

# Child *of* Mine

A Bahá'í inspired  
composition for  
expectant parents.

By Kamelia Khoshmashrab



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A Bahá'í Inspired Composition For  
Expectant Parents

*Topics range from pre-pregnancy until after birth*

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## **Title Inspiration**

“He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a **son of Mine**; upon him rest My Glory, My loving kindness, My Mercy, that have compassed the world.”

- Bahá'u'lláh -

## **Dedication**

Dedicated to my daughters Lara and Eva, whose very presence inspired me to write this composition. Also in loving memory of Tayebbeh Khoshmashrab, who strived tirelessly to live the Bahá'í life and be an example for her children.

## **Acknowledgments**

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Finally, a huge thank-you to my husband Stefan for his endless love and support.

## **Disclaimer**

This composition is the work of an individual Bahá'í believer.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia has reviewed this composition. This review assesses the text against the criteria of an accurate and dignified presentation of the Bahá'í Faith. It does not check for errors in typography or scientific content.

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## **About the Bahá'í Faith**

The Bahá'í Faith is a world religion whose purpose is to unite all the races and peoples in one universal Cause and one common Faith.

Bahá'ís are the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, Who they believe is the Promised One of all Ages. For more information on the Bahá'í Faith visit [www.bahai.org](http://www.bahai.org).

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# CHAPTER ONE:

## PRE-PREGNANCY MATTERS

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### 1.1 CHASTITY AND THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

The Bahá'í teachings encourage the people of the world to live “a chaste and godly life.” Chastity encompasses sexual morality. In the Bahá'í Faith sexual intercourse is permissible only between a man and woman who are married. This law also recognizes marriage and the family unit as the bedrock of human society, and is designed to protect and strengthen that divine institution.<sup>2</sup> The Guardian advises in a letter written on his behalf, that:

The Bahá'í Teachings on this matter, which is of such vital concern and about which there is a wide divergency of views, are very clear and emphatic. Briefly stated the Bahá'í conception of sex is based on the belief that chastity should be strictly practised by both sexes, not only because it is in itself highly commendable ethically, but also due to its being the only way to a happy and successful marital life...

The proper use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is precisely for this purpose that the institution of marriage has been established. The Bahá'ís do not believe in the suppression of the sex impulse but in its regulation and control.<sup>3</sup>

In the Bahá'í Faith the purpose of marriage is to bring forth children who will know and recognize God. The Guardian states in a letter written on his behalf, that:

Bahá'u'lláh explicitly reveals in His Book of Laws that the very purpose of marriage is the procreation of children who, when grown up, will be able to know God and to recognize and observe His Commandments and Laws as revealed through His Messengers. Marriage is thus, according to the Bahá'í Teachings, primarily a social and moral act.<sup>4</sup>

Where chastity has not been practiced and a child is born outside of wedlock, generally, the administrative rights of the parents should not be suspended. Deprivation of administrative or voting rights is a sanction placed on Bahá'ís who violate some of the laws and ordinances in the Bahá'í Faith. Every case is different, and there is more than one variable consideration to take into account, for example, “the circumstances of the individual, the degree to which the good name of the Faith is involved, whether the offence is blatant and flagrant.”<sup>5</sup> The Universal House of Justice has advised:

Generally, administrative rights should not be suspended because of the birth of a child out of wedlock. The questions to be considered are whether the party is guilty of blatant and flagrant immorality, whether such conduct is harming the Faith, and whether the believer has refused or neglected to improve her conduct despite repeated warnings.

As you no doubt know, deprivation of administrative rights is a very serious sanction, and the beloved Guardian repeatedly cautioned that it should be exercised only in extreme situations. In a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to another National Spiritual Assembly which asked similar questions, it was pointed out that it was the task of the institutions to provide both counsel and education for the believers, and thereafter it is for the individual Bahá'í to determine his course of conduct in relation to the situations of his daily life.<sup>6</sup>



## 1.2 RECREATIONAL DRUGS

Recreational drugs can have an adverse effect on the health of a mother and her unborn child. Pregnancy is physically and emotionally demanding, and a woman planning to fall pregnant should make a significant effort to be in the best of health.

Examples of recreational drugs include:

- Tobacco
- Alcohol
- Cannabis
- Opiates (Morphine, Codeine, Heroin etc.)
- LSD's
- Ecstasy
- Cocaine
- Amphetamine
- Methamphetamine

Some of the recreational drugs listed above have been linked to the following complications:

- Infertility
- Ectopic pregnancy
- Miscarriages
- Stillbirths
- Preterm birth
- Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- Placenta abruptions
- Increased risk of neonatal apnoea
- Reduction in birth weight and intrauterine growth restriction
- Malformations in the unborn child
- Maternal death

Recreational drugs can be highly addictive. It is therefore advisable to seek guidance from a health practitioner to stop the use of these substances as soon as possible.

Regarding alcohol, smoking and the use of opiates, `Abdu'l-Bahá expounds:

O Divine Providence! Bestow Thou in all things purity and cleanliness upon the people of Bahá. Grant that they be freed from all defilement, and released from all addictions. Save them from committing any repugnant act, unbind them from the chains of every evil habit, that they may live pure and free, and wholesome and cleanly, worthy to serve at Thy Sacred Threshold and fit to be related to their Lord. Deliver them from intoxicating drinks and tobacco, save them, rescue them, from this opium that bringeth on madness, suffer them to enjoy the sweet savours of holiness, that they may drink deep of the mystic cup of heavenly love and know the rapture of being drawn ever closer unto the Realm of the All-Glorious... O ye, God's loved ones! Experience hath shown how greatly the renouncing of smoking, of intoxicating drink, and of opium, conduceth to health and vigour, to the expansion and keenness of the mind and to bodily strength.<sup>7</sup>



Among these latter is smoking tobacco, which is dirty, smelly, offensive -- an evil habit, and one the harmfulness of which gradually becometh apparent to all. Every qualified physician hath ruled -- and this hath also been proven by tests -- that one of the components of tobacco is a deadly poison, and that the smoker is vulnerable to many and various diseases. This is why smoking hath been plainly set forth as repugnant from the standpoint of hygiene... Later on, the Book of Aqdas was revealed, and since smoking tobacco was not specifically forbidden there, the believers did not give it up. The Blessed Beauty, however,

always expressed repugnance for it, and although, in the early days, there were reasons why He would smoke a little tobacco, in time He completely renounced it, and those sanctified souls who followed Him in all things also abandoned its use.<sup>8</sup>



As to opium, it is foul and accursed. God protect us from the punishment He inflicteth on the user. According to the explicit Text of the Most Holy Book, it is forbidden, and its use is utterly condemned. Reason showeth that smoking opium is a kind of insanity, and experience attesteth that the user is completely cut off from the human kingdom. May God protect all against the perpetration of an act so hideous as this, an act which layeth in ruins the very foundation of what it is to be human, and which causeth the user to be dispossessed for ever and ever. For opium fasteneth on the soul, so that the user's conscience dieth, his mind is blotted away, his perceptions are eroded. It turneth the living into the dead. It quencheth the natural heat. No greater harm can be conceived than that which opium inflicteth. Fortunate are they who never even speak the name of it; then think how wretched is the user.<sup>9</sup>



