and approval by all the others. Finally a fourth disciple said, "There is still another aspect to our faith and unity. For Jesus' sake we shall be beaten, imprisoned and exiled. They may kill us. Let us receive this lesson now. Let us realize and resolve that though we are beaten, banished, cursed, spat upon and led forth to be killed, we shall accept all this joyfully, loving those who hate and wound us." All the disciples replied, "Surely we will—it is agreed; this is right." Then they descended from the summit of the mountain and each went forth in a different direction upon his divine mission.

This was true consultation. This was spiritual consultation and not the mere voicing of personal views in parliamentary opposition and debate.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE, PP. 72-73

The Nature of Consultation

1. Either aloud as a group or individually and silently, study the page of quotations on CONSULTATION.
2. After reading the quotations, write in the columns below two words or phrases that describe what consultation **IS** and two that describe what consultation **IS NOT**. These words or phrases may be explicitly in the texts you read, or implied by them.

Purpose:

Understand the Bahá'í concept of consultation.

CONSULTATION IS . . .

CONSULTATION IS NOT . . .

3. Then in the large group, share the words and phrases that you wrote down.

Process the Activity:

Briefly discuss: What is the role of consultation in marriage?

THE NATURE OF CONSULTATION

1 The Great Being saith: 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

2 The prime requisites for them that take counsel together 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. Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Bahá shall be vouchsafed to them. . . . The members thereof must take 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 any one 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, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL 1, p. 95

3 Bahá'u'lláh also stressed the importance of consultation. We should not think this worthwhile method of seeking solutions is confined to the administrative institutions of the Cause. 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. . . .

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 1, pp. 412-13

4 . . . 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 should 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. . . .

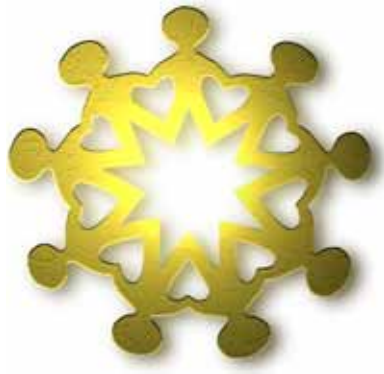
ON BEHALF OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE,
THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS, VOL. 2, p. 385

5 Consultation is no easy skill to learn, requiring as it does the subjugation of all egotism and unruly passions, the cultivation of frankness and freedom of thought as well as courtesy, openness of mind and wholehearted acquiescence in a majority decision. In this field Bahá'í youth may demonstrate the efficiency, the vigour, the access of unity which arise from true consultation and, by contrast, demonstrate the futility of partisanship, lobbying, debate, secret diplomacy and unilateral action which characterize modern affairs. Youth also take part in the life of the Bahá'í community as a whole and promote a society in which all generations—elderly, middle-aged, youth, children—are fully integrated and make up an organic whole. By refusing to carry over the antagonisms and mistrust between the generations which perplex and bedevil modern society they will again demonstrate the healing and life-giving nature of their religion.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *WELLSPRING OF GUIDANCE*, p. 96

Closing

Conclude your session with prayers and music, including prayers for unity.



**Core Curriculum for
Spiritual Education
and Training**

- Unique Virtues and Gifts
- Practicing Consultation

**Spiritual
Foundations
for
Marriage
and
Family Life**

A Course for Couples

SESSION 3

Practicing Consultation

Devotions

Begin your session with prayers and music. Then read together the theme quotations and learning objectives for this session.

Themes

The Great Being saith: 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

The prime requisites for them that take counsel together 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. Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Bahá shall be vouchsafed to them.... The members thereof must take 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 any one 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, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL 1, P. 95

Learning Objectives

KNOWLEDGE

- To study the Writings on the process of consultation.

WISDOM

- To understand the purpose of consultation.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- To discern the need to use the process of consultation in one's daily life.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- To demonstrate the use of consultation to resolve conflicts, solve problems, and make decisions.

Unique Virtues and Gifts

Everyone has certain gifts they bring to any relationship. These gifts come from the culture in which we live, the family in which we grow up, and of course, many are God-given. Bahá'u'lláh says to us,

Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P. 259

1. Turn to your spouse and share with him or her one quality that was encouraged in your family or in your culture that has allowed you to contribute to the well-being of humanity.
2. Reflect on a virtue or gift in you that may not have been encouraged in your family or in your culture, but that has enabled you to contribute to the well-being of humanity. Share that gift with your spouse.
3. In the whole group, briefly discuss the following questions:
 - How can our gifts bind us together?
 - In what ways could our unique gifts also be a source of conflict?
 - Can you think of ways that the bonds of unity in marriage give rise to additional gifts within a family?

Purpose:

Perceive the unique qualities that contribute to diversity of views in consultation.

Practicing Consultation

Purpose:

To practice the process of consultation.

1. Divide into study groups of 2 to 4 persons each.
2. In your study group, read together all the quotations, PRACTICING CONSULTATION, on the following page.
3. Then select one or more of the following questions and, using the principles of consultation, form a collective answer to share with the whole group.

Question no. 1

How might one's specific role in the family influence one's view of important issues families might face?

Question no. 2

How can the tool of consultation be taught the family?

Question no. 3

How does justice and fairness within a family promote love and unity in the family?

Question no. 4

How does love and unity in the family enhance that family's well-being and prosperity?

Question no. 5

What specific practical steps, however small, could help resolve conflict and create unity in the family?

Process the Activity:

What did you learn about the process of consultation in the search for truth?

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

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, p. 168

2 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

3 Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude. It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. . . . The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. I, p. 93

4 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.

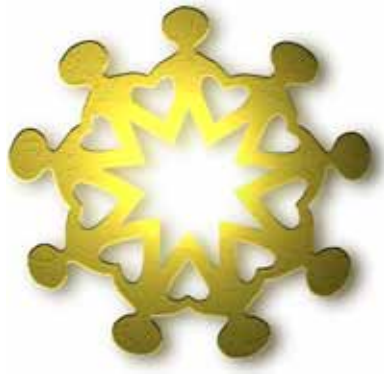
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. I, p. 412-413

5 The members thereof must take 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, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. I, p. 95

Closing

Conclude the session with sweet devotions and uplifting music..



**Core Curriculum for
Spiritual Education
and Training**

- What Is Love?
- A Chaste and Holy Life

**Spiritual
Foundations
for
Marriage
and
Family Life**

A Course for Couples

SESSION 4

A Chaste and Holy Life

Devotions

Begin the session with prayers and music, either sung or recorded.

Themes

What is Love?

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 hearts.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, P. 180

A Chaste and Holy Life

Briefly stated 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.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 1, P. 56

Learning Objectives

KNOWLEDGE

- To be able to identify the four kinds of love.
- To become familiar with the Bahá'í standard for a chaste and holy life through study of the Writings.

WISDOM

- To understand the power of love.
- To understand the role of sexuality within Bahá'í marriage.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- To identify examples of the power of love in one's own marriage.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- To develop a plan on how each couple will fortify their "fortress."

What is Love?

Jigsaw activity

1. Read aloud the following quotation from *Paris Talks*:

There are four kinds of love. . . . These four kinds of love originate from God. These are rays from the Sun of Reality; these are the Breathings of the Holy Spirit; these are the Signs of the Reality.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, PP. 180–81

Purpose:

To know and explain the Bahá'í concept of love.

2. Divide into four groups.
3. Each group will study one kind of love from the page of quotations THE FOUR KINDS OF LOVE by reading the quotation associated with it and discussing the focus questions.
4. After completing your study and discussion, recombine into four new groups comprised of at least one member from each of the previous groups.
5. Share your first group's insights with the other members of your new group.
6. Then, still in your small groups, create a short skit to illustrate an answer to the question, "What is love?"
7. Share your skits with the whole group.

THE FOUR KINDS OF LOVE

Focus Question: How does each kind of love play a role in marriage?

The First Kind of Love

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.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, P. 180

The Second Kind of Love

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.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, P. 180

The Third Kind of Love

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.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, P. 180

The Fourth Kind of Love

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 hearts. 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.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, PP. 180–81

1. Divide into same-gender pairs, women with women and men with men.
2. In your pair teams read the quotations on SEXUALITY WITHIN MARRIAGE.
3. With your study partner, develop at least three questions regarding sexuality within marriage that will be researched using the Bahá'í writings or books and letters referring to Bahá'í writings. Write each question on a separate index card.
4. Collect all question cards and read the questions aloud. Group similar questions together.
5. Select with your study partner one or more questions (or a group of similar questions) to research using the materials provided by your facilitator and the letters in the Appendix of this workbook. All answers must come from the Bahá'í writings and not be based on individual beliefs. If direct answers are not explicit in the texts, identify spiritual principles that can be applied to answer the question.

The following list of key references on the issue of sexuality within marriage should be seen as the beginning of a resource list. Hopefully, you will be able to add more references as you continue your study and reflection on this issue.

- Compilations:
 - *A Chaste and Holy Life*
 - *Marriage and Family Life*
 - *Family Life*
 - *Preserving Marriage*
 - *Divorce*
 - Books:
 - *The Compilation of Compilations, volumes 1, 2, and 3*
 - *Lights of Guidance*
 - *Advent of Divine Justice*
 - *Unrestrained as the Wind*
 - *Messages from the Universal House of Justice*
 - A few letters of the Universal House of Justice are included at the end of this module.
6. Share your answers in the whole group.

Purpose:

To find the answers to questions about appropriate sexuality within marriage.

SEXUALITY WITHIN MARRIAGE

1 Say: 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 Purity and chastity have been, and still are, the most great ornaments for the handmaidens of God. God is My Witness! 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. God hath verily made chastity to be a crown for the heads of his handmaidens. Great is the blessedness of that handmaiden that hath attained unto this great station.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, QUOTED IN *THE ADVENT OF DIVINE JUSTICE*, p. 27

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. This is Bahá'í marriage.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, p. 118

4 Briefly stated 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, and whoso violates this rule will not only be responsible to God, but will incur the necessary punishment from society.

The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse, but condemns its illegitimate and improper expression 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 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.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 1, p. 56

5 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 sullyng that unique and priceless bond that should unite man and wife.

ON BEHALF OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE,
THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS, VOL. 1, P. 58

6 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, *LIGHTS OF GUIDANCE*, P. 283

The Meaning of a Chaste and Holy Life

Purpose:

To perceive what Bahá'u'lláh meant by “spotless chastity,” “absolute faithfulness,” and the purpose of sexuality within marriage.

1. In the whole group, read aloud once more the following quotations. As you listen or follow in your workbook, identify portions that are personally meaningful.

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. This is Bahá'í marriage.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, P. 118

The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse, but condemns its illegitimate and improper expression 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 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.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE*, P. 14

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, *LIGHTS OF GUIDANCE*, P. 283

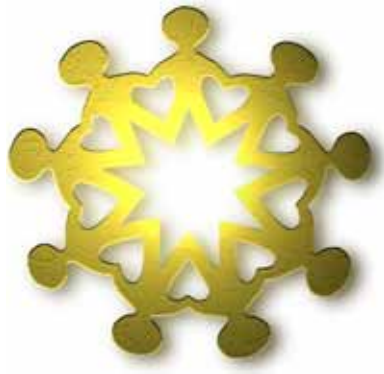
2. Partner with your spouse, and in turn share one or two portions of the above quotations that stand out as particularly meaningful to you.
3. Then identify any additional questions you and your spouse might have about sexuality in marriage. Take about 20 minutes to discuss these questions with your spouse, perhaps using the resources from the previous activity for research. You should feel free to move about, even going to another room for these discussions, if desired.

Process the Activity

Spend several minutes to record your thoughts, feelings, hopes and plans in your journals.

Closing

Conclude the session with sweet devotions and uplifting music. Include prayers for steadfastness.



**Core Curriculum for
Spiritual Education
and Training**

- The Power of Love
- Overcoming Difficulties Within Marriage
- Marriage Questionnaire

**Spiritual
Foundations
for
Marriage
and
Family Life**

A Course for Couples

SESSION 5

Overcoming Difficulties

Devotions

Begin your session with prayers and music. Then read together the theme quotations and learning objectives for this session.

Themes

The Power of Love

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 a—even his life. In the Gospel it is said God is love. . . .

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, PARIS TALKS, PGS. 179-180

Overcoming Difficulties Within Marriage

The friends of God must so live and conduct themselves, and evince such excellence of character and conduct, as to make others astonished. The love between husband and wife must 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!

In short, the foundation of the Kingdom of God is based upon harmony and love, oneness, relationship and union, not upon differences, especially between husband and wife. . . .

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS, VOL. I, P. 236

Learning Objectives

KNOWLEDGE

- To know that the solutions to overcoming difficulties in a marriage can be found in the Bahá'í Writings.

WISDOM

- To understand the power of love.
- To understand that one must use the Bahá'í Writings to overcome marital difficulties.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- To identify examples of the power of love in one's own marriage.
- To discern the spiritual solutions to marital difficulties.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- To develop a plan on how each couple will fortify their “fortress.”

