

**HANDOUTS FOR THE  
2004 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE  
MARRIAGE TRANSFORMATION PROJECT**

**PURE GOLD MARRIAGE  
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## Character

The light of a good character surpasseth the light of the sun and the radiance thereof. Whoso attaineth unto it is accounted as a jewel among [people]. The glory and the upliftment of the world...depend upon it.

~ *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 36

Bahá'í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart. Each must, however, exercise the utmost care to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the other, that the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever. Their purpose must be this: to become loving companions and comrades and at one with each other for time and eternity....

~ *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 118

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Bahá'í law places the responsibility for ascertaining knowledge of the character of those entering into the marriage contract on the two parties involved, and on the parents, who must give consent to the marriage.

~ (Universal House of Justice: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 368)

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You will always have some complaints about the person you live with. But there's a world of difference between a complaint and a criticism. A complaint only addresses the specific action at which your spouse failed. A criticism is more global—it adds on some negative words about your mate's character or personality.... By simply reminding yourself of your spouse's positive qualities—even as you grapple with each other's flaws—you can prevent a happy marriage from deteriorating.... All spiritual views of life are consistent with loving and honoring your spouse.

~ John M. Gottman, Ph.D. and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, pp. 27, 65, 102

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## Courtship

The following is a letter written by the Universal House of Justice in response to an inquiry from a father about his sons:

As you know, courtship practices differ greatly from one culture to another, and it is not yet known what pattern of courtship will emerge in the future when society has been more influenced by Bahá'í Teachings. However, there is no indication that it will resemble the practices extant in existing cultures.... In this interim period, the friends are encouraged to make great efforts to live in conformity with the Teachings and to gradually forge a new pattern of behavior, more in keeping with the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. In this context, we offer the following comments.

Although a Bahá'í may, if he chooses, seek his parents' advice on the choice of a partner, and although Bahá'í parents may give such advice if asked, it is clear from the Teachings that parents do not have the right to interfere in their children's actual choice of a prospective partner until approached for their consent to marry. Therefore, when discussing the issue of courtship with your sons, it would be best to discuss it on the level of principle without reference to individuals.

In the context of the society in which your family now lives, a society in which materialism, self-centeredness and failing marriages are all too common, your sons may well feel that it is wise to have a long period of courtship in which the prospective partners spend much time together and become thoroughly acquainted with each other's character, background and family. This practice does not in itself contradict Bahá'í law and, as it is not unacceptable in ... [country name removed], it appears to be a viable option. As you are aware, Bahá'u'lláh ordained that Bahá'í engagement should not exceed 95 days, and, although this law has not yet been applied universally, it highlights the desirability of marrying quickly once the decision to marry has been firmly taken and parental consent obtained. However, in a relationship in which such a decision 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.

You have mentioned that your sons like to invite their girlfriends to spend a lot of time with the family and that you are not entirely happy with this situation. Each family member has rights which should be respected, and if you wish to have some time in your home without the presence of non-family members, the other members of your family should take this seriously into consideration. However, we hasten to point out to you that the situation which you describe, in which your sons wish their friends to be involved with your family, is much more in line with the Teachings than the common pattern in Western countries in which many youth virtually exclude their parents from interacting with their peers, sometimes distancing themselves from their families in order to have the freedom to engage in frivolous and even unchaste behavior....

(Universal House of Justice: August 28, 1994, to an individual; *Marriage Can Be Forever—Preparation Counts!*, pg. 74)

## Truthfulness

(From "Pure Gold: Encouraging Character Qualities in Marriage")

### TO UNDERSTAND

Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues.... When this holy attribute is established in man, all the divine qualities will also be acquired.

~ Bahá'í Faith: *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 26

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With truthfulness, we look at the facts, without creating make-believe stories or assumptions about what occurs, and we actively seek to find the truth inside ourselves and in all situations. Truthfulness helps us to admit when we have made a mistake, and we don't lie about it, even to defend ourselves. It protects us from the damage and destruction that exaggeration, deceit, and lies cause. Sometimes we need to ask God for the courage to speak the truth, fearlessly, yet with a loving heart, and in a timely and wise way. Our truthfulness brings contentment to us and builds trust and ongoing love. Loving truthfulness is an important facet of our marriage. It supports all the other spiritual character qualities we practice.

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Truth is inclusive of all the virtues, ...and, like charity, more ancient than mankind.

