

On the Naming of Babies

Compiled by Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
2002-02

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
From Letters written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

1. When it is wished to celebrate the naming of a child, a special gathering may be held at which prayers and verses from the Holy Writings should be read out, and all should fervently entreat, in lowliness and devotion before the Divine Threshold, that the new-born infant may attain to righteousness, and beseech that it may be granted heavenly confirmation, steadfastness and constancy. The chosen name should then be conferred on the child, and afterwards sweetmeats and refreshments may be served—this is spiritual baptism.

(From a Tablet translated from the Persian)

From Letters written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

2. With reference to the House of Justice's suggesting a name for your dear son, it holds to the same policy as that of the beloved Guardian, a policy which is made clear in the following excerpt from a letter written to an individual believer on behalf of the Guardian by his secretary:

The new child which will soon be given to you by God is, indeed, a divine blessing, of which you should feel proud, and of the manifold responsibilities and obligations which it necessarily entails you should become fully aware. It is now that you can truly say that you have a family life. Without a child there can be no family, and through him the bonds of love and of service can be truly and strongly maintained between the wife and husband.

Your request from the Guardian that he should give a name for your baby is one which many believers have already made, and to which he has invariably given the same reply, namely, that since such demands were formerly made to the Master he does not think it would be fitting and appropriate that he should continue doing what 'Abdu'l-Bahá alone was fully entitled to do. He hopes that you will not misunderstand him on this point and that you will fully realize the wisdom of his instruction in this rather delicate matter.

(4 November 1933)

(5 June 1974 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

3. The Universal House of Justice has received your letter postmarked 5 January 1988 concerning the choice of a family name for your baby son.

We are directed to advise you that there is nothing in the teachings of the Faith concerning this subject. The friends are free to decide for themselves in such matters, bearing in mind the legal requirements and traditions of the countries in which they live. It is the hope of the House of Justice that you and your husband will, in earnest and loving consultation, come to a decision that will be conducive to joy and harmony among the members of your immediate family.

(19 January 1988 to an individual believer)

4. Concerning the various questions raised in your letter, we are asked to inform you that it is not the practice of the Universal House of Justice to select names for babies, and this matter is, therefore, left to the family to decide.

(29 June 1988 to a National Spiritual Assembly)

5. As you are aware, there is no naming ceremony for babies in the Teachings, as the following statement of the beloved Guardian, written in a letter dated 20 December 1938 to an individual believer, makes clear.

Regarding your question whether there is any special ceremony which the believers should perform when they wish to “name” a baby; the Teachings do not provide for any ceremony whatever on such occasions. We have no “baptismal service” in the Cause, such as the Christians have. There would be no objection, however, for the friends to come together on such happy occasions, provided they do not hold an official public ceremony, and provided also they strictly avoid uniformity and rigidity in all such practices.

(19 January 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

6. While Bahá'ís are certainly free to arrange informal gatherings to commemorate the naming of a baby, there is no religious ceremony which Bahá'ís are obliged to carry out for this purpose, as distinct from the followers of other religions, such as the Catholics, who are required to baptize their babies as a religious rite.

(From a letter dated 6 March 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)