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To Serve the Covenant

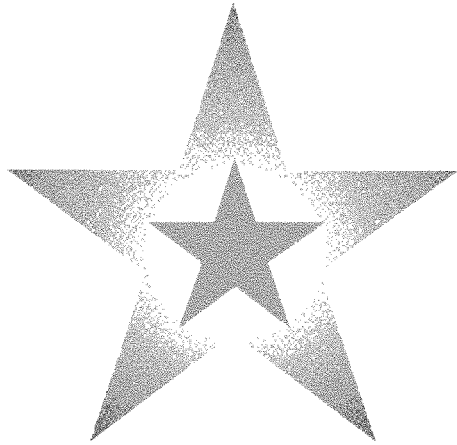
COURSE FIVE

A Sequence of
Courses on the
Fundamental
Verities of the
Bahá'í Faith



NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE
BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

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Bahá'ís of the United States



*I*f he be kindled with the fire of His love,
if he forgoeth all created things, the words
he uttereth shall set on fire them
that hear him.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

To Serve the Covenant

COURSE FIVE

Some
Fundamental
Verities of the
Bahá'í Faith

Introduction

OVERVIEW OF THE FUNDAMENTAL VERITIES COURSES: The Organization of the Courses

This course, developed under the supervision of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, has the purpose of evoking the spirit of the Bahá'í Faith and providing a basic knowledge of some of the fundamental verities of this Faith. Far from being a comprehensive study of the Faith, this sequence serves rather as an introduction to ongoing study of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh that inspire the love of God and service to all the human race.

Course Design and Presentation

This course is the fifth in a basic sequence of courses about the Bahá'í Faith. This six-part sequence consists of:

- Course One: This Day of God**
- Course Two: Circles of Unity**
- Course Three: The Seeker's Quest**
- Course Four: Every Believer Is a Teacher**
- Course Five: To Serve the Covenant**
- Course Six: Building a New Civilization**

In addition to this basic sequence of courses, other courses in the Fundamental Verities series include:

- To Be a Bahá'í**—An Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith
- Progressive Revelation: The Bible and Bahá'u'lláh**
- The Art of Facilitation**—a course for facilitators of the Fundamental Verities series

In its statement of March 24, 2003 entitled “Vision and Evolution of the Institute Process in the United States Bahá’í Community,” the National Spiritual Assembly stated:

Anticipating the diversity of cultural backgrounds, ages, literacy and learning styles, the Universal House of Justice called for training institutes to “develop a wide variety of approaches fitted to the needs of the diverse components of your population.”

The training institute process in the United States Bahá’í community is founded on two pillars: the *Fundamental Verities* and the *Rubi* materials. In the Five Year Plan, the National Assembly has called for the use of these two approaches and for the development of new curricula.

The Fundamental Verities Sequence of Courses, as all courses of the Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education, attempts to engage the mind and heart in a variety of activities such as reading, discussing, listening, reflecting, and expressing through the arts. These varied methods of teaching and learning are suggested in the writings of the Bahá’í Faith and compiled in the book *Foundations for a Spiritual Education* available through the Bahá’í Distribution Service.

Please refer to the Appendix for practical suggestions about facilitating this course in a study circle format. These suggestions are intended to be used with flexibility according to the needs and circumstances of the particular study circle.

Music and materials can be obtained by calling the Bahá’í Distribution Service, 1-800-999-9019. Additional questions about the course may be directed to the Education and Schools Office at the Bahá’í National Center (telephone 847-733-3492 or email: schools@usbnc.org) or to the National Teacher Training Center at Louhelen Bahá’í School (telephone 810-653-5033 or email: nttc@usbnc.org).

*Course Series on the
Fundamental Verities
of the Bahá'í Faith*



... All the forces of the universe, in the last analysis
serve the Covenant.
– ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ

Introductory Course: To Be a Bahá'í

- Course One: This Day of God**
Course Two: Circles of Unity
Course Three: The Seeker's Quest
Course Four: Every Believer Is a Teacher
Course Five: To Serve the Covenant
Course Six: Building a New Civilization

The Art of Facilitation

Each of these courses may be convened as a weekly study circle, except for *The Art of Facilitation*, which is intended as an intensive weekend program. Each session includes an opportunity to study, to consult, and to prepare to “translate that which hath been written into reality and action.”

Contents of Course Five: To Serve the Covenant

Session 1	The Story of the Covenant
Session 2	The Life of the Báb
Session 3	The Life of Bahá'u'lláh
Session 4	The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh
Session 5	‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Center of the Covenant
Session 6	The Covenant: Axis of the Oneness of Humanity
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A Spiritual Framework for Self-Directed Learning

This sequence of courses has the purpose of “educating large numbers of believers in the fundamental verities of the Faith and for training and assisting them to serve the Cause as their God-given talents allow.”¹ The sequence is designed to foster participatory and self-directed learning and application of the creative Word of God.

To this end, a learning model derived from the writings of Bahá’u’lláh provides the organizational framework for all Core Curriculum courses including this Fundamental Verities Sequence.

Strain every nerve to acquire both inner and outer perfections, for the fruit of the human tree hath ever been and will ever be perfections both within and without. It is not desirable that a man be left without knowledge or skills, for he is then but a barren tree. Then, so much as capacity and capability allow, ye needs must deck the tree of being with fruits such as knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception and eloquent speech.²

The Core Curriculum assists learners to learn, internalize, and apply the Word of God to everyday experiences and actions.

Learning activities in this program are organized to achieve the following four aspects of learning:

Knowledge

A keen awareness of information and facts; the remembering and recalling of previously learned materials.

Wisdom

True comprehension and insight into the meaning of information and facts.

Spiritual Perception

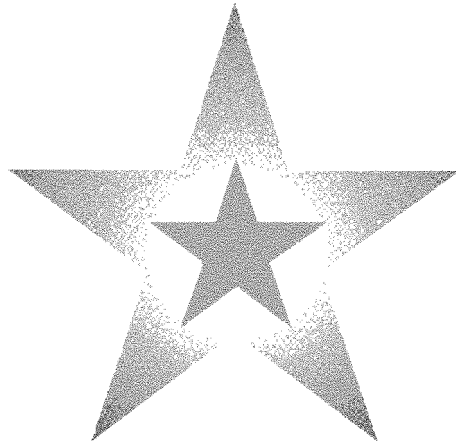
A penetrating inner vision and the internalization of what is being learned.

Eloquent Speech

The ability to speak or act in a way that manifests one’s learning.

¹ UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, to the Bahá’ís of the World, Ridván 153 B.E.

² BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, *Bahá’í Education*, #9, p. 3



*T*he whole earth hath been illumined
at the coming of Him
Who is the Lord of the Day of the Covenant!

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

To Serve the Covenant

COURSE FIVE

Some
Fundamental
Verities of the
Bahá'í Faith

Session 1

The Story of the
Covenant

Devotions

Welcome! This fifth course in the Fundamental Verities Sequence of Courses explores the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and how our obedience to that Covenant can contribute to the unfoldment of His World Order.

Please begin the session with reverent, uplifting devotions, including music about Bahá'u'lláh or other joyful devotional music from around the world.

You may also include the following quotation that indicates the theme for this session:

“I testify before God . . . to the greatness, the inconceivable greatness of this Revelation. Again and again have We in most of Our tablets borne witness to this truth, that mankind may be roused from its heedlessness.”
“In this most mighty Revelation . . . all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest, their final consummation.”

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, Quoted in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 103-104

Welcome!

“When a man has found the joy of life in one place, he returns to that same spot to find more joy.”³ God willing, the service we offer our community through this study circle will become a source of joy to all the inhabitants in our community and to our own selves. In this course, *To Serve the Covenant*, we explore the power of the Covenant as it is expressed through the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice.

Please introduce yourselves and review any necessary logistical information such as cost, time frame, location of washrooms, refreshments available, child care arrangements, or other details that will assist your study circle to function smoothly.

If desired, you may also share news of your service since completing Course Four in this sequence and a goal that you hope to achieve over the coming weeks.

³ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 33

Overview of Course Five: To Serve the Covenant

In previous courses of the Fundamental Verities Sequence, we have explored the magnificence of this Day of God; the relationship between unity in our families and our communities and the establishment of peace; and the importance of establishing friendships with many people and sharing the Word of God with receptive souls. We have practiced hosting devotional meetings, firesides, and gatherings that welcome and encourage young people into all aspects of community life. In this course, we will practice the art of storytelling to be able to share these marvelous stories of the Covenant with all.

Session 1	The Story of the Covenant
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Objectives of the Session

Knowledge

To become familiar with some of the sacred writings from the world's religions about the eternal Covenant of God with humanity.

Wisdom

To understand that the Revelations of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh fulfill the promises made in the scriptures of the past.

Spiritual Perception

To reflect on the power of the Covenant in one's own life.

Eloquent Speech

To describe the blessings of the Covenant in one's own life.
To create and implement a Personal Teaching Plan.

Activity

The Ancient Covenant

1. The Ancient Covenant tells the great story of the fulfillment of God's eternal promises to humanity. Let's for a moment consider the rainbow, a symbol of the Covenant of God with all created things. If available, notice how a prism or a crystal casts a beautiful rainbow of light. Notice how the colors flash and dance. Notice how they attract our attention.
2. Then, consider the rainbow in the heavens. You may view photographs, artistic images, or even simple drawings by children of the rainbow.
3. Briefly discuss the questions:
 - Under which circumstances do we see a rainbow?
 - When we see a rainbow, how many of us remember the story of Noah and God's promise to humanity?

And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:

I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.

And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth that the bow shall be seen in the cloud:

And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.

And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.

GENESIS 9:12-16

4. Taking the rainbow as a symbol of the eternal Covenant between God and every living creature, and remembering that the Universal House of Justice has described the Covenant as "a binding agreement between God and man, whereby God requires of man certain behavior in return for which He guarantees certain blessings, or whereby He gives man certain bounties in return for which He takes from those who accept them an undertaking to behave in a certain way," let's remember a specific time in our own lives when we felt intensely aware of God's many blessings and bounties.
5. Reflect a moment: Can we think of a story from our own lives in which we were making efforts to uphold the teachings of God and we found ourselves blessed or confirmed in an unanticipated and beautiful way?

6. After a few minutes of reflection, share your stories either in small groups or with the whole study circle, as you choose.
7. After enjoying the beauty of these stories, consider the following question: What would happen if every person in our community—man, woman, youth, and child—lived life conscious of the bounties and bestowals all around us? What could our community become?
8. The purpose of this course is to assist us to bring the joy of the Kingdom to our family members and friends, our co-workers and fellow students, and to continuously strive to increase the circle of friends with whom we can share the news of God's promises fulfilled.

Activity
God's Promises Fulfilled

1. In your study circle, play beautiful background music as you enjoy the following devotional readings. Consider interspersing the readings with singing or recorded music from around the world. If available, you may also enjoy viewing slides or a video of nature, holy places from around the world, or the Bahá'í gardens and Shrines in the Holy Land.
2. Let the beauty of these Words of God sink deep into your heart as you reflect upon the appearance of the Ancient Beauty in fulfillment of all the promises of the past.
3. Then, discuss the following questions:
 - How do we know in our own hearts that God's promises are indeed fulfilled?
 - How can we foster this joy of recognition in others?
 - What is the significance of our role as servants of God and servants of humanity in this Day of Fulfillment?



GOD'S PROMISES FULFILLED

1 Magnified be Thy name, O my God, for that Thou hast manifested the Day which is the King of Days, the Day which Thou didst announce unto Thy chosen Ones and Thy Prophets in Thy most excellent Tablets, the Day whereon Thou didst shed the splendor of the glory of all Thy names upon all created things. Great is his blessedness whosoever hath set himself towards Thee, and entered Thy presence, and caught the accents of Thy voice.

I beseech Thee, O my Lord, by the name of Him round Whom circleth in adoration the kingdom of Thy names, that Thou wilt graciously assist them that are dear to Thee to glorify Thy word among Thy servants, and to shed abroad Thy praise amidst Thy creatures, so that the ecstasies of Thy revelation may fill the souls of all the dwellers of Thine earth.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 117

2 Whenever there is a decline in righteousness, O Bharat, and the rise of irreligion, it is then that I send forth My spirit. For the salvation of the good, the destruction of the wicked, and for firmly establishing true religion (Dharma), I manifest myself from Age to Age.

THE BHAGAVAD GITA, 4:7-8

3 I am not the first Buddha Who came upon the earth, nor shall I be the last. In due time another Buddha will arise in the world, a Holy One, a supremely enlightened One . . . an incomparable Leader of men. . . . He will reveal to you the same eternal truths which I have taught you.

THE BUDDHA, *The Gospel of Buddha*, Paul Carus, ed., p. 245

4 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

JEREMIAH 31:31-33

5 And they shall be my people, and I will be their God: And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.

JEREMIAH 32:38-40

6 And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

JOHN 10:16

7 When God entered into covenant with the prophets, he said, "This is the Book and the Wisdom which I give you. Hereafter shall a prophet come unto you to confirm the Scriptures already with you. Ye shall surely believe on him, and ye shall surely aid him. Are ye resolved?" said he, "and do ye accept the covenant on these terms?" They said, "We are resolved;" "Be ye then the witnesses," said he, "and I will be a witness as well as you."

THE QU'RAN, 3:81

8 The world of being shineth in this Day with the resplendency of this Divine Revelation. All created things extol its saving grace and sing its praises. The universe is wrapt in an ecstasy of joy and gladness. The Scriptures of past Dispensations celebrate the great jubilee that must needs greet this most great Day of God. Well is it with him that hath lived to see this Day and hath recognized its station.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 106

9 The light hath shone forth from the horizon of Revelation, and the whole earth hath been illumined at the coming of Him Who is the Lord of the Day of the Covenant!

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 133-4

10 I testify, O my God, that this is the Day whereon Thy testimony hath been fulfilled, and Thy clear tokens have been manifested, and Thine utterances have been revealed, and Thy signs have been demonstrated, and the radiance of Thy countenance hath been diffused, and Thy proof hath been perfected, and Thine ascendancy hath been established, and Thy mercy hath overflowed, and the Day-Star of Thy grace hath shone forth with such brilliance that Thou didst manifest Him Who is the Revealer of Thyself and the Treasury of Thy wisdom and the Dawning-Place of Thy majesty and power. Thou didst establish His covenant with every one who hath been created in the kingdoms of earth and heaven and in the realms of revelation and of creation.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Prayers and Meditations*, pp. 35-6

11 Be fair, ye peoples of the world; is it meet and seemly for you to question the authority of one Whose presence 'He Who conversed with God' (Moses) hath longed to attain, the beauty of Whose countenance 'God's Well-beloved' (Muhammad) had yearned to behold, through the potency of Whose love the 'Spirit of God' (Jesus) ascended to heaven, for Whose sake the 'Primal Point' (the Báb) offered up His life?

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 106-7

Activity

The Art of Storytelling

1. In our study circle, we've shared stories of God's blessings in our own lives. We've shared the great story of this day of fulfillment for all the promises of the past. Let's also consider the following story, told by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in America in 1912:

It is said that at one time a king went out traveling incognito. He put on a humble suit of clothes and started on his way in a scorching desert and finally reached the door of an Arab tent. The Arab finding the man exhausted from heat and hunger dragged him under the shade. When the king was revived he asked the Arab what he had to eat and drink.

"I have a goat skin of wine and a little goat," the Arab answered.

"Very well, bring the wine and kill the goat to be cooked," he said. The wine was brought.

When the king drank one cup of wine he looked at the Arab and said: "Then you must know that I am a soldier in the king's army." The Arab was glad to entertain a brave man.

The king drank another cup of wine. "Do you know who I am?"

"Who are you?"

"I am a minister in the king's council chamber."

"I am delighted to receive such a distinguished statesman."

A third cup was taken. "Do you know who I am?"

"Well!"

"I am the king himself."

The Arab could not stand it any longer. He arose and took the goatskin of wine from him.

"Why do you do this?" the guest asked astonished.

"Because I believe if you drank another cup you would be the Prophet of God, and a fifth cup would raise you to the station of God, so it is better for you to stop."

REPORTED WORDS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *Star of the West*, Vol. 9, pp. 211-2

2. Then, discuss the questions: How does this story illustrate the importance of telling the stories of this Day of Fulfillment in all their richness and glory, trusting in the power of God to open the heart of the hearer? How can we gain the necessary confidence to tell the stories of this Day of God?

3. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains the importance of stories:

Divine things are too deep to be expressed by common words. The heavenly teachings are expressed in parable in order to be understood and preserved for ages to come.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London, p. 79

In future sessions of this course, we’ll practice telling stories about the Central Figures and the Covenant. Today, we’ll focus on our own stories.

