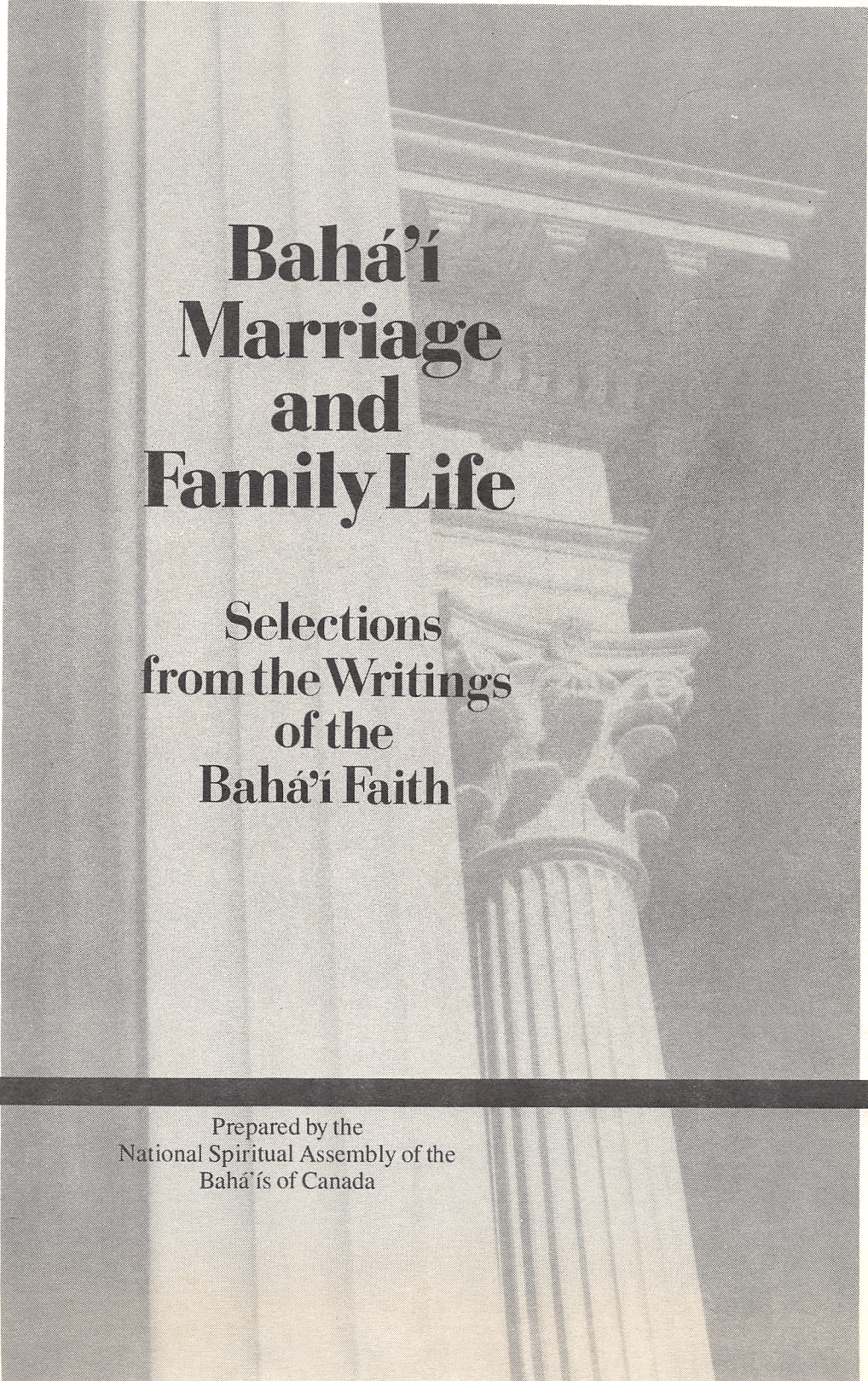


Study Guide

for



Bahá'í Marriage and Family Life

**Selections
from the Writings
of the
Bahá'í Faith**

Prepared by the
National Spiritual Assembly of the
Bahá'ís of Canada

**BAHA'I MARRIAGE
AND
FAMILY LIFE
STUDY GUIDE**

Prepared by:
The National Spiritual Assembly
of the Bahá'ís of Canada

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of the Bahá'ís of Canada

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The following study guide is a companion to the compilation *Bahá'í Marriage and Family Life*. It suggests one possible approach to our examination of the teachings related to Bahá'í marriage.

The National Spiritual Assembly invites believers not only to use this material as it is presented, but also to revise and adapt it to suit the needs and circumstances of the group studying the material.

Because study materials are continually being revised, please forward to the National Centre any observations, suggested changes or recommendations.

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INTRODUCTION

The general goal of this Study Guide as stated in the introduction of the compilation *Bahá'í Marriage and Family Life* is to help individuals

- understand the Bahá'í Writings related to marriage
 - prepare for marriage
 - who are already married
 - improve family life
- and to assist Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assemblies in their educational and counselling responsibilities.

A study of this compilation is intended to increase the knowledge and understanding of the individual and will do this by helping to

- a) focus on developing personal spiritual qualities in order to fulfill one's own contribution to marriage
- b) focus on those qualities to be considered when choosing a marriage partner
- c) know the legal requirements of Bahá'í marriage
- d) better understand the role of marriage as the foundation for a new social order
- e) know those qualities of Bahá'í marriage which create unity between the husband and wife, among children and extended family.

GUIDANCE FOR STUDY

This Study Guide can be used both by individuals and groups in various ways. Some suggestions are:

- a) Individual study - Set aside a regular period of time each week to study a section. Use a notebook to jot down thoughts and at the end of each lesson include a summary of what you have learned and how this is useful to you in your own life. Think also about sharing it with others.
- b) Group study - Set regular study times with clear time limits, and ask for a commitment to all the sessions. For groups (e.g. institutes, seminars, summer school courses) of 20 or more participants, divide into groups of 5 to 8 and choose group leaders to guide the sessions.

Motivation to use this study guide:

Why should people use this guide in addition to reading through the compilation? It is easier for most people to delve deeply into the Writings when a search is being made in answer to a specific question. This study guide leads one through the compilation in this manner.

Additional Guidelines:

It is important for the group to discuss the following in order to create anticipation for what is to be learned:

- a) How much time should be spent on this deepening? It will vary according to the learners' interest and the time available to the participants and instructor, but at the outset, clearly outline the general time frame (i.e. week-end, one evening every three weeks, and specifics such as Monday nights from 7 - 10 p.m.)
- b) How is the material to be studied? Divide the material into sections? Assign one group discussion leader for each segment? Assign the same section to all groups?

What are the duties of the leader?

- 1. Thoroughly prepare by studying material (compilation and study guide) in detail.
- 2. Decide, in consultation with the participants, what specific knowledge should be attained by the participants. Individuals and couples can be encouraged to set their own learning goals.
- 3. Explore how this goal will be achieved. In responding to the Creative Word, people need the framework that will draw out a holistic and appropriate response, unique to their own marriages and life situations. One of the most effective ways to accomplish this can be done by simply reading questions and quotations, then answering the questions before turning to the "possible answers" page. Another option is to put each question on a card and have participants choose their own questions. It is suggested that participants record their answers individually before

discussion begins, in order to encourage individual expression of opinion. The questions naturally stimulate discussion, and other methods such as role playing or demonstrations can be used when applicable.

4. Materials required:

- Compilation: *Bahá'í Marriage and Family Life*
- Study Guide on Bahá'í Marriage and Family Life
- Notebook and pen

5. It is important for the discussion leaders and/or co-ordinators to meet together beforehand to go over content, timing and procedure, as well as to allow time to debrief after each session. The discussion leader/coordinator is to be a facilitator, not a director, of the learning process, exhibiting flexibility as the study session progresses. Success will depend upon the extent to which the conditions of Bahá'í consultation are present.
6. Frequently, either before or at the end of each lesson, review the major points discussed.
7. Evaluate each session in terms of the objectives.
8. For your convenience, a check list has been placed at the top of each section of the study guide.
9. Case studies have been included in some sections to help the participants apply the principles they have been studying. They can be used as a role play or as a basis for discussion.

SECTION I: THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

CHECKLIST

- ☐ SET GOALS FOR LEARNING
- ☐ READ WRITINGS AHEAD OF TIME
- ☐ CONSULT ON THE WRITINGS
- ☐ SUMMARIZE MAJOR POINTS
- ☐ EVALUATE WHAT WAS LEARNED

A: Law of Marriage

Read the section entitled "Law of Marriage" and answer the following questions:

1. Is marriage a command that is binding on every individual? Explain.
2. If, as Shoghi Effendi states, marriage is not the central purpose of life, what is?
3. There are benefits that always come from obedience to the laws of God. Bahá'u'lláh enjoins us to marry as a means to establish order in the world and as an assistance to ourselves.

Based on the Writings and on your own knowledge and experience,

- a) How does marriage benefit society?
 - b) How does marriage benefit the individual?
4. Celibacy requirements for monks, priests, and nuns imply the notion that God can best be served by people who are not married. How is that different from Bahá'u'lláh's teachings?
 5. Many people today believe that "living together" is far better for society and the individual than getting married and planning to stay married. How would you convince them that marriage is necessary for the well-being of mankind?

Case Study

See p. 42 (I-A) for a situation designed to assist in the understanding and application of the Writings in this section.

SECTION I: THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

A: Law of Marriage Possible Answers

1. No. Although it is every person's "moral duty to marry", it is "by no means an obligation".
2. The following quotations from Bahá'u'lláh serve to illustrate the central purpose of life. (Of course, there are many more quotations which are also appropriate.)

