

Planning Your Wedding Day

Guidance for Couples

And when He desired to manifest grace and beneficence to men... He revealed observances and created laws; among them He established the law of marriage, made it as a fortress for well-being and salvation, and enjoined it upon us in that which was sent down out of the heaven of sanctity in His Most Holy Book. (Bahá'u'lláh)

When planning your Bahá'í wedding, you will want it to be an experience blessed with the spirit of unity. In order for the wedding to run smoothly there are number of issues you will need to take into consideration well in advance. These include:

- Seeking consent from all living natural parents of both parties, whether Bahá'í or not.
- Ensuring that your Bahá'í wedding and civil wedding (and/or the wedding ceremony of any other religion) take place on the same day without a night intervening. This is essential in order to comply with Bahá'í law.
- Approaching the Local Spiritual Assembly, where the wedding venue is located, to assist with the arrangements and officiate the wedding.
- Ensure the officiating Assembly is given the full address (including post code) of the wedding venue, to ensure that it is within that Assembly's jurisdiction.
- Consult with the officiating Local Assembly in order to decide who will be your witnesses (they should be responsible persons aged 15 or over but do not have to be Bahá'ís).
- If there is no Spiritual Assembly in the area where your wedding is taking place, please contact the National Bahá'í Centre. The National Spiritual Assembly must assume responsibility for the marriage in this case. In order to do this they may choose to delegate the responsibility to a nearby Local Assembly or an experienced and mature individual believer. If you have a preferred Assembly you would like to oversee the wedding, please do feel free to suggest it for the National Assembly's approval.

The Civil Wedding

Sometimes the friends put great effort into organising their Bahá'í wedding, including sending out the invitations, and then find there is a problem with arranging the civil wedding on the same day, leading to real difficulties.

It is wise to ensure that the civil wedding is arranged well ahead of time. If you are booking a wedding at a weekend, especially in the summer, this is particularly important because Registry Offices and Registrars do get booked up a long way ahead.

For further guidance on civil weddings in England and Wales, please see the General Registrar Office's website at <https://www.gov.uk/marriages-civil-partnerships/overview>

To contact the General Registrar's Office directly by telephone, call 0300 123 1837. They will be able to give you contact details for your local Register Office in order to register your plans to marry. (These can also be obtained from your local Town Hall.) The local Registrar will advise you further on the requirements for the civil wedding.

In Scotland and Northern Ireland it is possible to hold the Bahá'í and civil weddings simultaneously through a Bahá'í Marriage Officer who is empowered to celebrate the civil part of the ceremony in line with the Bahá'í laws. In order to find a Bahá'í Marriage Officer please contact your officiating Local Assembly or the National Bahá'í Centre who will give you their contact information.

For further information on this please contact the National Bahá'í Centre and ask for the relevant Guidance Notes.

Visas

If marrying someone from another country (other than the EU), it is particularly important to seek advice from your local Registrar's Office and from the Home Office to ensure that you are planning the wedding sufficiently ahead. The person coming from abroad will need to obtain a marriage visa through their relevant British Consulate and this can take quite a long time - up to 9 months in the case of someone from the Middle East). For information on this please see the Home Office website at www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visas-immigration/ and look for "Getting married or registering a civil partnership in the UK".

Parental consents

If for any reason you envisage there being a challenge with obtaining parental consent, please do contact the National Spiritual Assembly urgently to seek guidance. The National Assembly will need to know details of the situation – e.g. were you adopted, have you lost touch with your parents, etc. Such queries are always handled in complete confidence.

In a letter dated 18 October 2011 from the Universal House of Justice, the following guidance is offered with respect to parental consent in cases where the possibility of the requirement of consent being waived is being considered:

In view of the inherently delicate and sensitive nature of such cases, the process of investigating the facts and gaining a clear understanding of the situation can take considerable time, and a patient and loving approach is required. It would be inappropriate for the Assembly or the couple to impose a deadline by which the parent is to make a decision, such as by setting a date for the wedding. Preparations for the

ceremony should not be undertaken until consent has been given or the National Assembly has decided to permit the marriage to proceed without the consent of one or more of the parents.

Any other queries

Should you have any other questions which arise please do not hesitate to contact the Office of the Secretary at 0207 584 2566 or email nsa@bahai.org.uk for further help.