4. In pairs, recall your own story about the power of the Covenant and God’s blessings in your own life. Consult together about the people you know that would be interested in hearing a personal story from your own life illustrating the power of the Covenant.
5. If desired, you may also enhance your story with one of the quotations or ideas from today’s devotional program. With your study partner, practice retelling your story with this enhancement.
6. Work together to create a plan for reaching out to another soul by sharing your story in the coming week.
7. If desired, you may share your plans with the whole group.

Individual Acts of Teaching, Study, and Service
Choose one or more of these activities to complete before the next session.

Read aloud the following quotation from Bahá’u’lláh:

If it be Our pleasure We shall render the Cause victorious through the power of a single word from Our presence. He is in truth the Omnipotent, the All-Compelling. Should it be God’s intention, there would appear out of the forests of celestial might the lion of indomitable strength whose roaring is like unto the peals of thunder reverberating in the mountains. However, since Our loving providence surpasseth all things, We have ordained that complete victory should be achieved through speech and utterance, that Our servants throughout the earth may thereby become the recipients of divine good. This is but a token of God’s bounty vouchsafed unto them. Verily thy Lord is the All-Sufficing, the Most Exalted.

BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 197-8

Discuss the questions: How does Bahá’u’lláh tell us that His Cause will be established throughout the earth? In what way is this bounty a gift of ‘divine good’ to those who choose to become His servants?

Here are some actions that may assist us to arise as His servants:

1. Find a way to personally share with another soul the meaning of God’s blessings in your own life. Encourage that soul to also share with you one of these sacred stories of the heart, perhaps inspired by some of the same questions that we used in this session.

2. Select one of the quotations used in the devotional program to memorize or use in teaching. Can you set it to music or represent it with visual art that you'd like to share at the next session?
3. Write a letter to a friend or acquaintance sharing the information and describing the devotional program that is a part of this session.
4. Plan and host a devotional meeting or fireside, perhaps on the theme of the eternal Covenant.
5. Offer practical support to your local children's class.

Personal Teaching Plan

Consider listening to quiet music as you complete your Personal Teaching Plan.

Closing Devotions

Conclude the session with prayers of praise and thanksgiving.



BLAZON HIS NAME: A PERSONAL TEACHING PLAN

Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 137

What specific steps can I take this week...?



To take initiative; to seize opportunities; to form friendships; to interact personally with others; to build relationships?

How can I draw upon...?



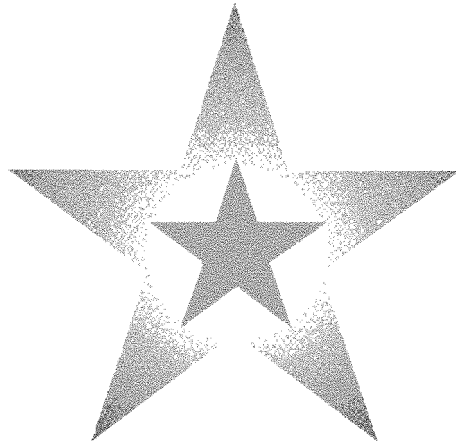
My love for Bahá'u'lláh; the power of the Covenant; the dynamics of prayer; the inspiration and education derived from regular reading and study of the Holy Texts?



The transformative forces that operate upon my soul as I strive to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles?



In addition, how can I attract the particular blessings promised by Bahá'u'lláh to the one who mentions His name?



I am the Primal Point
from which have been generated all created things.
I am the Countenance of God
Whose splendour can never be obscured,
the Light of God Whose radiance can never fade.

THE BÁB

To Serve the Covenant

COURSE FIVE

Some
Fundamental
Verities of the
Bahá'í Faith

Session 2

The Life of the Báb

Devotions

Please begin the session with reverent, uplifting devotions, including music inspired by the life and writings of the Báb. Some particularly beautiful pieces by Bahá'í artists around the world were created for the dedication program in May 2001 of the Arc and Terraces on Mt. Carmel.

You may also include the following quotation that indicates the theme for this session:

I am the Primal Point from which have been generated all created things. I am the Countenance of God Whose splendour can never be obscured, the Light of God Whose radiance can never fade. Whoso recognizeth Me, assurance and all good are in store for him, and whoso faileth to recognize Me, infernal fire and all evil await him. . . .

THE BÁB, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, pg. 12

Objectives of the Session

Read aloud the learning objectives for this session.

Knowledge

To know some of the major events in the life of the Báb.

To know the relationship between the Revelation of the Báb and that of Bahá'u'lláh.

Wisdom

To understand that Bahá'u'lláh fulfills the prophecies of the Báb.

Spiritual Perception

To appreciate the deep love between the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

To perceive the power of storytelling for attracting the human heart.

Eloquent Speech

To practice telling the story of a key event in the life of the Báb.

To be able to describe the station of the Báb.

To create and implement a personal teaching plan.

Consultation About Teaching Individual Acts of Teaching, Study, and Service

- Who was able to share your personal story of the Covenant with another soul? Were you also able to listen to a story from your friend's life? Then what happened? In what way might you continue the conversation?
- Who chose to memorize a quotation? Would you like to share it in the study circle?
- Who was able to host a devotional meeting or fireside or offer practical support to your local children's class?
- What are some of the ways that we've found to invite our friends to participate with us in these core activities? What is the role of friendship in making these invitations?

Activity

The Báb: Independent Manifestation and Herald of a New Era

1. Working in pairs, read aloud the passages on the following page that describe the station of the Báb as an independent Manifestation of God and as the Herald of Bahá'u'lláh's mighty Revelation.
2. Identify one or two phrases that particularly attract your hearts or could attract the hearts of the people you know personally.
3. Together, practice short answers to the question, "Who is the Báb?" that would show your love for this Manifestation of God and could attract the interest of your hearers. Consider incorporating a short phrase from these quotations in your answer.
4. Then, share your answers in the whole group. Applaud all contributions!



THE BÁB: INDEPENDENT MANIFESTATION AND HERALD OF A NEW ERA

- 1 The life of the Báb stands “at the confluence of two universal prophetic cycles, the Adamic Cycle stretching back as far as the first dawnings of the world’s recorded religious history and the Bahá’í Cycle destined to propel itself across the unborn reaches of time for a period of no less than five thousand centuries.”
- 2 The Báb is to “be regarded as the independent Author of a divinely revealed Dispensation, but must also be recognized as the Herald of a new Era and the Inaugurator of a great universal prophetic cycle.”
- 3 The Báb is “acclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh as the ‘Essence of Essences,’ the ‘Sea of Seas,’ the ‘Point round Whom the realities of the Prophets and Messengers revolve,’ ‘from Whom God hath caused to proceed the knowledge of all that was and shall be,’ Whose ‘rank excelleth that of all the Prophets,’ and Whose ‘Revelation transcendeth the comprehension and understanding of all their chosen ones.’”
- 4 He is affirmed by Himself as “‘the Primal Point from which have been generated all created things,’ ‘one of the sustaining pillars of the Primal Word of God,’ the ‘Mystic Fane,’ the ‘Great Announcement,’ the ‘Flame of that supernal Light that glowed upon Sinai,’ the ‘Remembrance of God’ concerning Whom ‘a separate Covenant hath been established with each and every Prophet.’”
- 5 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá hails the Báb as “the ‘Morn of Truth’ and ‘harbinger of the Most Great Light,’ Whose advent at once signalized the termination of the ‘Prophetic Cycle’ and the inception of the ‘Cycle of Fulfillment.’”
- 6 The Báb is “the ‘Qá’im’ (He Who ariseth) promised to the Shí’ahs, the ‘Mihdi’ (One Who is guided) awaited by the Sunnís, the ‘Return of John the Baptist’ expected by the Christians, the ‘Úshídar-Máh’ referred to in the Zoroastrian scriptures, the ‘Return of Elijah’ anticipated by the Jews.”
- 7 The Báb extolled Bahá’u’lláh as the “Essence of Being,” the “Remnant of God,” as the “Omnipotent Master,” as the “crimson, all-encompassing Light,” as “Lord of the visible and invisible,” and as the “sole Object of all previous Revelations, including The Revelation of the Qá’im Himself.” The Báb formally designated Bahá’u’lláh as “Him Whom God shall make manifest.” In the Bayán, the Báb “fixed beyond the shadow of a doubt, the time of [Bahá’u’lláh’s] Revelation and warned His followers lest ‘the Bayán and all that hath been revealed therein’ should ‘shut them out as by a veil’ from Him.”
- 8 The Báb declared Himself to be the “first servant to believe in” Bahá’u’lláh and that He Himself was a “ring” upon Bahá’u’lláh’s hand. The Báb declared that He yearned for martyrdom in the path of Bahá’u’lláh.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *God Passes By*, excerpts pp. 55-8, 97-8

Activity: The Art of Storytelling

1. In your study circle reflect on your own experiences listening to stories both as a child and more recently. Remembering the stories that you've heard from members of your family or in your community, think of one or more stories stand out as particularly memorable.
2. Discuss briefly: What makes these stories especially memorable? Is it the meaning and importance of the story? Is it a warm or spiritual connection with the storyteller? What was the manner of telling? What else makes these stories stand out in your memory?
6. As we recall, storytelling is a powerful form of spiritual education that has been used all over the world throughout human history. In this era, we know that the arts, including the art of storytelling, will flourish. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that "the Messengers of God . . . tell the story of Divinity"⁴ and that "heavenly teachings are expressed in parable in order to be understood and preserved for ages to come."⁵

Jigsaw Activity: Stories of the Báb

1. Today we'll practice telling some of the powerful stories that attract the hearts of humanity to the beauty of the Báb. Begin by organizing your study circle into three study groups.
2. In your group, work as a team to prepare yourselves to retell one of the following dramatic episodes as a story: The Declaration of the Báb; The Conference of Badash; The Martyrdom of the Báb.
3. Read the historical account aloud, listening for content. List the main points of the episode, clearly identifying a beginning, middle, and end. Decide which parts to retell in the form of a story. Create an outline for your story. It will be important for each person in your group to have a copy of this outline.
4. Read aloud the historical account again, listening to the flow of the language. Are there particular words or phrases that you'd like to incorporate in your story? Add these words or phrases to your outline.
5. In your group, practice telling your story to each other.
6. Then, reconvene your study circle and form new groups so that each new group includes one member from each of the three previous groups.
7. In your new group, share the story you created in your first group. Enjoy listening to the other two stories.
8. Gather again in your whole group. Briefly discuss: What are some natural situations in which we can share these stories with others? Why is it important to learn to tell these stories accurately and with feeling?

⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 173

⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, p. 79



THE DECLARATION OF THE BÁB

The opening scene of the initial act of this great drama was laid in the upper chamber of the modest residence of the son of a mercer of Shíráz, in an obscure corner of that city. The time was the hour before sunset, on the 22nd day of May, 1844. The participants were the Báb, a twenty-five year old siyyid, of pure and holy lineage, and the young Mullá Husayn, the first to believe in Him. Their meeting immediately before that interview seemed to be purely fortuitous. The interview itself was protracted till the hour of dawn. The Host remained closeted alone with His guest, nor was the sleeping city remotely aware of the import of the conversation they held with each other. No record has passed to posterity of that unique night save the fragmentary but highly illuminating account that fell from the lips of Mullá Husayn.

“I sat spellbound by His utterance, oblivious of time and of those who awaited me,” he himself has testified, after describing the nature of the questions he had put to his Host and the conclusive replies he had received from Him, replies which had established beyond the shadow of a doubt the validity of His claim to be the promised Qá’im. “Suddenly the call of the Mu’adh^hdhin, summoning the faithful to their morning prayer, awakened me from the state of ecstasy into which I seemed to have fallen. All the delights, all the ineffable glories, which the Almighty has recounted in His Book as the priceless possessions of the people of Paradise—these I seemed to be experiencing that night. . . . Sleep had departed from me that night. I was enthralled by the music of that voice which rose and fell as He chanted; now swelling forth as He revealed verses of the Qayyúmu’l-Asmá, again acquiring ethereal, subtle harmonies as He uttered the prayers He was revealing. At the end of each invocation, He would repeat this verse: ‘Far from the glory of thy Lord, the All-Glorious, be that which His creatures affirm of Him! And peace be upon His Messengers! And praise be to God, the Lord of all beings!’”

“This Revelation,” Mullá Husayn has further testified, “so suddenly and impetuously thrust upon me, came as a thunderbolt which, for a time, seemed to have benumbed my faculties. I was blinded by its dazzling splendor and overwhelmed by its crushing force. Excitement, joy, awe, and wonder stirred the depths of my soul. Predominant among these emotions was a sense of gladness and strength which seemed to have transfigured me. How feeble and impotent, how dejected and timid, I had felt previously! Then I could neither write nor walk, so tremulous were my hands and feet. Now, however, the knowledge of His Revelation had galvanized my being. I felt possessed of such courage and power that were the world, all its peoples and its potentates, to rise against me, I would, alone and undaunted, withstand their onslaught. The universe seemed but a handful of dust in my grasp. I seemed to be the voice of Gabriel personified, calling unto all mankind: ‘Awake, for, lo! the morning Light has broken. Arise, for His Cause is made manifest. The portal of His grace is open wide; enter therein, O peoples of the world! For He Who is your promised One is come!’”

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *God Passes By*, pp. 5-6



THE CONFERENCE OF BADASHT

The primary purpose of that gathering was to implement the revelation of the Bayán by a sudden, a complete and dramatic break with the past—with its order, its ecclesiasticism, its traditions, and ceremonials.

. . . The scene of such a challenging and far-reaching proclamation was the hamlet of Badasht, where Bahá'u'lláh had rented, amidst pleasant surroundings, three gardens, one of which He assigned to Quddús, another to Táhirih, whilst the third He reserved for Himself. The eighty-one disciples who had gathered from various provinces were His guests from the day of their arrival to the day they dispersed. On each of the twenty-two days of His sojourn in that hamlet He revealed a Tablet, which was chanted in the presence of the assembled believers. On every believer He conferred a new name, without, however, disclosing the identity of the one who had bestowed it. He Himself was henceforth designated by the name Bahá. Upon the Last Letter of the Living was conferred the appellation of Quddús, while Qurratu'l-'Ayn was given the title of Táhirih. By these names they were all subsequently addressed by the Báb in the Tablets He revealed for each one of them.

It was Bahá'u'lláh Who steadily, unerringly, yet unsuspectedly, steered the course of that memorable episode, and it was Bahá'u'lláh Who brought the meeting to its final and dramatic climax. One day in His presence, when illness had confined Him to bed, Táhirih, regarded as the fair and spotless emblem of chastity and the incarnation of the holy Fátimih, appeared suddenly, adorned yet unveiled, before the assembled companions, seated herself on the right-hand of the affrighted and infuriated Quddús, and, tearing through her fiery words the veils guarding the sanctity of the ordinances of Islam, sounded the clarion-call, and proclaimed the inauguration, of a new Dispensation. The effect was electric and instantaneous. She, of such stainless purity, so revered that even to gaze at her shadow was deemed an improper act, appeared for a moment, in the eyes of her scandalized beholders, to have defamed herself, shamed the Faith she had espoused, and sullied the immortal Countenance she symbolized. Fear, anger, bewilderment, swept their inmost souls, and stunned their faculties. 'Abdu'l-Kháliq-i-Isfahání, aghast and deranged at such a sight, cut his throat with his own hands. Spattered with blood, and frantic with excitement, he fled away from her face. A few, abandoning their companions, renounced their Faith. Others stood mute and transfixed before her. Still others must have recalled with throbbing hearts the Islamic tradition foreshadowing the appearance of Fátimih herself unveiled while crossing the Bridge (Sirát) on the promised Day of Judgment. Quddús, mute with rage, seemed to be only waiting for the moment when he could strike her down with the sword he happened to be then holding in his hand.

Undeterred, unruffled, exultant with joy, Táhirih arose, and, without the least premeditation and in a language strikingly resembling that of the Qur'án, delivered a fervid and eloquent appeal to the remnant of the assembly, ending it with this bold assertion: "I am the Word which the Qá'im is to utter, the Word which shall put to flight the chiefs and nobles of the earth!" Thereupon, she invited them to embrace each other and celebrate so great an occasion. . . .