"...Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee...."
Noonday prayer

"The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know His Creator and to attain His Presence."
Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 70

"Whatever duty Thou has prescribed unto Thy servants of extolling to the utmost Thy Majesty and Thy glory is but a token of Thy grace unto them, that they may be enabled to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of the knowledge of their own selves."
Gleanings, pp. 4-5

3. Possible answers might include

Benefits to SOCIETY

- marriage provides for continuation of the human race
- since the family is the basic unit of society, marriage helps create order in society
- marriage provides a secure place for the nurturing and training of children
- if we follow the command to "bring forth one who will remember God", we will be assisting in the creation of a society which is attuned to its Creator.

Benefits to the INDIVIDUAL

- marriage is, ideally, a source of love, encouragement and support
- marriage can act as a catalyst for the improvement of one's spiritual life
- it can provide the opportunity for one to become and have a loving companion and friend.

4. Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation to the priests and monks to marry and "bring forth one who will make mention of God" implies that the rearing of children who will know and love God is a greater service to God and humanity than being secluded from the world.

SECTION I: THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

CHECKLIST

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B: Commitments and Responsibilities

Read the section entitled "Commitments and Responsibilities" and answer the following questions:

1. According to the passages in this section, Bahá'í marriage could be defined as follows:

- a) a commitment of two people, one to the other
- b)
- c)

(List at least two more.)

2. What is the purpose of Bahá'í marriage? See passages 6, 8, 10.
3. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that "Bahá'í marriage is the commitment of two parties one to the other...." Define commitment. Why is that an important element in a marriage?
4. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the relationship husband and wife should have with one another: "They are two helpmates, two intimate friends who should be concerned about the welfare of each other...." He promises that the rewards of this relationship are "contentment, bliss and peace of heart...."
 - a) Describe how you feel when someone helps you.
 - b) What are some ways that a helping relationship between husband and wife could be developed?
5. Read passage #10.

Study the following definitions:

Procreate -- to produce children
Vitiate -- to make ineffective or worthless

- a) Who set forth the primary purpose of marriage?

- b) Are there any limitations to the use of birth control?
- c) Since it is permissible to limit the number of children in a marriage, how would a husband and wife go about deciding how many children to have, and what would be some of their considerations?

Case Study

See p. 42 (I-B) for a situation designed to assist in the understanding and application of the Writings in this section.

SECTION I: THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

B: Commitments and Responsibilities Possible Answers

1. A definition of Bahá'í marriage could include:
 - a commitment of two people
 - mutual attachment of mind and heart
 - union - both physical and spiritual
 - an eternal union of spirits.
2. The purpose of Bahá'í marriage is two-fold. The first purpose is "to become loving companions and comrades and at one with each other for time and eternity...." The second is "the procreation of children...."
3. Commitment: An act of entrusting. An agreement or pledge to do something in the future. Commitment ensures security.
4. Some of the ways of developing a helping relationship might include
 - consultation
 - negotiation
 - concentrating on the correction of one's own faults
 - attempting to be selfless and generous
 - considering the other's needs as priority.
5. Bahá'u'lláh stated the primary purpose of marriage as the procreation of children.

Birth control should not be used to produce a childless marriage.

Discussion.

Answers can also be found in the following sources: Extracts from the Letters of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice on Birth Control and Related Subjects (see Appendix I, pp. 55-56) and *Lights of Guidance*, quotations 695-704, pp. 260-264.

SECTION I: THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

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C: The Marriage Ceremony

Read the section entitled "The Marriage Ceremony" and answer the following questions:

1. In order for a Bahá'í marriage to be valid, what conditions must be met?
2. Bahá'í marriage vows require each party to promise to "abide by the Will of God." How does this statement help spouses to set priorities?
3. Scott and Elaine Parker became Bahá'ís three months after their marriage. They would love to have a Bahá'í marriage ceremony. Please advise them.
4. Except for the phrase "We will all verily abide by the Will of God", Bahá'í marriage ceremonies are not all alike. Why? What guidelines should be kept in mind when planning a Bahá'í ceremony?

C: The Marriage Ceremony Possible Answers

1. To be valid, these conditions must be met:
 - a) The Local Spiritual Assembly must officiate and appoint two witnesses. See passages 13, 18
 - b) If there are two ceremonies, both must take place within 24 hours of one another. See passages 16, 17
 - c) Consummation should take place within 24 hours of marriage or cohabitation should begin with the intention of setting up a family relationship. See #19
 - d) The legal requirements of the state/province must be met.
2. One possible result of this vow is that it encourages spouses to go to the Writings to discover their responsibilities. It also encourages them to continue living a Bahá'í life.
3. See #21.

4. Beyond the obligation of the vows, Bahá'u'lláh has given freedom to arrange the marriage ceremony in a way that is meaningful and pleasing to the couple being married. There is no uniform mold and marriages often reflect the culture(s) of the individuals involved. However, Shoghi Effendi states that the "ceremony itself must be simple."

SECTION I: THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

CHECKLIST

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D: Marriage as the Basis for Unity

Read the section entitled "Marriage as the Basis for Unity" and answer the following questions:

1. Read passage #22. According to Bahá'u'lláh, what is the main purpose of religion? How does marriage reflect this purpose?
2. There are two processes occurring at all times in life: the process of disintegration or breakdown and separation, and the process of union.
 - a) In terms of the development of one's spiritual self, how can disintegration be seen in a positive light?
 - b) What comes from the union of created things?
3. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, marriage of Bahá'ís should be the union of
 - a)
 - b)If it is, what does He say the results will be?
4. In passage #25, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that "when any souls grow to be true believers they will attain a spiritual relationship with one another...and that union of theirs, that connection, will also abide forever."
 - a) Why do you think He chose the word "grow"?
 - b) If we are all in the process of growing to be true believers, how would that affect the way we relate to and treat one another (including our spouses)?
 - c) What is His definition of a "true believer"? Explain it in your own words.
5. In passage #26, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that the tie between husband and wife is the "Word of God".
 - a) What does He say are the results of this tie?

- b) What are some ways that the Word of God could be used "to cause them to become the signs of harmony and unity until the end of time"? In other words, how can the Word of God be used to promote unity between husband and wife?

Case Study

See p. 44 (III-A) for a situation designed to assist in the understanding and application of the Writings in this section.

SECTION I: THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

D: Marriage as the Basis for Unity Possible Answers

1. The fundamental purpose of religion as defined by Bahá'u'lláh is to "safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men."

The institution of marriage reflects this purpose in that it safeguards the perpetuation of the human race, provides a secure environment for the rearing of children, establishes the basic unit of harmony in society, and when entered through the love of God, causes a "wave of tenderness to be cast on the shore of life."

2. a) When disintegration involves the dissolution of personality traits that hamper spiritual growth and the sense of harmony with those around you, then it is positive in as much as it serves to free one from the material self.

b) From the union of created things comes:
 - Divine bounties
 - life itself
 - eternal life
 - tenderness
3. A) body
B) soul
If the union is spiritual as well as physical, then it will last forever. #25
4. a) The word "grow" is a process word, implying that time is involved in change. He may have chosen it to reassure us that God has patience with us.

b) Perhaps we should have patience with ourselves and with others as we strive to attain human perfections.

c) 'Abdu'l Bahá states:
"...Souls, that is, who will
 1. consign their own selves to oblivion
 2. strip from themselves the defects of human kind
 3. unchain themselves from human bondage..."
5. A) The results of this tie:
"multitudes to assemble," "remote ones to be united," "the appearance of divine bounties," and "children who are born in the cradle of the love of God..."

b) - Daily prayers of husband and wife together
- Obedience to the laws
- Praying for one another
- Deepening together
- Bahá'í service

SECTION I: THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

CHECKLIST

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E: Attitude Towards Divorce

Read the section entitled "Divorce" and answer the following questions:

1. Read passages 28, 29, 34, 35
 - a) What are the conditions mentioned under which divorce can be considered?
 - b) Define "aversion".
2. In passages 28, 29, and 31, conditions are mentioned which should not be used as conditions for divorce. What are they?
3. What and why is the year of patience?
4. What is the attitude of the Faith toward divorce? Use quotations to back up your answer.
5. A decision to divorce is one not to be taken lightly. Many factors must be considered, including the effects of the divorce. In view of the Writings on divorce, what are some of the factors that should be considered?
6. Study passages 28, 30, 32, 36. What are the responsibilities of the Local Assembly toward troubled marriages and divorce?
7. For discussion:

What do you think are some of the factors contributing to the high rate of divorce among North American Bahá'ís?

Based on the Writings, what are some possible remedies for each factor?

Case Study

See p. 42 (I-E) for a situation designed to assist in the understanding and application of the Writings in this section.

SECTION I: THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

E: Attitude Towards Divorce Possible answers

1. Divorce can be considered under the following circumstances:
 - a. - "aversion" ('Abdu'l Bahá)
- "in exceptional circumstances, and when grave issues are involved" (Shoghi Effendi)
- "only under rare and urgent circumstances" (Shoghi Effendi)
- "only under exceptional and unbearable circumstances" (Shoghi Effendi)
 - b. - aversion = extreme dislike or disinclination: repugnance.
2. The following conditions should not be used as grounds for divorce:
 - slight friction or displeasure #28
 - no physical attraction #28
 - sexual disharmony and incompatibility #29
 - love for another person besides one's spouse #29
 - service to the Cause hindered by one's spouse #31
3. The year of patience is a one-year period granted to an estranged couple during which husband and wife are physically separated and have separate living quarters. Its purpose is to give the couple time to work on re-establishing harmony.
4. Shoghi Effendi used the following words to describe the attitude of the Faith toward divorce:
 - "reprehensible act" #29
 - "discouraged, deprecated, and against the good pleasure of God" #30
 - "strongly condemns it" #33
 - "should be avoided most strictly" #34
 - "a last resort, to be avoided at all costs if possible and not to be lightly granted" #37
5. Some factors to weigh in considering divorce are
 - a) the impact of divorce on children #s 33, 35, 36
 - b) consequences of the divorce on the life of each partner #28, and #35 (2nd part)
 - c) impact of the divorce on the community (Kingdom of God) #28
6. Responsibilities of the Local Spiritual Assembly:
 - a) circulate Writings about divorce #30
 - b) monitor the year of patience #28
 - c) investigate each case to decide if there are grounds for divorce #30
 - d) serve as counsel and help #36
 - e) try to preserve the family #32
 - f) give final approval (or disapproval) of the divorce #30

