

XVI. THE FAMILY

Compiled from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l

Original English



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A. Family Relationships¹

1. Family Ties

"Deep as are family ties, we must always remember that the spiritual ties are far deeper; they are everlasting and survive death, whereas physical ties, unless supported by spiritual bonds, are confined to this life. You should do all in your power, through prayer and example, to open the eyes of your family to the Bahá'í Faith, but do not grieve too much over their actions. Turn to your Bahá'í brothers and sisters who are living with you in the light of the Kingdom."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, May 8, 1942)

"Do not be satisfied until each one with whom you are concerned is to you as a member of your family ... if you can attain to this, your difficulties will vanish; you will know what to do."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Pattern of Bahá'í Life, p. 24)

1. The Family: A Special Kind of Community — Each Member Has Rights and Responsibilities

"A family, however, is a very special kind of 'community'. The Research Department has not come across any statements which specifically name the father as responsible for the 'security, progress and unity of the family' as is stated in Bahiyyih Nakhjavani's book, but it can be inferred from a number of the responsibilities placed upon him, that the father can be regarded as the 'head' of the family. 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

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advancement. The training which a 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. This principle of the husband's responsibility [pg 220] to provide for and protect the family can be seen applied also in the law of intestacy which provides that the family's dwelling place passes, on the father's death, not to his widow, but to his eldest son; the son at the same time has the responsibility to care for his mother."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, December 28, 1980)

1. The Family Progresses When There is Unity

"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 tranquillity, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but added to its stature and its lasting honour, as day succeedeth day...."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 279)

"If love and agreement are manifest in a single family, that family will advance, become illumined and spiritual; but if enmity and hatred exist within it destruction and dispersion are inevitable."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 144-145, 1982 ed.)

1. Bahá'u'lláh Provides Way to Remove Hostility and Dissension from the World

"Consider the harmful effect of discord and dissension in a family; then reflect upon the favours and blessings which descend upon that family when unity exists among its various members. What incalculable benefits and blessings would descend upon the great human family if unity and brotherhood were established! In this century when the beneficent results of unity and the ill effects of discord are so clearly apparent, the means for the attainment and accomplishment of human fellowship have appeared in the world. His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh has proclaimed and provided the way by which hostility and dissension may be removed from the human world. He has left no ground or possibility for strife and disagreement. First he has proclaimed the oneness of mankind and specialized religious teachings for existing human conditions."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Star of the West, Vol. 17, No. 7, p. 232)

1. It is Important for Man to Raise a Family

"It is highly important for man to raise a family. So long as he is young, because of youthful self-complacency, he does not realize its significance, but this will be a source of regret when he grows old... 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 true and sincere love [pg 221] towards each other and educate their children in such a manner as to blazon the fame and glory of their family."

(From a talk of Abdu'l-Bahá: Family Life, A Compilation of the Universal House of Justice, p. 13)

1. Keys to Strengthening of Family

"The relationship between husband and wife must be viewed in the context of the Bahá'í ideal of family life. Bahá'u'lláh came to bring unity to the world, and a fundamental unity is that of the family. Therefore, one must believe that the Faith is intended to strengthen the family, not weaken it, and one of the keys to the strengthening of unity is loving consultation. 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 of the Universal House of Justice, December 28, 1980 to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand)

1. Mother-in-Law Problem

"Regarding your other question concerning the strained relationship between you and your mother-in-law and what you can do to alleviate the situation, we feel you should, with the help and consultation of your husband, persevere in your efforts to achieve unity in the family. From your description of the unfriendly attitude your mother-in-law displays toward you it is clear that you will not have an easy task. However, the important thing is that you, as a Bahá'í, are aware of Abdu'l-Bahá's admonition to concentrate on an individual's good qualities and that this approach to your mother-in-law can strengthen you in your resolve to achieve unity. And furthermore, perseverance in prayer will give you the strength to continue your efforts."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, September 6, 1970: Family Life, A Compilation of the Universal House of Justice, p. 29)

