

Bahá'í Marriage Requirements

By Susan Gammage ¹

Introductory Notes:

1. Many of the extracts below are from guidance given by the Canadian National Spiritual Assembly, so they may not always apply to other parts of the world. Please refer to your Local Spiritual Assembly or National Spiritual Assembly in case there is further clarification relating to your specific country.
2. Citations from Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities are from the edition used by the Ocean search engine.
3. Citations from Lights of Guidance are from the 1994 Revised Edition.
4. I have also included two extracts from a now out-of-print booklet published in Canada by John Skeaff "Consent of Parents".

Planning A Bahá'í Wedding

1. When you are planning to get married please contact the Local Spiritual Assembly in whose jurisdiction the wedding will be held without delay. A Bahá'í wedding cannot take place without the authorization of the Local Assembly. Bahá'ís who intentionally disregard the marriage law are subject to the possible loss of their administrative rights. (National Spiritual of the Bahá'ís of Canada, January/February 2013 issue of Bahá'í Canada, p. 32)

Bahá'í Marriage Laws

What is Bahá'í Marriage?

1. And when He [God] desired to manifest grace and beneficence to men, and to set the world in order, He revealed observances and created laws; among them He established the law of marriage, made it as a fortress for well-being and salvation, and enjoined it upon us in that which was sent down out of the heaven of sanctity in His Most Holy Book. He saith, great is His glory: 'Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants. This is My bidding unto you; hold fast to it as an assistance to yourselves.' (Bahá'u'lláh: Bahá'í Prayers (US 2002), p. 118)
2. 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

¹ Prepared by David Bowie (2023) for posting, with permission of author, at https://bahai-library.com/gammage_various_essays

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

Requirements

The requirements of the Bahá'í marriage law currently binding upon the believers in the West are:

- Mutual consent between the two parties to the marriage
- Consent of all living, natural parents
- The holding of a Bahá'í marriage ceremony authorized by a Spiritual Assembly
- Approval of two witnesses by the Spiritual Assembly

(National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 34)

Why is Obedience to all the Marriage Laws Important?

[E]ntering into a marriage is a step that has tremendous implications for a whole range of people beyond the couple themselves, both in this life and in the next. The laws of the Faith are established on very sound foundations, and obedience to them is not only important for the proper development of society, but also for the attainment of true personal happiness. (Universal House of Justice to an N.S.A.: August 10, 2000, https://www.bahaimarriage.net/resources_parentalconsent.htm)

Age for Marrying

1. Marriage is conditioned upon both parties having attained the age of maturity which is fixed at 15. (The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 149, C.1.c)
2. It is unlawful to become engaged to a girl before she reaches the age of maturity. (The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 150, C.1.i.ii)
3. The Bahá'í youth should, on the one hand, be taught the lesson of self-control which, when exercised, undoubtedly has a salutary effect on the development of character and of personality in general, and on the other should be advised, nay even encouraged, to contract marriage while still young and in full possession of their physical vigour. Economic factors, no doubt, are often a serious hindrance to early marriage but in most cases are only an excuse, and as such should not be over stressed. (Shoghi Effendi cited in Messages From The Universal House of Justice, 1963 to 1986, p. 234, 126.7c)
4. Marriage, for instance, need not be long delayed, as it is in some parts of the world where the maturity and responsibilities of adulthood are deferred in pursuit of the license that a socially prolonged adolescence grants. For the individual, who both contributes to and draws strength from the environment

that is the Bahá'í community, adhering to Bahá'í law is endowed with meaning and, though perhaps still difficult on occasion, does not pose the insurmountable challenge that you fear it will. (Universal House of Justice, 19 April 2013 in Framework for Action, p. 294, 51.11)

Consent from all Living Parents

1. Marriage is conditioned on the consent of both parties and their parents, whether the woman be a maiden or not. (The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 150, C.1.d)
2. Bahá'u'lláh has clearly stated the consent of all living [birth/natural] 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 the children for those who have given them life and sent their souls out on the eternal journey towards their Creator. (Shoghi Effendi, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 207, Note 92)
3. In all cases of marriage, including remarriage, Bahá'ís are required to have consent of all living parents of both parties. (From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 29 August 1965, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 35)
4. Q – I haven't been in touch with my father for many years, and don't know where he lives. Do I still need his consent?

A - As long as the parents are alive, the consent must be obtained; it is not conditioned on their relationship to their children. If the whereabouts of the parents is not known legally, in other words, if they are legally dead, then it is not necessary for the children to obtain their consent, obviously. It is not a question of the child not knowing the present whereabouts of its parents, it is a question of a legal thing – if the parents are alive, they must be asked. (Shoghi Effendi, Messages to Canada, 1999 edition, p. 241, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 35))

5. ...a child may be permitted to marry without seeking the consent of a man who denies paternity and never assumed the responsibilities of parenthood. Marriage is also permitted without seeking the consent of a parent who abandoned the child from infancy. Furthermore, a child conceived as a consequence of rape is not obliged to seek consent of the male offender...When cases arise involving any of the circumstances discussed above, a Local Spiritual Assembly should ascertain all relevant facts and refer the matter for consideration to your National Spiritual Assembly. (From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 19 January 2010, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 35)

6. Q – I was adopted and have never had contact with my birth parents. How can I obtain parental consent?
 A - Regarding the matter of adopted children, the consent of all natural parents must be obtained wherever this is legally possible but no effort should be made to trace the natural parents if this contravenes the provision of the adoption certificate or the laws of the country. (The Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 24 October 1965, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 36)
7. The Universal House of Justice advised the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada that if the effect of adoption legislation is to extinguish the rights and responsibilities of the natural parents, the child does not require their consent. Please consult with your Local Spiritual Assembly about this. (National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 36)
8. There is no requirement of Bahá'í law that the consent of foster or adopting parents be obtained, although the child may wish to do so. (From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 16 June 1966, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 36)
9. Q – I want to marry in Canada but my parents are in Iran. My Assembly needs more than my word that they have given consent. What do I need to do?
 A – Your parents' consent has to be verified in Iran before your Local Spiritual Assembly can authorize the wedding. The National Assembly has provided all Local Assemblies with guidance on how they are to verify consents from parents in Iran, so you should be in touch with your Local Assembly about this. (NSA of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 36)
10. If you have any questions about seeking consent, you should consult with your Local Spiritual Assembly, if you have one, or the National Spiritual Assembly, if you do not. (NSA of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 35)