SECTION I: THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

CHECKLIST

- ☐ SET GOALS FOR LEARNING
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- ☐ EVALUATE WHAT WAS LEARNED

F: Sex in Marriage

Read the section entitled "Sex in Marriage" and answer the following questions:

1. What is the Bahá'í law regarding sex?
2. What is the meaning of the word "chastity" as Shoghi Effendi uses it in passage #43?
3. Read passage #42. What is the Bahá'í attitude toward sex?
4. Bahá'u'lláh states, "We, verily, have forbidden you lechery, and not that which is conducive to fidelity...."
 - a) Study the following definitions:
 1. lechery--excessive sexual activity
 2. conducive--tending to cause, promote or help bring about
 3. fidelity--faithfulness (to spouse)
 - b) Fidelity and chastity in marriage seem to imply the same behavior--sexual activity only inside marriage. What attitudes, actions and environments promote fidelity?
5. According to the passages in this section on sex, what is the role of sex in marriage?
6. Read passages 25 and 43, second paragraph.
 - a) What is the Bahá'í viewpoint on relationships between men and women who are not married to one another?
 - b) How are they expected to conduct themselves?
 - c) How is this attitude different from
 - i) orthodox religions where men and women are separated?
 - ii) the permissive sexual values of today's society?

SECTION I: THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

F: Sex in Marriage Possible Answers

1. The Bahá'í law on sex is that marriage is the only lawful place for sexual relations. Sex outside of marriage is forbidden.
2. Shoghi Effendi uses chastity to mean abstinence from unlawful sex as well as purity of behavior and thought. It implies that we are responsible for our thoughts (which influence our behavior), our behavior itself, and the implications of our behavior, i.e. the appearances and intentions implicit in our actions. It also implies that we have the capacity to exercise control over these processes.
3. The Bahá'í attitude towards sex is that it is a very natural and positive human behavior not to be suppressed, but engaged in only within the context of marriage.
4. Discussion.
5. The role of sex in marriage is
 - for procreation #39
 - for the spread of tenderness #40
 - subordinate to the spiritual purpose of marriage #41
 - for enjoyment--the natural right of every individual in marriage #42
6. a) We are encouraged to establish relationships based on the bonds of spiritual comradeship and love, but which are not, except in the case of marriage, translated into sexual behavior. 'Abdu'l-Bahá promises that when spiritual relationships are established, they, too, last forever.
 - b) Relationships between men and women should reflect the teachings of the Faith regarding the dignity and nobility of man and the equality of men and woman, as well as the law of chastity. Perhaps men and women friends should consider the appearance of their behavior.
 - c) i) In orthodox religions, the controls governing the relations between men and women are imposed from without and physically structured into daily life. Bahá'u'lláh, on the other hand, has allowed men and women the freedom to know one another and expected them to have inner control to know that which "leads to loftiness or abasement."
 - ii) North American society allows and even expects friendships to be translated into sexual terms. On the other hand, having sexual relations does not necessarily imply friendship. Bahá'u'lláh puts sex back into its proper place, marriage, and reminds us that true friendship is based on the union of spirit, not bodies.

SECTION II: PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

CHECKLIST

- ☐ SET GOALS FOR LEARNING
- ☐ READ WRITINGS AHEAD OF TIME
- ☐ CONSULT ON THE WRITINGS
- ☐ SUMMARIZE MAJOR POINTS
- ☐ EVALUATE WHAT WAS LEARNED

A: Self-knowledge

Read the section entitled "Self-knowledge" and passages 44-52 of "Choosing a Marriage Partner". Then answer the following questions.

1. Define:

- a) apprehend (#44)
- b) munificence (#44)
- c) extol (#45)

2. Read #44.

- a) According to Bahá'u'lláh, what will happen when one begins to understand what God has entrusted to his/her own soul?
- b) What does Bahá'u'lláh mean by the phrase "all created things"?
- c) According to Bahá'u'lláh, if we have some knowledge of this ideal inner self, where the "seas of loving-kindness and bounty" move, that can help us to become detached from (freed from the influence of) all created things. How does "knowing" facilitate the process of letting go?

3. Bahá'u'lláh states, "Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self." *Gleanings*, p. 65.

Make a list of at least 10 attributes of God, using the following chart:

- a) Choose one or two attributes you would like to work on.
 - b) Identify some of the obstacles that prevent you from manifesting that quality as much as you would like to.
 - c) How can those obstacles be changed or removed?
4. Self-knowledge involves several elements. One is knowing about the divine qualities, representing the potential ideal self, another is understanding one's own strengths and weaknesses, and a third is recognizing what leads to loftiness or to baseness.

- a) How can one learn about one's strengths and weaknesses?
 - b) How can one recognize what would lead to one's honour or abasement?
 - c) How will I know when I'm ready for marriage?
5. How would the understanding that the true self is a reflection of God affect the following:
- a) Your self-concept
 - b) Your way of communicating
 - c) Your relationship with others
 - d) Choices in such things as entertainment, clothing, friends, etc.?

SECTION II: PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

A: Self-knowledge Possible Answers

1. Definitions: *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*

- a) apprehend--to grasp with understanding; recognize the meaning of
- b) munificence--lavishness; generosity
- c) extol--to praise highly; glorify

2. a) If you could apprehend the potential entrusted to your soul, you would:

- i) become detached from all created things
- ii) "gain a knowledge of your own true selves"
- iii) become independent of all save God
- iv) perceive the attributes of "loving-kindness and bounty moving within you."

- b) In *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 110, Bahá'u'lláh writes "Know thou moreover that all else besides Him have been created through the potency of a word from His presence...." From this passage, we can infer that everything but God is a "created thing".

In another sense, man, in his reflection of the name of God, the Creator, also has the power to create. Man creates not only material objects but also deceptions, fears and illusions, as well as harmony, unity and love, etc.

- c) Knowledge of the inner self aids detachment in many ways. For example, this knowledge gives us a goal. We know that we are striving towards it. This knowledge of our potential inspires a sense of awe about the self and makes us eager to let go, however painfully, of the attachments that hamper our progress.

Another way that knowledge of the true self aids detachment is by giving us a standard by which to assess our behaviour and to measure progress.

3. Example:

<u>Attributes to be Acquired</u>	<u>Obstacles</u>	<u>How I will overcome the obstacles</u>
Generosity	- not enough money - selfishness	- give gifts and one's time to others - look for ways to cut down on spending - pray for the Fund - let go of material things a little at a time and savour the good feeling

4. a) Ways to learn about oneself:

- read the Writings and look for the names and attributes of God
 - "Bring thyself to account each day..." looking at both positive and negative deeds
 - consult with others about your concerns and your potential
 - acquire knowledge of psychology
 - seek counselling with a skilled professional
 - pray and meditate
 - "Treasure the companionship of the righteous". Look for role models that manifest qualities of God, and study their lives.
 - "Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee."
 - analyze the effects of your behaviour on others
 - evaluate the consequences of your decisions
- b) The better you know yourself, the easier it is to recognize actions/decisions that lead to happiness and honour rather than to baseness or shame. Also, the more self-knowledge, the easier it is to remain unaffected by the influence of another, so that character evaluation can be done on a more objective basis.

For a more comprehensive answer, see Chapter 4 of *A Fortress for Well-Being*.

c) Answers to this question will vary according to experience. Here are some of the questions a person might ask of him/herself in determining readiness for marriage:

- Am I willing to sacrifice some individuality and independence for the unity of the marriage?
- Am I willing to share responsibility for the relationship and daily living chores?
- Am I willing to put the sanctity of the marriage above all other considerations, except God?
- How do I handle responsibility?
- Do I see a task through?
- Do I accept responsibility for my decisions?
- Am I tolerant of another's faults and do I concern myself primarily with correcting my own?

5. Effects of Knowledge

a) self-concept

- can't think of oneself as being worthless
- gives dignity, sense of ability
- makes one lovable both to others as well as to oneself

b) way of communicating

- communicate in ways that recognize and preserve the dignity of each human, i.e. not using derogatory names or racial/cultural slurs
- being kind and courteous

- c) relationships
 - treat others with respect
 - love others for "the Beauty of God reflected in the soul"
 - would not abuse others
 - would not encourage others to do things that compromise the qualities of the soul (lying, backbiting, etc.)
- d) choices
 - avoid friends who cause one to disobey laws or abase self
 - choose clothing that reflects the dignity and beauty of the self
 - choose activities that elevate and avoid those that abase the self

SECTION II: PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

CHECKLIST

- ☐ SET GOALS FOR LEARNING
- ☐ READ WRITINGS AHEAD OF TIME
- ☐ CONSULT ON THE WRITINGS
- ☐ SUMMARIZE MAJOR POINTS
- ☐ EVALUATE WHAT WAS LEARNED

B: Choosing a Marriage Partner

Read the section entitled "Choosing a Marriage Partner", quotation #6, "Commitments and Responsibilities", and if available, Chapter 4 of *A Fortress for Well-Being* and pp. 65-70 of *Bahá'í Studies Notebook: The Divine Institution of Marriage* (March 1983).

1. In #48, Bahá'u'lláh again exhorts us to detach ourselves from the world and gives us reasons why. In *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, He explains further: "By the world is meant that which turneth you aside from Him Who is the Dawning-Place of Revelation, and inclineth you unto that which is unprofitable unto you."
Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 54
 - a) What role does detachment from the world play in choosing a marriage partner?
 - b) How does detachment relate to quotation #52?
2. Bahá'u'lláh has allowed individuals to choose whom they will marry, subject to parental consent. Read #6.
 - a) Why is it important for each partner to know about the other's character?
 - b) In the process of becoming acquainted with the intended spouse's character, what does one need to know about him/her?
 - c) How does one learn about the other's inner qualities/character? Evaluate western dating customs as a means for exploring another's character.
 - d) In choosing a person to marry, how important is it for both people to be of the same religion? Does being of the same Faith ensure the success of the marriage? Why or why not?
3. Read passages 3, 53 and the following excerpt from *Bahá'í World Faith* (p. 373):
"...when the people of Bahá desire to enter the sacred union of marriage, eternal connection and ideal relationship, spiritual and physical association of thoughts and conceptions of life must exist between them...."

