

The Bahá'í Teachings on marriage and divorce

The breakdown of the institution of marriage has become rampant and severely affects the stability of present-day society.

Unfortunately, the Bahá'í community cannot entirely avoid the baleful influences of its environment, particularly in an area of life as basic and essential as marriage. Therefore, we are faced with the mounting challenge of avoiding as much as possible the ill effects of divorce and other conditions which undermine marriage and the family.

The Local Spiritual Assembly is the institution of the Faith in the best position to help the Bahá'í community maintain sound, stable and happy marriages, and it is that Assembly which must display the leadership required to raise up distinctive Bahá'í standards in this vital area of life.

To help the Bahá'í community draw closer to the Divine standard, we hereby call upon all Local Assemblies to take a more active role in educating the friends on marriage and divorce and in counseling couples who are having marital difficulties. The approach we ask Local Assemblies to take involves the following steps:

1. Conduct a deepening on marriage at least once a year for Bahá'í youth and young adults who have not yet been through such a deepening.

2. Review the Bahá'í teachings on marriage and divorce with couples who wish to marry.

3. Make a strong effort to reconcile couples who ask for a year of patience, explain to them the Bahá'í teachings on divorce, give them practical and spiritual guidance, and, if necessary, refer them to competent professional marriage counselors whose views of marriage are consistent with the Bahá'í teachings.

To assist you in putting these measures into practice, we enclose herewith a paper that elaborates on the three points mentioned above, contains a statement on marriage and divorce, and discusses other questions Assemblies frequently ask.

At the end of the paper is a compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi on the Bahá'í teachings discouraging divorce, prepared by the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre on behalf of the Universal House of Justice. Many of these extracts will be new to you.

The basic building block of society is the family, and the strength of the family depends on the bond of loyalty between husband and wife.

As the old order disintegrates, the believers need increasingly to appreciate the supreme importance of the institution of marriage and its indispensable role in undergirding the unity of mankind.

We hope and pray that your community will derive enduring benefit from the use of the enclosed materials.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

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

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

A. Deepening of Youth on Bahá'í Marriage

Each year Local Spiritual Assemblies are to provide a deepening on marriage for all youth and young adults in their communities who have not already been through such a deepening. The deepening would cover the following points:

1. The Bahá'í teachings on chastity and sex.
2. Basic elements of a happy, wholesome and stable marriage.
3. The Bahá'í laws of marriage.
4. The Bahá'í teachings on divorce.

The compilation on divorce appended to this paper, the discussion of marriage and divorce found in Section D, **The Advent of Divine Justice**, "Challenge to Individuals to Obey the Law of God in Their Personal Lives" (a letter from the Universal House of Justice published in **Messages from The Universal House of Justice: 1968-73**, pages 105-12), and **A Fortress for Well-Being** will give you material to draw upon in formulating the deepening program. You are encouraged to utilize the talent, resources and ingenuity of your community in preparing for and conducting the sessions.

B. Deepening of Couples Who Wish to Marry

When a couple asks a Local Spiritual Assembly to arrange a Bahá'í ceremony for them, the Assembly is to review with them the statement on Bahá'í marriage and divorce in Section D of this paper. The purpose of the review is to impress on the couple the importance of the step they are about to take, not only for themselves, but for the Bahá'í community, and to help them understand the permanent nature of their commitment to each other.

This session should be both a serious and happy occasion, and should include the recitation of prayers and passages from the Bahá'í writings on marriage.

Under no circumstances is the Local Spiritual Assembly, or its representatives, to interfere with the couple's personal affairs or intention to marry, or to do anything which would discourage the couple from marrying. Of course, if one or both parties should ask for the Assembly's advice, it may be given freely.

C. Counseling Couples Who Wish to Begin a Year of Patience

When a couple or a partner to a marriage approaches an Assembly with the intention of starting a year of patience, the Assembly should review the Bahá'í teachings on divorce.

It may be pointed out that divorce is condemned and that a condition of aversion, antipathy and repugnance must exist to justify the extreme measure of dissolving the marriage. (See Section D.)

If only one of the parties wants to begin a year of patience, the Assembly should interview both parties before setting the date if at all possible.

It would be preferable to meet with both parties present to explain the teachings on the year of pa-

tience and Bahá'í divorce, and urge the couple to reconcile. However, if this is not advisable or possible, the Assembly will have to counsel each party separately.

