

Selected Extracts from Letters Written on Behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Nothing has been found in the Bahá'í writings that deals explicitly with the subjects of transsexuality or surgical operations carried out to change sex or establish a single sex. In the past when questions about sex change were raised, the House of Justice advised, at the time, that the issues should be considered as medical questions on which advice and guidance should be sought from experts in that field. However, today questions related to gender are often challenging given the social, psychological, and political forces shaping human thought in a milieu that largely ignores the spiritual purpose of life. These forces, in addition to impacting the general discourse related to gender, have also affected the perspectives of the scientific and medical communities. If a believer were advised to just seek the advice of experts, he or she may well obtain an imbalanced view of the issue. In light of the increased confusion surrounding the matter, the House of Justice feels that believers who are considering the possibility of a sex change would benefit from additional guidance, which is set forth below.

While there are many complexities surrounding the biological issues pertaining to sex and the social issues pertaining to gender, the Bahá'í writings affirm the generally held perspective that there are two sexes, male and female. This, of course, is not in conformity with some recent social theories that divide gender into multiple types. The House of Justice has acknowledged that there may be instances—involving largely biological rather than essentially social factors—where procedures to change sex, or to establish a single sex, would be warranted and that such a matter is a medical question on which advice from experts can be sought. This perspective is based on the specific findings of natural science that in some unusual instances there are challenges associated with the biological basis of sex that can be ameliorated by recourse to medical methods.

A Bahá'í considering a change of sex is advised to carefully and prayerfully weigh the medical opinion received in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and not be swayed by contemporary notions that regard gender as something to be altered as a matter of personal preference or intuition. In addition to considering the medical factors, the believer would wish to reflect on how perception of the issue has been influenced by powerful, contemporary forces affecting society. Most importantly, the believer ought to take into account the spiritual teachings bearing on such a decision. These relate to such matters as the purpose of life, the twofold nature of human beings, the soul's lack of gender, and the role of tests in an individual's spiritual development. Depending on circumstances, consideration of relevant spiritual teachings might prompt questions such as the following: How best may one fulfill the spiritual purpose of life? Will one's spiritual happiness result from the material solution of a sex change, or might one be pursuing a chimera, which will result in a new set of problems? Is it possible to view the challenge of gender identity as a test that one can come to grips with and manage? What will be the impact of such a decision on one's family members, including any spouse or children?

Because of the deeply personal nature of these questions, the decision whether to pursue a sex change can only be made by the individual, preferably after consulting with family members, and is not a matter on which Bahá'í institutions would offer specific advice. If a person does undergo the medical procedures required to change his or her sex and the change of sex has been legally recognized, the spiritual, moral, and legal prerogatives and obligations

relevant to that sex would apply, and marriage to a person of the opposite sex would be permissible.

Although Bahá'í institutions would not specifically counsel believers on the advisability or inadvisability of undergoing a sex change, they could assist such friends by suggesting consultation with mature Bahá'ís who understand the issues and who also have the pertinent professional expertise....

(From a letter dated 30 March 2017 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

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You indicate that ... you have been reflecting on your life and, after consulting with counselors and psychologists, have come to the view that you identify as a man while in the body of a woman. Unfortunately, issues related to gender today are often challenging given the social, psychological, and political forces shaping human thought in a milieu that largely ignores the spiritual purpose of life. Such forces have even had an effect on some scientific fields, including psychology, which is still a very young and inexact science. A Bahá'í faced with the issue you have raised is advised to carefully and prayerfully weigh the medical opinion received in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and not be swayed by contemporary notions that regard gender as something to be altered as a matter of personal preference or intuition.

Among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh that you are encouraged to reflect on is that the purpose of life is fundamentally spiritual—that “true life is not the life of the flesh but the life of the spirit.” Moreover, human beings have a twofold nature—a physical nature and a spiritual nature—and the goal in life should be for the spiritual to overcome the physical. The purpose of the appearance of the Manifestation of God is to educate the human soul, which does not have a gender, for life in this world and beyond. In that process of education, the soul is subjected to tests and trials that develop its capacity.

Reflection on the above-mentioned Bahá'í teachings and others may prompt questions such as how best one may fulfill the spiritual purpose of life and whether it is possible to view the challenge of gender identity as presented in society as a test that one can come to grips with and manage. In addition to your prayerful and personal consideration of the matter, the House of Justice suggests that you may wish to consult with mature believers who have professional expertise relevant to the issue of concern. Your National Spiritual Assembly may be able to offer the names of psychologists or professional counselors who may be able to further explore, from a Bahá'í perspective, such questions with you.

(From a letter dated 30 March 2017 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

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While there are many complexities surrounding the biological issues pertaining to sex and the social issues pertaining to gender, the Bahá'í writings affirm the generally held perspective that there are two sexes, male and female. This, of course, is not in conformity with some recent social theories that divide gender into multiple types. The House of Justice has acknowledged that there may be instances—involving largely biological rather than essentially social factors—where procedures to change sex, or to establish a single sex, would be warranted and that such a matter is a medical question on which advice from experts can be

sought. Of course, the Bahá'í community does not seek to impose its values on others and does not pass judgement on others on the basis of its own moral standards.

(From a letter dated 15 November 2018 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

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