~ A. Bronson Alcott

How might it benefit us to develop Truthfulness in our marriage? How can the strengthening and moderating qualities below assist us with practicing it to the best of our ability?

*Strengthening Qualities:* Commitment, Courage, Faithfulness, Honesty, Integrity, Justice, Purity, Sincerity, Trustworthiness

*Moderating Qualities:* Caring, Compassion, Humility, Patience, Tactfulness, Wisdom

1. How might discretion and tactfulness affect the method and timeliness of telling the truth? What else might be a factor?
2. What signals do we display to one another when one of us is telling the truth? When one of us is lying? How do we handle hearing the truth? Hearing lies?
3. What would the gift of truthfulness bring to our relationship?

*We commit* to love and embrace truthfulness as a foundation of trust in our marriage.

### TO PRACTICE

- ♥ Tell one another a story about something happening outside our home, being exact and careful in our accuracy, but without engaging in harmful gossip
- ♥ Communicate with one another about our true intentions with an action we are considering taking
- ♥ Each create a collage of photos and words from magazines that expresses the truth about ourselves, and then together create a third one that expresses the truth about our marriage
- ♥ Identify a needed communication that one of us has postponed sharing and work through it together, telling the truth about our thoughts and feelings
- ♥ Others?

## Character Qualities

**(List from *Pure Gold: Encouraging Character Qualities in Marriage*)**

Acceptance	Courtesy	Generosity	Mercy	Sincerity
Assertiveness	Creativity	Gentleness	Moderation	Spirituality
Beauty	Detachment	Helpfulness	Patience	Tactfulness
Caring	Encouragement	Honesty	Peacefulness	Thankfulness
Chastity	Enthusiasm	Humility	Perseverance	Thoughtfulness
Commitment	Equality	Idealism	Purity	Trustworthiness
Compassion	Excellence	Integrity	Purposefulness	Truthfulness
Confidence	Faithfulness	Joyfulness	Respect	Unity-Building
Contentment	Flexibility	Justice	Responsibility	Wisdom
Cooperation	Forgiveness	Kindness	Self-Discipline	
Courage	Friendliness	Love	Service	

Choose five qualities that are your strengths:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Which five qualities do you seek in someone you want marry?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Discuss:

1. Would you stop seeing the person if he/she is not skilled at practicing a quality you consider vital? Would you assume there wouldn't be any substantial change in the quality and accept it? Would you expect them to change after marriage? Would you encourage them to strengthen the quality and observe their progress?
  
2. Is it necessary for both the man and women in a couple to have the same quality strengths? Why or why not? Benefits? Negatives? What are the benefits or negatives to the couple having different ones?
  
3. How could you handle the situation if someone has a character quality, but he/she is misusing it in some way that is harmful?

## **Gaining Confidence: Using Character Quality Language** **(Pure Gold: Encouraging Character Qualities in Marriage, Chapter 7)**

One effective tool to influence and strengthen character qualities in yourself and one another is to incorporate these qualities into your daily speech. This means actively and joyfully looking for them both in your own actions and attitudes and one another. Clearly seeing these qualities gives you opportunities to affirm and encourage them. Look at the difference in these two statements:

**First Statement:**

It's nice that you did the dishes.

**Alternative That Uses Character Quality Language:**

Thank you for doing the dishes even though it was my turn. It was very *thoughtful* of you...my day was difficult. I especially appreciate that you were so *careful* with the new china. (Qualities of Thoughtfulness and Caring)

There's nothing wrong with the first interaction, and your spouse would likely feel appreciated. However, the second *affirms* his/her character and shows the application of the qualities in daily life. Here's another example:

**First Statement:**

Thanks for listening about my problems at work.

**Alternative That Uses Character Quality Language:**

I feel much more *peaceful* now that we've talked about what I'm going through at work. It means a lot to me that you *sincerely* listen to me and *care* about me. (Qualities of Peacefulness, Sincerity, and Caring)

Sincere character quality language can build confidence and self-respect and assist you to nurture character development in yourself and others.

To Consider: When you praise or encourage someone, it loses its effectiveness if it is in the form of a comparison that says, "You are better than someone else." Your tone of voice and phrasing are also important so that there isn't implied criticism underneath the praise about how your spouse did the action the last time [Example: It was thoughtful of you to FINALLY do the dishes].

Also, it is important to have pure motives in these interactions and not be manipulative or controlling. The goal is to be loving, honest, and sincere.

