

Devotional Gathering: Friendship and Marriage

Introduction

Friendship as part of a couple relationship before marriage provides a close bond and the ability to rely on one another. When you are friends, you ensure that you have interests in common and enjoy similar activities. You learn to confide in each other and build trust between you.

True friendship is then a firm foundation for marriage that will see you through its joys and challenges. You will have many opportunities to deepen and develop it as your marriage progresses. Friendship strengthens when you confide in one another, parent together, support one another through difficulties, share joys, and participate in fun and relaxation. Marriage is very much about companionship and is in many ways one long conversation and relationship with a close friend. Ideally, you will be closer to your spouse than to any other human being.

The love that builds between friends can be eternal, and therefore a close friendship based on love and appreciation is part of what helps marriage to be eternal.

Musical selections are wonderful for touching people's hearts, and you are encouraged to use them whenever appropriate.

Quotations

- O my God! O my God! Verily, I invoke Thee and supplicate before Thy threshold, asking Thee that all Thy mercies may descend upon these souls. Specialize them for Thy favor and Thy truth.

O Lord! Unite and bind together the hearts, join in accord all the souls, and exhilarate the spirits through the signs of Thy sanctity and oneness. O Lord! Make these faces radiant through the light of Thy oneness. Strengthen the loins of Thy servants in the service of Thy kingdom.

O Lord, Thou possessor of infinite mercy! O Lord of forgiveness and pardon! Forgive our sins, pardon our shortcomings, and cause us to turn to the kingdom of Thy clemency, invoking the kingdom of might and power, humble at Thy shrine and submissive before the glory of Thine evidences.

O Lord God! Make us as waves of the sea, as flowers of the garden, united, agreed through the bounties of Thy love. O Lord! Dilate the breasts through the signs of Thy oneness, and make all mankind as stars shining from the same height of glory, as perfect fruits growing upon Thy tree of life.

Verily, Thou art the Almighty, the Self-Subsistent, the Giver, the Forgiving, the Pardoner, the Omniscient, the One Creator.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Baha’i Prayers* (US 2002), p. 238)
- Do not be content with showing friendship in words alone, let your heart burn with loving kindness for all who may cross your path. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Paris Talks*, p. 16)

3. O ye beloved of the Lord! Commit not that which defileth the limpid stream of love or destroyeth the sweet fragrance of friendship. By the righteousness of the Lord! Ye were created to show love one to another and not perversity and rancor. Take pride not in love for yourselves but in love for your fellow-creatures. Glory not in love for your country, but in love for all mankind. Let your eye be chaste, your hand faithful, your tongue truthful and your heart enlightened. ...[L]et your adorning be forgiveness and mercy and that which cheereth the hearts of the well-favored of God. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 138-139)

4. But the love which sometimes exists between friends is not (true) love, because it is subject to transmutation; this is merely fascination. As the breeze blows, the slender trees yield. If the wind is in the East the tree leans to the West, and if the wind turns to the West the tree leans to the East. This kind of love is originated by the accidental conditions of life. This is not love, it is merely acquaintanceship; it is subject to change.
 Today you will see two souls apparently in close friendship; tomorrow all this may be changed. Yesterday they were ready to die for one another, today they shun one another's society! This is not love; it is the yielding of the hearts to the accidents of life. When that which has caused this "love" to exist passes, the love passes also; this is not in reality love. (Abdu'l-Bahá: *Paris Talks*, pp. 179-181)

5. ...[M]an and woman should truly be friends, and should be in sympathy with one another. Their understanding should have a basis in reality and not be based upon passion and desire... (Abdu'l-Bahá: quoted in Agnes Ghaznavi, *Sexuality, Relationships and Spiritual Growth*, p. 121)

6. ...[T]he life of a married couple should resemble the life of the angels in heaven—a life full of joy and spiritual delight, a life of unity and concord, a friendship both mental and physical. (Abdu'l-Bahá: *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, "Family Life"*, p. 397)

7. You must love your friend better than yourself; yes, be willing to sacrifice yourself. (Abdu'l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 218)

8. ...Bahá'í engagement is the perfect communication and the entire consent of both parties. However, they must show forth the utmost attention and become informed of one another's character and the firm covenant made between each other must become an eternal binding, and their intentions must be everlasting affinity, friendship, unity and life. (Abdu'l-Bahá: *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. 2*, p. 325)

9. ...[I]n a relationship in which such a decision [to marry] has not been taken and in which the law of chastity is strictly observed, there is no objection, in principle, to a prolonged friendship in which the two individuals entertain the possibility of marrying each other at some time in the future. (Universal House of Justice: An unpublished letter August 28, 1994, to an individual; published in *Marriage Can Be Forever—Preparation Counts!*, p. 141)

10. It is not surprising that serious-minded Bahá'í youth growing up in a bewildering moral environment are asking for specific guidance on the matter of proper conduct in friendship between boys and girls, men and women. It is also not surprising that their parents and other adult advisors are themselves sometimes confused on the issues that arise as they find old standards are changing and new patterns of behavior are developing in society which are unsettling, possibly even frightening to them. The primary protection for the friends in these matters, both young and old alike, is to continue to deepen, truly deepen, in the Teachings so that their behavior more readily conforms to the high standards of the [Bahá'í] Faith... (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice: An unpublished letter February 5, 1992, to an individual; published in *Marriage Can Be Forever—Preparation Counts!*, pp. 130-131)
11. The love of God has brought us together, and this is the best of means and motive. Every other bond of friendship is limited in effectiveness, but fellowship based upon the love of God is unlimited, everlasting, divine and radiant. ('Abdu'l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 442)
12. O Thou compassionate Lord, Thou Who art generous and able! We are servants of Thine sheltered beneath Thy providence. Cast Thy glance of favor upon us. Give light to our eyes, hearing to our ears, and understanding and love to our hearts. Render our souls joyous and happy through Thy glad tidings. O Lord! Point out to us the pathway of Thy kingdom and resuscitate all of us through the breaths of the Holy Spirit. Bestow upon us life everlasting and confer upon us never-ending honor. Unify mankind and illumine the world of humanity. May we all follow Thy pathway, long for Thy good pleasure and seek the mysteries of Thy kingdom. O God! Unite us and connect our hearts with Thy indissoluble bond. Verily, Thou art the Giver, Thou art the Kind One and Thou art the Almighty. ('Abdu'l-Bahá: *Bahá'í Prayers* (US 2002), p. 112)

Reflection and Discussion

1. What are the qualities of a good friend/friendship?
2. What is the role of friendship in marriage?
3. What attitudes and behavior are present in excellent friendships?
4. What sustains a friendship over time?
5. What might you sacrifice for a friend?
6. What role do spirituality, religion, and God play in lasting friendships?

Skill-Building: Widening and Deepening Your Circle of Friends

Purpose: To understand how you are currently spending your time, and to determine what you could be doing differently with your time to increase the number of friends and potential partners you have (for those who are not married). If you already have many friends, you can use this worksheet to consider whether to deepen your relationship with some of them and how to do that.

1. What are the main activities that I generally spend my time doing (List at least 5)?

2. How do these activities help me to meet new people (or deepen a current friendship)?

3. What other activities can help me to meet someone who is a potential marriage partner; deepen a friendship with a current friend so that it becomes a relationship; or deepen the friendship in my marriage?