Regarding the use of liquor: According to the text of the Book of Aqdas, both light and strong drinks are prohibited. The reason for this prohibition is that alcohol leadeth the mind astray and causeth the weakening of the body.<sup>10</sup>

### 1.3 SEEKING OUT A COMPETENT HEALTH PRACTITIONER

No specific school of nutrition or medicine has been associated with the Bahá'í teachings. Shoghi Effendi has advised that it is 'premature to try and elaborate on the few general references to health and medicine made in our Holy Scriptures.'" In response to a question, the Universal House of Justice wrote:

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh has stated: 'Whenever ye fall ill, refer to competent physicians. Verily, We have not abolished recourse to material means, rather We have affirmed it through this Pen which God hath made the Dawning Place of His luminous and resplendent Cause.'" The secretaries of the Guardian have conveyed his guidance on this point in many letters to individual believers in passages such as these: '...refer to competent physicians, and abide by their considered decisions'; '...invariably consult and follow the treatment of competent and conscientious physicians...' and '...consult the best physicians...doctors who have studied a scientific system of medicine.' Thus the obligation to consult physicians and to distinguish between doctors who are well trained in medical sciences and those who are not is clear, but the Faith should not be associated with any particular school of medicine theory or practice. It is left to each believer to decide for himself which doctors he should consult, bearing in mind the principles enunciated above.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.4 ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION, OVARIAN STIMULATION, IN VITRO FERTILIZATION AND SURROGACY

*Artificial insemination* is the deliberate introduction of semen into a female for the purpose of fertilization, by means other than ejaculation directly into the vagina.

*Ovarian stimulation* is a fertility treatment that uses medications to cause or regulate ovulation, or increase the number of eggs produced during a cycle.

*In vitro fertilization (IVF)* is a process by which an egg is fertilized by sperm outside the body. The process involves removing an egg or eggs from a woman's ovaries and fertilizing them with sperm in a laboratory. The fertilised egg is cultured for 3 to 5 days and is then implanted back into the woman's uterus, with the intention of establishing a successful pregnancy. When a woman's natural cycle is monitored to collect a naturally selected egg for fertilization, it is known as natural cycle IVF.

*Surrogacy* is an arrangement by which a woman carries and delivers a child for another couple or person. This woman, the surrogate mother, may be the child's genetic mother (traditional surrogacy), or she may be genetically unrelated to the child (gestational surrogacy).

In relation to artificial insemination, the Universal House of Justice has advised:

The beloved Guardian states in a letter written on his behalf to an individual believer, that "... there is no objection to having a baby by means of artificial insemination as long as your husband is the father of it". In view of this, it would not be permissible under Bahá'í law for a Bahá'í couple seeking to have a child to utilize a sperm bank.<sup>13</sup>

In response to a letter querying ovarian stimulation, the Universal House of Justice wrote:

With respect to the question of multiple ovulation and pregnancies induced through the use of certain chemical agents,

the House of Justice knows of nothing in the Writings on this matter. Since the process described is essentially only an accentuation of a normal process, i.e., inducing ovulation where formerly there was some physiological obstacle to successful release of ova, the possibility of multiple pregnancies may be viewed as the chance that is taken in achieving an otherwise successful outcome to a therapeutic intervention...<sup>14</sup>

With regards to surrogacy and in vitro fertilization, the Universal House of Justice has advised the following:

The queries you raise about donors of eggs or sperm in cases of infertility and the state of the souls of frozen embryos relate to the broader question of the Bahá'í attitude toward recent advances in medical science, which increase the probability of conception in cases of infertility.

The Bahá'í view is very balanced. While appreciating the value of the new medical techniques which enable previously childless couples to enjoy the blessings of a family, the teachings define such limits as are necessary to preserve the dignity of the individual and the sanctity of marriage.

... While artificial insemination is a very different process from in-vitro fertilization, the principle enunciated by the Guardian is the same, namely, that to be acceptable to Bahá'ís the egg cell of the wife should be fertilized by the sperm of the husband in the procedure.

The spiritual and social implications involved in the use of surrogate mothers to provide for the gestation of the embryo, even when the embryo results from the fertilization of the husband's sperm and the wife's egg cell which is later implanted into the womb of the third party, are too far-reaching for such a procedure to be permissible to Bahá'ís.<sup>15</sup>



[T]he Bahá'í Writings affirm that the human soul comes into being at the time of conception. However, they do not clearly define the exact biological moment and nature of the event described as conception and this may, indeed, be a question that is insoluble by human thought or investigation, since it relates to mysteries of the spiritual world and the nature of the soul itself.<sup>16</sup>



The proposed procedure [surrogacy] leads to a mechanistic use of the human body, incompatible with the dignity assigned to the individual in the Bahá'í teachings. Apart from legal questions to which such a procedure could give rise, it should be remembered that, since human beings are endowed with a spiritual nature, an accurate assessment of the implications of the physical actions in which an individual engages must include consideration of the spiritual, emotional and psychological effects of these actions; this interrelationship is evident on examining the emphasis placed in the Bahá'í teachings on modesty, chastity and fidelity. The use of a surrogate for the gestation of an embryo would raise a number of issues pertaining to the future impact on the child itself, as well as the emotional ties between the surrogate and the child, and also between the donor of the ovum and the child.<sup>17</sup>



The Universal House of Justice has considered the question of whether Bahá'ís are required to take extraordinary measures to facilitate the natural process of conception. For the present, it is left to the Bahá'í couple to decide whether or not they wish to use in vitro fertilization as a means of having children. The use of such procedures is clearly a matter of choice, and not a requirement. In this regard, there is value in obtaining the best medical advice available.<sup>18</sup>

# CHAPTER TWO:

## MATTERS WITHIN PREGNANCY AND BREASTFEEDING

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### 2.1 PRAYING FOR THE CHILD

Bahá'ís believe that the soul or spirit of man appears at the moment of conception.<sup>19</sup> Because of this belief parents are encouraged to pray for the wellbeing of the unborn child while it is still in the womb. There is a Bahá'í prayer revealed by `Abdu'l-Bahá specifically for expectant mothers. It calls upon expectant mothers to “prostrate thyself and kneel down before the gracious Lord, in His greatest Kingdom, and say:

My Lord! My Lord! I praise Thee and I thank Thee for that whereby Thou hast favored Thine humble maid-servant, Thy slave beseeching and supplicating Thee, because Thou hast verily guided her unto Thine obvious Kingdom and caused her to hear Thine exalted Call in the contingent world and to behold Thy Signs which prove the appearance of Thy victorious reign over all things.

O my Lord. I dedicate that which is in my womb unto Thee. Then cause it to be a praiseworthy child in Thy Kingdom, and a fortunate one by Thy favor and Thy generosity; to develop and to grow up under the charge of Thine education. Verily Thou art the Gracious! Verily Thou art the Lord of Great Favor!<sup>20</sup>



It is important to note that all prayers read by a mother, including her own daily obligatory prayers, can influence her unborn child. According to the Universal House of Justice, “[h]er attitude, her prayers, even what she eats and her physical condition have a great influence on the child when it is still in the womb.”<sup>21</sup>

After the birth of their child, there are numerous prayers parents may recite to their newborn. A selection of these infant prayers is as follows:

Praised be Thou, O Lord my God! Graciously grant that this infant be fed from the breast of Thy tender mercy and loving providence and be nourished with the fruit of Thy celestial trees. Suffer him not to be committed to the care of anyone save Thee, inasmuch as Thou, Thyself, through the potency of Thy sovereign will and power, didst create and call him into being. There is none other God but Thee, the Almighty, the All-Knowing.

