

Family Life

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I. Extracts From The Writings Of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 Blessed is the spot, and the house, and the place, and the city, and the heart, and the

mountain, and the refuge, and the cave, and the valley, and the land, and the sea, and the island, and the meadow where mention of God hath been made, and His praise glorified.

(“Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá”, 1985 ed. (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1985))

- 2 The parents must exert every effort to rear their offspring to be religious, for should the children not attain this greatest of adornments, they will not obey their parents, which in a certain sense means that they will not obey God. Indeed, such children will show no consideration to anyone, and will do exactly as they please.

(Bahá’u’lláh, translated from the Persian, published in “Bahá’í Education”, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 4)

- 3 “Verily, We have enjoined on every son to serve his father.” Such is the decree which We have set forth in the Book.¹

(Bahá’u’lláh, “The Kitáb-i-Aqdas”, Questions and Answers no. 104, p. 138)

¹ A newer translation of this passage has been substituted for the translation originally included.

- 4 The fruits of the tree of existence are trustworthiness, loyalty, truthfulness and purity. After the recognition of the oneness of the Lord, exalted be He, the most important of all duties is to have due regard for the rights of one’s parents. This matter hath been mentioned in all the Books of God...

(Bahá’u’lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian and Arabic)

- 5 Blessed is the house that hath attained unto My tender mercy, wherein My remembrance is celebrated, and which is ennobled by the presence of My loved ones, who have proclaimed My praise, cleaved fast to the cord of My grace and been honoured by chanting My verses. Verily they are the exalted servants whom God hath extolled in the *Qayyúmu’l-Asmá’* and other scriptures. Verily He is the All-Hearing, the Answerer, He Who perceiveth all things.

(Bahá’u’lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

- 6 These blessed words were uttered by the Tongue of Grandeur in the Land of Mystery,² exalted and glorified is His utterance:

One of the distinguishing characteristics of this most great Dispensation is that the kin of such as have recognized and embraced the truth of this Revelation and have, in the glory of His name, the Sovereign Lord, quaffed the choice, sealed wine from the chalice of the love of the one true God, will, upon their death, if they are outwardly non-believers, be graciously invested with divine forgiveness and partake of the ocean of His Mercy.

This bounty, however, will be vouchsafed only to such souls as have inflicted no harm upon Him Who is the Sovereign Truth nor upon His loved ones. Thus hath it been ordained by Him Who is the Lord of the Throne on High and the Ruler of this world and of the world to come.

(Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

² Adrianople

- 7 We have caused thee to return to thy home as a token of Our mercy unto thy mother, inasmuch as We have found her overwhelmed with sorrow. We have enjoined you in the Book “to worship no one but God and to show kindness to your parents”.³ Thus hath the one true God spoken and the decree hath been fulfilled by the Almighty, the All-Wise. Therefore We have caused thee to return unto her and unto thy sister, that your mother’s eyes may thereby be cheered, and she may be of the thankful.

Say, O My people! Show honour to your parents and pay homage to them. This will cause blessings to descend upon you from the clouds of the bounty of your Lord, the Exalted, the Great.

When We learned of her sadness, We directed thee to return unto her, as a token of mercy unto thee from Our presence, and as an admonishment for others.

Beware lest ye commit that which would sadden the hearts of your fathers and mothers. Follow ye the path of Truth which indeed is a straight path. Should anyone give you a choice between the opportunity to render a service to Me and a service to them, choose ye to serve them, and let such service be a path leading you to Me. This is My exhortation and command unto thee. Observe therefore that which thy Lord, the Mighty, the Gracious, hath prescribed unto thee.

(Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

³ Qur’án 46:15.

II. Extracts From The Writings Of The Báb

- 8 It is seemly that the servant should, after each prayer, supplicate God to bestow mercy and forgiveness upon his parents. Thereupon God's call will be raised: "Thousand upon thousand of what thou hast asked for thy parents shall be thy recompense!" Blessed is he who remembereth his parents when communing with God. There is, verily, no God but Him, the Mighty, the Well-Beloved.

("Selections from the Writings of the Báb", [rev. ed.] (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), p. 94)

- 9 O my God! Let the outpourings of Thy bounty and blessings descend upon homes whose inmates have embraced Thy Faith, as a token of Thy grace and as a mark of loving-kindness from Thy presence....

("Selections from the Writings of the Báb", p. 200)

III. Extracts From The Writings Of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 10 As to the terminology I used in my letter, bidding thee to consecrate thyself to service in the Cause of God, the meaning of it is this: limit thy thoughts to teaching the Faith. Act by day and night according to the teachings and counsels and admonitions of Bahá'u'lláh. This doth not preclude marriage. Thou canst take unto thyself a husband and at the same time serve the Cause of God; the one doth not preclude the other. Know thou the value of these days; let not this chance escape thee. Beg thou God to make thee a lighted candle, so that thou mayest guide a great multitude through this darksome world.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), sec. 64, pp. 106-107)

- 11 Marriage, among the mass of the people, is a physical bond, and this union can only be temporary, since it is foredoomed to a physical separation at the close.

Among the people of Bahá, however, marriage must be a union of the body and of the spirit as well, for here both husband and wife are aglow with the same wine, both are enamoured of the same matchless Face, both live and move through the same spirit, both are illumined by the same glory. This connection between them is a spiritual one, hence it is a bond that will abide forever. Likewise do they enjoy strong and lasting ties in the

physical world as well, for if the marriage is based both on the spirit and the body, that union is a true one, hence it will endure. If, however, the bond is physical and nothing more, it is sure to be only temporary, and must inexorably end in separation.

When, therefore, the people of Bahá undertake to marry, the union must be a true relationship, a spiritual coming together as well as a physical one, so that throughout every phase of life, and in all the worlds of God, their union will endure; for this real oneness is a gleaming out of the love of God.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", sec. 84, p. 124)

- 12 Bahá'í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart. Each must, however, exercise the utmost care to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the other, that the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever. Their purpose must be this: to become loving companions and comrades and at one with each other for time and eternity....

The true marriage of Bahá'ís is this, that husband and wife should be united both physically and spiritually, that they may ever improve the spiritual life of each other, and may enjoy everlasting unity throughout all the worlds of God. This is Bahá'í marriage.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", sec. 86, p. 125)

- 13 And above all other unions is that between human beings, especially when it cometh to pass in the love of God. Thus is the primal oneness made to appear; thus is laid the foundation of love in the spirit....