A little over four years had elapsed since the birth of the Báb's Revelation when the trumpet-blast announcing the formal extinction of the old, and the inauguration of the new Dispensation was sounded. No pomp, no pageantry marked so great a turning-point in the world's religious history. Nor was its modest setting commensurate with such a sudden, startling, complete emancipation from the dark and embattled forces of fanaticism, of priestcraft, of religious orthodoxy and superstition. The assembled host consisted of no more than a single woman and a handful of men, mostly recruited from the very ranks they were attacking, and devoid, with few exceptions, of wealth, prestige and power. The Captain of the host was Himself an absentee, a captive in the grip of His foes. The arena was a tiny hamlet in the plain of Badasht on the border of Mázindarân. The trumpeter was a lone woman, the noblest of her sex in that Dispensation, whom even some of her co-religionists pronounced a heretic. The call she sounded was the death-knell of the twelve hundred year old law of Islam.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *God Passes By*, p. 31-34



THE MARTYRDOM OF THE BÁB

. . . Two highly significant incidents occurred, incidents that cast an illuminating light on the mysterious circumstances surrounding the opening phase of His [the Báb's] martyrdom. The farrásh-báshí had abruptly interrupted the last conversation which the Báb was confidentially having in one of the rooms of the barracks with His amanuensis Siyyid Husayn, and was drawing the latter aside, and severely rebuking him, when he was thus addressed by his Prisoner: "Not until I have said to him all those things that I wish to say can any earthly power silence Me. Though all the world be armed against Me, yet shall it be powerless to deter Me from fulfilling, to the last word, My intention." To the Christian Sám Khán—the colonel of the Armenian regiment ordered to carry out the execution—who, seized with fear lest his act should provoke the wrath of God, had begged to be released from the duty imposed upon him, the Báb gave the following assurance: "Follow your instructions, and if your intention be sincere, the Almighty is surely able to relieve you of your perplexity."

Sám Khán accordingly set out to discharge his duty. A spike was driven into a pillar which separated two rooms of the barracks facing the square. Two ropes were fastened to it from which the Báb and one of his disciples, the youthful and devout Mirzá Muhammad-'Alí-í-Zunúzí, surnamed Anís, who had previously flung himself at the feet of his Master and implored that under no circumstances he be sent away from Him, were separately suspended. The firing squad ranged itself in three files, each of two hundred and fifty men. Each file in turn opened fire until the whole detachment had discharged its bullets. So dense was the smoke from the seven hundred and fifty rifles that the sky was darkened. As soon as the smoke had cleared away the astounded multitude of about ten thousand souls, who had crowded onto the roof of the barracks, as well as the tops of the adjoining houses, beheld a scene which their eyes could scarcely believe.

The Báb had vanished from their sight! Only his companion remained, alive and unscathed, standing beside the wall on which they had been suspended. The ropes by which they had been hung alone were severed. "The Siyyid-i-Báb has gone from our sight!" cried out the bewildered spectators. A frenzied search immediately ensued. He was found, unhurt and unruffled, in the very room He had occupied the night before, engaged in completing His interrupted conversation with His amanuensis. "I have finished My conversation with Siyyid Husayn" were the words with which the Prisoner, so providentially preserved, greeted the appearance of the farrásh-báshí, "Now you may proceed to fulfill your intention." Recalling the bold assertion his Prisoner had previously made, and shaken by so stunning a revelation, the farrásh-báshí quitted instantly the scene, and resigned his post.

Sám Khán, likewise, remembering, with feelings of awe and wonder, the reassuring words addressed to him by the Báb, ordered his men to leave the barracks immediately, and swore, as he left the courtyard, never again, even at the cost of his life, to repeat that act. Áqá Ján-i-Khamsih, colonel of the body-guard, volunteered to replace him. On the same wall and in the same manner the Báb and His companion were again suspended, while the new regiment formed in line and opened fire upon them. This time, however, their breasts were riddled with bullets, and their bodies completely dissected, with the exception of their faces which were but little marred. “O wayward generation!” were the last words of the Báb to the gazing multitude, as the regiment prepared to fire its volley, “Had you believed in Me every one of you would have followed the example of this youth, who stood in rank above most of you, and would have willingly sacrificed himself in My path. The day will come when you will have recognized Me; that day I shall have ceased to be with you.”

Nor was this all. The very moment the shots were fired a gale of exceptional violence arose and swept over the city. From noon till night a whirlwind of dust obscured the light of the sun, and blinded the eyes of the people. In Shíráz an “earthquake,” foreshadowed in no less weighty a Book than the Revelation of St. John, occurred in 1268 A.H. which threw the whole city into turmoil and wrought havoc amongst its people, a havoc that was greatly aggravated by the outbreak of cholera, by famine and other afflictions. In that same year no less than two hundred and fifty of the firing squad, that had replaced Sám Khán’s regiment, met their death, together with their officers, in a terrible earthquake, while the remaining five hundred suffered, three years later, as a punishment for their mutiny, the same fate as that which their hands had inflicted upon the Báb. To insure that none of them had survived, they were riddled with a second volley. . . . The prime instigator of the Báb’s death, the implacable Amír-Nizám, together with his brother, his chief accomplice, met their death within two years of that savage act.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *God Passes By*, pp. 52-54

Individual Acts of Teaching, Study, and Service
Choose one or more of these activities to complete before the next session.

1. Make a list of the places where you meet people. Consider how you can increase the number of people you meet each week or how can you strengthen friendships with the people you know. Could you build friendships as families? Could you find a way to encourage the young people in the families you know?
2. Memorize one of the quotations that describe the station of the Báb.
3. Read additional episodes from the life of the Báb in *The Dawn-Breakers* or other sources. Choose one of these episodes to retell in the form of a story at the beginning of the next session.
4. Practice retelling the story you told during this session. Consider how you could enhance your effectiveness as a storyteller.
5. Research the art of storytelling on the internet, in the library, or by observing or listening to the storytellers you know personally.

References for studying the life of the Báb:

General History

The New Garden, pp. 22-26
All Things Made New, pp. 185-202
God Passes By, pp. 3-60
The Dawnbreakers

Conference of Badasht

All Things Made New, pp. 193-194
Call To Remembrance, pp. 30-34

Declaration of the Báb

All Things Made New, pp. 186-190
Days to Remember, pp. 47-54

Martyrdom of the Báb

All Things Made New, pp. 197-199
Days to Remember, pp. 97-110
Call To Remembrance, pp. 43-47

The Core Curriculum storybooks tell these events and others in story form. *The Central Figures: The Báb, vol. 1, 2, and 3* will become available in 2004.

Personal Teaching Plan

Consider listening to quiet music as you complete your Personal Teaching Plan.

Closing Devotions

Conclude the session with prayers and singing or other music.



BLAZON HIS NAME: A PERSONAL TEACHING PLAN

Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 137

What specific steps can I take this week...?



To take initiative; to seize opportunities; to form friendships; to interact personally with others; to build relationships?

How can I draw upon...?



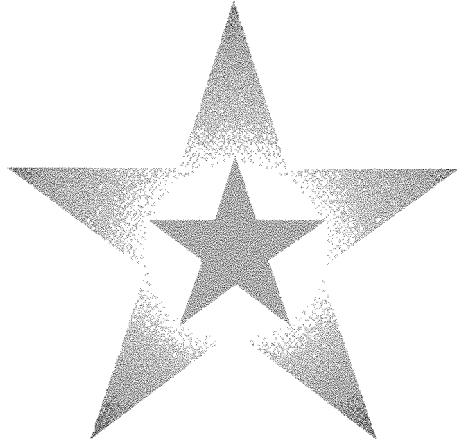
My love for Bahá'u'lláh; the power of the Covenant; the dynamics of prayer; the inspiration and education derived from regular reading and study of the Holy Texts?



The transformative forces that operate upon my soul as I strive to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles?



In addition, how can I attract the particular blessings promised by Bahá'u'lláh to the one who mentions His name?



*V*erily I say, this is the Day
in which mankind can behold the Face,
and hear the Voice, of the Promised One.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

To Serve the Covenant

COURSE FIVE

Some
Fundamental
Verities of the
Bahá'í Faith

Session 3

The Life of
Bahá'u'lláh

Opening Devotions

Begin the session with prayers, readings, and singing or other music, perhaps including one of the many beautiful pieces created as tributes to Bahá'u'lláh. Consider including the following quotation along with your devotions:

Verily I say, this is the Day in which mankind can behold the Face, and hear the Voice, of the Promised One. The Call of God hath been raised, and the light of His countenance hath been lifted up upon men. It behoveth every man to blot out the trace of every idle word from the tablet of his heart, and to gaze, with an open and unbiased mind, on the signs of His Revelation, the proofs of His Mission, and the tokens of His glory.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 106

Objectives of the Session

Read aloud the learning objectives for this session.

Knowledge

To know some of the major events in the life of Bahá'u'lláh.

Wisdom

To understand that Bahá'u'lláh fulfills the prophecies of the Báb.

Spiritual Perception

To discern that Bahá'u'lláh's life of sacrifice brought the priceless Message of God to humanity and can serve as inspiration for our own efforts toward self-sacrifice.

Eloquent Speech

To gain courage from the life of Bahá'u'lláh and to use this courage in teaching the Faith to others.

To be able to describe the station of Bahá'u'lláh and retell a story from His life.

Consultation on Individual Service, Teaching, and Study

- Who was able to take steps to strengthen friendships with individuals or a family? What bounties do we receive from these friendships? What service can we offer?
- Who was able to offer encouragement to a young person in our community? How did this young friend respond? What are some of the special joys of forming friendships with young people?
- Who would like to share a quotation memorized since the last session? Were you able to share this quotation with another soul?
- Who chose to learn another story or further refine your story about the life of the Báb? What opportunities have you discovered for sharing these stories with others?
- Who has had the opportunity to learn more about the art of storytelling? What would you like to share with us?

Activity *The Station of Bahá'u'lláh*

1. Working in teams of two, read aloud the quotations, “The Station of Bahá'u'lláh,” on the following page.
2. In your team, develop two questions about the station of Bahá'u'lláh that can be answered by the quotations provided. If desired, memorize all or part of a quotation that answers your questions.
3. Share your team’s questions and answers with the whole group. Applaud all contributions!



THE STATION OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

1 Better is it for thee . . . to recite but one of the verses of Him Who God shall make manifest than to set down the whole of the Bayán, for on that Day that one verse can save thee, whereas the entire Bayán cannot save thee.

Today the Bayán is in the stage of seed; at the beginning of the manifestation of Him Whom God shall make manifest its ultimate perfection will become apparent.

THE BÁB, Quoted in *God Passes By*, p. 30

2 The Bayán deriveth all its glory from Him Whom God shall make manifest. All that hath been revealed in the Bayán is but a ring upon My hand, and I Myself am, verily, but a ring upon the hand of Him Who God shall make manifest. . . . He turneth it as He pleaseth. . . .

THE BÁB, Quoted in *God Passes By*, p. 30

3 Of all the tributes I have paid to Him Who is to come after Me, the greatest is this, My written confession, that no words of Mine can adequately describe Him, nor can any reference to Him in My Book, the Bayán, do justice to His Cause.

THE BÁB, Quoted in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 77-78

4 Verily I say, this is the Day in which mankind can behold the Face, and hear the Voice, of the Promised One. The Call of God hath been raised, and the light of His countenance hath been lifted up upon men. It behoveth every man to blot out the trace of every idle word from the tablet of his heart, and to gaze, with an open and unbiased mind, on the signs of His Revelation, the proofs of His Mission, and the tokens of His glory.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 106

5 The holy ones of past ages and centuries have, each and all, yearned with tearful eyes to live, though for one moment, in the Day of God. Their longing unsatisfied, they repaired to the Great Beyond. How great, therefore, is the bounty of the Abhá Beauty Who, notwithstanding our utter unworthiness, hath through His grace and mercy breathed into us in this divinely-illuminated century the spirit of life, hath gathered us beneath the standard of the Beloved of the world, and chosen to confer upon us a bounty for which the mighty ones of bygone ages had craved in vain.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, Quoted in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 110-111

Activity
Celebration of the Life of Bahá'u'lláh

1. Let's consider again the art of storytelling. During the last session we created stories from historical accounts. We identified powerful words and phrases from the historical account to incorporate into our stories and we practiced telling them with each other. In this session we'll continue to develop our skill in the art of storytelling.
2. Briefly discuss: What are some simple ways that we can use our voices to enhance our effectiveness as storytellers, while keeping the listener's attention on the story and not on ourselves? Which simple and natural gestures might enhance the story without being overly dramatic? Are some stories better without gestures?
3. If available as resources, let's make use of the stories created for the Core Curriculum storybook series, *The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 2 and 3. Alternate references also are provided on page 38 for historical accounts of these important events in the life of Bahá'u'lláh. Alternatively, you may use the excerpts from the statement of the Bahá'í International Community, *Bahá'u'lláh*, provided in the Appendix, pp. 142-6.
4. Organize your study circle into teams of two. Working in your team, select one of the topics listed on p. 38 about the life of Bahá'u'lláh.
5. Select your story and read it aloud together. Listen to the storyline and identify the introduction, important points, and conclusion to your story.
6. Read the story aloud again. Notice the main characters that interact with Bahá'u'lláh. What spiritual qualities do they demonstrate or lack? What sorts of people are they? What simple means could you use to convey their characters to the listener? Notice that a simple approach is often most effective.
7. Practice reading or telling your story to each other. If using the Core Curriculum storybooks, practice holding the book so that you can show the illustrations to the listeners. Work on fluency, intonation, and timing. Provide specific encouragement to each other as you practice. Above all, focus on the **meaning** of these sacred events as you read or retell the story with simple dignity and a natural tone.
8. After allowing yourselves time to practice these stories, share them with the entire group. Celebrate the presentations!
9. Then decide when, where, and how to share your stories with others—for a devotional meeting, fireside, children's class, or in conversations; individually or as a study circle. If you choose to create a devotional program or other presentation with your stories, decide how to create a reverent uplifting environment, select music, and consider adding a few carefully selected prayers and readings to complete your program. Select a specific time and place to host this gathering.



REFERENCES ON THE LIFE OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

General History

The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 1, 2, 3
The New Garden, pp. 26-31
All Things Made New, pp. 203-223
Call To Remembrance, pp. 5-53
God Passes By
The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 1, 2, 3, 4
The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh
The Dawnbreakers
Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory

Mullá Husayn's Visit to Bahá'u'lláh

The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 2, pp. 53-60
The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 34-7
The Dawnbreakers, pp. 97-128
God Passes By, p. 8

Bahá'u'lláh's Experiences in the Siyáh-Chál

The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 2, pp. 81-94
Call To Remembrance, pp. 61-69
Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory, pp. 78-80

Bahá'u'lláh's Withdrawal to Sulaymáníyyih

The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 2, pp. 102-5
The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 69-74
God Passes By, pp. 118-26
Call To Remembrance, pp. 258-62
Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory, pp. 420-28
The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 1, pp. 246-56

Attempts on Bahá'u'lláh's Life

The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 3, pp. 51-4
The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 80-83
God Passes By, pp. 165-6
Bahá'u'lláh The King of Glory, pp. 420-28
The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 2, pp. 153-61

Exiles of Bahá'u'lláh

The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 2, pp. 35-9
The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 2, pp. 123-8
The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 3, pp. 41-61
God Passes By, pp. 106-90
Call To Remembrance, pp. 258-62
Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory, pp. 420-28
The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 1, pp. 12-25
The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 2, pp. 430-36

The Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh

The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 2, pp. 115-21
All Things Made New, pp. 213-14
Days to Remember, pp. 34-39
Call To Remembrance, pp. 108-16
The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol.1, pp. 257-82
Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory, pp. 173-74

The Life of Bahá'u'lláh in the Holy Land

The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 3, pp. 62-70
All Things Made New, pp. 217-19
Call To Remembrance, pp. 165-243
Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory, pp. 281-90
The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 3, pp. 52-65

The Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh

The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 3, pp. 71-4
Days to Remember, pp. 87-89
God Passes By, pp. 221-23
Call To Remembrance, pp. 258-62
Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory, pp. 420-28

Individual Acts of Service, Teaching, and Study
Choose one or more of these activities to complete before the next session.

1. Read additional stories about Bahá'u'lláh in the Central Figures storybooks or other sources. Learn another story well enough to share it with others.
2. Share stories about Bahá'u'lláh with your family or with young people in your community. Can you find a way to reflect the sweetness of life in the Holy Family in your own family and community life?
3. Write a letter or email to a friend or acquaintance. Describe what you're learning in this study circle and what it means to you. Consider how your personal story might touch the heart of your friend and perhaps inspire their own investigation of this Cause.
4. Plan and host a fireside or devotional meeting. Invite a new friend or invite a seeker or new believer to collaborate with you in this act of service to your community.
5. Invite children in your neighborhood to your local children's class. Offer a ride. Do you know a seeker or new believer, youth or adult, that you could invite to collaborate with you in this service?

Personal Teaching Plan

Contemplate events in the majestic life of the Manifestation of God as you complete your Personal Teaching Plan. How can we show our gratitude through our daily deeds of constructive spiritual living?

Closing Devotions

Conclude with uplifting prayers of praise and thanksgiving.



BLAZON HIS NAME: A PERSONAL TEACHING PLAN

Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 137

What specific steps can I take this week...?



To take initiative; to seize opportunities; to form friendships; to interact personally with others; to build relationships?

How can I draw upon...?