Lauded art Thou, O my Best Beloved, waft over him the sweet savors of Thy transcendent bounty and the fragrances of Thy holy bestowals. Enable him then to seek shelter beneath the shadow of Thy most exalted Name, O Thou Who holdest in Thy grasp the kingdom of names and attributes. Verily, Thou art potent to do what Thou willest, and Thou art indeed the Mighty, the Exalted, the Ever-Forgiving, the Gracious, the Generous, the Merciful.<sup>22</sup>

∞

O Thou peerless Lord! Let this suckling babe be nursed from the breast of Thy loving-kindness, guard it within the cradle of Thy safety and protection and grant that it be reared in the arms of Thy tender affection.<sup>23</sup>

∞

O God! Rear this little babe in the bosom of Thy love, and give it milk from the breast of Thy providence. Cultivate this fresh plant in the rose garden of Thy love and aid it to grow through the showers of Thy bounty. Make it a child of the kingdom, and lead it to Thy heavenly realm. Thou art powerful and kind, and Thou art the Bestower, the Generous, the Lord of surpassing bounty.<sup>24</sup>

In particular mothers are encouraged to read or sing to their children prayers or Writings revealed by Bahá'u'lláh as they put them to sleep. `Abdu'l-Bahá has instructed that:

When the children are ready for bed, let the mother read or sing them the Odes of the Blessed Beauty, so that from their earliest years they will be educated by these verses of guidance.<sup>25</sup>

It is important to note that Bahá'í parents are not obligated to recite a specific prayer upon the birth of their child.

## **PRAYER FOR NEWBORN MIRZA RUHU'LLAH**

Bahá'u'lláh revealed a prayer for the newborn babe Mirza Ruhu'llah, after his mother had besought Bahá'u'lláh to bless the expected child. In response, Bahá'u'lláh had instructed the child's father, Apostle of Bahá'u'lláh and Hand of the Cause of God, Mirza 'Ali-Muhammad-i-Varqa to recite three times in the right ear of the child a short prayer specifically disclosed for the occasion. It reveals that Mirza Ruhu'llah has come by God's command, and has been made manifest for His remembrance.

The prayer may be found in Arabic in "Amr va Khalq"<sup>26</sup>, but has yet to be officially translated by the Universal House of Justice.

This prayer was revealed specifically for Mirza Ruhu'llah and as such Bahá'í parents are not obligated to whisper the prayer in the ears of their newborn.

## 2.2 THE BAHÁ'Í FAST

Bahá'u'lláh designated a nineteen-day period each year when Bahá'ís between the ages of 15 and 70 are enjoined to fast. The Bahá'í fast involves abstaining from food and drink from sunrise to sunset each day. The nineteen-day period coincides with the Bahá'í month of Ala (meaning Loftiness), and falls within the month of March.<sup>27</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas has deemed “those who are with child or giving suck, are not bound by the fast.”<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers are not required to perform the Bahá'í fast.

## 2.3 DIAGNOSIS OF FOETAL ABNORMALITY

Modern medicine, through the use of various scans and tests, allows for prenatal testing of foetuses for traits that signify impairment or disability. In response to a question, as to whether it is permissible to terminate a pregnancy following the discovery through amniocentesis of a severely handicapped foetus, the Universal House of Justice counsels that:

... [T]his is a matter left to the judgement of capable professionals in the field, and the consciences of the parents. As you are aware, the Bahá'í Writings prohibit the practice of abortion solely for the purpose of terminating unwanted pregnancies; however, circumstances may occur in which an abortion would be justifiable. The Texts of the Faith do not specify what these circumstances are, and the House of Justice does not wish to legislate on this matter presently. Therefore, a Bahá'í couple faced with making this decision should be guided by this principle, the best medical advice possible, and their individual consciences.<sup>29</sup>

## 2.4 MISCARRIAGES AND STILLBIRTHS

*Miscarriage* is the term used for a pregnancy that ends on its own, within the first 20 weeks of gestation. In most instances the cause of a miscarriage is unknown, although often it results from chromosomal abnormalities. The vast majority of miscarriages occur within the first 12 weeks of gestation.

*Stillbirth*, or intrauterine foetal demise, is a term used to define the death of a foetus at any time after 20 weeks and prior to delivery. In many instances the cause of a stillbirth is unknown, even after an autopsy has been performed.

Miscarriages and stillbirths, especially when they occur in multiple pregnancies, are traumatic for the family involved. Such an event should not be brushed aside and thought of merely as the passing of a foetus, as the family in reality is grieving the loss of a child. In the Bahá'í Faith the soul is recognized as being present from the time of conception, and therefore the foetus is endowed with a soul that will progress towards God. Prayers should therefore be offered for the progress of the child's soul in the next world, with the sure knowledge that loved ones would be reunited with the child in the spiritual realm.

In the Bahá'í Faith, death is not seen as an end, but rather as a transition or birth from this world into the next. We are 'born' from this physical world into the spiritual world. The Bahá'í Writings tell us we will continue to progress through the worlds of God infinitely, and that our progress towards God is indefinite. 'Abdu'l-Bahá counsels:

But when I consider this calamity in another aspect, I am consoled by the realization that the worlds of God are infinite; that though they were deprived of this existence, they have other

opportunities in the life beyond, even as Christ has said, "In my Father's house are many mansions." They were called away from the temporary and transferred to the eternal; they abandoned this material existence and entered the portals of the spiritual world. Foregoing the pleasures and comforts of the earthly, they now partake of a joy and happiness far more abiding and real, for they have hastened to the Kingdom of God<sup>30</sup>

Depending on the circumstances of a miscarriage or stillbirth, parents may determine what occurs to the remains of their child. Regarding the burial of a foetus, health practices may vary on their guidelines, so a family should speak to their health professional and discuss their options. In response to a letter, the Universal House of Justice states:

From a Bahá'í point of view, the soul is present from conception and therefore the foetus, no matter how young, should not be treated with disrespect and carelessly discarded into an incinerator, if this can be prevented. The House of Justice knows of nothing in the writings specifically referring to the burial of embryos, and, in previous instances, has left such details to the discretion of the parents. In one case it was reported to the world center that the parents had buried the foetus in a corner of their own garden and had said a few prayers for the progress of their child's soul.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.5 BREASTFEEDING

Where possible mothers should breastfeed their babies. There is extensive medical literature documenting the benefits of human milk. In relation to mothers breastfeeding their children, the Bahá'í Writings expound:

The child must, from the day of his birth, be provided with whatever is conducive to his health; and ye know this: so far as

possible, the mother's milk is best for, more agreeable and better suited to, the child, unless she should fall ill or her milk should run entirely dry.<sup>32</sup>

∞

The great importance attached to the mother's role derives from the fact that she is the first educator of the child... When the child is born, it is she who has been endowed by God with the milk which is the first food designed for it, and it is intended that, if possible, she should be with the baby to train and nurture it in its earliest days and months.<sup>33</sup>

# CHAPTER THREE:

## INFANT HEALTH

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### 3.1 IMPORTANCE OF INFANT HEALTH

The physical health and development of a young child should not be neglected, as ill health and malnutrition early in life can cause long-term health problems. `Abdu'l-Bahá instructs, that:

Unless the child, in his earliest years, be carefully tended, whether in a material or a spiritual sense, whether as to his physical health or his education, it will prove extremely difficult to effect any changes later on. For example, if a child is not properly cared for at the beginning of life, so that he doth not develop a sound body and his constitution doth not flourish as it ought, his body will remain feeble, and whatever is done afterward will take little effect. This matter of protecting the health of the child is essential, for sound health leadeth to insights and sense perceptions, and then the child, as he learneth sciences, arts, skills, and the civilities of life, will duly develop his powers...<sup>34</sup>

### 3.2 CIRCUMCISION

Male circumcision is the surgical removal of the foreskin (prepuce) from the male genitals. Circumcision is often performed on a young male infant due to the parent's religious or cultural beliefs and practices.