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", sec. 87, p. 126)

- 14 Thy wife is not in harmony with thee, but praise be to God, the Blessed Beauty is pleased with thee and is conferring upon thee the utmost bounty and blessings. But still try to be patient with thy wife, perchance she may be transformed and her heart may be illumined....

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", sec. 89, p. 128)

- 15 As to thy respected husband: it is incumbent upon thee to treat him with great kindness, to consider his wishes and be conciliatory with him at all times, till he seeth that because

thou hast directed thyself toward the Kingdom of God, thy tenderness for him and thy love for God have but increased, as well as thy concern for his wishes under all conditions.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", sec. 91, p. 129)

- 16 O ye two believers in God! The Lord, peerless is He, hath made woman and man to abide with each other in the closest companionship, and to be even as a single soul. They are two helpmates, two intimate friends, who should be concerned about the welfare of each other.

If they live thus, they will pass through this world with perfect contentment, bliss, and peace of heart, and become the object of divine grace and favour in the Kingdom of heaven. But if they do other than this, they will live out their lives in great bitterness, longing at every moment for death, and will be shamefaced in the heavenly realm.

Strive, then, to abide, heart and soul, with each other as two doves in the nest, for this is to be blessed in both worlds.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", sec. 92, p. 129)

- 17 O ye loving mothers, know ye that in God's sight, the best of all ways to worship Him is to educate the children and train them in all the perfections of humankind; and no nobler deed than this can be imagined.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", sec. 114, p. 146)

- 18 O dear one of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! Be the son of thy father and be the fruit of that tree. Be a son that hath been born of his soul and heart and not only of water and clay. A real son is such one as hath branched from the spiritual part of man. I ask God that thou mayest be at all times confirmed and strengthened.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", sec. 117, pp. 147-48)

- 19 Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world. their concerns are in order, they enjoy comfort and tranquility, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but addeth to its stature and its lasting honour, as day succeedeth day....

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", sec. 221, p. 292)

- 20 Comfort thy mother and endeavour to do what is conducive to the happiness of her heart....

('Abdu'l-Bahá, "Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas", vol. 1 (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1930), p. 74)

- 21 Deliver my longings and greetings to the consolation of thine eye,⁴ Verily I love them both even as a compassionate father loveth his dear children. As to thee, have for them an abundant love and exert thine utmost in training them, so that their being may grow through the milk of the love of God, forasmuch as it is the duty of parents to perfectly and thoroughly train their children.

There are also certain sacred duties on children toward parents, which duties are written in the Book of God, as belonging to God. The [children's] prosperity in this world and the Kingdom depends upon the good pleasure of parents, and without this they will be in manifest loss.

("Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas", vol. 2 (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1930), pp. 262-63)

⁴ "Consolation of thine eye" - idiomatic Persian expression meaning "son".

- 22 As to thy question concerning the husband and wife, the tie between them and the children given to them by God: Know thou, verily, the husband is one who hath sincerely turned unto God, is awakened by the call of the Beauty of El-Bahá and chanteth the verses of Oneness in the great assemblies; the wife is a being who wisheth to be overflowing with and seeketh after the attributes of God and His names; and the tie between them is none other than the Word of God. Verily, it [the Word of God] causeth the multitudes to assemble together and the remote ones to be united. Thus the husband and wife are brought into affinity, are united and harmonized, even as though they were one person. Through their mutual union, companionship and love great results are produced in the world, both material and spiritual. The spiritual result is the appearance of divine bounties. The material result is the children who are born in the cradle of the love of God, who are nurtured by the breast of the knowledge of God, who are brought up in the bosom of the gift of God, and who are fostered in the lap of the training of God. Such children are those of whom it was said by Christ, "Verily, they are the children of the Kingdom!"

("Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas", vol. 3 (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1930), pp. 605-6)

- 23 The friends of God must so live and conduct themselves, and evince such excellence of character and conduct, as to make others astonished. The love between husband and wife must not be purely physical, nay, rather, it must be spiritual and heavenly. These two souls should be considered as one soul. How difficult it would be to divide a single soul! Nay, great would be the difficulty!

In short, the foundation of the Kingdom of God is based upon harmony and love, oneness, relationship and union, not upon differences, especially between husband and wife....

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

- 24 You have asked whether a husband would be able to prevent his wife from embracing the divine light or a wife dissuade her husband from gaining entry into the Kingdom of God. In truth neither of them could prevent the other from entering into the Kingdom, unless the husband hath an excessive attachment to the wife or the wife to the husband. Indeed when either of the two worshippeth the other to the exclusion of God, then each could prevent the other from seeking admittance into His Kingdom.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

- 25 I beseech God to graciously make of thy home a centre for the diffusion of the light of divine guidance, for the dissemination of the Words of God and for enkindling at all times the fire of love in the hearts of His faithful servants and maidservants. Know thou of a certainty that every house wherein the anthem of praise is raised to the Realm of Glory in celebration of the Name of God is indeed a heavenly home, and one of the gardens of delight in the Paradise of God.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Arabic)

- 26 If thou wouldst show kindness and consideration to thy parents so that they may feel generally pleased, this would also please Me, for parents must be highly respected and it is essential that they should feel contented, provided they deter thee not from gaining access to the Threshold of the Almighty, nor keep thee back from walking in the way of the Kingdom. Indeed it behoveth them to encourage and spur thee on in this direction.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

27 O Lord! In this Most Great Dispensation Thou dost accept the intercession of children in behalf of their parents. This is one of the special infinite bestowals of this Dispensation. Therefore, O Thou kind Lord, accept the request of this Thy servant at the threshold of Thy singleness and submerge his father in the ocean of Thy grace, because this son hath arisen to render Thee service and is exerting effort at all times in the pathway of Thy love. Verily, Thou art the Giver, the Forgiver and the Kind!

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

28 Treat all thy friends and relatives, even strangers, with a spirit of utmost love and kindness.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

29 Exert yourselves, that haply ye may be enabled to acquire such virtues as shall honour and distinguish you amongst all women. Of a surety, there is no greater pride and glory for a woman than to be a handmaid in God’s Court of Grandeur; and the qualities that shall merit her this station are an alert and wakeful heart; a firm conviction of the unity of God, the Peerless; a heartfelt love for all His maidservants; spotless purity and chastity; obedience to and consideration for her husband; attention to the education and nurturing of her children; composure, calmness, dignity and self-possession; diligence in praising God, and worshipping Him both night and day; constancy and firmness in His holy Covenant; and the utmost ardour, enthusiasm, and attachment to His Cause....

