

## Consent to Marriage a Bahá'í Perspective

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### Parental Consent

In the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah has made it obligatory for all living parents to give consent to the marriage before it can take place, to ensure peace in the family:

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 the children for those who have given them life and sent their souls out on the eternal journey towards their Creator. (Shoghi Effendi, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 207, note 92)

This is both an honor and a privilege for parents, who have the responsibility, along with their children, of assessing the character of the intended spouse:

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)

Each parent must come to a decision about how to give consent:

Since the specific guidance in the authoritative text pertaining to consent is quite limited, the friends should not seize upon this as an opportunity to embellish the act of consent or transform it into an elaborate process or exaggerated procedures. It may, for example, be as simple as a parent's expressed commitment to give his or her blessing and support to the proposed marriage. Indeed, consent could be given even if the parent has never personally met the prospective spouse. This does not mean that a parent may not wish to go further; but it does mean that others cannot expect that a parent ought to do more. Thus, in such an intensely personal situation, there is no basis for suggesting Bahá'í responsibilities that are not set out explicitly in the Writings. (Universal House of Justice, to an individual, 24 September 2014. [https://bahaimarriage.net/resources\\_parentalconsent.htm](https://bahaimarriage.net/resources_parentalconsent.htm))

It doesn't have to be in writing:

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While it is desirable to have a signed consent from each parent it is not a requirement under Bahá'í Law. The responsible Spiritual Assembly must satisfy itself that consent is freely given but it should not insist upon a signed document. Reliable evidence of oral consents is quite sufficient; some parents freely give their consents orally while refusing to write their consents. (The Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 376, #1253)

In the Baha'í Faith, there are certain instances in which consent is not needed:

When a parent abandoned the child from infancy:

Marriage is also permitted without seeking the consent of a parent who abandoned the child from infancy. (Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 19 Jan, 2010.

<https://bahaiquotes.com/subject/consent-not-needed>)

When a child was adopted in such a way that to trace the natural parents contravenes the provision of the adoption certificate or the laws of the country:

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, Lights of Guidance, p. 374, #1250)

When adoption legislation extinguished the rights and responsibilities of the natural parents:

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. ... 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. <https://bahaiquotes.com/subject/consent-not-needed>)

When a parent has committed incest and when a parent consciously fails to protect the child from flagrant sexual abuse.

He [Bahá'u'lláh] has indicated that under certain circumstances, the parents could be deprived of the right of parenthood as a consequence of their actions. The Universal House of Justice has the right to legislate on this matter. It has decided for the present that all cases should be referred to it in which the conduct or character of a parent appears to render him unworthy of having such parental rights as that of giving consent to marriage. Such questions could arise, for example, when a parent has committed incest, or when the child was conceived as a consequence of rape, and also when a parent consciously fails to protect the child

from flagrant sexual abuse. (The Universal House of Justice, 1993, Violence against Women and Children. [https://bahai-library.com/uhj\\_violence\\_against\\_women](https://bahai-library.com/uhj_violence_against_women))

When the child was conceived as a consequence of rape:

Furthermore, a child conceived as a consequence of rape is not obliged to seek consent of the male offender. (Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 19 Jan, 2010.

<https://bahaiquotes.com/subject/consent-not-needed>)

When a father denies paternity and never assumed the responsibilities of parenthood:

A child may be permitted to marry without seeking the consent of a man who denies paternity and never assumed the responsibilities of parenthood. (Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 19 Jan, 2010. <https://bahaiquotes.com/subject/consent-not-needed>)

When a parent seeks to use the requirement for consent in a manner which subverts the spirit and intent of the law:

Finally, the right of the parent to consent can be forfeited if he or she seeks to use the requirement for consent in a manner which subverts the spirit and intent of the law or obstructs an individual's right as a believer in Bahá'u'lláh to marry in accordance with the provisions of Bahá'í law. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "As for the question regarding marriage under the Law of God: first thou must choose one who is pleasing to thee, and then the matter is subject to the consent of father and mother." Yet, in some instances, a parent has refused consent in order to deprive the child of the right to choose and to force the child to marry someone of the parent's choosing. In other instances, a parent has denied consent in order to try to prevent the child from marrying anyone. (Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 19 Jan, 2010.

<https://bahaiquotes.com/subject/consent-not-needed>)

When parents or children have disowned each other; severing family ties and renouncing their responsibilities:

In some cases it is permissible under the law of God either for the parents or for the children to disown the other, to deprive the other of certain rights, to sever family ties and to renounce their responsibilities. However, the law thereof is to be decided by the Universal House of Justice. (Shoghi Effendi, quoted in a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 19 Jan, 2010. <https://bahaiquotes.com/subject/parental-rights>)

What can a parent do to assure the marriage will be a healthy one?