There is no requirement in the Bahá'í Faith to circumcise a child. "The beloved Guardian says that the question of circumcision has nothing to do with the Bahá'í Teachings; and the believers are free to do as they please in the matter."<sup>35</sup>

### 3.3 VACCINATIONS

Whether a health practitioner administers a vaccination to the mother and the child will depend on the medical history of an individual and the common medical practices of the country. In response to a question about vaccinations, the Guardian states in a letter written on his behalf, that:

[T]hese are technical matters which have not been specifically mentioned in the teachings, and consequently the Guardian cannot make any statement about them. No doubt medical science will progress tremendously as time goes by, and the treatment of disease become more perfect.<sup>36</sup>

### 3.4 PHYSICAL AND VERBAL ABUSE

The Bahá'í Writings prohibit physical and verbal abuse of a child, and warn that such abuse will pervert the child. 'Abdu'l-Bahá instructs:

Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him, and use means based on reason, even a slight verbal chastisement should this be necessary. It is not, however, permissible to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse.<sup>37</sup>



God has destined that the role of parents should be one of protection and love. In the Hidden Words, Bahá'u'lláh states that “Thus, ere thou didst issue from thy mother’s womb, I destined for thee two founts of gleaming milk, eyes to watch over thee, and hearts to love thee.”<sup>38</sup>

### 3.5 CLEANLINESS

'Abdu'l-Bahá advises parents to raise their children in an environment of “extreme cleanliness,”<sup>39</sup> as external cleanliness can also have a powerful influence on the spiritual development of a child. 'Abdu'l-Bahá expounds:

External cleanliness, although it is but a physical thing, hath a great influence upon spirituality.<sup>40</sup>



Even in the physical realm, cleanliness will conduce to spirituality, as the Holy Writings clearly state. And although bodily cleanliness is a physical thing, it hath, nevertheless, a powerful influence on the life of the spirit.... Observe how pleasing is cleanliness in the sight of God, and how specifically it is emphasized in the Holy Books of the Prophets; for the Scriptures forbid the eating or the use of any unclean thing.<sup>41</sup>

### 3.6 CHILDREN BORN WITH A DISABILITY OR ILLNESS

Discovering a child has a disability or illness can have profound effects on the family involved. Often the question is asked ‘why?’ or ‘to what end?’ as a life of great suffering seems in store for the

child and the family involved. In relation to the meaning and purpose of suffering, the Bahá'í Writings inform us that:

The mind and spirit of man advance when he is tried by suffering. The more the ground is ploughed the better the seed will grow, the better the harvest will be. Just as the plough furrows the earth deeply, purifying it of weeds and thistles, so suffering and tribulation free man from the petty affairs of this worldly life until he arrives at a state of complete detachment. His attitude in this world will be that of divine happiness. Man is, so to speak, unripe: the heat of the fire of suffering will mature him. Look back to the times past and you will find that the greatest men have suffered most.<sup>42</sup>

∞

Tests are benefits from God, for which we should thank Him. Grief and sorrow do not come to us by chance, they are sent to us by the Divine Mercy for our own perfecting.<sup>43</sup>

∞

Never lose thy trust in God. Be thou ever hopeful, for the bounties of God never cease to flow upon man. If viewed from one perspective they seem to decrease, but from another they are full and complete. Man is under all conditions immersed in a sea of God's blessings. Therefore, be thou not hopeless under any circumstances, but rather be firm in thy hope.<sup>44</sup>

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Whenever you see tremendous personal problems in your private lives... you must remember that these afflictions are part of human life; and, according to our teachings one of their wisdoms is to teach us the impermanence of this world and the permanence of the spiritual bonds that we establish with God, His Prophet, and those who are alive in the faith of God.<sup>45</sup>

Suffering is both a reminder and a guide. It stimulates us better to adapt ourselves to our environmental conditions, and thus leads the way to self improvement. In every suffering one can find a meaning and a wisdom. But it is not always easy to find the secret of that wisdom. It is sometimes only when all our suffering has passed that we become aware of its usefulness. What man considers to be evil turns often to be a cause of infinite blessings. And this is due to his desire to know more than he can. God's wisdom is, indeed, inscrutable to us all, and it is no use pushing too far trying to discover that which shall always remain a mystery to our mind.<sup>46</sup>

Although a child may be afflicted by a disability or illness we are assured in the Bahá'í Writings that the soul of that child is "exalted above, and is independent of all infirmities of body or mind."<sup>47</sup> The Bahá'í Writings advise the following:

Know thou that the soul of man is exalted above, and is independent of all infirmities of body or mind. That a sick person showeth signs of weakness is due to the hindrances that interpose themselves between his soul and his body, for the soul itself remaineth unaffected by any bodily ailments. Consider the light of the lamp. Though an external object may interfere with its radiance, the light itself continueth to shine with undiminished power. In like manner, every malady afflicting the body of man is an impediment that preventeth the soul from manifesting its inherent might and power. When it leaveth the body, however, it will evince such ascendancy, and reveal such influence as no force on earth can equal. Every pure, every refined and sanctified soul will be endowed with tremendous power, and shall rejoice with exceeding gladness.<sup>48</sup>

Therefore it is evident that this spirit is different from the body, and that the bird is different from the cage, and that the power and penetration of the spirit is stronger without the intermediary of the body. Now, if the instrument is abandoned, the possessor of the instrument continues to act. For example, if the pen is abandoned or broken, the writer remains living and present; if a house is ruined, the owner is alive and existing. This is one of the logical evidences for the immortality of the soul.

There is another: this body becomes weak, or heavy, or sick, or it finds health; it becomes tired or rested; sometimes the hand or leg is amputated, or its physical power is crippled; it becomes blind or deaf or dumb; its limbs may become paralyzed; briefly, the body may have all the imperfections. Nevertheless, the spirit in its original state, in its own spiritual perception, will be eternal and perpetual; it neither finds any imperfection nor will it become crippled. But when the body is wholly subjected to disease and misfortune, it is deprived of the bounty of the spirit; like a mirror which, when it becomes broken, or dirty, or dusty, cannot reflect the rays of the sun, nor any longer show its bounties.