1. A Truly Bahá'í Home — A Fortress Upon which the Cause Can Rely

"A truly Bahá'í home is a true fortress upon which the Cause can rely while planning its campaigns. If ... and ... love each other and would like to marry, Shoghi Effendi does not wish them to think that by doing so they are depriving themselves of the privilege of service; in fact such a union will enhance their ability to serve. There is nothing more beautiful than to have young Bahá'ís marry and found truly Bahá'í homes, the type Bahá'u'lláh wishes them to be...."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, November 6, 1932: Ibid.)

1. The Home is an Institution Bahá'u'lláh Has Come to Strengthen and Not to Weaken

"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 [pg 222] 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."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, May 14, 1929: Ibid.)

1. Preserve Bahá'í Families: Harmony, Unity and Love Highest Ideals in Human Relationships

"Whenever there is a Bahá'í family, those concerned should by all means do all they can to preserve it, because divorce is strongly condemned in the Teachings, whereas harmony, unity and love are held up as the highest ideals in human relationships. This must always apply to the Bahá'ís, whether they are serving in the pioneering field or not."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central America, November 9, 1956: Ibid., p. 20)

1. Rights and Prerogatives of Each Member of the Family

"According to the teachings 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, 1982 ed.)

1. Violence in the Home

"No statements dealing directly with violence in the family have come to light from the Writings; however, the House of Justice feels that the absence of specific references to the subject should not be construed as implying that we do not have the necessary guidance in the Faith to treat the problems cited in your letter. Acts of violence might properly be regarded as a negation of

the persistent emphasis on concord, understanding and unity which are at the heart of the Bahá'í Teachings, and the sacred Writings are replete with advice as to how these positive objectives may be attained. In His 'Tablet of the World' Bahá'u'lláh states,

'...The distinguishing feature that marketh the pre-eminent character of this Supreme Revelation consisteth in that We have, on the one hand, blotted out from the pages of God's holy Book whatsoever hath been the cause of strife, of malice and mischief amongst the children of men and have, on the other, laid down the essential prerequisites of concord, of understanding, of complete and enduring unity. Well is it with them that keep My statutes.'

"Elsewhere in the same Tablet the 'people of God' are forbidden 'to engage in contention and conflict.' In view of such statements and the stress laid by both Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá on love and harmony as the hallmark of marriage, the law for which Bahá'u'lláh describes as a 'fortress for well-being and salvation,' and in view of Abdu'l-Bahá's exhortation that each member of the family must uphold the rights of the others, it becomes obvious that violence in the family is antithetical to the spirit of the Faith and a practice to be condemned." [pg 223]

"If the broad structure of society is to remain intact, resolute efforts, including medical ones, as necessary, should be made to curb acts of aggression within families, particularly their extreme forms of wife beating and child abuse by parents. This is a matter of fundamental importance, for if the friends are not able to maintain harmony within their families, on what other basis do they hope to demonstrate to a skeptical world the efficacy of the preeminent character of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh? What possible influence could they hope to exert on the development of nations and the establishment of world peace? The following statement by the beloved Master sheds illumination on these points:

'...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, all 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....'

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, September 22, 1983)

1. Love Can Change Vile, Mean Person into Heavenly Soul

"The Guardian ... is very much grieved indeed to learn of the severe opposition which you are encountering from your husband because of your affiliation with the Cause. He can very well realize the terrible condition facing you, but feels confident that Bahá'u'lláh is guiding you to follow the right way, and is continually assisting and strengthening you in your efforts to solve this most serious and challenging problem of your life. The staunch and unwavering loyalty and

devotion which you have thus far so splendidly demonstrated in your attitude to the Faith is truly remarkable and worthy of the highest praise and admiration. The persecutions from which you are now suffering have this one great advantage, namely to deepen your faith in the Cause, and to revive and refresh your energies for its service. You should, therefore, rejoice and welcome those sufferings in so far as they serve to further awaken your consciousness of being a member of the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh."