If one of the parties is a non-Bahá'í, the Assembly will want to consider what its relationship to the non-Bahá'í should be and to what extent it will communicate with him or her.

In the course of interviewing the parties, an effort should be made to ascertain the reason for their differences and to encourage reconciliation. Practical and spiritual advice given by the Assembly can be very helpful at this stage.

Rather than setting the date of the year of patience at the initial meeting, the Assembly may find it wise to give the couple a chance to reflect on its guidance. In some cases a period of separation may be more appropriate than the initiation of a year of patience.

In regard to the granting of a year of patience, the Universal House of Justice has explained:

"When someone applies to a Spiritual Assembly for a Bahá'í divorce, the Assembly must immediately investigate the situation and attempt to reconcile the couple. Only when it finds that real repugnance exists and after its attempt to reconcile the couple has been unsuccessful should it set the date for the beginning of the year of patience. In setting this date it may back-date it to the time at which the couple separated with the intention of divorce—but not earlier than that." (From a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, dated July 12, 1970)

It is important to remember that setting a date for the year of patience is not automatic.

"Thus, it is not sufficient," the Universal House of Justice has written, "that one or both of the parties has asked that the date for the beginning of the year of waiting be fixed; the Assembly must find the condition of irreconcilable antipathy to exist before the date can be fixed." (From a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of Alaska, dated May 24, 1972)

Once the date for the year of waiting has been set, the Assembly should continue to make efforts to help the couple reconcile their differences.

"During the ensuing year," the Universal House of Justice has explained, "it is highly desirable that further efforts at reconciliation should be made, but if no reconciliation is attained, the divorce may be realized. The Assembly has no authority to withhold the divorce on the ground that one party has made no real effort toward reconciliation." (From a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of Alaska, dated May 24, 1972)

Another factor to be considered is whether the couple would benefit from seeing a marriage counselor.

However, if this is thought to be advisable, it is vital that the counselor be one whose view of marriage is consistent with the Bahá'í teachings; many counselors, psychologists and psychiatrists hold views and advocate practices which are at odds with the Bahá'í teachings and which can lead to the further disintegration of the marital bond.

Each Assembly, then, should become acquainted with marriage counselors in its area, identify those whose views coincide with the Bahá'í teachings, establish a relationship with

them, and refer couples to them as the need arises.

Local Assemblies, either as a body or through their appointed representatives, may well wish to interview certain counselors in their area to whom couples could be referred.

The Assembly may wish to lend or give a counselor **A Fortress for Well-Being** so that he may become acquainted with the Bahá'í teachings on marriage and have a basis for discussing whether he could counsel Bahá'í couples within the framework of the Bahá'í teachings.

Assemblies with large communities might consider appointing a mature and deepened believer who is professionally trained to counsel married couples, or they may wish to have a member of the Assembly take an approved course on marriage counseling.

D. Marriage and Divorce

The purpose of marriage, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá assert, is to bring forth children who will grow into men and women dedicated to the advancement of the Faith.

"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, in **Bahá'í Prayers**, p. 187)

"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." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, in **Bahá'í Prayers**, pp. 187-88)

A couple's ability to raise children "who will remember Me amongst My servants" depends on the strength of the bond which ties them together.

To a child the unity between mother and father is the first manifestation of love and unity and the quality of the parents' relationship greatly affects how a child views the world and relates to others.

Children raised in homes where the parents are unified will have a clear understanding of what unity is and will be more likely to be well-balanced and unified within themselves. They will also be more likely to have unified and stable marriages when they grow up.

Children whose parents are not unified will reflect the disunity within themselves and are likely to suffer from psychological disorders when they grow up.

In short, a child's ability to be a source of unity to the world largely depends on the degree to which his parents are unified in their relationship.

Moreover, the lack of love and unity in the parents' relationship will very likely retard the spiritual development of the child.

Another purpose of marriage is to foster unity in society. Bahá'ís thus have an obligation to society to make their marriages work.

Breaking the marriage bond is extremely serious and has grave social repercussions, for it impedes society's ability to be unified. For this reason, Bahá'ís eschew divorce, as the following extract from the Bahá'í Writings attests:

"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 maketh 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 should 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 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. If one of these two become the cause of divorce, that one will unquestionably fall into great difficulties, will become the victim of formidable calamities and experience deep remorse."