We have already explained that the spirit of man is not in the body, because it is freed and sanctified from entrance and exit, which are bodily conditions. The connection of the spirit with the body is like that of the sun with the mirror. Briefly, the human spirit is in one condition; it neither becomes ill from the diseases of the body, nor cured by its health; it does not become sick, nor weak, nor miserable, nor poor, nor light, nor small. That is to say, it will not be injured because of the infirmities of the body, and no effect will be visible even if the body becomes weak or if the hands and feet and tongue be cut off, or if it loses the power of hearing or sight. Therefore it is evident and certain that the spirit is different from the body, and that its duration is independent of that of the body; on the contrary, the spirit with the utmost greatness rules in the world of the body, and its power and influence, like the bounty of the sun in the mirror, are

apparent and visible. But when the mirror becomes dusty or breaks, it will cease to reflect the rays of the sun.<sup>49</sup>

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As to the subject of babes and infants and weak ones who are afflicted by the hands of oppressors: This contains great wisdom and this subject is of paramount importance. In brief, for those souls there is a recompense in another world and many details are connected with this matter. For those souls that suffering is the greatest mercy of God. Verily that mercy of the Lord is far better and Preferable to all the comfort of this world and the growth and development of this place of mortality.<sup>50</sup>

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Regarding your questions concerning the condition of the soul during illness. The passages in the "Gleanings" make it quite clear that physical ailments, no matter how severe, cannot bring any change in the inherent condition of the soul. As Bahá'u'lláh says: 'The spirit is permanent and steadfast in its station'. The veil or hindrance that interposes between soul and body during physical disease is sickness itself. Sickness reveals itself. Sickness reveals a lack of balance in human organism, an absence of equilibrium in the forces essential for the normal functioning of the human body.<sup>51</sup>

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The Beloved Guardian has asked me to assure you and the parents of the dear baby of his prayers for his healing, both material and spiritual. It is difficult for us to understand these calamities when they come to us. Those who are firm in the Faith, know that the Hand of God protects them, and if something of this nature comes upon them, it is for some reason which may have to do with the spiritual development of the one affected, of the spiritual development and welfare of the loved

ones; or even for the melting of the hearts of non-Bahá'ís, who will be affected by the Divine Spirit, through the manner in which the Bahá'í meets such an ordeal.<sup>52</sup>

In many countries and localities parents can connect with support groups, organizations and foundations that address the disabilities and illnesses present in their child. A health care practitioner should also be consulted at the earliest possible stage, as many misconceptions and questions regarding the child's disability or illness can be addressed. In most cases early intervention from a health care professional ensures the child fulfills its potential.

The Bahá'í community may also be a source of support and comfort for many parents. Disabilities and illnesses should not be a barrier for a person to engage in the Bahá'í community. The Bahá'í Faith strives to embrace the diversity of our community, with the understanding that “difference reinforceth harmony, diversity strengtheneth love, and multiplicity is the greatest factor for co-ordination.”<sup>53</sup>

### 3.7 THE PASSING OF A CHILD

The passing of a young child can be an exceptionally difficult test and an irreparable loss for any parent. In response to the news of a child's passing, the Guardian wrote to the aggrieved parents, that:

A child is undoubtedly the most precious material object a person can possess, and to see it pass away is an irreparable loss to be deeply lamented. We should, however, remember the promises we are given of the world to come, and picturing to ourselves the greater spiritual development - the departed ones obtain, comfort ourselves and patiently await our reunion there.<sup>54</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá, whom himself lost five of his nine children in their infancy, wrote the following consoling letter to a grieving mother whose child had recently passed away:

O thou who art afflicted by a visitation by which thine eyes are overflowing with tears!

Be not grieved and afflicted for this calamity which hath befallen thee; nay, rather, rejoice that God hath favored (thy babe) with His heavenly gifts. Truly, I say unto thee, wert thou informed of that felicity which thy babe hath attained in the worlds of God, thy breast would be dilated and thy soul would be purified. Truly, I say unto thee, thy child will be fostered from the breast of the gift of God in the Exalted Kingdom and will be nursed in the bosom of mercy in the Supreme World of God. Therefore, be filled with delight, for the favor of thy Lord is very great!

I beg of God to pour on thee becoming patience, so that thy heart may be consoled with the fragrance of His mercy and that thy breast may be dilated with His favors, that thou mayest attain to the spiritual states which are lasting forever and ever.

Thou oughtest to bear it with becoming patience. Again, thou oughtest to patiently bear this calamity which hath flowed thine eyes with tears and hath greatly afflicted thee.<sup>55</sup>

In another consoling letter 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

O thou beloved maidservant of God, although the loss of a son is indeed heart-breaking and beyond the limits of human endurance, yet one who knoweth and understandeth is assured that the son hath not been lost but, rather, hath stepped from this world into another, and she will find him in the divine realm. That reunion shall be for eternity, while in this world separation is inevitable and bringeth with it a burning grief.

Praise be unto God that thou hast faith, art turning thy face toward the everlasting Kingdom and believest in the existence of a heavenly world. Therefore be thou not disconsolate, do not languish, do not sigh, neither wail nor weep; for agitation and mourning deeply affect his soul in the divine realm.

That beloved child addresseth thee from the hidden world: 'O thou kind Mother, thank divine Providence that I have been freed from a small and gloomy cage and, like the birds of the meadows, have soared to the divine world -- a world which is spacious, illumined, and ever gay and jubilant. Therefore, lament not, O Mother, and be not grieved; I am not of the lost, nor have I been obliterated and destroyed. I have shaken off the mortal form and have raised my banner in this spiritual world. Following this separation is everlasting companionship. Thou shalt find me in the heaven of the Lord, immersed in an ocean of light.'<sup>56</sup>

The following is a prayer that the Báb revealed for His wife, Khadijih-Bagum, after the passing of their infant son, Ahmad. He did not lament his loss, but consecrated his death by words such as these:

O God, my God! Would that a thousand Ishmaels were given Me, this Abraham of Thine, that I might have offered them, each and all, as a loving sacrifice unto Thee.

O my Beloved, my heart's Desire! The sacrifice of this Ahmad whom Thy servant Ali-Muhammad hath offered up on the altar of Thy love can never suffice to quench the flame of longing in His heart. Not until He immolates His own heart at Thy feet, not until His whole body falls a victim to the cruelest tyranny in Thy path, not until His breast is made a target for countless darts for Thy sake, will the tumult of His soul be stilled.



O my God, my only Desire! Grant that the sacrifice of My son, My only son, may be acceptable unto Thee. Grant that it be a prelude to the sacrifice of My own, My entire self, in the path of Thy good pleasure. Endue with Thy grace My life-blood which I yearn to shed in Thy path. Cause it to water and nourish the seed of Thy Faith. Endow it with Thy celestial potency, that this infant seed of God may soon germinate in the hearts of men, that it may thrive and prosper, that it may grow to become a mighty tree, beneath the shadow of which all the peoples and kindreds of the earth may gather.

Answer Thou My prayer, O God, and fulfil My most cherished desire. Thou art, verily, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful.<sup>57</sup>

The following is a story Ridvaniyyih Khanum related to Lady Bloomfield of her sick child whom `Abdu'l-Bahá visited. According to Ridvaniyyih Khanum, `Abdu'l-Bahá came and gave two pink roses to her little child, then, turning to her, he told her to "be patient." Later that evening the child passed away. Ridvaniyyih Khanum recounts the following words spoken by `Abdu'l-Bahá:

"Ridvaniyyih," said the Master, "there is a Garden of God. Human beings are trees growing therein. The Gardener is Our Father. When He sees a little tree in a place too small for her development, He prepares a suitable and more beautiful place, where she may grow and bear fruit. Then He transplants that little tree. The other trees marvel, saying: 'This is a lovely little tree. For what reason does the Gardener uproot it?'"