"The Guardian wishes me specially to urge you to remain patient and confident, and above all to show your husband the utmost kindness and love, in return for all the opposition and hatred you receive from him. A conciliatory and friendly attitude in such cases is not only the duty of every Bahá'í but is also the most effective way of winning for the Cause the sympathy and admiration of its former foes and enemies. Love is, indeed, a most potent elixir that can transform the vilest and meanest of people into heavenly souls. May your example serve to further confirm the truth of this beautiful teaching of our Faith."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, December 6, 1935) [pg 224]

1. Believer Must Be Patient with Non-Bahá'í Spouse, Attract with Loving Kindness, Wisdom, Tact

"As to your husband who, he is most sorry to hear, seems to be so antagonistic to the Cause, having fallen under the evil influence of Mr. ...: The Guardian wishes you to be patient with him, and to endeavour through loving kindness, wisdom and tact to enlist his consideration and sympathy for the Faith. However unfriendly his present attitude to the Cause may be, and no matter how seriously he may interfere in your activities as a believer, you should never lose hope of winning him to the Faith, nay even of guiding him to openly and actively assist you in your Bahá'í activities. With the unfailing help of Bahá'u'lláh and the example of your own conduct your task will assuredly be made easy and will be crowned with success."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 15, 1939)

1. Teaching Relatives

"He would not advise you to in any way force the teachings on your husband, but rather through prayer, love and example attract his heart to what he will be forced to see has not only made you a happier person but a better wife and mother than ever before. It is often most difficult to teach those nearest to us, but the Guardian will earnestly pray that your husband and children will join you in serving this wonderful Cause."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer: High Endeavours, Messages to Alaska, pp. 72-73)

1. Earn Right to Plead on Behalf of Family

"He was sorry to hear that Mrs. ... is in an unhappy state of mind. She should certainly not grieve if she finds that her family are not receptive to the teachings — for not every soul is spiritually enlightened. Indeed, many members of the families of the Prophets themselves have remained unconverted even in face of the example and persuasion of the Manifestation of God; therefore, the friends should not be distressed by such things but rather leave the future of those they love in the hand of God, and by their services and devotion to the Faith, win the right to plead for their ultimate spiritual re-birth."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 9, 1942)

1. One Should Not Be Deceptive with Non-Bahá'í Spouse or Parents

"It seems to him that just as you leave your husband free to believe or not to believe in whatever pleases him, he should accord you the same rudimentary privilege. Surely the right to worship God in the way one believes to be right is the greatest fundamental freedom in the world? On the other hand no one should force one's own convictions on another and if Mr. ... objects to your Bahá'í affiliation you should carry on your activities not secretly, but not in such a way as to force him to be constantly conscious of them. In other words, you should, for his sake, sometimes forgo the pleasure of attending a Feast or meeting if there is something he wants you to do with him."

"The Guardian does not feel your daughter should deceive her father and not let him know she is a Bahá'í. She, like you, for his sake should be willing [pg 255] to sacrifice her attendance at meetings sometimes, but he cannot very well force her to not believe and accept what she holds to be the Truth for this Age!"

"Every sincere believer in God must inevitably make some sacrifices, and, however heavy these may be, they are insignificant compared to the blessing of accepting Bahá'u'lláh. This is certainly true of dear Mr. ... who has suffered because of the firmness of his faith. We cannot bow to the blindness of the world; all we can do is to be tactful."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, September 22, 1948)

1. Duty of Believer to Endeavour to Lead Family to the Faith

"...If the believer is the only one of his family who has embraced the Faith, it is his duty to endeavour to lead as many other family members as possible to the light of divine guidance. As soon as a Bahá'í family unit emerges, the members should feel responsible for making the collective life of the family a spiritual reality, animated by divine love and inspired by the ennobling principles of the Faith. To achieve this purpose, the reading of the Sacred Writings and prayers should ideally become a daily family activity. As far as the teaching work is concerned, just as individuals are called upon to adopt teaching goals, the family itself could adopt its own goals. In this way the friends could make of their families strong healthy units, bright candles for the diffusion of the light of the Kingdom, and powerful centres to attract the