Responsibilities of Parents

1. Although a Bahá'í may, if he chooses, seek his parents' advice on the choice of a partner, and although Bahá'í parents may give such advice if asked, it is clear from the Teachings that parents do not have the right to interfere in their children's actual choice of a prospective partner until approached for their consent to marry. (Universal House of Justice to an individual believer: August 28, 1994, cited in Marriage Can Be Forever—Preparation Counts!, <https://www.bahaimarriage.net/MarriageCanBeForever-QuotationCompilation.pdf>)

2. Bahá'í law places the responsibility for ascertaining knowledge of the character of those entering into the marriage contract on the two parties involved, and on the parents, who must give consent to the marriage. (Universal House of Justice: Lights of Guidance, p. 368, #1231)
3. There is nothing in the Writings, however, which requires a couple to get married once they have consent from all parents; they are quite free to change their minds. Likewise, if a parent changes his or her mind, he or she can withdraw his or her permission at any time before the marriage takes place, in which case the couple cannot get married. (Universal House of Justice: Consent of Parents, p. 40)
4. You will note that the aspect of protecting the child from making the wrong decision is not mentioned in any...quotations as a reason for the law, although it may well play a part in the parents' decision as they have the obligation to consider the welfare and happiness of their children at all times. However limited our understanding of this and other laws given us by Bahá'u'lláh, we are assured that the divine blessings await those who place their reliance in Him and obey His commandments. (Universal House of Justice, Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities, 16.7)

Reasons for Refusing Consent

1. ...the principle of the oneness of mankind prevents any true Bahá'í from regarding race itself as a bar to union.... For both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá never disapproved of the idea of interracial marriage, nor discouraged it. The Bahá'í Teachings, indeed, by their very nature transcend all limitations imposed by race.... (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 386, #1288)
2. The validity of a Bahá'í marriage is dependent upon the free and full consent of all four parents. The freedom of the parents in the exercise of this right is unrestricted and unconditioned. They may refuse their consent on any ground, and they are responsible for their decision to God alone. (On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, p. 445, #2312)
3. It is perfectly true that Bahá'u'lláh's statement that the consent of all living parents is required for marriage places a grave responsibility on each parent. When the parents are Bahá'ís they should, of course, act objectively in withholding or granting their approval. They cannot evade this responsibility by merely acquiescing in their child's wish, nor should they be swayed by prejudice; but, whether they be Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í, the parents' decision is binding, whatever the reason that may have motivated it. Children must recognize and understand that this act of consenting is the duty of a parent. They must have respect in their hearts for those who have given them life, and whose good pleasure they must at all times strive to win. (Universal House of Justice: Lights of Guidance, p. 369, #1237)

When Parents Don't Give Consent

1. Bahá'ís who cannot marry because of lack of consent of one or more parents could consult with their Local Spiritual Assembly, to see whether it may suggest a way to change the attitude of any of the parents involved. The believers, when faced with such problems, should put their trust in Bahá'u'lláh, devote more time to the service, the teaching and the promotion of His Faith, be absolutely faithful to His injunctions on the observance of an unsullied, chaste life, and rely upon Him to open the way and remove the obstacle, or make known His will. (Universal House of Justice: Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities, 16.15)
2. The Universal House of Justice will offer ardent prayers in the Holy Shrines that your parents' hearts may be inspired and enlightened to see and consider the best interests of their daughter. It may be helpful in this regard to ask the assistance of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the area where your parents live, or of some wise and mature Bahá'ís to meet with your parents and gradually familiarize them with the tenets of the [Bahá'í] Faith and remove the misconceptions they have... You are strongly advised by the House of Justice to continue your loving attitude towards your parents and be assured that your dutiful obedience to your parents will attract Bahá'u'lláh's blessings and will ensure your future happiness. (Universal House of Justice: Consent of Parents, p. 39)

Length of Engagement (not yet universally applied)

1. Bahá'u'lláh ordained that Bahá'í engagement should not exceed 95 days, and, although this law has not yet been applied universally, it highlights the desirability of marrying quickly once the decision to marry has been firmly taken and parental consent obtained. (Universal House of Justice to an individual believer: August 28, 1994, cited in Marriage Can Be Forever—Preparation Counts!, <https://www.bahaimarriage.net/MarriageCanBeForever-QuotationCompilation.pdf>)
2. Q – Is the law concerning a 95-day engagement period applicable in Canada?
A – The ninety-five day period of engagement is binding on Bahá'ís from the countries of the older communities of the Middle East, wherever they reside. Children born to such parents who are brought up in the tradition of these countries and who are thoroughly conversant with the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas will obviously feel an obligation and should be assisted to observe this if circumstances permit. The circumstances of children of mixed descent will vary and it is left to them to decide in light of their own situations whether to observe this law. If one of the parties, whether Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í is not from this background, this law is not binding. (Universal House of Justice to an individual, 4 November 2007. Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 37)

3. Q – When does the 95-day engagement period begin?
 A – This past year the National Spiritual Assembly sought clarification from the Universal House of Justice on when the 95-day engagement period begins ... The response dated 25 August 2010, written on behalf of the House of Justice, states:
 “Your email letter ... seeking clarification regarding the commencement of the ninety-five day engagement period currently binding on Baha'is from the countries of the older communities of the Middle East, wherever they reside, ... has been received by the Universal House of Justice, which has asked us to respond as follows.
 “With respect to the commencement of the engagement period, in the ‘Questions and Answers’ section of The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, number 43, Bahá’u’lláh states that ‘it is unlawful to announce a marriage earlier than ninety-five days before the wedding’. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has provided further explanation:
 ‘Following the arrangement for marriage and its official public announcement, that is, when all the friends, relatives and kindred have been informed that the two parties have been betrothed, the period of engagement must not exceed ninety-five days, during which marriage should take place, and the verses be recited and the dowry paid. Although it is forbidden to exceed the ninety-five days, as this is an act of disobedience to the law of God, the marriage contract should not be revoked on this account.’” (Bahá’í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 38)
4. Q – Both my fiancé and I are of Persian background. We got engaged based on the verbal approval of our parents in Iran, but the 95-day engagement period is running out and our consents haven’t arrived from Iran yet. What do we do?
 A – You should contact the National Spiritual Assembly at once to inform it of your circumstances and if necessary ask it to grant an extension to the engagement period. ... Concerning the observance of details of the marriage law, such as the duration of the engagement period and the payment of dowry by the Persian believers residing in the west: if the two parties are Persians, these laws are binding and necessary. (Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 7 July 1968, Bahá’í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 38)
5. An extension of the period beyond ninety-five days may be granted by a National Spiritual Assembly if it feels there are sufficient grounds to justify it. (The Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 4 November 2007, Bahá’í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 38)