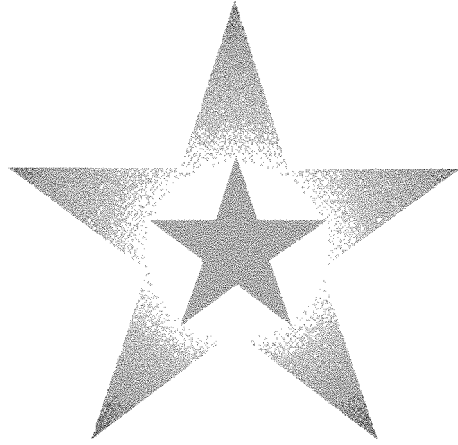
My love for Bahá'u'lláh; the power of the Covenant; the dynamics of prayer; the inspiration and education derived from regular reading and study of the Holy Texts?



The transformative forces that operate upon my soul as I strive to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles?



In addition, how can I attract the particular blessings promised by Bahá'u'lláh to the one who mentions His name?



*A*lthough the Realm of Glory hath none of the vanities
of the world, yet within the treasury of trust and resignation

We have bequeathed to Our heirs an excellent
and priceless heritage.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

To Serve the Covenant

COURSE FIVE

Some
Fundamental
Verities of the
Bahá'í Faith

Session 4

The Covenant of
Bahá'u'lláh

Opening Devotions

Begin the session with reverent prayers, including music. While group singing is ideal, recorded music may also be used. You may also consider including the following quotation along with your opening prayers:

Although the Realm of Glory hath none of the vanities of the world, yet within the treasury of trust and resignation We have bequeathed to Our heirs an excellent and priceless heritage.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 217

Objectives of the Session

Read aloud the learning objectives for this session.

Knowledge

To read and study the Bahá'í Writings on the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.

To know that the Lesser Covenant is embodied in the Will and Testament of Bahá'u'lláh.

To know that Bahá'u'lláh appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Center of the Covenant.

Wisdom

To understand that one of the unique features of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh is His provision in His Will and Testament for the Center of the Covenant and for the continuation of divine guidance through the Universal House of Justice.

To gain insight into the meaning of the term Center of the Covenant.

Spiritual Perception

To appreciate the unique station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

To perceive the importance of firmness in the Covenant.

Eloquent Speech

To be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the actual text of the Kitáb-i-'Ahd.

To describe to others the Station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Center of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.

Consultation on Individual Service, Teaching, and Study

- Who has been able to share one of the stories about the Báb or Bahá'u'lláh with another soul? Did you also choose to consult about how our own families can reflect the sweetness of the Holy Family?
- Who chose to write a letter or email to a friend, describing your involvement in this study circle? Has your friend responded?
- Who chose to learn another story this week? Have you had a chance to share it?
- Who was able to host a fireside or devotional gathering? At these gatherings, what seems to touch the hearts of your friends?
- What's the news from our local children's classes?

Activity *The Covenant*

Read aloud the quotations entitled “The Covenant” in the whole group and discuss the focus questions.



THE COVENANT

Focus Questions:

How is the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh different from the Covenants made in the past? Who is the Center of the Covenant? How is divine guidance continued today? How does the Covenant protect the unity of the Bahá'í Faith? Why is the Covenant so important to the future well-being of the entire human race?

1 Inasmuch as great differences and divergences of denominational belief had arisen throughout the past, every man with a new idea attributing it to God, Bahá'u'lláh desired that there should not be any ground or reason for disagreement among the Bahá'ís. Therefore, with His own pen He wrote the Book of His Covenant, addressing His relations and all people of the world, saying, 'Verily, I have appointed One Who is the Center of My Covenant. All must obey Him; all must turn to Him; He is the Expounder of My Book, and He is informed of My purpose. All must turn to Him. Whatsoever He says is correct, for, verily, He knoweth the texts of My Book. Other than He, no one doth know My Book.' The purpose of this statement is that there should never be discord and divergence among the Bahá'ís but that they should always be unified and agreed. . . .

Therefore, whosoever obeys the Center of the Covenant appointed by Bahá'u'lláh has obeyed Bahá'u'lláh, and whosoever disobey Him has disobeyed Bahá'u'lláh. . . .

Beware! Beware! lest anyone should speak from the authority of his own thoughts or create a new thing out of himself. Beware! Beware! According to the explicit Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh you should care nothing at all for such a person. Bahá'u'lláh shuns such souls.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 322-23

2 Bahá'u'lláh, the Revealer of God's Word in this Day, the Source of Authority, the Fountainhead of Justice, the Creator of a new World Order, the Establisher of the Most Great Peace, the Inspirer and Founder of a world civilization, the Judge, the Lawgiver, the Unifier and Redeemer of all mankind, has proclaimed the advent of God's Kingdom on earth, has formulated its laws and ordinances, enunciated its principles, and ordained its institutions. To direct and canalize the forces released by His Revelation He instituted His Covenant, whose power has preserved the integrity of His Faith, maintained its unity and stimulated its world-wide expansion throughout the successive ministries of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. It continues to fulfill its life-giving purpose through the agency of the Universal House of Justice whose fundamental object, as one of the twin successors of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is to ensure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of the Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers, and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice*, pp. 3-4

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and The Kitáb-i-'Ahd

1. Begin by telling the story of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh:

Already nine months before His ascension Bahá'u'lláh, as attested by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, had voiced His desire to depart from this world. From that time onward it became increasingly evident, from the tone of His remarks to those who attained His presence, that the close of His earthly life was approaching, though He refrained from mentioning it openly to any one. On the night preceding the eleventh of *Shavvál* 1309 A.H. (May 8, 1892) He contracted a slight fever which, though it mounted the following day, soon after subsided. He continued to grant interviews to certain of the friends and pilgrims, but it soon became evident that He was not well. His fever returned in a more acute form than before, His general condition grew steadily worse, complications ensued which at last culminated in His ascension, at the hour of dawn, on the 2nd of *Dhi'l-Qa'dih* 1309 A.H. (May 29, 1892), eight hours after sunset, in the 75th year of His age. . . .

Six days before He passed away He summoned to His presence, as He lay in bed leaning against one of His sons, the entire company of believers, including several pilgrims, who had assembled in the Mansion, for what proved to be their last audience with Him. "I am well pleased with you all," He gently and affectionately addressed the weeping crowd that gathered about Him. "Ye have rendered many services, and been very assiduous in your labors. Ye have come here every morning and every evening. May God assist you to remain united. May He aid you to exalt the Cause of the Lord of being." To the women, including members of His own family, gathered at His bedside, He addressed similar words of encouragement, definitely assuring them that in a document entrusted by Him to the Most Great Branch He had commended them all to His care.

The news of His ascension was instantly communicated to Sultán 'Abdu'l-Hámid in a telegram which began with the words "the Sun of Bahá has set" and in which the monarch was advised of the intention of interring the sacred remains within the precincts of the Mansion, an arrangement to which he readily assented. Bahá'u'lláh was accordingly laid to rest in the northernmost room of the house which served as a dwelling-place for His son-in-law, the most northerly of the three houses lying to the west of, and adjacent to, the Mansion. His interment took place shortly after sunset, on the very day of His ascension.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *God Passes By*, p. 221

2. Organize your study circle into three study groups, so that each study group reads one section of the *Kitáb-i-'Ahd*, pages 46-8.
3. In your group, consult to identify some key elements in your section. Create a sentence or two describing these points, including a direct quotation in the sentences.
4. Reconvene your study circle and share your sentences in the whole group. Then, time permitting, read the *Kitáb-i-'Ahd* in its entirety. Briefly discuss: Why is this document so important to the unity of the Bahá'í Faith?



Section One

Although the Realm of Glory hath none of the vanities of the world, yet within the treasury of trust and resignation We have bequeathed to Our heirs an excellent and priceless heritage. Earthly treasures We have not bequeathed, nor have We added such cares as they entail. By God! In earthly riches fear is hidden and peril is concealed. Consider ye and call to mind that which the All-Merciful hath revealed in the Qur'án: 'Woe betide every slanderer and defamer, him that layeth up riches and counteth them.' Fleeting are the riches of the world; all that perisheth and changeth is not, and hath never been, worthy of attention, except to a recognized measure.

The aim of this Wronged One in sustaining woes and tribulations, in revealing the Holy Verses and in demonstrating proofs hath been naught but to quench the flame of hate and enmity, that the horizon of the hearts of men may be illumined with the light of concord and attain real peace and tranquillity. From the dawning-place of the divine Tablet the day-star of this utterance shineth resplendent, and it behoveth everyone to fix his gaze upon it: We exhort you, O peoples of the world, to observe that which will elevate your station. Hold fast to the fear of God and firmly adhere to what is right. Verily I say, the tongue is for mentioning what is good, defile it not with unseemly talk. God hath forgiven what is past. Henceforward everyone should utter that which is meet and seemly, and should refrain from slander, abuse and whatever causeth sadness in men. Lofty is the station of man! Not long ago this exalted Word streamed forth from the treasury of Our Pen of Glory: Great and blessed is this Day—the Day in which all that lay latent in man hath been and will be made manifest. Lofty is the station of man, were he to hold fast to righteousness and truth and to remain firm and steadfast in the Cause. In the eyes of the All-Merciful a true man appeareth even as a firmament; its sun and moon are his sight and hearing, and his shining and resplendent character its stars. His is the loftiest station, and his influence educateth the world of being.

Every receptive soul who hath in this Day inhaled the fragrance of His garment and hath, with a pure heart, set his face towards the all-glorious Horizon is reckoned among the people of Bahá in the Crimson Book. Grasp ye, in My Name, the chalice of My loving-kindness, drink then your fill in My glorious and wondrous remembrance.

Section Two

O ye that dwell on earth! The religion of God is for love and unity; make it not the cause of enmity or dissension. In the eyes of men of insight and the beholders of the Most Sublime Vision, whatsoever are the effective means for safeguarding and promoting the happiness and welfare of the children of men have already been revealed by the Pen of Glory. But the foolish ones of the earth, being nurtured in evil passions and desires, have remained heedless of the consummate wisdom of Him Who is, in truth, the All-Wise, while their words and deeds are prompted by idle fancies and vain imaginings.

O ye the loved ones and the trustees of God! Kings are the manifestations of the power, and the daysprings of the might and riches, of God. Pray ye on their behalf. He hath invested them with the rulership of the earth and hath singled out the hearts of men as His Own domain.

Conflict and contention are categorically forbidden in His Book. This is a decree of God in this Most Great Revelation. It is divinely preserved from annulment and is invested by Him with the splendour of His confirmation. Verily He is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

It is incumbent upon everyone to aid those daysprings of authority and sources of command who are adorned with the ornament of equity and justice. Blessed are the rulers and the learned among the people of Bahá. They are My trustees among My servants and the manifestations of My commandments amidst My people. Upon them rest My glory, My blessings and My grace which have pervaded the world of being. In this connection the utterances revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas are such that from the horizon of their words the light of divine grace shineth luminous and resplendent. O ye My Branches! A mighty force, a consummate power lieth concealed in the world of being. Fix your gaze upon it and upon its unifying influence, and not upon the differences which appear from it.

The Will of the divine Testator is this: It is incumbent upon the Aghsán, the Afnán and My Kindred to turn, one and all, their faces towards the Most Mighty Branch. Consider that which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book: ‘When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.’ The object of this sacred verse is none other except the Most Mighty Branch [‘Abdu’l-Bahá]. Thus have We graciously revealed unto you our potent Will, and I am verily the Gracious, the All-Powerful. Verily God hath ordained the station of the Greater Branch [Muhammad-’Alí] to be beneath that of the Most Great Branch [‘Abdu’l-Bahá]. He is in truth the Ordainer, the All-Wise. We have chosen ‘the Greater’ after ‘the Most Great’, as decreed by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.

Section Three

It is enjoined upon everyone to manifest love towards the Aghsán, but God hath not granted them any right to the property of others.

O ye My Aghsán, My Afnán and My Kindred! We exhort you to fear God, to perform praiseworthy deeds and to do that which is meet and seemly and serveth to exalt your station. Verily I say, fear of God is the greatest commander that can render the Cause of God victorious, and the hosts which best befit this commander have ever been and are an upright character and pure and goodly deeds.

Say: O servants! Let not the means of order be made the cause of confusion and the instrument of union an occasion for discord. We fain would hope that the people of Bahá may be guided by the blessed words: 'Say: all things are of God.' This exalted utterance is like unto water for quenching the fire of hate and enmity which smouldereth within the hearts and breasts of men. By this single utterance contending peoples and kindreds will attain the light of true unity. Verily He speaketh the truth and leadeth the way. He is the All-Powerful, the Exalted, the Gracious.

It is incumbent upon everyone to show courtesy to, and have regard for the Aghsán, that thereby the Cause of God may be glorified and His Word exalted. This injunction hath time and again been mentioned and recorded in the Holy Writ. Well is it with him who is enabled to achieve that which the Ordainer, the Ancient of Days hath prescribed for him. Ye are bidden moreover to respect the members of the Holy Household, the Afnán and the kindred. We further admonish you to serve all nations and to strive for the betterment of the world.

That which is conducive to the regeneration of the world and the salvation of the peoples and kindreds of the earth hath been sent down from the heaven of the utterance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. Give ye a hearing ear to the counsels of the Pen of Glory. Better is this for you than all that is on the earth. Unto this beareth witness My glorious and wondrous Book.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*. pp. 217-223

Individual Acts of Teaching, Service, and Study
Choose one or more of these activities to complete before the next session.

1. Read Chapter XIV, “The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh,” in *God Passes By*, pp. 237-43. Prepare a 2-minute summary of key points to share at the next session.
2. Read the stories, “Waiting for the Master” and “Flowers for the Ancient King” in *The Central Figures: Bahá’u’lláh, volume 2*, pp. 19-28. Share these stories with a member of your family. Discuss with your family member ways that the sweetness of the love between Bahá’u’lláh and “Abdu’l-Bahá is also reflected in your own family. Then re-tell these stories with another person.
3. Plan and host a devotional meeting or a fireside with the theme of the Covenant. Invite your friends!
4. Offer service to your local children’s class. Could you visit the class and tell stories about the Central Figures of the Bahá’í Faith?
5. What are some possibilities for reaching out with an open heart to friends and neighbors of any age or background? Could you participate in service with another community group?

Personal Teaching Plan

Contemplate events in the majestic life of the Manifestation of God as you complete your Personal Teaching Plan. How can we show our gratitude through our daily deeds of constructive spiritual living?

Closing Devotions

Conclude with uplifting prayers of praise and thanksgiving. If your time permits, include one of the short stories mentioned in #2 above as part of your closing devotions.



BLAZON HIS NAME: A PERSONAL TEACHING PLAN

Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 137

What specific steps can I take this week...?



To take initiative; to seize opportunities; to form friendships; to interact personally with others; to build relationships?

How can I draw upon...?



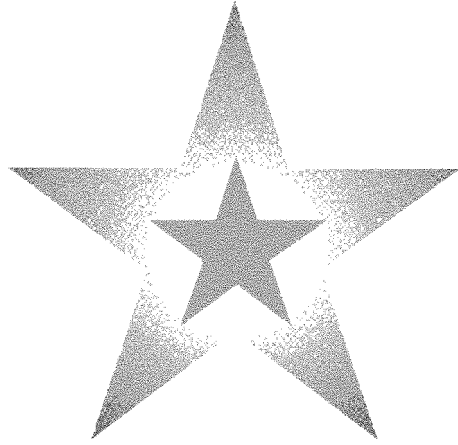
My love for Bahá'u'lláh; the power of the Covenant; the dynamics of prayer; the inspiration and education derived from regular reading and study of the Holy Texts?



The transformative forces that operate upon my soul as I strive to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles?



In addition, how can I attract the particular blessings promised by Bahá'u'lláh to the one who mentions His name?



*W*hen the ocean of My presence hath ebbed
and the Book of My Revelation is ended,
turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed,
Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

To Serve the Covenant

COURSE FIVE

Some
Fundamental
Verities of the
Bahá'í Faith

Session 5

'Abdu'l-Bahá: The
Center of the
Covenant

Opening Devotions

Welcome! Please begin your study circle with prayers and music, especially group singing.

You may also consider including the following quotation along with your opening prayers:

When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, paragraph 121

Objectives of the Session:

Read aloud the learning objectives for this session.

Knowledge

To know that Bahá'u'lláh appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Center of the Covenant.

To know that 'Abdu'l-Bahá set a perfect example of every virtue.

Wisdom

To understand that one of the unique features of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh is His provision in His Will and Testament for the Center of the Covenant and for the continuation of divine guidance through the Universal House of Justice.

To gain insight into the meaning of the term Center of the Covenant.

Spiritual Perception

To appreciate the unique station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

To discern one's own obligation to follow the instructions and example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

To discern the sacrifices in the life of the Master and use His life as an example in our own efforts at self-sacrifice.

