

# Abortion

According to the Bahá'í Teachings the human soul starts with the formation of the embryo, and continues to develop and pass through stages of existence after its separation from the body. Its progress is thus infinite.

— Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 204

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Abortion and surgical operations for the purpose of preventing the birth of unwanted children are forbidden in the Cause unless there are circumstances which justify such actions on medical grounds, in which case the decision, at present, is left to the consciences of those concerned who must carefully weigh the medical advice in the light of the general guidance given in the Teachings. Beyond this nothing has been found in the Writings concerning specific methods or procedures to be used in family planning. It should be pointed out, however, that the Teachings state that the soul appears at conception, and that therefore it would be improper to use such a method, the effect of which would be to produce an abortion after conception has taken place.

— Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 344

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Abortion merely to prevent the birth of an unwanted child is strictly forbidden in the Cause. There may, however, be instances in which an abortion would be justified by medical reasons, and legislation on this matter has been left to the Universal House of Justice. At the present time, however, the House of Justice does not intend to legislate on this very delicate issue, and therefore it is left to the consciences of those concerned who must carefully weigh the medical advice in the light of the general guidance given in the teachings.

— Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 343

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All Bahá'ís are subject to Bahá'í law and Bahá'í standards. It would clearly be unacceptable for a Bahá'í doctor to advocate abortion as a method of birth control and set up a clinic for that purpose, or for a Bahá'í psychiatrist to publicly advocate sexual intercourse before marriage.

— The Universal House of Justice, 1992 Dec 10, *Issues Related to Study Compilation*

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As to the permissibility of terminating a pregnancy following the discovery through amniocentesis of a severely handicapped foetus, this 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."

— Universal House of Justice, 21 May 1992, to an individual

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Basically the deliberate taking of human life is forbidden in the Cause, but the Sacred Text envisages certain possible exceptions to this rule and allows for the Universal House of Justice to legislate upon them. One such possible exception is the matter of abortion. It is clear that it is absolutely forbidden for a woman to have an abortion merely because she wants to have one, but there may be circumstances in which an abortion might be justified. However, at the present time we do not wish to legislate on whether or in what circumstances abortion may be permitted, and therefore the whole matter is left to the consciences of those concerned who must carefully weigh the medical advice on the case in the light of the general guidance given in the Teachings.

— Universal House of Justice, NSA USA - Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities

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It is clear that to have surgical operation merely to avoid unwanted children is not acceptable. However, as in the case of abortion, circumstances might exist in which such an operation would be justified. Individual believers called upon to make such a decision must be guided by the Bahá'í principles involved, the best professional advice available to them and their own consciences. In arriving at a decision the parties must also take into consideration the availability, reliability, and reversibility of all contraceptive methods.

— Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 347

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It should also be noted that it is neither possible nor desirable for the Universal House of Justice to set forth a set of rules covering every situation. Rather is it the task of the individual believer to determine, according to his own prayerful understanding of the Writings, precisely what his course of conduct should be in relation to situations which he encounters in his daily life. If he is to fulfil his true mission in life as a follower of the Blessed Perfection, he will pattern his life according to the

Teachings. The believer cannot attain this objective merely by living according to a set of rigid regulations. When his life is oriented towards service to Bahá'u'lláh, and when every conscious act is performed within this frame of reference, he will not fail to achieve the true purpose of his life.

— Universal House of Justice, Legislating on Morality, 5 June 1988

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It would clearly be unacceptable for a Bahá'í doctor to advocate abortion as a method of birth control and set up a clinic for that purpose.

— The Universal House of Justice, 1992 Dec 10, Issues Related to Study Compilation

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One of the most heinous of sexual offences is the crime of rape. When a believer is a victim, she is entitled to the loving aid and support of the members of her community, and she is free to initiate action against the perpetrator under the law of the land should she wish to do so. If she becomes pregnant as a consequence of this assault, no pressure should be brought upon her by the Bahá'í institutions to marry. As to whether she should continue or terminate the pregnancy, it is for her to decide on the course of action she should follow, taking into consideration medical and other relevant factors, and in the light of the Bahá'í Teachings. If she gives birth to a child as a result of the rape, it is left to her discretion whether to seek financial support for the maintenance of the child from the father; however, his claim to any parental rights would, under Bahá'í law, be called into question, in view of the circumstances.

— The Universal House of Justice, 1992, Violence and Sexual Abuse of Women and Children

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The Universal House of Justice does not feel that the time has come for it to provide detailed legislation on subjects such as abortion, homosexuality and other moral issues. The principles pertaining to these issues are available in the book "Lights of Guidance" and elsewhere. In studying these principles, it should be noted that in most areas of human behaviour there are acts which are clearly contrary to the law of God and others which are clearly approved or permissible; between these there is often a grey area where it is not immediately apparent what should be done. It has been a human tendency to wish to eliminate these grey areas so that every aspect of life is clearly prescribed. A result of this tendency has been the tremendous accretion of interpretation and subsidiary legislation which has smothered the spirit of certain of the older religions. In the Bahá'í Faith moderation, which is so strongly upheld by Bahá'u'lláh, is applied here also. Provision is made for supplementary legislation by the Universal House of Justice -- legislation which it can itself

abrogate and amend as conditions change. There is also a clear pattern already established in the Sacred Scriptures, in the interpretations made by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, and in the decisions so far made by the Universal House of Justice, whereby an area of the application of the laws is intentionally left to the conscience of each individual believer. This is the age in which mankind must attain maturity, and one aspect of this is the assumption by individuals of the responsibility for deciding, with the assistance of consultation, their own course of action in areas which are left open by the law of God.

— The Universal House of Justice, 1988 Jun 05, Detailed Legislation on Moral Issues

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Compiled by Susan Gammage, designed by Tim Freeman

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