Based on these quotations and your own experience, what conditions should exist in a relationship before marriage takes place?

4. What implications does #56 have for choosing a marriage partner?
5. How can consultation be used as a tool in choosing a spouse?
6. Read #54. Briefly explain, in your own words, what true love is. Compare it to the popular idea of romantic love. Is love a prerequisite to a successful marriage? Is true love enough in marriage?

Case Study

See p. 43 (II-B) for a situation designed to assist in the understanding and application of the Writings in this section.

SECTION II: PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

B: Choosing a Marriage Partner Possible Answers

1. a) Part of knowing oneself is being able to recognize which people and circumstances lead you closer to God, and which things lead you to things "unprofitable unto you". Evaluating another person's character and its effect on your self requires a certain objectivity. It is difficult to be objective if there is already a strong emotional or physical attachment to or dependence on the other person. The same is true if there is an overwhelming desire to be married. See #59 and Chapter 4 of *A Fortress for Well-Being*.
- b) In making decisions from a "detached" viewpoint, honesty in assessing oneself is vital to future happiness.
2. a) Trust is the foundation of a relationship, and trust is based on knowledge. If knowledge of the other's character is only superficial, one is bound to learn things about the other that can erode the foundation of trust and jeopardize the unity of the marriage. 'Abdu'l-Bahá exhorts Bahá'ís contemplating marriage to become informed of the character of each other so that "the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever." #6
- b) It is helpful to be familiar with these things about one's intended:
 - attitude towards self
 - commitment to serve and obey God
 - honesty and trustworthiness
 - standards of cleanliness and hygiene (personal and in the home)
 - responsibility
 - attitudes about money, time
 - attitude about work and spouse's work
 - response to stress, anger
 - attitude towards children, their training and discipline
 - relationships with family and friends
 - sense of humour
 - prejudices
 - emotional stability
 - creative interests
 - sports and recreative interests
- c) Ways of learning about these qualities of character include working together on Bahá'í or other projects, evaluating his/her job record, observing how he/she relates to family and friends, noticing how he/she behaves around children, and examining attitudes about money, etc.
- d) It is extremely helpful to have one's spouse be of the same faith since it provides a common base of values and mutual goals/directions for further growth involving children, personal development and marital cooperation. In addition, if both partners have a mutual point of attraction (God) then by growing closer to

Him, they will grow closer to each other. This serves as a powerful force for the unity of the marriage. See #25.

However, being of the same faith does not ensure the unity of the marriage. Shoghi Effendi points out that faith and character are not synonymous.

'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that a stronger prerequisite for a successful marriage is having a thorough knowledge of the other's character. Furthermore, the success of a marriage is based on numerous other factors including the maturity of both partners, similarity of life conceptions, degree of commitment, etc.

3. The relationship before marriage involves four types of attraction between the partners: emotional, mental, physical and spiritual. A relationship based on all four types of attraction has a greater probability for success than one based on fewer.
4. These quotations lead to the conclusion that the hope for making desirable changes in a partner after marriage are slim, regardless of whether or not he/she is a Bahá'í.
5. Consultation with close friends or a Local Spiritual Assembly can accomplish many things. It can inform others of one's desire to find a mate. It can clarify issues within an existing relationship. It can provide an objective view of the suitability of a prospective partner. It can solicit advice about securing consent from reluctant parents, etc.

6. TRUE LOVE

- attained through the knowledge of God-
- characterized by continuing growth
- accepting of another's limitations
- result of a process of knowing
- demands discipline, hard work, the overcoming of self
- is a conscious decision

ROMANTIC LOVE

- based on physical attraction
- fluctuates with changing perceptions or waning physical attraction
- based on "fate"
- relatively short in duration
- individuals think only of the self in relation to the partner, often exclusive of others
- just "happens" - seems accidental

One can confer that true love--this attraction of one heart to another through the love of God--is a requisite to a successful Bahá'í marriage. However, this alone is not enough for a stable marriage. There must also be integrity of character and a mutual attraction of mind and body. See #6 and #25.

SECTION II: PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

CHECKLIST

- ☐ SET GOALS FOR LEARNING
- ☐ READ WRITINGS AHEAD OF TIME
- ☐ CONSULT ON THE WRITINGS
- ☐ SUMMARIZE MAJOR POINTS
- ☐ EVALUATE WHAT WAS LEARNED

C: Chastity - D: Parental Consent - E: Engagement

Read the sections entitled "Chastity" (II-C), "Parental Consent" (II-D), and "Engagement" (II-E) and answer the following questions.

1. a) Define these words from #67:
 - i) temperance
 - ii) avocation
 - iii) vigilance
 - iv) trivial
 - v) pernicious
- b) Discuss the meaning of chastity and what it means in terms of behaviour (#68).
2. What are some reasons for the sexual aspect of the law of chastity? How does keeping sex out of a courting relationship help detachment? (Refer to *Messages from the Universal House of Justice* 1968-73, pp. 107-109.)
3. Shoghi Effendi has said we are living in a "decadent age".
 - a) How can one, especially a single person, live in such a time without being compromised by its corrupting influence?
 - b) What are the rewards of living a "chaste and holy life"?
4. Why is parental consent a prerequisite for marriage?
5. What should parents consider when asked to give consent?
6. What should a couple do when consent is not given?
7. What effects can obedience to the Bahá'í law on parental consent have on oneself and others, particularly in the face of tests?

Case Studies

See p. 43 (II-C and D) for situations designed to assist in the understanding and application of the Writings in this section.

SECTION II: PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

C: Chastity - D: Parental Consent - E: Engagement Possible Answers

1. a) Definitions: (from *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*)
 - i) temperance:
 - 1) moderation in action, thought, or feeling: restraint
 - 2) abstinence from the use of intoxicating drink.
 - ii) avocation: a hobby
 - iii) vigilance: alert watchfulness
 - iv) trivial:
 - 1) commonplace, ordinary
 - 2) of little worth or importance
 - v) pernicious: highly injurious or destructive
- b) On one level chastity refers specifically to abstinence from unlawful sex. On another broader level, chastity goes far beyond the sexual act itself to encompass purity of thought and deed in all forms of behaviour.
2. There are numerous reasons for avoiding sex outside marriage and many of them are related to protection:
 - Chastity provides protection from sexually transmitted diseases.
 - It protects the unity and sanctity of marriage by fostering security, trust and the avoidance of comparisons.
 - Sexual relations have, of course, the potential to create children. Chastity protects those potential children from a complicated life.
 - Sexual relations complicate and can seriously undermine a courting relationship.
 - Practicing chastity in a relationship can protect one partner from emotional manipulation by the other.
 - Evaluating character is much easier when one is free from the emotional involvement implied when sex is involved in the courting relationship.
 - Chastity frees us to have spiritually-grounded friendships that are not clouded by the emotional web of sexual pursuit.
3. a) Lifestyles promoted by today's society lack a sense of the true nature of man and are made very attractive to our material nature. It takes knowledge of the true self, great effort, and daily vigilance to avoid being drawn into a lifestyle based on false standards. Aids to living a chaste life include
 - Being moderate in language, dress and behaviour
 - Abstinence from drugs and alcohol
 - Avoiding places and people that could lead to compromising one's values
 - Cultivating friends who have spiritual values and philosophies
 - Becoming involved in Bahá'í community life

- Volunteering in a community service organization
 - Studying the Writings, meditating, and bringing oneself to account each day
 - Praying for God's guidance
 - Always seeking to replace something of negative influence with something of positive influence.
- b) Living a "chaste and holy life" can be difficult, but it is not without its rewards, both tangible and intangible:
- It offers protection from disease
 - Such a lifestyle brings honour to the Cause
 - The bonds of friendship and love are strengthened for time and eternity
 - Such a life strengthens the family unit which is the foundation of society itself
 - Exercising self-control has a beneficial effect on character development
 - See passages 62, 64, and 68 for assurances of other rewards
4. According to Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'u'lláh laid down the consent law to "strengthen the social fabric, to knit closer the ties of the home, to place a certain gratitude and respect in the hearts of children for those who have given them life...." (#72)
5. Parents need to consider such things as
- The serious nature of giving consent
 - The character of the proposed mate
 - Whether or not spiritual, mental and physical attraction exist between their son/daughter and the prospective mate
 - Each person's emotional and spiritual maturity and readiness to assume responsibility
6. See #79.
7. See #80.

SECTION III: FAMILY LIFE

CHECKLIST

- ☐ SET GOALS FOR LEARNING
- ☐ READ WRITINGS AHEAD OF TIME
- ☐ CONSULT ON THE WRITINGS
- ☐ SUMMARIZE MAJOR POINTS
- ☐ EVALUATE WHAT WAS LEARNED

A: Love and Unity

1. What is the station of unity?
2. What is the prerequisite for real love?
3. What is the relationship between members of a family and nations?
4. How does 'Abdu'l-Bahá describe the ideal life of a married couple? What are the positive results of such a union? What are the negative results when such a union does not exist?
5. How would you describe the current North American ideal of love? How does your description compare with that of 'Abdu'l-Bahá?
6. What is one of the first essentials to achieve unity? Why do you think the word "cordial" is used?

Case Study

See p. 44 (III-A) for a situation designed to assist in the understanding and application of the Writings in this section.