Dowry (not yet universally applied)

1. With the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh many familiar concepts, customs and institutions are redefined and take on new meaning. One of these is the dowry. The institution of dowry is a very ancient practice in many cultures and takes

many forms. In some countries it is a payment made by the parents of the bride to the bridegroom; in others it is a payment made by the bridegroom to the parents of the bride, called a "bride-price". In both such cases the amount is often quite considerable. The law of Bahá'u'lláh abolishes all such variants and converts the dowry into a symbolic act whereby the bridegroom presents a gift of a certain limited value to the bride. For city-dwellers at nineteen mithqáls of pure gold, and for village-dwellers at the same amount in silver (Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p.208, Notes 93 & 94)

2. No marriage may be contracted without payment of a dowry (#66) The Synopsis and Codification, section IV.C.1.j.i.-v., summarizes the main provisions concerning the dowry. These provisions have their antecedents in the Bayan. The dowry is to be paid by the bridegroom to the bride. It is fixed at 19 mithqáls of pure gold for city-dwellers, and 19 mithqáls of silver for village-dwellers (Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p.208, Note 94)
3. Bahá'u'lláh indicates that, if, at the time of the wedding, the bridegroom is unable to pay the dowry in full, it is permissible for him to issue a promissory note to the bride (Kitáb-i-Aqdas,p.119, Q & A 39).
4. Bahá'u'lláh specifies that the criterion for determining the dowry payment is the location of the permanent residence of the bridegroom, not of the bride (Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 132, Q & A 87, 88)
5. Whoso wisheth to increase this sum, it is forbidden him to exceed the limit of ninety-five mithqals... If he content himself, however, with a payment of the lowest level, it shall be better for him according to the Book. (Kitáb-i-Aqdas , p. 42, # 66)
6. In answer to a question about the dowry, Bahá'u'lláh stated:

"Whatever is revealed in the Bayan, in respect to those residing in cities and villages, is approved and should be carried out. However, in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas mention is made of the lowest level. The intention is nineteen mithqals of silver, specified in the Bayan for village-dwellers. This is more pleasing unto God, provided the two parties agree. The purpose is to promote the comfort of all, and to bring about concord and union among the people. Therefore, the greater the consideration shown in these matters the better it will be... The people of Bahá must associate and deal with each other with the utmost love and sincerity. They should be mindful of the interests of all, especially the friends of God."

`Abdu'l-Bahá, in one of His Tablets, summarized some of the provisions for determining the level of the dowry. The unit of payment mentioned in the extract, cited below, is the "váhid". One váhid is equivalent to nineteen mithqals. He stated:

“City-dwellers must pay in gold and village-dwellers in silver. It dependeth on the financial means at the disposal of the groom. If he is poor, he payeth one váhid; if of modest means, he payeth two váhids; if well-to-do, three váhids; if wealthy, four váhids; and if very rich, he giveth five váhids. It is, in truth, a matter for agreement between the bridegroom, the bride, and their parents. Whatever agreement is reached should be carried out.”

In this same Tablet, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá encouraged the believers to refer questions concerning the application of this law to the Universal House of Justice, which has “the authority to legislate”. He stressed that “it is this body which will enact laws and legislate upon secondary matters which are not explicit in the Holy Text”. (The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, pp. 208-209, Note 95)

7. Q – I am of Persian background: do I have to pay dowry if I am married in the West?

A – Persians living in the west should abide by the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas as they do in Iran. When a western believer is involved, as in the case of a marriage between a Persian and westerner, those laws applicable only to Persians, such as that of dowry, are not binding, but the couple are, of course, free to follow such laws if they so wish. (Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, 2 September 1985, Bahá’í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 37)

Authorization from a Local Spiritual Assembly

1. The carrying out of the Bahá’í marriage laws, as given to the friends throughout the world, is a vital obligation of every believer who wishes to marry, and it is an important duty of every Local Spiritual Assembly to ensure that these laws are known to, and obeyed by, the believers within their jurisdiction, whether or not the Bahá’í marriage ceremony is recognized by civil law. Each Assembly, therefore, must conscientiously carry out its responsibilities in connection with the holding of Bahá’í marriage ceremonies, the recording of Bahá’í marriages in a register kept for this purpose, and the issuing of Bahá’í marriage certificates. (Messages From The Universal House of Justice: 1963 to 1986, pp. 488-489, #280.21)
2. When a Bahá’í marriage ceremony takes place, there is no individual, strictly speaking, who ‘performs’ it—no Bahá’í equivalent to a minister of the Church. The couple themselves perform the ceremony by each saying, in the presence of at least two witnesses, the prescribed verse ‘we will all, verily, abide by the Will of God.’ This ceremony is performed under the authority of a Spiritual Assembly which has the responsibility for ensuring that the various requirements of Bahá’í Law, such as obtaining the consent of the parents, are met, to whom the witnesses must be acceptable, and which issues the marriage

certificate. (Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 23 May 1985, cited in Lights of Guidance, p. 385, #1284)

3. A Bahá'í wedding cannot take place until the Local Spiritual Assembly in whose jurisdiction the wedding will be held has verified that all the requirements of both the Bahá'í and civil law have been met. In terms of the Bahá'í law, the Local Assembly must for example verify that the consent of all living natural parents has been given, and it must also approve those who will witness that the Bahá'í marriage ceremony has taken place. Believers who are planning to marry are therefore urged to consult with their Local Spiritual Assembly as far in advance of the wedding date as possible. This is suggested both as a courtesy to the Local Spiritual Assembly and as an assistance to the couple in case complications arise, as for example, with obtaining parental consent. Bahá'ís who intentionally disregard the marriage law are subject to the possible loss of their administrative rights. (NSA of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 34)