The Power of Love

1. Read aloud the following quotations on the theme of love.
2. After reading, allow some time for reflection. Then, based on your insights and understanding from these writings, individually make a drawing, poem or other artistic expression illustrating the power of love.
3. Present your work as a gift for your partner, either during this session or at a later time.

THE POWER OF LOVE

1 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. . . .

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, PP. 179–80

2 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.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, P. 181

3 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*, P. 181

4 Be in perfect unity. Never become angry with one another. Let your eyes be directed toward the kingdom of truth and not toward the world of creation. 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. Therefore, do not look at the shortcomings of anybody; see with the sight of forgiveness. The imperfect eye beholds imperfections. The eye that covers faults looks toward the Creator of souls.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, P. 93

5 When you love a member of your family or a compatriot, let it be with a ray of the Infinite Love! Let it be in God, and for God!

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, P. 38

1. Read aloud the following quotations:

O Son of Spirit! 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. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC NO. 2

. . . The root of the exaltation of man is the good attributes and virtues which are the adornments of his reality. These are the divine appearances, the heavenly bounties, the sublime emotions, the love and knowledge of God; universal wisdom, intellectual perception, scientific discoveries, justice, equity, truthfulness, benevolence, natural courage and innate fortitude; the respect for rights and the keeping of agreements and covenants; rectitude in all circumstances; serving the truth under all conditions; the sacrifice of one's life for the good of all people; kindness and esteem for all nations; obedience to the teachings of God; service in the Divine Kingdom; the guidance of the people, and the education of the nations and races. This is the prosperity of the human world! This is the exaltation of man in the world! This is eternal life and heavenly honor!

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SOME ANSWERED QUESTIONS*, P. 79

2. Discuss in the whole group the following questions, in light of the readings:

- Why is justice necessary in marriage and family life?
- What is the relationship of justice and truth, of frankness and honesty?
- How does justice facilitate the growth of love?

Loving consultation is the panacea for domestic conflict. It is a search for truth in which all participate. All may not have the same role in decision-making (parent v. child), but all have a view of the truth that is necessary to contribute to the best decision. Allowing this to happen unifies and advances the family. It becomes illuminated, spiritual and prospers, contributing to society and creating a source of happiness.

Overcoming Difficulties

Purpose:

To identify strategies for overcoming difficulties within marriage.

1. Read the quotations on OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES WITHIN MARRIAGE together in the whole group.
2. After reading the quotations, brainstorm answers to the question:
 - What are some strategies offered in the Bahá'í writings for overcoming difficulties?Record responses on chart paper.
3. Briefly discuss your responses.
4. Ask each participant to make a personal list of the qualities they would like to be able to demonstrate in their marriage.
5. Invite those who wish to share some of the qualities that are important to them.

OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES WITHIN MARRIAGE

1 If any differences arise amongst you, behold Me standing before your face and overlook the faults of one another for my namesake and as a token of your love for my manifest and resplendent Cause.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P. 315

2 The friends of God must so live and conduct themselves, and evince such excellence of character and conduct, as to make others astonished. The love between husband and wife must 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!

In short, the foundation of the Kingdom of God is based upon harmony and love, oneness, relationship and union, not upon differences, especially between husband and wife.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. I, P. 236

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*, NO. 86, P. 118

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

Among the people of Bahá, however, marriage must be a union of the body and of the spirit as well, for here both the 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.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P. 117

5 Thy wife is not in harmony with thee, but praise be to God, the Blessed Beauty is pleased with thee and is conferring upon thee the utmost bounty and blessings. But still try to be patient with thy wife, perchance she may be transformed and her heart may be illumined.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, p. 121

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 When you love a member of your family or a compatriot, 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, whether he be of your family or of another.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, p. 38

8 He was very sorry to hear that you and your husband are still so unhappy together. It is always a source of sorrow in life when married people cannot get on well together, but the Guardian feels that you and your husband, in contemplating divorce, should think of the future of your children and how this major step on your part will influence their lives and happiness. If you feel the need of advice and consultation he suggests you consult your Local Assembly; your fellow Bahá'ís will surely do all they can to counsel and help you, protect your interests and those of the Cause.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 1, p. 241

9 The Guardian . . . has learned with deep concern of your family difficulties and troubles. He wishes me to assure you of his fervent prayers on your behalf and on behalf of your dear ones at home, that you may be guided and assisted from on High to compose your differences and to restore complete harmony and fellowship in your midst. While he would urge you to make any sacrifice in order to bring about unity in your family, he wishes you not to feel discouraged if your endeavours do not yield any immediate fruit. You should do your part with absolute faith that in doing so you are fulfilling your duty as a Bahá'í. The rest is assuredly in God's hand.

As regards your husband's attitude towards the Cause: unfriendly though that may be you should always hope that, through conciliatory and friendly means, and with wise, tactful and patient effort you can gradually succeed in winning his sympathy for the Faith. Under no circumstances should you try to dictate and impose upon him by force your personal religious convictions. Neither should you allow his opposition to the Cause [to] seriously hinder your activities. . . . You should act patiently, tactfully and with confidence that your efforts are being guided and reinforced by Bahá'u'lláh.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 1, pp. 400–01

10 It is one of the essential teachings of the Faith that unity should be maintained in the home. Of course this does not mean that any member of the family has a right to influence the faith of any other member; and if this is realized by all the members, then it seems certain that unity would be feasible.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 1, P. 408

11 When such difference of opinion and belief occurs between husband and wife it is very unfortunate for undoubtedly it detracts from that spiritual bond which is the stronghold of the family bond, especially in times of difficulty. The way, however, that it could be remedied is not by acting in such wise as to alienate the other party. One of the objects of the Cause is actually to bring about a closer bond in the homes. In all such cases, therefore, the Master used to advise obedience to the wishes of the other party and prayer. Pray that your husband may gradually see the light and at the same time so act as to draw him nearer rather than prejudice him. Once that harmony is secured then you will be able to serve unhampered.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, P. 444

12 . . . He indeed feels rejoiced at the happy news of the settlement of your domestic differences with Mrs.____ and particularly to know that you have jointly undertaken a most successful teaching tour. . . . This bond of common service to the Cause which is so closely uniting your hearts and has proved such an effective solution of your personal problems, he hopes, and indeed will fervently pray, will be further cemented by the passing of years and through your increased and joint participation in the teaching work. . . .

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, P. 448

13 He was sorry to hear of the inharmony and unhappiness which has arisen in your home, and he assures you he will pray for its removal. He suggests to you that perhaps you are not giving your husband enough of your love, physically and spiritually, to keep his interest centred in you. Marriage problems are often very involved and subtle, and we Bahá'ís, being enlightened and progressive people, should not hesitate, if it seems necessary or desirable, to turn to science for help in such matters. If you and your husband talked over your problems - together or separately - with a good physician you might find that you can cure your own husband, or at least try to do so. It is a great pity that two believers, united in this glorious Cause, and blessed with a family, should not be able to live together really harmoniously, and he feels you should take constructive action and not allow the situation to get worse. When the shadow of separation hangs over a husband and wife they should leave no stone unturned in their effort to avert its becoming a reality. He urges you both to devote more of your time to teaching the Cause and to pray together that Bahá'u'lláh may give you a real and lasting love for each other.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, P.451

14 In considering the problems that you and your wife are experiencing, the House of Justice points out that the 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 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. Bahá'u'lláh also stressed the importance of consultation. We should not think this worthwhile method of seeking solutions is confined to the administrative institutions of the Cause. 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.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, P. 453

Marriage Questionnaire

Alternatively, you may choose to assign this activity as homework.

Read the following quotations:

The first Taráz and the first effulgence which hath dawned from the horizon of the Mother Book is that 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

. . . Among them are trustworthiness, truthfulness, purity of heart while communing with God, forbearance, resignation to whatever the Almighty hath decreed, contentment with the things His Will hath provided, patience, nay thankfulness in the midst of tribulation, and complete reliance, in all circumstances, upon Him. These rank, according to the estimate of God, among the highest and most laudable of all acts. All other acts are, and will ever remain, secondary and subordinate unto them. . . .

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P. 290

Truthfulness is the foundation of all the virtues of the world of humanity. Without truthfulness, progress and success in all of the worlds of God are impossible for a soul. When this holy attribute is established in man, all the divine qualities will also become realized.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, IN *BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND THE NEW ERA*, P. 85

1. Turn to the questionnaire on the following pages. Reflect on and answer the questions individually.
2. When complete, share and discuss your responses with your partner.

Purpose:

To identify and explore some of the issues that married couples share.

Process the Activity

What benefits did you discover by engaging in this activity? Did you have any difficulty with any of the questions?

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS WITHIN MARRIAGE

. . . 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

Truthfulness is the foundation of all the virtues of the world of humanity. Without truthfulness, progress and success in all of the worlds of God are impossible for a soul. When this holy attribute is established in man, all the divine qualities will also become realized.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, IN *BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND THE NEW ERA*, P. 85

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

The following are some areas that may become important to you in married life. These questions are meant to help you reflect on your own ideas, then share them with your spouse.

1. I feel loved when my spouse . . .

2. The happiest times in our marriage for me are . . .

3. When I think of my ideal family, I see . . . (may want to include parents' role, grand-parents' role, education of each spouse, children, etc.)

4. What are some important qualities that hold a marriage together?

5. How do I express my Faith in my life? How do I understand the role of the Bahá'í Faith in my spouse's life? What are my expectations for my spouse with my religious practices? If a Bahá'í, do I expect him/her to attend Feast; teach children's classes; go pioneering? If not a Bahá'í, do I expect him/her to go to holy days with me? If my spouse is not a Bahá'í, how do the differences in religious belief affect our family?

6. How do we arrange financial matters in our family? How do we make decisions about money?

7. What sort of marriage did my parents have as I was growing up? Be specific. How has this influenced me in my marriage?

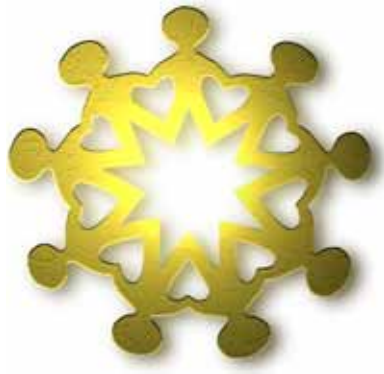
8. What qualities do I find attractive in my spouse?

9. What qualities do I believe my spouse finds attractive in me?

10. In what ways do we demonstrate unity as parents in the eyes of our child (or children)? How can we strengthen this demonstration of unity?

11. In what ways are we a positive resource for each other and others? How can we increasingly show our love and support for each other?

Conclude the session with sweet devotions and uplifting music.



**Core Curriculum for
Spiritual Education
and Training**

- Marriage—A Divinely Ordained Institution
- The Purpose of Marriage

**Spiritual
Foundations
for
Marriage
and
Family Life**

A Course for Couples

SESSION 6

**A Divinely Ordained
Institution**

Devotions

Begin your session with prayers and music. Then read together the theme quotations and learning objectives for this session.

Themes

A Divinely Ordained Institution

Regarding the question of matrimony: Know thou that the command of marriage is eternal. It will never be changed nor altered. This is divine creation and there is not the slightest possibility that change or alteration will affect this divine creation (marriage).

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *TABLETS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, VOL. II, P. 474,
CITED IN HOWARD COLBY IVES, *PORTALS TO FREEDOM*, P. 108

The Purpose of Marriage

And when He 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*, U.S., 1982, P. 187

Learning Objectives

KNOWLEDGE

- To know that Bahá'u'lláh came to bring unity and that a fundamental unity is the unity of the family.

WISDOM

- To understand that the spiritual relationship of marriage is conducive to happiness in this world and in all the worlds of God.
- To understand the benefits of marriage to society.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- To perceive marriage as a covenant with God, as well as between husband and wife.
- To identify factors that make marriage a fortress for one's own well-being and salvation.
- To identify significant characteristics in the marriages of the Hands of the Cause of God.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- To be able to articulate the spiritual foundations and social purposes of marriage.

Marriage: A Divinely Ordained Institution

Jigsaw Activity

1. Read aloud the quotations, A DIVINELY ORDAINED INSTITUTION. Discuss in the whole group the focus question: In what ways is marriage a divinely ordained institution?
2. Begin a "jigsaw" activity by first dividing into 3 groups.
3. Each group will read one of the stories on the following pages about the marriages of different Hands of the Cause of God.
 - Group 1–Louis Gregory and his wife Louisa
 - Group 2–Dorothy Baker and her husband Frank
 - Group 3–Bill Sears and his wife Marguerite
4. In your small group read your story and discuss the spiritual qualities discerned from the story. Try to remember as much as possible about your story.
5. After completing study of your story, form new groups that contain at least one member from each of the previous groups; in other words, each new group will have members who have read each of the three stories.
6. In the new groups, share what you remember about the story you read in your first group.
7. After each person has shared, identify some of the common elements from all the stories.
8. Reconvene in the whole group and, as time permits, share in the large group the results of your consultations.

Purpose:

To understand the significance of the institution of marriage.

To explore 3 stories about the marriages of Hands of the Cause of God.

A DIVINELY ORDAINED INSTITUTION

Focus Question: In what ways is marriage a divinely ordained institution?

1 As to thy question concerning the husband and wife, the tie between them and the children is given to them by God: Know thou, verily, the husband is the one who hath sincerely turned unto God, is awakened by the call of the Beauty of the All-Glorious and chanteth the verses of Oneness in the great assemblies; the wife is a being who wisheth to be overflowing with and seeketh after the attributes of God and His names; and the tie between them is none other than the Word of God. Verily, it causeth the multitudes to assemble together and the remote ones to be united. Thus the husband and wife are brought into affinity, are united and harmonized, even as though they were one person. The spiritual result is the appearance of divine bounties. The material result is the children who are born in the cradle of the love of God, who are brought up in the bosom of the gift of God, and who are fostered in the lap of the training of God. Such children are those of whom it was said by Christ, "Verily, they are the children of the Kingdom!"

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *TABLETS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, VOL. III, PP. 605-06

2 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 favour 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.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P. 122

3 In short, the foundation of the Kingdom of God is based upon harmony and love, oneness, relationship and union . . .

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PRESERVING BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGES*, P. 15

4 Real love is impossible unless one turn his face towards God and be attracted to His Beauty.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *TABLETS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ ABBAS*, VOL. 3, P. 505

5 Among the majority of the people marriage consists of physical relationship and this union is temporary for at the end physical separation is destined and ordained. But the marriage of the people of Bahá must consist of both physical and spiritual relationship for both of them are intoxicated with the wine of one cup, are attracted by one Peerless Countenance, are quickened with one Life and are illumined with one Light. This is the spiritual relationship and everlasting union. Likewise in the physical world they are bound together with strong and unbreakable ties.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, BAHÁ'Í WORLD FAITH, PP. 372-73
CITED IN HOWARD COLBY IVES, *PORTALS TO FREEDOM*, P. 108

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 conditions surrounding the family surround the nation. The happenings in the family are the happenings in the life of the nation. Would it add to the progress and advancement of a family if dissensions should arise among its members, fighting, pillaging each other, jealous and revengeful of injury, seeking selfish advantage? Nay, this would be the cause of the effacement of progress and advancement. So it is in the great family of nations, for nations are but an aggregate of families.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, P. 151

LOUIS AND LOUISE GREGORY



One can well imagine that it was a happy time—to have been carrying out 'Abdu'l-Bahá's wishes, knowing that He would soon be returning to the East Coast and enfolding them in the warmth of His acceptance.

Beyond both the initial difficulties and the unexpected happiness of the marriage there emerged in time a sense of its significance. Louise Gregory told Mrs. Parsons how she had eventually come to understand the Master's words to her in Naples:

Some two years after our marriage I suddenly realized what 'Abdu'l-Bahá had meant when He said "I saw a seed in your heart etc." The seed I realized was the attraction between Louis & myself, the watering time the ripening of this feeling into love leading to marriage and its fruit, the "one seed producing many seeds" the attraction of the hearts of the white and colored races to be produced by our love & marriage.

Our marriage therefore is important as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has indicated. He said I heard later that the importance of our marriage was not understood at that time but would be understood later. It was the first inter-racial marriage between these two races among the Bahá'ís you know & known to be brought about by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself thus

encouraging inter-racial marriage & letting the Bahá'ís know that He encouraged it. Since then I suppose you know there have been two of these marriages among Bahá'ís neither of which I think would have taken place without the example of our marriage.

The “seed” of their marriage thrived despite manifold obstacles. It was difficult for the Gregorys to travel together, difficult simply to find a place to live. Told of their problems, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reportedly “replied emphatically that at Haifa they would be received with open arms.” But in America such acceptance was rare. With one exception, they were never together in the Southern region upon which Mr. Gregory concentrated so much effort as an itinerant racial amity worker. That exception was a summer spent together in Maryland, where intermarriage was considered, as he expressed it, “an infamous crime.”

In Washington, D.C., their home for a number of years, their union was legal but ill-received. Even the Bahá'ís—black as well as white – found it difficult to accept the marriage or to imagine its survival in a segregated society. “The vile reproaches of people of both races descended upon me for a step which I have never regretted,” he recalled. Even for such an amiable person as Louis Gregory, friends were “none too many.” He never forgot those few individuals or ceased to be grateful to them. Years later, for example, he told a friend that the Ali-Kuli Khans, whose own marriage bridged the gulf between East and West, had demonstrated “such real Bahá'í love and understanding as I hope never to forget in time or eternity.”

Outside the small circle of their friends, the Gregorys' actions were subjected continually to scrutiny and criticism. Once, when the Bahá'í Temple Unity moved to send Louis on a teaching trip through the South, Agnes Parsons worried so over the prospect of Louise's accompanying him that she wrote to William H. Randall of the Temple Unity: “Mr. Gregory has had much to meet in Washington from members of his own race because of his marriage and in the farther south the marriage will be taken even more seriously. I cannot see how he will reach either white or colored there—if his wife be with him.” Mrs. Parsons was neither malicious nor insincere, but her overcautious intervention illustrates the extent to which even well-meaning speculation and interference intruded upon their lives.

Yet when Louise, having been effectively prevented by circumstances and discretion from traveling with her husband, decided in the 1920s to follow her own independent course and teach the Bahá'í Faith in Europe, gossip and conjecture only intensified. Once she even contemplated returning ahead of schedule to the United States in order to attend a major Bahá'í event with Louis, “to set at rest the reports which are going around among the colored people, so Louis told me, that we had separated.” As she explained to Mrs. Parsons, with whom she eventually established a congenial relationship:

This report about our separation bothered him somewhat & he was even ready to think we had made a mistake in my coming as he is very desirous of convincing the colored people that the Bahá'í Movement makes all things possible even inter-racial marriages & he knows 'Abdu'l-Bahá had said there was a special purpose in our marriage & he did not wish them to think I had gone to Europe because I found conditions in America on account of my marriage unbearable which is what the colored people had been expecting ever since our marriage & and now they seemed ready to say to each other "I told you so."

The difficulties and frustrations the Gregorys experienced as an interracial couple were never unbearable, however, because their unity fortified them. They enjoyed each other's companionship. Each found encouragement in the other's accomplishments and in a common purpose, even when their fields of endeavor were on separate continents. "I was greatly blessed," Louis Gregory wrote Edith Chapman after a quiet summer in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, near Green Acre,

by . . . the presence of my angel wife, Louise, who had a four months' "furlough" from her teaching campaign in Bulgaria. That Balkan region is where the world war started & it is still a seething caldron of unrest. Hence the importance of the Great Message reaching it[s] varied peoples so full of racial & religious & national hatreds, all of which spell tragedy these days. We were supremely happy together in our quaint old home near the sea.

As the years passed, their shared goals in life continued to bind the Gregorys together. Louis observed in 1950 that Louise's "fine cooperation in teaching service has been a tower of strength to me."

Above all, whether they faced the challenges of living together as an interracial couple in a deeply prejudiced society or of living apart to fulfill their individual destinies, Louis and Louise Gregory found constant strength in their relationship with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He had brought them together, and He never failed to assure them of His support. "Continually do I remember you," He once wrote them. "I beg of God that through you good fellow-ship may be obtained between the white and the black for you are an introduction to the accomplishment."

GAYLE MORRISON, *TO MOVE THE WORLD*, PP. 69-72

DOROTHY AND FRANK BAKER



In her family and in her town, Dorothy was alone with her beliefs. But not quite; Frank was a Bahá'í. He was quiet about it, though. Now that Ellen was gone, she no longer had someone with whom she could explore the depths of the Writings and the facets of her own spiritual growth.

Frank was a worker. He lived his life devoted to his straightforward yet noble purposes: providing for his family, running his bakery, and with his assets helping local boys with college tuition or improving conditions for the employees at Plezol. Dorothy felt alone with the inner weight of inherited responsibility and the self-imposed, almost self-inflicted, resolve to be of service to the Bahá'í Faith. . . .

Frank was always at work; now all the children were out of the house, too. Dorothy sat down to a lonely cup of coffee in the pullman, the little room between the kitchen and dining room where built-in benches and table covered three walls. A double window above the table overlooked the back yard. On the fourth wall next to the china cabinet was the door

to the basement where she knew the laundry waited for attention. The kitchen clock clucked like a mechanical chicken, her only companion. . . .

That night, busy in the kitchen when Frank came home, Dorothy felt better. He sniffed around the oven as he caught her up on his day at the bakery.

'Floyd Spahr came by my office.'

'How's he doing? Still happy at Plezol, I hope, don't know what you'd do without him.'

'Oh, yeah, it wasn't business—he and some others are studying something called Unity and thought we might know enough to give a class on it.'

'I've heard of it, but that's all.'

'Well, I told him you were good at talking about religion and you could probably tell him about Bahá'í since they believe in unity, too.'

Dorothy stopped stirring: her spoon slipped into the sauce.

'What did he say?'

'He said it sounds good. They're all coming over next Sunday night.'

It was Monday. That gave her four full days and maybe a little time on the weekend to get ready. Dorothy spent every free hour she could find that week reading and indexing, preparing her talk.

By that weekend the outline had expanded to include everything her thirty-odd hours of study had touched on. Then a pattern began to emerge and Dorothy followed it, planning, editing, connecting each thought with the next. Stories, insights from time spent with Mother Beecher tied theory into reality so that by Sunday night Dorothy was nervous, but prepared. The group that met that first Sunday consisted of the Bakers, Floyd and Gertrude Spahr, Frank and Charlene Warner, Marie Kramer and a few others.

Dorothy was able to inform Shoghi Effendi, on February 2, 1933, of the formation of the first Bahá'í community in Lima, Ohio. There were eighteen members and a second study group had been formed for other interested individuals. . . .

There was energy for everything: the Sunday night meetings, preparing her talks for them, setting up the den for the Friday night Bahá'í Men's Club led by Harry Jay, time also for children's classes, which Bill and Louise Baker loved, and for the weekly luncheon Dorothy gave for the Bahá'í women and their friends. . . .

There were still moments of despair or depression, but Dorothy's efforts in Lima began to balance out. Still, at times she became overtired and Frank would ask her to list all the committees and activities she was involved with. Then he would suggest that she consider in which of these her presence was not really vital. Usually Dorothy came up with at least

one which, on his recommendation, she would then drop. With Frank's help she managed to keep her Bahá'í work in its place, as the major interest of her life, but not as a ravenous god to which all else, including the happiness of children and husband, had to be totally sacrificed.

On the way home from National Convention in the spring of the year, Dorothy always stopped at roadside stands to buy whatever fruit the farmers had brought to sell. Convention was just before strawberry time so she usually arrived home with a crate of berries. Dorothy would gather the whole family to help with the jam making. She had a real interest in the whole process and infused the operations with the same sort of intensity she gave other projects. Rhubarb from the back yard, well sugared, was the base for the jam, or Dorothy used several cans of pineapple. Then the strawberries would go in and as summer fruits ripened, Dorothy added them to the big crock of jam in the cellar and the Bakers called it 'heavenly hash'. Later in the year, when Frank came home with a bushel or two of fresh peaches, the family gathered again as Dorothy organized the canning. A favorite dessert was 'fried eggs', two peach halves with the curved sides up and each surrounded by a circle of fresh whipped cream. She once commented that she needed these activities to keep a balance in her life.

Frank adored the thriving home life Dorothy created, but he encouraged her to take on everything she wanted to do. With real appreciation Dorothy often told people of Frank's advice to her, 'We both love this Cause, and neither one of us wants you to give only your gray hairs to it.'

Just as he encouraged her, Dorothy showed great gentleness toward her husband. When the double living room and the wide entry hall of their home were filled with people during the Sunday night meetings, Frank would settle himself on the comfortable blue couch in the very back of the room and occasionally fall asleep as Dorothy spoke. But her loving, indulgent smile removed all embarrassment. When a snore or sleepy snort made heads turn, she would laugh and suggest that if it annoyed anyone they should wake him, but otherwise let him sleep. . . .

DOROTHY FREEMAN, *FROM COPPER TO GOLD*, pp. 109-20

BILL AND MARGUERITE SEARS



When I had been no higher than Mickey Mantle's bat I had promised God and myself that if I ever found out the truth about my dream I'd go all over the world and share the news of my discovery. I had never kept that promise.

I had written several radio and television scripts for the Bahá'í Faith; I'd been a member of its National Radio Committee; I'd even published an essay on my belief in Edward R. Murrow's compilation *This I Believe*; but of late I had been gradually sinking back into that formula of success: Get up, go to work, go to the bank, go to bed, die.