To perceive the importance of firmness in the Covenant.

Eloquent Speech

To describe to others the Station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Center of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.

To gain courage from studying the life and example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and to use this courage in teaching the Faith to others.

Consultation about Individual Teaching and Service

- Who was able to share stories about Bahá'u'lláh with a family member or another person? How does the sweetness of the relationship between Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá inspire our own relationships, especially within the family?
- What are we learning as we continue to strive to reach out to friends and neighbors? Do we feel that we're making connections with people? Which of our efforts seem to foster the spirit of unity? How can we discern receptive souls when we see them?
- If you were able to host a fireside or devotional meeting or visit a children's class, what was a high point for you?

Consultation about Individual Study

- Who chose to read the selection from *God Passes By*? What are some key points from that chapter?

Activity *The Most Mighty Branch*

1. In your study circle read aloud the quotations entitled "The Most Mighty Branch" on the following page and discuss the focus questions.
2. Working in small teams, select one page from the "Stories of the Most Great Branch" on the following pages.
3. Read your story aloud and prepare to eloquently and simply retell it in your study circle
4. Using the art materials provided, also create a simple visual symbol of one or more spiritual qualities displayed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in your stories. This symbol could be designed in the form of a 'fruit' that adorns the Most Great Branch.
5. If available, display a small branch in a study vase, pot, or by other means.
6. Reconvene your study circle, share your stories, and adorn the branch with the symbols of some of the spiritual qualities so beautifully displayed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.
7. Briefly discuss: In what ways do these visual symbols assist us to convey the spirit of the stories? How do the stories help us to appreciate 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station as the Center of the Covenant? How do they help us teach others about His unique role in the history of humanity? How do they help us be more like Him?



THE MOST MIGHTY BRANCH

Focus questions:

Who does Bahá'u'lláh intend when He says “Most Mighty Branch”?

How can we explain to others the twin truths of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s unique position as the Center of the Covenant and His vigorous defense of the Covenant with His embodiment of the spiritual qualities of love, service, and utmost humility?

1 When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.

BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 62, paragraph 121

2 And in the Book of the Covenant He explicitly saith that the object of this verse ‘Who hath branched from this Ancient Root’ is the Most Mighty Branch. And He commandeth all the Aghsán, the Afnán, the kindred and the Bahá’ís to turn toward Him. Now, either one must say that the Blessed Beauty hath made a mistake, or He must be obeyed. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá hath no command for the people to obey save the diffusion of the fragrances of God, the exaltation of His Word, the promulgation of the oneness of the world of humanity, the establishment of universal peace, and other of the commands of God. These are divine commands and have nothing to do with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Whoever wisheth may accept them, and anyone who rejecteth them may do as he pleaseth.

Now some of the mischief-makers, with many stratagems, are seeking leadership, and in order to reach this position they instill doubts among the friends that they may cause differences, and that these differences may result in their drawing a party to themselves. But the friends of God must be awake and must know that the scattering of these doubts hath as its motive personal desires and the achievement of leadership.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 213-4

3 He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Center and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, 118 His most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá'í virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God, the Being “round Whom all names revolve,” the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation—styles and titles that are implicit and find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He is, above and beyond these appellations, the “Mystery of God”—an expression by which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 134



1. Childhood of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the eldest Son of Bahá’u’lláh, was born in Tíhrán on May 23rd 1844, the midnight of the same evening that the Báb revealed His Mission in Shíráz. He was named ‘Abbás after His grandfather, but, as already mentioned, took the name of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá after the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh. He was only eight years old when—in the wake of a desperate and futile attempt on the life of Násiri’-Dín Sháh, by two half-crazed men—Bahá’u’lláh was imprisoned, and the Bábís were ferociously persecuted. Bahá’u’lláh’s house was pillaged, His lands and goods were confiscated, and His family reduced from opulence to penury. One day, while in Europe, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recalled the sufferings of those bleak times:

Detachment does not imply lack of means; it is marked by the freedom of the heart. In Tíhrán, we possessed everything at a nightfall, and on the morrow we were shorn of it all, to the extent that we had no food to eat. I was hungry, but there was no bread to be had. My mother poured some flour into the palm of my hand and I ate that instead of bread. Yet, we were contented.

And again:

At that time of dire calamities and attacks mounted by the enemies I was a child of nine. They threw so many stones into our house that the courtyard was crammed with them . . . Mother took us for safety to another quarter, and rented a house in a back alley where she kept us indoors and looked after us. But one day our means of subsistence were barely adequate, and mother told me to go to my aunt’s house, and ask her to find us a few qiráns . . . I went and my aunt did what she could for us. She tied a five-qirán piece in a handkerchief and gave it to me. On my way home someone recognized me and shouted: ‘Here is a Bábí?; whereupon the children in the street chased me. I found refuge in the entrance to a house . . . There I stayed until nightfall, and when I came out, I was once again pursued by the children who kept yelling at me and pelted me with stones . . . When I reached home I was exhausted. Mother wanted to know what had happened to me. I could not utter a word and collapsed.

Bahá’u’lláh’s imprisonment lasted four months in a dark, verminous dungeon. He was in the company of cut-throats and highwaymen. With Him also were many Bábís who loved and revered Him, and were happy to be near Him and to share His sufferings. The agonies of the Bábís were intense, and when death came to them they walked with radiant faces into its embrace, though it was attended by tortures beyond belief. And as they went out of their cell to die they knelt in front of Bahá’u’lláh and kissed the hem of His garment, grateful for this last reward of their total dedication. . . .

H.M. BALYUZI, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá—the Centre of the Covenant*, pp. 9-11

2. Childhood of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

One day ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, anxious to see His Father, was taken to the dungeon. This is His account of that awesome visit:

They sent me with a black servant to His blessed presence in the prison. The warden indicated the cell, and the servant carried me in on his shoulders. I saw a dark, steep place. We entered a small, narrow doorway, and went down two steps, but beyond those one could see nothing. In the middle of the stairway, all of a sudden we heard His blessed voice: ‘Do not bring him in here’, and so they took me back. We sat outside, waiting for the prisoners to be led out. Suddenly they brought the Blessed Perfection out of the dungeon. He was chained to several others. What a chain! It was very heavy. The prisoners could only move it along with great difficulty. Sad and heart-rending it was.

At last came release, but also banishment. Bahá’u’lláh and His family were expelled from their native land. Despoiled and destitute they travelled in the heart of winter over the snow-bound peaks of western Írán. Ill-equipped for such an arduous journey, their sufferings were great. Some seventy years later, Bahíyyih Khánúm, the daughter of Bahá’u’lláh, entitled the Greatest Holy Leaf, was relating her experiences of those far-off days to an English lady who was devoted to the Cause of her Father. Noticing tears in the eyes of her companion, she said: ‘This time is very sad, Laydee, I shall make you grieve if I tell of it.’ And Lady Bloomfield said: ‘Oh, I want to be with you in my heart through all your sadness, dearest Khánúm.’ Bahíyyih Khánúm’s reply was: ‘Well, well! If I did not live in my thoughts all through the events of the sad days of our lives, I should have naught else in my life, for it has been all sorrow; but sorrow is really joy, when suffered in the path of God!’

‘Abdu’l-Bahá at that early age was a victim of consumption. Sixty years later, when speaking of the illness which was keeping Him in the French capital for a period longer than expected, He brought to mind those years of His childhood:

I have been travelling for two years and a half. Nowhere was I ill except here. Because of that I had to stay a long time. Were it not for this illness I would not have stayed in Paris more than a month. There is a reason for this. It has been so from the early years of my life. The wisdom of whatever has happened to me has become apparent later. While I was a child in Tíhrán, seven years of age I contracted tuberculosis. There was no hope of recovery. Afterwards the wisdom of and the reason for this became evident. Were it not for that illness I would have been in Mázindarán. But because of it I remained in Tíhrán and was there when the Blessed Perfection was imprisoned. Thus I travelled to ‘Iraq in His company. And when the time came, although physicians had despaired of my recovery, I was suddenly cured. It happened in spite of the fact that all had said a cure was impossible.

H.M. BALLYUZI, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá—the Centre of the Covenant*, pp. 11-13

3. The Early Youth of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

We are told that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was conscious of the station of His beloved Father. His attitude towards Bahá’u’lláh was not merely that of a son to his father. It expressed a higher devotion, a worthier obedience. The Báb states that the first one to believe in a Manifestation of God is the essence of the achievement of the preceding dispensation; and so, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the first to believe with His whole being in the Mission of His Father, was the most eminent representative of the virtues called forth by the Báb. And He was also to be ‘the embodiment of every Bahá’í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá’í virtue’. . . .

Exactly a year after His arrival at Baghdád, Bahá’u’lláh decided to seek the seclusion of the mountain and the wilderness. His health restored, He had arisen to fulfill the pledge made in the dungeon of Tíhrán, to revitalize the broken community of the Báb. But bitter adversaries attacked from within, and their action threatened disruption and chaos.

[‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s] youthful shoulders had to bear responsibilities which mature men prefer to forgo. He read avidly what He could find of the Writings of the Báb. No school had ever moulded His mind, the unfoldment of which had been the loving care of Bahá’u’lláh. Some years later, still in His teens, He wrote a lucid, illuminating commentary on the well-known tradition ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad: ‘I was a Hidden Treasure and loved to be known, therefore I created beings to know.’ He undertook this task at the request of ‘Alí Shawkat Páshá, a nobleman, highly-cultured and deeply-read. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s commentary not only reveals profound knowledge, striking mastery of language, and rare qualities of mind, but above all it shows the most profound understanding.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá oftentimes walked among the learned who were wise with the wisdom of age and competent with experience, and conversed with them on their themes and topics. They respected the speech of the young boy, because it was mature and enlightening, and because the speaker was modest and charming. Once a redoubtable enemy of Bahá’u’lláh remarked that had He no other proof to substantiate His exceptional powers, it were sufficient that He had reared such a son as ‘Abbás Effendi. . . .

[Exiled again] on May 3rd 1863, the exiles set out on their long journey to the capital of the Ottoman Empire. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was then a youth of nineteen, handsome, gracious, agile, zealous to serve, firm with the wilful, generous to all. He strove hard to make the toil of a long journey less arduous for others. At night He was among the first to reach the halting-place, to see to the comfort of the travellers. Wherever provisions were scarce, He spent the night in search of food. And at dawn He rose early to set the caravan on another day’s march. Then the whole day long He rode by the side of His Father, in constant attendance upon Him. It took them one hundred and ten days to reach the port of Sámshún on the Black Sea, where they embarked for Constantinople, and arrived at the metropolis of the Ottoman Empire on August 16th 1863.

H.M. BALYUZI, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá—the Centre of the Covenant*, pp. 13-16

5. The Master at ‘Akká

“When I was about twenty-five years old, we were moved from Constantinople to Adrianople and from there went with a guard of soldiers to the fortified city of Acca where we were imprisoned and closely guarded.

“There was no communication whatever with the outside world. Each loaf of bread was cut open by the guard to see that it contained no message. All who believed in the universal precepts of Bahá’u’lláh, children, men and women, were imprisoned with us. At one time there were one hundred and fifty of us together in two rooms and no one was allowed to leave the place except four people who went to the bazaar to market each morning under guard.

“Acca was a fever-ridden town in Palestine. It was said that a bird attempting to fly over it would drop dead. The food was poor and insufficient, the water was drawn from a fever-infected well and the climate and conditions were such that even the natives of the town fell ill. Many soldiers succumbed and eight out of ten of our guard died. During the intense heat of that first summer, malaria, typhoid, and dysentery attacked the prisoners, so that all the men, women and children were sick at one time. There were no doctors, no medicine, no proper food and no medical treatment of any kind. I used to make broth for the people and as I had much practice, I made good broth,” said ‘Abdu’l Bahá, laughingly.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London*, pp. 115-6

‘Abdu’l-Bahá tended the sick, shielded His Father, faced the scorn and the fury of the inhabitants of ‘Akká, held His ground with callous gaolers and brutal guards and hostile officials. He never wavered. His vigil never relaxed. Years later, as related by Hájí Mírzá Haydar-’Alí in his autobiography, Bahá’u’lláh recalled the endeavour and the achievement of His Son:

In Baghdád We Ourselves would go and take a seat in the coffee-house to meet the people—friends and acquaintances, strangers and inquirers alike. We brought those who were remote near to the Faith, and led many a soul into the fold of the Cause. Thus We served the Cause of God, gave victory to His Word and exalted His Name. The Most Great Branch undertook the same task and served in the same way, to a much greater degree, in Adrianople, and then to a far greater extent and with greater efficacy, in ‘Akká. The same hardships and afflictions which were Ours in the early days befell Him. In Baghdád We were not prisoners, and the Cause of God had not obtained even a fraction of the fame which it has gained today. At that time the number of its opponents and adversaries and ill-wishers was far less than today. In the Land of Mystery [Adrianople] We used to meet with some and let them come into Our presence. But in the Most Great Prison We do not meet the people who are not within the fold of the Cause. We have closed the doors of social intercourse. It is the Master Who has taken every trouble upon Himself. For Our sake, in order that We may have ease and comfort, He faces the world and its peoples. For Us He has become a mighty stronghold, a mighty armour. At first He rented the Mansion of Mazra’ih. We were there for a while. Then he secured for Us this Mansion of Bahjí. He has arisen with all His power to serve the Faith, and confirmation crowns His effort. This work so occupies His days and nights that He is perforce kept away from Bahjí for weeks. We consort with the Friends and reveal His [God’s] Word. He, the Master, is the target and bears all hardships.

H.M. Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá—the Centre of the Covenant*, pp. 25-6

In the whole group or in pairs memorize the following quotation:

When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and
the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces
toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath
branched from this Ancient Root.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, paragraph 121

Individual Acts of Service, Teaching, and Study

Choose one or more of these activities to complete before the next session.

1. Share a story from the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá with a friend, coworker, or family member. What is a natural situation in which you could introduce your story in a friendly way?
2. Read about 'Abdu'l-Bahá's trip to America in *God Passes By*, *Mahmoud's Diary*, or Balyuzi's *'Abdu'l-Bahá* and find a story about 'Abdu'l-Bahá to summarize or re-tell (2 minutes) at the next session.
3. Read and study *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* or the short book by David Hoffman, *Commentary on The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*. Identify two important points to share with friends at the next session.
4. Identify a specific opportunity to encourage a child or youth in your community. Could you share a story about 'Abdu'l-Bahá?
5. Could you host a fireside or devotional meeting? Would you like to include a story about 'Abdu'l-Bahá? Do you know a seeker or new believer of any age that could collaborate with you in this service? Why is it important to encourage others in their service?

Personal Teaching Plan

Enjoy listening to quiet music as you complete your Personal Teaching Plan.

Closing Devotions

Conclude the session with prayers for firmness in the Covenant.



BLAZON HIS NAME: A PERSONAL TEACHING PLAN

Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 137

What specific steps can I take this week...?



To take initiative; to seize opportunities; to form friendships; to interact personally with others; to build relationships?

How can I draw upon...?



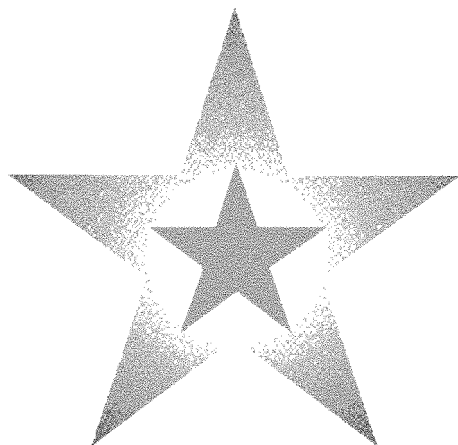
My love for Bahá'u'lláh; the power of the Covenant; the dynamics of prayer; the inspiration and education derived from regular reading and study of the Holy Texts?



The transformative forces that operate upon my soul as I strive to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles?



In addition, how can I attract the particular blessings promised by Bahá'u'lláh to the one who mentions His name?



*T*he differences among the religions of the world are due to the varying types of minds. . . . If, however, one single, universal perceptive power be introduced—a power encompassing all the rest—those differing opinions will merge, and a spiritual harmony and oneness will become apparent.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ

To Serve the Covenant

COURSE FIVE

Some
Fundamental
Verities of the
Bahá’í Faith

Session 6

The Covenant: Axis
of the Oneness of
Humanity

Opening Devotions

Please begin your study circle with prayers and singing or other music.

You may also consider including the following quotation along with your opening prayers:

The differences among the religions of the world are due to the varying types of minds. So long as the powers of the mind are various, it is certain that men's judgements and opinions will differ one from another. If, however, one single, universal perceptive power be introduced—a power encompassing all the rest—those differing opinions will merge, and a spiritual harmony and oneness will become apparent.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 63

Objectives of the Session:

In the group, read aloud the learning objectives for this session.