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, April 17, 1981)

1. **If Family Members Are Hostile, Avoid Antagonizing Them, Leave Them to Themselves**

"Not every one is ready to receive the Cause, but in every walk of life there are souls longing for this new Divine Outpouring, and sufficiently mature spiritually to accept it. The Bahá'ís, each according to his own opportunities, must seek out such people."

"The Guardian deeply regrets the hostile attitude of some members of your family towards the Cause you have arisen to serve, and he feels that you should do everything in your power to avoid antagonizing them — short, of course, of giving up your Faith and becoming inactive in it."

"As you cannot induce them to be interested in it, the best thing to do is what the Master always advised in such cases: leave them to themselves, and pray for them. The Guardian, you may be sure, will also pray for their illumination. Many people have, after bitterly opposing the Faith, been eventually won over by the patience, love, tact and prayers of their Bahá'í relative or friend."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 14, 1943)



B. The Relationship Between Husband and Wife

1. **Keys to Strengthening of Family**

"The relationship between husband and wife must be viewed in the context of [pg 226] the Bahá'í ideal of family life. Bahá'u'lláh came to bring unity to the world, and a fundamental unity is that of the family. Therefore, one must believe that the Faith is intended to strengthen the family, not weaken it, and one of the keys to the strengthening of unity is loving consultation. 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 to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, December 28, 1980)

1. **Honour and Privilege Ordained for Women: Obedience to Husbands**

"It is in this context of mutual and complementary duties and responsibilities that one should read the Tablet in which Abdu'l-Bahá gives the following exhortation:

'O Handmaids of the Self-Sustaining Lord! Exert your efforts so that you may attain the honour and privilege ordained for women. Undoubtedly the greatest glory of women is servitude at His

Threshold and submissiveness at His door; it is the possession of a vigilant heart, and praise of the incomparable God; it is heartfelt love towards other handmaids and spotless chastity; it is obedience to and consideration for their husbands and the education and care of their children; and it is tranquillity, and dignity, perseverance in the remembrance of the Lord, and the utmost enkindlement and attraction."

(Ibid.)

1. **Domination by Husband or Wife Not Right**

"This exhortation to the utmost degree of spirituality and self-abnegation should not be read as a legal definition giving the husband absolute authority over his wife, for, in a letter written to an individual believer on 22th July 1943, the beloved Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf:

'The Guardian, in his remarks ... about parents and children, wives and husbands' relations in America meant that there is a tendency in that country for children to be too independent of the wishes of their parents and lacking in the respect due to them. Also wives, in some cases, have a tendency to exert an unjust degree of domination over their husbands which, of course, is not right, anymore than that the husband should unjustly dominate his wife.'

(Ibid.)

1. **Time When Wife Should Defer to Husband and Time When Husband Should Defer to Wife**

"In any group, however loving the consultation, there are nevertheless points on which, from time to time, agreement cannot be reached. In a Spiritual Assembly this dilemma is resolved by a majority vote. There can, however, be no majority where only two parties are involved, as in the case of a husband and wife. There are, therefore, times when a wife should defer to her husband, and times when a husband should defer to his wife, but neither should ever unjustly dominate the other. In short, the relationship between husband and wife [pg 227] should be as held forth in the prayer revealed by Abdu'l-Bahá which is often read at Bahá'í weddings: 'Verily they are married in obedience to Thy command. Cause them to become the signs of harmony and unity until the end of time.'"²

(Ibid.)

