

Becoming Loving Companions: Nurturing Intimacy and Connection in Marriage



Outline

- Historical views and functions of marriage
- Baha'i concept of marriage
- Building a loving foundation
- Nurturing connection and emotional safety
- Preserving connection in difficult times
- Finding a way forward –reconnecting and repairing
- Summary

Historical Role of Marriage

- Economic, political and tribal unity
- Procreation, sexual relationships
- Preservation of family property
- Protection and survival for women



Baha'i Concept of Marriage: A Spiritual Partnership, Eternal in Nature

"A fortress for well-being"

- Baha'u'llah

*Bahá'í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart...Their purpose must be this: **to become loving companions and comrades and at one with each other** for time and eternity."*

- Abdu'l-Baha

*"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. "*

- Abdu'l-Baha



Building a Loving Culture in Our Marriage



Expressing Affection and Admiration

- Loving glances – maintaining eye contact nurtures trust
- Physical affection, hugs (long ones to deepen your bond)
- Loving acts of service for each other
- Sharing smiles, humour
- Delighting in and celebrating each other and your relationship
- Spending quality time together
- Loving words/messages – Don't think they know.



Seeing Each Other with Loving Eyes – With Generosity of Spirit

*“Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value.”
- Baha’u’llah*

*“One must see in every human being only that which is
worthy of praise.”
- Abdu'l-Baha*

- Seeing each other in a positive light, as a noble being
- Listening with openness and receptivity
- Assuming good intentions
- Looking for and naming the spiritual qualities (virtues) you see in one another. Be specific, be genuine, bring it out.
 - E.g. I really love your creativity in decorating our home.



Caring for Each Other's Well-being and Growth

“They are two helpmates, two intimate friends, who should be concerned about the welfare of each other.”

- Abdu'l-Baha

Making **Love Maps** (Gottman Institute)

- Attuning to each other and staying curious about one another
- Asking questions and taking notice of the little things
 - (e.g. how they like their coffee or how they relax)
- Noticing communication habits, personality, what energizes/drains them
- Learning about their dreams, hopes, aspirations as well as dislikes, triggers/wounds to heal, passions, sources of joy



Being Kind and Respectful

“A kindly tongue is the lodestone of the hearts of men. It is the bread of the spirit, it clotheth the words with meaning, it is the fountain of the light of wisdom and understanding.”

- Bahá'u'lláh

- *Choosing kind tone of voice, kind words and kind acts*

“Respect is appreciation of the separateness of the other person, of the ways in which he or she is unique.”

— Annie Gottlieb

- Honouring one another as an equal and independent being
- Caring for each other's dignity
- Speaking and acting with courtesy
- Appreciating cultural differences



Nurturing Connection and Emotional Safety



Offering understanding and Empathy

“Empathy is seeing with the eyes of another, hearing with the ears of another and feeling with the heart of another”

-Alfred Adler

- Being deeply present
- Seeking to comprehend the truth and emotions of the other
- Being curious
- Listening with our ears, eyes and heart

Brene Brown on Empathy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>



Sharing Sacred Moments, Conversations and Experiences

“Your thoughts must be lofty, your ideals luminous, your minds spiritual ...Together make mention of noble aspirations and heavenly concepts.”

-Abdu'l-Baha

- Praying together
- Having spiritual conversations
- Participating or planning meaningful service activities
- Hosting gatherings that are spiritual in nature
- Going on spiritual retreats
- Taking walks in the nature and sharing feelings of awe



Having Regular Conversations about Your Relationship

“Harbour not in your hearts any grievance, but rather explain its nature to each other with such frankness and understanding that it will disappear, leaving no remembrance. ”
-Abdul-Baha

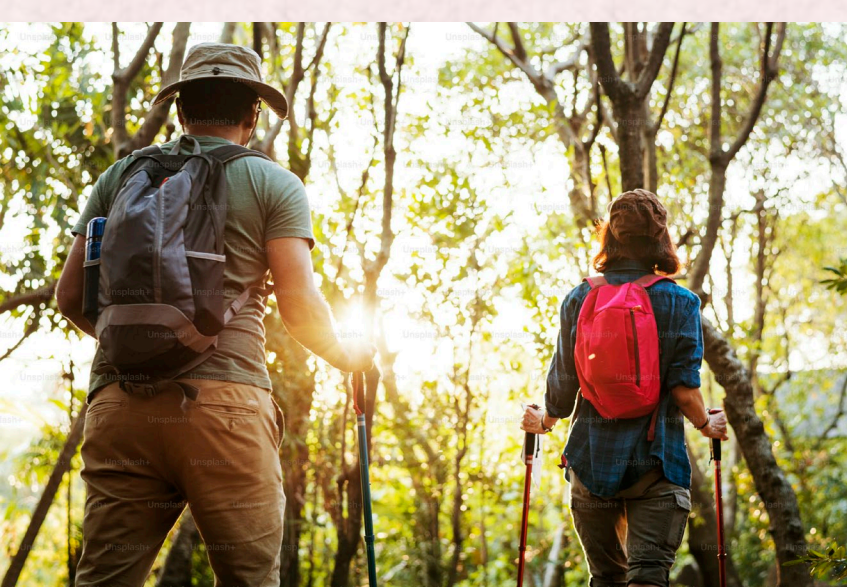
Scheduling daily or weekly check in times