Marguerite knew I was very troubled. She suggested that we all go to the Intercontinental Conference of the Bahá'ís at Chicago.

It was also my first visit to the Bahá'í Temple in Wilmette, Illinois. . . . I sat under the lofty dome and heard words of inspiration read from the

holy Books of all Faiths. I recalled how 'Abdu'l-Bahá had stood on this barren plain during those days when I was first having my dream and had dedicated the land and the Universal House of Worship which was to be built upon it, to the welfare of men of all religions, nations, and races. He had prophesied that when this Temple was dedicated, from that centre the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh would be carried to every corner of the planet.

Now we were present at the dedication, listening to the magnificent music of the choir glorifying the oneness of God, His Messengers, and all His creatures.

The next day in Chicago there began a great spiritual World Crusade, reminiscent of the crusade which sent Paul, Peter, Barnabas, Timothy, and the Apostles of Christ into the countries and villages of Europe.

There was a message to the Conference from the great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh, the World Head of the Bahá'í Faith. It was an inspiring call for pioneers to go to far-distant lands. Now I understood the full meaning of my dream. The time had come to "fish" like Peter, through the seven seas for the souls of men.

I had known in my heart that it is not enough merely to believe, but perhaps I had hoped, as Jonah had, that someone else would go to Nineveh.

I had quoted the words of the Greek philosopher to Marguerite too many times to try to evade their meaning now: "Seek the truth. Decide in your own heart if it be true or false. If it be false, oppose it with all your might; but, if it be true, arise and serve it steadfastly to the end."

At lunch-time the Sears all began talking at once. Apparently everybody had the same idea, although their destinations were a bit far apart.

Michael said, "How about China?"

"Hawaii, I think," Billy suggested.

Almost in one breath, Marguerite and I said, "Africa."

We sold our farm and all our possessions. Even up to the end, many of our friends thought it was only a publicity stunt.

"You're really going?" they'd say, surprised.

"You're giving up everything?"

Marguerite said it best. "We're giving up nothing. Everything is in the going."

"I never took you kids for religious bugs. It's taken you all your life, Bill, to get where you are now. Most guys would give their right arm for your job, and you're tossing it away like a used banana peel."

"You hardly have time to carry your money to the bank these days, Bill. You've got it made! Stick around."

"He feels that he's got to go to Nineveh," Marguerite explained.

"Where?"

"Nineveh."

"I thought you were going to Africa?"

"We are."

"You kids better buy yourselves an atlas. You may never even get to New York."

Our African journey brought us all days of unforgettable happiness, excitement, and laughter. I have told the story in another book called *Black Sunlight*. This story of a boy and his dream had ended at the foot of the rainbow.

Michael is now studying to be an architect; Billy wants to be a writer; Marguerite wants another dachshund. Oh, yes, she's still the Animal Lady. When she walks round the property in the mornings they still string out behind her. She still looks like the engine on a long New York Central freight train. We have chickens, chinchilla gigantic rabbits, and two peacocks. One peacock climbs to the top of every fence we put up, so he is called Sir Edmund. One won't even try. He is called Lord Listless. There are the two dachshunds Cyrano and Roxane, the two Ridgeback watchdogs Big Finnegan and Scotland Yard (I've always wanted a dog with that name so I could look up dramatically to Marguerite and say, "Call the Yard!"), a puppy which is part ridgeback and part bull-mastiff. It grows with alarming rapidity, as though someone were blowing it up like a balloon. When it was sent to us from a nearby farm Billy took one look and said:

"They've made a mistake and sent us the farm."

It's name is Sugar-bush. We also have cats named Figaro, Mr. Murphy, Kubla Khan, as well as a litter in my brown suit that are not named as yet. I suggest the sextette from Lucia, but Marguerite said, "Don't start that again."

We have no right to be so happy. It is a wonderful place to come home to. It is almost always filled with people. The Bahá'í teachings say, "If you want a palace in paradise, make your home the gathering place for friends."

I am still trying to fulfill that hunger in my heart to share the news of this wonderful day with people everywhere in the world. I have travelled over a quarter of a million miles. I come home just long enough to earn enough money for another journey.

I write a little, broadcast a little, and travel a lot.

I went to Israel so that I could make a personal and detailed investigation of all the places visited there by Bahá'u'lláh.

Marguerite, Bill, Michael, and Cyrano drove me out to the airport to see me off. How many times we have said good-bye in the past five years, and in how many different parts of the world. Marguerite's life is given to spreading the Bahá'í Faith also, and frequently we drive, sail, or fly in opposite directions.

"I don't like goodbyes," she said wistfully as we parted one day at the London Airport.

"If there are no goodbyes," I told her, quoting an African proverb, "there would be no hellos."

She went on a journey through India, Burma, Thailand, and Malaya. She sent a cable home from Singapore. "Miss you."

Bill answered her: "You certainly did. Dad's in Haifa, remember?"

I cabled one day from Stuttgart, Germany, to Tucson, Arizona. Marguerite's mother answered: "Marguerite is in Mexico." Marguerite cabled to Stuttgart upon her return, only to hear: "Bill is in Greece."

One afternoon I was sitting in the restaurant at Ciampino Airport in Rome waiting for flight SA 121 to Nairobi. I was enjoying a glass of Perrier water and Art Buchwald's column in the French edition of the Herald Tribune, when a shadow crossed the table. I looked up. It was Marguerite as fresh and full of life as the day I had first seen her through that studio window.

"Going my way?" I asked.

She showed me her ticket. Flight SA 121 to Nairobi.

"What's new?"

She said, "Nothing. Same old thing: Mexico, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, London, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Rome, Istanbul, New Delhi."

Our laughter attracted considerable attention and disapproval. The loudspeaker called out our plane, and as we walked hand-in-hand across the runway towards the big DC7 I thought of many things: the time we had gone for days without food in Salt Lake City, until finally we scraped together enough for a big bowl of soup. We lighted candles on the table, and for a centre-piece I had carried in the dachshund, Spook, lying flat on his back on a serving tray. The boys broke into tears thinking we were going to eat him, jumped up in fear, and upset all our soup on to the floor.

The time I raced our Jeep station-wagon down the Schuylkill River Drive rushing to Hahnemann Hospital, holding Marguerite up with one arm, as she was gradually dying beside me. It was the night we lost our child.

The time we were down to our last three dollars with no resources in sight. Marguerite said, "We're going about this the wrong way. It's negative. I'm going out and spend the three dollars on a good dinner."

"It's not three dollars," I told her. "It's one pound, one and six."

"I'm getting a strange feeling," she said, "something is breathing over me."

"That's me," I said ungrammatically, "taking a last look at the three dollars."

She came back with the ingredients for a wonderful dinner, "so that we can celebrate," she said.

"Celebrate what?" I asked.

"The fact that we're going to have such a splendid dinner." She smiled. "And who knows, maybe something else."

She was right, of course. I came home the next day with a job.

Now, as the plane took off from Rome, bent away from Castel Gandolfo, and started climbing towards Naples, I said to Marguerite: "We've certainly followed Bahá'u'lláh's instructions in one thing."

"What, dear?"

"We've lived a full, rich life. We've extracted all the throbbing joy, wonder, awe, excitement, and beauty out of each minute. I've made more come-backs than a yoyo, and it's all been pretty special."

The plane came down from the Great Rift Valley and circled to land at Nairobi's new airport. I squeezed Marguerite's hand.

"Africa," I said.

"Happy?"

"To be back home?" I asked. "Of course. You can get weary of travelling. How about you?"

I looked in her lap. She had a Pan American flight schedule and two maps of South America and a strange light in those robin's-egg blue eyes.

We both began to laugh.

To myself I said, "I think God loves laughter. I know I do."

WILLIAM SEARS, *GOD LOVES LAUGHTER*, PP. 175-79

The Purpose of Marriage

1. Read the quotations on THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE. This can either be done individually or in small groups.
2. Form small groups and discuss the insights gleaned from your reading.
3. Then, based on your understanding of the purpose of marriage, create a human sculpture depicting some aspect of your collective understanding of the purpose of marriage.
4. Present these “sculptures” to the whole group.

THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

1 We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDAS*, p. 105

2 Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amidst My servants. This is My bidding unto you; hold fast to it as an assistance to yourselves.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDAS*, p. 41

3 O peerless Lord! In Thine almighty wisdom Thou hast enjoined marriage upon the peoples, that the generations of men may succeed one another in this contingent world, and that ever, so long as the world shall last, they may busy themselves at the threshold of Thy oneness with servitude and worship, with salutation, adoration and praise. "I have not created spirits and men, but that they should worship me." 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. "He hath let loose the two seas, that they meet each other: Between them is a barrier which they overpass not. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will ye deny? From each He bringeth up greater and lesser pearls."

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*, pp. 187–88

4 But for man, who, on My earth, would remember Me, and how could My attributes and My names be revealed?

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *EPISTLE TO THE SON OF THE WOLF*, p. 49

5 . . . It is enjoined upon the father and mother, as a duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son, to nurse them from the breast of knowledge and to rear them in the bosom of sciences and arts. Should they neglect this matter, they shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, p. 127, no. 98

6 Train these children with divine exhortations. From their childhood instill in their hearts the love of God so they may manifest in their lives the fear of God and have confidence in the bestowals of God. Teach them to free themselves from human imperfections and to acquire the divine perfections latent in the heart of man. The life of man is useful if he attains the perfections of man. If he becomes the center of the imperfections of the world of humanity, death is better than life, and non-existence better than existence. Therefore make ye an effort in order that these children may be rightly trained and educated and that each one of them may attain perfection in the world of humanity. Know ye the value of these children for they are all my children.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, p. 51

7 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, 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. This is Bahá'í marriage.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, p. 118, NO. 86

8 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 favour 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.

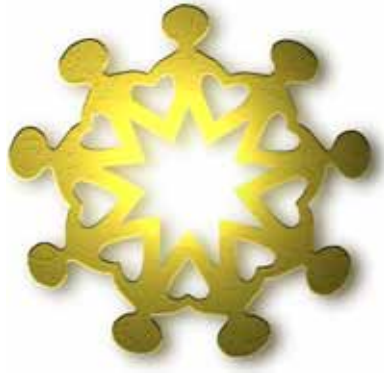
'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, p. 122, NO. 92

9 And above all other unions is that between human beings, especially when it cometh to pass in the love of God. Thus is the primal oneness made to appear; thus is laid the foundation of love in the spirit. . . .

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, p. 119

Closing

Conclude the session with sweet devotions and uplifting music. Include prayers of praise and gratitude.



**Core Curriculum for
Spiritual Education
and Training**

- Preserving Marriage and Preventing Divorce
- The Lover and the Divine Beloved

**Spiritual
Foundations
for
Marriage
and
Family Life**

A Course for Couples

SESSION 7

Preserving Marriage

Devotions

Begin your session with prayers and music. Then read together the theme quotations and learning objectives for this session.

Themes

Preserving Marriage

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.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, p. 122

Marriage Vow

We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDAS*, p. 105

Learning Objectives

KNOWLEDGE

- To know that the command of marriage is divine and eternal.
- To know the Bahá'í writings regarding preserving marriage and preventing divorce.

WISDOM

- To understand that the spiritual relationship of marriage is conducive to happiness in this world and in all the worlds of God.
- To understand the benefits of marriage to society.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- To perceive marriage as a covenant with God, as well as between husband and wife.
- To reflect upon the contrast between marriage and divorce.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- To be able to articulate the spiritual foundations and social purposes of marriage.

Preserving Marriage and Preventing Divorce

1. In the whole group, read aloud the quotations on PRESERVING MARRIAGE AND PREVENTING DIVORCE.
2. Then listen to two stories that illustrate the despair of divorce and the joy of marriage, even under difficult conditions.
3. Following each story there are some questions for reflection. The facilitator might ask these questions about the stories, but not give or ask for any concrete answers. These stories, and the questions, are more for quiet reflection than for analysis. Participants may offer some thoughts or feelings about the stories, and then give them some quiet journal time.
4. Resources for further research and reflection might include the compilation “Preserving Bahá’í Marriages” and the section in the manual “Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities” prepared as a guide for Local Spiritual Assemblies.

Purpose:

To become familiar with the importance of preserving marriage and preventing divorce.

PRESERVING MARRIAGE AND PREVENTING DIVORCE

1 Truly, the Lord loveth union and harmony and abhorreth separation and divorce. Live ye one with another, O people, in radiance and joy.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDAS*, PARAGRAPH 70, P. 45

2 . . . When diverse shades of thought, temperament and character, are brought together under the power and influence of one central agency, the beauty and glory of human perfection will be revealed and made manifest. Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas and convictions of the children of men.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P. 292

3 Real love is impossible unless one turn his face towards God and be attracted to His beauty.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *TABLETS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ ABBAS*, VOL. III, P. 505

4 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

5 Be in perfect unity. Never become angry with one another. . . . 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.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, P. 89

6 Formerly in Persia divorce was very easily obtained. Among the people of the past Dispensation a trifling matter would cause divorce. However, as the light of the Kingdom shone forth, souls were quickened by the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh, then they totally eschewed divorce. In Persia now divorce doth not take place among the friends, unless a compelling reason existeth which makes harmony impossible. Under such rare circumstances some cases of divorce take place.