1. **In Tablet of the World Women and Men Envisaged as Breadwinners**

"In the Tablet of the World, Bahá'u'lláh Himself has envisaged that women as well as men would be breadwinners in stating:

'Everyone, whether man or woman, should hand over to a trusted person a portion of what he or she earneth through trade, agriculture or other occupation, for the training and education of

2. (Bahá'í Prayers, p. 107, 1982 ed.)

children, to be spent for this purpose with the knowledge of the Trustees of the House of Justice."

(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 90)

"A very important element in the attainment of such equality is Bahá'u'lláh's provision that boys and girls must follow essentially the same curriculum in schools."

(Ibid.)

1. Love Between Husband and Wife

"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 should 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: Family Life, A Compilation of the Universal House of Justice)

1. The Institution of Marriage

"The institution of marriage, as established by Bahá'u'lláh, while giving due importance to the physical aspect of marital union considers it as subordinate to the moral and spiritual purposes and functions with which it has been invested by an all-wise and loving Providence. Only when these different values are given each their due importance, and only on the basis of the subordination of the physical to the moral, and the carnal to the spiritual can such excesses and laxity in marital relations as our decadent age is so sadly witnessing be avoided, and family life be restored to its original purity, and fulfill the true function for which it has been instituted by God."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, May 8, 1939: Ibid.)

1. Husband and Wife as a Single Soul

"...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." [pg 228]

"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)

1. **Wife Should Treat Husband with Kindness**

"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."

(Ibid., p. 122)

1. **Tolerate Cruel Actions, Ill Treatment, Demonstrate Loving Kindness**

"Hold thy husband dear and always show forth an amiable temper towards him, no matter how ill-tempered he may be. Even if thy loving kindness maketh him more bitter, manifest thou more kindliness, more tenderness, be more loving and tolerate his cruel actions and ill-treatment."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Family Life, A Compilation of the Universal House of Justice)

1. **Pray to Bahá'u'lláh for Help, Think of Abdu'l-Bahá as Perfect Example**

"He feels you should by all means show your husband the greatest love and sympathy; if we are ever in any doubt as to how we should conduct ourselves as Bahá'ís we should think of Abdu'l-Bahá and study His life and ask ourselves what would He have done, for He is our perfect example in every way. And you know how tender He was, and how His affection and kindness shone like sunlight on everyone."

"Your husband and your child have a right to your love, and give you a wonderful opportunity of demonstrating your faith in the Cause."

"Also you should pray to Bahá'u'lláh to help unite you with your husband and make your home a true and happy home."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 9, 1946: Ibid.)

1. **Bahá'ís Should Make Almost a Superhuman Effort to Avoid Divorce³**

"He feels that you should by all means make every effort to hold your marriage together, especially for the sake of your children, who, like all children of divorced parents, cannot but suffer from conflicting loyalties, for they are deprived of the blessing of a father and mother in

3. (See also: XXIX. K. 1302-1338, Divorce.)

one home, to look after their interests and love them jointly."

"Now that you realize that your husband is ill, you should be able to reconcile yourself to the difficulties you have faced with him emotionally, and not take an unforgiving attitude, however much you may suffer."

"We know that Bahá'u'lláh has very strongly frowned upon divorce; and it is really incumbent upon the Bahá'ís to make almost a superhuman effort not to allow a Bahá'í marriage to be dissolved."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 6, 1953) [pg 229]



C. Ancestors and Descendants

1. Faith of Believer Attracts God's Mercy to Souls of Parents

"In reference to your questions about ancestors and descendants, we have been directed to say that while there are Tablets from Bahá'u'lláh stating that faith in the Manifestation of God on the part of a believer attracts God's mercy to the souls of departed parents the House of Justice knows of no text in Bahá'í Writings to support the statement that a believer's seven past generations and seven generations to descend from him are blessed when that person becomes a Bahá'í. You may also be familiar with the statement of Abdu'l-Bahá that 'it is permitted to ask for advancement, forgiveness, mercy, beneficence, and blessings for a man after his death.... Therefore children ... must implore pardon and forgiveness for their parents.' (From "Some Answered Questions" pages 268-269)."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, February 23, 1978)