SECTION III: FAMILY LIFE

A: Love and Unity Possible Answers

1. After recognition of God and steadfastness, unity, along with affection and harmony, occupies a position superior to that of most other qualities. In fact, it possesses great power, and is the "main purpose for which the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and the Master suffered".
2. Before we can experience real love, we must be attracted to God and turn to Him. Then we are able to love, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggests, "in God, and for God".
3. Since nations evolved from the family, a family might be described as a "nation in miniature"; what happens in the nation is a reflection of what is occurring in the family. In the same way, the blessings that a united family experiences will be experienced by a united humanity.
4. In an ideal marriage, joy and spiritual delight, unity and concord, mental and physical friendship, and order and organization should be present. The couple should be a source of happiness and an example for others, and should educate their children in such a way that their characters bring fame and glory to the family.

Some positive effects of such a union are progress and prosperity, comfort and tranquillity, security, illumination and spirituality. When a union suffers from disunity, some negative effects are destruction and dispersion, unhappiness, preoccupation and distraction from our main purpose.

5. Some elements of the current North American idea of love might be possession, physical attraction to the exclusion of other considerations, self-validation ("if someone loves me, I can't be all bad"), and the expectation that the other person will make one happy.

'Abdu'l-Bahá says that we must love wherever we find the attributes of God, which means that love is not limited to one person or just a few. Love is the "vital bond inherent...in the realities of things". It is a light that guides, the source of true happiness ("felicity") in both worlds and assures progress of souls that are illumined and unites God with man. While in some elements, such as the idea of happiness, the two concepts of love may be similar, the scope of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's description is much wider.

6. One of the first essentials for the achievement of unity is that we resist the natural temptation to concern ourselves with the shortcomings of others instead of our own. Perhaps the word "cordial", which means warm and friendly, is used to suggest that our unity must be based on love, and not convenience or expedience.

SECTION III: FAMILY LIFE

CHECKLIST

- ☐ SET GOALS FOR LEARNING
- ☐ READ WRITINGS AHEAD OF TIME
- ☐ CONSULT ON THE WRITINGS
- ☐ SUMMARIZE MAJOR POINTS
- ☐ EVALUATE WHAT WAS LEARNED

B: Communication

1. How are a kindly tongue, compassion, and understanding related to consultation?
2. What are the prime requisites for consultation?
3. How do you think a wrong decision that is unanimously agreed upon can lead to the truth?
4. Is consultation to be used only for major matters? Is it only for the Institutions?

B: Communication Possible Answers

1. We are told that a kindly tongue is the "lodestone of the hearts of men", which "clothe the words with meaning" and is the "fountain of the light of wisdom and understanding...." Compassion goes hand in hand with consultation in the illumination of the "heaven of divine wisdom". Understanding is described as a gift which is made manifest through consultation.
2. See #109.
3. See #111.
4. "Man must consult on all matters, whether major or minor, so that he may become cognizant of what is good." Consultation is not limited to Institutions only; families and individuals are encouraged to consult "even in their ordinary affairs".

Case Study

See p. 44 (III-B) for a situation designed to assist in the understanding and application of the Writings in this section.

SECTION III: FAMILY LIFE

CHECKLIST

- ☐ SET GOALS FOR LEARNING
- ☐ READ WRITINGS AHEAD OF TIME
- ☐ CONSULT ON THE WRITINGS
- ☐ SUMMARIZE MAJOR POINTS
- ☐ EVALUATE WHAT WAS LEARNED

C: Tests and Difficulties

1. How can calamity be "inwardly...light and mercy"?
2. What advice are we given for dealing with tests?
3. How must we respond to non-Bahá'í families whose attitudes toward the Faith create tests? Is it absolutely necessary to behave in this way?

C: Tests and Difficulties

Possible Answers

1. Tests and difficulties, or calamities, lead to moral and spiritual development and strengthen character, even though we may experience physical and emotional pain in the process.
2. We are told to feel contentment and to avoid being overcome by grief, sorrow, jealousy or anger. Instead we must be patient, enduring, praise God, rely on Him, and think of Him continually.
3. We must treat them with great kindness, always consider their wishes, and pray for them. We are told that it is our duty to be conciliatory and friendly, and that this is the most effective means of gaining sympathy and admiration for the Faith.

Case Study

See pp. 44-45 (III-C) for a situation designed to assist in the understanding and application of the Writings in this section.

SECTION III: FAMILY LIFE

CHECKLIST

- ☐ SET GOALS FOR LEARNING
- ☐ READ WRITINGS AHEAD OF TIME
- ☐ CONSULT ON THE WRITINGS
- ☐ SUMMARIZE MAJOR POINTS
- ☐ EVALUATE WHAT WAS LEARNED

D: Equality of Men and Women

1. Why is it important for women to attain their rightful place in society?
2. In what ways are women themselves responsible for attaining their rightful place?

D: Equality of Men and Women Possible Answers

1. Women must attain their rightful place in society so that mankind can "obtain the fruit of holiness", "fly heavenwards", "achieve greatness", and realize happiness.
2. Women must strive to close the gap between their development and that of men, so that there will remain no doubt of their capacity.

Case Study

See p. 45 (III-D) for a situation designed to assist in the understanding and application of the Writings in this section.

SECTION III: FAMILY LIFE

CHECKLIST

- ☐ SET GOALS FOR LEARNING
- ☐ READ WRITINGS AHEAD OF TIME
- ☐ CONSULT ON THE WRITINGS
- ☐ SUMMARIZE MAJOR POINTS
- ☐ EVALUATE WHAT WAS LEARNED

E: Education of Children

1. What is the "bounden duty" of all parents? Why?
2. What are the responsibilities of the mother?
3. Much emphasis is placed on the role of the mother. Do fathers have responsibilities? What are they?
4. What responsibilities do sons have? Would daughters' responsibilities be the same? Different?
5. What place do music and the care of animals hold in the education of children?

E: Education of Children

Possible Answers

1. It is the duty of parents to raise their children to be strong in the Faith. A child with no relationship with God will not act in an acceptable manner; he/she will not know how to reject evil or how consciously to choose good. The Bahá'í view assumes that natural deficiencies exist in every child, and these must be remedied through spiritual or moral education, and loving, careful discipline.
2. The mother establishes the character and conduct of the child. She achieves this through education and training, giving first importance to whatever concerns the child's education.
3. The father's responsibilities are similar to those of the mother, with the additional duty of providing for the academic training of the children.
4. Sons must be obedient and humble and sacrifice their own desires for the comfort and welfare of their parents. A daughter's responsibilities would probably be similar.
5. Caring for animals teaches children to be tender, loving and kind. Music influences their hearts and helps them express their latent talents.

Case Study

See p. 45 (III-E) for a situation designed to assist in the understanding and application of the Writings in this section.

SECTION III: FAMILY LIFE

CHECKLIST

- ☐ SET GOALS FOR LEARNING
- ☐ READ WRITINGS AHEAD OF TIME
- ☐ CONSULT ON THE WRITINGS
- ☐ SUMMARIZE MAJOR POINTS
- ☐ EVALUATE WHAT WAS LEARNED

F: Relationships within the Family

1. What is the relationship between obedience and religion?
2. What are the responsibilities of children toward their parents?
3. How do the rights of men and women compare to their functions? Give some examples.
4. How is the family "a very special kind of community"?

F: Relationships within the Family Possible Answers

1. Religious training leads to obedience based on the love and fear of God, to self-knowledge and understanding rather than response to parental threats.
2. Some of the responsibilities of children toward their parents are to show kindness, to honour and pay homage to them, to regard their rights, to serve them and to comfort them.
3. Men and women have equal rights, but their functions are different. For example, both men and women have the right to an education and a career, but a man's function is such that he becomes responsible for the financial support of the family, while the woman is responsible for the initial education of the children.
4. Although a family could be described as a "small" community, the special relationships between husband and wife, parents and children, and brother and sister make the dynamics a bit different. Each has certain rights and obligations toward the others. In consultation between husband and wife, for instance, when there is a difference of opinion, one party must always defer to the other in order to come to a decision; there can be no majority vote. (See also Appendix II, p. 57 for an extract from a letter on this subject written by the Universal House of Justice.)

Case Study

See pp. 45-46 (III-F) for a situation designed to assist in the understanding and the application of the Writings in this section.

SECTION III: FAMILY LIFE

CHECKLIST

- ☐ SET GOALS FOR LEARNING
- ☐ READ WRITINGS AHEAD OF TIME
- ☐ CONSULT ON THE WRITINGS
- ☐ SUMMARIZE MAJOR POINTS
- ☐ EVALUATE WHAT WAS LEARNED

G: Death

1. Many people view death at a young age as a punishment from God. What is the Bahá'í view?
2. What happens to the soul of a child who dies before the age of 15?

G: Death Possible Answers

1. The Bahá'í view is that man's soul is freed to thrive and flourish after death. Although we may feel a great loss when a loved one dies, our reunion in the next world is eternal, and we escape the suffering and disabilities of this life.
2. A child who dies before the age of 15 is protected by God's bounty and compassion.

Case Study

See p. 46 (III-G) for a situation designed to assist in the understanding and application of the Writings in this section.

SECTION III: FAMILY LIFE

CHECKLIST

- ☐ SET GOALS FOR LEARNING
- ☐ READ WRITINGS AHEAD OF TIME
- ☐ CONSULT ON THE WRITINGS
- ☐ SUMMARIZE MAJOR POINTS
- ☐ EVALUATE WHAT WAS LEARNED

H: Work and Finance

1. What conditions must we keep in mind as we enjoy the "ornaments of the earth"?
2. What is the "secret of right living"?
3. Although we are urged to contribute to the Fund to the point of sacrifice, a line is drawn at unreasonable efforts to do so. Give examples of what might be considered "unreasonable efforts".

H: Work and Finance Possible Answers

1. We must not allow material wealth to interfere with our relationship with God. Our goals must remain high and we must maintain the image of "celestial perfection".
2. The "secret of right living" is unlimited generosity to others without fear of suffering want ourselves. We must also rely on God's bounty for our own well-being.
3. Some examples might be taking out a loan which would be difficult to repay; depriving family members of necessities; not repaying previously incurred debts; making unilateral decisions without consultation with those affected.