4. Q – I want to marry in two weeks and my Assembly is having difficulty meeting. How can I have a Bahá'í marriage?
A – Under these circumstances you should contact the National Spiritual Assembly for assistance in obtaining the help of a Local Spiritual Assembly that can authorize your Bahá'í marriage ceremony to take place. (NSA of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 37)

Marriage Registrars

1. Q – Our Bahá'í wedding is being held in our own community, but our best friend is the marriage registrar in the next community. Can we invite him to register our marriage?
A – A marriage registrar's role is to serve as the Assembly's representative in ensuring that the provincial government marriage requirements are met, including registering the Baha'i marriage with the government once the ceremony has taken place. The registrar of your own Local Spiritual Assembly will also register your marriage in the marriage register of your Assembly. If an Assembly is unincorporated or if the marriage registrar is unavailable, your Assembly may request a registrar from another Local Spiritual Assembly to serve in its jurisdiction. (NSA of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 39)

2. Q – We want to hold our Baha'i wedding in the community where our best friend is the marriage registrar. Can we also ask him to act as one of the witnesses to our marriage?
A – No. A registrar cannot serve at a marriage as both registrar and witness. The Bahá'í marriage registrar should never appear to be acting in the role of clergy, nor become involved in the responsibility of the witnesses. The registrar

is only responsible for the legal aspects of registering the marriage. (NSA of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 39)

Witnesses

The local Spiritual Assembly approves two trustworthy witnesses, often chosen by the couple, but the witnesses do not need to be Assembly members. Civil laws have varying requirements, so please check with your Spiritual Assembly for guidance.

1. The marriage ceremony must be witnessed by two trustworthy individuals, approved by the authorizing Assembly, whose testimony is deemed acceptable. It is not necessary that the witnesses be Bahá'ís. An Assembly may not accept as witnesses anyone under the age legislated by the province or territory as the age of majority.

"The witnesses can be any two trustworthy people whose testimony is acceptable to the Spiritual Assembly under whose jurisdiction the marriage is performed. This fact makes it possible for a lone pioneer in a remote post to have a Bahá'í marriage." (From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 8 August 1969. Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2013, p.20)

2. Q – Can my non-Bahá'í friend be a witness to my Bahá'í marriage ceremony?
A – Yes. These two witnesses may be chosen by the couple or by the Spiritual Assembly, but must in any case be acceptable to the Assembly; they may be its chairman and secretary, or two members of the Assembly, or two other people, Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í, or any combination of these. . . . The witnesses can be any two trustworthy people whose testimony is acceptable to the Spiritual Assembly under whose jurisdiction the marriage is performed. This fact makes it possible for a lone pioneer in a remote post to have a Bahá'í marriage. (Letter from the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, dated 8 August 1969, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 37)
3. Q – Can my little brother be a witness to my Bahá'í marriage? He's 14.
A – No. A person cannot usually serve in a legally registered marriage if under the age set by the provincial/territorial government for being of legal maturity. This is usually the age when one is allowed to vote in provincial/territorial elections. The age requirement may vary in each Province/Territory. (NSA of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 37)

Wedding Ceremony

1. The following quotations from letters written by the Guardian's secretary indicate the desirability of the Bahá'í marriage ceremony being simple. 'There is no ritual, according to the Aqdas [Kitáb-i-Aqdas], and ... [Shoghi Effendi] is very anxious that none should be introduced at present and no general form accepted. He believes the ceremony should be as simple as possible...'
'The only compulsory part of a Bahá'í wedding is the pledge of marriage, the phrase to be spoken separately by the Bride and Bridegroom in turn, in the

presence of Assembly witnesses.' (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: Lights of Guidance, p.389, #1294)

2. Compared to matrimonial conception and forms current among existing religions, the Bahá'í conception of marriage is practically void of all ceremonies. There is no officiating priesthood. The two contracting parties simply appear before the Spiritual Assembly and express their desire to be united with the bonds of marriage. There is a short formula which they have to pronounce before the members, and a marriage certificate which they both have to sign. In the Cause we do not have what is commonly called the 'Aqid'. The appearance of the two parties before the Assembly has even only an Administrative importance. It carries with it no spiritual or sacramental obligation of significance. I mean only the mere act of appearing before the Assembly, not marriage itself which is of course essentially a spiritual and moral act of union. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 378, #1263)
3. As you know, there is no ritual, according to the Aqdas, and the Guardian is very anxious that none should be introduced at present and no general forms accepted. He believes this ceremony should be as simple as possible, the parties using the words ordained by Bahá'u'lláh ['We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God' – cited in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p.105], and excerpts from the Writings and Prayers being read if desired. There should be no commingling of the old forms with the new and simple one of Bahá'u'lláh. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 390, #1298)
4. There are some exclusive religious ceremonies in which Bahá'ís should not participate, in order to safeguard the independence of the Faith. In this regard, the beloved Guardian has given the following advice to an individual believer: In these days the friends should, as much as possible, demonstrate through their deeds the independence of the Holy Faith of God, and its freedom from the customs, rituals and practices of a discredited and abrogated past. In observing this principle, the House of Justice advises the Bahá'ís to maintain a balance between their adherence to the Cause and obedience to its laws on the one hand, and their role in society on the other. When an individual becomes a Bahá'í he acquires, as you are aware, a wider loyalty to the Manifestations of God. Having found this new way of life, he should be careful not to isolate himself from his family and his people, and he should show respect for his former religion. The Bahá'ís should, of course, avoid performing any acts which could be considered as implying their membership in another religion or which are contrary to Bahá'í Principles. There is a clear distinction between participating in festive and cultural events, as opposed to performing religious ceremonies and rituals. (Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 139, #465)
5. Surely the simplicity of the marriage of Shoghi Effendi - reminiscent of the simplicity of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own marriage in the prison-city of 'Akká - should

