**Long-Distance Relationships:**

**A Conversation with Ms. Susanne Alexander**

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It is still important that no matter how well you think you know the person, that you spend some time with them face-to-face. The guidance in the Bahá'ís Writings is to study each other’s character and to know each other's character thoroughly.

The problem with long-distance relationships is that the person relies on what you say about yourself. So I can say things about myself, and you can see a little bit about my character, but it's me talking about me. It's not you observing my behavior. It’s really hard to assess character in a long-distance relationship as there are just so many things that you miss seeing.

With my first husband, who was very difficult, he was drinking alcohol all the time but because we were in different countries, I was not seeing the behavior. So we would have phone conversations, and while it seemed something might be wrong because I had never been around anybody who drank, I knew nothing about it. I was not seeing his behavior and that became a problem in the marriage.

How you get to know someone long distance is hard. You can ask them to carry their phone around with them so you can see how they interact with other people. You could ask a Local Assembly for a reference letter about a person, but an Assembly might or might not be willing to do that. Or maybe you will know someone who could give a reference that could help.

It’s very hard. But the good thing about long-distance relationships is that you can study and consult without chastity being an issue. You have the opportunity to get to know each other and build a friendship in many ways without the physical passions distracting you. Sometimes, when people are together in person, they just feel this physical attraction, and they don't do the discussing of things and the building of the friendship. So it has advantages too!

With a situation I had where I moved in order to get to know someone better when I was there in person, all of a sudden, I was a real person for him. The possibility of being married and living together all of a sudden became real for him in a way that when we were at a distance, it hadn't seemed real. It became very clear for him, and he felt like marriage was not something he could do.

I have seen a couple get into trouble when there's a move, and then they feel they have to get married because someone made so many sacrifices to move. That marriage lasted nine months.

It's difficult, and issues with immigration and visas, and all of those kinds of things, don't make it easy to visit and don't make it easy to move. COVID and quarantine obviously makes all of these things more difficult.

But as much as you can you need to spend time together. To make a decision to live with someone for the rest of your life and for eternity without spending any time to be together in person, I think, is really potentially unwise.

If you’re having a bit of a difficult day and you’re unhappy, maybe on that day you won’t call the person you are getting to know. But if you’re in the same place, you will see each other in all of your different moods! It’s very difficult for men during the week that women have their period. Hormones may affect them and can make someone behave in very different ways. So it is good to see what that’s like, how you react and how you navigate that is important.

It is just knowing the reality of life.