1. True Believer in Better Position to Intercede for Ancestors⁴

"We cannot take the teaching that if a believer remains steadfast till the end of his life he will be the means of the spiritual awakening of all his ancestors too literally, especially as it is only reported, and not in an authenticated form. However, we can be assured that the true and faithful believer will be in a much better position to intercede for his ancestors, and aid in their development than if he were not spiritually enlightened."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, December 12, 1942)



⁴. (See also: No. 699)

D. The Relationships Between Parents and Children

1. The Most Important of All Duties After the Recognition of God — Due Regard for Rights of Parents

"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: Family Life, A Compilation of the Universal House of Justice)

1. If Children Do Not Obey Parents — They Will Not Obey God

"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."

(Ibid.) [pg 230]

1. The Son Must Serve His Father

"We have enjoined upon every son to serve his father. Thus have We decreed this command in the Book."

(Ibid.)

1. Consultation Between Father and Son

"Regarding thy question about consultation of a father with his son, or a son with his father, in matters of trade and commerce, consultation is one of the fundamental elements of the foundation of the Law of God. Such consultation is assuredly acceptable, whether between father and son, or with others. There is nothing better than this. Man must consult in all things for this will lead him to the depths of each problem and enable him to find the right solution."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Ibid.)

1. Father Must Give Son Advice — Son Must Obey Father

"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."

"The son, on the other hand, must show forth the utmost obedience towards his father, and should conduct himself as a humble and a lowly servant. Day and night he should seek diligently to ensure the comfort and welfare of his loving father and to secure his good-pleasure. He must forgo his own rest and enjoyment and constantly strive to bring gladness to the hearts of his father and mother, that thereby he may attain the good-pleasure of the Almighty and be graciously aided by the hosts of the unseen."

(Ibid.)

1. Parents Must Be Respected — Should Not Keep Child Back from Serving the Cause

"If thou wouldst show kindness and consideration to thy parents so that they may feel generally pleased, this would also please Me, for parents must be highly respected and it is essential that they should feel contented, provided they deter thee not from gaining access to the Threshold of the Almighty, nor keep thee back from walking in the way of the Kingdom. Indeed it behoveth them to encourage and spur thee on in this direction."

(Ibid.)

1. If One Must Make Choice Between Service to Bahá'u'lláh or Service to Parents

"We have caused thee to return to thy home as a token of Our Mercy unto thy mother, inasmuch as We have found her overwhelmed with sorrow. We have enjoined you in the Book 'to worship no one but God and to show kindness to your parents'.⁵ Thus hath the one true God spoken and the decree hath been [pg 231] fulfilled by the Almighty, the All-Wise. Therefore We have caused thee to return unto her and unto thy sister, that your mother's eyes may thereby be cheered, and she may be of the thankful."

"Say, O My people! Show honour to your parents and pay homage to them. This will cause blessings to descend upon you from the clouds of the bounty of your Lord, the Exalted, the Great."

"When We learned of her sadness, We directed thee to return unto her, as a token of mercy unto thee from Our presence, and as an admonishment for others."

"Beware lest ye commit that which would sadden the hearts of your fathers and mothers. Follow ye the path of Truth which indeed is a straight path. Should anyone give you a choice between the opportunity to render a service to Me and a service to them, choose ye to serve them, and let such service be a path leading you to Me. This is My exhortation and command unto thee. Observe therefore that which thy Lord, the Mighty, the Gracious, hath prescribed unto thee."

5. (Qur'an 46:15)

(Bahá'u'lláh: Ibid.)

1. **It is a Privilege to Look After Parents**

"In regard to the questions you asked him: He feels sure that, although in some ways you may be a financial burden to your children, it is to them a privilege to look after you; you are their mother and have given them life, and through the bounty of Bahá'u'lláh they are now attracted to His Faith. Anything they do for you is small recompense for all you have done for them."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, September 20, 1948: Ibid.)

