

Potential Correlations Between Principles in the Plans from the Universal House of Justice and Relationships and Marriage

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“...[T]he rise...in the capacity of the friends to converse with others on spiritual matters and to speak with ease about the Person of Bahá’u’lláh and His Revelation.”

- Marriage is a spiritual matter that we are becoming increasingly comfortable speaking about. We can let go of fears of what other people will think about our perspectives and consult on this important topic. Marriage is foundational for the transformation and unification of society.

“...[H]ow courageous and deliberate the rank and file of the believers have become in stepping outside their immediate circle of family members and friends, ready to be led by the guiding Hand of the All-Merciful to receptive souls in whatever quarter they may reside.”

- In searching for a marriage partner, we must be willing to be guided to people who are a good fit to be in a relationship or marriage with us.

“...[E]stablish ties of friendship, on the basis of shared understanding, with those previously regarded as strangers.”... “To the extent that the conversation continues beyond the initial encounter and veritable friendships are formed, a direct teaching effort of this kind can become a catalyst for an enduring process of spiritual transformation.”

- The Bahá’í Writings are very clear about the importance of friendship generally and that it is a vital part of a unified, happy marriage. As we develop excellent friendship skills, we strengthen our ability to be friends with our partners and spouses.

“To read the writings of the Faith and to strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of the significance of Bahá’u’lláh’s stupendous Revelation are obligations laid on every one of His followers. All are enjoined to delve into the ocean of His Revelation and to partake, in keeping with their capacities and inclinations, of the pearls of wisdom that lie therein. In this light, local deepening classes, winter and summer schools, and specially arranged gatherings in which individual believers knowledgeable in the writings were able to share with others insights into specific subjects emerged naturally as prominent features of Bahá’í life. Just as the habit of daily reading will remain an integral part of Bahá’í identity, so will these forms of study continue to hold a place in the collective life of the community.”

- Studying the Writings and the guidance of the institutions about marriage are a very important focus area for deepening at the individual, couple, and community levels, both before and after marriage. Relationships and marriages are strengthened through study and prayer when couples do them together.

“Passivity is bred by the forces of society today. A desire to be entertained is nurtured from childhood, with increasing efficiency, cultivating generations willing to be led by whoever proves skilful at appealing to superficial emotions. ... That the Bahá’í world has succeeded in developing a culture which promotes a way of thinking, studying, and acting, in which all consider themselves as treading a common path of service—supporting one another and advancing together, respectful of the knowledge that each one possesses at any given moment and avoiding the tendency to divide the believers into categories such as deepened and uninformed—is an accomplishment of enormous proportions. And therein lie the dynamics of an irrepressible movement.”

“This evolution in collective consciousness is discernable in the growing frequency with which the word ‘accompany’ appears in conversations among the friends, a word that is being endowed with new meaning as it is integrated into the common vocabulary of the Bahá’í community. It signals the significant strengthening of a culture in which learning is the mode of operation, a mode that fosters the informed participation of more and more people in a united effort to apply Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings to the construction of a divine civilization, which the Guardian states is the primary mission of the Faith.”

- In our society, passivity also exists with respect to marriage and preparing for marriage. Rather than couples taking an active role in preparing for marriage, they are seduced by movies and media to only consider passion and romance as prerequisites. Preparing for marriage and maintaining strong and happy marriages ideally involves the accompaniment of many people and the institutions. Unified marriages are a vital service to the world.

“Learning as a mode of operation requires that all assume a posture of humility, a condition in which one becomes forgetful of self, placing complete trust in God, reliant on His all-sustaining power and confident in His unfailing assistance, knowing that He, and He alone, can change the gnat into an eagle, the drop into a boundless sea.”

- The task of creating healthy marriages in a world where divorce is rampant and there are decreasing models of excellence, we must humbly help one another to succeed. No one knows how to perfectly create marriages. In this service of accompanying each other toward a healthy marriage, we remain free of ego, not engaging in competition with one other, being genuinely happy to see the progress of others in this sacred endeavor.

“Rather [a Spiritual Assembly’s] strength must be measured, to a large extent, by the vitality of the spiritual and social life of the community it serves—a growing community that welcomes the constructive contributions of both those who are formally enrolled and those who are not.”

- Part of the vitality of spiritual and social life is having happy, unified marriages within the community. Happy married couples are more likely to serve through the core activities and other means, because they will have an outward-looking orientation instead of being inwardly focused on problems. There are significant resources both within and outside the Bahá’í community who can serve to educate individuals and couples.

“Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation...calls for profound change not only at the level of the individual but also in the structure of society. ... There are no shortcuts, no formulas. Only as effort is made to draw on insights from His Revelation, to tap into the accumulating knowledge of the human race, to apply His teachings intelligently to the life of humanity, and to consult on the questions that arise will the necessary learning occur and capacity be developed.”

- Preparation for marriage and maintaining marriages require an inner refinement of character and dedication to stay on a path of service to humanity. There are no shortcuts to this—steadfastness is needed on this path, a dedication to learning, and perseverance.

“Numerous groups and organizations, animated by the spirit of world solidarity that is an indirect manifestation of Bahá’u’lláh’s conception of the principle of the oneness of humankind, will contribute to the civilization destined to emerge out of the welter and chaos of present-day society. It should be clear to everyone that the capacity created in the Bahá’í community over successive global Plans renders it increasingly able to lend assistance in the manifold and diverse dimensions of civilization building, opening to it new frontiers of learning.”

- We are walking together on this path of service towards marriage with many like-minded people. Baha'u'llah's Revelation gives us priceless gems of learning and insight about the sacred institution of marriage, which is a form of social action we can engage in.

“...[R]eflect on the nature of the contributions which...growing, vibrant communities will make to the material and spiritual progress of society. In this respect, it will prove fruitful to think in terms of two interconnected, mutually reinforcing areas of activity: involvement in social action and participation in the prevalent discourses of society.”

- As we progress and learn about marriage in the Bahá'í community, we will have more and more of value to offer to our greater human family.

“Justice demands universal participation.”

- In order to have a just and peaceful society, all people must participate in this sacred endeavor of preparing themselves for a unified and healthy marriage or in supporting the marriages of others.

“The watchword in all cases is humility. While conveying enthusiasm about their beliefs, the friends should guard against projecting an air of triumphalism, hardly appropriate among themselves, much less in other circumstances.”

- Humility is crucial in all relationships, including with a potential partner or spouse. Marriages in the Bahá'í community are also a work in progress, not something to hold up as an ideal example.

“Involvement in the life of society will flourish as the capacity of the community to promote its own growth and to maintain its vitality is gradually raised. It will achieve coherence with efforts to expand and consolidate the community to the extent that it draws on elements of the conceptual framework which governs the current series of global Plans. And it will contribute to the movement of populations towards Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a prosperous and peaceful world civilization to the degree that it employs these elements creatively in new areas of learning.”

- Marriage preparation and marriage strengthening are new areas of learning for the Baha'i community. As unified marriages grow and maintain their vitality, they will contribute to the general population. Our efforts to be creative in educating ourselves will contribute to the valuing of marriage around the world.

“For is it not love for God that burns away all veils of estrangement and division and binds hearts together in perfect unity? Is it not His love that spurs you on in the field of service and enables you to see in every soul the capacity to know Him and to worship Him?”

- As we explore the possibility of marriage with various people, we must do so with nobility and the love of God, doing our best to maintain unity even when we decide not to marry. As we struggle within our marriages, the love of God can inspire us to keep trying and keep reaching out for help. When a marriage ends, love of God can help protect the community and the individuals from the devastating effects of the divorce.

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“...[F]ormulate a clear conception of how [to extend] to other spheres of operation the mode of learning which has so undeniably come to characterize its teaching endeavors, gaining the capacity needed to employ with a high degree of coherence the instruments and methods which it has so painstakingly developed...”

- The learning which is occurring in the Bahá’í community, such as service enhancing knowledge and growth, the value of accompaniment, the power of encouragement, and more can empower the community as we humbly learn how to prepare for and maintain strong marriages.