Shoghi Effendi deplored the "rising tide of divorce" and termed it one of the signs of the moral downfall of society.

"Divorce," he wrote, "is considered a natural right, and obtained on the flimsiest and most unwarrantable and shabby pretexts." (*Bahá'í News*, December, 1947, p. 2)

Referring to Bahá'u'lláh's own pronouncement against divorce in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Shoghi Effendi wrote that Bahá'u'lláh "censures divorce." (*God Passes By*, p. 214)

The following extracts from letters written on behalf of the beloved Guardian give us a clear indication of just what the attitude of Bahá'ís toward divorce should be:

"As Bahá'u'lláh was so very much against divorce (even though He permits it) and considered marriage a most sacred responsibility, believers should do everything in their power to preserve the marriages they have contracted, and to make them exemplary unions, governed by the noblest motives." (From a letter dated October 19, 1947, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"Regarding the Bahá'í teachings on divorce: While the latter has been made permissible by

Bahá'u'lláh, yet He has strongly discouraged its practice, for if not checked and seriously controlled it leads gradually to the disruption of family life and to the disintegration of society." (From a letter dated November 16, 1936, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

"Divorce should be avoided most **strictly** by the believers, and only under rare and urgent circumstances be resorted to. Modern society is criminally lax as to the sacred nature of marriage, and the believers must combat this trend assiduously." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi by his secretary, dated January 5, 1948)

The above extracts, along with those cited at the end of this paper, make it clear that divorce is not a natural right of the individual and that it is censured and condemned.

While divorce is censured in the strongest terms, the Bahá'í teachings permit it in extreme circumstances when a condition described by words such as "aversion," "repugnance" and "antipathy" exists. (The dictionary defines **aversion** as "The action of turning away, of averting, warding off, getting rid of. A moral turning of oneself away; estrangement. A mental attitude of opposition or repugnance; a fixed, habitual dislike; antipathy." **Repugnance** is defined as "contradictory opposition or disagreement. Strong dislike, distaste, antipathy; aversion to or against a person or thing." **Antipathy** is defined as "Contrariety of feeling, disposition or nature (between persons or things). Hostile feelings towards; constitutional or settled aversion or dislike.")

In view of the strong injunction against divorce found in the Bahá'í teachings, many of the reasons for divorce today are unacceptable.

From the Bahá'í point of view, one would not seek a divorce because one no longer feels a strong attachment or deep love for his spouse, because one has grown tired of being married, because one feels his potentialities are not being fully realized, or because one feels he could establish a better and more harmonious union with someone else.

If one or more of these conditions exist, the marriage would still stand, although the couple would have a definite responsibility to work together to overcome them and to strive to establish a deeper and more satisfying bond of affinity, loyalty and affection.

E. The Civil Divorce

The primary purpose of the year of patience is to provide a means by which the parties can reflect on their relationship, make amends and restore their union. Consequently, filing for a civil divorce before the end of the year of waiting undermines its purpose.

Local Spiritual Assemblies should strongly discourage individuals from effecting a civil divorce before the year of waiting has ended.

The Universal House of Justice explained in 1974 that membership rights may not be removed when a civil divorce is obtained before the end of the year of waiting.

However, the Supreme Institution has made it clear that civil divorce proceedings should not be initiated before the end of the year unless there are special circumstances which would justify such action. If a marriage has deteriorated to the

point where one party would be subjected to extreme danger by not seeking the protection of the civil law, he would be compelled to take civil action.

However, such action should only be undertaken in extreme circumstances, since the purpose of the year of patience is to create an opportunity for reconciliation to occur.

If a party to a marriage feels that civil action needs to be taken before the year of patience has ended, he or she should consult the Local Spiritual Assembly. The Bahá'í divorce becomes effective when both the year of patience has ended and the civil divorce has been granted.

F. Voiding the Year of Patience

The year of patience is voided when a couple share a common residence or have sexual relations. If either of these criteria has been met and one or both of the parties still does not intend to continue in the marriage, a new date for the beginning of the year of waiting must be set.

Violations of Bahá'í moral laws and standards during the year of waiting do not void the year of patience and are to be treated separately.

G. Child Support and Custody and the Civil Divorce Proceedings

While the 50 states have authorized Local Spiritual Assemblies to conduct marriages on their behalf, they have not recognized the legitimacy of Bahá'í divorce.

