

# Baha'i Relationships

*A workshop on Relationships, Chastity and Marriage*

## Outline

- This marriage workshop is in several sections, and will work well carried out over several sessions.
- Participants should have read beforehand some quotations from the Resources below. Extracts can be specifically emailed in advance or made available on the day. If some participants haven't read anything, the workshop will still work well. At least one person (eg facilitator), but preferably more, should know the quotes and topic very well so that attention can be drawn to specific writings wherever required.

## Resources

- Outlines with Quotes - [Warwick](#) \* [bahaimarriage.net](#) and [Q&A](#)
  - Quotes - [Family Life](#) \* [Preserving Baha'i Marriages](#) \* [Consent of Parents](#) \* [A Chaste and Holy Life](#) \* [Lights of Guidance : Laws of Marriage](#) \* + Search for 'Marriage' in the [Contents](#) \* [Easy Familiarity](#) (on Hugging and Kissing)
  - Civil Guidelines - [NRS \(National Registrar of Scotland\) Website](#) \* [NRS Detailed PDF](#)
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## About Marriage

- What (in simpler terms) is marriage?
- Does a person have to marry?
- What are the main purposes and benefits of marriage?
  - Does everyone get these benefits in equal measure?
- How strongly is marriage recommended?

## Before Marriage

We live in the western world where certain ways have become normalised; relationships are casually made and quickly broken, and marriages often lack strength and peace.

- Before a couple marry, should they first get to know each other?
  - *How well* should you know someone before marrying them? - Is there a good comparison?
  - What *ways* can one go about knowing a future partner?
  - What *qualities* should one look for as the most important?  
How does the *purpose* of marriage shape the approach to and choice of partner?
- In the Faith it is expected that Baha'is do not become physically involved with someone before marriage.
  - How does physical involvement impede seeing the others' character?
  - How does physical involvement impede moving away from an unsuitable liaison?
  - Are there any further considerations?
  - What *level* of physical involvement complicates a pre-marriage relationship (as above discussed) - e.g. holding hands? kissing?  
In discussing these, consider what level of '*commitment*' such actions are *conveying* to the other person, and what *role* (healthy or unhealthy) they have before a couple has finally *committed* themselves.
  - It is expected that those who are unmarried should not share a flat with someone of the other gender (who is not family). Discuss.
  - Purity before (and within) marriage is called chastity. What are the *challenges or conflicts* unmarried people may face in regards to chastity?
  - In moving away from an unsuitable liaison, much pain is felt; the longer the connection has been,

the greater the pain. Discuss the effect of 'broken relationships' on *future* ones.

- What roles (incl. distinctive) *do*, and *should*, the following have in people forming pre-marriage relationships:-
  - Parents    Friends    The Community (Baha'i/Civil)    Media/Arts/Music
  - Schools    Dating Sites (Baha'i and non-Baha'i)
- The marriage vows are that "We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God".
  - Does this hinder/exclude marrying an atheist?
  - Is this important or not?
- There is a nice saying:  
"Be true to your future spouse even before you have met them".
  - Further questions and discussion.

#### Extra Discussion

Here are some extra explorative topics if there happens to be time at the end of the session -

- When do young adults first develop feelings for a relationship?
  - What are the advantages or disadvantages of this happening at an earlier or later age?
  - Has this changed over the years?
- Explore where the western view of 'romance' relationships comes from.
- How have attitudes to marriage changed over the decades in different parts of the world?

#### **Marrying**

*After a couple has decided to marry, they gain parental consents, make known more widely the intention of marrying (including to the Assembly!), choose witnesses, choose a wedding date, and comply with civil and Baha'i requirements; then at the wedding itself they utter the marriage vows and sign certain documents (with a marriage officer this can be done as a single event instead of a civil followed by a Baha'i one). The engagement period from deciding to marry and becoming married is kept as short as is practicable.*

- When a couple has decided to marry, they communicate it definitively and this is the start of their engagement, until they are married.
  - Discuss the *purpose* and *practical arrangements* of engagement. (How do different cultures carry it out?)
  - The engagement period should not be extended beyond 95 days (currently applicable to Baha'is from countries of the older communities of the Middle East). Discuss.
- Consent of the couple's *natural living parents* is required (but not adopting parents), Sometimes it may be waived, for example with an abusive parent. Discuss the *purpose* and *benefit* (and sometimes *challenges*) of gaining this parental consent.
- The couple must consent to the marriage, which isn't the norm in some cultures. Discuss.
- The Assembly requires *two witnesses* to the marriage, as does the state, which can be the same or different (i.e. 2-4 taken together). What are witnesses for?
- The Assembly should be notified at least *6 weeks* before marriage.
  - What is the *conceptual role* of the Assembly in a marriage?  
e.g. is it witnessing (passive) or marrying (active) a couple?
- In Scotland you contact the Registrar's office at least *6 weeks* before marriage, and more if you are anticipating unusual circumstances. You and/or your partner may be from other countries and may decide to hold the marriage abroad. The process is quite simple, and in general in most countries will involve filling a form with who you are and the date of the wedding, providing evidence of who you are and that you are free to marry (your country of origin will provide a 'CONI' certificate); there are small fees for all these items; and then waiting a pre-set minimum time. The main surprises that might catch a couple out are that you may have to fly to your home country to get the CONI in person and then back again or you didn't look at your visa requirements, so wedding dates should not be set until these are

considered in discussion with the Civil Registrars. Discuss with those who have gone through the civil process, their experiences.

- A couple should be *deepened* on marriage before marriage. Discuss ways this can be achieved.
- Weddings take many forms. Discuss the *spiritual* and *practical* considerations of a wedding's:-
  - Size Cost Inclusivity of Attendees Duration Venue
  - Complications of relatives who don't get on well
- Baha'i Marriage Officers are empowered by the state to execute the civil side and by the Baha'i administration to execute the Baha'i side. Through such means, the whole wedding can happen in one place as a single event with one person (the Marriage Officer) officiating. The civil vows are said followed by the Baha'i vows, and papers shortly after signed similarly. Without this, you usually have to go to a Registrar's office for the civil wedding, then the wedding venue for the Baha'i wedding (which has to be within 24 hours). This is a distinctive feature of Scotland that along with its scenery causes people to come here to marry. Discuss this if you feel need more detail.
- The marriage vow is  
*"We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God"*  
According to the World Centre, the words of the vow "do not refer only to two people, but to more than two... the "we" does not refer exclusively to the parties to the marriage. Its application is all encompassing. It refers to we of the male gender and we of the female gender." - Discuss.
- In marrying someone who is not a Baha'i, the Baha'i should not give up their right to educate any children in Baha'i matters, which should be considered early on. Discuss the *benefits* and *challenges* surrounding this.
- Summarise the process of marrying that has been discussed.

## Married Life

- What roles (in common and distinctive) *do*, and *should*, the following have on people's marital relationships:-
  - Parents Relatives/Siblings In-Laws Friends The Community (Baha'i/Civil) Media
  - How have attitudes to married life and roles changed over the decades in different parts of the world?
- How do children affect marriage?
- How does a married person respond to bereavement?
  - If a person's partner dies, is it better to marry or stay single?
- If a couple are having unusual difficulty between themselves, how should they proceed?
  - By what means can difficulties be reduced or prevented before they arise?
- Sometimes the husband or wife unduly dominates the other, either in certain areas or over all. Discuss.
- The Baha'i writings state that divorce is abhorred and should be extremely rare. Discuss.

## Feedback

- How enjoyable was the workshop?
- Was there anything missed out, done too briefly, or could have been better worded?
- How often should such a workshop be held?
- How long should a study take?
- Any other comments?