

BAHÁ'Í FAMILIES: PERSPECTIVES, PRINCIPLES, PRACTICE**Author:** Patricia Wilcox**Published by:** George Ronald, Oxford, 1991, 166 pages

This is an excellent book that builds on compilations of the Universal House of Justice. The thinking is original, helpful, and to the point. It is well organized and places the nuclear Bahá'í family in context in the modern world. It is adequately concise and discusses its subject well without being too long.

Bahá'í Families begins with an introduction that describes the "bedrock" of Bahá'í law on which the family is reared. It goes on to discuss the place of the family in the world and the various relationships and responsibilities in the family. One chapter is devoted in a very practical way to implementing the equality between men and women. This is followed by a chapter that discusses changes facing women today. The next chapter discusses consultation with a special emphasis on goal setting and includes a chart summarizing the goal-setting process. This is followed by two chapters on the general education of children and divine education—the importance of prayer, memorizing verses, giving to the fund, and other practices in which we all need education.

The summary of the respective roles of the various members of the family is excellent, and sometimes humorous, for instance, when we are told that parents have no obligation to be obedient to children. The elucidation, supported by quotations from the Bahá'í sacred writings and the writings of the Universal House of Justice, of the respective roles and responsibilities of husband and wife is very helpful.

The author pulls together a number of quotations summarizing ways in which women are superior to men, and quotes from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi saying, ". . . wives, in some cases, have a tendency to exert an unjust degree of domination over their husbands which, of course, is not right, any more than that the husband should unjustly dominate his wife" (30). The author then has a very specific series of questions to address the balance of burdens as they currently exist in one's own home, with suggestions as to how to redress any imbalances. Wilcox herself exhibits a very strong sense of balance in how she discusses this topic.

Always there is the emphasis on the well-being of the whole taking precedence over personal preferences: ". . . the House of Justice points out that the unity of your family should take priority over any other consideration. . . . For example, service to the Cause should not produce neglect of the family" (16–17).

The book presents an idealized portrait of the holy family. In reality, the holy family was, tragically, not whole, due to the violations of Mírzá Yahyá and the Covenant-breakers within it. Perhaps, there is no deeper example of the fact that no matter how wonderful are some of the members of a family, the ultimate

responsibility for the soul's well-being lies with its bearer. Even perfect parents can have imperfect children.

An index would be a welcome addition to subsequent editions.

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