1. **Pray for Parents**

"It is seemly that the servant should, after each prayer, supplicate God to bestow mercy and forgiveness upon his parents. Thereupon God's call will be raised: 'Thousand upon thousand of what thou hast asked for thy parents shall be thy recompense!' Blessed is he who remembereth his parents when communing with God. There is, verily, no God but Him, the Mighty, the Well-Beloved."

(The Bab: Selections from the Writings of the Bab, p. 94, 1982 ed.)

"O Lord! In this Most Great Dispensation Thou dost accept the intercession of children in behalf of their parents. This is one of the special infinite bestowals of this Dispensation. Therefore, O Thou kind Lord, accept the request of this Thy servant at the threshold of Thy singleness and submerge his father in the ocean of Thy grace, because this son hath arisen to render Thee service and is exerting effort at all times in the pathway of Thy love. Verily, Thou art the Giver, the Forgiver and the Kind!"

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Ibid.)

1. **Father Who Fails to Educate His Children Forfeits Rights of Fatherhood**

"These are all relationships within the family, but there is a much wider sphere of relationships between men and women than in the home, and this too we should consider in the context of Bahá'í society, not in that of past or present [pg 232] social norms. For example, 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...."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, December 28, 1980)

1. **Mothers Are Not Necessarily Confined to the Home**

"...Similarly, although the primary responsibility for supporting the family financially is placed upon the husband, this does not by any means imply that the place of women is confined to the home. On the contrary, Abdu'l-Bahá has stated:

'In this Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, the women go neck and neck with the 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.'" (Paris Talks, p. 182)

"and again:

'So it will come to pass that when women participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world, when they enter confidently and capably the great arena of laws and politics, war will cease;...' (The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 135)

(Ibid.)

1. Underage Child Needs Parental Consent to Pioneer

"Regarding the Guardian's statement that pioneering is conditioned upon the consent of parents and that it would be necessary for them to concur, you have asked whether this ruling applies equally to children who are of age and those who are not. The Guardian's reply is that the ruling applies only to those who have not yet come of age."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran, January 18, 1943)

1. Parents and Children in the Pioneering Field

"The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 23 June, 1977 in which you express the ardent desire of yourself and your husband to see your children grow as active supporters of the Faith, and you ask whether, in view of the responsibilities of Bahá'í parents in the pioneering field, the seeming sufferings the children bear as the result of their parents' commitments in service to the Cause will somehow be compensated." We have been asked by the Universal House of Justice to convey to you the following points:

"In considering this problem it is important to bear in mind the reality of the unity of the family, and the children's part in its activities. In a talk which Abdu'l-Bahá gave in America in 1912, He made this significant statement: [pg 233]

'According to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the family being a human unit must be educated according to the rules of sanctity.... 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.... All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained.'" (Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 168, 1982 ed.)

"It should also be realized that a child, from early life, is a conscious and thinking soul, a member of his family with his own duties towards it, and is able to make his own sacrifices for the Faith in many ways. It is suggested that the children should be made to feel that they are given the privilege and opportunity of participating in the decisions as to the services their parents are able to offer, thus making their own conscious decision to accept those services with consequence for their own lives. Indeed, the children can be led to realize that it is the earnest wish of their parents to undertake such services with their children's whole-hearted support."

"There are many texts included in 'A Compilation on Bahá'í Education', from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian, which indicate that 'children must, from their infancy, be raised to be spiritual and godly Bahá'ís. If such be their training, they will remain safe from every test.' (Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 36). Bahá'u'lláh Himself has written: 'As to the children: We have directed that in the beginning they should be trained in the observances and laws of religion; ... and in deeds that will further the victory of God's Cause...' (p. 8). They should even be trained from an early age to make their own sacrifices for the Faith, as indicated in these words: 'Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship. Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import...' (Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 31)."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, August 23, 1977) [pg 234]