- Being prepared to listen with compassion and detachment
- Being physically and mentally present
- Turning towards not away from each other (Gottman):
 - Sharing thoughts and feelings
 - being attentive and interested in each other's cares



Creating Enjoyable Shared Experiences

- Creating opportunities to laugh (games, movies, surprises)
- Being creative together (cooking, baking, painting)
- Enjoying a good meal, pleasant walk, travel, service
- Planning an outdoor activity which jointly challenges you



Preserving Connection in Times of Conflict



Unhealthy Responses to Conflicts

Each partner enters the relationship with coping patterns of behavior influenced by their early experiences.

- Avoidance
- Withdrawal
- Passive aggressive or revengeful words or behavior
- Anger/aggression



Negative Patterns of Interaction

In a couple relationship, the individual coping patterns interact, resulting in negative cycles of interaction, most common ones are:

- Pursue-withdraw (more common)
- Attack-attack
- Withdraw-withdraw
- Avoid-avoid



Patterns of Communication That Bring Disconnection and Their Antidote

‘Four Horsemen of Relationship Apocalypse’ (J. Gottman) that damage connection and relationships are:

- **Criticism:** verbally attacking personality or character

“You never think of me being alone at home. You are so selfish.”

Antidote: “I feel lonely when you are not home. Please come home earlier”.

- **Contempt:** attacking partner’s sense of self, aiming to insult or abuse

“Do you not even have a sense that an adult should clean up after themselves. I am the only one who is responsible in here!”

Antidote: “Thank you for cooking tonight.”

- **Defensiveness:** victimizing yourself to ward off a perceived attack and reverse the blame

“Well, so what if I forgot to wash the dishes last night. You could have done it, too!”

Antidote: “I am sorry I forgot to do the dishes. I will do them now.”

- **Stonewalling:** withdrawing to avoid conflict and convey disapproval

Walking away, changing the subject, dismissing the concern

Antidote: “I am feeling anxious and cannot discuss this. Let’s take a break and come back in 20 minutes.”

Spiritual Principles to Help Connection

***“Beware lest ye harm any soul** or make any heart to sorrow; lest ye wound any man with your words, be he known to you or a stranger, be he friend or foe.”*

- Abdu’l-Baha

***Refrain from reprimanding them**, and if you wish to give admonition or advice, let it be offered in such a way that it will not burden the bearer. Turn all your thoughts toward bringing joy to hearts.*

- Abdu’l-Bahá


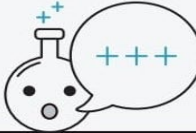




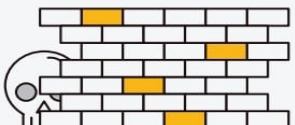

If a man has ten good qualities and one bad one, look at the ten and forget the one. And if a man has ten bad qualities and one good one, to look at the one and forget the ten.

- Abdu’l-Bahá

*“Man should **weigh his opinions with the utmost serenity, calmness and composure**. Before expressing his own views he should carefully consider the views already advanced by others. If he finds that a previously expressed opinion is more true and worthy, he should accept it immediately and not willfully hold to an opinion of his own. By this excellent method he endeavors to arrive at unity and truth*

- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Examples

	Scenario	Unhealthy	Healthy	
CRITICISM Verbally attacking personality or character. 	Coming home late from work	"You never think of me being alone at home. You are so selfish."	I feel lonely when you come home late.	GENTLE START UP Talk about your feelings using "I" statements and express a positive need. 
CONTEMPT Attacking sense of self with an intent to insult or abuse. 	Dirty dishes are left on the counter	"Do you not even have a sense that an adult should clean up after themselves. I am the only one who is responsible in here."	Thank you for doing the cooking tonight.	BUILD CULTURE OF APPRECIATION Remind yourself of your partner's positive qualities and find gratitude for positive actions. 
DEFENSIVENESS Victimizing yourself to ward off a perceived attack and reverse the blame. 	You reminded that you have not washed the dishes last night	"Well, so what if I forgot. You could have done it, too!"	I am sorry, I forgot to wash the dishes as I had promised. I will go wash them now.	TAKE RESPONSIBILITY Accept your partner's perspective and offer an apology for any wrongdoing. 
STONEWALLING Withdrawing to avoid conflict and convey disapproval, distance, and separation. 	Your partner wants to talk about a hurtful comment you made earlier	Walking away, changing the subject, dismissing the concern	I am too anxious to talk about this now. Could we take a break and come back in 20 minutes	PHYSIOLOGICAL SELF-SOOTHING Take a break and spend that time doing something soothing and distracting. 