"The Divine Gardener, alone, knows the reason.

"You are weeping, Ridvaniyyih, but if you could see the beauty of the place where she is, you would no longer be sad.

"Your child is now free, and, like a bird, is chanting divine joyous melodies.

"If you could see that sacred Garden, you would not be content to remain here on earth. Yet this is where your duty now lies."<sup>58</sup>

# CHAPTER FOUR:

## MATTERS AFTER BIRTH

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### 4.1 NAMING A CHILD

In certain instances the early believers of the Bahá'í Faith would ask either Bahá'u'lláh or `Abdu'l-Bahá to help name their child. This request was often granted to the believer. However, this practice has ceased since the time of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice. In response to requests to name a child, the Universal House of Justice writes:

With reference to the House of Justice's suggesting a name for your dear son, it holds to the same policy as that of the beloved Guardian, a policy which is made clear in the following excerpt from a letter written to an individual believer on behalf of the Guardian by his secretary:

“The new child which will soon be given to you by God is, indeed, a divine blessing, of which you should feel proud, and of the manifold responsibilities and obligations which it necessarily entails you should become fully aware. It is now that you can truly say that you have a family life. Without a child there can be no family, and through him the bonds of love and of service can be truly and strongly maintained between the wife and husband.

Your request from the Guardian that he should give a name for your baby is one which many believers have already made, and to which he has invariably given the same reply, namely, that since such demands were formerly made to the Master he does not think it would be fitting and appropriate that he should continue

doing what 'Abdu'l-Bahá alone was fully entitled to do. He hopes that you will not misunderstand him on this point and that you will fully realize the wisdom of his instruction in this rather delicate matter.<sup>59</sup>



The Universal House of Justice has received your letter ... concerning the choice of a family name for your baby son. We are directed to advise you that there is nothing in the teachings of the Faith concerning this subject. The friends are free to decide for themselves in such matters, bearing in mind the legal requirements and traditions of the countries in which they live. It is the hope of the House of Justice that you and your husband will, in earnest and loving consultation, come to a decision that will be conducive to joy and harmony among the members of your immediate family.<sup>60</sup>

There are certain names within the Bahá'í Faith that the believers are prohibited or discouraged from using when naming a child. With regards to naming a child, the Universal House of Justice has advises, that:

There is no objection to the use of the personal names of the Central Figures of the Faith or of members of the Holy Family, such as Ḥusayn, 'Alí, 'Abbás, and Shoghi for a boy child or Bahíyyih and Munírih for a girl child. Likewise the name Rúhíyyih could be used for a girl, if a parent were to so decide. However, the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi clearly prohibit the friends from naming their children Bahá'u'lláh or Báb, a prohibition which also applies to Bahá and its close derivative Abhá.

As to the title of the Master—that is, 'Abdu'l-Bahá—the House of Justice feels that it is inappropriate for the friends to give this name to their children. Further, the title of Effendi should not be

used in conjunction with 'Abbás and Shoghi. Similarly, it is best to refrain from naming a child Navváb, as this was a title given by Bahá'u'lláh to His wife.<sup>61</sup>

## 4.2 NAMING CEREMONY

In some cultures, parents may wait and officially name a child during a ceremony. The rituals associated with such a ceremony vary greatly across cultures. In the Bahá'í Faith, there is no requirement to hold a naming ceremony. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has advised:

Thou hast asked regarding the naming of children: When thou wishest to name a babe, prepare a meeting therefor; chant the verses and communes, and supplicate and implore the Threshold of Oneness and beg the attainment of guidance for the babe and wish confirmed firmness and constancy; then give the name and enjoy beverage and sweetmeat. This is spiritual baptism.<sup>62</sup>

In a letter dated December 20, 1938, the Guardian expounds:

Regarding your question whether there is any special ceremony which the believers should perform when they wish to 'name ' a baby; the Teachings do not provide for any ceremony whatever on such occasions. We have no 'baptismal service' in the Cause, such as the Christians have. There could be no objection, however, for the friends to come together on such happy occasions, provided they do not hold an official public ceremony, and provided also they strictly avoid any uniformity and rigidity in all such practices...<sup>63</sup>

## 4.3 BAPTISM

Unlike the children of some other religions, Bahá'í children do not automatically inherit the Faith of their parents. Parents are still, however, responsible for the upbringing and spiritual education of their children. In the Bahá'í Faith a person may reaffirm or declare their Faith in Bahá'u'lláh at the age of fifteen.

Baptism is the Christian religious rite of sprinkling water on to a person's forehead or of immersing them in water, symbolizing purification or regeneration and admission to the Christian Church. In relation to the topic of baptism the Universal House of Justice advises, that:

Obviously, if both parties are Bahá'ís they cannot baptize their child, however, in the case of a non-Bahá'ís spouse insisting upon the baptism of the children, we said in a letter to the National Assembly of Spain of 18 February 1965:

'The Bahá'í parent may attend the ceremony with the understanding that he will not undertake any commitment or vow which is contrary to the principles of his Faith.'<sup>64</sup>

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In reply to your letter of 5 September 1984 saying that a ... believer will soon marry a member of the Roman Catholic Church and asking whether it is permissible for their children to be baptized, the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to convey its guidance.

'Children of such a union may be baptized if the Christian parent so wishes; from the Bahá'í point of view the baptism has no effect. It must be emphasized, however, that the Bahá'í parent, while perfectly free to attend the baptismal ceremony, should not undertake any commitment or vow contrary to Bahá'í law and should not surrender her parental right to impart the Bahá'í teachings to her child.'<sup>65</sup>

A Bahá'í who swears to rear their child in another faith may be subject to administrative sanction. In a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, it states:

... [N]o Bahá'í can conscientiously swear to bring up his children in another religion; and of course he has no right to lie; therefore it becomes impossible for him to make such a promise on his marriage to a non-Bahá'í. Any Bahá'í doing this should be deprived of his voting rights...<sup>66</sup>

#### 4.4 GODPARENTS

A godparent, in many denominations of Christianity, is someone who sponsors a child's baptism. Today, the word does not always have explicitly religious overtones. There is no obligation in the Bahá'í Faith to appointment a godparent to a child.

The Universal House of Justice expounds:

The position of 'godparent' varies considerably from country to country, and from one Christian denomination to another. In many cases it involves the godparent in participation in a religious service as a member of the church in question, and in assumption of the obligation to bring the child up in the teachings of that church. It is clearly impossible for a Bahá'í to become a godparent in such circumstances.