1. What might be the effect on a relationship if one partner criticizes the other partner's character? (Examples: "You should have paid the bills. You can't be trusted!?" or "You should have showed up on time to pick me up! You can't be trusted!" This is an attack on the person's trustworthiness.)
2. What might be the effect on a relationship if there is encouragement and praise instead? (Examples: "Thank you for paying the bills on time. I'm happy I can trust you to do it." or "Thank you for picking me up on time. I'm happy I can trust you to be here when I need you." This is an affirmation of the person's trustworthiness.)
3. Practice an example of using this affirming "character quality language" as shown in the example in question #2 using a different quality.

# COMMUNICATION SKILLS - GIVING PRAISE AND ENCOURAGEMENT

## Read & Discuss:

Never speak disparagingly of others, but praise without distinction. Pollute not your tongues by speaking evil of another.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 453)

I hope that the believers of God will shun completely backbiting, each one praising the other cordially and believe that backbiting is the cause of Divine Wrath, to such an extent that if a person backbites to the extent of one word, he may become dishonored among all the people, because the most hateful characteristic of man is fault-finding. One must expose the praiseworthy qualities of the souls and not their evil attributes. The friends must overlook their shortcomings and faults and speak only of their virtues and not their defects.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 91)

We can never exert the influence over others which we can exert over ourselves. If...we show love, patience, and understanding of the weaknesses of others; if we seek to never criticize but rather encourage, others will do likewise....

(Shoghi Effendi: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 83)

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## In groups of three people, read the quotes above and discuss the following:

How do praise and encouragement relate to supporting character growth in someone else?

People respond very differently to criticism than they do to encouragement and praise. Criticism can prompt a person to change, he or she also can resist change because of resentful feelings about changing his or her behavior, or he or she changes only temporarily. When you encourage, and honestly and sincerely praise someone, it prompts him/her to try even harder. Encouragement releases creative energy in the recipient. Do the following steps:

1. Each identify at least one time that you received praise or encouragement and responded positively. Describe the situations to each other.
2. Each of you create a goal/project of identifying someone to encourage, choosing a specific person and talk about how you will encourage them, both verbally and in other ways. If you are in a relationship or marriage with someone, please choose them.
3. Assist each other in identifying what challenges might come up in carrying out this goal and how you might overcome them.

# COMMUNICATION SKILLS: USING THE LOVE LANGUAGES

## **Based on “The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate”**

(Adapted from *The Five Love Languages*, Northfield Publishing,  
copyright © 1992, 1995 by Gary Chapman. Used with permission.)

(Worksheet ©2004 Marriage Transformation<sup>SM</sup> Project; [www.marriagetransformation.com](http://www.marriagetransformation.com))

To have a full “love tank,” your partner needs to express love to you in the way that most makes you feel loved. If you are not receiving love in the way that is most important to you, then you may begin to believe that your spouse does not love you. You can use a number of methods to communicate love, called “love languages,” but it is vital that you each use your spouse’s most important language to maintain a strong, loving marriage. Here are the primary languages for you to choose from:

1. **Words of Affirmation:** verbal compliments; words of appreciation; praise; encouragement; kind words; noticing and appreciating the positive actions and qualities of the other
2. **Quality Time:** undivided and focused attention; togetherness (not just being in the same space at the same time, but interacting); uninterrupted time; quality conversation; regard marriage as a relationship, not a problem to be solved; eye contact; listen for feelings/emotions; observe body language; sympathetic listening; self-revealing intimacy; sharing; doing activities together
3. **Receiving Gifts:** something you can hold in your hand; symbol that you were thought about; cost not usually important; visual symbol of love; not just on special occasions; gift of your presence, especially at important moments
4. **Acts of Service:** do things for the other; housework/yard work; make requests (not demands) of the other; done with loving attitude (not fear, guilt, or resentment); actions that reflect equality and partnership, not role stereotypes
5. **Physical Touch:** loving physical contact; intimate touch; tender hug; back rub/massage; kissing; holding hands; holding while crying/comforting; faithfulness

1. Which Love Language **most** communicates to you that someone loves you? Which is next?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_

2. How do you feel when someone does one of the other languages and rarely does the one that means the most to you?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What is the primary Love Language of your boyfriend/girlfriend/close friend/spouse?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What Love Language is most comfortable for you to use? Does it match the primary Language of the above person?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What could I do or say that would fill this person’s “Love Tank”?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_