Now the friends in America must live and conduct themselves in this way. They must strictly refrain from divorce unless something ariseth which compelleth them to separate because of their aversion for each other, in that case with the knowledge of the Spiritual Assembly they may decide to separate. They must then be patient and wait one complete year. If during this year, harmony is not re-established between them, then their divorce may be realized. It should not happen that upon the occurrence of a slight friction or displeasure between husband and wife, the husband would think of union with some other woman, or God forbid, the wife also think of another husband. This is contrary to the standard of heavenly value and true chastity. The friends of God must so

live and conduct themselves, and evince such excellence of character and conduct, as to make others astonished. The love between husband and wife must 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!

In short, the 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 becomes 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, *PRESERVING BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGES*, P. 17

7 He feels that you and your wife should do everything in your power to produce a harmonious relationship between you and avoid divorce by all means, if possible. The Bahá'í attitude is that marriage is a very serious and sacred relationship and divorce a last resort to be avoided if humanly possible.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, P. 448

The Lover and the Divine Beloved

Conclude this session with a lovely devotional program using some or all of the quotations provided, as desired. Please also include music in your devotional program. At the conclusion of the program and before departing, turn to your journals and reflect on the question:

- In what way does the love between husband and wife serve as a metaphor for the soul's quest for the Divine Beloved, the Manifestation of God for this Age?
- What other new discoveries did you make today about the institution of marriage?

THE LOVER AND THE DIVINE BELOVED

O SON OF MAN! Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC NO. 3

O 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, *HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC NO. 4

O 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, *HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC NO. 5

O SON OF BEING! Thy Paradise is My love; thy heavenly home, reunion with Me. Enter therein and tarry not. This is that which hath been destined for thee in Our kingdom above and Our exalted Dominion.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC NO. 6

O SON OF MAN! If thou lovest Me, turn away from thyself; and if thou seekest My pleasure, regard not thine own; that thou mayest die in Me and I may eternally live in thee.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC NO. 7

O SON OF SPIRIT! There is no peace for thee save by renouncing thyself and turning unto Me; for it behooveth thee to glory in My name, not in thine own; to put thy trust in Me and not in thyself, since I desire to be loved alone and above all that is.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC NO. 8

O SON OF THE WONDROUS VISION! I have breathed within thee a breath of My own Spirit, that thou mayest be My lover. Why hast thou forsaken Me and sought a beloved other than Me?

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC NO. 19

O SON OF SPIRIT! My claim on thee is great, it cannot be forgotten. My grace to thee is plenteous, it cannot be veiled. My love has made in thee its home, it cannot be concealed. My light is manifest to thee, it cannot be obscured.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC NO. 20

O SON OF MAN! For everything there is a sign. The sign of love is fortitude under My decree and patience under My trials.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC NO. 48

O YE PEOPLE THAT HAVE MINDS TO KNOW AND EARS TO HEAR! The first call of the Beloved is this: O mystic nightingale! Abide not but in the rose-garden of the spirit. O messenger of the Solomon of love! Seek thou no shelter except in the Sheba of the well-beloved, and O immortal phoenix! dwell not save on the mount of faithfulness. Therein is thy habitation, if on the wings of thy soul thou soarest to the realm of the infinite and seekest to attain thy goal.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 1

O SON OF SPIRIT! The bird seeketh its nest; the nightingale the charm of the rose; whilst those birds, the hearts of men, content with transient dust, have strayed far from their eternal nest, and with eyes turned towards the slough of heedlessness are bereft of the glory of the divine presence. Alas! How strange and pitiful; for a mere cupful, they have turned away from the billowing seas of the Most High, and remained far from the most effulgent horizon.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 2

O FRIEND! In the garden of thy heart plant naught but the rose of love, and from the nightingale of affection and desire loosen not thy hold. Treasure the companionship of the righteous and eschew all fellowship with the ungodly.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 3

O SON OF JUSTICE! Whither can a lover go but to the land of his beloved? and what seeker findeth rest away from his heart's desire? To the true lover reunion is life, and separation is death. His breast is void of patience and his heart hath no peace. A myriad lives he would forsake to hasten to the abode of his beloved.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 4

O SON OF DUST! All that is in heaven and earth I have ordained for thee, except the human heart, which I have made the habitation of My beauty and glory; yet thou didst give My home and dwelling to another than Me; and whenever the manifestation of My holiness sought His own abode, a stranger found He there, and, homeless, hastened unto the sanctuary of the Beloved. Notwithstanding I have concealed thy secret and desired not thy shame.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 27

O ESSENCE OF DESIRE! At many a dawn have I turned from the realms of the Placeless unto thine abode, and found thee on the bed of ease busied with others than Myself. Thereupon, even as the flash of the spirit, I returned to the realms of celestial glory and breathed it not in My retreats above unto the hosts of holiness.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 28

O BOND SLAVE OF THE WORLD! Many a dawn hath the breeze of My loving-kindness wafted over thee and found thee upon the bed of heedlessness fast asleep. Bewailing then thy plight it returned whence it came.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 30

O SON OF EARTH! Wouldst thou have Me, seek none other than Me; and wouldst thou gaze upon My beauty, close thine eyes to the world and all that is therein; for My will and the will of another than Me, even as fire and water, cannot dwell together in one heart.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 31

O BEFRIENDED STRANGER! The candle of thine heart is lighted by the hand of My power, quench it not with the contrary winds of self and passion. The healer of all thine ills is remembrance of Me, forget it not. Make My love thy treasure and cherish it even as thy very sight and life.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 32

O MY BROTHER! Harken to the delightful words of My honeyed tongue, and quaff the stream of mystic holiness from My sugar-shedding lips. Sow the seeds of My divine wisdom in the pure soil of thy heart, and water them with the water of certitude, that the hyacinths of My knowledge and wisdom may spring up fresh and green in the sacred city of thy heart.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 33

O SON OF SPIRIT! Burst thy cage asunder, and even as the phoenix of love soar into the firmament of holiness. Renounce thyself and, filled with the spirit of mercy, abide in the realm of celestial sanctity.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 38

O OFFSPRING OF DUST! Be not content with the ease of a passing day, and deprive not thyself of everlasting rest. Barter not the garden of eternal delight for the dust-heap of a mortal world. Up from thy prison ascend unto the glorious meads above, and from thy mortal cage wing thy flight unto the paradise of the Placeless.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 39

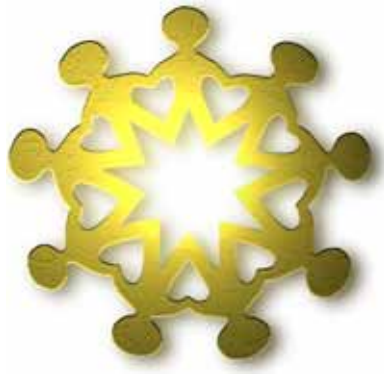
Behold how the manifold grace of God, which is being showered from the clouds of Divine glory, hath, in this day, encompassed the world. For whereas in days past every lover besought and searched after his Beloved, it is the Beloved Himself Who now is calling His lovers and is inviting them to attain His presence. Take heed lest ye forfeit so precious a favor; beware lest ye belittle so remarkable a token of His grace. Abandon not the incorruptible benefits, and be not content with that which perisheth. Lift up the veil that obscureth your vision, and dispel the darkness with which it is enveloped, that ye may gaze on the naked beauty of the Beloved's face, may behold that which no eye hath beheld, and hear that which no ear hath heard.

Hear Me, ye mortal birds! In the Rose Garden of changeless splendor a Flower hath begun to bloom, compared to which every other flower is but a thorn, and before the brightness of Whose glory the very essence of beauty must pale and wither. Arise, therefore, and, with the whole enthusiasm of your hearts, with all the eagerness of your souls, the full fervor of your will, and the concentrated efforts of your entire being, strive to attain the paradise of His presence, and endeavor to inhale the fragrance of the incorruptible Flower, to breathe the sweet savors of holiness, and to obtain a portion of this perfume of celestial glory. Whoso followeth this counsel will break his chains asunder, will taste the abandonment of enraptured love, will attain unto his heart's desire, and will surrender his soul into the hands of his Beloved. Bursting through his cage, he will, even as the bird of the spirit, wing his flight to his holy and everlasting nest.

Night hath succeeded day, and day hath succeeded night, and the hours and moments of your lives have come and gone, and yet none of you hath, for one instant, consented to detach himself from that which perisheth. Bestir yourselves, that the brief moments that are still yours may not be dissipated and lost. Even as the swiftness of lightning your days shall pass, and your bodies shall be laid to rest beneath a canopy of dust. What can ye then achieve? How can ye atone for your past failure?

The everlasting Candle shineth in its naked glory. Behold how it hath consumed every mortal veil. O ye moth-like lovers of His light! Brave every danger, and consecrate your souls to its consuming flame. O ye that thirst after Him! Strip yourselves of every earthly affection, and hasten to embrace your Beloved. With a zest that none can equal make haste to attain unto Him. The Flower, thus far hidden from the sight of men, is unveiled to your eyes. In the open radiance of His glory He standeth before you. His voice summoneth all the holy and sanctified beings to come and be united with Him. Happy is he that turneth thereunto; well is it with him that hath attained, and gazed on the light of so wondrous a countenance.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, PP. 320-22



**Core Curriculum for
Spiritual Education
and Training**

- Equality in Marriage
- Roles of Family Members
- Promoting The Principle of Oneness in the Family

**Spiritual
Foundations
for
Marriage
and
Family Life**

A Course for Couples

SESSION 8

Equality in Marriage

Devotions

Begin your session with prayers and music. Then read the theme quotations and learning objectives for this session.

Themes

Equality

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, THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE, P. 182

Roles Within the Family

According to the teaching 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.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE, P. 168

Oeness

Wherefore, O my loving friends! Consort with all peoples, kindreds and religions of the world with the utmost truthfulness, uprightness, faithfulness, kindness, goodwill and friendliness, that all the world of being may be filled with the holy ecstasy of the grace of Bahá, that ignorance, enmity, hate and rancor may vanish from the world and the darkness of estrangement amidst the peoples and kindreds of the world may give way to the Light of Unity.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, THE WILL AND TESTAMENT OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, PP. 13-14

Learning Objectives

KNOWLEDGE

- To become aware of the Bahá'í writings on the equality of men and women.
- To study the Sacred Texts that apply to the roles of family members.

WISDOM

- To understand the relationship of family unity to world peace.
- To understand how the principle of equality can be expressed through complementary functions within the family.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- To identify ways that individual effort can support family life.
- To perceive the importance of the principle of equality in the family.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- To be able to demonstrate an understanding of the concept of a unified family.

The Principle of Equality

1. Divide into smaller groups with equal representation of women and men.
2. In your small groups, read quotations on THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY and answer the focus question:
 - How can we model the principle of the equality of men and women in our family?
3. Then, with your marriage partner, enhance your “birds in the nest” art project created in the first session of this course to illustrate at least one way in which your marriage promotes the principle of the equality of men and women.
4. Share your nest enhancements with the whole group.

Purpose:

To understand how the principle of equality is applied in marriage and family life.

THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY

Focus Question: How can we model the principle of the equality of women and men in our family?

1 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 of 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

2 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, p. 369

3 In this Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, the women go neck and neck with men. In no movement will they be left behind. Their rights with men are equal in degree. They will enter all the administrative branches of politics. They will attain in all such a degree as will be considered the very highest station of the world of humanity and will take part in all affairs.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, p. 182

4 Humanity is like a bird with its two wings—the one is male, the other female. Unless both wings are strong and impelled by some common force, the bird cannot fly heavenwards. According to the spirit of this age, women must advance and fulfill their mission in all departments of life, becoming equal to men. They must be on the same level as men and enjoy equal rights.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, QUOTED IN *BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND THE NEW ERA*, p. 147

5 Divine justice demands that the rights of both sexes should be equally respected since neither is superior to the other in the eyes of Heaven. 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

6 Women have equal rights with men upon earth; in religion and society they are a very important element. 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

Roles Within the Family

Purpose:

To be able to explain the role of each family member.

1. In small groups read the quotations on ROLES WITHIN THE FAMILY and discuss the question:
 - How do roles within the family complement each other?
2. In your small group, construct a model using modeling clay, play dough, toothpicks, tinker toys, or some other modeling materials to illustrate the roles of members of the family.
3. Then describe your group's model for the whole group.

Focus Question: How do roles within the family complement each other?

