



## BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S MARRIAGE LAW

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*The following guidance on Bahá'u'lláh's marriage law is provided in light of the deepening on Bahá'í marriage that Local Spiritual Assemblies are asked to arrange in February each year.*

**A**mong the laws Bahá'u'lláh has revealed is that of marriage:

It hath been laid down in the Bayán that marriage is dependent upon the consent of both parties. Desiring to establish love, unity and harmony amidst Our servants, We have conditioned it, once the couple's wish is known, upon the permission of their parents, lest enmity and rancour should arise amongst them. And in this We have yet other purposes. Thus hath Our commandment been ordained.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 42, ¶65)

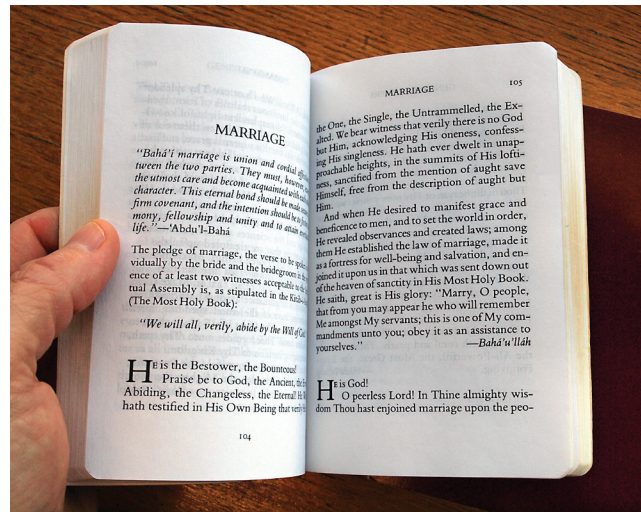
The purpose of "this great law" is "to strengthen the social fabric, to knit closer the ties of the home, to place a certain gratitude and respect in the hearts of children for those who have given them life and sent their souls out on the eternal journey towards their Creator."

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

The requirements of the Bahá'í marriage law currently binding upon the believers in the West are:

- Mutual consent between the two parties to the marriage
- Consent of all living, natural parents
- The holding of a Bahá'í marriage ceremony authorized by a Spiritual Assembly
- Approval of two witnesses by the Spiritual Assembly

When a Bahá'í marriage ceremony takes place, there is no individual, strictly speaking, who 'performs' it—no Bahá'í equivalent to a minister of the Church. The couple themselves perform the ceremony by each saying, in the presence of at least two witnesses, the prescribed verse 'we will



all, verily, abide by the Will of God.' This ceremony is performed under the authority of a Spiritual Assembly which has the responsibility for ensuring that the various requirements of Bahá'í Law, such as obtaining the consent of the parents, are met, to whom the witnesses must be acceptable, and which issues the marriage certificate.

(Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 23 May 1985, cited in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 385)

A Bahá'í wedding cannot take place until the Local Spiritual Assembly in whose jurisdiction the wedding will be held has verified that all the requirements of both the Bahá'í and civil law have been met. In terms of the Bahá'í law, the Local Spiritual Assembly must for example verify that the consent of all living natural parents has been given, and it must also approve those who will witness that the Bahá'í marriage ceremony has taken place. **Believers who are planning to marry are therefore urged to consult with their Local Spiritual Assembly as far in advance of the wedding date as possible.** This is suggested both as a courtesy to the Local Spiritual Assembly and as an assistance to the couple in case complications arise, as for example, with obtaining parental consent. Bahá'ís who intentionally disregard the marriage law are subject to the possible loss of their administrative rights.

Further guidance on the Bahá'í marriage law may be found in *Lights of Guidance*, 4th revised edition (1996), pages 369-391, and in the compilation *Bahá'í Marriage and Family Life*.



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*“With regard to your question concerning the so-called Marriage Tablet printed on page 47 of the supplement of the British Prayer Book, this is not a Tablet, but a talk ascribed to the Master by Mirza Ahmad Sobrab. It was given some time in December, 1918 about Sobrab’s marriage. It cannot be regarded as Bahá’í scripture as ‘nothing can be considered as scripture for which we do not have an original text’, as the beloved Guardian pointed out. The friends may use this talk, but it is not to be considered as scripture.”*

(From the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of South and west Africa, January 18, 1971: *Bahá’í Journal of the United Kingdom*, No. 218, August 1973, p. 2; as published in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 386)

### The Bahá’í marriage ceremony

“As you know, there is no ritual, according to the Aqdas, and the Guardian is very anxious that none should be introduced at present and no general forms accepted. He believes this ceremony should be as simple as possible, the parties using the words ordained by Bahá’u’lláh [‘We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God’ – cited in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 105], and excerpts from the Writings and Prayers being read if desired. There should be no commingling of the old forms with the new and simple one of Bahá’u’lláh . . .”

(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 13 March 1944, cited in *Lights of Guidance*, 4th ed., p. 390, #1298)

### Frequently asked questions about marriage

**Q** – I understand that I must seek the consent of my parents to marry, but I don’t really understand why. I’m an adult.

**A** – “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 toward their Creator.”

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

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

“In all cases of marriage, including remarriage, Bahá’ís are required to have consent of all living parents of both parties.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 29 August 1965)

If you have any questions about seeking consent, you should consult with your Local Spiritual Assembly, if you have one, or the National Spiritual Assembly, if you do not.

**Q** – I haven’t been in touch with my father for many years, and don’t know where he lives. Do I still need his consent?

**A** – “As long as the parents are alive, the consent must be obtained; it is not conditioned on their relationship to their children.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, 26 June 1956)

“If the whereabouts of the parents is not known legally, in other words, if they are legally dead, then it is not necessary for the children to obtain their consent, obviously. It is not a question of the child not knowing the present whereabouts of its parents, it is a question of a legal thing – if the parents are alive, they must be asked.”

(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Messages to Canada*, pp. 59-60)

“...a child may be permitted to marry without seeking the consent of a man who denies paternity and never assumed the responsibilities of parenthood. Marriage is also permitted without seeking the consent of a parent who abandoned the child from infancy. Furthermore, a child conceived as a consequence of rape is not obliged to seek consent of the male offender...When cases arise involving any of the circumstances discussed above, a Local Spiritual Assembly should ascertain all relevant facts and refer the matter for consideration to your National Spiritual Assembly.”

(Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual



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Assembly of the United States, 19 January 2010)

**Q** – I was adopted and have never had contact with my birth parents. How can I obtain parental consent?

**A** – “Regarding the matter of adopted children, the consent of all natural parents must be obtained wherever this is legally possible but no effort should be made to trace the natural parents if this contravenes the provision of the adoption certificate or the laws of the country.”

(The Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 24 October 1965)

The Universal House of Justice advised the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada that if the effect of adoption legislation is to extinguish the rights and responsibilities of the natural parents, the child does not require their consent. Please consult with your Local Spiritual Assembly about this.

“There is no requirement of Bahá'í law that the consent of foster or adopting parents be obtained, although the child may wish to do so.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 16 June 1966)

**Q** – I want to marry in Canada but my parents are in Iran. My Assembly needs more than my word that they have given consent. What do I need to do?

**A** – Your parents' consent has to be verified in Iran before your Local Spiritual Assembly can authorize the wedding. The National Assembly has provided all Local Assemblies with guidance on how they are to verify consents from parents in Iran, so you should be in touch with your Local Assembly about this.

**Q** – We are having a Bahá'í marriage ceremony and, since my intended spouse is not a Bahá'í, a church wedding. Can the Bahá'í marriage be held in the church?

**A** – Yes, if you meet the following conditions:

“... When a Bahá'í is marrying a non-Bahá'í, and the religious wedding ceremony of the non-Bahá'í partner is to be held in addition to the Bahá'í ceremony, both ceremonies may, if requested, be held in the place of worship of the other religion provided that:

Equal respect is accorded to both ceremonies. In other words, the Bahá'í ceremony, which is basically so simple, should not be regarded as a mere formal adjunct to the ceremony of the other religion.

The two ceremonies are clearly distinct. In other words, they should not be commingled into one combined ceremony.”

(Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 26 February 1986, cited in *Lights of Guidance* 2nd ed., p. 388)

**Q** – I am having two marriage ceremonies, Bahá'í and Christian. Can I have the Bahá'í marriage ceremony the next day?

**A** – No. When two ceremonies are being held they must both take place on the same calendar day and it does not matter which ceremony takes place first, or which one is to be legally registered.

“As to cases involving another ceremony in addition to the Bahá'í one, the friends should bear in mind that according to Bahá'í Law the consummation of the marriage must take place within twenty-four hours of the Bahá'í marriage ceremony. If other marriage ceremonies are to be held in addition to the Bahá'í one, all the ceremonies must precede consummation of the marriage and, together with the consummation fall within one twenty-four hour period. Naturally any requirements of civil law as to the order in which the ceremonies should be held must be observed.”

(From the Universal House of Justice to the International Teaching Center, February 17, 1976)

In Canada the twenty-four hour period is to begin at 00:01h (12.01am) of the day in which the first ceremony is held and conclude at 24:00h (midnight) of that same day.

“The consummation of marriage by a couple is, as you aptly state, an intimate and private matter outside the scrutiny of others. While consummation normally implies a sexual relationship, the Bahá'í Law requiring consummation to take place within twenty-four hours of the ceremony can be considered as fulfilled if the couple has commenced co-habitation with the intention of setting up the family relationship.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer dated 28 July 1978)

**Q** – Do I need to have a civil marriage ceremony in addition to a Bahá'í ceremony when I marry in Canada?

**A** – No. Throughout Canada, the Bahá'í marriage ceremony is legally recognized and it is not necessary to have a civil ceremony. When a Bahá'í is marrying a non-Bahá'í, and the non-Bahá'í wishes to have a civil ceremony, it is permissible in such a case to have the additional civil ceremony, which should be held on the same calendar day as the Bahá'í ceremony on the condition that the two ceremonies are clearly distinct and not commingled into one combined ceremony.



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However, in cases where, because of geographic distance, two Bahá'ís are marrying and it is impossible for a registrar to be present, a civil ceremony would be required in addition to the Bahá'í ceremony. Both ceremonies must be performed on the same day and are subject to the same conditions as listed in the above paragraph. Arrangements for such a situation, however, must be authorized by a nearby Local Spiritual Assembly prior to the wedding.

**Q** – Both of us are Bahá'í but in addition to the Bahá'í ceremony we wish to have another ceremony of the religion of our relatives to make them happy and so they will feel more comfortable with the Bahá'í marriage. Can we have an additional religious ceremony (e.g. Christian, Muslim, Hindu) if both of us are Bahá'ís?

**A** – “The instructions of the beloved Guardian are clear on this point. When two Bahá'ís are married they may not be married by the religious ceremony of another Faith.”

(Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 20 May 1968)

**Q** – I want to marry in two weeks and my Assembly is having difficulty meeting. How can I have a Bahá'í marriage?

**A** – Under these circumstances you should contact the National Spiritual Assembly for assistance in obtaining the help of a Local Spiritual Assembly that can authorize your Bahá'í marriage ceremony to take place.

**Q** – Can my non-Bahá'í friend be a witness to my Bahá'í marriage ceremony?

**A** – Yes. “These two witnesses may be chosen by the couple or by the Spiritual Assembly, but must in any case be acceptable to the Assembly; they may be its chairman and secretary, or two members of the Assembly, or two other people, Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í, or any combination of these. . . .