Knowledge

To know that Bahá'u'lláh appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Center of the Covenant.

To know that 'Abdu'l-Bahá set a perfect example of how to apply the principle of oneness in our lives.

Wisdom

To gain insight into the meaning of the term Center of the Covenant.

To gain a deeper understanding of the principle of oneness through study of the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Spiritual Perception

To discern one's own obligation to follow the instructions and example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

To perceive the importance of firmness in the Covenant.

Eloquent Speech

To describe to others the link between the Covenant and the principle of oneness.

To gain courage from studying the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and use this courage in teaching the Faith to others.

Consultation on Individual Teaching, Service, and Study

- Who was able to share a story about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with a friend, coworker, or family member? How did you decide which story to tell? How did the person respond?
- Who has perceived the confirming power of the Holy Spirit in sharing the Word of God with others in a devotional meeting, a children’s class, a family setting, or through individual friendship?
- What can we learn from these interactions about the power of the Holy Spirit? What might be some next steps in our path of service as teachers of the Cause?
- Who chose to study the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá or His trip to America? What did you learn? Did you find a story to re-tell?

Activity

The Covenant and the Principle of Oneness

1. Read together the quotations on “The Covenant and the Principle of Oneness” and discuss the focus question.
2. Then, working in pairs or small groups, read aloud the talk given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Bahá’u’lláh Has Drawn a Circle of Unity,” and answer the focus questions.
3. Next, individually select one of the stories (pages 67-70) chosen to illustrate how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá taught us how to express the principle of the oneness of humanity in our daily lives. Working in your small group, prepare to simply but eloquently re-tell your individual story in the whole group. Consider linking the story to one of the metaphors that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá uses to illustrate the concept of unity in diversity.
4. Focus your attention on the listeners. Maintain eye contact as appropriate, to help engage and maintain the listener’s attention. Move your attention to each person in turn so that all are included in the circle. You may choose to use a simple prop, such as an item from the story. You may choose to enhance the environment with flowers or a candle. You may add simple gestures if you like. Keep your attention on the listeners and draw them into the story. Tell your story with simple dignity and confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit.
5. Share your story in the whole group. Warmly encourage each other in these efforts!
6. Discuss: What are some opportunities that we have in our everyday lives to share these stories? How can we learn to recognize these opportunities?



THE COVENANT AND THE PRINCIPLE OF ONENESS

Focus Question:

What is the relationship between the Covenant, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the Center of the Covenant, and the Principle of Oneness?

1 . . . That which hath streamed forth from the Most Exalted Pen is conducive to the glory, the advancement and education of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Indeed it is the sovereign remedy for every disease, could they but comprehend and perceive it.

BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 73

2 Can any power withstand the penetrative influence of the Word of God? Nay, by God! The proof is clear and the evidence is complete! If anyone looketh with the eyes of justice he shall be struck with wonder and amazement and will testify that all the peoples, sects and races of the world should be glad, content and grateful for the teachings and admonitions of Bahá’u’lláh. For these divine injunctions tame every ferocious beast, transform the creeping insect into a soaring bird, cause human souls to become angels of the Kingdom, and make the human world a focus for the qualities of mercy.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 293

3 Firmness in the Covenant means obedience so that no one may say, “this is my opinion,” nay rather he must obey that which proceeds from the Pen and Tongue of the Covenant.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *The Power of the Covenant*, part II, p. 33

4 Know this for a certainty that today, the penetrative power in the arteries of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant. The body of the world will not be moved through any power except through the power of the Covenant. There is no other power like unto this. This Spirit of the Covenant is the real Center of love and is reflecting its rays to all parts of the globe, which are resuscitating and regenerating man and illuminating the path to the Divine Kingdom.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, quoted in Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 71

5 It is evident that the axis of the oneness of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant and nothing else.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, p. 51

6 The Covenant is the “axis of the oneness of the world of humanity” because it preserves the unity and integrity of the Faith itself and protects it from being disrupted by individuals who are convinced that only their understanding of the Teachings is the right one—a fate that has overcome all past Revelations. The Covenant is, moreover, embedded in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh Himself. Thus, as you clearly see, to accept Bahá’u’lláh is to accept His Covenant; to reject His Covenant is to reject Him.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *Messages 1963 to 1986*, p. 519



BAHÁ'U'LLÁH HAS DRAWN A CIRCLE OF UNITY

Focus Questions:

What are the metaphors that 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses to explain the principle of oneness?
How do these metaphors assist us to understand the beauty of divinity?

The Creator of all is One God.

From this same God all creation sprang into existence, and He is the one goal, towards which everything in nature yearns. This conception was embodied in the words of Christ, when He said, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end'. Man is the sum of Creation, and the Perfect Man is the expression of the complete thought of the Creator—the Word of God.

Consider the world of created beings, how varied and diverse they are in species, yet with one sole origin. All the differences that appear are those of outward form and colour. This diversity of type is apparent throughout the whole of nature.

Behold a beautiful garden full of flowers, shrubs, and trees. Each flower has a different charm, a peculiar beauty, its own delicious perfume and beautiful colour. The trees too, how varied are they in size, in growth, in foliage—and what different fruits they bear! Yet all these flowers, shrubs and trees spring from the self-same earth, the same sun shines upon them and the same clouds give them rain.

So it is with humanity. It is made up of many races, and its peoples are of different colour, white, black, yellow, brown and red—but they all come from the same God, and all are servants to Him. This diversity among the children of men has unhappily not the same effect as it has among the vegetable creation, where the spirit shown is more harmonious. Among men exists the diversity of animosity, and it is this that causes war and hatred among the different nations of the world.

Differences which are only those of blood also cause them to destroy and kill one another. Alas! that this should still be so. Let us look rather at the beauty in diversity, the beauty of harmony, and learn a lesson from the vegetable creation. If you beheld a garden in which all the plants were the same as to form, colour and perfume, it would not seem beautiful to you at all, but, rather, monotonous and dull. The garden which is pleasing to the eye and which makes the heart glad, is the garden in which are growing side by side flowers of every hue, form and perfume, and the joyous contrast of colour is what makes for charm and beauty. So is it with trees.

An orchard full of fruit trees is a delight; so is a plantation planted with many species of shrubs. It is just the diversity and variety that constitutes its charm; each flower, each tree, each fruit, beside being beautiful in itself, brings out by contrast the qualities of the others, and shows to advantage the special loveliness of each and all.

Thus should it be among the children of men! The diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord. If you meet those of different race and colour from yourself, do not mistrust them and withdraw yourself into your shell of conventionality, but rather be glad and show them kindness. Think of them as different coloured roses growing in the beautiful garden of humanity, and rejoice to be among them.

Likewise, when you meet those whose opinions differ from your own, do not turn away your face from them. All are seeking truth, and there are many roads leading thereto. Truth has many aspects, but it remains always and forever one.

Do not allow difference of opinion, or diversity of thought to separate you from your fellow-men, or to be the cause of dispute, hatred and strife in your hearts.

Rather, search diligently for the truth and make all men your friends. Every edifice is made of many different stones, yet each depends on the other to such an extent that if one were displaced the whole building would suffer; if one is faulty the structure is imperfect.

Bahá'u'lláh has drawn the circle of unity, He has made a design for the uniting of all the peoples, and for the gathering of them all under the shelter of the tent of universal unity. This is the work of the Divine Bounty, and we must all strive with heart and soul until we have the reality of unity in our midst, and as we work, so will strength be given unto us. Leave all thought of self, and strive only to be obedient and submissive to the Will of God. In this way only shall we become citizens of the Kingdom of God, and attain unto life everlasting.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *Paris Talks*, pp. 51-54



STORIES OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ AND THE PRINCIPLE OF ONENESS

The Oneness of Humanity: Race Unity

1. While ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was living in a Paris hotel, among those who often came to see Him was a poor, black man. He was not a Bahá’í, but he loved the Master very much. One day when he came to visit, someone told him that the management did not like to have him—a poor black man—come, because it was not consistent with the standards of the hotel. The poor man went away. When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá learned of this, He sent for the man responsible. He told him that he must find His friend—He was not happy that he should have been turned away. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “I did not come to see expensive hotels or furnishings, but to meet My friends. I did not come to Paris to conform to the customs of Paris, but to establish the standard of Bahá’u’lláh.”

HONNOLD, *Vignettes of the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 94-95, #86

2. The Master’s every act was meaningful. On one auspicious occasion in Washington, D.C. He demonstrated what justice and love can do. The chargé d’affaires of the Persian Legation in the city and his wife had arranged a luncheon in His honour. Their guest list included members of the social and political life in the capital, as well as a number of Bahá’ís.

Louis Gregory, a cultivated gentleman and employee in the government—he later became the first black Hand of the Cause—had been invited to visit the Master. He was surprised at the time scheduled for a visit, as he knew of the luncheon plans, but naturally he arrived on time. Their conference seemed to go on and on—as if indeed the Master might be prolonging it deliberately.

Eventually the butler announced that luncheon was being served. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá led the way, the invited guests following closely behind. Mr. Gregory was perplexed: should he leave or wait for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to return? The guests were seated when suddenly the honoured Guest rose, looked around and then asked in English, “Where is My friend, Mr. Gregory?” adding “My friend, Mr. Gregory, must lunch with Me!” It just so happened that Louis Gregory had not been on the luncheon list, so naturally he had remained behind. Now the charge d’affaires hastened after him. The Master rearranged the place sitting at His right, the seat of honour, of course—ignoring utterly the delicate laws of protocol—and the luncheon started only after Mr. Gregory had been seated. Then, in a most natural manner, as if nothing at all unusual had happened in the capital that day in 1912, with tact and humour, the Master ‘electrified the already startled guests’ by talking about the unity of mankind.

HONNOLD, *Vignettes of the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 94-95, #89

3. Louis Gregory was blessed with going on pilgrimage. Towards its end ‘Abdu’l-Bahá summoned Louis Gregory and Louisa Matthew, a white English pilgrim. He questioned them, and to their surprise, expressed the wish that they should join their lives together. In deference to His wishes they were married, and he sent them forth as a symbol of the spiritual unity, cooperation, dignity in

relationships and service He desired for the races of mankind. That marriage presented many challenges. It brought all the obstacles to understanding and amity, and other cruel pressures. But it endured because the two souls it joined were ever guided and protected by a love beyond themselves and the pressures of the world. Theirs was a demonstration of the love which is prompted by the knowledge of God and reflected in the soul. They saw in each other the Beauty of God; and, clinging to this, they were sustained throughout the trials, the accidental conditions of life and the changes and chances of human experience.

HONNOLD, *Vignettes of the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 94-95, #90

The Oneness of Humanity: Equality of Women and Men

4. One day the sound of peals of laughter came from the direction of the kitchen. The Master went quickly to the cheery party:

“I am very much pleased that you are so happy. Tell me, why are you laughing?”

It appeared that the Persian servant had remarked: “In the East women wear veils and do all the work.” To which our English housekeeper had replied: “In the West women don’t wear veils, and take good care that the men do at least some of the work. You had better get on with cleaning that silver.”

The Master was delighted, laughed heartily, and gave each of them a small gold coin, “for being happy.” . . .

The Master, always loving trees and meadow, went into Richmond Park, where he watched a race on ponies between some boys and a girl. When the latter won, he clapped his hands, crying out, “Bravo! Bravo!”

LADY BLOMFIELD, “‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s Visit to London,” *The Bahá’í World*, vol. 4, pp. 383-4

5. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s interest in women’s work and progress is well known, and among the notable leaders who came to see him, may be mentioned Mrs. Annie Besant, President of the Theosophical Society, the organizers of various suffrage bodies, civic and philanthropic workers, the principals of several woman’s colleges and lady doctors.

A spirited conversation due to the visit of an ardent suffragist will be long remembered by those who had the privilege of being present. . . .

‘Abdu'l-Bahá asked the company if they remembered the story of Zenobia and of the fall of Palmyra. He then continued as follows, using his hands in the grave and simple gesticulations characteristic of him:

“There was once a Governor in Ancient Syria, who had a beautiful and clever wife. She was so capable that when the Governor died, she was made ruler in his stead. The land prospered under her sway, and men acknowledged that she was a better ruler than her husband. After a time the legions of Rome invaded the country, but again and again she drove them out with great confusion. She let down her beautiful hair, and herself rode at the head of her army, clad in a scarlet cloak, wearing a crown of gold, and wielding a two-edged sword in her hand. The Roman Caesar then withdrew his strength from five other provinces in order to subdue her. After a long and brave fight Zenobia

retired into the city of Palmyra, which she strengthened with wonderful fortifications, and there she endured a siege of four months, Caesar being unable to dislodge her. The food she had stored within the walls at last was gone, and the misery of her starving and plague-stricken people compelled her to surrender.

“Caesar was full of admiration for this great woman, because of her courage and endurance, and he asked her to become his wife. But she refused, saying that she would never consent to take as her husband the enemy of her people. Thereupon, Caesar was enraged, and determined to humble her. He took her back with him in his ships to Rome. For his triumphal entry a great procession was prepared, and the streets were filled with people. In the procession came first elephants, after the elephants came the camels, after the camels came the tigers and the leopards, after the leopards came the monkeys, and lastly, after the monkeys, walked Zenobia with a gold chain round her neck. Still she carried her head high, and was firm in her determination. Nothing could break her spirit! She refused to become the Empress of Caesar, so she was thrown into a dungeon, and eventually she died.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá ceased. Silence fell upon the room, and it was some time before it was broken.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ IN LONDON, pp. 103-105

7. Upon another occasion ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said to a group of friends around him: “Taken in general, women today have a stronger sense of religion than men. The woman’s intuition is more correct; she is more receptive and her intelligence is quicker. The day is coming when woman will claim her superiority to man.

“Woman has everywhere been commended for her faithfulness. After the Lord Christ suffered, the disciples wept, and gave way to their grief. They thought that their hopes were shattered, and that the Cause was utterly lost, till Mary Magdalene came to them and strengthened them saying: ‘Do you mourn the body of Our Lord or His Spirit? If you mourn His Spirit, you are mistaken, for Jesus lives! His Spirit will never leave us!’ Thus through her wisdom and encouragement the Cause of Christ was upheld for all the days to come. Her intuition enabled her to grasp the spiritual fact.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then added: “But in the sight of God sex makes no difference. He or she is greatest who is nearest to God.”

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ IN LONDON, p. 105

Oneness of Humanity: Oneness of Religion

8. Roy Wilhelm, an early pilgrim to the Master in ‘Akká, observed the esteem ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had won from even those who were not Bahá’ís: ‘Our room fronted upon a little garden in which was a fountain, and nearby a tent in which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá receives many of those who come to see Him. So intense are the hatreds between the followers of the different religious systems that it is unusual for a man to be well spoken of outside his own system, but ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is regarded by all classes as a man of such wisdom and justice that it is to Him that they come for explanation of their religious Books, for the adjustment of their business quarrels, and even for the settlement of family difficulties. The inquirer

will be told that ‘Abbás Effendi (‘Abdu’l-Bahá) makes no distinction; that He helps Jew, Muhammadan, and Christian alike. So fair was He in His dealings that a just Governor of ‘Akká, Ahmad Big Tawfíq, ‘used to send his son to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for instruction, and in the exercise of justice and sound his son to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for instruction, and in the exercise of justice and sound government turned to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for counsel.

HONNOLD, *Vignettes of the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, #43

9. A delightful story is told of a Mademoiselle Letitia, who had come from a poor family in Haifa to live in the Master’s home in ‘Akká to teach French to the children. She was happy there, though she was a Catholic and the nuns in the convent watched over her. One day, when a French pilgrim came for a visit, her services as translator were needed, as no one else knew French. Mademoiselle became embarrassed and later confessed to the nuns. For a number of days thereafter she looked very stern. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, noticing this, called her to Him and reassured her: “Letitia, tell the good nuns that they need have no fear. I asked you to interpret for me because there was no one else to speak French, not because I desired to teach you. We have so many Bahá’ís, who come here, begging with all their hearts and all their love for instruction, that only to them do we give our precious teaching. You would have to beg and beg before I would give it to you, and even then I might not do so; for it is not so cheap as to be bestowed where it is not wanted.

“Stay in the home if you like, or go if you are not happy here. We are glad to have you if you care to stay, but free your heart of all fear that we will try to make a Bahá’í of you.”

HONNOLD, *Vignettes of the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, #17

10. In Paris on one occasion a man from India stated frankly to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “My aim in life is to transmit as far as in me lies the message of Krishna to the world.”

In His loving way the Master replied: “The Message of Krishna is the message of love. None has ever thought that war and hate are good. Every one agrees in saying that love and kindness are best.”

A negative approach would have hurt this man. The Master did not offer argument. Instead He showed appreciation, and thus He encouraged this devout follower of Krishna.