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

30 Regarding thy question about consultation of a father with his son, or a son with his father, in matters of trade and commerce, consultation is one of the fundamental elements of the foundation of the Law of God. Such consultation is assuredly acceptable, whether between father and son, or with others. There is nothing better than this. Man must consult in all things for this will lead him to the depths of each problem and enable him to find the right solution.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

- 31 Your affectionate brother hath written and mentioned your names, and hath highly praised and commended you. Observe how drawn he is to you, and how he loveth you. Thus should a brother be, so affectionate and soul-uplifting, unlike ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s brother, who is more bitter than venom.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

- 32 The father must always endeavour to educate his son and to acquaint him with the heavenly teachings. He must give him advice and exhort him at all times, teach him praiseworthy conduct and character, enable him to receive training at school and to be instructed in such arts and sciences as are deemed useful and necessary. In brief, let him instil into his mind the virtues and perfections of the world of humanity. Above all he should continually call to his mind the remembrance of God so that his throbbing veins and arteries may pulsate with the love of God.

The son, on the other hand, must show forth the utmost obedience towards his father, and should conduct himself as a humble and a lowly servant. Day and night he should seek diligently to ensure the comfort and welfare of his loving father and to secure his good pleasure. He must forgo his own rest and enjoyment and constantly strive to bring gladness to the hearts of his father and mother, that thereby he may attain the good pleasure of the Almighty and be graciously aided by the hosts of the unseen.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

- 33 Hold thy husband dear and always show forth an amiable temper towards him, no matter how ill-tempered he may be. Even if thy loving-kindness maketh him more bitter, manifest thou more kindness, more tenderness, be more loving and tolerate his cruel actions and ill-treatment.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

IV. Extracts From The Utterances Of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

- 34 The variety of inherited qualities comes from strength and weakness of constitution — that is to say, when the two parents are weak, the children will be weak; if they are strong, the children will be robust. In the same way, purity of blood has a great effect; for the pure

germ is like the superior stock which exists in plants and animals. For example, you see that children born from a weak and feeble father and mother will naturally have a feeble constitution and weak nerves; they will be afflicted and will have neither patience, nor endurance, nor resolution, nor perseverance, and will be hasty; for the children inherit the weakness and debility of their parents.

Besides this, an especial blessing is conferred on some families and some generations. Thus it is an especial blessing that from among the descendants of Abraham should have come all the Prophets of the children of Israel. This is a blessing that God has granted to this descent: to Moses from His father and mother, to Christ from His mother's line; also to Muḥammad and the Báb, and to all the Prophets and the Holy Manifestations of Israel. The Blessed Beauty⁵ is also a lineal descendant of Abraham, for Abraham had other sons besides Ishmael and Isaac who in those days migrated to the lands of Persia and Afghánistán, and the Blessed Beauty is one of their descendants.

Hence it is evident that inherited character also exists, and to such a degree that if the characters are not in conformity with their origin, although they belong physically to that lineage, spiritually they are not considered members of the family, like Canaan⁶, who is not reckoned as being of the race of Noah.

("Some Answered Questions", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 213)

⁵ Bahá'u'lláh

⁶ Cf. Gen. 9:25.

35 Also a father and mother endure the greatest troubles and hardships for their children; and often when the children have reached the age of maturity, the parents pass on to the other world. Rarely does it happen that a father and mother in this world see the reward of the care and trouble they have undergone for their children. Therefore, children, in return for this care and trouble, must show forth charity and beneficence, and must implore pardon and forgiveness for their parents. So you ought, in return for the love and kindness shown you by your father, to give to the poor for his sake, with greatest submission and humility implore pardon and remission of sins, and ask for the supreme mercy.

("Some Answered Questions", pp. 231-232)

36 If love and agreement are manifest in a single family, that family will advance, become illumined and spiritual; but if enmity and hatred exist within it, destruction and

dispersion are inevitable....

("The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912", 2nd. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 144-45)

- 37 According to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh the family, being a human unit, must be educated according to the rules of sanctity. All the virtues must be taught the family. 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. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one, the honor of all.

("The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912", p. 168)

- 38 The child must not be oppressed or censured because it is undeveloped; it must be patiently trained....

("The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912" pp. 180-81)

- 39 When you love a member of your family or a compatriot, let it be with a ray of the Infinite Love! Let it be in God, and for God! Wherever you find the attributes of God love that person, whether he be of your family or of another....

("Paris Talks: Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912" 10th ed. (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), p. 38)

- 40 This is in truth a Bahá'í house. Every time such a house or meeting place is founded it becomes one of the greatest aids to the general development of the town and country to which it belongs. It encourages the growth of learning and science and is known for its intense spirituality and for the love it spreads among the peoples.

("Paris Talks: Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912" pp. 72-73)

- 41 Consider the harmful effects of discord and dissension in a family; then reflect upon the favours and blessings which descend upon that family when unity exists among its various members. What incalculable benefits and blessings would descend upon the great human family if unity and brotherhood were established! In this century when the beneficent results of unity and the ill effects of discord are so clearly apparent, the means for the attainment and accomplishment of human fellowship have appeared in the world. His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh has proclaimed and provided the way by which hostility and dissension may be removed from the human world. He has left no ground or possibility for strife and disagreement. First He has proclaimed the oneness of mankind and specialized religious teachings for existing human conditions.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet, published in “Star of the West” vol. 17, no. 7, (October 1926), p. 232)

- 42 My home is the home of peace. My home is the home of joy and delight. My home is the home of laughter and exultation. Whosoever enters through the portals of this home, must go out with gladsome heart. This is the home of light; whosoever enters here must become illumined....