Case Study

See p. 46 (III-H) for a situation designed to assist in the understanding and application of the Writings in this section.

SECTION III: FAMILY LIFE

CHECKLIST

- ☐ SET GOALS FOR LEARNING
- ☐ READ WRITINGS AHEAD OF TIME
- ☐ CONSULT ON THE WRITINGS
- ☐ SUMMARIZE MAJOR POINTS
- ☐ EVALUATE WHAT WAS LEARNED

I: Hospitality

1. What are some benefits of associating with all people?
2. What must our attitude be toward friends and strangers?
3. What role can the Bahá'í home play in the progress of mankind?
4. Do guests in the home have responsibilities toward their hosts?

I: Hospitality

Possible Answers

1. Associating with others leads to unity and concord, which in turn promote order and regeneration in the world.
2. We must exhibit the following qualities toward friend and stranger: love and kindness, affectionate fellowship, and consideration.
3. A Bahá'í home can be the source of illumination for the Bahá'í community and can assist in the development of the town and country. Such a home can also promote learning and science and can spread love.
4. Guests should enter another's home only by invitation and should not abuse hospitality by disregarding the rights of their host(s).

Case Study

See p. 46 (III-I) for a situation designed to assist in the understanding and application of the Writings in this section.

SECTION III: FAMILY LIFE

CHECKLIST

- ☐ SET GOALS FOR LEARNING
- ☐ READ WRITINGS AHEAD OF TIME
- ☐ CONSULT ON THE WRITINGS
- ☐ SUMMARIZE MAJOR POINTS
- ☐ EVALUATE WHAT WAS LEARNED

J: Relationship with Bahá'í Institutions and Community

1. Why is firmness in the Covenant crucial to the protection of the Cause?
2. What is the mightiest of the "unshakeable supports of the Faith of God"? How is the Spiritual Assembly affected?
3. In what ways do we often confuse the function of the Administration with the obligations of the individual believer?
4. What are some of the options available to believers with personal problems?

J: Relationship with Bahá'í Institutions and Community Possible Answers

1. Firmness in the Covenant will prevent disunity. We will also receive confirmations from Bahá'u'lláh and support from the Supreme Concourse, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's advice will remain with us.
2. Learning and the use of the mind, expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God. As the "Trustees of the Merciful", the Local Spiritual Assembly must make every effort to educate the children from infancy.
3. All of us are called upon to love our fellow-man, but the Spiritual Assembly has the added responsibility of administering justice. We have a tendency as individuals to judge others and sometimes attempt to punish them, while we often expect the Assembly to turn the other cheek.
4. Believers with personal problems may approach the Assembly or appropriate committee if the problems concern the Faith; make their own decisions after prayer and consideration; seek advice from friends or professional counsellors, or consult with individuals involved in the matter. We should be careful, however, not to burden the Assembly with problems we can solve ourselves or to bare our souls in unnecessary confessions.

Case Study

See p. 46 (III-J) for a situation designed to assist in the understanding and application of the Writings in this section.

SECTION III: FAMILY LIFE

CHECKLIST

- ☐ SET GOALS FOR LEARNING
- ☐ READ WRITINGS AHEAD OF TIME
- ☐ CONSULT ON THE WRITINGS
- ☐ SUMMARIZE MAJOR POINTS
- ☐ EVALUATE WHAT WAS LEARNED

K: Family Life and Bahá'í Service

1. Which is more important: family life or service to the Cause?
2. In what ways can the creation of a Bahá'í home be a form of service?
3. What are some examples of instances where service to the Cause has a negative effect?

Case Study

See p. 47 (III-K) for a situation designed to assist in the understanding and application of the Writings in this section.

K: Family Life and Bahá'í Service Possible Answers

1. Since Bahá'u'lláh came to strengthen the family, it is important that we not neglect the home in favour of Bahá'í activities. We must try to find the balance.
2. Marriage enhances our ability to serve. We raise children who are steadfast in the Cause, and the home provides a stable element around which to plan activities in a community.
3. Some examples might be neglecting non-Bahá'í family because we prefer to be with Bahá'ís; neglecting our immediate family; taking advantage of facilities at the work-place to do Bahá'í work without the employer's or supervisor's permission; doing Bahá'í-related work on company time.

CASE STUDIES - SECTION I

THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

The following case studies have been prepared for several of the lessons to assist you in exploring these issues:

I A. The Law of Marriage

Joan has the choice of pioneering to Haiti or marrying Howard, a Bahá'í whom she met recently at a conference. Although she likes Howard well enough, she has really been looking forward to pioneering and is reluctant to marry at this time.

Howard has been pressuring her with quotations from the Writings regarding the duty of marriage. Joan has come to your Assembly for guidance. What do you advise?

I B. Commitments and Responsibilities

Harriet and James, two Bahá'ís in their early twenties, are contemplating marriage. Since both had difficult childhoods, they have decided not to have children. They have been studying the Writings regarding marriage lately, and are beginning to feel uneasy about their decision. They have come to your Assembly for clarification and advice.

I D. Marriage as the Basis for Unity

See case study for III A (Love and Unity).

I E. Attitude Toward Divorce

Ed and Eleanor have been married for 23 years. Their youngest child, a daughter, has just married and moved to another city. They are both working and find their jobs satisfying. They own their own home and are financially stable. They now discover that they have lost touch with one another and have little in common.

Eleanor has become attracted to a young man in the community who is a fairly new Bahá'í. He seems to admire her a great deal for her knowledge of the Faith. Lately she has been spending quite a bit of time helping him deepen in the Writings.

Ed is uneasy about the situation. Although he has not discussed it with Eleanor, he feels that she is making a fool of herself. One evening when Eleanor begins to openly make comparisons between Ed and the young man, Ed reveals his feelings. Eleanor tells him that she is thinking of ending the marriage, since it no longer seems to have meaning. How does your Assembly advise them when they come to you?

CASE STUDIES - SECTION II

PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

II B. Choosing a Partner

Gloria is a very devoted and active Bahá'í. She has been chairman of the college club and has taught children's classes for the last several years. She is mature for her age (22), and feels ready to find someone with whom she is compatible and can share her life.

Two men are interested in marrying her. Don is not a Bahá'í, but he has a fine character. He is intelligent, well-educated, and hard-working. He has a good job with excellent prospects. Gloria's parents adore Don. He is their ideal of a young man - good looking, well mannered, and he drives a new car. It appears to them that he can offer their daughter a comfortable life, and their values and ethnic backgrounds are similar to those of Don's parents.

Gloria's other friend is Carl. He is a very enthusiastic and deepened Bahá'í. He is also a musician and his original songs about the Faith make Gloria's spirit soar. She and Carl can talk forever about the Writings. He rides a ten-speed bike and is not as handsome or well-groomed as Don. In fact, because of his lack of money and problems with drugs and alcohol in his pre-Bahá'í days, Gloria's parents are not wild about him, although they do agree that he has a pure heart. They doubt that he will be able to provide for their daughter financially, but they have promised to give their consent regardless of which man she decides to marry.

Now Gloria has come to your Assembly for some guidance. How do you advise her?

II C. Chastity

Hal and Jeanine, both Bahá'ís, are engaged to be married next month. Hal has been trying to convince Jeanine that since they're getting married soon anyway, it's alright to sleep together before the ceremony. What arguments can Jeanine use to convince him otherwise?

II D. Parental Consent

Louis has just asked Meredith to marry him. Meredith's father has agreed to the marriage but her mother is hesitant about giving the written consent required. She feels that Louis lacks the emotional and financial stability necessary. Meredith is angry with her mother, upset with her "materialistic attitude" and "inability to see Louis' good qualities".

Louis and Meredith are both sincere Bahá'ís, but this situation is a difficult test for them. They have come to your Assembly for guidance.

CASE STUDIES - SECTION III

FAMILY LIFE

III A. Love and Unity

Marvin and Helene, an older couple, are having problems at home. Marvin retired recently and Helene, not used to having him at home all day, feels he is underfoot. Marvin, on the other hand, is restless and bored, and has begun criticizing the way Helene goes about her daily household activities.

Helene has been grouchy and uncooperative at the last few Assembly meetings, and members of their community have noticed that they don't talk to each other much at Feast. Should the Assembly approach them? Why or why not? If so, how does your Assembly advise them?

III B. Communication

Ernie and Bill, brothers, have always been very close. Each has sometimes made decisions affecting the other without his prior knowledge and it has never caused any problems. They both work at outside jobs, but also have their own part-time business. For the past two years they've had a joint savings account.

Ernie was out of town last week so Bill went to the Feast alone. During the consultation an appeal was made by the Assembly for increased contributions to the National Fund. Bill has forgotten to tell Ernie about this and is thinking of withdrawing the money from their savings account in order to make a contribution. Ernie, on the other hand, is considering using that money to expand their own business so that they can quit their jobs and have more flexibility in serving the Faith.

They are both anxious to go about their plans right away, and each has made an appointment to discuss them without the other's knowledge. What would your Assembly say to them?

III C. Tests and Difficulties

Sally was married for twelve years before she began investigating the Faith. After going to firesides for one year, she decided to enroll. She hoped that her husband would also become a Bahá'í, or at least show interest in the Faith. So far, Hans has done neither.

Hans comes from a traditional European background and is skeptical of religion in general. Sally enjoys going to firesides and Feasts and wants to take their two children to children's classes. Hans, however, feels threatened by her interest and activities in the Faith. He constantly

makes cutting remarks about religion, even in front of the children. As a result, Sally feels discouraged, depressed, and angry.

Sometimes Sally wonders about divorcing Hans. He is a good provider, a dedicated father, and he acts nicely when other people are around. But when alone, he puts Sally's ideas down, never really listens to or consults with her, and just wants to dominate. She is so tired of living with him, she wonders if she even loves him anymore. He seems like an obstacle between her and the Faith.

Sally has come to your Assembly for advice. What do you suggest?