provide a thought-provoking example to the Bahá'ís everywhere. No one, with the exception of his parents, my parents and a brother and two sisters of his living in Haifa, knew it was to take place. He felt strongly urged to keep it a secret, knowing from past experience how much trouble any major event in the Cause invariably stirred up. It was therefore a stunning surprise to both the servants and the local Bahá'ís when his chauffeur drove him off, with me beside him, to visit the Holy Tomb of Bahá'u'lláh on the afternoon of 25 March 1937. His heart drew him to that Most Sacred Spot on earth at such a moment in his life. I remember I was dressed, except for a white lace blouse, entirely in black for this unique occasion, and was a typical example of the way oriental women dressed to go out into the streets in those days, the custom being to wear black. Although I was from the West Shoghi Effendi desired me to fit into the pattern of the life in his house - which was a very oriental one - as naturally and inconspicuously as possible and I was only too happy to comply with his wishes in every way. When we arrived at Bahjí and entered the Shrine he requested me to give him his ring, which I was still wearing concealed about my neck, and this he placed on the ring-finger of my right hand, the same finger that corresponded to the one of his own on which he himself had always worn it. This was the only gesture he made. He entered the inner Shrine, beneath the floor of which Bahá'u'lláh is interred, and gathered up in a handkerchief all the dried petals and flowers that the keeper of the Shrine used to take from the threshold and place in a silver receptacle at the feet of Bahá'u'lláh. After he had chanted the Tablet of Visitation we came back to Haifa and in the room of the Greatest Holy Leaf our actual marriage took place, as already mentioned. Except for this visit, the day he told me he had chosen to confer this great honour on me, and one or two brief moments in the Western Pilgrim House when he came over for dinner, I had never been alone with the Guardian. There was no celebration, no flowers, no elaborate ceremony, no wedding dress, no reception. His mother and father, in compliance with the laws of Bahá'u'lláh, signified their consent by signing our marriage certificate and then I went back to the Western Pilgrim House across the street and joined by parents (who had not been present at any of these events), and Shoghi Effendi went to attend to his own affairs. At dinner-time, quite as usual, the Guardian appeared, showering his love and congratulations on my mother and father. He took the handkerchief, full of such precious flowers, and with his inimitable smile gave them to my mother, saying he had brought them for her from the inner Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. My parents also signed the marriage certificate and after dinner and these events were over I walked home with Shoghi Effendi, my suitcases having been taken across the street by Fujita while we were at dinner. We sat for a while with the Guardian's family and then went up to his two rooms which the Greatest Holy Leaf had had built for him so long ago. (Rúhíyyih Khánum, The Priceless Pearl, pp. 151-152)

Bahá'í Marriage Vow

1. When the consent of the parents is obtained, the only other requirement for the ceremony is the recitation by both parties in the presence of two witnesses of the specifically revealed verse: 'We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God.' (Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, pp. 388-389, #1294)
2. The sincerity with which the sacred verse is spoken is a matter for the consciences of those who utter it. (From a letter dated 23 May 1985 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, cited in Lights of Guidance, p. 386, no. 1284)
3. There are two versions of the wording of the verse in English from which one can choose, as explained in the following extract from a letter dated 15 March 1973 written by the House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly:

The specifically revealed verse as translated by the Guardian is: 'We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God'. Another version which has been used by some is: 'Verily, we are content with the Will of God'. When asked by the British National Assembly about which one to use, the Guardian's Secretary replied on his behalf, '...the two version mean practically the same thing, and either may be used.

Thus, the original words could well imply either a pledge to abide by or a description of a state of contentment in the Will of God. Both meanings would appear to be inherent the verse.

It should also be noted that if the verse had been intended to be a clear statement of future action, it would have been worded, 'We shall all, verily, abide by the Will of God'. The use of the wording 'We will all ...' implies wish and desire, not an absolute statement of future behaviour.

Another factor for consideration is that the word 'we' used in the verse does not refer exclusively to the parties to the marriage. It is clear from the grammatical construction of the verse in the original Arabic language that the words 'We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God' do not refer only to two people but to more than two. . . .

In Arabic, grammar differences of gender affect the declension of verbs, nouns, and the like. The 'we' in the marriage verse refers to we of the male gender and we of the female gender. The Research Department has not, to date, been able to locate any statements in the Bahá'í Teachings which explain the reason for the use of plural pronouns in the Bahá'í marriage verse. Nevertheless, it is clear that the verse recited as part of the ceremony by an individual is something other than a direct personal vow. (An extract from a memorandum from the Research Department to the Universal House of Justice, dated, 19 July 2006)

4. Q – My fiancé is an atheist. Is it okay if he doesn't say the marriage vow?
A – No Bahá'í marriage can be valid without the recitation of the prescribed verse by both parties. (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ecuador regarding an atheist who agreed to the Bahá'í ceremony but since he did not believe in God did not wish to repeat the marriage verse using the name of God. 19 December 1974. Published in Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 39)
5. According to the explicit text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, both the bride and groom must, in the presence of witnesses, recite the prescribed verse; this is an essential requirement of the marriage ceremony. Thus if a Bahá'í is marrying a non-Bahá'í and this person for any reason refuses to utter this verse, the Bahá'í cannot marry that person. (From a letter dated 23 May 1985 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, cited in Lights of Guidance 4th ed. p. 386, no. 1284)
6. A letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice clarifies 'that the recitation of this prescribed verse by both parties is a requirement for the Bahá'í ceremony, and that as all believers wishing to marry must have a Bahá'í ceremony, if the non-Bahá'í party is unwilling to recite this verse, it is not possible for you to marry him.' (An extract from a memorandum from the Research Department to the Universal House of Justice, dated, 19 July 2006)
7. It may be worthwhile to reflect upon one additional aspect of the verse, the Bahá'í understanding of the concept of God. The following extracts are from letters addressed to National Spiritual Assemblies, which asked about counselling couples similar to that of ...
- In counselling a particular couple your Assembly will, of course, have to use understanding and wisdom, while ensuring that the point is made quite clear. The House of Justice suggests that it could be of considerable help if the Bahá'í teachings about the nature of God, the unknowability of His Essence, and His relationship to His creation were explained to an atheist who finds himself in the situation you instance. (Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly 28 October 1985, cited in a memorandum from the Research Department to the Universal House of Justice, dated, 19 July 2006)
8. ...the House of Justice feels that the problem may be overcome by explaining to him the Bahá'í concept of God as that Unknowable Essence of Essences described in the Bahá'í Writings. In other words, it should be made clear that the word 'God' for a Bahá'í has a very different meaning from that which is current in European society. Undoubtedly you can find appropriate

quotations from 'Gleanings' and other Writings with which to indicate this. (Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 9 October 1989, cited in memorandum from the Research Department to the Universal House of Justice, dated, 19 July 2006)