HONNOLD, *Vignettes of the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 47, #18

Individual Acts of Teaching, Study, and Service

Choose one or more of these extended activities to complete before the next session.

1. Consider your daily flow of activities at home, work, school, and in your neighborhood. Identify opportunities to uphold the principle of oneness in these varied settings. What could you say? Could you tell a story about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to illustrate your point? Would you also like to use a phrase or sentence from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talk about the principle of oneness?
2. Memorize a portion of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talk about the principle of oneness. Recite it at the beginning of our next session.
3. Read and study *The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* or the short book by David Hoffman, *Commentary on The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*. Identify two important points to share with friends at the next study circle.
4. Invite a friend or family member to watch the 20-minute video presentation “Victories of the Covenant” from the World Congress Video Set, Day 3. Briefly describe a favorite scene at the next session.
5. Host a fireside or devotional meeting.
6. Invite the children and junior youth in your community to tell about their Bahá’í classes at the 19 Day Feast. Trade stories about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.
7. Prepare to simply and eloquently tell the story on pp. 76-7 for the next session.

Personal Teaching Plan

Carefully reflect on the suggested acts of teaching, study, and service described above. Consider how they might be integrated within your daily pattern of action. Consider also how you might involve your family members or friends in shared acts of service.

Closing Devotions

Conclude the session with prayers for humanity and songs that reflect the beauty of diversity. If available, consider including a portion of the video suggested above (Individual Acts #4) as part of your closing devotions.



BLAZON HIS NAME: A PERSONAL TEACHING PLAN

Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 137

What specific steps can I take this week...?



To take initiative; to seize opportunities; to form friendships; to interact personally with others; to build relationships?

How can I draw upon...?



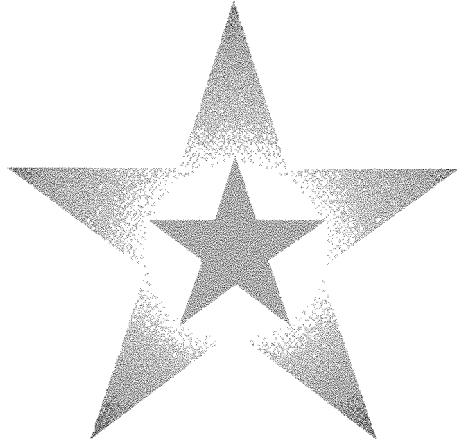
My love for Bahá'u'lláh; the power of the Covenant; the dynamics of prayer; the inspiration and education derived from regular reading and study of the Holy Texts?



The transformative forces that operate upon my soul as I strive to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles?



In addition, how can I attract the particular blessings promised by Bahá'u'lláh to the one who mentions His name?



*R*emember, whether or not I be on earth,
My presence will be with you always.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ

To Serve the Covenant

COURSE FIVE

Some
Fundamental
Verities of the
Bahá’í Faith

Session 7

Shoghi Effendi:
Guardian of the
Cause of God

Opening Devotions

Consider beginning your study circle with carefully chosen devotions including music and prayers. Consider using the book *The Mystery of God* to select devotional passages on the theme of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Mystery of God, the Center of the Covenant, the Master, the Exemplar, such as the following:

Remember, whether or not I be on earth,
My presence will be with you always.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ

Display a portrait of the beloved Master in the room and consider placing candles or flowers near the picture of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Objectives of the Session

In the group, read aloud the learning objectives for this session.

Knowledge

To know the importance of The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the Charter of the Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.

To know that the twin Institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are both invested with Divine authority.

Wisdom

To gain insight into the vital role of the Greatest Holy Leaf in preserving the Covenant during this critical period of Bahá’í history.

To understand the station of Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith.

To understand that the Institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are the continuance of God’s Covenant with humanity.

Spiritual Perception

To perceive that obedience to the wishes of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as described in His Will and Testament, is the personal responsibility of every Bahá’í.

To perceive how turning to the writings of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice protects us and provides guidance for our lives.

Eloquent Speech

To articulate the provisions of The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

To teach others about the Institution of the Guardianship.

To demonstrate the responsibility entrusted to each individual Bahá’í to continually strive to deepen one’s understanding of the importance of obedience to the Guardian and to the Universal House of Justice.

Consultation on Individual Acts of Teaching and Service

- Who was able to share a story from the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá? Were you also able to share one of the metaphors describing the principle of oneness? Did you share the story individually or in a group setting? What attracted the listeners’ hearts?
- What was a highlight from a devotional meeting, fireside, or conversation with children and youth?
- Have you been able to invite a seeker or a new believer to participate with you in these important acts of community service? What have been the results?
- What other teaching opportunities have we had this week?

Consultation About Individual Study

- Who would like to share your insights from studying the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá?
- If you were able to view the video segment, “Victories of the Covenant,” what was a favorite scene?
- Who would like to share a memorized portion of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talk?

Activity

The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

1. Enjoy listening as one or more members of your study circle reads “The Appointment of the Guardian of the Cause of God,” pp. 76-77. We will share our responses to this story later in this session.
2. Organize your study circle into small study groups. In your group, carefully study a specific subset of the quotations, “The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.” Create an outline of the main points. Then, create a simple visual representation of these main points using the materials provided.
3. Share your main points and visual representation in the whole group. Then, briefly discuss: How does this inviolable Covenant protect the future well-being of humanity? How does it also protect us as individuals and as a local community?



THE APPOINTMENT OF THE GUARDIAN OF THE CAUSE OF GOD

Excerpt from *The Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith*, Chapter 2, by Rúhíyyih Rabanni

The address of Major Tudor Pole, in London, was often used as the distributing point for cables and letters to the Bahá'ís. Shoghi Effendi himself, whenever he went up to London, usually called there. On November 29, 1921, at 9:30 in the morning the following cable reached that office:

Cyclometry London
His Holiness 'Abdu'l-Bahá ascended Abhá Kingdom. Inform friends.
—Greatest Holy Leaf

In notes he made of this terrible event and its immediate repercussions, Tudor Pole records that he immediately notified the friends by wire, telephone and letter. I believe he must have telephoned Shoghi Effendi, asking him to come at once to his office, but not conveying to him at that distance a piece of news which he well knew might prove too much of a shock. However this may be, at about noon Shoghi Effendi reached London, went to 61 St. James' Street (off Piccadilly and not far from Buckingham Palace) and was shown into the private office. Tudor Pole was not in the room at the moment but as Shoghi Effendi stood there his eye was caught by the name of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the open cablegram lying on the desk and he read it. When Tudor Pole entered the room a moment later he found Shoghi Effendi in a state of collapse, dazed and bewildered by this catastrophic news. He was taken to the home of Miss Grand, one of the London believers, and put to bed there for a few days.

Owing to passport difficulties Shoghi Effendi cabled Haifa he could not arrive until the end of the month. He sailed from England on December 16th, accompanied by Lady Bloomfield and Rouhangeze [his sister], and arrived in Haifa by train at 5:20 p.m. on December 29th, from Egypt where his boat from England had docked. Many friends went to the station to bring him home; it is reported he was so overcome on his arrival that he had to be assisted up the steps. Awaiting him in the house was the only person who could in any measure assuage his suffering—his beloved great-aunt, the sister of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. She had already—so frail, so quiet, so modest at all times—shown herself in these past weeks to be a strong rock to which the believers clung in the midst of the tempest that had so suddenly burst upon them. The calibre of her soul, her breeding, her station, fitted her for the role she played in the Cause and in Shoghi Effendi's life during this extremely difficult and dangerous period.

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá so unexpectedly and quietly passed away, after no serious illness, the distracted members of His family searched His papers to see if by chance He had left any instructions as to where He should be buried. Finding none they entombed Him in the centre of the three rooms adjacent to the inner Shrine of the Báb. They discovered His Will—which consists of three Wills written at different times and forming one document—addressed to Shoghi Effendi. It now became the painful duty of Shoghi Effendi to hear what was in it; a few days after his arrival they read it to him.

There is no doubt that the Greatest Holy Leaf, and probably a selected few of the Master's family knew, before Shoghi Effendi reached Haifa, the gist at least of what was in the Will because it had been examined to see if He had made any provisions for His own burial. That this is so is borne out by cables sent to the Persian and to the American believers, by the Greatest Holy Leaf, on December 21, 1921. The one to America read as follows: "Memorial meeting world over January seven. Procure prayers for unity and steadfastness. Master left full instructions in His Will and Testament. Translation will be sent. Inform friends." But the provisions of the Will were not made known until it was first read to Shoghi Effendi and, indeed, until it was officially read on January 3, 1922. . . .

It must not be thought, however, that the act of promulgating the Master's Will solved all problems and ushered in a new era in the Cause with the greatest of ease. Far from it. Before Shoghi Effendi reached Haifa the Greatest Holy Leaf had been obliged to cable America on December 14th: "Now is period of great tests. The friends should be firm and united in defending the Cause. Nakeseens [Covenant-breakers] starting activities through press other channels all over world. Select committee of wise cool heads to handle press propaganda in America."

One of the oldest and most staunch of the American believers wrote to Shoghi Effendi on January 18, 1922, less than two weeks after the public announcement of the provisions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will: "As you know we are having great troubles and sorrows with violators in the Cause in America. This poison has penetrated deeply among the friends . . ." In many reports, in great detail, accusations and facts poured in upon the newly-made Guardian. There was, of course, another aspect. With touching pure-heartedness and trust the Bahá'ís of East and West rallied round their young leader and poured out avowals of their love and loyalty: "We long to assist the Guardian in every way and our hearts are responsive to the burdens upon his young shoulders . . ."; "Word has reached us here in Washington that our beloved Master has placed the guidance and protection of the Holy Cause in your hands and that He named you as the head of the House of Justice. I write you these few lines responding with all my heart to the sacred instructions of our Beloved Lord and assuring all the support and fidelity of which I am capable . . ."; "Beloved of our beloved," he was addressed by two pillars of the Faith in America, "how our hearts sang with joy at the news that the Master had not left us comfortless but had made you, His beloved, the centre of the Unity of His Cause, so that the hearts of all the friends may find peace and certainty."; "Our lives have been in utter darkness until the blessed cablegram of the Greatest Holy Leaf arrived with the first ray of light, and that is your appointment by the Merciful Lord as our Guardian and our Head as well as the Guardian of the Cause of God and the Head of the House of Justice."; "Whatever the Guardian of the Cause wishes or advises these servants to do, that is likewise our desire and intention."



Twin Successors

1 O my loving friends! After the passing away of this wronged one, it is incumbent upon the Aghsán (Branches), the Afnán (Twigs) of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abhá Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi—the youthful branch branched from the two hallowed and sacred Lote-Trees and the fruit grown from the union of the two offshoots of the Tree of Holiness,—as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, he unto whom all the Aghsán, the Afnán, the Hands of the Cause of God and His loved ones must turn. He is the expounder of the words of God and after him will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendants.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 11

2 The sacred and youthful branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God as well as the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God; whoso disputeth with him hath disputed with God; whoso denieth him hath denied God; whoso disbelieveth in him hath disbelieved in God; whoso deviateth, separateth himself and turneth aside from him hath in truth deviated, separated himself and turned aside from God.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 11

3 And now, concerning the House of Justice which God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error, it must be elected by universal suffrage, that is, by the believers. Its members must be manifestations of the fear of God and day-springs of knowledge and understanding, must be steadfast in God's faith and the well-wishers of all mankind.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 14

4 Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 19

Complementary Institutions

5 The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh had been instituted solely through the direct operation of His Will and purpose. The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, on the other hand, may be regarded as the offspring resulting from that mystic intercourse between Him Who had generated the forces of a God-given Faith and the One Who had been made its sole Interpreter and was recognized as its perfect Exemplar. The creative energies unleashed by the Originator of the Law of God in this age gave birth, through their impact upon the mind of Him Who had been chosen as its unerring Expounder, to that Instrument, the vast implications of which the present generation, even after the lapse of twenty-three years, is still incapable of fully apprehending. This Instrument can, if we would correctly appraise it, no more be divorced from the One Who provided the motivating impulse for its creation than from Him Who directly conceived it. The purpose of the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation had, as already observed, been so thoroughly infused into the mind of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and His Spirit had so profoundly impregnated His being, and their aims and motives been so completely blended, that to dissociate the doctrine laid down by the former from the supreme act associated with the mission of the latter would be tantamount to a repudiation of one of the most fundamental verities of the Faith.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *God Passes By*, pp. 325-326

6 It should be stated, at the very outset, in clear and unambiguous language, that these twin institutions of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh should be regarded as divine in origin, essential in their functions and complementary in their aim and purpose. Their common, their fundamental object is to insure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of our Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings. Acting in conjunction with each other these two inseparable institutions administer its affairs, coordinate its activities, promote its interests, execute its laws and defend its subsidiary institutions. Severally, each operates within a clearly defined sphere of jurisdiction; each is equipped with its own attendant institutions—instruments designed for the effective discharge of its particular responsibilities and duties. Each exercises, within the limitations imposed upon it, its powers, its authority, its rights and prerogatives. These are neither contradictory, nor detract in the slightest degree from the position which each of these institutions occupies. Far from being incompatible or mutually destructive, they supplement each other's authority and functions, and are permanently and fundamentally united in their aims.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 148

7 They [Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá] have also, in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as their chosen Successors, destined to apply the principles, promulgate the laws, protect the institutions, adapt loyally and intelligently the Faith to the requirements of progressive society, and consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 19-20

8 . . . it is made indubitably clear and evident that the Guardian of the Faith has been made the Interpreter of the Word and that the Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings. The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgment on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly revealed. Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 149-150

The Passing of Shoghi Effendi

9 At the time of our beloved Shoghi Effendi's death it was evident, from the circumstances and from the explicit requirements of the Holy Texts that it had been impossible for him to appoint a successor in accordance with the provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. . . .

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 44

10 After prayerful and careful study of the Holy Texts bearing upon the question of the appointment of the successor to Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Cause of God, and after prolonged consultation which included consideration of the views of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, the Universal House of Justice finds that there is no way to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 11

11 Future Guardians are clearly envisaged and referred to in the Writings, but there is nowhere any promise or guarantee that the line of the Guardians would endure forever; on the contrary there are clear indications that the line could be broken. Yet, in spite of this, there is a repeated insistence in the Writings on the indestructibility of the Covenant and the immutability of God's Purpose for this Day.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986*, p. 158

The Establishment of the Universal House of Justice

12 In the Bahá'í Faith there are two authoritative centers appointed to which the believers must turn, for in reality the Interpreter of the Word is an extension of that center which is the Word itself. The Book is the record of the utterance of Bahá'u'lláh, while the divinely inspired Interpreter is the living Mouth of that Book—it is he and he alone who can authoritatively state what the Book means. Thus one center is the Book with its Interpreter, and the other is the Universal House of Justice guided by God to decide on whatever is not explicitly revealed in the Book. This pattern of centers and their relationships is apparent at every stage in the unfoldment of the Cause. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh tells the believers to refer after His passing to the Book, and to 'Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.' In the Kitáb-i-'Ahd (the Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant), He makes it clear that this reference is to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In the 'Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh also ordains the institution of the Universal House of Justice, and confers upon it the powers necessary for it to discharge its ordained functions. The Master in His Will and Testament explicitly institutes the Guardianship, which Shoghi Effendi states was clearly anticipated in the verses of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, reaffirms and elucidates the authority of the Universal House of Justice, and refers the believers once again to the Book: "Unto the Most Holy Book everyone must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice," and at the very end of the Will He says: 'All must seek guidance and turn unto the Center of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error.'

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1963-1986*, p. 160

Jigsaw Activity
The Will and Testament and the Appointment
of Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian

1. Organize your study circle into three study groups of equal size, with each group assuming one of the following roles:
 - **Group 1:** Western friends present in the Holy Land at the time of the passing of the Master and the reading of His Will and Testament.
 - **Group 2:** Bahá'ís in both East and West.
 - **Group 3:** Members of the Master's family.

2. In your group, discuss the following questions from the perspective of your role, referring again to pp. 76-81 as desired.
 - How has the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the reading of His Will and Testament affected your thoughts, feelings, and relationship to the Covenant?
 - What are your insights into the role of Bahá'u'lláh's daughter Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf, during this critical period in Bahá'í history?
 - What are your new insights into the stature and station of Shoghi Effendi as Guardian during these early days of his Guardianship as he immediately began the construction of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, chartered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament?

3. Form new groups, each with one member from each of the three groups above, to share your understanding from your consideration of these important questions.

4. Then turn to a blank page in this book and record:
 - your fresh insights into the station of the Guardian and the life and works of Shoghi Effendi, and
 - your plans to study one book or compilation of letters of Shoghi Effendi.

5. A video entitled *Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Cause of God* (available from the Bahá'í Distribution Service) provides another marvelous opportunity to learn more about the Guardian. Discuss: Is this video available in our community? If not, could we acquire it? Could we arrange a time to view this video as a study circle, perhaps along with our friends and family members?

