

Homosexuality

Bahá'u'lláh

Partial translation



Homosexuality

*"It is forbidden you to wed your fathers' wives. We shrink, for very shame, from treating of the subject of boys. Fear ye the Merciful, O peoples of the world! Commit not that which is forbidden you in Our Holy Tablet, and be not of those who rove distractedly in the wilderness of their desires."*¹

*"Know ye that the embodiment of liberty and its symbol is the animal. That which beseemeth man is submission unto such restraints as will protect him from his own ignorance, and guard him against the harm of the mischief-maker. Liberty causeth man to overstep the bounds of propriety, and to infringe on the dignity of his station. It debaseth him to the level of extreme depravity and wickedness."*²

*"He has forbidden you adultery, sodomy, and betrayal"*³

*"Then we must labor to destroy the animal condition, till the meaning of humanity shall come to light."*⁴

"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."⁵

"Amongst the many other evils afflicting society in this spiritual low water mark in history, is the question of immorality, and over-emphasis of sex. Homosexuality, according to the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, is spiritually condemned. This does not mean that people so afflicted must not be helped and advised and sympathized with. It does mean that we do not believe that it is a permissible way of life; which, alas, is all too often the accepted attitude nowadays.

"We must struggle against the evils in society by spiritual means, and medical and social ones as well. We must be tolerant but uncompromising, understanding but immovable in our point of view.

1. Baha'u'llah, The Most Holy Book, para 107

2. Baha'u'llah, The Most Holy Book, para 123

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

4. Bahá'u'lláh, Seven Valleys

5. " Baha'u'llah, Questions & Answers no. 49



"The thing people need to meet this type of trouble, as well as every other type, is greater spiritual understanding and stability; and of course we Bahá'ís believe that ultimately this can only be given to mankind through the Teachings of the Manifestation of God for this Day."⁶

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

"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.

"God judges each soul on its own merits. The Guardian cannot tell you what the attitude of God would be towards a person who lives a good life in most ways, but not in this way. All he can tell you is that it is forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh, and that one so afflicted should struggle and struggle again to overcome it. We must be hopeful of God's Mercy but not impose upon it."⁷

"Certainly the problem confronting you is a difficult one. However, its solution lies within your power, for Bahá'u'lláh has assured us that God '*will never deal unjustly with anyone, neither will He task a soul beyond its power*'. And again, 'Whensoever he hath fulfilled the conditions implied in the verse: "Whoso maketh efforts for Us," he shall enjoy the blessings conferred by the words: "In Our Way shall We assuredly guide him." ' You can be confident that with the help of doctors, by prayer and meditation, by self-abnegation and by giving as much time as possible to serving the Cause in your community you can eventually succeed in overcoming your problem."

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"The question of how to deal with homosexuals is a very difficult one. Homosexuality is forbidden in the Bahá'í Faith by Bahá'u'lláh; so, for that matter, are immorality and adultery. If one is going to start imposing heavy sanctions on people who are the victims of this abnormality, however repulsive it may be to others, then it is only fair to impose equally heavy sanctions on any Bahá'ís who step beyond the moral limits defined by Bahá'u'lláh. Obviously at the present time this would create an impossible and ridiculous situation.

"He feels, therefore, that, through loving advice, through repeated warnings, any friends who are flagrantly immoral should be assisted, and, if possible, restrained. If their activities overstep all bounds and become a matter of public scandal, then the Assembly can consider depriving them of their voting rights. However, he does not advise this course of action, and feels it should only be resorted to in very flagrant cases."⁹

6. From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, May 21, 1954

7. From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, March 26, 1950

8. From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, March 26, 1950

9. From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, August 20, 1955

“the subject of boys

The word translated here as “boys” has, in this context, in the Arabic original, the implication of pederasty. Shoghi Effendi has interpreted this reference as a prohibition on all homosexual relations.

The Bahá'í teachings on sexual morality center on marriage and the family as the bedrock of the whole structure of human society and are designed to protect and strengthen that divine institution. Bahá'í law thus restricts permissible sexual intercourse to that between a man and the woman to whom he is married.

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

Bahá'u'lláh makes provision for the Universal House of Justice to determine, according to the degree of the offense, penalties for adultery and sodomy (Q&A 49)."¹⁰

"This law is no reason for Bahá'ís to consider homosexuals as outcasts. If they are not Bahá'ís there is also no reason to expect them to obey the Bahá'í law in this respect any more than we would expect a non-Bahá'í to abstain from drinking alcohol."¹¹

"To regard a person who has a homosexual orientation with prejudice or disdain is entirely against the spirit of the Faith. And where occasion demands, it would be appropriate to speak out or act against unjust or oppressive measures directed towards homosexuals."¹²

"In working for social justice, Bahá'ís must inevitably distinguish between those dimensions of public issues that are in keeping with the Bahá'í Teachings, which they can actively support, and those that are not, which they would neither promote nor necessarily oppose. In connection with issues of concern to homosexuals, the former would be freedom from discrimination and the latter the opportunity for civil marriage. Such distinctions are unavoidable when addressing any social issue. For example, Bahá'ís actively work for the establishment of world peace but, in the process, do not engage in partisan political activities directed against particular governments."¹³

"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 Baha'i Teachings on these matters. If it is later discovered that a

¹⁰. Notes to the Kitab-i-Aqdas no. 134

¹¹. Universal House of Justice, 16 March 1992

¹². Research Department, On behalf of the Universal House of Justice

¹³. Research Department, On behalf of the Universal House of Justice

believer is violating Baha'i 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 misbehavior."¹⁴