“The...capacity to shape a pattern of life distinguished for its devotional character has risen perceptibly. In diverse settings, on every continent, groups of believers are uniting with others in prayer, turning their hearts in supplication to their Maker, and calling to their aid those spiritual forces upon which the efficacy of their individual and collective efforts depends.”

- We have built the capacity to shape a devotional pattern of life, which is so needed in relationships and marriages. Regular prayer is vital for the individuals and for the couple together.

“...[O]pportunities...to enter into meaningful and distinctive conversation with local residents dictate how the process of growth begins...”

- Individuals with an interest in marrying must engage in meaningful conversation to build friendships, engage in courtship, become thoroughly acquainted with the character of a partner, and consult with parents about consent.

“All of the institutions and agencies promoting the aim of the current series of global Plans need to exercise the measure of agility that the birth of such a dynamic process demands—but none more so than the Auxiliary Board members. To help the friends visualize this first important milestone, and the multiplicity of ways in which it can be reached, is central to the functioning of every Auxiliary Board member and an increasing number of his or her assistants. In this, as in all their work, they must display breadth of vision and clarity of thought, flexibility and resourcefulness.”

- The Auxiliary Board members and their assistants have the responsibility to promote and protect unity in the community. As such, they can also be called upon to consult about marriage.

“...[T]urn hesitation into courage born of trust in God and transform a yearning for excitement into a commitment to long-term action. Calm determination will be vital as they strive to demonstrate how stumbling blocks can be made stepping stones for progress.”

- Due to a culture filled with divorces and poor marriage examples, many are afraid to marry. It takes courage to prepare for marriage and enter into it with the determination to create a strong and happy partnership.
- Our culture breeds this yearning for excitement and a desire for “quick fixes” and instant gratification. Yet, a commitment to long-term action is needed to have a healthy marriage, including a commitment to preparing oneself spiritually before even finding someone and also a commitment to being steadfast in the face of challenges once one has entered into the marriage relationship.
- Often along this path of finding a partner and marrying, many obstacles will present themselves. On our spiritual journey, part of the process is seeing each step along the way as part of a learning process and knowing that we are making progress on this path.

“...[T]he process of growth in the cluster will conform to the rhythm established by pronounced cycles of expansion and consolidation, which, punctuated every three months by a meeting for reflection and planning, are unfolding without interruption.”

- It is useful for every couple considering marriage and those already married to periodically consult about the health of their relationship, pray, and move forward with new learning to improve its quality and vitality.

“In this way will the tendency to reduce a complex process of transformation into simplistic steps, susceptible to instruction by manual, be averted. Discrete actions are placed in context, and even the smallest of steps is endowed with meaning. The operation of spiritual forces in the arena of service becomes increasingly apparent, and bonds of friendship, so vital to a healthy pattern of growth, are continuously reinforced.”

- Each step of progress we make along this path of preparation for matehood is divinely guided and of great importance, no matter how small it may seem. Marriage is a service to ourselves, to humanity, and to God. Therefore the operation of spiritual forces is potent.
- As we come to thoroughly know the character of potential marriage partners, we are strengthening bonds of friendship and unity. People won't be pressured to marry someone they aren't compatible with, but will be accompanied along this path with humility and love.
- There is no formula for preparing for marriage or maintaining marriage. Couples make the best choices they can in light of the guidance of the Writings, research on marriage, advice of parents, and utilization of various resources and classes.

“Progress is achieved through the dialectic of crisis and victory, and setbacks are inevitable.”

- There will also be setbacks along this path of finding a partner and developing a marriage, which sometimes can cause despair and hopelessness. We must persevere and be steadfast and put our trust in God. These crises will help us to achieve success.

“New frontiers of learning are now open to the friends, who are asked to dedicate their energies to the creation of vibrant communities, growing in size and reflecting in greater and greater degrees Bahá'u'lláh's vision for humanity.”

- Bahá'u'lláh's vision for humanity includes unified marriages, which are the foundation of society. The healthier and happier marriages we have in our communities, the more vibrant and of service they will be. There are growing learning opportunities available to Bahá'ís for creating strong marriages.