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet, published in “Star of the West”, vol. 9, no. 3, (28 April 1918), p. 40)

- 43 It is highly important for man to raise a family. So long as he is young, because of youthful self-complacency, he does not realize its significance, but this will be a source of regret when he grows old.... In this glorious Cause the life of a married couple should resemble the life of the angels in heaven—a life full of joy and spiritual delight, a life of unity and concord, a friendship both mental and physical. The home should be orderly and well-organized. Their ideas and thoughts should be like the rays of the sun of truth and the radiance of the brilliant stars in the heavens. Even as two birds they should warble melodies upon the branches of the tree of fellowship and harmony. They should always be elated with joy and gladness and be a source of happiness to the hearts of others. They should set an example to their fellow-men, manifest a true and sincere love towards each other and educate their children in such a manner as to blazon the fame and glory of their family.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet—translated from the Persian)

V. Extracts From Letters Written By Shoghi Effendi

- 44 I urge you to concentrate for a time upon whatever means you think will eventually secure the good-will, tolerance and sympathy of your husband. Show him the utmost kindness and consideration, and try, at the opportune moment to make him realize the purpose and spirit of the Faith. I will pray for the success of your efforts in this connection and wish you happiness from all my heart.

(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 20 March 1928 written on his behalf to an individual believer)

- 45 I cannot refrain, out of my great love and sympathy for you, from adding a few words myself in order to impress upon you the necessity of showing continually the utmost regard, consideration and love to your dear and respected husband. I have great hopes that upon your attitude, and consideration for him will chiefly depend his ultimate acceptance of the Cause which you love so dearly and serve so well. My profound sympathy is with you in your domestic cares which I know weigh heavily on your heart. I will continue to supplicate for you from the very depths of my heart. I pray that you may achieve in your manifold activities your heart's fondest desire.

(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi appended to a letter dated 20 December 1928 written on his behalf to an individual believer)

VI. Extracts From Letters Written On Behalf Of Shoghi Effendi

- 46 When such difference of opinion and belief occurs between husband and wife it is very unfortunate for undoubtedly it detracts from that spiritual bond which is the stronghold of the family bond, especially in times of difficulty. The way, however, that it could be remedied is not by acting in such wise as to alienate the other party. One of the objects of the Cause is actually to bring about a closer bond in the homes. In all such cases, therefore, the Master used to advise obedience to the wishes of the other party and prayer. Pray that your husband may gradually see the light and at the same time so act as to draw him nearer rather than prejudice him. Once that harmony is secured then you will be able to serve unhampered.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 15 July 1928 to an individual believer)

- 47 Under such circumstances the Master used to ask the friends to be lavish in their love and become exceptionally obedient to their husbands. Such individuals have to see through acts that the Cause has not come to break up family ties but to strengthen them; it has not come to eliminate love but to strengthen it; it has not been created to weaken social institutions but to strengthen them.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 14 October 1928 to an individual believer)

- 48 Surely Shoghi Effendi would like to see you and the other friends give their whole time and energy to the Cause, for we are in great need for competent workers, but the home is an institution that Bahá'u'lláh has come to strengthen and not to weaken. Many unfortunate things have happened in Bahá'í homes just for neglecting this point. Serve the Cause but also remember your duties towards your home. It is for you to find the balance and see that neither makes you neglect the other. We would have many more husbands in the Cause were the wives more thoughtful and moderate in their Bahá'í activities.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 14 May 1929 to an individual believer)

- 49 A truly Bahá'í home is a true fortress upon which the Cause can rely while planning its campaigns. If ... and ... love each other and would like to marry, Shoghi Effendi does not wish them to think that by doing so they are depriving themselves of the privilege of service; in fact such a union will enhance their ability to serve. There is nothing more beautiful than to have young Bahá'ís marry and found truly Bahá'í homes, the type Bahá'u'lláh wishes them to be. Please give them both the Guardian's loving greetings.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 6 November 1932 to an individual believer)

- 50 A God that is only loving or only just is not a perfect God. The Divinity has to possess both of these aspects as every father ought to express both in his attitude towards his children. If we ponder a while, we will see that our welfare can be ensured only when both of these divine attributes are equally emphasized and practised.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 29 April 1933 to an individual believer)

- 51 There is no limit to our offerings to the Temple. The more we give, the better it is for the Cause and for ourselves. But your case is a special one, since your husband is not a

believer. If you can succeed in convincing him of the importance of your donations to the Cause, so much the better. But you should never oppose him on this matter and allow anything [to] disturb the peace and unity of your family life...

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 21 September 1933 to an individual believer)

- 52 The Guardian wishes me specially to urge you to remain patient and confident, and above all to show your husband the utmost kindness and love, in return for all the opposition and hatred you receive from him. A conciliatory and friendly attitude in such cases is not only the duty of every Bahá'í but is also the most effective way of winning for the Cause the sympathy and admiration of its former foes and enemies. Love is, indeed, a most potent elixir that can transform the vilest and meanest of people into heavenly souls. May your example serve to further confirm the truth of this beautiful teaching of our Faith.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 6 December 1935 to an individual believer)

- 53 The Guardian ... has learned with deep concern of your family difficulties and troubles. He wishes me to assure you of his fervent prayers on your behalf and on behalf of your dear ones at home, that you may be guided and assisted from on High to compose your differences and to restore complete harmony and fellowship in your midst. While he would urge you to make any sacrifice in order to bring about unity in your family, he wishes you not to feel discouraged if your endeavours do not yield any immediate fruit. You should do your part with absolute faith that in doing so you are fulfilling your duty as a Bahá'í. The rest is assuredly in God's hand.

As regards your husband's attitude towards the Cause: unfriendly though that may be you should always hope that, through conciliatory and friendly means, and with wise, tactful and patient effort you can gradually succeed in winning his sympathy for the Faith. Under no circumstances should you try to dictate and impose upon him by force your personal religious convictions. Neither should you allow his opposition to the Cause [to] seriously hinder your activities.... You should act patiently, tactfully and with confidence that your efforts are being guided and reinforced by Bahá'u'lláh.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 23 July 1937 to an individual believer)

- 54 It made him very happy to know of the recent confirmation of your ... friend, and of her earnest desire to serve and promote the Faith. He will certainly pray on her behalf that she

may, notwithstanding the opposition of her parents and relatives, increasingly gain in knowledge and in understanding of the Teachings, and become animated with such zeal as to arise, and bring into the Cause a large number of her former co-religionists.

Under no circumstances, however, should she allow her parents to become completely alienated from her, but it is her bounden duty to strive, through patient, continued and loving effort, to win their sympathy for the Faith, and even, perhaps, to bring about their confirmation....

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 6 July 1938 to an individual believer)

- 55 As regards your plans: the Guardian fully approves indeed of your view that no matter how urgent and vital the requirements of the teaching work may be you should under no circumstances neglect the education of your children, as towards them you have an obligation no less sacred than towards the Cause.

Any plan or arrangement you may arrive at which would combine your twofold duties towards your family and the Cause, and would permit you to resume active work in the field of pioneer teaching, and also to take good care of your children so as to not jeopardize their future in the Cause would meet with the whole-hearted approval of the Guardian.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 17 July 1938 to an individual believer)

- 56 The institution of marriage, as established by Bahá'u'lláh, while giving due importance to the physical aspect of marital union, considers it as subordinate to the moral and spiritual purposes and functions with which it has been invested by an all-wise and loving Providence. Only when these different values are given each their due importance, and only on the basis of the subordination of the physical to the moral, and the carnal to the spiritual can such excesses and laxity in marital relations as our decadent age is so sadly witnessing be avoided, and family life be restored to its original purity, and fulfil the true function for which it has been instituted by God.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 8 May 1939 to an individual believer)

- 57 While the Guardian highly appreciates your desire to take a more active part in the teaching field, he realizes also that in deference to the wishes of your husband, towards whom you have duties no less sacred and binding than those facing you as a believer, you should endeavour to so arrange your plans as not to be too far away from him,

particularly as he himself is anxious that you should not break up, however temporarily, your home life.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 5 June 1939 to an individual believer)

- 58 The Guardian is, nevertheless, thankful that he does not object in principle to your attending Bahá'í meetings, and gives you full freedom to participate in all local Bahá'í activities. Even though he may insist on your obtaining his consent in such matters, you should not feel hurt or discouraged, but rather should continue, in a friendly and conciliatory way, to endeavour [to] win his sympathy towards the Cause. You can have no serious reason for any real grievance against him, unless he unduly interferes in your Bahá'í work, and prevents you from discharging your vital spiritual and administrative obligations towards the Faith.

The Guardian will pray in the meantime that your hopes of seeing him well confirmed and active in the Cause may be fulfilled, and that also you may be guided to adopt towards him such [a] true Bahá'í attitude as will serve to further awaken his sympathies for the Faith, and quicken the spiritual energies latent in his heart to the point of bringing about his full confirmation in the Cause. Rest assured, and confidently persist in your efforts.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 5 August 1939 to an individual believer)

- 59 The task of bringing up a Bahá'í child, as emphasized time and again in Bahá'í writings, is the chief responsibility of the mother, whose unique privilege is indeed to create in her home such conditions as would be most conducive to both his material and spiritual welfare and advancement. The training which a child first receives through his mother constitutes the strongest foundation for his future development, and it should therefore be the paramount concern of your wife ... to endeavour from now imparting to her new-born son such spiritual training as would enable him later on to fully assume and adequately discharge all the responsibilities and duties of Bahá'í life.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 16 November 1939 to an individual believer)

- 60 He has noted with feelings of genuine admiration your longing to serve in the field of pioneer teaching, but is sorry to hear that your domestic circumstances do not permit you to carry out this dear wish of your heart.

While he heartily appreciates your eagerness to labour for the Faith in distant and hitherto unopened territories, he feels that, in view of your husband's opposition, and also in consideration of the need of your children for your close help and guidance, you should, for the present, endeavour instead to work in virgin localities in the vicinity of ... or of the adjoining towns.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 7 November 1940 to an individual believer)

- 61 The question of the training and education of children in case one of the parents is a non-Bahá'í is one which solely concerns the parents themselves, who should decide about it the way they find best and most conducive to the maintenance of the unity of their family, and to the future welfare of their children. Once the child comes of age, however, he should be given full freedom to choose his religion, irrespective of the wishes and desires of his parents.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 14 December 1940 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India and Burma)

- 62 ...now that you both feel the sincere desire to unite in your efforts to make your married life happy, Shoghi Effendi advises you to do everything in your power, through love and kindness, to win your husband to your side and to remove his prejudice against the Cause.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 27 November 1941 to an individual believer)

- 63 She should certainly not grieve if she finds that her family are not receptive to the teachings—for not every soul is spiritually enlightened. Indeed, many members of the families of the Prophets themselves have remained unconverted even in face of the example and persuasion of the Manifestation of God; therefore, the friends should not be distressed by such things but rather leave the future of those they love in the hand of God, and by their services and devotion to the Faith, win the right to plead for their ultimate spiritual rebirth...

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 9 March 1942 to an individual believer)

- 64 Deep as are family ties, we must always remember that the spiritual ties are far deeper; they are everlasting and survive death, whereas physical ties, unless supported by spiritual bonds, are confined to this life. You should do all in your power, through prayer and

example, to open the eyes of your family to the Bahá'í Faith, but do not grieve too much over their actions. Turn to your Bahá'í brothers and sisters who are living with you in the light of the Kingdom.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 8 May 1942 to an individual believer)

- 65 Our Faith is just as much for children as for older people, and it rejoices his heart when he sees both working together to bring this great Message of good to all mankind.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 30 November 1942 to two believers)

- 66 Regarding the Guardian's statement that pioneering is conditioned upon the consent of parents and that it would be necessary for them to concur, you have asked whether this ruling applies equally to children who are of age and those who are not. The Guardian's reply is that the ruling applies only to those who have not yet come of age.

(From a letter dated 18 January 1943 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Persia)

- 67 Bahá'u'lláh has urged marriage upon all people as the natural and rightful way of life. He has also, however, placed strong emphasis on its spiritual nature, which, while in no way precluding a normal physical life, is the most essential aspect of marriage. That two people should live their lives in love and harmony is of far greater importance than that they should be consumed with passion for each other. The one is a great rock of strength on which to lean in time of need; the other a purely temporary thing which may at any time die out.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 20 January 1943 to an individual believer)

- 68 The Guardian, in his remarks ... about parents' and children's, wives' and husbands' relations in America, meant that there is a tendency in that country for children to be too independent of the wishes of their parents and lacking in the respect due to them. Also wives, in some cases, have a tendency to exert an unjust degree of domination over their husbands, which, of course, is not right, any more than that the husband should unjustly dominate his wife.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 22 July 1943 to an individual believer)

69 He feels you should by all means show your husband the greatest love and sympathy; if we are ever in any doubt as to how we should conduct ourselves as Bahá'ís we should think of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and study His life and ask ourselves what would He have done, for He is our perfect example in every way. And you know how tender He was, and how His affection and kindness shone like sunlight on everyone.