III D. Equality of Men and Women

Now that John and Viviane's children have left home, Viviane would like to go back to school and start a new career. John feels that he makes more than enough money to support them comfortably and doesn't understand why she can't just stay home and take care of him and the house. He is reluctant to pay her school fees, but to be fair, he has agreed to consult with the Assembly before making his final decision. What advice does your Assembly offer them?

III E. Education of Children

Your community is holding its Feast and the topic of consultation is a child education program for the community. Someone has suggested a "family night" each week, with each Bahá'í home having a deepening and other activities related to the Faith. Since the few children in the community are of such varying ages and the nearest children's classes are quite distant, the idea seems a good one.

Several members of the community feel that a special program is not necessary. After all, they leave Bahá'í books around the house for the children to pick up and read and always bring the children to Feast and Holy Day activities if they don't have something else to do. In fact, all the adults in the community are so active that the children are sure to pick up knowledge of the Faith in the process. What is your response?

III F. Relationships Within the Family

Trudy is an only child whose parents were in their forties when she was born. She and her husband have been Bahá'ís for some time. Although not Bahá'ís themselves, Trudy's parents have always been proud of their daughter and are friendly toward the Faith. They are especially attached to their two young grandchildren.

Trudy and her husband Robert have been investigating pioneer posts with the intention of leaving within the next year. Trudy's parents, now advanced in years, have expressed the fear that they will never see their

grandchildren again if the family leaves. Trudy and Robert both love her parents, and feel they need to gain some perspective of the issues since pioneering is equally important to them. When they come to your Assembly, how do you advise them?

III G. Death

Margaret has just had a miscarriage. She is feeling bitter and depressed, and feels that she was somehow at fault. She has come to your Assembly for help. How do you comfort her?

III H. Work and Finance

Alan has always loved working with his hands, and is the most promising student in his automotive repair class at school. He and his parents have recently become Bahá'is and are especially attracted by the high level of education among their Bahá'í friends.

Alan's parents, though proud of their son's mechanical abilities, are beginning to pressure him about going to college instead of trade school. He knows he could do reasonably well in academic subjects, but he experiences great happiness and pride in solving difficult repair problems. He and his parents have come to your Assembly for advice.

III I. Hospitality

The Arnolds and Hugh Johnston are not as friendly as they used to be. Hugh was invited to their home several times, and then began dropping in unannounced. He has used their telephone for personal calls without asking permission and has routinely gone into the refrigerator and helped himself to food.

When Jan Arnold pointed out that these actions showed a lack of courtesy and respect for their rights, Hugh became angry with her and accused them of behaving in an un-Bahá'í manner by not offering true hospitality. Now Hugh has come to your Assembly to complain about the situation. What is your advice?

III J. Relationship with Bahá'í Institutions and Community

A new Assembly is about to form in your community's extension teaching goal. This Assembly is anxious to get off to a good start and has asked a representative from your Assembly to give a deepening in the community before holding its election. Specific concerns are the relationship between the Assembly and the community, including the responsibilities of both toward one another, and the new community would also like to have a similar discussion about the Assembly and the family. Your Assembly has asked you to handle the assignment. What comments do you prepare?

III K. Family Life and Bahá'í Service

Marian and Bill have been married for ten years and have two young children, seven and eight. Since the children have been in school, Marian has become very involved in Bahá'í activities and is frequently away from home giving firesides and classes. She is also secretary of the Local Spiritual Assembly and a member of the Teaching Committee.

Bill, a good-natured man, has been very supportive and has also taken over a good many of her home responsibilities -- cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the children. Lately, however, his attitude has been changing. He feels that Marian's involvement outside the home has gone too far. One night after he has put the children to bed and Marian has finally returned from a committee meeting, he confronts her with his frustrations and tells her that she must limit her activities. Marian counters that her services to the Faith are too important.

Now they have come to your Assembly for help. What do you tell them?

The following appendix has been added to assist those using this compilation to find references more readily.

SUMMARY OF QUOTATIONS

I. The Institution of Marriage

A. Law of Marriage

1. The law of marriage
2. Lives of seclusion no longer approved
3. The command of marriage is eternal
4. A moral duty but not obligation
5. Highly desirable but not central purpose of life

B. Commitments and Responsibilities

6. Bahá'í marriage - definition and purpose
7. To be as a single soul
8. Marriage to raise up families
9. Duty of fathers and mothers to train children
10. Primary purpose, procreation of children

C. The Marriage Ceremony

11. Recitation of a revealed verse
12. "We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God."
13. Assemblies to officiate
14. Ceremony to be simple
15. No set form
16. Bahá'í service and other service must occur on same day
17. A night should not intervene between ceremonies
18. Choosing of two witnesses
19. Consummation of marriage
20. Bahá'í ceremony required for every Bahá'í
21. The Bahá'í ceremony and those who are already married

D. Marriage as the Basis for Unity

22. Promoting the unity of the human race
23. Prayer for a Bahá'í couple
24. Pairing of created things yields most laudable results
25. Union must be spiritual
26. Spiritual and materials results of marriage

E. Attitude to Divorce

27. God loves concord, abhors separation
28. Strict avoidance of divorce; aversion only cause; year of patience; husband and wife considered as one soul; great difficulties for one who causes divorce
29. Cannot divorce in order to marry another; bigamy forbidden; subordination of the physical to moral
30. Divorce against God's pleasure; Assembly's responsibilities
31. Service to Cause no reason for divorce
32. Use every means to preserve family; divorce strongly condemned
33. Bahá'is influenced by society's lax morals and flippant attitude toward divorce, divorce last resort; effect on children
34. Bahá'is to combat lax trend
35. Bahá'is to exert greatest efforts to preserve marriage
36. Consider effect on children's happiness and future; turn to Assembly
37. Divorce last resort; avoid at all costs

F. Sex in Marriage

38. Marry to procreate; forbid lechery
39. Command to beget one who will remember God
40. Union to yield pure and goodly pearls
41. Love and harmony more important than passion
42. Regulation not suppression of sex instinct
43. Chastity before and after marriage

II Preparation for Marriage

A. Self-knowledge

44. Bounties of self-knowledge
45. Glorifying God enables man to attain self-knowledge
46. Knowing what leads to loftiness or baseness

B. Choosing a Marriage Partner

44. "I created thee rich..."
48. Detachment from world and its vanities
49. "Bring thyself to account each day"
50. Seek company of righteous, avoid ungodly
51. Use of consultation
52. Be honest with self and others
53. Choose partner first, then acquire consent of parents
54. Difference between real love and mere fascination
55. The love of God helps distinguish between true love and lust

- 56. Character of person set by puberty, difficult to alter
- 57. Reliance on God solves problems
- 58. Black and white marriage encouraged
- 59. Principle overrides passionate emotions
- 60. Race no bar to marriage
- 61. Difference between character and faith; character transformation often slow and painful
- 62. Become informed of each other's character; intention eternal bond

C. Chastity

- 63. A chaste and holy life rewarded
- 64. "...guard Thy handmaidens within the tabernacle of Thy chastity..."
- 65. Purity and chastity
- 66. Warning against mundane desires and seduction by beauty
- 67. Physical frame is throne of inner temple
- 68. Requirements for a chaste and holy life
- 69. Value of sex impulse acknowledged; properly used only in marriage

D. Parental Consent

- 70. Consent of partners and parents builds family unity
- 71. Marriage law applicable regardless of age or marital status
- 72. Reasons for parental consent
- 73. Parental consent essential; parents responsible to God alone
- 74. Settle parent/child differences amicably
- 75. No interference once written consent given
- 76. Marriage law no mere administrative regulation
- 77. Obligation of parents to act objectively; consent duty of parent; decision binding
- 78. Marriage law may be test of faith
- 79. Consent of foster parents not required
- 80. Advice to believers whose parents withhold consent
- 81. Effects of obeying the marriage law on individuals, on parents' character, on parent-child relationship

E. Engagement

- 82. Explanation of engagement law
- 83. Engagement begins when consents given
- 84. Engagement law not applied in West
- 85. Engagement

III Family Life

A. Love and Unity

86. Union and association pleasing to God, separation and dissension abhorred
87. Concord, harmony, affection chief among good deeds
88. The power of the light of unity
89. Manifestations create love and friendship
90. Bahá'ís must become united first, then unite others
91. Real love between people is based on the love of God
92. A family is a nation in miniature
93. Characteristics of a true Bahá'í marriage
94. Benefits of unity to the world
95. Effects of a united family on its members
96. A united and disunited family compared
97. Loving thoughts constructive
98. Definition of love
99. Human evolution began with family life
100. Cause strengthens family life, love, social institutions
101. Reasons for avoiding fault finding, back-biting, criticism.

