

Adultery

Bahá'u'lláh, Shoghi Effendi

Partial translation



Adultery

*"Ye have been forbidden to commit murder or adultery, or to engage in backbiting or calumny; shun ye, then, what hath been prohibited in the holy Books and Tablets."*¹

*"God hath imposed a fine on every adulterer and adulteress, to be paid to the House of Justice: nine mithqáls of gold, to be doubled if they should repeat the offence. Such is the penalty which He Who is the Lord of Names hath assigned them in this world; and in the world to come He hath ordained for them a humiliating torment. Should anyone be afflicted by a sin, it behoveth him to repent thereof and return unto his Lord. He, verily, granteth forgiveness unto whomsoever He willeth, and none may question that which it pleaseth Him to ordain. He is, in truth, the Ever-Forgiving, the Almighty, the All-Praised"*²

*"Should a woman be divorced in consequence of a proven act of infidelity, she shall receive no maintenance during her period of waiting. Thus hath the daystar of Our commandment shone forth resplendent from the firmament of justice. Truly, the Lord loveth union and harmony and abhorreth separation and divorce. Live ye one with another, O people, in radiance and joy. By My life! All that are on earth shall pass away, while good deeds alone shall endure; to the truth of My words God doth Himself bear witness. Compose your differences, O My servants; then heed ye the admonition of Our Pen of Glory and follow not the arrogant and wayward."*³

*"He has forbidden you adultery, sodomy, and betrayal"*⁴

"Question: Concerning the punishment of the adulterer and adulteress.

Answer: Nine mithqáls are payable for the first offense, eighteen for the second, thirty-six for the third, and so on, each succeeding fine being double the preceding. The weight of one mithqál is equivalent to nineteen nakhuds in accordance with the specification of the Bayán."⁵

1. Baha'u'llah, The Most Holy Book, par 19

2. Baha'u'llah, The Most Holy Book, par 49

3. Baha'u'llah, The Most Holy Book, par 70

4. Baha'u'llah, Amr va Khalq, Provisional translation

5. Baha'u'llah, Questions & Answers no. 23



“Question: Concerning the penalties for adultery, sodomy, and theft, and the degrees thereof.

Answer: The determination of the degrees of these penalties rests with the House of Justice.”⁶

"The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse, but condemns its illegitimate and improper expressions such as free love, companionate marriage and others, all of which it considers positively harmful to man and to the society in which he lives. The proper use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is precisely for this purpose that the institution of marriage has been established. The Bahá'ís do not believe in the suppression of the sex impulse but in its regulation and control."⁷

"With reference to the question you have asked concerning the Bahá'í attitude towards the problem of sex and its relation to marriage.

"The Bahá'í Teachings on this matter, which is of such vital concern and about which there is a wide divergency of views, are very clear and emphatic. Briefly stated the Bahá'í conception of sex is based on the belief that chastity should be strictly practised 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 therefor, and whoso violates this rule will not only be responsible to God, but will incur the necessary punishment from society."⁸

"The Bahá'í teaching on sexual intercourse is very clear. It is permissible only between a man and the woman who is his wife ..."⁹

"...Every other Word of Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Writings is a preachment on moral and ethical conduct; all else is the form, the chalice, into which the pure spirit must be poured; without the spirit and the action which must demonstrate it, it is a lifeless form. "When we realize that Bahá'u'lláh says adultery retards the progress of the soul in the after life -- so grievous is it -- and that drinking destroys the mind, and not to so much as approach it, we see how clear are our teachings on these subjects."¹⁰

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6. Baha'u'llah, Questions & Answers no. 49

7. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, September 5, 1938: Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973, p. 108

8. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, September 5, 1938: Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973, p. 107

9. From letter of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, February 6, 1973; excerpt from a letter in response to questions from an individual believer, September 5, 1938: Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973, p. 107

10. From letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, September 30, 1949: Living the Life, pp. 15-16

"When we realize that Bahá'u'lláh says adultery retards the progress of the soul in the afterlife--so grievous is it--and that drinking destroys the mind, and not to so much as approach it, we see how clear are our teachings on these subjects."¹¹

"You express surprise at the Guardian's reference to 'the necessary punishment from society'. In the Kitab-i-Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh prohibits sexual immorality and in the Annex to that Book states that the various degrees of sexual offences and the punishments for them are to be decided by the Universal House of Justice. In this connection it should be realised that there is distinction drawn in the Faith between the attitudes which should characterize individuals in their relationship to other people, namely, loving forgiveness, forbearance, and concern with one's own sins not the sins of others, and those attitudes which should be shown by the Spiritual Assemblies, whose duty is to administer the law of God with justice."¹²