Be Curious, Not Furious*, Listen First

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

-George Bernard Shaw

- Check if your perception and understanding is correct. Repeat back what you have heard to ensure you have heard correctly.
- Invite your partner to tell you more
- Empathize, see their perspective and **validate** the feelings that come from that perspective

(Imago Dialogue)

Listen with your **ears**, your **eyes** and most importantly with your **heart**



Do Not Argue When Emotions Are High

“Of all men the most negligent is he that disputeth idly and seeketh to advance himself over his brother.” - Baha’u’llah

“When you notice that a stage has been reached when enmity and threats are about to occur, you should immediately postpone discussion of the subject, until wrangling, disputations, and loud talk vanish, and a propitious time is at hand.” - Abdu’l-Baha

- Take time to cool down
- Set a time to come back together to resolve conflicts through frank and open consultation
- Reflect on your emotional reactivity and practice self-care



Reconnecting and Repairing



The attainment of any object is conditioned upon knowledge, volition and action. Unless these three conditions are forthcoming, there is no execution or accomplishment.

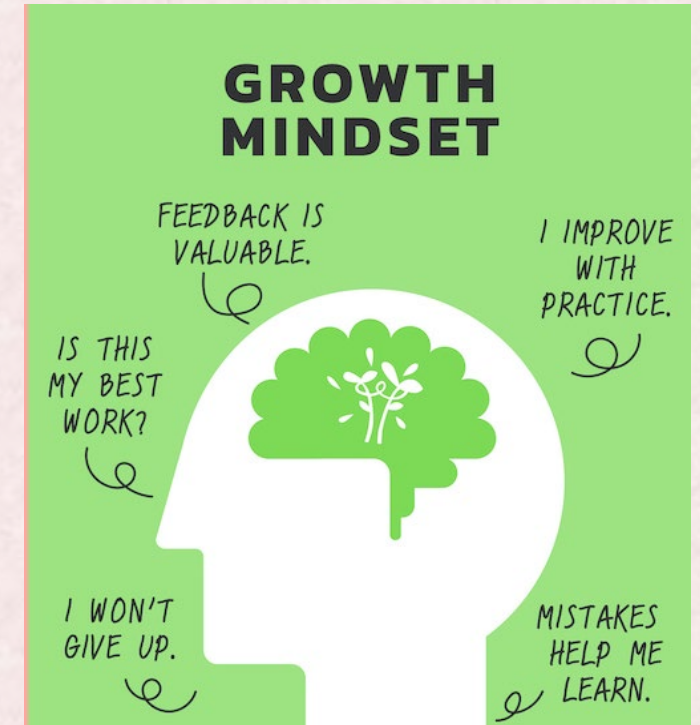
- Abdu'l-Baha

Taking Responsibility for Change- Adopting a Growth Mindset, Knowing Yourself

“The more difficulties one sees in the world, the more perfect one becomes. The more you plow and dig the ground, the more fertile it becomes. ”
- Abdu'l-Baha

“Bring thyself to account each day...”
- Baha'u'llah

“Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom”
- Laozi



Balancing Forgiveness and Justice

“If one of you has been wounded in the heart by the words or deeds of another, during the past year, forgive him now; that in purity of heart and loving pardon, you may feast in happiness, and arise, renewed in spirit.”

- Abdu'l-Bahá

“To nurse a grievance or hatred against another soul is spiritually poisonous to the soul which nurses it...”

- Universal House of Justice

“Justice must be sacred, and the rights of all the people must be considered. Desire for others only that which you desire for yourselves.”

- Abdu'l-Bahá

Harbour not in your hearts any grievance, but rather explain its nature to each other with such frankness and understanding that it will disappear, leaving no remembrance.

- Abdu'l-Bahá

Resolving Conflicts Through Frank and Open Consultation

“They must then proceed with the **utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation** to express their views. They must in every matter **search out the truth** and **not insist upon their own opinion**, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. “
- Baha'u'llah

Purpose: finding the truth or best solution, not deciding who is right

Ultimate outcome: increased unity

Necessary attitudes: detachment from one's idea, humility, respect, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation



Learning More and Seeking Help

- Learn more about effective communication:
 - Seek guidance from spiritual and scientific sources,
 - attend workshops,
 - read books,
 - talk to trusted and wise friends
- Get support
 - form a community of supportive friends
 - Say prayers for your spouse, your relationship and your family
- Seek professional help if needed



Be assured that when you work for unity in your relationship, you will be confirmed and supported.

Rely Upon God



Rely upon God. Trust in Him. Praise Him,
and call Him continually to mind.

He verily turneth trouble into ease,
and sorrow into solace, and toil into utter peace.
He verily hath dominion over all things.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá