

Some Thoughts on Baha'i Marriage

And when He desired to manifest grace and beneficence to men, and to set the world in order, He revealed observances and created laws; among them He established the law of marriage, made it as a fortress for well-being and salvation, and enjoined it upon us in that which was sent down out of the heaven of sanctity in His Most Holy Book. He saith, great is His glory: "Marry, O people, that from you may appear he who will remember Me amongst My servants; this is one of My commandments unto you; obey it as an assistance to yourselves."

Baha'u'llah, "Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá"

O thou dear handmaid of God! Thy letter hath been received, and its contents were noted. 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.

In the same way, 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 splendours of oneness, and will all attain unto real union in the world that dieth not.

Selections From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, number 84

Requirements of Baha'i Marriage

It is not possible to have a Baha'i marriage ceremony without the *prior authorization* of a Local Spiritual Assembly.

All Baha'is who wish to marry must contact a Local Spiritual Assembly prior to the marriage. For Baha'is who plan to be married in Santa Monica, this is the Santa Monica Spiritual Assembly – check your newsletter for current contact information. If the wedding is planned to be held outside of Santa Monica, the Assembly in that locality must be contacted. If required, the Santa Monica Spiritual Assembly can assist you in contacting the appropriate Spiritual Assembly.

The role of the Spiritual Assembly in Baha'i marriages includes insuring:

- Both parties consent to the marriage
- All living parents consent to the marriage
- Approval of witnesses (by the Spiritual Assembly)
- The marriage conforms with civil requirements
- A Baha'i ceremony is performed with the prior authorization of an Assembly

Checklist of Requirements

As soon as possible, prior to the wedding:

- Contact Spiritual Assembly where wedding is planned to take place.
- Obtain civil marriage license.
- Obtain written consent from parents of bride and groom and provide to Spiritual Assembly.
- Choose two witnesses who are over 21 years old and obtain approval from the Spiritual Assembly that has jurisdiction over the locality where ceremony takes place.
- Plan/arrange for payment of the dowry (Currently required only of Persian believers. See FAQ below.).

At the wedding:

- Bride and groom each recite vow in the presence of two approved witnesses:
“We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God.”
- Bride, groom, and two witnesses sign marriage license.
- Give signed marriage license and envelope provided with the license to the Spiritual Assembly’s representative. (If official copies are desired, refer to instructions that come with the marriage license.)

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the requirements regarding parental consent?

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, Paragraph no. 65

In a letter written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi has commented on this provision of the law:

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 the children for those who have given them life and sent their souls out on the eternal journey towards their Creator.

Note no. 92 in Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas

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

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated August 29, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Basically, Bahá'í law pertaining to marriage requires that the parties intending to marry must obtain consent of all living natural parents. Further, the responsibility of the parents in giving their consent is unrestricted and unconditioned, but in discharging this duty they are responsible for their decision to God.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated October 9, 1975, to an individual believer

What are the requirements regarding the two witnesses to the marriage?

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, dated August 8, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly

In considering the acceptability of the witnesses the Assembly must be satisfied as to their reliability. Pertinent to this is the reply given by Bahá'u'lláh when asked for a definition of the qualifications of those who may be called upon to give testimony or bear witness. His reply was

that a witness must be of “good reputation among men,” and “the testimony of followers of any faith is acceptable to God.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated September 2, 1976, to an individual believer

What are the requirements regarding the nature of a Baha'i wedding ceremony?

There is no ritual, according to the Aqdas, the Guardian is very anxious that none should be introduced at present and no general form accepted. He believes the ceremony should be as simple as possible, the parties using the words ordained by Bahá'u'lláh 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, and Bahá'ís should not be married in the church or any other acknowledged place of worship of the followers of other faiths.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in *The Bahá'í Community*, pp. 43–44

QUESTION: Concerning the Marriage Verses.

ANSWER: For men: “We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God.” For women: “We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Questions and Answers, no. 3)

There is no guidance concerning the use of wedding rings and believers are free to use them or not as they wish.

“Developing Distinctive Baha'i Communities,” Section 17.30

What if either the bride or groom is not a Baha'í?