The states have retained exclusive jurisdiction over divorce and related matters, such as child custody and support, and property and financial settlements. Consequently, Local Spiritual Assemblies should approach such matters with great caution and restrict their involvement so that they do not become entangled in matters which must eventually be resolved in the courts.

As Article IV of the By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly states, an Assembly shall "rigorously abstain from any action or influence, direct or indirect, that savors of intervention on the part of a Bahá'í body in matters of public and civil jurisdiction."

Sometimes a couple, or one of the parties, asks the Local Spiritual Assembly to give advice on child custody and support or the financial settlement. Before agreeing to give such advice, the Assembly should consider the degree to which the parties are able to cooperate with each other and their willingness to accept the Assembly's advice.

Many Assemblies have spent a great deal of time consulting on such questions only to find that one or both of the parties are unwilling to accept their advice. Precious time is wasted and the energies of the Assembly are drained.

It must be also borne in mind that an Assembly's role in divorce matters is purely advisory. Even if one or both of the parties vow to obey the Assembly's advice and then fail to do so, sanctions cannot be imposed.

If, for some reason, a Local Spiritual Assembly feels it wise to advise one or both of the parties to a divorce on matters pertaining to the divorce settlement, the Assembly should be certain to point out that (1) its role is purely advisory, (2) ideally the Assembly's advice would be written into the civil divorce decree, (3) the parties to the divorce should seek legal counsel if they have not done so

already, and (4) if one or both of the parties finds the Assembly's advice unsatisfactory, they should seek resolution through civil courts.

Assemblies should keep in mind that their primary concern when counseling a couple having marital problems is the reconciliation of their differences. All other matters are secondary and should not be allowed to obscure this essential objective.

H. Jurisdictional Questions

It often happens that one partner to a marriage moves to a different town during the year of waiting. It is preferable that the Assembly that initially counseled the couple continue to retain responsibility for the case.

However, if one of the parties has moved to a distant location, he or she may seek the counsel of a new Local Spiritual Assembly in the area, although the Assembly that initially counseled the couple would still have jurisdiction over the case and is free to communicate directly with the party who has moved away.

If both parties relocate but remain close to the Assembly with which they initially consulted, that Assembly would retain jurisdiction.

It is preferable that the parties stay close enough to each other during the year of patience to create greater opportunities for consultation and to maximize the possibility of reconciliation, and Assemblies should urge them to do so.

As a rule, pioneering during the year of waiting is not approved by the National Spiritual Assembly.

I. Reporting to the National Spiritual Assembly

The Local Spiritual Assembly should report to the National Spiritual Assembly by letter when it has set a date for the year of patience. The report should state the full names of both parties, include their Bahá'í identification numbers, and give the date set for the beginning of the year of waiting.

The Assembly should also report to the National Spiritual Assembly when reconciliation occurs, when a new date for the year of patience is set, or when the Bahá'í divorce is granted.

Again, the full names and identification numbers of both parties are needed, along with the dates concerned.

Before the Bahá'í divorce is granted, the Assembly should see, and preferably have in its files, a copy of the civil divorce decree. A copy of the decree need not be sent to the National Spiritual Assembly, but may be requested in certain cases.

EXTRACTS FROM THE BAHÁ'Í TEACHINGS DISCOURAGING DIVORCE

(All passages are extracts from previously untranslated or unpublished Tablets provided by the Universal House of Justice unless the source of publication is given.)

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

"God doth verily love union and concord, and abhorreth separation and divorce."

"At all times hath union and association been well-pleasing in the sight of God, and separation and dissension abhorred. Hold fast unto that which God loveth and is His command unto you.

He, verily, is the All-Knowing and the All-Seeing, and He is the All-Wise Ordainer."

"God, exalted be His glory, disliketh divorce..."

"Thou hast asked about affection and reconciliation, in the case of Mirza ... this matter was mentioned in the Holy Presence. This is what the tongue of our All-Merciful Lord uttered in response. 'This is regarded with favour and is well-pleasing. After man's recognition of God, and becoming steadfast in His Cause the station of affection, of harmony, of concord and of unity is superior to that of most other goodly deeds. This is what He Who is the Desire of the world hath testified at every morn and eve. God grant that ye may follow that which hath been revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.'"

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

"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." (*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 122)

"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 maketh 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 should 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

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. If one of these two become the cause of divorce, that one will unquestionably fall into great difficulties, will become the victim of formidable calamities and experience deep remorse."

From the Writings of Shoghi Effendi

"The recrudescence of religious intolerance, of racial animosity, and of patriotic arrogance; the increasing evidences of selfishness, of suspicion, of fear and of fraud; the spread of terrorism, of lawlessness, of drunkenness and of crime; the unquenchable thirst for, and the feverish pursuit after, earthly vanities, riches and pleasures; the weakening of family solidarity; the laxity in parental control; the lapse into luxurious indulgence; the irresponsible attitude towards marriage and the consequent rising tide of divorce; the degeneracy of art and music, the infection of literature, and the corruption of the press; the extension of the influence and activities of those 'prophets of decadence' who advocate companionate marriage, who preach the philosophy of nudism, who call modesty an intellectual fiction, who refuse to regard the procreation of children as the sacred and primary purpose of marriage, who denounce religion as an opiate of the people, who would, if given free rein, lead back the human race to barbarism, chaos, and ultimate extinction—these appear as the outstanding characteristics of a decadent society, a society that must either be reborn or perish." (*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 187-188)

"Not only must irreligion and its monstrous offspring, the triple curse that oppresses the soul of mankind in this day, be held responsible for the ills which are so tragically besetting it, but other evils and vices, which are, for the most part, the direct consequences of the 'weakening of the pillars of religion,' must also be regarded as contributory factors to the manifold guilt of which individuals and nations stand convicted. The signs of moral downfall, consequent to the dethronement of religion and the enthronement of these usurping idols, are too numerous and too patent for even a superficial observer of the state of present-day society to fail to notice. The spread of lawlessness, of drunkenness, of gambling, and of crime; the inordinate love of pleasure, of riches, and other earthly vanities; the laxity in morals, revealing itself in the irresponsible attitude towards marriage, in the weakening of parental control, in the rising tide of divorce, in the deterioration in the standard of literature and of the press, and in the advocacy of theories that are the very negation of purity, of morality and chastity—these evidences of moral decadence, invading both the East and the West, permeating every stratum of society, and instilling their poison in its members of both sexes, young and old alike, blacken still further the scroll upon

which are inscribed the manifold transgressions of an unrepentant humanity." **The Promised Day Is Come**, p. 119)

From Letters Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

"On behalf of the Guardian I wish to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated December 15th, and to express his sorrow at the disharmony existing between you and your husband. He is the more grieved to learn that the situation has reached such a state as to compel you to ask for separation from Mr. ...—a step which, though legally valid from the standpoint of the Cause, is nevertheless most sad and painful to you and to those concerned.

"The Guardian, however, appreciates the fact that, in conformity with the Teachings, you have laid the matter before the local spiritual assembly. He sincerely hopes that under the guidance of that body, and through your own efforts as well, conditions between you and your husband will gradually improve, and that you will not feel it necessary to ask for divorce after the one year period of separation has been terminated.

"He is fervently entreating Bahá'u'lláh that He may guide you and Mr. ... in solving this most delicate problem of your life, and that the solution reached may be such as to bring peace and satisfaction to your heart, and thus bring happiness to you, and also protection to the Cause whose interests you have so devotedly served for many years." (January 14, 1936, to an individual believer)

"Regarding the Bahá'í teachings on divorce. While the latter has been made permissible by Bahá'u'lláh yet He has strongly discouraged its practice, for if not checked and seriously controlled it leads gradually to the disruption of family life and to the disintegration of society." (November 16, 1936, to an individual believer)

"Regarding divorce the Guardian stated that it is discouraged, deprecated and against the good pleasure of God. The Assembly must circulate among the friends whatever has been revealed from the Pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in this connection so that all may be fully reminded. Divorce is conditional upon the approval and permission of the Spiritual Assembly. The members of the Assembly must in such matters independently and carefully study and investigate each case. If there should be valid grounds for divorce and it is found that reconciliation is utterly impossible, that antipathy is intense and its removal is not possible, then the Assembly may approve the divorce." (July 7, 1938, to the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran—translated from the Persian)

"While he wishes me to assure you that he will pray for the solution of your domestic troubles, he would urge you to endeavour, by every means in your power, to compose your differences, and not to allow them to reach such proportions as to lead to your complete and final separation from your husband.

"For while, according to the Bahá'í law, divorce is permissible, yet it is highly discouraged, and should be resorted to only when every effort to prevent it has proved to be vain and ineffective.

"It is for you, and for Mr. ... as well, to ponder

carefully over the spiritual implications which any act of divorce on either part would involve, and strengthened by the power of faith and confident in the blessings which strict adherence to the principles and laws of Bahá'u'lláh is bound to confer upon every one of His faithful followers, to make a fresh resolve to solve your common difficulties and to restore the harmony, peace and happiness of your family life." (September 11, 1938, to an individual believer)

"The situation facing you is admittedly difficult and delicate, but no less grave and indeed vital are the responsibilities which it entails and which, as a faithful and loyal believer, you should conscientiously and thoroughly assume. The Guardian, therefore, while fully alive to the special circumstances of your case, and however profound his sympathy may be for you in this challenging issue with which you are so sadly faced, cannot, in view of the emphatic injunctions contained in the Teachings, either sanction your demand to contract a second marriage while your first wife is still alive and is united with you in the sacred bonds of matrimony, or even suggest or approve that you divorce her just in order to be permitted to marry a new one.

"For the Bahá'í teachings do not only preclude the possibility of bigamy, but also, while permitting divorce, consider it a reprehensible act, which should be resorted to only in exceptional circumstances, and when grave issues are involved, transcending such ... considerations as physical attraction or sexual compatibility and harmony. 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 fulfil the true function for which it has been instituted by God.

"The Guardian will most fervently pray that, inspired and guided by such divine standard, and strengthened by Bahá'u'lláh's unfailing assistance and confirmations, you may be able to satisfactorily adjust your relations with the persons concerned, and thus reach the one right solution to this assuredly challenging problem of your life." (From a letter dated May 8, 1939, written on behalf of the Guardian to a believer who, having married his first wife out of compassion, now wished to be permitted to marry a woman with whom he had fallen in love, saying that his wife was agreeable to his taking this second wife.)

"As regards the action you contemplate in seeking divorce from him. He leaves the final decision in this matter to you and your husband, though of course, from the standpoint of the Cause, he thinks it preferable for you both not to resort to such drastic action, unless it is absolutely unavoidable." (February 24, 1940, to an individual believer)

"Marriage is, in the Aqdas, set forth as a most sacred and binding tie, and the Bahá'ís should

realize that divorce is viewed as a last resort, to be **avoided at all costs if possible and not to be lightly granted.**" (October 17, 1944, to an individual believer)

"Marriage is viewed by Bahá'u'lláh as a very sacred tie which should under no circumstances be severed unless the reasons are **very grave**. He hopes and will pray that you and your wife, as believers, will reconsider this matter and do your utmost to live together in the service of the Cause you both love so dearly." (October 17, 1944, to an individual believer)

"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." (November 16, 1945, to an individual believer)

"Shoghi Effendi wishes me to add this note in connection with your marriage: he does not feel that any believer, under any circumstances whatsoever, can ever use the Cause or service to it as a reason for abandoning their marriage; divorce, as we know, is very strongly condemned by Bahá'u'lláh, and only grounds of extreme gravity justify it." (April 7, 1947, to an individual believer)

"As Bahá'u'lláh was so very much against divorce (even though He permits it) and considered marriage a most sacred responsibility, believers should do everything in their power to preserve the marriages they have contracted, and to make of them exemplary unions, governed by the noblest motives." (October 19, 1947, to an individual believer)

"Bahá'u'lláh has clearly stated the consent of all living parents is required for a Bahá'í marriage. This applies whether the parents are Bahá'ís or non-Bahá'ís divorced for years or not. This great law He has laid down to strengthen the social fabric, to knit closer the ties of the home, to place a certain gratitude and respect in the hearts of children for those who have given them life and sent their souls out on the eternal journey towards their Creator. We Bahá'ís must realize that in present-day society the exact opposite process is taking place: young people care less and less for their parents' wishes, divorce is considered a natural right, and obtained on the flimsiest and most unwarrantable and shabby pretexts. People separated from each other, especially if one of them has had full custody of the children, are only too willing to belittle the importance of the partner in marriage also responsible as a parent for bringing those children into this world. The Bahá'ís must, through rigid adherence to the Bahá'í laws and teachings, combat these corrosive forces which are so rapidly destroying home life and the beauty of family relationships, and tearing down the moral structure of society." (October 25, 1947, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

"He wishes me to tell you that he regrets extremely the sorrow that has come into your life, and that he agrees with all you have stated in general on the subject of divorce.