Violations of Bahá'í Law

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada provided the following guidance to a Local Spiritual Assembly on 18 August 2022)

1. Regarding the involvement of Bahá'í family members in a marriage ceremony that is known beforehand to be in violation of Bahá'í law, the following passage provides essentially the same guidance that you have cited:

You are, of course, well aware that any Bahá'í who ceases to believe in Baha'u'llah and has a sincere desire to join another religion is perfectly free to do so. A different case arises when a believer dissimulates his faith solely for the purpose of getting married under another religion. Such an action merely in order to evade the requirements of Bahá'í law and to enable him to have the ceremony of the other religion is not permissible and would usually lead to the imposition of administrative sanctions. In addition, if the parents actively take part in facilitating such a marriage, they would be subject to the same sanctions as would apply to the child.

You also seek guidance with regard to whether parents could attend the Muslim wedding of their daughter, who is seeking to convert to Islam for the sole purpose of marrying under that religion. In such a case, the general principle regarding believers attending weddings of Baha'is who are marrying contrary to Bahá'í law would apply. That is, if it is known beforehand that a believer is violating such laws, it would be inappropriate for the friends to attend the ceremony, out of respect for Bahá'í law. This same principle would apply to attendance at a reception celebrating the marriage. Nevertheless, the concern and care that the parents have for their child would naturally be unaffected even if she lost her administrative rights as the result of such a marriage. The parents would be free, and indeed encouraged, to demonstrate affection for their daughter, welcoming the couple into their home and joyfully interacting with any grandchildren resulting from the union. (From a letter dated 20 July 2009 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

Civil Ceremony

1. Q – Do I need to have a civil marriage ceremony in addition to a Bahá'í ceremony when I marry in Canada?

A – No. Throughout Canada, the Bahá'í marriage ceremony is legally recognized and it is not necessary to have a civil ceremony. When a Bahá'í is marrying a non-Bahá'í, and the non-Bahá'í wishes to have a civil ceremony, it is permissible in such a case to have the additional civil ceremony, which should be held on the same calendar day as the Bahá'í ceremony on the condition that the two ceremonies are clearly distinct and not commingled into one combined ceremony.

However, in cases where, because of geographic distance, two Bahá'ís are marrying and it is impossible for a registrar to be present, a civil ceremony would be required in addition to the Bahá'í ceremony. Both ceremonies must be performed on the same day and are subject to the same conditions as listed in the above paragraph. Arrangements for such a situation, however, must be authorized by a nearby Local Spiritual Assembly prior to the wedding. (NSA of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011 pp. 36-37)

Consummation of the Marriage

1. As to the holding of the Bahá'í and civil marriage ceremonies on the same day, as the consummation of the marriage should not take place until both ceremonies have been held, a night should not intervene between the two ceremonies. (Universal House of Justice, USA-NSA, Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities, 16.20)
2. As to cases involving another ceremony in addition to the Bahá'í one, the friends should bear in mind that according to Bahá'í Law the consummation of the marriage must take place within twenty-four hours of the Bahá'í marriage ceremony. If other marriage ceremonies are to be held in addition to the Bahá'í one, all the ceremonies must precede consummation of the marriage and, together with the consummation fall within one twenty-four hour period. Naturally any requirements of civil law as to the order in which the ceremonies should be held must be observed. (From the Universal House of Justice to the International Teaching Center, February 17, 1976, Lights of Guidance, p. 391, #1300)
3. The consummation of marriage by a couple is, as you aptly state, an intimate and private matter outside the scrutiny of others. While consummation normally implies a sexual relationship, the Bahá'í Law requiring consummation to take place within twenty-four hours of the ceremony can be considered as fulfilled if the couple has commenced co-habitation with the intention of setting up the family relationship. (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer dated 28 July 1978, Lights of Guidance, p. 390, #1299)

4. In Canada the twenty-four hour period is to begin at 00:01h (12.01am) of the day in which the first ceremony is held and conclude at 24:00h (midnight) of that same day. (NSA of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011 p. 36)

Marriage between Two Bahá'ís

Religious Ceremony

Q – Both of us are Bahá'í but in addition to the Bahá'í ceremony we wish to have another ceremony of the religion of our relatives to make them happy and so they will feel more comfortable with the Bahá'í marriage. Can we have an additional religious ceremony (e.g. Christian, Muslim, Hindu) if both of us are Bahá'ís?

A – The instructions of the beloved Guardian are clear on this point. When two Bahá'ís are married they may not be married by the religious ceremony of another Faith. (Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 20 May 1968, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011 p. 37)

Location

1. Q – My wedding is taking place in a banquet hall outside of my home community. Can I still ask my Assembly to authorize my wedding?