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, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 1, P. 385

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

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, P. 168

3 The members of a family all have duties and responsibilities towards one another and to the family as a whole, and these duties and responsibilities vary from member to member because of their natural relationships. The parents have the inescapable duty to educate their children—but not vice versa; the children have the duty to obey their parents—the parents do not obey the children; the mother—not the father—bears the children, nurses them in babyhood, and is thus their first educator, hence daughters have a prior right to education over sons and, as the Guardian's secretary has written on his behalf, '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 the child first receives through his mother constitutes the strongest foundation for his future development.' A corollary of this responsibility of the mother is her right to be supported by her husband—a husband has no explicit right to be supported by his wife.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE*, PP. 57–58

4 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.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *WOMEN*, p. 32

5 Indeed, 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 TO AN INDIVIDUAL, 11 JANUARY 1988

6 The atmosphere within a Bahá'í family as within the community as a whole should express "the keynote of the Cause of God" which, the beloved Guardian has stated, "is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation."

FROM A LETTER WRITTEN ON BEHALF OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE,
LIGHTS OF GUIDANCE, NO. 730, p. 218

Promoting the Principle of Oneness in the Family

1. Read aloud in the whole group the quotations on ONENESS IN THE FAMILY.
2. Divide the participants into small groups and re-read the quotes aloud. Then brainstorm specific ideas, strategies, or activities that families could implement that would promote the concept of oneness in their family unit.
3. Reconvene in the large group and share ideas from the small group brainstorming.

Purpose:

To be able to implement in the family the principle of oneness.

Process the Activity

- Based on the ideas shared, select with your spouse at least 3 ideas to share with your family when you return home.
- Implement at least one new activity or strategy in your family before returning for the next session.

ONENESS IN THE FAMILY

Focus Question: What strategies or activities could families implement to promote the concept of oneness?

1 Wherefore, O my loving friends! Consort with all peoples, kindreds and religions of the world with the utmost truthfulness, uprightness, faithfulness, kindness, goodwill and friendliness, that all the world of being may be filled with the holy ecstasy of the grace of Bahá, that ignorance, enmity, hate and rancor may vanish from the world and the darkness of estrangement amidst the peoples and kindreds of the world may give way to the Light of Unity.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE WILL AND TESTAMENT OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, pp. 13-14

2 Through example, loving fellowship, prayer, and kindness the friends can attract the hearts of such people and enable them to realize that this is the Cause of God in deed, not merely words!

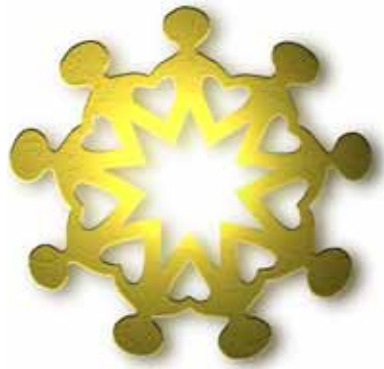
SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE INDIVIDUAL AND TEACHING*, p. 25

3 By all means persevere and associate in a friendly spirit with other groups . . . particularly of a different race or minority nationality, for such association will demonstrate your complete conviction of the oneness of mankind.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE INDIVIDUAL AND TEACHING*, p. 25

Closing

Conclude the session with sweet devotions and uplifting music. Include prayers for spiritual insight.



**Core Curriculum for
Spiritual Education
and Training**

- Childrearing
- Balancing Family Life and Service

**Spiritual
Foundations
for
Marriage
and
Family Life**

A Course for Couples

SESSION 9

**Family Life and
Childrearing**

Devotions

Begin your session with prayers for families and music, either sung or recorded. Then read the theme quotations and learning objectives.

Themes

Childrearing

Therefore make ye an effort in order that these children may be rightly trained and educated and that each one of them may attain perfection in the world of humanity. Know ye the value of these children for they are all my children.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, PP. 180–81

Balancing Family Life and Service

. . . 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, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 1, P. 399

Learning Objectives

KNOWLEDGE

- To study the Sacred Texts that apply to the roles of family members.
- To identify from the Bahá'í writings some general principles of childrearing.

WISDOM

- To understand the relationship of family unity to world peace.
- Understand the importance of childrearing to an ever-advancing civilization.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- To identify ways that individual effort can support family life.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- To be able to demonstrate an understanding of the concept of a unified family.
- To be able to demonstrate an understanding of key principles of childrearing.

The Purpose of Childrearing

1. Divide yourselves into small groups.
2. In your small group read the quotations on THE PURPOSE OF CHILDREARING and discuss the focus question:
 - How can parents rear their children according to Bahá'í principles?
3. In your small group, select one of the quotations and role-play a situation that demonstrates your understanding of childrearing, based on your selected quotation.
4. Present your role-play to the entire group.
5. The National Spiritual Assembly has created additional training courses on Spiritual Parenting available through the National Children's Education and Resource Center at Louhelen Bahá'í School. For more information, email ncerc@usbnc.org, or phone (810) 653-5033.

Purpose:

To demonstrate an understanding of childrearing from a Bahá'í perspective.

THE PURPOSE OF CHILDREARING

Focus Question: How can parents rear their children according to Bahá'í principles?

1 I give you my advice and it is this: Train these children with divine exhortations. From their childhood instill in their hearts the love of God so they may manifest in their lives the fear of God and have confidence in the bestowals of God. Teach them to free themselves from human imperfections and to acquire the divine perfections latent in the heart of man. The life of man is useful if he attains the perfections of man. If he becomes the center of the imperfections of the world of humanity, death is better than life, and nonexistence better than existence. Therefore make ye an effort in order that these children may be rightly trained and educated and that each one of them may attain perfection in the world of humanity. Know ye the value of these children for they are all my children.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, PP. 180-81

2 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. Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.

ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, P.129

3 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.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. I, P. 248

4 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.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. I, P. 303

5 Let the mothers consider that whatever concerneth the education of children is of the first importance. Let them put forth every effort in this regard, for when the bough is green and tender it will grow in whatever way ye train it. Therefore is it incumbent upon the mothers to rear their little ones even as a gardener tendeth his young plants. Let them strive by day and by night to establish within their children faith and certitude, the fear of God, the love of the Beloved of the worlds, and all good qualities and traits. 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, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. I, PP. 289–90

6 The father must always endeavour to educate his son and to acquaint him with the heavenly teachings. He must give him advice and exhort him at all times, teach him praiseworthy conduct and character, enable him to receive training at school and to be instructed in such arts and sciences as are deemed useful and necessary. In brief, let him instill into his mind the virtues and perfections of the world of humanity. Above all he should continually call to his mind the remembrance of God so that his throbbing veins and arteries may pulsate with the love of God.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. I, P. 393

7 Teach ye your children the verses that have been divinely revealed, that they may recite them in most melodious voices. This is what hath been set down in His mighty Book.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. I, P. 250

Balancing Family Life and Service to God

Purpose:

To realize that the home must not be neglected for service to the Cause.

To explore how the home is a fortress for teaching the Cause.

1. Read aloud in the whole group the quotations on BALANCING FAMILY LIFE AND SERVICE TO GOD.
2. Then, using materials supplied by your facilitators, pair with your spouse to make a pyramid that illustrates the balance and interrelationship of four aspects of life:
 - Spiritual Development of the Individual
 - Family Life
 - Teaching and Serving the Cause of God
 - Service to Humanity and Career.
3. Consult with your spouse and with others in your group as you build your pyramid:
 - What does the base of the pyramid represent? What tools are we given to ascend from this earthly plane?
 - Observe how the four sides of the pyramid are connected. What happens as to all these apparently conflicting goals as we ascend the pyramid?
 - How does our view of the pyramid change when seen from the top, with the point of the pyramid facing our eyes?

Process the Activity

Turn to your journal and reflect on the question: What practical steps can I take to achieve greater balance in my life?

Steps to building the pyramid

Materials needed: A piece of flat posterboard about 1 foot square for the base; four pieces of 8 ½" x 11" tagboard, or thin cardboard; triangle template from Facilitator Manual; ruler; scissors.

Mark the triangles on tagboard this way:

1. Cut out triangle template (attached).
2. Lay it on your tagboard as shown.
3. Mark dots for each point of the triangle.
4. Join these dots with a ruler.
5. Trace the tab on the triangle.
6. Do this to three other pieces of tagboard.
7. Label each triangle on the outside with one of the following titles:
 - Spiritual Development of the Individual
 - Family Life
 - Teaching and Serving the Cause of God
 - Service to Humanity and Career

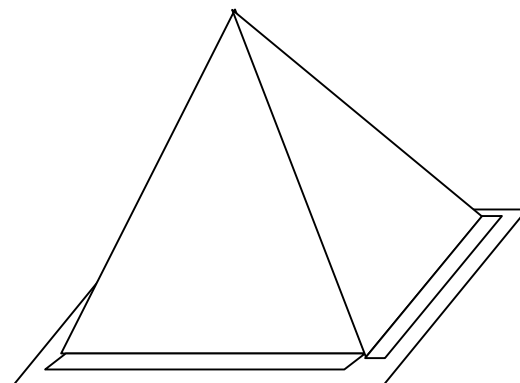
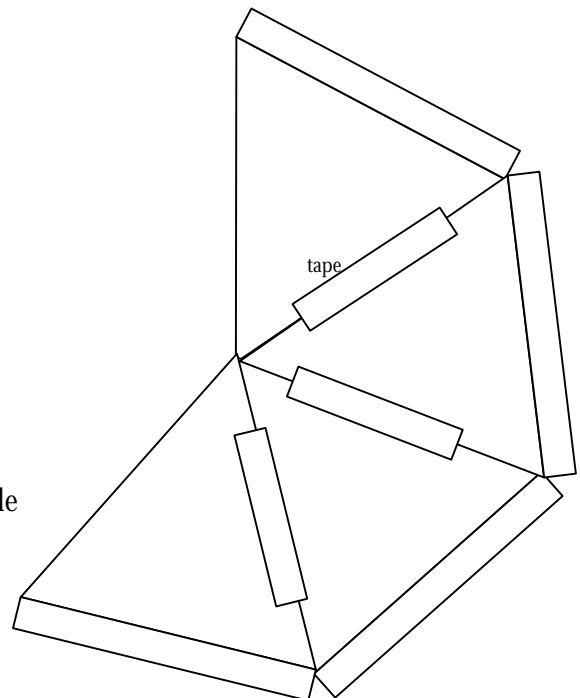
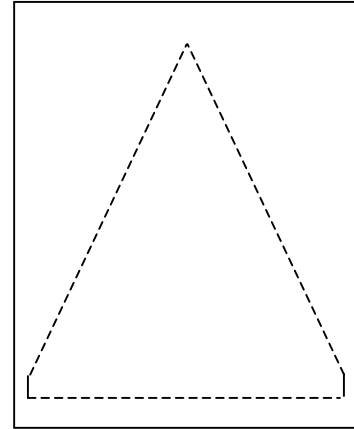
8. Carefully cut out all triangles drawn on tagboard (include tabs).

9. Lay the four triangles on your table like this, with long edges together and tape the seams.

10. Using a guide, draw a perfect square, 6-1/2 inches to a side, in the middle of the posterboard. Make sure that the four corners are 90°. Do it lightly in pencil first!

11. Fold the triangles to a pyramid shape and stand them on the posterboard square.

12. When you have "squared up the pyramid," tape the tabs to the posterboard.

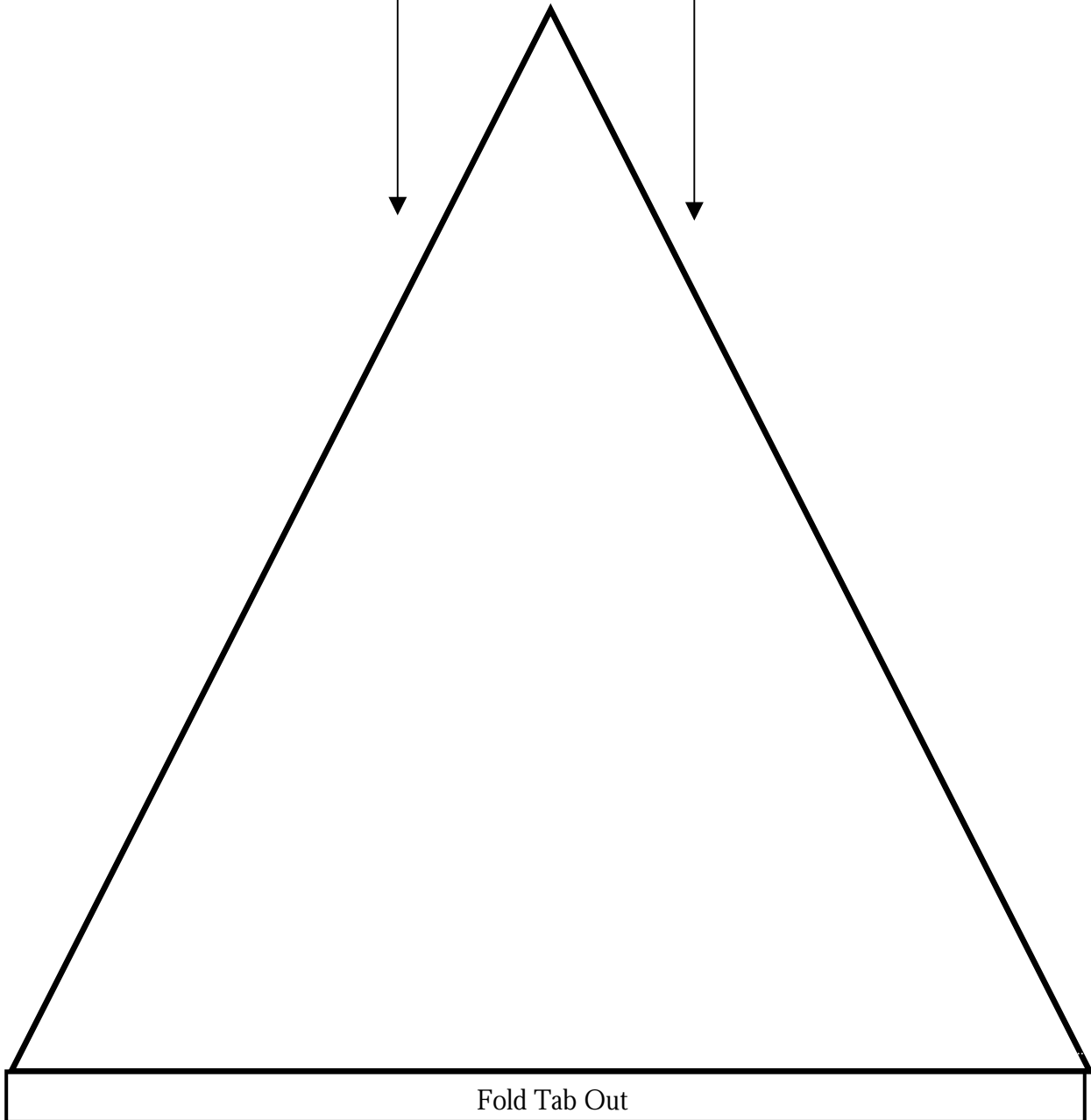
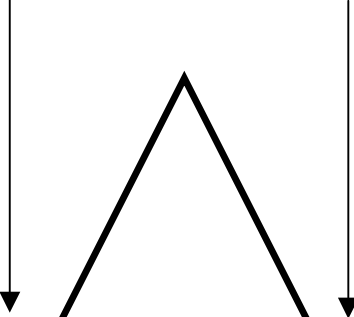


Triangle Template

Trace on tagboard or thin cardboard.

4 pieces.

Tape these edges together



Tape four tabs to Base

BALANCING FAMILY LIFE AND SERVICE TO GOD

1 As to the terminology I used in my letter, bidding thee to consecrate thyself to service in the Cause of God, the meaning of it is this: limit thy thoughts to teaching the Faith. Act by day and night according to the teachings and counsels and admonitions of Bahá'u'lláh. This doth not preclude marriage. 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

2 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 honour, as day succeedeth day. . . .

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, p. 279

3 You have asked whether a husband would be able to prevent his wife from embracing the divine light or a wife dissuade her husband from gaining entry into the Kingdom of God. In truth neither of them could prevent the other from entering into the Kingdom, unless the husband hath an excessive attachment to the wife or the wife to the husband. Indeed when either of the two worshippeth the other to the exclusion of God, then each could prevent the other from seeking admittance into His Kingdom.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL I, p. 392

4 This is in truth a Bahá'í house. Every time such a house or meeting place is founded it becomes one of the greatest aids to the general development of the town and country to which it belongs. It encourages the growth of learning and science and is known for its intense spirituality and for the love it spreads among the peoples.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, p. 72-73

5 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. We would have many more husbands in the Cause were the wives more thoughtful and moderate in their Bahá'í activities.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. I, P. 399

6 As regards your plans: the Guardian fully approves indeed of your view that no matter how urgent and vital the requirements of the teaching work may be you should under no circumstance neglect the education of your children, as towards them you have an obligation no less sacred than towards the Cause.

Any plan or arrangement you may arrive at which would combine your twofold duties towards your family and the Cause and would permit you to resume active work in the field of pioneer teaching, and also to take good care of your children so as to not jeopardize their future in the Cause would meet with the whole-hearted approval of the Guardian.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. I, P. 401

Closing Thoughts

1. Read the following quotation about the family's relationship to society.

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 conditions surrounding the family surround the nation. The happenings in the family are the happenings in the life of the nation. Would it add to the progress and advancement of a family if dissensions should arise among its members, fighting, pillaging each other, jealous and revengeful of injury, seeking selfish advantage? Nay, this would be the cause of the effacement of progress and advancement. So it is in the great family of nations, for nations are but an aggregate of families.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, p. 157

2. Discuss in the whole group:
 - What is the relationship of family unity to world peace?
3. Turn to your spouse and discuss how you can enhance your “nest of love” with your new understanding of marriage and childrearing.

Evaluations

Please take a few minutes to complete the evaluation of the course and give it to your facilitators, or send it directly to the National Children's Education and Resource Center.

Closing Devotions

Include prayers on spiritual growth, assistance, marriage and family.

EVALUATION

Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education

held on _____

in _____

Marriage and Family Life

facilitated by _____

sponsored by _____

Please candidly share your feelings and reactions. Your comments will be invaluable to us in planning future courses.

	Excellent	Very good	Fair	Poor
The facilitators were organized and clear in their presentation.				
The purpose of the course and the individual sessions was made clear.				
The materials supported the presentations.				
Adequate time was provided for reflection upon and recording of your observations.				
The training demonstrated the use of different teaching methods, teaching tools, and modalities of learning.				
The Sacred Writings were sufficiently utilized to elevate the spirit of the participants and lay the foundation for the work before them?				
The expectations and directions for your role as a teacher was made clear and seems sufficient?				

Please take time to expand on any of the items listed above, particularly if any are rated fair or poor so that we might improve the quality of the training.

What was most helpful to you?

What was least helpful to you?

What would you recommend for future workshops?

Letters for Research

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
BAHÁ'Í WORLD CENTRE

Department of the Secretariat

24 January 1993

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Further to our letter of 14 November 1991, the Universal House of Justice has now completed its consideration of your letter of 21 September 1991, in which you raised a number of questions pertaining to violence and to the sexual abuse of women and children. We have been instructed to provide the following response to your questions.

As you know, the principle of the oneness of mankind is described in the Bahá'í Writings as the pivot round which all the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve. It has widespread implications which affect and remould all dimensions of human activity. It calls for a fundamental change in the manner in which people relate to each other, and the eradication of those age-old practices which deny the intrinsic human right of every individual to be treated with consideration and respect.

Within the family setting, the rights of all members must be respected. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated:

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...

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. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written, "O ye lovers of God! In this, the cycle of Almighty God, violence and force, constraint and oppression, are one and all condemned. Let those who, driven by their passions or by their inability to exercise discipline in the control of their anger, might be tempted to inflict violence on another human being, be mindful of the condemnation of such disgraceful behaviour by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Among the signs of moral downfall in the declining social order are the high incidence of violence within the family, the increase in degrading and cruel treatment of spouses and children, and the spread of sexual abuse. It is essential that the members of the community of the Greatest Name take the utmost care not to be drawn into acceptance of such practices because of their prevalence. They must be ever mindful of their obligation to exemplify a new way of life distinguished by its respect for the dignity and rights of all people, by its exalted moral tone, and by its freedom from oppression and from all forms of abuse.

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.

A number of your questions pertain to the treatment of women, and are best considered in light of the principle of the equality of the sexes which is set forth in the Bahá'í Teachings. This principle 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, "The Guardian wishes to state that there is absolute equality between the two, and that no distinction or preference is permitted..." With the passage of time, during which Bahá'í men and women endeavour to apply more fully the principle of the equality of the sexes, will come a deeper understanding of the far-reaching ramifications of this vital principle. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated, "Until the reality of equality between man and woman is fully established and attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible."

The Universal House of Justice has in recent years urged that encouragement be given to Bahá'í women and girls to participate in greater measure in the social, spiritual and administrative activities of their communities, and has appealed to Bahá'í women to arise and demonstrate the importance of their role in all fields of service to the Faith.

For a man to use force to impose his will on a woman is a serious transgression of the Bahá'í Teachings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that:

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.

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.

From the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh Himself has come the following statement on the subject of the treatment of women:

The friends of God must be adorned with the ornament of justice, equity, 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. He, verily, speaketh the truth and commandeth that which benefitteth His servants and handmaidens. He is the Protector of all in this world and the next.

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. Bahá'u'lláh has warned: "They that follow their lusts and corrupt inclinations, have erred and dissipated their efforts. They, indeed, are of the lost." Believers might well ponder the exalted standard of conduct to which they are encouraged to aspire in the statement of Bahá'u'lláh concerning His "true follower", that: "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. Thus instructeth you the Pen of the Ancient of Days, as bidden by your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful."

One of the most heinous of sexual offences is the crime of rape. When a believer is a victim, she is entitled to the loving aid and support of the members of her community, and she is free to initiate action against the perpetrator under the law of the land should she wish to do so. If she becomes pregnant as a consequence of this assault, no pressure should be brought upon her by the Bahá'í institutions to marry. As to whether she should continue or terminate the pregnancy, it is for her to decide on the course of action she should follow, taking into consideration medical and other relevant factors, and in the light of the Bahá'í Teachings. If she gives birth to a child as a result of the rape, it is left to her discretion to seek financial support for the maintenance of the child from the father; however, his claim to any parental rights would, under Bahá'í law, be called into question, in view of the circumstances.

The Guardian has clarified, in letters written on his behalf that, "The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse," and that, "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." In this aspect of the marital relationship, as in all others, mutual consideration and respect should apply. If a Bahá'í suffers abuse or is subjected to rape by her husband, she has the right to turn to 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.

You have raised several questions about the treatment of children. It is clear from the Bahá'í Writings that a vital component of the education of children is the exercise of discipline. Shoghi Effendi has stated, in a letter written on his behalf about the education of children, that:

Discipline of some sort, whether physical, moral or intellectual is indeed indispensible, 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 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 ensure his healthy physical and moral development. Bahá'í parents cannot simply adopt an attitude of nonresistance 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 endeavour 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....

While the physical discipline of children is an acceptable part of their education and training, such actions are to be carried out "gently and patiently" and with "loving care", far removed from the anger and violence with which children are beaten and abused in some parts of the world. To treat children in such an abhorrent manner is a denial of their human rights, and a betrayal of the trust which the weak should have in the strong in a Bahá'í community.

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. At a time in the fortunes of humanity when, in the words of the Guardian, "The perversion of human nature, the degradation of human conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions, reveal themselves ... in their worst and most revolting aspects," and when "the voice of human conscience is stilled," when "the sense of decency and shame is obscured," the Bahá'í institutions must be uncompromising and vigilant in their commitment to the protection of the children entrusted to their care, and must not allow either threats or appeals to expediency to divert them from their duty. 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 behaviour, and to promote healing and therapy.

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.

As humanity passes through the age of transition in its evolution to a world civilization which will be illuminated by spiritual values and will be distinguished by its justice and its unity, the role of the Bahá'í community is clear: it must accomplish a spiritual transformation of its members, and must offer to the world a model of the society destined to come into being through the power of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Membership in the Bahá'í community is open to all who accept Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God, and who thereupon embark on the process of changing their conduct and refining their character. It is inevitable that this community will, at times, be subject to delinquent behaviour of members whose actions do not conform to the standards of the Teachings. At such times, the institutions of the Faith will not hesitate to apply Bahá'í law with justice and fairness in full confidence that this Divine Law is the means for the true happiness of all concerned.

However, it should be recognized that the ultimate solution to the problems of humanity lies not in penalties and punishments, but rather in spiritual education and illumination. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written:

It is incumbent upon human society to expend all its forces on the education of the people, and to copiously water men's hearts with the sacred streams that pour down from the Realm of the All-Merciful, and to teach them the manners of Heaven and spiritual ways of life, until every member of the community of man will be schooled, refined, and exalted to such a degree of perfection that the very committing of a shameful act will seem in itself the direst infliction and most agonizing of punishments, and man will fly in terror and seek refuge in his God from the very idea of crime, as something far harsher and more grievous than the punishment assigned to it.

It is toward this goal that the community of the Greatest Name is striving, aided and reinforced by the limitless power of the Holy Spirit.

With-loving Bahá'í greetings,

(signed Florence Conway)

For Department of the Secretariat

bc: International Teaching Centre

National Assemblies of Alaska, Australia, the United States,
the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Hawaii, New Zealand

Bahá'í International Community,

Office of Public Information, Haifa (with enclosure)

Office for the Advancement of Women (with enclosure)

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF CANADA

ASSEMBLÉE SPIRITUELLE NATIONALE
DES BAHÁ'ÍS DU CANADA

26 February 1993

The Spiritual Assembly of
the Bahá'ís of _____

Cherished Friends,

I am writing on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly in response to a request from an individual member of your Assembly for clarification of the principles governing the Assembly's responsibility in cases involving reported or suspected cases of child abuse.