"The question you raise as to the place in one's life that a deep bond of love with someone we meet other than our husband or wife can have is easily defined in view of the teachings. Chastity implies both before and after marriage an unsullied, chaste sex life. Before marriage absolutely chaste, after marriage absolutely faithful to one's chosen companion. Faithful in all sexual acts, faithful in word and in deed."¹³

"The Arabic word "ziná," here translated as "adultery," signifies both fornication and adultery. It applies not only to sexual relations between a married person and someone who is not his or her spouse, but also to extramarital sexual intercourse in general. One form of "ziná" is rape. The only penalty prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh is for those who commit fornication (see note 77); penalties for other kinds of sexual offense are left to the Universal House of Justice to determine."¹⁴

"God hath imposed a fine on every adulterer and adulteress, to be paid to the House of Justice"

Although the term translated here as adultery refers, in its broadest sense, to unlawful sexual intercourse between either married or unmarried individuals (see note 36 for a definition of the term), 'Abdu'lBahá has specified that the punishment here prescribed is for sexual intercourse between persons who are unmarried. He indicates that it remains for the Universal House of Justice to determine the penalty for adultery committed by a married individual. (See also Q&A 49.)

In one of His Tablets, 'Abdu'lBahá refers to some of the spiritual and social implications of the violation of the laws of morality and, concerning the penalty here described, He indicates that

¹¹. From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, September 30, 1949: Living the Life, pp. 15-16, World Centre, November 1972, in Lights of Guidance, no. 1159; also in Messages to Canada, pp. 121

¹². From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer; excerpts to all National Spiritual Assemblies, February 6, 1973: Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973, p. 110, in Lights of Guidance, no. 1148

¹³. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, September 28, 1941: Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973, pp. 108-109, in Lights of Guidance, no. 1212

¹⁴. Notes to the Kitab-i-Aqdas no. 36

the aim of this law is to make clear to all that such an action is shameful in the eyes of God and that, in the event that the offense can be established and the fine imposed, the principal purpose is the exposure of the offenders—that they are shamed and disgraced in the eyes of society. He affirms that such exposure is in itself the greatest punishment.

The House of Justice referred to in this verse is presumably the Local House of Justice, currently known as the Local Spiritual Assembly.”¹⁵

“nine mithqáls of gold, to be doubled if they should repeat the offense

A mithqál is a unit of weight. The weight of the traditional mithqál used in the Middle East is equivalent to 24 nakhuds. However, the mithqál used by the Bahá’ís consists of 19 nakhuds, “in accordance with the specification of the Bayán” (Q&A 23). The weight of nine of these mithqál equals 32.775 grams or 1.05374 troy ounces.

In relation to the application of the fine, Bahá’u’lláh clearly specifies that each succeeding fine is double the preceding one (Q&A 23); thus the fine imposed increases in geometrical progression. The imposition of this fine is intended for a future condition of society, at which time the law will be supplemented and applied by the Universal House of Justice.”¹⁶



Islamic Dispensation

“And those who do not invoke with Allah another deity or kill the soul which Allah has forbidden [to be killed], except by right, and do not commit unlawful sexual intercourse. And whoever should do that will meet a penalty. Multiplied for him is the punishment on the Day of Resurrection, and he will abide therein humiliated. Except for those who repent, believe and do righteous work. For them Allah will replace their evil deeds with good. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.”¹⁷

“The [unmarried] woman or [unmarried] man found guilty of sexual intercourse - lash each one of them with a hundred lashes, and do not be taken by pity for them in the religion [i.e., law] of Allāh, if you should believe in Allāh and the Last Day. And let a group of the believers witness their punishment.”¹⁸



¹⁵. Notes to the Kitab-i-Aqdas no. 77

¹⁶. Notes to the Kitab-i-Aqdas no. 78

¹⁷. The Holy Qur’an, Surih Al Furqan 25:68-70

¹⁸. The Holy Qur’an, Surih Al Nur 24:2

Christian Dispensation

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'" ¹⁹

"But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." ²⁰

"Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. 9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." ²¹



Jewish Dispensation

"Thou Shalt not Commit Adultery" ²²

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's." ²³



¹⁹. Matthew 5:27-28

²⁰. Revelation 21:8

²¹. Matthew 19:8-9

²². Exodus 20:14 & Deuteronomy 5:18

²³. Exodus 20:15 & Deuteronomy 5:21