“What should be apparent is that, if the Administrative Order is to serve as a pattern for future society, then the community within which it is developing must not only acquire capacity to address increasingly complex material and spiritual requirements but also become larger and larger in size.”

- Stronger, unified marriages are part of the complex material and spiritual requirements that we must address within the Bahá'í community in order to grow. Unified and happy marriages are a magnet that will draw people to Bahá'u'lláh.

“Every effort is being exerted to ensure that the process reflects the complementarity of ‘being’ and ‘doing’ the institute courses make explicit; the centrality they accord to knowledge and its application; the emphasis they place on avoiding false dichotomies; the stress they lay on memorization of the Creative Word; and the care they exercise in raising consciousness, without awakening the insistent self.”

- Being and doing must be a part of any spiritual preparation, including preparing for marriage and they must be part of marriage itself. Imbalance on either side will cause dysfunction.
- The practice of raising consciousness and not awakening the insistent self is very important in the process of consultation, including when getting to know the character of someone as a potential partner and also when married.

“...[I]n the final analysis, it is not technique but unity of thought, consistent action, and dedication to learning which will bring about progress.”

- Steadfastness and perseverance are needed when on the path of finding a spouse, learning new skills and knowledge about relationships and marriage, and while maintaining a marriage. Always being in learning mode will benefit couples.

“...[T]he development of the Local Assembly can best be understood in terms of capacity building.”

- Assemblies are learning how to help people prepare for marriage and how to help couples stay married. They are learning to respond to difficult issues, such as domestic violence and couple separation and divorce.

“...[L]ay the foundations on which can be built that uniquely affectionate and genuinely supportive relationship... which Local Spiritual Assemblies should establish with the individual believer.”

- A positive and caring relationship between individuals and couples and their Local Spiritual Assemblies will make it possible for support to occur for marriage preparation, weddings, and marriage strengthening. Bahá'ís will feel more comfortable to ask for prayers and consultation with their Assembly about this foundational aspect of their lives and their service.

“...[Spiritual Assemblies] continued development implies adherence to the injunction laid down by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that ‘discussions must all be confined to spiritual matters that pertain to the training of souls, the instruction of children, the relief of the poor, the help of the feeble throughout all classes in the world, kindness to all peoples, the diffusion of the fragrances of God and the exaltation of His Holy Word.’ Its steady advancement requires an unbending commitment to promote the best interests of the community and a vigilance in guarding the process of growth against the forces of moral decay that threaten to arrest it.”

- Assemblies can help guard relationships and marriages from the forces of moral decay.

“And when inevitable problems arise, whether in relation to some activity or among individuals, they will be addressed by a Local Spiritual Assembly which has so completely gained the confidence of the members of the community that all naturally turn to it for assistance. This implies that the Assembly has learned through experience how to help the believers put aside the divisive ways of a partisan mindset, how to find the seeds of unity in even the most perplexing and thorny situations and how to nurture them slowly and lovingly, upholding at all times the standard of justice.”

- When Local Assemblies are operating at this level, people will naturally turn to them for guidance in their process of finding a marriage partner and also to assist in building unity in their existing marriage. Couples will be able to approach Assemblies when they are beginning to have difficulties rather than when problems are entrenched.

“Efforts in a village will generally begin on a small scale, perhaps with the emergence of groups of friends, each concerned with a specific social or economic need it has identified and each pursuing a simple set of appropriate actions. Consultation at the Nineteen Day Feast creates a space for the growing social consciousness of the community to find constructive expression.”

- One social and spiritual need in the Bahá'í community is for unified marriages. There is a need among single Bahá'ís to foster their capacity to enter confidently into creating unified marriages. How to support marriage preparation and marriage strengthening can be addressed during consultation at Feast and through social action efforts.

“...[T]he Assembly [is required] to become familiar with the myriad social spaces, beyond geographic ones, in which segments of the population come together and to offer them, to the extent possible, the wisdom enshrined in the teachings.”

- Social spaces exist where groups of single people who are friends come together and talk about their challenges with finding a partner. Others exist where married couples engaged in activities. The Assembly could offer the wisdom of the Bahá’í Writings to both.

“...[T]he Guardian described...spiritual prerequisites for the success of all Bahá’í undertakings. Of these, three, he indicated, ‘stand out as preeminent and vital’: rectitude of conduct, a chaste and holy life, and freedom from prejudice.”

“Referring to rectitude of conduct, Shoghi Effendi spoke of the ‘justice, equity, truthfulness, honesty, fair-mindedness, reliability, and trustworthiness’ that must ‘distinguish every phase of the life of the Baha’i community.’”

- Rectitude of conduct is intimately linked with the concept of having an excellent character, something that is foundational for strong relationships and marriages. Chastity, purity, and holiness are all contributors to healthy, happy relationships and marriages. Freedom from prejudice makes it possible for interracial relationships and marriages to succeed and thrive.

“No less pertinent to the success of the Bahá’í enterprise today are the Guardian’s forthright comments on the importance of a chaste and holy life, ‘with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness’. He was unequivocal in his language, summoning the friends to a life unsullied ‘by the indecencies, the vices, the false standards, which an inherently deficient moral code tolerates, perpetuates, and fosters’. We need not provide for you here evidence of the influence that such a deficient code now exerts on humanity as a whole; even the remotest spots on the globe are captivated by its enticements. Yet we feel compelled to mention a few points related specifically to the theme of purity. The forces at work on the hearts and minds of the young, to whom the Guardian directed his appeal most fervently, are pernicious indeed. Exhortations to remain pure and chaste will only succeed to a limited degree in helping them to resist these forces. What needs to be appreciated in this respect is the extent to which young minds are affected by the choices parents make for their own lives, when, no matter how unintentionally, no matter how innocently, such choices condone the passions of the world—its admiration for power, its adoration of status, its love of luxuries, its attachment to frivolous pursuits, its glorification of violence, and its obsession with self-gratification. It must be realized that the isolation and despair from which so many suffer are products of an environment ruled by an all-pervasive materialism. And in this the friends must understand the ramifications of Bahá’u’lláh’s statement that ‘the present-day order’ must ‘be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead.’ Throughout the world today, young people are among the most enthusiastic supporters of the Plan and the most ardent champions of the Cause; their numbers will, we are certain, increase from year to year. May every one of them come to know the bounties of a life adorned with purity and learn to draw on the powers that flow through pure channels.”

- Purity and chastity not only contribute to the happiness and well-being of the individual, but contribute to a divine civilization which includes unified and healthy marriages. Strong marriages make it possible for parents to provide a healthy foundation for the rearing of their children. Consultation skills within the marriage will help to raise the standard of parenting. Purity and chastity are part of rearing children from the beginning of life, and are reinforced by the quality of children’s classes, junior youth groups, and study circles.

“...[P]rejudices of all kinds—of race, of class, of ethnicity, of gender, of religious belief— continue to hold a strong grip on humanity. While it is true that, at the level of public discourse, great strides have been taken in refuting the falsehoods that give rise to prejudice in whatever form, it still permeates the structures of

society and is systematically impressed on the individual consciousness. It should be apparent to all that the process set in motion by the current series of global Plans seeks, in the approaches it takes and the methods it employs, to build capacity in every human group, with no regard for class or religious background, with no concern for ethnicity or race, irrespective of gender or social status, to arise and contribute to the advancement of civilization. We pray that, as it steadily unfolds, its potential to disable every instrument devised by humanity over the long period of its childhood for one group to oppress another may be realized.”

- Being free from prejudice when seeking a partner is vitally important, including all these types of prejudice mentioned.
- Marriage is an institution that should help to end the oppression of women and foster the equality of women and men. It is important for any individual on the path of marriage preparation to take themselves into account on the beliefs they have about the opposite gender and gender equality and move forward from there.

“...the importance of two fundamental, interlocking precepts: On the one hand, the high standard of conduct inculcated by Baha’u’llah’s Revelation can admit no compromise; it can, in no wise, be lowered, and all must fix their gaze on its lofty heights. On the other, it must be acknowledged that, as human beings, we are far from perfect; what is expected of everyone is sincere daily effort. Self-righteousness is to be eschewed.”

- When gaining knowledge of someone’s character in preparation for marriage, it is important to see their strengths and weaknesses and be clear how they will potentially affect the quality of a marriage. At the same time we must avoid being judgmental and have compassion and love for them as a soul.
- Marriage is a process that helps to refine our words and actions and bring them more into conformity with the standards of the Faith. At the same time, we cannot expect or demand perfection from our spouses.

“To this end, they must remain acutely aware of the inadequacies of current modes of thinking and doing—this, without feeling the least degree of superiority, without assuming an air of secrecy or aloofness, and without adopting an unnecessarily critical stance towards society.”

- While we recognize that society is full of relationship and marriage choices that are not in alignment with the Bahá’í teachings, we must remain humbly aware that relationships and marriages within the community are often growing and struggling as well.

“Finally, a significant advance in culture, one which we have followed with particular interest, is marked by the rise in capacity to think in terms of process. That, from the outset, the believers have been asked to be ever conscious of the broad processes that define their work is apparent from a careful reading of even the earliest communications of the Guardian related to the first national plans of the Faith. However, in a world focused increasingly on the promotion of events, or at best projects, with a mindset that derives satisfaction from the sense of expectation and excitement they generate, maintaining the level of dedication required for long-term action demands considerable effort. The expansion and consolidation of the Bahá’í community encompasses a number of interacting processes, each of which contributes its share to the movement of humanity towards Bahá’u’llah’s vision of a new World Order. The lines of action associated with any given process provide for the organization of occasional events, and from time to time, activities take the shape of a project with a clear beginning and a definite end. If, however, events are imposed on the natural unfoldment of a process, they will disrupt its sound evolution. If the projects undertaken in a cluster are not made subordinate to the explicit needs of the processes unfolding there, they will yield little fruit.”

- There are many processes involved in creating unified marriages. These include developing a friendship, getting to know someone’s character, building unity with families, going through parental

consent, meeting with an Assembly, planning a spiritual wedding, maintaining an income, becoming parents, dealing with illness and preparation for life after death, and more.

- Our culture focuses a lot on the “event” of a wedding, not always so much on the process of getting to know each other or the commitment required to have a successful marriage.

“At a fundamental level these relationships are characterized by cooperation and reciprocity, manifestations of the interconnectedness that governs the universe. So it is that the individual, with no regard for ‘personal benefits and selfish advantages,’ comes to see him- or herself as ‘one of the servants of God, the All-Possessing,’ whose only desire is to carry out His laws. So it is that the friends come to recognize that ‘wealth of sentiment, abundance of good-will and effort’ are of little avail when their flow is not directed along proper channels, that ‘the unfettered freedom of the individual should be tempered with mutual consultation and sacrifice,’ and that ‘the spirit of initiative and enterprise should be reinforced by a deeper realization of the supreme necessity for concerted action and a fuller devotion to the common weal.’”

- Marriage involves devotion to the common weal and sacrificing one’s personal opinions and inclinations to the good of the marriage entity that has been created. When we are getting to know someone for marriage, it is good to choose someone who will be able to create unity with us, not someone where combating disharmony will be a constant energy drain. The couple can then build a fortress of well-being and salvation together to meet the challenges of the world, not a fortress to protect them from each other.

“Composed of such individuals and such institutions, the community of the Greatest Name becomes that spiritually charged arena in which powers are multiplied in unified action. It is of this community that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes: ‘When any souls grow to be true believers, they will attain a spiritual relationship with one another, and show forth a tenderness which is not of this world. They will, all of them, become elated from a draught of divine love, and that union of theirs, that connection, will also abide forever. Souls, that is, who will consign their own selves to oblivion, strip from themselves the defects of humankind, and unchain themselves from human bondage, will beyond any doubt be illumined with the heavenly splendors of oneness, and will all attain unto real union in the world that dieth not.’”

- Marriages with such individuals at the foundation will have a far greater opportunity to succeed.