It is only when a non-Bahá'í partner is involved that a Bahá'í may participate in the religious ceremony of the non-Bahá'í partner.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 20, 1968, to a National Spiritual Assembly

If a Bahá'í marries a non-Bahá'í who wishes to have the religious ceremony of his own sect carried out, it must be quite clear that, first, the Bahá'í partner is understood to be a Bahá'í by religion, and not to accept the religion of the other party to the marriage through having his or her religious ceremony; and, second, the ceremony must be of a nature which does not commit the Bahá'í to any declaration of faith in a religion other than his own.

Under these circumstances, the Bahá'í can partake of the religious ceremony of his non-Bahá'í partner. The Bahá'í should insist on having the Bahá'í ceremony carried out before or after the non-Bahá'í one, on the same day.

Shoghi Effendi, in *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 45, no. 120

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.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated March 3, 1986, to a National Spiritual Assembly

As long as both the Bahá'í and the other religious (whatever it may be) ceremony are both performed prior to the consummation of the marriage, we do not mind which ceremony is performed first. It should be left to the individuals concerned to decide among themselves.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated August 9, 1945, in *Dawn of a New Day*, p. 113

What are the requirements regarding the nature of a Baha'i wedding reception?

An Assembly has the overriding duty to protect the good name of the Faith in relation to any activity of the friends, but it should always exercise great care not to restrict the individual's freedom of action unnecessarily. Normally the size of the wedding celebration, the place in which it is to be held and who is to be invited are all left entirely to the discretion of the bride and groom and an Assembly should interpose an objection only if it is quite certain that the Cause will really be injured if it does not do so.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 20, 1966, to a National Spiritual Assembly

No Bahá'í should serve alcohol at any function or reception given by him, such as a wedding reception or a party to which a number of people are invited.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated January 31, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

When a Bahá'í is marrying a non-Bahá'í, the non-Bahá'í may wish to serve alcoholic beverages and is free to do. No pressure should be placed upon the non-Bahá'í to conform to Bahá'í law, but Bahá'ís attending the wedding should avoid alcoholic food or drink.

"Developing Distinctive Baha'i Communities," Section 17.30

FAQ - Laws Binding Only on Persian Believers, Wherever They Reside

What are the requirements regarding the law in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas regarding a 95-day engagement, which states:

[I]t is unlawful to announce a marriage earlier than ninety-five days before the wedding.
(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, no. 43)

The law requiring Bahá'ís to be married within the 95-day period following an engagement is not yet applicable in the West. However, Persians residing in the West obey such laws as a matter of conscience.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 14, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Concerning the question as to how the term “Persian believer” should be defined in applying this law, you should be guided as follows. The law applies to Persian believers wherever they have established residence after leaving Iran. In cases where children born to such parents are brought up in the Persian tradition, speak Persian, and are thoroughly conversant with the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, they will obviously feel an obligation, and should be assisted, to observe this law as circumstances permit.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 6, 1987, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Concerning observance of details of Bahá'í law pertaining to marriage such as the duration of the engagement period...by the Iranian believers now residing in the West, these laws are binding if the two parties are Iranians. However, if one party is Iranian and the other is a western believer, the Iranian believer, although it is a praiseworthy act to inform his/her spouse of these laws, should not bring pressure to bear for their observance.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 7, 1968, to an individual believer, in Bahá'í Marriage and Family Life, p. 27

The Iranian believers residing in western countries . . . should not require the western Bahá'ís to be bound by the same laws as are applicable to themselves, nor should they expect more of them than the pen of the beloved Guardian prescribed for them for this period.

The Universal House of Justice, dated July 7, 1968

Concerning the question of marriage and the stipulated period between the time of the engagement and the marriage, this is the decisive text of the Book of God and may not be interpreted. In the past, serious difficulties and problems arose when a long period of time elapsed between the engagement and the marriage. Now according to the Text of the Book, when marriage between the parties is arranged, i.e., when the parties become engaged, and it is certain that they will be married, not more than ninety-five days should elapse before the marriage takes

place. . . .

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated April 11, 1982, to a National Spiritual Assembly

What are the requirements regarding payment of a dowry?

No marriage may be contracted without payment of a dowry, which hath been fixed for city-dwellers at nineteen mithqáls of pure gold, and for village-dwellers at the same amount in silver. Whoso wisheth to increase this sum, it is forbidden him to exceed the limit of ninety-five mithqáls. Thus hath the command been writ in majesty and power. If he content himself, however, with a payment of the lowest level, it shall be better for him according to the Book. God, verily, enricheth whomsoever He willeth through both heavenly and earthly means, and He, in truth, hath power over all things.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Paragraph no. 66

The Synopsis and Codification, section IV.C.1.j.i.-v., summarizes the main provisions concerning the dowry. These provisions have their antecedents in the Bayán.