“The witnesses can be any two trustworthy people whose testimony is acceptable to the Spiritual Assembly under whose jurisdiction the marriage is performed. This fact makes it possible for a lone pioneer in a remote post to have a Bahá'í marriage.”  
(Letter from the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, dated 8 August 1969)

**Q** – Can my little brother be a witness to my Bahá'í marriage? He's 14.

**A** – No. A person cannot usually serve in a legally registered marriage if under the age set by the provincial/territorial government for being of legal

maturity. This is usually the age when one is allowed to vote in provincial/territorial elections. The age requirement may vary in each Province/Territory.

**Q** – I have been previously married and obtained a civil divorce. I now want to marry another person. What do I need to know before I can have a Bahá'í marriage?

**A** – “Even though a Bahá'í has obtained a civil divorce, under Bahá'í law he cannot be regarded as divorced unless he has also obtained a Bahá'í divorce, therefore he is not free to marry. Should he attempt to marry and in the process violate the Bahá'í law governing marriage, he is, of course, subject to sanction.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, 13 February 1975)

Before issuing a Bahá'í divorce the National Spiritual Assembly requires confirmation from a Local Spiritual Assembly of the beginning and end of the year of waiting and a copy of the individual's *Certificate of Divorce*.

**Q** – I am of Persian background: do I have to pay dowry if I am married in the West?

**A** – “Persians living in the west should abide by the laws of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* as they do in Iran. When a western believer is involved, as in the case of a marriage between a Persian and westerner, those laws applicable only to Persians, such as that of dowry, are not binding, but the couple are, of course, free to follow such laws if they so wish.”

(Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, 2 September 1985)

**Q** – Is the law concerning a 95-day engagement period applicable in Canada?

**A** – “The ninety-five day period of engagement is binding on Bahá'ís from the countries of the older communities of the Middle East, wherever they reside. Children born to such parents who are brought up in the tradition of these countries and who are thoroughly conversant with the laws of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* will obviously feel an obligation, and should be assisted, to observe this as circumstances permit. The circumstances of children of mixed descent will vary, and it is left to them to decide in light of their own situations whether to observe this law. If one of the parties, whether Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í, is not from this background, the law is not binding.”

(The Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 4 November 2007)

**Q** – When does the 95-day engagement period begin?



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**A** – This past year the National Spiritual Assembly sought clarification from the Universal House of Justice on when the 95-day engagement period begins, as follows:

“In considering the calculation of the engagement period, we consulted on a letter dated 8 July 2009 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to . . . , a believer in Canada, which refers to the “need to marry within ninety-five days of the announcement of your engagement”, whereas several references previously available to us refer to “the day on which the consents have been obtained.” There is some question, therefore, as to whether the 95-day period commences from the day on which the consents have been obtained or from the time when an announcement is made.”

The response dated 25 August 2010, written on behalf of the House of Justice, states:

“Your email letter . . . seeking clarification regarding the commencement of the ninety-five-day engagement period currently binding on Baha'is from the countries of the older communities of the Middle East, wherever they reside, . . . has been received by the Universal House of Justice, which has asked us to respond as follows. . . .

“With respect to the commencement of the engagement period, in the ‘Questions and Answers’ section of *The Kitab-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, number 43, Bahá'u'lláh states that ‘it is unlawful to announce a marriage earlier than ninety-five days before the wedding’. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá has provided further explanation:

‘Following the arrangement for marriage and its official public announcement, that is, when all the friends, relatives, and kindred have been informed that the two parties have been betrothed, the period of engagement must not exceed ninety-five days, during which marriage should take place, and the verses be recited, and the dowry paid. Although it is forbidden to exceed the ninety-five days as this is an act of disobedience to the Law of God, the marriage contract should not be revoked on this account.’

**Q** – Both my fiancé and I are of Persian background. We got engaged based on the verbal approval of our parents in Iran, but the 95-day engagement period is running out and our consents haven’t arrived from Iran yet. What do we do?

**A** – You should contact the National Spiritual Assembly at once to inform it of your circumstances,

and if necessary ask it to grant an extension to the engagement period. “. . . Concerning the observance of details of the marriage law, such as the duration of the engagement period and the payment of dowry by the Persian believers residing in the west: if the two parties are Persians, these laws are binding and necessary.”

(Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 7 July 1968)

“An extension of the period beyond ninety-five days may be granted by a National Spiritual Assembly if it feels there are sufficient grounds to justify it.”

(The Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 4 November 2007)

**Q** – I want my fiancée to immigrate to Canada and it was suggested that we have a proxy marriage in Iran, to be followed by a Bahá'í wedding when he arrives in Canada.

**A** – “In reply to your letter of October 19th asking whether a young believer in your jurisdiction may be married by proxy; we do not approve of the proposed proxy marriage.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, October 26, 1967, cited in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 387)

**Q** – I want to marry outside of Canada. What steps do I need to take before getting married?

**A** – Well in advance of the wedding, you should contact the National or Local Spiritual Assembly in the country where you intend to marry to inform them of your plans and obtain information concerning the legal requirements for marriage in their jurisdiction. You can seek the assistance of your Local Spiritual Assembly in Canada in verifying the authenticity of parental consents, if necessary. Additionally, you should contact the Records Department at the Canadian Bahá'í National Centre informing it of your plans; that Department will then send a letter confirming your plans and your Bahá'í status to the National Spiritual Assembly concerned. Following the marriage, the Assembly authorizing your marriage has the responsibility to inform the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada that your marriage took place according to Bahá'í law.

**Q** – My intended spouse is registered as a Bahá'í in another country, and we are planning to marry in Canada. What steps do I need to take before getting married?

**A** – Your intended spouse should arrange for their National Spiritual Assembly to send confirmation of her or his Bahá'í status to our National Spiritual Assembly. This information will then be provided to the Local Spiritual Assembly authorizing your marriage. Additionally, you should ensure that your



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intended spouse is legally permitted to marry in Canada, according to Canada's immigration laws.

**Q** – My fiancé is an atheist. Is it okay if he doesn't say the marriage vow?

**A** – “No Bahá'í marriage can be valid without the recitation of the prescribed verse by both parties.”

(Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ecuador regarding an atheist who agreed to the Bahá'í ceremony but since he did not believe in God did not wish to repeat the marriage verse using the name of God. 19 December 1974)

**Q** – My wedding is taking place in a banquet hall outside of my home community. Can I still ask my Assembly to authorize my wedding?

**A** – The Local Spiritual Assembly in the locality where the marriage is taking place provides Bahá'í authority for a Bahá'í wedding in that locality. For example, a wedding taking place in Vancouver would be authorized by the Spiritual Assembly of Vancouver.

**Q** – Our Bahá'í wedding is being held in our own community, but our best friend is the marriage registrar in the next community. Can we invite him to register our marriage?

**A** – A marriage registrar's role is to serve as the Assembly's representative in ensuring that the provincial government marriage requirements are met, including registering the Bahá'í marriage with the government once the ceremony has taken place. The registrar of your own Local Spiritual Assembly will also register your marriage in the marriage register of your Assembly. If an Assembly is unincorporated or if the marriage registrar is unavailable, your Assembly may request a registrar from another Local Spiritual Assembly to serve in its jurisdiction.

**Q** – We want to hold our Bahá'í wedding in the community where our best friend is the marriage registrar. Can we also ask him to act as one of the witnesses to our marriage?

**A** – No. A registrar cannot serve at a marriage as both registrar and witness. The Bahá'í marriage registrar should never appear to be acting in the role of “clergy,” nor become involved in the responsibility of the witnesses. The registrar is only responsible for the legal aspects of registering the marriage.

For additional guidance from the Writings regarding the Bahá'í marriage law or a Bahá'í wedding, contact your Local Spiritual Assembly. ■

## Planning a Bahá'í wedding

When you are planning to get married please contact the Local Spiritual Assembly in whose jurisdiction the wedding will be held without delay. A Bahá'í wedding cannot take place without the authorization of the Local Assembly. Bahá'ís who intentionally disregard the marriage law are subject to the possible loss of their administrative rights. ■