In some countries a godfather or godmother is regarded by most people simply as a good friend of the family who sends gifts to the child annually. If that were all, there would, of course, be no objection to a Bahá'í accepting to be a godfather or godmother. However, even in such countries it is likely that, beyond assuming this responsibility, the godparent would have to take part in the baptismal ceremony of the infant and, although many

nominal Christians may treat such matters very lightly, a Bahá'í should be aware of the solemnity with which the church regards the rite and should not assume an undertaking which he cannot fulfill or do anything which would imply a denial of his faith.<sup>67</sup>

## 4.5 REGISTRATION OF A BAHÁ'Í CHILD

When a Bahá'í has a child they are encouraged to inform their Local Spiritual Assembly of the birth, as it is a matter of joy for the whole local community, as well as for the couple. In reference to registering a Bahá'í child, the Universal House of Justice enjoins, that:

Unlike the children of some other religions, Bahá'í children do not automatically inherit the Faith of their parents. However, the parents are responsible for the upbringing and spiritual welfare of their children, Spiritual Assemblies have the duty to assist parents, if necessary, in fulfilling these obligations, so that the children will be reared in the light of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and from their earliest years will learn to love God and His Manifestations and to walk in the way of God's Law. It is natural, therefore, to regard the children of Bahá'ís as Bahá'ís unless there is a reason to conclude the contrary. It is quite wrong to think of Bahá'í children as existing in some sort of spiritual limbo until the age of fifteen at which point they can 'become' Bahá'ís. In the light of this one can conclude the following:

Children born to a Bahá'í couple are regarded as Bahá'ís from the beginning of their lives, and their births should be registered by the Spiritual Assembly.

The birth of a child to a couple, one of whom is a Bahá'í, should also be registered unless the non-Bahá'í parent objects.

A Spiritual Assembly may accept the declaration of faith of a child of non-Bahá'í parents, and register him as a Bahá'í child, provided the parents give their consent.<sup>68</sup>

## 4.6 CHILDREN'S NURSERY (CHILDCARE)

With regards to placing a child in the care of someone other than the mother, the Guardian wrote in a letter on his behalf:

With reference to the question of the training of children; given the emphasis placed by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the necessity for the parents to train their children while still in their tender age, it would seem preferable that they should receive their first training at home at the hand of their mother, rather than be sent to a nursery. Should circumstances, however, compel a Bahá'í mother to adopt the latter course, there can be no objection.<sup>69</sup>

In the Bahá'í Writings, it is advised that formal education for the child should begin at the age of five. That is, from the age of five onwards “during the daytime they should be looked after in a place where there are teachers, and should learn good conduct.”<sup>70</sup> Pertaining to children being separated from their parents within the first five years of life, the Universal House of Justice writes that:

There is nothing in the teachings specifically to state that a child must not be separated from its parents and its home for the first five years of its life. In a Tablet, however, 'Abdu'l-Bahá points out that formal education at school begins when the child is five years old. Shoghi Effendi has indicated in one of his letters that the formulation of system of education based on the teachings can only be gradually undertaken, and has to be accomplished by Bahá'í scholars and educationalists of the future...<sup>71</sup>



# CHAPTER FIVE:

## THE SPIRITUAL ENVIRONMENT OF INFANTS

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### 5.1 LOVE OF GOD

A child should feel the love of God from their infancy. This love may be felt as parents speak daily of their own love for God, continually give thanks to Him, and speak of the confirmations they receive from Him. When the love of God is established in a child, they will grow up longing to serve Him and humanity, and will forever be sheltered under His protection.

In the Writings we are told that we were created to know and worship God.<sup>72</sup> Therefore the love of God is the source and primary purpose of the child's existence. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has instructed, that:

From the very beginning, the children must receive divine education and must continually be reminded to remember their God. Let the love of God pervade their inmost being, commingled with their mother's milk.<sup>73</sup>

∞

From his infancy, the child must be nursed at the breast of God's love, and nurtured in the embrace of His knowledge, that he may radiate light, grow in spirituality, be filled with wisdom and learning, and take on the characteristics of the angelic host.<sup>74</sup>

∞

Thou didst ask as to the education of children. Those children who, sheltered by the Blessed Tree, have set foot upon the world, those who are cradled in the Faith and are nurtured at the breast of grace -- such must from the beginning receive spiritual training directly from their mothers. That is, the mother must continually call God to mind and make mention of Him, and tell of His greatness, and instill the fear of Him in the child, and rear the child gently, in the way of tenderness, and in extreme cleanliness. Thus from the very beginning of life every child will be refreshed by the gentle wafting of the love of God and will tremble with joy at the sweet scent of heavenly guidance. In this lieth the beginning of the process; it is the essential basis of all the rest.<sup>75</sup>

## 5.2 EDUCATING AN INFANT

Marzieh Gail in the book *Summon Up Remembrance* shares a response given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to parents who had asked for guidance on how to educate their one year old.

The Master was then asked, 'How should little children such as ours -- a year old -- be trained?' 'Abdu'l-Bahá said: 'Children are of two kinds, those capable of distinguishing (tashkhis) and those incapable of distinguishing [right from wrong]. Now this child is too young to have that power of discernment and his sense or feeling is not yet developed. He should therefore be allowed to remain as he is until he grows older and develops the capability for and adaptability to training.<sup>76</sup>

## 5.3 ROLE OF THE MOTHER

Bahá'ís view child rearing not only as a source of great joy, but also as a sacred obligation. In the Bahá'í Faith one of the chief responsibilities of the mother is to educate her children in both spiritual and material matters. A mother should impart this knowledge at the earliest possible stage “commingled with her milk.”<sup>77</sup> The Bahá'í Writings advise:

O handmaid of God! ...To the mothers must be given the divine Teachings and effective counsel, and they must be encouraged and made eager to train their children, for the mother is the first educator of the child. It is she who must, at the very beginning, suckle the new-born at the breast of God's Faith and God's Law, that divine love may enter into him even with his mother's milk, and be with him till his final breath.<sup>78</sup>

∞

Let the mothers consider that whatever concerneth the education of children is of the first importance. Let them put forth every effort in this regard, for when the bough is green and tender it will grow in whatever way ye train it. Therefore is it incumbent upon the mothers to rear their little ones even as a gardener tendeth his young plants. Let them strive by day and by night to establish within their children faith and certitude, the fear of God, the love of the Beloved of the worlds, and all good qualities and traits. Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him, and use means based on reason, even a slight verbal chastisement should this be necessary. It is not, however, permissible to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse.<sup>79</sup>



Wherefore, O ye loving mothers, know ye that in God's sight, the best of all ways to worship Him is to educate the children and train them in all the perfections of humankind; and no nobler deed than this can be imagined...<sup>80</sup>



O handmaids of the Merciful! Render ye thanks unto the Ancient Beauty that ye have been raised up and gathered together in this mightiest of centuries, this most illumined of ages. As befitting thanks for such a bounty, stand ye staunch and strong in the Covenant and, following the precepts of God and the holy Law, suckle your children from their infancy with the milk of a universal education, and rear them so that from their earliest days, within their inmost heart, their very nature, a way of life will be firmly established that will conform to the divine Teachings in all things.

For mothers are the first educators, the first mentors; and truly it is the mother who determine the happiness, the future greatness, the courteous ways and learning and judgment, the understanding and the faith of their little ones.<sup>81</sup>



Work ye for the guidance of the women in that land, teach the young girls and the children, so that the mothers may educate their little ones from their earliest days, thoroughly train them, rear them to have a goodly character and good morals, guide them to all virtues of humankind, prevent the development of any behavior that would be worthy of blame, and foster them in the embrace of Bahá'í education.<sup>82</sup>

The task of bringing up a Bahá'í child, as emphasized time and again in Bahá'í writings, is the chief responsibility of the mother, whose unique privilege is indeed to create in her home such conditions as would be most conducive to both his material and spiritual welfare and advancement. The training which a child first receives through his mother constitutes the strongest foundation for his future development, and it should therefore be the paramount concern of your wife...to endeavour from now imparting to her new-born son such spiritual training as would enable him later on to fully assume and adequately discharge all the responsibilities and duties of Bahá'í life.<sup>83</sup>

If the role of women as mothers is properly valued, their work in nurturing and educating children will be respected and properly rewarded. It should also be acknowledged that the child-bearing role does not diminish one's aptitude for leadership, or undermine one's intellectual, scientific or creative capacity. Indeed, it may be an enhancement.<sup>84</sup>

## 5.4 ROLE OF THE FATHER

In the Bahá'í Faith great importance has been placed on the role of the mother in educating her children. This, however, does not diminish the role a father must play in educating his children both spiritually and materially. The Bahá'í Writings state, that:

God hath prescribed unto every father to educate his children, both boys and girls, in the sciences and in morals, and in crafts and professions...<sup>85</sup>



The Pen of Glory counselleth everyone regarding the instruction and education of children. Behold that which the Will of God hath revealed upon Our arrival in the Prison City and recorded in the Most Holy Book.<sup>86</sup> Unto every father hath been enjoined the instruction of his son and daughter in the art of reading and writing and in all that hath been laid down in the Holy Tablet. He that putteth away that which is commanded unto him, the Trustees are then to take from him that which is required for their instruction, if he be wealthy, and if not the matter devolveth upon the House of Justice. Verily, have We made it a shelter for the poor and needy. He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My Glory, My Loving-Kindness, My Mercy, that have compassed the world.<sup>87</sup>



The father must always endeavour to educate his son and to acquaint him with the heavenly teachings. He must give advice and exhort him at all times, teach him praiseworthy conduct and character, enable him to receive training at school and to be instructed in such arts and sciences as are deemed useful and necessary. In brief, let him instill into his mind the virtues and perfections of the world of humanity. Above all he should continually call to his mind the remembrance of God so that his throbbing veins and arteries may pulsate with the love of God.<sup>88</sup>



The great importance attached to the mother's role derives from the fact that she is the first educator of the child... This does not mean that the father does not also love, pray for, and care for his baby, but as he has the primary responsibility of providing for the family, his time to be with his child is usually limited, while the mother is usually closely associated with the baby during this

intensely formative time when it is growing and developing faster than it ever will again during the whole of its life. As the child grows older and more independent, the relative nature of its relationship with its mother and father modifies and the father can play a greater role.<sup>89</sup>

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That the first teacher of the child is the mother should not be startling, for the primary orientation of the infant is to its mother. This provision of nature in no way minimizes the role of the father in the Bahá'í family. Again, equality of status does not mean identity of function.<sup>90</sup>

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These are all relationships within the family, but there is a much wider sphere of relationships between men and women than in the home, and this too we should consider in the context of Bahá'í society, not in that of past or present social norms. For example, although the mother is the first educator of the child, and the most important formative influence in his development, the father has the responsibility of educating his children, and this responsibility is so weighty that Bahá'u'lláh has stated that a father who fails to exercise it forfeits his rights of fatherhood.<sup>91</sup>

Hand of the Cause of God, George Townshend, gave the following insights into fatherhood:

.... While they are at your side, love these little ones to the utmost. Forget yourself. Serve them; care for them; lavish all your tenderness on them. Value your good fortune while it is with you, and let nothing of the sweetness of their babyhood go unprized. Not for long will you keep the happiness that now lies within your reach. You will not always walk in the sunshine with a little warm, soft hand nestling in each of yours, nor hear little feet

pattering beside you, and eager baby voices questioning and prattling of a thousand things with ceaseless excitement. Not always will you see that trusting face upturned to yours, feel those little arms about your neck, and those tender lips pressed upon your cheek, nor will you have that tiny form to kneel beside you, and murmur baby prayers into your ear.

... Love them and win their love, and shower on them all the treasures of your heart. Fill up their days with happiness, and share with them their mirth and innocent delights. Childhood is but for a day. Ere you are aware it will be gone with all its gifts forever.<sup>92</sup>

## 5.5 POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION AND THE BABY BLUES

Many mothers may experience the 'baby blues' after giving birth. Signs of the baby blues include; mood swings, feeling sad, anxious or overwhelmed, crying, loss of appetite, or having trouble sleeping. Baby blues are thought to occur because of the dramatic change in hormone levels experienced after birth. The baby blues will most often go away within a few days or weeks, with no treatment being necessary.

The symptoms of postpartum depression last longer and are more severe. In addition to the symptoms of baby blues, a mother may feel hopeless, worthless and lose interest in the baby. The mother may have thoughts or take action in hurting herself or the baby, or in extreme cases she may experience hallucinations. Postpartum depression can begin anytime after childbirth. The cause is not known. Hormonal and physical changes after birth and the stress of caring for a new baby may play a role. Women who have a history of depression are at higher risk. Mothers who think they are experiencing postnatal depression should seek help from a health practitioner as soon as possible.



Women who are experiencing the baby blues or postpartum depression can greatly benefit from surrounding themselves with a positive network of family, friends and healthcare professionals. Joining a support group, talking to other mothers, or having an open frank discussion about their feelings with their family, may alleviate some of the anxieties they are experiencing.

The Bahá'í community may also be a great source of positive reinforcement during difficult times. `Abdu'l-Bahá advises, that:

We should all visit the sick. When they are in sorrow and suffering, it is a real help and benefit to have a friend come. Happiness is a great healer to those who are ill. In the East it is the custom to call upon the patient often and meet him individually. The people in the East show the utmost kindness and compassion to the sick and suffering. This has greater effect than the remedy itself. You must always have this thought of love and affection when you visit the ailing and afflicted.<sup>93</sup>

In addition to any treatment a mother may seek, spiritual remedies should also be harnessed. `Abdu'l-Bahá informed the friends, that:

There are two ways of healing sickness, material means and spiritual means. The first is by the treatment of physicians; the second consisteth in prayers offered by the spiritual ones to God and in turning to Him. Both means should be used and practised.<sup>94</sup>

One of the many prayers a mother may say during times of anxiety or depression is the short healing prayer revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. In this prayer we intone:

Thy name is my healing, O my God, and remembrance of Thee is my remedy. Nearness to Thee is my hope, and love for Thee is my companion. Thy mercy to me is my healing and my succor in

both this world and the world to come. Thou, verily, art the All-Bountiful, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.<sup>95</sup>

Parents may feel stressed and overwhelmed as they adjust to the demands of parenting a newborn. From birth, infants can pick up on the emotional cues of others, to the point that parents will often comment upon their child seeming more unsettled when they themselves are stressed. The Bahá'í Writings encourage us to always remain positive and optimistic despite our difficulties.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá gives the following advise:

A bright and happy face cheers people on their way. If you are sad, and pass a child who is laughing, the child, seeing your sad face, will cease to laugh, not knowing why. If the day be dark, how much a gleam of sunshine is prized; so let believers wear smiling happy faces, gleaming like sunshine in the darkness.<sup>96</sup>

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