B. Communication

102. "A kindly tongue is the lodestone of the hearts of men"; offering information without expectations
103. Consult in all matters
104. Justice, unity and consultation
105. Consultation results in understanding
106. Consultation brings awareness and well-being
107. Trust in God
108. Mutual helpfulness and concern for one another
109. Prime requisites for consultation
110. Freedom of expression necessary, clash of opinions reveals truth
111. Unity more important than being right
112. Slander, gossip, unseemly talk forbidden
113. Attitude towards faults of others
114. Spiritual benefits of consultation
115. Family consultation, a cure for domestic conflict

C. Tests and Difficulties

116. Training value of calamity
117. Healer of all ills is God
118. Harmful effects of grief, sorrow, jealousy, anger
119. Overlook others' faults for God's sake
120. Tests refine man's character
121. Trust in God turns sorrow into solace
122. God recompenses those who endure hardship with joyful hearts
123. Wife's kindness to husband means of winning his respect for Faith

124. Husband's patience with wife means of her transformation
125. Overcoming hardship achieves moral and spiritual development
126. Failures and tests can purify spirit, develop character, increase service
127. Patience with self and others
128. Importance of forgiveness in marriage
129. Consideration for non-Bahá'í spouse, benefit of prayer
130. Silence, love, forbearance win victories
131. Wisdom, tact, patience help deal with non-Bahá'í spouse
132. Respect each other's freedom of conscience
133. Transforming power of love and kindness
134. Loving attitude to non-Bahá'í relatives promotes unity
135. Contributing funds to the Cause if spouse is not a Bahá'í
136. Unfriendly mother-in-law
137. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's counsel about dealing with others' faults
138. Unity of family always has priority

D. Equality of Men and Women

139. Why we are all created from the same dust
140. Equal development of the two wings of humanity
141. Divine Justice demands equal respect for rights of both sexes
142. Man's station dependent upon women's advancement
143. Condition of women due to education, not nature
144. Future attitude of men toward women
145. The place of women in this Revelation
146. Woman must strive
147. Women's condition due to need of education and opportunity
148. Education of women more important than men

E. Education of Children

149. Essential to raise children staunch in faith
150. Fear of God the prime factor
151. Father responsible for education of children; or, if unable, House of Justice
152. Importance of literacy, striving to excel
153. Mother the first teacher
154. Act of worship for mother to educate her children
155. Father/son responsibilities to each other
156. Objectives of children's education; women's role; use of praise and reasonable punishment; physical or verbal abuse forbidden
157. Goals for the training of girls
158. Character development and verbal expression vital
159. Kindness to animals
160. Value of music
161. Love and fear of God; training in human perfections
162. Oppression or censuring of children prohibited
163. Discipline indispensable in regulating and harmonizing natural inclination
164. Two-fold duties to family and Cause
165. Parents must decide together on education of their child even if one is not a Bahá'í; child free to choose when of age

166. Father's and mother's status in family equal, but functions differ

F. Relationships Within the Family

- 167. Obedience of children acquired through religious training
- 168. Children to honour parents; service to them preferred above service to Cause
- 169. Rights of parents
- 170. God's bounty to relatives of believers after death
- 171. Son to serve father
- 172. Parents to be respected, but not to hold children back spiritually
- 173. Recognition of the rights of all family members
- 174. Transmitting spiritual qualities from one generation to another
- 175. Duties of children to parents sacred
- 176. Children's attitude to father
- 177. Children to be spiritual as well as physical offspring
- 178. Children to make mother happy
- 179. Results of excessive attachment of husband and wife to one another rather than God
- 180. Right of each family member to own faith
- 181. Father/son consultation in business matters
- 182. Privilege of children to look after mother
- 183. Embracing Faith must not alienate parents
- 184. Detailed explanation of relationships, functions and duties of family members

G. Death

- 185. Death a messenger of joy
- 186. Loved husband not lost by death
- 187. Loss of a son; 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words of a departed son to his mother
- 188. Infants after death receive God's special favour
- 189. Death brings liberation and further nurturing in next world
- 190. Next world not removed from ours; work of the Kingdom is the same as ours

H. Work and Finance

- 191. Worldly things to be enjoyed, provided God always comes first
- 192. Prosperity and abasement both pass away
- 193. Attitude to poverty
- 194. Love of God provides right motive for work and spending
- 195. Craftsmanship is worship; craftsman must exert highest efforts
- 196. Attaining perfection in profession is worship
- 197. Earthly pursuits necessary but subordinate to spiritual aspirations
- 198. Material advantages good but spiritual progress is better
- 199. Giving is the secret of right living
- 200. Wisdom in giving; sacrifice not to lead to debt or suffering of others

I. Hospitality

- 201. Remembrance of God blesses house

201. Association with followers of all religions promotes unity and brings progress
202. Obligations of a guest
203. Bahá'í homes blessed
204. Ideas for Bahá'í home
205. Showing forth utmost love and kindliness to all
206. Unconditional acceptance and affection
207. Home is to be a centre for diffusion of divine guidance
208. A Bahá'í house aids its community

J. Relationship with Bahá'í Institutions and Community

210. Firmness in Covenant of God the first condition
211. Training of the mind and expansion of consciousness essential; promotion of knowledge duty of all; the Spiritual Assembly responsible to educate children
212. Support of institutions source of all future blessings
213. Consultation between believers and Assembly at 19 Day Feasts
214. Difficulties with other community members
215. Patience and understanding necessary for maturing of Bahá'í community
216. Individual relationships based on love and mercy; friends should not play "Spiritual Assembly" to each other
217. Forget internal disagreements and rush to aid of humanity
218. Unfortunate events in community affairs must be overlooked
219. Turn to Assembly for advice in family problems
220. Assembly is loving shepherd of the Bahá'í flock
221. Courses open to a believer with problems
222. The individual's relationship with the Assembly and contribution to its progress

K. Devotion and Service

223. Effect on children of intoning verses of God
224. Bahá'í union enhances capacity to serve
225. Devotion to Cause to be translated into noble deeds for mankind
226. Necessity of balance in our lives
227. Balance between service inside and outside the home
228. Serving Cause no reason to leave spouse
229. Desire to serve no reason to destroy family life
230. Cooperation of family to enable parent to pioneer
231. Love and encouragement woman's greatest contribution to home life; obligation not to neglect this
232. Believer not to pioneer against spouse's wishes
233. Family prayers and readings encouraged
234. Unity of family takes priority over everything
235. Duties between parents and children take precedence over other service

APPENDIX I

As to your question about whether it is permissible for a married Bahá'í couple not to have children, a letter written to an individual believer on behalf of the beloved Guardian states:

"Regarding your question of whether Bahá'ís should consider it their duty to have children: as Bahá'u'lláh has stated that the fundamental purpose of marriage is to bring other souls into this world, to serve God and love Him, the Guardian does not believe that you should be unwilling to undertake this responsibility and privilege, even if it should, temporarily at least, interfere with the tempo of your Bahá'í activities."

However, there is nothing in the Writings to indicate or imply that Bahá'í marriage is open only to those who are physically able to have children. The bearing of children is but one of the purposes of marriage, albeit a fundamental one.

The question was raised about bringing forth a "defective" child. In a letter to an individual concerning a serious hereditary disease which afflicted the male members of the family, and which was feared latent in any child the couple might bear, the House of Justice states that there is nothing in the Teachings about the use of contraceptive methods in order to prevent the transmission through inheritance of undesirable family traits and tendencies. These are, therefore, matters which the Universal House of Justice will have to consider in the future, but which it does not wish to legislate on presently. Therefore the decision in each case is left to the individual believers involved. The House of Justice states that there may be circumstances which would justify not having children, and that those called upon to make decisions in this regard must rely on the best medical advice available (preferably more than one expert should be consulted) and their own consciences. They should also take into account the availability, reliability and reversibility of methods of contraception.

(From letter dated 13 August 1980 from the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

In a letter written to an individual believer on 3 February 1932, the beloved Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf:

"You enquired whether we have anything in the teachings concerning birth control and the sex element in marriage. Shoghi Effendi says that there is scarcely anything on that subject in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master except a constant emphasis on mutual fidelity. Both Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb emphasize the need for children in marriage. The latter, for example, states that to beget children is the highest physical fruit of man's existence. But neither say whether the number of children should be limited or not. Or if it is to be limited what is the proper method to be used."

Bahá'u'lláh stated that the primary purpose of marriage was the procreation of children, and the beloved Guardian alludes to this in many of the letters that were written on his behalf on this subject. This does not imply that a couple are obliged to have as many children as they can; the Guardian's secretary clearly stated on his behalf, in answer to an enquiry, that it was for the husband and wife to decide how many children they would have. A decision to have no children at all would vitiate the primary purpose of marriage and would

be contrary to the spirit of the law of Bahá'u'lláh, unless, of course, there were some medical reason why such a decision would be required.

Concerning the general matter of family planning, the spacing of children and the methods available for such birth control, there is nothing in the Sacred Writings beyond what Bahá'u'lláh has revealed regarding the nature, purpose and character of marriage. However, with reference to the use of intrauterine devices, the House of Justice understands that there is a difference of professional opinion as to how intrauterine devices work, i.e. whether they prevent conception or whether they prevent the fertilized ovum from attaching to the wall of the uterus. According to our teachings, individual life begins at conception. In using such devices, therefore, Bahá'ís will have to be guided by the best professional advice available and their own consciences.

Abortion merely to prevent the birth of an unwanted child is strictly forbidden in the Cause. There may, however, be instances in which an abortion would be justified by medical reasons, and legislation on this matter has been left to the Universal House of Justice. At the present time, however, the House of Justice does not intend to legislate on this very delicate issue, and therefore it is left to the consciences of those concerned who must carefully weigh the medical advice in the light of the general guidance given in the teachings.

A surgical operation to induce permanent sterility is prohibited unless there is some specific medical reason which would make it advisable, in which case, again, this is a matter left to the judgement and consciences of those involved in light of the principles given in the teachings, and taking into consideration, when arriving at a decision, the availability, reliability and reversibility of all contraceptive methods.

(From a letter dated 16 March 1983 from the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ireland)

APPENDIX II

In the letter of 28 December 1980, the family is likened to a special kind of community and the term "head" used in such a context, does not confer superiority upon the husband, no does it give him special rights to undermine the rights of the other members of his family. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

"The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother, none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary."

Indeed, to use the human temple as the example, if the husband is the head, the wife can well be regarded as the heart of the family. When the husband and the wife work cooperatively and complementarily, the well-being, health and proper functioning of the unit can be ensured.

...You have asked...for specific rules of conduct to govern the relationships of husbands and wives. This the House of Justice does not wish to do, and it feels that there is already adequate guidance included in the compilation on this subject. For example the principle that the rights of each and all in the family unit must be upheld, and the advice that loving consultation should be the keynote, that all matters should be settled in harmony and love, and that there are times when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other. Exactly under what circumstances such deference should take place, is a matter for each couple to determine. If, God forbid, they fail to agree, and their disagreement leads to estrangement, they should seek counsel from those they trust and in whose sincerity and sound judgement they have confidence, in order to preserve and strengthen their ties as a united family.

(From a letter dated 16 May 1982 from the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)