"A number of sexual problems such as homosexuality and transsexuality can well have medical aspects, and in such cases recourse should certainly be had to the best medical assistance. But it is clear from the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh that homosexuality is not a condition to which a person should be reconciled, but is a distortion of his or her nature which should be controlled and overcome. This may require a hard struggle, but so also can be the struggle of a heterosexual person to control his or her desires. The exercise of self-control in this, as in so very many other aspects of life, has a beneficial effect on the progress of the soul. It should, moreover, be borne in mind that although to be married is highly desirable, and Bahá'u'lláh has strongly recommended it, it is not the central purpose of life. If a person has to wait a considerable period before finding a spouse, or if ultimately, he or she must remain single, it does not mean that he or she is thereby unable to fulfil his or her life's purpose."¹⁵

"... Any act or activity by a believer which is contrary to our teachings will surely be harmful to the spiritual future of the individual concerned, and may give non-Bahá'ís a wrong impression of the principles of our Faith. Whereas consider how important it is for a believer to reflect in his actions the redeeming features of the Cause he has embraced. Shoghi Effendi has pointed out:

'Not by the force of numbers, not by the mere exposition of a set of new and noble principles, not by an organized campaign of teaching—no matter how worldwide and elaborate in its character—not even by the staunchness of our faith or the exaltation of our enthusiasm, can we ultimately hope to vindicate in the eyes of a critical and sceptical age the supreme claim of the Abhá Revelation. One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely, the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendour of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh.'

"While recognizing the divine origin and force of the sex impulse in man, religion teaches that it must be controlled, and Bahá'u'lláh's law confines its expression to the marriage relationship. The unmarried homosexual is therefore in the same position as anyone else who does not marry. The Law of God requires them to practise chastity.

"Even though you feel that the conflict between sensuality and spirituality is more than you can bear, your affirmation—I do know I am a Bahá'í—is a positive factor in the battle you must wage. Every believer needs to remember that an essential characteristic of this physical world is that

¹⁴. Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated September 11, 1995, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*

¹⁵. From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, January 12, 1973: cited in *Messages from The Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973*, pp. 110-111

we are constantly faced with trials, tribulations, hardships and sufferings and that by overcoming them we achieve our moral and spiritual development; that we must seek to accomplish in the future what we may have failed to do in the past; that this is the way God tests His servants and we should look upon every failure or shortcoming as an opportunity to try again and to acquire a fuller consciousness of the Divine Will and purpose." ¹⁶

"The House of Justice comments that while there is little in Bahá'í literature that specifically points to the causes of homosexuality itself, there is much that concerns the nature of man, his inner life and growth, and the way to a true Bahá'í life. If you are sincerely intent on overcoming your problem, you must yourself determine to resist wayward impulses each time they arise and the House of Justice feels that there is no better way than to turn to the Writings to divert our thoughts into spiritual channels, perhaps to concentrate on what we may do to help others along the way to discovering the Bahá'í Faith. The more we occupy ourselves with teaching the Cause and serving our fellow-man in this way, the stronger we become in resisting that which is abhorrent to our spiritual selves.

"Man's physical existence on this earth is a period during which the moral exercise of his free will is tried and tested in order to prepare his soul for the other worlds of God, and we must welcome affliction and tribulations as opportunities for improvement in our eternal selves. The House of Justice points out that homosexuals are not the only segment of human society labouring at this daily task—every human being is beset by such inner promptings as pride, greed, selfishness, lustful heterosexual or homosexual desires, to name a few which must be overcome, and overcome them we must if we are to fulfil the purpose of our human existence."

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"There should be real incentive for you to courageously face the problems inherent in the situation you describe in your letter, and to firmly resolve to change your way of life. But you must desire to do so. Both you and your Bahá'í friend must first recognize that a homosexual relationship subverts the purpose of human life and that determined effort to overcome the wayward tendencies which promote this practice which, like other sexual vices, is so abhorrent; the Creator of all mankind will help you both to return to a path that leads to true happiness." ¹⁸

"Our appetites and inclinations are strongly influenced by the condition of our physical makeup, and our bodies are in varying degrees of health, depending on factors such as heredity, environment, nourishment and our own treatment of them. Genetic variations occur, producing conditions which can create problems for the individual. Some conditions are of an emotional or psychological nature, producing such imbalances as quickness to anger, recklessness, timorousness, and so forth; others involve purely physical characteristics, resulting not only in unusual capacities but also in handicaps or diseases of various kinds. Whether deficiencies are inborn or are acquired, our purpose in this life is to overcome them and to train ourselves in accordance with the pattern that is revealed to us in the divine Teachings." ¹⁹

¹⁶. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, January 9, 1977

¹⁷. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, July 16, 1980

¹⁸. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, August 23, 1982

Islamic Dispensation

*"Indeed, you approach men with desire, instead of women. Rather, you are a transgressing people."*²⁰

*"Do you approach males among the worlds. And leave what your Lord has created for you as mates? But you are a people transgressing."*²¹

*"Do you indeed approach men with desire instead of women? Rather, you are a people behaving ignorantly."*²²

Christian & Jewish Dispensation

*"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination."*²³

*"If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them."*²⁴

*"For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done."*²⁵

*"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."*²⁶

19. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, Sept. 11, 1995; published in "The American Bahá'í", Qawl 152 BE/Nov. 23, 1995, pp. 11

20. The Holy Qur'an, Surih Al A'araf 80:81

21. The Holy Qur'an, Surih Al Shu'ara 25:165-166

22. The Holy Qur'an, Surih Al Naml 27:55

23. Leviticus 18:22

24. Leviticus 20:13

25. Romans 1:26-28

26. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

*"Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted."*²⁷

*"But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband."*²⁸



²⁷. 1 Timothy 1:8-11

²⁸. 1 Corinthians 7:2