A – The Local Spiritual Assembly in the locality where the marriage is taking place provides Bahá'í authority for a Bahá'í wedding in that locality. For example, a wedding taking place in Vancouver would be authorized by the Spiritual Assembly of Vancouver. (NSA of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 39)

2. When two Bahá'ís are marrying, the wedding ceremony should not be held in the place of worship of another religion, nor should the forms of marriage of other religions be added to the simple Bahá'í ceremony. (Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 389, #1295)

Marriage to a non-Bahá'í

Conversion of Faith

1. If a Bahá'í marries a non-Bahá'í who wishes to have the religious ceremony of his own sect carried out, it must be quite clear that, first, the Bahá'í partner is understood to be a Bahá'í by religion, and not to accept the religion of the other party to the marriage through having his or her religious ceremony; and, second, the ceremony must be of a nature which does not commit the Bahá'í to any declaration of faith in a religion other than his own. (Shoghi Effendi, NSA USA - Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities, 16.19)

Ceremony

1. When a Bahá'í is marrying a non-Bahá'í, and the religious wedding ceremony of the non-Bahá'í partner is to be held in addition to the Bahá'í ceremony, both ceremonies may, if requested, be held in the place of worship of the other religion provided that:
 - Equal respect is accorded to both ceremonies. In other words, the Bahá'í ceremony, which is basically so simple, should not be regarded as a mere formal adjunct to the ceremony of the other religion.
 - The two ceremonies are clearly distinct. In other words, they should not be commingled into one combined ceremony. (Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 26 February 1986, cited in Lights of Guidance, p. 389, #1295)
2. It is only when a non-Bahá'í partner is involved that a Bahá'í may participate in the religious ceremony of the non-Bahá'í partner. (Universal House of Justice, USA-NSA, Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities, 16.19)
3. With reference to your question regarding mixed marriages, that is to say between Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís; in all such cases the believer must insist that the Bahá'í ceremony should, as far as he is concerned, be performed in its entirety, but should also give full freedom to the other contracting party to carry out the non-Bahá'í rite or ceremony be it Muslim, Christian or otherwise, provided the latter does not invalidate the Bahá'í marriage act. This is the general principle which your N.S.A. should explain to the friends. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 386, #1282)
4. If the parents of a Bahá'í couple are, for example, Christians, there is no objection to their attending church with their parents and their parents' friends and relations, if their parents so wish, in order to pray for the future of the marriage, but such attendance should not involve any form of marriage ceremony or simulated marriage ceremony. (Universal House of Justice, USA-NSA, Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities, 16.19)

Timing

1. As long as both the Bahá'í and the other religious (whatever it may be) ceremony are both performed prior to the consummation of the marriage, we do not mind which ceremony is performed first. It should be left to the individuals concerned to decide among themselves. (Shoghi Effendi, USA-NSA, Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities, 16.20. Also published in Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent, p. 262)
2. Under these circumstances [when two ceremonies are held], the Bahá'í can partake of the religious ceremony of his non-Bahá'í partner. The Bahá'í should insist on having the Bahá'í ceremony carried out before or after the non-Bahá'í one, on the same day. (Shoghi Effendi, USA-NSA, Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities, 16.19)

3. Q – I am having two marriage ceremonies, Bahá'í and Christian. Can I have the Bahá'í marriage ceremony the next day?

A – No. When two ceremonies are being held they must both take place on the same calendar day and it does not matter which ceremony takes place first, or which one is to be legally registered. (NSA of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 36)

Location

1. When a Bahá'í is marrying a non-Bahá'í, and the religious wedding ceremony of the non-Bahá'í partner is to be held in addition to the Bahá'í ceremony, both ceremonies may, if requested, be held in the place of worship of the other religion provided that:
 - Equal respect is accorded to both ceremonies. In other words, the Bahá'í ceremony, which is basically so simple, should not be regarded as a mere formal adjunct to the ceremony of the other religion.
 - The two ceremonies are clearly distinct. In other words, they should not be commingled into one combined ceremony. (Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 26 February 1986, cited in Lights of Guidance, p. 389, #1295)

Bahá'í attendance at non-Bahá'í Weddings

1. Further, there is no objection for Bahá'ís to attend religious marriage ceremonies of their friends and relatives or take part in festivities usually connected with these events, provided that in doing so they do not contravene Bahá'í Law. For example, if consuming alcoholic beverages is a part of such activities, the Bahá'ís, of course, would be obliged to refrain from partaking of such drinks. (Universal House of Justice, NSA USA: Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities, 9.32)

Raising children

1. In all cases of marriage of Bahá'ís to followers of other religions the Bahá'í has two essential obligations as regards the children:
 - a) He must not educate or assume a vow to educate the children of the marriage in a religion other than his own.
 - b) He must do whatever he can to provide for the training of the children in the Bahá'í teachings. (Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 390, #1297)

Baptism

1. The future christening of the ... child should present no problem, for the Bahá'í parent should have no objection to the baptism of his child if the Catholic

mother wishes it. Similarly, the use of champagne upon that occasion is a matter which she is free to undertake, but of course the Bahá'ís would not partake of alcoholic beverages. (Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 353, #1182)

Special Considerations

Living Together

1. Concerning the three definitions of 'companionate marriage' which you give in your letter, the first, which is defined as living together without being married, on either a trial or immoral basis, is obviously unacceptable in Bahá'í teachings and is, moreover, an offence which, if persisted in, could call for deprivation of voting rights. The second and third, namely (2) a marriage where the couple agree ahead of time that they will not have children, ever, and (3) an marriage in which the couple would not have children until they are sure that they wish to stay married, divorce by mutual consent being envisaged before children are born, are private situations which would be undetectable by anyone who has not been confided in by either the husband or the wife. thus, unlike the first type of companionate marriage they do not constitute blatant immorality and no question of removal of voting rights would arise. Nevertheless they are also both contrary to the spirit of Bahá'í Law. The Bahá'í Teachings do not contemplate any form of 'trial marriage'. A couple should study each other's character and spend time getting to know each other before they decide to marry, and when they do marry it should be with the intention of establishing an eternal bond. They should realize, moreover, that the primary purpose of marriage is the procreation of children. A couple who are physically incapable of having children may, of course, marry, since the procreation of children is not the only purpose of marriage. However, it would be contrary to the spirit of the Teachings for a couple to decide voluntarily never to have any children. (Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 380, #1269)

Same Sex Marriages

1. Know thou that the command of marriage is eternal. It will never be changed nor altered. This is divine creation and there is not the slightest possibility that change or alteration affect this divine creation. (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v2, p. 474)
2. The kind of sexuality purposed by God is the love between a man and a woman. (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 3 May 1994, https://bahai-library.com/uhj_homosexual_practices)
3. Regarding the question of whether or not same-sex marriages would ever be permitted by the Universal House of Justice, the enclosed extracts indicate clearly that it would not. (From a Research Department memorandum to the

Universal House of Justice, 1993 July 05, Homosexuality https://bahai-library.com/uhj_homosexuality_biology)

Remarriage after Divorce

1. Q – I have been previously married and obtained a civil divorce. I now want to marry another person. What do I need to know before I can have a Bahá'í marriage?