Your husband and your child have a right to your love, and give you a wonderful opportunity of demonstrating your faith in the Cause.

Also you should pray to Bahá'u'lláh to help unite you with your husband and make your home a true and happy home.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 9 March 1946 to an individual believer)

70 He was very sorry to see you are having trouble in your home because of the Bahá'í Faith. He feels that you should do all in your power to promote love and harmony between your husband and yourself, for your own sakes and for the sake of your children. You should, however, point out to him that every man is free to seek God for himself, and that, although you will never seek to influence him or even discuss the Bahá'í Faith with him, if he does not want to, he should leave you free to attend the meetings. The Guardian hopes that through patience, tact and prayer, you will gradually overcome his prejudice.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 16 March 1946 to an individual believer)

71 A Bahá'í is never forced to stay in a particular place; if you could not earn a living in ... and wished to be near your aged parents, you were quite right to leave....

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1 April 1946 to an individual believer)

72 Shoghi Effendi wishes me to add this note in connection with your marriage: he does not feel that any believer, under any circumstances whatsoever, can ever use the Cause or service to it as a reason for abandoning their marriage; divorce, as we know, is very strongly condemned by Bahá'u'lláh, and only grounds of extreme gravity justify it....

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 7 April 1947 to an individual believer)

73 He feels, in regard to your family problems, that you should take these matters up with your Assembly, if you desire advice; one of the duties of these Assemblies is to advise and

aid the friends, and it is your privilege to turn to your Assembly....

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 10 April 1947 to two believers)

74 He was very happy to hear of your desire to assist the pioneer work....

He does not feel that your activities in this field, however, should be a source of inharmony between you and your dear husband, and he assures you he will pray for him in the Holy Shrines, that God may awaken him to a realization of the meaning of our Faith and quicken him in its service.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 30 April 1947 to an individual believer)

75 Bahá'u'lláh has clearly stated the consent of all living parents is required for a Bahá'í marriage. This applies whether the parents are Bahá'ís or non-Bahá'ís, divorced for years or not. This great law He has laid down to strengthen the social fabric, to knit closer the ties of the home, to place a certain gratitude and respect in the hearts of children for those who have given them life and sent their souls out on the eternal journey towards their Creator. We Bahá'ís must realize that in present-day society the exact opposite process is taking place: young people care less and less for their parents' wishes, divorce is considered a natural right, and obtained on the flimsiest and most unwarrantable and shabby pretexts. People separated from each other, especially if one of them has had full custody of the children, are only too willing to belittle the importance of the partner in marriage also responsible as a parent for bringing those children into this world. The Bahá'ís must, through rigid adherence to the Bahá'í laws and teachings, combat these corrosive forces which are so rapidly destroying home life and the beauty of family relationships, and tearing down the moral structure of society.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 25 October 1947 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

76 In regard to the questions you asked him: he feels sure that, although in some ways you may be a financial burden to your children, it is to them a privilege to look after you; you are their Mother and have given them life, and through the bounty of Bahá'u'lláh they are now attracted to His Faith. Anything they do for you is small recompense for all you have done for them.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 20 September 1948 to an individual believer)

- 77 Your responsibility towards your son and your husband is very great, and the Guardian hopes your work will soon reach a point where you can return, at least for some time, to them, and give them that love and encouragement which is a woman's great contribution to home life.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 5 August 1949 to an individual believer)

- 78 He was particularly pleased to hear your family relationships are so satisfactory, and feels you are doing the right thing by deferring to your husband's wishes and remaining abroad longer.

The Guardian has long felt that the American Bahá'ís are not, in some cases, living up to the ideal of marriage set forth by Bahá'u'lláh. They are prone to being influenced by the current light and selfish attitude of the people towards the marriage bond. Consequently when he sees you are successfully living up to the Bahá'í standard, putting your best into it and preserving this sacred tie you have with your husband, he is very happy indeed. He hopes you will be in a position to be an example to others. For he disapproves of the way some Bahá'ís, in the name of serving the Cause, disencumber themselves of their husbands, or go and get new ones!

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 2 April 1950 to an individual believer)

- 79 It is one of the essential teachings of the Faith that unity should be maintained in the home. Of course this does not mean that any member of the family has a right to influence the faith of any other member; and if this is realized by all the members, then it seems certain that unity would be feasible.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 6 July 1952 to an individual believer)

- 80 The Guardian will pray that your mother may become a Bahá'í, and very actively serve the Cause of God. It should be borne in mind that by your leading a consecrated Bahá'í life, your mother will be affected perhaps as much or more than by reading and studying. When one sees the effect of the Bahá'í Teachings on another person's life, that very often has a very great effect.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 12 July 1952 to an individual believer)

- 81 He feels that you should by all means make every effort to hold your marriage together, especially for the sake of your children, who, like all children of divorced parents, cannot but suffer from conflicting loyalties, for they are deprived of the blessing of a father and mother in one home, to look after their interests and love them jointly.

Now that you realize that your husband is ill, you should be able to reconcile yourself to the difficulties you have faced with him emotionally, and not take an unforgiving attitude, however much you may suffer.

We know that Bahá'u'lláh has very strongly frowned upon divorce; and it is really incumbent upon the Bahá'ís to make almost a superhuman effort not to allow a Bahá'í marriage to be dissolved.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 6 March 1953 to an individual believer)

- 82 The Guardian fully appreciates your desire to go forth as a pioneer at this time, and to help establish the Faith in the virgin areas, but you should not go against the wishes of your husband, and force him to give up everything in order that you might serve the Faith in this manner. We must bear in mind the wishes and the rights of those who are closely connected in our lives.

If your husband wishes you to remain where you are, certainly there is a vast field for teaching there...

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 31 July 1953 to an individual believer)

- 83 Your sons, even though they will not be able at first to serve with you in pioneering, are certainly helping you to do so because of their devoted spirit and their complete co-operation. Life at best is so full of unexpected vicissitudes that leaving your boys at home does not, he feels, present any added risks. They are devoted to the Cause and will no doubt be inspired by your example.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 10 August 1953 to two believers)

- 84 With regard to your question as to your going out as a pioneer ... the Guardian feels, in view of the aversion of Bahá'u'lláh to divorce, that it is not right for a Bahá'í, even for the purpose of pioneering, to break up a marriage. He, therefore, urges you to endeavour with all your powers to become reconciled with your husband, as he considers this is more important than that you should go forth to a virgin territory to pioneer.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 27 August 1953 to an individual believer)

85 ...he wishes me to say that he favours your pioneering. However, if you consider that your going to one of the Pacific Islands as a pioneer, will destroy your relationship with your father, then he would suggest that perhaps your wife could go now, and then you can see how things work out for your joining her later.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 27 September 1953 to an individual believer)

86 The Guardian, in view of the fact that your husband does not really wish to be separated from you, but on the contrary is desirous of keeping your marriage together, feels that you, as a Bahá'í, have no right to destroy it because of your desire to serve the Faith.

Marriage is a very sacred institution. Bahá'u'lláh said its purpose is to promote unity. If the friends neglect, for the sake of the Cause, this institution, they place the Faith in a poor light before the public. In these days the people of the world are so immoral, and treat the marriage institution so lightly; and we, as Bahá'ís, in contrast to the people of the world, are trying to create a high moral standard, and reinstate the sanctity of marriage.

If your husband will allow you to do a certain amount of teaching work, and occasionally to travel in the interests of the Faith, all the better; but he does not think the Faith should be made the thing which destroys your family life.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 6 June 1954 to an individual believer)

87 He feels, in view of your husband's circumstances and feelings, and also considering that your two older children will naturally want to see you, and indeed should see you at times so that you can help them in their Bahá'í lives, that the wise thing for you to do is to pioneer with your husband somewhere in the States, where your services will be of the greatest value.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 29 July 1954 to an individual believer)

88 He appreciates very much the pioneer services you have rendered. He hopes that from now on you and your dear husband will be able to serve the Faith unitedly and devotedly together, as that is the highest form of Bahá'í cooperation in marriage.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 3 March 1955 to an individual believer)

- 89 If the condition of the health of your parents is such that your presence is really needed, then you should not leave them. If, however, there is some other relative who could care for them, then you could help with the work in ... and aid the friends in establishing the Faith on a solid foundation there.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 28 October 1955 to an individual believer)

- 90 He will pray that the opposition of your husband and sister may be changed, through your own acts of love, kindness, and the patience and tolerance you show to them.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 20 March 1956 to an individual believer)

- 91 Wherever there is a Bahá'í family, those concerned should by all means do all they can to preserve it, because divorce is strongly condemned in the Teachings, whereas harmony, unity and love are held up as the highest ideals in human relationships. This must always apply to the Bahá'ís, whether they are serving in the pioneering field or not.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 9 November 1956 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central America)

- 92 He feels that, now that you have found the thing you were searching for inwardly, and have this added joy in your life of our glorious Faith, you should be kinder to your husband and more considerate than ever, and do everything in your power to make him feel that this has not taken you away from him, but only made your love for him, and your desire to be a good wife to him, greater. Whether he will ultimately be able to become a Bahá'í or not, is something that only time can tell; but there is no doubt where your duty lies, and that is to make him appreciate the fact that your new affiliation has not interfered in any way with his home life or his marriage, but, on the contrary, has strengthened both.

It is difficult when one has found what one knows is the truth, to sit by and see a dear and close relative completely blind to it. The temptation is to try and “stir them up and make them see the light”, but this is often disastrous. Silence, love and forbearance will win greater victories in such cases. However, your husband has no right to ask you to give up being a Bahá'í. That is going too far. Nobody should trespass on the sacred bond every human being has a right to have with their Creator.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 20 April 1957 to an individual believer)

- 93 However, as you no doubt know, Bahá'u'lláh has stated that the purpose of marriage is to promote unity, so you should bear this in mind when dealing with your non-Bahá'í relatives; they cannot be expected to feel the way we do on questions of racial amity, and we must not force our views on them, but rather lovingly and wisely seek to educate them.

(In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 30 August 1957 to an individual believer)

VII. Extracts From Messages Of The Universal House Of Justice

- 94 Regarding your other question concerning the strained relationship between you and your mother-in-law and what you can do to alleviate the situation, we feel you should, with the help and consultation of your husband, persevere in your efforts to achieve unity in the family. From your description of the unfriendly attitude your mother-in-law displays toward you it is clear that you will not have an easy task. However, the important thing is that you, as a Bahá'í, are aware of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's admonition to concentrate on an individual's good qualities and that this approach to your mother-in-law can strengthen you in your resolve to achieve unity. And furthermore, perseverance in prayer will give you the strength to continue your efforts.

(In a letter written by the Universal House of Justice, 6 September 1970 to an individual believer)

- 95 A Bahá'í who has a problem may wish to make his own decision upon it after prayer and after weighing all the aspects of it in his own mind; he may prefer to seek the counsel of individual friends or of professional counsellors such as his doctor or lawyer so that he can consider such advice when making his decision; or in a case where several people are involved, such as a family situation, he may want to gather together those who are affected so that they may arrive at a collective decision....

(In a letter written by the Universal House of Justice, 19 March 1973 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada)

- 96 That the first teacher of the child is the mother should not be startling, for the primary orientation of the infant is to its mother. This provision of nature in no way minimizes the

role of the father in the Bahá'í family. Again, equality of status does not mean identity of function.

(In a letter written by the Universal House of Justice, 23 June 1974 to an individual believer)

- 97 In considering the problems that you and your wife are experiencing, the House of Justice points out that the unity of your family should take priority over any other consideration. Bahá'u'lláh came to bring unity to the world, and a fundamental unity is that of the family. Therefore, we must believe that the Faith is intended to strengthen the family, not weaken it. For example, service to the Cause should not produce neglect of the family. It is important for you to arrange your time so that your family life is harmonious and your household receives the attention it requires.

Bahá'u'lláh also stressed the importance of consultation. We should not think this worthwhile method of seeking solutions is confined to the administrative institutions of the Cause. Family consultation employing full and frank discussion, and animated by awareness of the need for moderation and balance, can be the panacea for domestic conflict...

(In a letter written by the Universal House of Justice, 1 August 1978 to an individual believer)

- 98 Although Bahá'í services should be undertaken with a spirit of sacrifice, one cannot lose sight of the importance given in our Holy Writings to the responsibilities placed on parents in relationship to their children, as well as to the duties of children towards their parents.

(In a letter written by the Universal House of Justice, 19 November 1978 to an individual believer)

- 99 The House of Justice suggests that all statements in the Holy Writings concerning specific areas of the relationship between men and women should be considered in the light of the general principle of equality between the sexes that has been authoritatively and repeatedly enunciated in the Sacred Texts. In one of His Tablets 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts: "In this divine age the bounties of God have encompassed the world of women. Equality of men and women, except in some negligible instances, has been fully and categorically announced. Distinctions have been utterly removed." That men and women differ from one another in certain characteristics and functions is an inescapable fact of nature; the important thing is that 'Abdu'l-Bahá regards such inequalities as remain between the sexes as being "negligible".

The relationship between husband and wife must be viewed in the context of the Bahá'í ideal of family life. Bahá'u'lláh came to bring unity to the world, and a fundamental unity is that of the family. Therefore, one must believe that the Faith is intended to strengthen the family, not weaken it, and one of the keys to the strengthening of unity is loving consultation. The atmosphere within a Bahá'í family as within the community as a whole should express “the keynote of the Cause of God” which, the beloved Guardian has stated, “is not dictatorial authority, but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation.”

A family, however, is a very special kind of “community”. The Research Department has not come across any statements which specifically name the father as responsible for the “security, progress and unity of the family” as is stated in Bahíyyih Nakhjavání's book, but it can be inferred from a number of the responsibilities placed upon him, that the father can be regarded as the “head” of the family. The members of a family all have duties and responsibilities towards one another and to the family as a whole, and these duties and responsibilities vary from member to member because of their natural relationships. The parents have the inescapable duty to educate their children—but not vice versa; the children have the duty to obey their parents—the parents do not obey the children; the mother—not the father—bears the children, nurses them in babyhood, and is thus their first educator; hence daughters have a prior right to education over sons and, as the Guardian's secretary has written on his behalf, “The task of bringing up a Bahá'í child, as emphasized time and again in Bahá'í Writings, is the chief responsibility of the mother, whose unique privilege is indeed to create in her home such conditions as would be most conducive to both his material and spiritual welfare and advancement. The training which a child first receives through his mother constitutes the strongest foundation for his future development...” A corollary of this responsibility of the mother is her right to be supported by her husband—a husband has no explicit right to be supported by his wife. This principle of the husband's responsibility to provide for and protect the family can be seen applied also in the law of intestacy which provides that the family's dwelling place passes, on the father's death, not to his widow, but to his eldest son; the son at the same time has the responsibility to care for his mother.

It is in this context of mutual and complementary duties, and responsibilities that one should read the Tablet in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives the following exhortation:

○ Handmaids of the All-Sufficing God!

Exert yourselves, that haply ye may be enabled to acquire such virtues as shall honour and distinguish you amongst all women. Of a surety, there is no

greater pride and glory for a woman than to be a handmaid in God's Court of Grandeur; and the qualities that shall merit her this station are an alert and wakeful heart; a firm conviction of the unity of God, the Peerless; a heartfelt love for all His maidservants; spotless purity and chastity; obedience to and consideration for her husband; attention to the education and nurturing of her children; composure, calmness, dignity and self-possession; diligence in praising God, and worshipping Him both night and day; constancy and firmness in His holy Covenant; and the utmost ardour, enthusiasm, and attachment to His Cause.....⁷

This exhortation to the utmost degree of spirituality and self-abnegation should not be read as a legal definition giving the husband absolute authority over his wife, for, in a letter written to an individual believer on 22 July 1943, the beloved Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf:

The Guardian, in his remarks ... about parents' and children's, wives' and husbands' relations in America, meant that there is a tendency in that country for children to be too independent of the wishes of their parents and lacking in the respect due to them. Also wives, in some cases, have a tendency to exert an unjust degree of domination over their husbands, which, of course, is not right, any more than that the husband should unjustly dominate his wife.

In any group, however loving the consultation, there are nevertheless points on which, from time to time, agreement cannot be reached. In a Spiritual Assembly this dilemma is resolved by a majority vote. There can, however, be no majority where only two parties are involved, as in the case of a husband and wife. There are, therefore, times when a wife should defer to her husband, and times when a husband should defer to his wife, but neither should ever unjustly dominate the other. In short, the relationship between husband and wife should be as held forth in the prayer revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá which is often read at Bahá'í weddings: "Verily, they are married in obedience to Thy command. Cause them to become the signs of harmony and unity until the end of time."

These are all relationships within the family, but there is a much wider sphere of relationships between men and women than in the home, and this too we should consider in the context of Bahá'í society, not in that of past or present social norms. For example, although the mother is the first educator of the child, and the most important formative influence in his development, the father also has the responsibility of educating his children, and this responsibility is so weighty that Bahá'u'lláh has stated that a father who fails to exercise it forfeits his rights of fatherhood.

Similarly, although the primary responsibility for supporting the family financially is placed upon the husband, this does not by any means imply that the place of woman is confined to the home. On the contrary, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated:

In the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, women are advancing side by side with men. There is no area or instance where they will lag behind: they have equal rights with men, and will enter, in the future, into all branches of the administration of society. Such will be their elevation that, in every area of endeavour, they will occupy the highest levels in the human world....⁸

and again:

So it will come to pass that when women participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world, when they enter confidently and capably the great arena of laws and politics, war will cease;...

("The Promulgation of Universal Peace" p. 135)

In the Tablet of the World, Bahá'u'lláh Himself has envisaged that women as well as men would be breadwinners in stating:

Everyone, whether man or woman, should hand over to a trusted person a portion of what he or she earneth through trade, agriculture or other occupation, for the training and education of children, to be spent for this purpose with the knowledge of the Trustees of the House of Justice.

("Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", p. 90)

A very important element in the attainment of such equality is Bahá'u'lláh's provision that boys and girls must follow essentially the same curriculum in schools.

(In a letter written by the Universal House of Justice, 28 December 1980 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand)

⁷ The quotation in the original letter has been replaced by this revised translation.

⁸ The quotation in the original letter which was taken from "Paris Talks", p. 182, has been replaced by this revised translation.