An Assembly has both a legal and a moral responsibility in these matters and must report to the authorities any alleged or suspected instances of child abuse. The legislation in effect as of 1993 requires "any person" who suspects the possibility of child abuse to report it "forthwith". Regardless of the letter of the law, your Assembly's overriding responsibility is your moral obligation to ensure that any such case of suspected or reported child abuse is immediately communicated to the authorities, so that those agencies who are charged by our society to protect those who are at risk, are able to act swiftly, and bring all of their skill and training to bear upon the situation. The analysis of whether indeed the child is in any danger rests fully with the authorities and not with those (including the Assembly) who may receive such a report or have such a suspicion.

You do have a responsibility to give spiritual counsel to believers who may be violating the standards or principles of the Faith, and you should always do so, but the Assembly does not have the kind of professional training that is necessary to help someone change such behaviour, nor do you have legal authority to ensure that your counsel is enforced. For those who abuse women and children, it is not enough to express willingness to change such behaviour -the motivation to change must be coupled with extensive therapy over a period of time. This motivation is often propelled by the courageous willingness of those who report the offence, even in the face of the possibility of temporarily increasing the danger to the victim. Allowing the situation to continue, by silence, may very well be the greater evil.

It is important to understand all of the above within the context of the local Spiritual Assembly's pre-eminent responsibility to uphold principles of justice in all matters. Society has learned that in these cases it is necessary to act without hesitation and without delay to protect the children, recognizing that in some few rare cases the allegations of abuse may not hold up, but nevertheless always putting the protection of any child who may be at risk ahead of an adult. In the following passage, Bahá'u'lláh enjoins His followers to "be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness". For the Institution of the Assembly--the nascent House of Justice,--this means that it is important first to recognize there is a difference between "justice" and "mercy", and second, to understand that the exercise of "justice" is the obligation of the Institution of the Assembly:

"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." (underline added)

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, page 93)

7200 Leslie St., Thornhill, ON L3T 6L
(BAHACANADA TOR)

Telephone: (416) 339-8168
Fax: (416) 889-8194

Telex: 06 964713
iNet: BAHAI.NSA

"The Day of God is a Day of Joy, but also a Day of Judgment. Every man is guided both by the Love of God and by the Fear of God. In their relationships with one another individual believers should be loving and forgiving, overlooking one another's faults for the sake of God, but the Spiritual Assemblies are the upholders of the Law of God. They are embryonic Houses of Justice. The education of a child requires both love and discipline; so also does the education of believers and the education of a community. One of the failings of Bahá'ís, however, is to confuse these two roles, individuals behaving like little Spiritual Assemblies, and Spiritual Assemblies forgetting that they must exercise justice."

(The Universal House of Justice to an individual believer July 22, 1981)

The Universal House of Justice has recently shared with the National Spiritual Assembly a copy of a lengthy letter it addressed to an individual believer on the subject of violence and sexual abuse of women and children. I take this opportunity to forward this document to you, and encourage you to study it, as it emphasizes, in compelling language, the absolute prohibition in the Writings against the use of force as a means of imposing one's will, and underscores the responsibility of the Institutions of the Faith in unequivocal language: "It is inevitable that this community will, at times, be subject to delinquent behaviour of members whose actions do not conform to the standards of the Teachings. At such times, the institutions of the Faith will not hesitate to apply Bahá'í law with justice and fairness in full confidence that this Divine Law is the means for the true happiness of all concerned." (underline added)

Be assured of our readiness to be of assistance, and our prayers that your Assembly's efforts to serve and protect the friends in your trust are abundantly confirmed.

With abiding love,

Reginald Newkirk, Secretary

encl: The Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 24 Jan.
1993

11 September 1995

The National Spiritual Assembly of
The Bahá'ís of the United States

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has considered your letters of 27 August 1993 and 19 September 1994 in which you describe the impact of the changing sexual mores and the public debate on homosexuality on some of the members of the American Bahá'í community who are homosexuals. We are instructed to provide the following guidance in response to the National Spiritual Assembly's requests for a clarification of the Bahá'í law on homosexual practices and for assistance in guiding the believers.

It is important to understand that there is a difference between the Bahá'í attitude towards, on the one hand, the condition of homosexuality and those who are affected by it and, on the other, the practice of homosexual relations by members of the Bahá'í community.

As you know, the Bahá'í Faith strongly condemns all blatant acts of immorality, and it includes among them the expression of sexual love between individuals of the same sex. With regard to homosexual practices, Bahá'u'lláh, in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, paragraph 107, and Questions and Answers, number 49, forbids paederasty and sodomy. The following extract from one of His Tablets reveals the strength of His condemnation:

Ye are forbidden to commit adultery, sodomy and lechery. Avoid them, O concourse of the faithful. By the righteousness of God! Ye have been called into being to purge the world from the defilement of evil passions. This is what the Lord of all mankind hath enjoined upon you, could ye but perceive it. He who relateth himself to the All-Merciful and committeth satanic deeds, verily is not of Me. Unto this beareth witness every atom, pebble, tree and fruit, and beyond them this ever-proclaiming, truthful and trustworthy Tongue.

In a letter dated 26 March 1950, written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi, the authorised interpreter of the Bahá'í Teachings, further explicates the Bahá'í attitude towards homosexuality. It should be noted that the Guardian's interpretation of this subject is based on his infallible understanding of the Texts. It represents a statement of moral principle and unerring guidance to Bahá'ís who are homosexuals. The letter states:

No matter how devoted and fine the love may be between two 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.

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 handicap.

It is evident, therefore, that the prohibition against Bahá'ís engaging in homosexual behaviour is an explicit Teaching of the Cause. The Universal House of Justice is authorised to change or repeal its own legislation as conditions change, thus providing Bahá'í law with an essential element of flexibility, but it can not abrogate or change any of the laws which are

explicitly laid down in the sacred Texts. It follows, then, that the House of Justice has no authority to change this clear teaching on homosexual practice.

You mention that concern has been expressed by some of the friends that the unique identity of homosexual Bahá'ís is not sufficiently appreciated by the Bahá'í community. It is important to reflect on the fact that the Writings of the Faith not only acknowledge that each individual has a God-given identity, but they also set out the means by which this identity can achieve its highest development and fulfilment. Bahá'u'lláh attests that through the Teachings of the Manifestation of God "every man will advance and develop until he attaineth the station at which he can manifest all the potential forces with which his inmost true self hath been endowed". 'Abdu'l-Bahá observes that should man's "natural qualities ... be used and displayed in an unlawful way, they become blameworthy". Shoghi Effendi, in a letter dated 25 May 1936, written on his behalf, identifies man's "true self" with "his soul". In describing the nature of man's inner spiritual self or reality, he notes that the "two tendencies for good or evil are but manifestations of a single reality or self", and that the self "is capable of development in either way". Under-lining the importance of education to the actualisation of man's potential, the Guardian concludes:

All depends fundamentally on the training or education which man receives. Human nature is made up of possibilities both for good and evil. True religion can enable it to soar in the highest realm of the spirit, while its absence can, as we already witness around us, cause it to fall to the lowest depths of degradation and misery.

As a framework within which to consider the subject of homosexuality, it is important to acknowledge, with all due humility, that basic to the Bahá'í Teachings is the concept that it is only God Who knows the purpose of human life, and Who can convey this to us through His Manifestations. A distinguishing feature of human existence is that we have been given the capacity to know and love God and to consciously obey Him. Thus we also have the converse: the ability to turn away from God, to fail to love Him and to disobey Him. Indeed, left to himself, man is naturally inclined towards evil. Human beings need not only assistance in defining acceptable behaviour of one person towards another, but also guidance which will help them to refrain from doing that which is spiritually damaging to themselves. By responding to the Message of the Manifestation of God we learn how we should live and draw on the spiritual strength which comes with it. Through studying the Word of God and training ourselves to follow His commandments, we rise to the full stature that He has designed for us.

The material world, in relation to the spiritual world, is a world of imperfections. It is full of dangers and difficulties which have been greatly aggravated by man's neglect and misuse of his responsibilities. Human society itself, which exists in the material world, is in disastrous disarray.

Our appetites and inclinations are strongly influenced by the condition of our physical makeup, and our bodies are in varying degrees of health, depending upon factors such as heredity, environment, nourishment and our 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.

The view that homosexuality is a condition that is not amenable to change is to be questioned by the Bahá'ís. There are, of course, many kinds and degrees of homosexuality, and overcoming extreme conditions is sure to be more difficult than overcoming others. Nevertheless, as noted earlier, the Guardian has stated, that "through the advice and help of doctors, through a strong and determined effort, and through prayer, a soul can overcome this handicap".

The statistics which indicate that homosexuality is incurable are undoubtedly distorted by the fact that many of those who overcome the problem never speak about it in public, and others solve their problems without even consulting professional counsellors.

Nevertheless there are undoubtedly cases in which the individual finds himself (or herself) unable to eliminate a physical attraction to members of the same sex, even though he succeeds in controlling his behaviour. This is but one of the many trials and temptations to which human beings are subject in this life. For Bahá'ís, it cannot alter the basic concept taught by Bahá'u'lláh, that the kind of sexuality purposed by God is the love between a man and a woman, and that its primary (but not its only) purpose is the bringing of children into this world and providing them with a loving and protective environment in which they can be reared to know and love God. If, therefore, a homosexual cannot overcome his or her condition to the extent of being able to have a heterosexual marriage, he or she must single, and abstain from sexual relations. These are the same requirements as for a heterosexual person who does not marry. While Bahá'u'lláh encourages the believers to marry, it is important to note that marriage is by no means an obligation. It is for the individual to decide whether he or she wishes to lead a family life or to live in a state of celibacy.

The condition of being sexually attracted to some object other than to a mature member of the opposite sex, a condition of which homosexuality is but one manifestation, is regarded by the Faith as a distortion of true human nature, as a problem to be overcome, no matter what specific physical or psychological condition may be the immediate cause. Any Bahá'í who suffers from such a disability should be treated with understanding, and should be helped to control and overcome it. All of us suffer from imperfections which we must struggle to overcome and we all need one another's understanding and patience.

To regard homosexuals with prejudice and disdain would be entirely against the spirit of Bahá'í Teachings. The doors are open for all of humanity to enter the Cause of God, irrespective of their present circumstance; this invitation applies to homosexuals as well as any others who are engaged in practices contrary to the Bahá'í Teachings. Associated with this invitation is the expectation that all believers will make a sincere effort to eradicate those aspects of their conduct which are not in conformity with Divine Law. It is through such adherence to the Bahá'í Teachings that a true and enduring unity of the diverse elements of the Bahá'í community is achieved and safeguarded.

When a person wishes to join the Faith and it is generally known that he or she has a problem such as drinking, homosexuality, taking drugs, adultery, etc., the individual should be told in a patient and loving way of the Bahá'í Teachings on these matters. If it is later discovered that a believer is violating Bahá'í standards, it is the duty of the Spiritual Assembly to determine whether the immoral conduct is flagrant and can bring the name of the Faith into disrepute, in which case the Assembly must take action to counsel the believer and require him or her to make every effort to mend his ways. If the individual fails to rectify his conduct in spite of repeated warnings, sanctions should be imposed. Assemblies, of course, must exercise care not to pry into the private lives of the believers to ensure that they are behaving properly, but should not hesitate to take action in cases of blatant misbehaviour.

The Spiritual Assemblies should, to a certain extent, be forbearing in the matter of people's moral conduct, such as homosexuality, in view of the terrible deterioration of society in general. The Assemblies must also bear in mind that while awareness of contemporary social and moral values may well enhance their understanding of the situation of the homosexual, the standard which they are called upon to uphold is the Bahá'í standard. A flagrant violation of this standard

disgraces the Bahá'í community in its own eyes even if the surrounding society finds the transgression tolerable.

With regard to the organised network of homosexual Bahá'ís mentioned in your letter, the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to say that, while there is an appropriate role in the Bahá'í community for groups of certain individuals to come together to help each other to understand and to deal with certain problem situations, according to the Bahá'í Teachings there can be no place in our community for groups which actively promote a style of life that is contrary to the Teachings of the Cause. It should be understood that the homosexual tendencies of some individuals do not entitle them to an identity setting them apart from others. Such individuals share with every other Bahá'í the responsibility to adhere to the laws and principles of the Faith as well as the freedom to exercise administrative rights.

The Universal House of Justice will pray that, armed with the guidance contained in this letter, the National Spiritual Assembly will act with love, sensitivity and firmness to assist the believers both to gain a deeper understanding of their true and ennobling purpose in life and to make a strong and determined effort to overcome every handicap to their spiritual development.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

For Department of the Secretariat