A - Even though a Bahá'í has obtained a civil divorce, under Bahá'í law he cannot be regarded as divorced unless he has also obtained a Bahá'í divorce, therefore he is not free to marry. Should he attempt to marry and in the process violate the Bahá'í law governing marriage, he is, of course, subject to sanction. (From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, 13 February 1975)

2. Before issuing a Bahá'í divorce the National Spiritual Assembly requires confirmation from a Local Spiritual Assembly of the beginning and end of the year of waiting and a copy of the individual's Certificate of Divorce. (NSA of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011 p. 37)

Proxy Marriage

1. The question of marriage by proxy is a complicated one since not all civil jurisdictions allow it. The only Bahá'í guidance available on-line appears to be this in Lights of Guidance:

“In reply to your letter of October 19th asking whether a young believer in your jurisdiction may be married by proxy; we do not approve of the proposed proxy marriage.” (Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly Lights of Guidance, p.387, #1286.)

The reply refers to “the proposed” marriage not to “every proposed” marriage. Therefore, until there is further general guidance available, individuals contemplating a proxy marriage should check with their own National Spiritual Assembly.

Marriage in a Different Country

1. Q – I want to marry outside of Canada. What steps do I need to take before getting married?

A – Well in advance of the wedding, you should contact the National or Local Spiritual Assembly in the country where you intend to marry to inform them of your plans and obtain information concerning the legal requirements for marriage in their jurisdiction. You can seek the assistance of your Local Spiritual Assembly in Canada in verifying the authenticity of parental consents, if necessary. Additionally, you should contact the Records Department at the

Canadian Bahá'í National Centre informing it of your plans; that Department will then send a letter confirming your plans and your Bahá'í status to the National Spiritual Assembly concerned. Following the marriage, the Assembly authorizing your marriage has the responsibility to inform the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada that your marriage took place according to Bahá'í law. (NSA of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, p. 34)

Immigration Issues

1. Q – My intended spouse is registered as a Bahá'í in another country, and we are planning to marry in Canada. What steps do I need to take before getting married?

A – Your intended spouse should arrange for their National Spiritual Assembly to send confirmation of her or his Bahá'í status to our National Spiritual Assembly. This information will then be provided to the Local Spiritual Assembly authorizing your marriage. Additionally, you should ensure that your intended spouse is legally permitted to marry in Canada, according to Canada's immigration laws. (NSA of the Bahá'ís of Canada, Bahá'í Canada, January/February 2011, pp. 38-39)

Loss of Administrative Rights

There are grave spiritual consequences if a Bahá'í chooses to disobey Bahá'í law and proceed with marriage without consent. If a Bahá'í marriage does not happen, and only a civil one or one of another faith occurs, the Bahá'í community and institutions do not regard the couple as married. Breaking the marriage law can also result in the sanction of a Bahá'í losing his or her administrative rights, which can exclude the person from such activities as voting in elections, serving on administrative bodies, attending the 19-Day Feast, and giving to the Bahá'í Fund. The individual(s) would then have to consult with the Spiritual Assemblies at the local and national level about remedying this spiritually painful situation.

1. ... if a Bahá'í has a civil marriage ceremony only, he is subject to loss of his voting rights. If the Assembly is satisfied that such a couple is repentant, their voting rights may be restored on condition that they have the Bahá'í ceremony. (Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, pp. 53-54, #190)
2. We have your letter of October 9, 1971 informing us of your action to deprive ... of his voting rights for violation of Bahá'í marriage law in that he married without having consent of all living parents. It is noted that he had a civil ceremony and a Catholic ceremony. The question you have asked deals with possible restoration of his voting rights. In cases involving only the civil ceremony, voting rights may be restored if the Assembly feels that the believer is truly repentant and wishes to comply with the Bahá'í law previously broken. The civil marriage ceremony itself is not contrary to Bahá'í law, and therefore the dissolution of the civil marriage is not a prerequisite to restoration of voting

rights. In such cases the Bahá'í marriage ceremony may take place if the parents now give their consent to the marriage and the Assembly is satisfied that the consent has been genuinely and freely given and is not conditioned by the fact that the parties have already had a civil ceremony. In such cases the Assembly would restore voting rights immediately before the Bahá'í ceremony on the condition that it be performed. Should ... apply for restoration of his voting rights, and should your Assembly feel that he is truly repentant, you should offer assistance in arranging the other details including helping him to obtain the consents of parents. (Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 58-59, #208)

3. A survey of the letters written on behalf of the Guardian shows that he advised the National Spiritual Assemblies that they should resort to the severe sanction of deprivation of a believer's administrative rights only for such matters as . . . disregard for the laws of personal status', ... and 'breaking of laws, such as the consent of parents to marriage'. (Universal House of Justice, Violation of Baha'i and Civil Law, 9 December 1991)
4. When an allegation is made that a believer has violated Bahá'í law, irrespective of the consequence in civil law, the process of investigation calls for a diligent and persistent effort by the Assembly to ascertain the facts, and the wholehearted cooperation of all concerned in the search for truth. Believers called upon to provide information should, if necessary, be reminded of the responsibility they bear to speak the truth and of the spiritual consequences of a failure to do so. (Universal House of Justice, Violation of Baha'i and Civil Law, 9 December 1991)
5. The prospect of a believer's displaying an attitude of hostility, when being interviewed by a Spiritual Assembly or its representatives who are seeking to determine the facts of a matter, is abhorrent. All believers are strongly enjoined to have the utmost respect for the Assemblies, to cooperate fully with them, and to support their decisions. An Assembly enquiring into a matter should not allow itself to be deterred by the hostility of a believer who is withholding relevant information; it should appeal to him for cooperation, remind him forcefully of his responsibilities and, in extreme cases such as threats made to the investigators, warn him of the administrative consequences of the persistence of his deplorable conduct. (Universal House of Justice, Violation of Baha'i and Civil Law, 9 December 1991)

The last three extracts and more information about Administrative Sanctions are available at http://bahai-library.com/uhj_violation_bahai_laws