In my role as life coach I'm often asked what a parent can do to assure the marriage will be a healthy one. To this end, I often share the following questionnaire, which I've put

together in anticipation of the time when my own son will ask for consent. I hope you find it useful!

I ask each of the parties to consider the following quotes and answer the questions separately. Then the parents can meet with the couple as they share their answers with each other, and facilitate a discussion if necessary.

#### Quotes and Questions to Consider

Bahá'í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart. Each must, however, exercise the utmost care to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the other, that the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 118)

- How are you attached in mind and heart?
- What would you like your partner to do differently so that you will feel attached in mind and heart?
- What have you done to acquaint yourself with your partner's character?
- What have you learned about their character?
- What "red flags" have you found? (ie. what don't you like about their character, or wish they would change?)
- If this is your first marriage, what will you do to make this "a tie that will endure forever"? What do you need your partner to do?
- If this is your second marriage, what caused you to sever the tie the first time around? How do you know you will be able to make this "a tie that will endure forever"? What do you need your partner to do?

We will all, verily, abide by the will of God. (Bahá'í Marriage Vow)

- What does this mean to you? How will you accomplish it?

"There is no teaching in the Bahá'í Faith that 'soul mates' exist. What is meant is that marriage should lead to a profound friendship of spirit ... a deep spiritual bond which will be ever-lasting, and not merely physical bonds of human relationship." (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, (1997), p. 206, # 689)

- What will you do to ensure that your marriage will lead to a profound friendship of spirit?
- What would you like your partner to do to accomplish this?
- What actions are you taking to establishing a "deep spiritual bond"?
- What actions would you like to take, and what do you need to make this happen?

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. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, page 122, #92)

- What do you do now in the relationship "to abide with each other in the closest companionship"?
- What do you wish your partner would do to accomplish this?
- What does the term "helpmates" mean to you?
- What actions do you take in the relationship now, to become a helpmate?
- What do you wish your partner would do?
- Define intimacy?
- What barriers to intimacy exist in the relationship now?
- What does your partner need from the relationship?
- What will your partner need from you once you are married?
- How do you know this?

The true marriage of Bahá'ís is this, that husband and wife should be united both physically and spiritually, that they may ever improve the spiritual life of each other, and may enjoy everlasting unity throughout all the worlds of God. This is Bahá'í marriage. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 118, #86)

- How are you currently united physically and spiritually?
- How will you unite physically and spiritually once you are married? 5 years from now? 20 years from now?
- What will you do to improve the spiritual life of each other?

O ye my two beloved children! The news of your union, as soon as it reached me, imparted infinite joy and gratitude. Praise be to God, those two faithful birds have sought shelter in one nest. I beseech God that He may enable them to raise an honoured family, for the importance of marriage lieth in the bringing up of a richly blessed family, so that with entire gladness they may, even as candles, illuminate the world. For the enlightenment of the world dependeth upon the existence of man. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 120, #88)

- Do you want children?
- How many?
- How soon after you are married?
- How close together?
- How would your partner answer this question?
- What method of birth control will you use?
- What would your partner's preference be?
- How soon do you think the wife should return to work after the children are born?
- What are your reasons for this decision?
- How do you think your partner would answer this question?
- What does it mean to "raise an honoured family"?
- Give concrete examples of what you would do to accomplish this.
- How do you propose to accomplish "the bringing up of a richly blessed family"?

It is clear and evident that the body of mankind in this day stands in dire need of such members and organs as are capable, useful and active, so that their movements and activities, their bearing and behaviour, their tender feelings, lofty sentiments and noble intentions may at all times reflect heavenly virtues and perfections and become the expressions of divine attributes and saintly characteristics, thus breathing a new life and spirit into all the dwellers of the world and causing the inner ties and spiritual relationships to be fostered and fortified in all fields of human endeavour. (Bahíyyih Khánúm, p. 191, #68)

- What are the “tender feelings” of your partner?
- What are your partner’s intentions (or goals) for life?
- What virtues and perfections do you bring to the marriage?
- What virtues and perfections does your partner bring?

"Indeed, the believers have not yet fully learned to draw on each other's strength and consolation in time of need. The Cause of God is endowed with tremendous powers, and the reason the believers do not gain more from it is because they have not learned to draw fully on these mighty forces of love and strength and harmony generated by the Faith. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 93, #321)

- What do you do now to “draw on each other’s strength and consolation in time of need”?
- How would you like to do this in the future?
- What does your partner do to give strength and consolation?
- What would you like your partner to do?