The dowry is to be paid by the bridegroom to the bride. It is fixed at 19 mithqáls of pure gold for city-dwellers, and 19 mithqáls of silver for village-dwellers (see note 94). Bahá'u'lláh indicates that, if, at the time of the wedding, the bridegroom is unable to pay the dowry in full, it is permissible for him to issue a promissory note to the bride (Q and A 39).

With the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh many familiar concepts, customs and institutions are redefined and take on new meaning. One of these is the dowry. The institution of dowry is a very ancient practice in many cultures and takes many forms. In some countries it is a payment made by the parents of the bride to the bridegroom; in others it is a payment made by the bridegroom to the parents of the bride, called a “bride-price”. In both such cases the amount is often quite considerable. The law of Bahá'u'lláh abolishes all such variants and converts the dowry into a symbolic act whereby the bridegroom presents a gift of a certain limited value to the bride.

(Note no. 93 in Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas)

In answer to a question about the dowry, Bahá'u'lláh stated:

Whatever is revealed in the Bayán, in respect to those residing in cities and villages, is approved and should be carried out. However, in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas mention is made of the lowest level. The intention is nineteen mithqáls of silver, specified in the Bayán for village-dwellers. This is more pleasing unto God, provided the two parties agree. The purpose is to promote the comfort of all, and to bring about concord and union among the people. Therefore, the greater the consideration shown in these matters the better it will be... The people of Bahá must associate and deal with each other with the utmost love and sincerity. They should be mindful of the interests of all, especially the friends of God.

(Note no. 95 in Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas)

The dowry is determined by the dwelling-place of the bridegroom; if he be a city-dweller, the dowry is of gold, and if he be a village-dweller, it is of silver.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, no. 87)

The criterion is permanent residence and, depending on where this is, the injunction in the Book must be observed accordingly.

(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, no. 88)

What is a mithqál?

A mithqál is a measure of weight. One mithqál is equal to 0.1170802 troy ounces. The current value of one troy ounce of silver or gold can be found on the Internet.

Obtaining a Marriage License

A marriage license must be obtained prior to a wedding, and may take some time to obtain. In California, counties issue marriage licenses. For a marriage that is going to be held in Los Angeles County (e.g., in Santa Monica, Los Angeles, Culver City, etc.), information on where to obtain a marriage license is provided in the table below. Both the bride and groom must apply for and sign the license together. A valid photo ID or driver's license is required. Residency and blood tests are not required. There is no waiting period to obtain the license, which is valid for 90 days. If either the bride or groom has been previously married, he or she must present the bureau with the divorce decree or death certificate. In Los Angeles County, the documents must be presented if the divorce or death was within the last two years. Only cash, check or money orders are accepted. Call ahead to check details of time and cost.

Where to apply:

Recorder's Office	Address	Phone Number
Norwalk Recorder	12400 Imperial Highway Norwalk, CA 90650	562-462-2137
Florence/Firestone Recorder	7807 S. Compton Ave. Room 215 Los Angeles, CA 90007	323-586-6192
East LA Recorder	4716 E. Cesar Chavez Ave. Los Angeles, CA 90022	323-260-2991
Beverly Hills Recorder	9355 Burton Way, Fl. 1 Beverly Hills, CA 90210	310-288-1261

Marriage License Application

City Ceremony Will Take Place: _____
 Date of Ceremony: _____

License Type applying for:

- Public – \$70.00 (Record will become public record once recorded)
- Confidential – \$70.00 (Record will be closed, and not opened to public once recorded)
- Other –\$70.00 For Denomination (Buddhist, Muslim, Bahai, etc.)

GROOM'S PERSONAL DATA	BRIDE'S PERSONAL DATA
GROOM'S ID or DL# Exp:	BRIDE'S ID or DL# Exp:
First Name:	First Name:
Middle Name:	Middle Name:
Last Name (Family):	Current Last Name (If Different):
Date of Birth:	Birth Last Name (If Different):
State of Birth:	Date of Birth:
Number of Previous Marriages:	State of Birth:
Last Marriage Ended By (1): <input type="checkbox"/> Death <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce <input type="checkbox"/> Annulment	Number of Previous Marriages:
Date Last Marriage Ended Month/Day/Year:	Last Marriage Ended By (1): <input type="checkbox"/> Death <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce <input type="checkbox"/> Annulment
Job Title:	Date Last Marriage Ended Month/Day/Year:
Type of Business:	Job Title:
Education 1-19 (Total Years Completed):	Type of Business:
Father's Full Name:	Education 1-19 (Total Years Completed):
Father's State of Birth:	Father's Full Name:
Mother's Full Maiden Name:	Father's State of Birth:
Mother's State of Birth:	Mother's Full Maiden Name:
Groom's Address:	Mother's State of Birth:
City: Zip:	Bride's Address:
County	City: Zip:
Mailing Address:	County:
City: Zip:	Mailing Address (If Different):
County:	City: Zip:
Daytime Phone Number:	County:

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COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
REGISTRAR-RECORDER/COUNTY CLERK
P.O. BOX 53120, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90053-0120 / (562) 462-2137

CONNIE B. McCORMACK
Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk

REQUIREMENTS TO OBTAIN A MARRIAGE LICENSE

1. MARRIAGE LICENSE APPLICATION

To apply for and obtain a marriage license on the same day, **both applicants** must appear **together** at the Office of the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk in Norwalk or at a district office to complete an application and have it submitted to the cashier no later than 4 p.m. (or 3:30 p.m. at District Offices). The processing time to complete the license is 1 hour. For same day service we recommend that you be at the office by 3 p.m. When applications are submitted after 4 p.m. at Norwalk or 3:30 p.m. at the District Offices, the couple may pick up the license together on the following business day.

2. PROOF OF AGE

A valid California I.D., driver's license, passport or alien resident card must be presented as proof of age. A certified birth certificate or baptismal record and a picture form of identification issued by a government agency will also be accepted for that purpose. Documents must be in English. If the document is in another language, it must be accompanied by a certified English translation. Documentation which has expired is not acceptable.

Anyone under 18 must also provide a notarized parent or guardian consent statement and a Superior Court Order granting the minor permission to marry. Please call this office for more information about these requirements (562) 462-2137.

3. All persons previously married must present a **copy of divorce/annulment papers** if the event occurred within two years or less.

4. MARRIAGE LICENSE REQUIREMENTS

- A. Regular Marriage License Fee: \$70
A marriage license is valid for 90 days from the date it was obtained. The marriage license can be used only within the State of California.
- B. Confidential Marriage License Fee: \$70
Couple (not minors) must be living together as man and wife. **A Confidential Marriage License is valid for 90 days and must be used in the county where it is issued.** A confidential marriage license is not a public record. Information pertaining to the facts of marriage can be obtained by the couple or by court order.

5. CIVIL CEREMONY Fee: \$25

Civil marriage ceremonies are performed at the Norwalk Office Monday through Friday (except holidays) **by appointment only**. The Beverly Hills district office will schedule a ceremony on Thursday's **by appointment only**. The East Los Angeles, Florence-Firestone, LAX Airport and Van Nuys District Offices will schedule on Fridays by appointment only. **You must bring your own witness for the ceremony.** Please contact each office at the number listed below to schedule an appointment.

6. LOCATIONS WHERE A MARRIAGE LICENSE CAN BE OBTAINED

NORWALK

12400 Imperial Highway, Room 1002
Office Hours: 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
(562) 462-2137

LANCASTER

335 A East Avenue K-6
Office Hours: 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
(661) 723-4494

BEVERLY HILLS

9355 Burton Way, 1st Floor
Office Hours: 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
(310) 288-1261

LAX AIRPORT

11701 S. La Cienega Blvd., 6th Floor
Office Hours: 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
(310) 727-6142

LOS ANGELES

4716 E. Cesar E. Chavez Ave. (Formerly Brooklyn Ave.)
Office Hours: 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
(323) 260-2991

CATALINA BRANCH COURT (By Appointment Only)

Avalon, CA 90704
Office Hours: 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Monday – Thursday
(310) 510-0026

VAN NUYS

14340 West Sylvan Street
Office Hours: 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
(818) 374-7176

FLORENCE FIRESTONE

7807 S. Compton Ave., Rm. 215
Office Hours: 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
(323) 586-6192