"There is no doubt about it that the believers in America, probably unconsciously influenced by the extremely lax morals prevalent and the flip-pant attitude towards divorce which seems to be increasingly prevailing, do not take divorce seriously enough and do not seem to grasp the fact that although Bahá'u'lláh has permitted it, He has only permitted it as a last resort and **strongly condemns it.**

"The presence of children, as a factor in divorce, cannot be ignored, for surely it places an even greater weight of moral responsibility on the man and wife in considering such a step. Divorce under such circumstances no longer just concerns them and their desires and feelings but also concerns the children's entire future and their own attitude towards marriage." (December 19, 1947, to an individual believer)

"Divorce should be avoided most **strictly** by the believers, and only under rare and urgent circumstances be resorted to. Modern society is criminally lax as to the sacred nature of marriage, and the believers must combat this trend assiduously." (January 5, 1948, to an individual believer)

"He will pray for your husband and son and your daughter-in-law, that, through drawing near to Bahá'u'lláh, they may be united and uplifted into a happier and more harmonious atmosphere, for the Cause can heal friction if people will let it and make the effort themselves as well." (June 11, 1948, to an individual believer)

"He was very sorry to hear that you are contemplating separation from your husband. As you know doubt know, Bahá'u'lláh considers the marriage bond very sacred; and only under very exceptional and unbearable circumstances is divorce advisable for Bahá'ís.

"The Guardian does not tell you that you must not divorce your husband; but he does urge you to consider prayerfully, not only because you are a believer and anxious to obey the laws of God, but also for the sake of the happiness of your children, whether it is not possible for you to rise above the limitations you have felt in your marriage hitherto, and make a go of it together.

"We often feel that our happiness lies in a certain direction; and yet, if we have to pay too heavy a price for it in the end we may discover that we have not really purchased either freedom or happiness, but just some new situation of frustration and disillusion." (April 5, 1951, to an individual believer)

"As regards the problem of your marriage, you are free to refer this to the National Spiritual Assembly. As both you and your wife know, however, Bahá'u'lláh was not in favor of divorce, and the friends should make every effort to avoid bringing it about. If it is absolutely impossible, they then are free to divorce, but they should bear in mind the will of God in such matters." (March 13, 1953, to an individual believer)

"He has been very sorry to hear that your marriage seems to have failed utterly. I need not tell you as a Bahá'í that every effort should be made

by any Bahá'í to salvage their marriage for the sake of God, rather than for their own sake. In the case of pioneers, it is even more important, because they are before the public eye. However, in such matters it is neither befitting nor right that the Guardian should bring pressure on individuals. He can only appeal to you and ... to try again; but if you cannot rise to this test, that is naturally a personal matter." (January 13, 1956, to an individual believer)

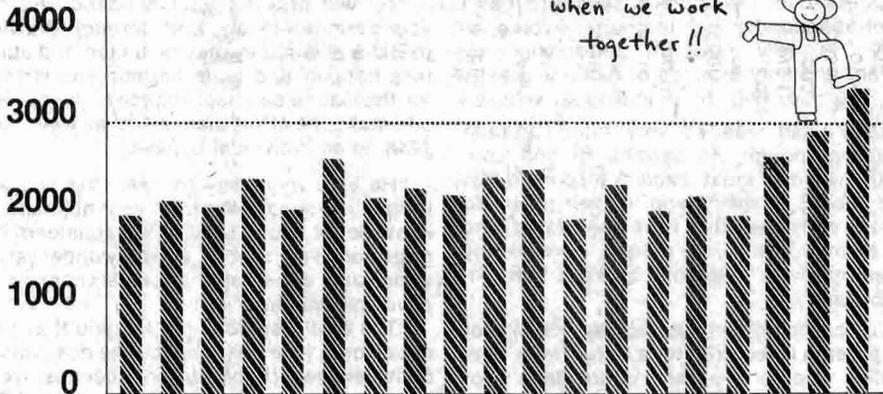
"Wherever there is a Bahá'í family, those concerned should by all means do all they can to preserve it, because divorce is strongly condemned in the Teachings, whereas harmony, unity and love are held up as the highest ideals in human relationships. This must always apply to the Bahá'ís, whether they are serving in the pioneering field or not." (November 9, 1956, to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central America)

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