Individual Acts of Teaching, Service, and Study

Choose one or more of these extended activities to complete before the next session.

1. Explain the importance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament to a young person in your community, perhaps over a snack or during a walk.
2. Share another story about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with at least one person before the next session.
3. Pray for the seekers you know. Pray also for guidance in teaching.
4. Host a devotional meeting or fireside. Mention Bahá’u’lláh’s Name at this gathering.
5. Carefully read the entire text of the *Will and Testament* of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and prepare a 2-minute report for the next session.
6. Carefully read the *Commentary on the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* by David Hoffman and prepare a 2-minute report for the next session.
7. Review the book, *The Mystery of God*, and find an inspiring quotation about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá or a short story about His life to share at the beginning of the next session.

Personal Teaching Plan

Consider listening to quiet music as you prayerfully complete your Personal Teaching Plan for the coming week.

Closing Devotions

Conclude your study circle with prayers and singing.



BLAZON HIS NAME: A PERSONAL TEACHING PLAN

Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 137

What specific steps can I take this week...?



To take initiative; to seize opportunities; to form friendships; to interact personally with others; to build relationships?

How can I draw upon...?



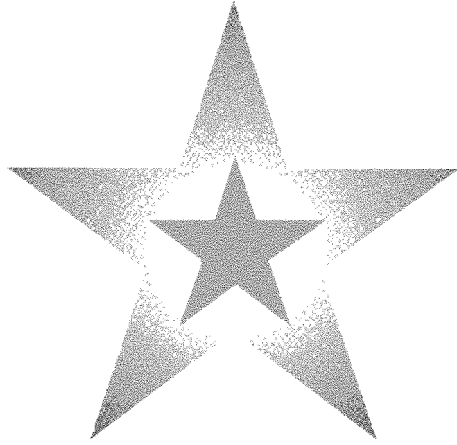
My love for Bahá'u'lláh; the power of the Covenant; the dynamics of prayer; the inspiration and education derived from regular reading and study of the Holy Texts?



The transformative forces that operate upon my soul as I strive to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles?



In addition, how can I attract the particular blessings promised by Bahá'u'lláh to the one who mentions His name?



Observe My commandments
for the love of My beauty.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

To Serve the Covenant

COURSE FIVE

Some
Fundamental
Verities of the
Bahá'í Faith

Session 8

The Covenant and
the Individual

Opening Devotions

Welcome! Begin your study circle with prayers and group singing or beautiful recorded music from a diversity of artists.

Consider also including the following quotations:

Observe My commandments for the love of My beauty.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 20, paragraph 4

Whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence. Consider for instance such things as liberty, civilization and the like. However much men of understanding may favourably regard them, they will, if carried to excess, exercise a pernicious influence upon men.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 169

Objectives of the Session

In the group, read aloud the learning objectives for this session.

Knowledge

To know that obedience to the Institutions of the Faith is an important aspect of the fulfillment of our part of the Lesser Covenant.

Wisdom

To understand that individual love and obedience to the institutions of the Faith builds the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Spiritual Perception

To perceive the relationship between love and obedience in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Eloquent Speech

To articulate ways to fulfill one's part in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Consultation About Individual Teaching and Service

- Who was able to share ideas about the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá with a young person in the community? What did you do to engage their interest and attract their hearts?
- Who was able to host a devotional meeting or fireside? What additional opportunities have we found to mention Bahá'u'lláh's Name, tell a story about 'Abdu'l-Bahá, or share spiritual principles with others?
- Thinking about our time together in this study circle, which of our actions have been most effective in touching the hearts of seekers?

Consultation About Individual Study

- Who would like to share a story or highlight or quotation from your study of *The Mystery of God, The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, or *Commentary on the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*?
- Who would like to share a recently memorized quotation?

Activity

The Covenant and the Individual

1. Remembering all the stories we’ve heard about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the perfect example of how to follow Bahá’u’lláh’s exhortation to “Observe My commandments for the love of My beauty,” what should be our response to the Covenant? Considering our role as lovers of God and servants to humanity, what are some specific ways that we can uphold the Covenants of God and of Bahá’u’lláh?
2. Working in pairs or small teams, organize your study circle so that each team explores the question, “How can I show love and obedience to this link in the Covenant?” in light of one of the following sets of quotations.
 - Bahá’u’lláh: The Promised One
 - ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Center of the Covenant
 - The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice
 - National and Local Spiritual Assemblies
3. After about 20 minutes of study in your team, select one of the metaphors for the Covenant listed on p. 92. Each team should select a different metaphor, to foster a diversity of expression. If available, you may also select one object from the items provided as a tangible expression of your metaphor.
4. Using the metaphor, work with your team to answer the focus question in light of the specific quotation you studied.
5. Then, share your answers in the whole group. Applaud all contributions!



BAHÁ'U'LLÁH: THE PROMISED ONE

1 O My servants! There shineth nothing else in Mine heart except the unfading light of the Morn of Divine guidance, and out of My mouth proceedeth naught but the essence of truth, which the Lord your God hath revealed. Follow not, therefore, your earthly desires, and violate not the Covenant of God, nor break your pledge to Him. With firm determination, with the whole affection of your heart, and with the full force of your words, turn ye unto Him, and walk not in the ways of the foolish. The world is but a show, vain and empty, a mere nothing, bearing the semblance of reality. Set not your affections upon it. Break not the bond that uniteth you with your Creator, and be not of those that have erred and strayed from His ways.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 328, CLIII

2 God's purpose in sending His Prophets unto men is twofold. The first is to liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance, and guide them to the light of true understanding. The second is to ensure the peace and tranquillity of mankind, and provide all the means by which they can be established.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 79-80, XXXIV

3 The Revelation which, from time immemorial, hath been acclaimed as the Purpose and Promise of all the Prophets of God, and the most cherished Desire of His Messengers, hath now, by virtue of the pervasive Will of the Almighty and at His irresistible bidding, been revealed unto men.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 5, III

4 The progress of the Cause of God gathers increasing momentum and we may with confidence look forward to the day when this Community, in God's good time, shall have traversed the stages predicated for it by its Guardian, and shall have raised on this tormented planet the fair mansions of God's Own Kingdom wherein humanity may find surcease from its self-induced confusion and chaos and ruin, and the hatreds and violence of this time shall be transmuted into an abiding sense of world brotherhood and peace. All this shall be accomplished within the Covenant of the everlasting Father, the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.

Messages of the Universal House of Justice, pp.119-120

5 The Covenant is, moreover, embedded in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh Himself. Thus . . . to accept Bahá'u'lláh is to accept His Covenant; to reject His Covenant is to reject Him.

WRITTEN ON BEHALF OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *The Covenant*, p. 18



‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ: THE CENTER OF THE COVENANT

1 He is the Trust of God amongst you, His charge within you, His manifestation unto you and His appearance among His favored servants. . . . We have sent Him down in the form of a human temple. Blest and sanctified be God Who createth whatsoever He willeth through His inviolable, His infallible decree. They who deprive themselves of the shadow of the Branch, are lost in the wilderness of error, are consumed by the heat of worldly desires, and are of those who will assuredly perish.

BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, *Tablet of the Branch*, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 135

2 He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Center and Pivot of Bahá’u’lláh’s peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá’í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá’í virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God, the Being "round Whom all names revolve," the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation—styles and titles that are implicit and find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He is, above and beyond these appellations, the "Mystery of God"—an expression by which Bahá’u’lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 134

3 The purpose of the Blessed Beauty in entering into this Covenant and Testament was to gather all existent beings around one point so that the thoughtless souls, who in every cycle and generation have been the cause of dissension, may not undermine the Cause. He hath, therefore, commanded that whatever emanateth from the Centre of the Covenant is right and is under His protection and favour, while all else is error.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 209

4 The potent energies released through the ascension of the Center of His Covenant crystallized into this supreme, this infallible Organ for the accomplishment of a Divine Purpose. The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá unveiled its character, reaffirmed its basis, supplemented its principles, asserted its indispensability, and enumerated its chief institutions.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 89



THE GUARDIANSHIP AND THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

1 The sacred and youthful branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, as well as the Universal House of Justice to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God; whoso disputeth with him hath disputed with God; whoso denieth him hath denied God; whoso disbelieveth in him hath disbelieved in God; whoso deviateth, separateth himself and turneth aside from him hath in truth deviated, separated himself and turned aside from God.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *Will and Testament*, p. 11

2 The essence of the Covenant is the continuation of divine guidance after the Ascension of the Prophet through the presence in this world of an institution to which all the friends turn and which can indisputably state what is the Will of God. After 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are such institutions.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, letter of 3/23/75

3 Independent investigation of truth recognizes that no human being can have a full and correct understanding of the revelation of God; it places upon each individual the duty to strive for an ever greater understanding of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. . . . This will produce great diversity of views on a wide variety of subjects, and this is excellent. What it cannot and must not do is to produce 'sects' in relation to the Teachings of the Faith; the Covenant provides the centre of guidance which is to prevent such a degeneration.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, letter of 10/20/77

4 The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is unbroken, its all-encompassing power inviolate. The two unique features which distinguish it from all religious covenants of the past are unchanged and operative. The revealed Word, in its original purity, amplified by the divinely guided interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, remains immutable, unadulterated by any man-made creeds or dogmas, unwarrantable inferences, or unauthorized interpretations. The channel of Divine guidance, providing flexibility in all the affairs of mankind, remains open through that institution which was founded by Bahá'u'lláh and endowed by Him with supreme authority and unfailing guidance, and of which the Master wrote: "Unto this body all things must be referred." How clearly we see the truth of Bahá'u'lláh's assertion: The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an enduring foundation. Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *Wellspring of Guidance*, p. 13



NATIONAL AND LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES

1 They who are the beloved of God, in whatever place they gather and whomsoever they may meet, must evince, in their attitude towards God, and in the manner of their celebration of His praise and glory, such humility and submissiveness that every atom of the dust beneath their feet may attest the depth of their devotion.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 7, V

2 Few will fail to recognize that the Spirit breathed by Bahá'u'lláh upon the world . . . can never permeate and exercise an abiding influence upon mankind unless and until it incarnates itself in a visible Order, which would bear His name, wholly identify itself with His principles, and function in conformity with His laws. . . . He [Bahá'u'lláh], as well as 'Abdu'l-Bahá after Him, has, unlike the Dispensations of the past, clearly and specifically laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy. These are destined to be a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness and justice upon the earth . . . they revealed all the directions required for the practical realization of those ideals which the Prophets of God have visualized, and which from time immemorial have inflamed the imagination of seers and poets in every age.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 19

3 The bedrock on which this Administrative Order is founded is God's immutable Purpose for mankind in this day. . . .

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 156

4 Once a Bahá'í has the profound conviction of the authority from God, nested in the Prophet, passed on to the Master, and by Him, to the Guardians, and which flows out through the assemblies and creates order based on obedience—once a Bahá'í has this, nothing can shake him.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *Light of Divine Guidance*, Vol.2, pp. 83-84

5 His brotherly advice to you, and to all loyal and ardent young believers like you, is that you should deepen your knowledge of the history and of the tenets of the Faith, not merely by means of careful and thorough study, but also through active, whole-hearted and continued participation in all the activities, whether administrative or otherwise, of your community. The Bahá'í community life provides you with an indispensable laboratory, where you can translate into living and constructive action the principles which you imbibe from the Teachings. By becoming a real part of that living organism you can catch the real spirit which runs throughout the Bahá'í Teachings.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2, p. 424



FIRMNESS IN THE COVENANT

1 The light of the Covenant . . . is the Educator of the minds, the spirits, the hearts and souls of men.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, Quoted in *God Passes By*, p. 239

2 It [the Covenant] is the fortified fortress of the Cause of God.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, p. 48

3 . . . the pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, Quoted in *God Passes By*, p. 238

4 The Covenant of God . . . is a lifeboat and ark of salvation. All true followers of the Blessed Perfection are sheltered and protected in this ark.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *Star of the West, Vol. VIII*, p. 222

5 . . . the dynamic power of the world existence is the power of the Covenant which like an artery pulsateth in the body of the contingent world. . . .

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 208-209

6 . . . act accordingly and hoist the standard of the Covenant. . . .

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 102-103

7 The Covenant is like the sea and the believers are fishes in the sea.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *Star of the West, Vol. VIII*, p. 222

8 It [the Covenant] is . . . the firm pillar of the religion of God.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, p. 48

9 [The Covenant] is the cord stretched betwixt the earth and the Abhá Kingdom.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, Quoted in *God Passes By*, p. 239

10 . . . the dynamic power of the world of existence is the power of the Covenant which like an artery pulsateth in the body of the contingent world.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 102-103

Individually look back through this course book from the beginning of the course until today. Using one of the blank pages in this book, take a few minutes to record your reflections about your service to the Cause of God during this course. Consider listening to quiet music while you record your reflections.

Then, individually select one of the metaphors for the Covenant, copy onto a card or nice paper and create a beautiful border for the quotation using the art materials available. Consider using this quotation to illustrate a significant aspect of your learning and service in this study circle. After some time to work, share your quotation cards with the group, if desired.

Individual Acts of Teaching, Service, and Study
Choose one or more of these activities to complete before the next session.

1. Take leadership for a regular devotional meeting in your cluster or initiate a regularly scheduled fireside in your home. Make a special effort to meet new people, befriend them, and invite receptive souls to these gatherings. Fireside packets that may also be adapted for devotional meetings are available through the internet at http://www.education.usbnc.org/a_themes/fireside_manuals.htm.
2. Take leadership for supporting children's classes in your cluster. Do the children's teachers have access to teacher training and classroom materials? Would you like to arise as a teacher for children and junior youth? For information about the Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education of children and junior youth or to arrange teacher training, contact the National Teacher Training Center by phone at 810-653-5033 or by email at nttc@usbnc.org.
3. Memorize your selected metaphor for the Covenant. Make it a part of your daily devotions.
4. Continue to refine your skills in the art of storytelling by practicing the stories you have learned in this course. Offer to tell a story at a devotional meeting, children's class, or Nineteen Day Feast.
5. Read *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*, published in *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. Prepare a 2-minute report for the next session.
6. Share your metaphor for the Covenant and a favorite story during family devotions.

Personal Teaching Plan

Complete your Personal Teaching Plan, incorporating one or more of the individual acts of teaching, study and service described above.

Closing Devotions

Conclude this session with prayers and singing.



BLAZON HIS NAME: A PERSONAL TEACHING PLAN

Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 137

What specific steps can I take this week...?



To take initiative; to seize opportunities; to form friendships; to interact personally with others; to build relationships?

How can I draw upon...?



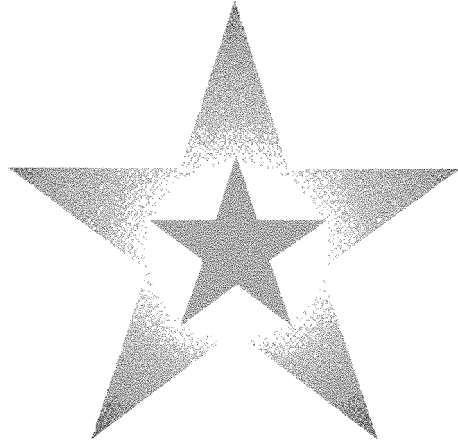
My love for Bahá'u'lláh; the power of the Covenant; the dynamics of prayer; the inspiration and education derived from regular reading and study of the Holy Texts?



The transformative forces that operate upon my soul as I strive to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles?



In addition, how can I attract the particular blessings promised by Bahá'u'lláh to the one who mentions His name?



*M*ankind in its entirety must firmly adhere to
whatsoever hath been revealed and vouchsafed unto it.
Then and only then will it attain unto true liberty.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

To Serve the Covenant

COURSE FIVE

Some
Fundamental
Verities of the
Bahá'í Faith

Session 9

Individual Rights
and Freedoms in
the World Order of
Bahá'u'lláh

Opening Devotions

Begin your study circle with prayers, group singing, and recorded music that reflects the beautiful diversity of the human family.

Consider also including the following quotation:

Mankind in its entirety must firmly adhere to whatsoever hath been revealed and vouchsafed unto it. Then and only then will it attain unto true liberty.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 96

Objectives of the Session

In the group, read aloud the learning objectives for this session.

Knowledge

To know that obedience to the Institutions of the Faith is an important aspect of the fulfillment of our part of the Lesser Covenant.

Wisdom

To understand that the Administrative Order balances the true liberty of individuals with the strength and unity of the community.

Spiritual Perception

To perceive ways to foster individual self-expression and preserve unity in your community.

Eloquent Speech

To articulate examples of true liberty in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Consultation About Individual Teaching and Service

- What results are we seeing from our efforts to serve the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh through our service, especially through hosting or supporting devotional meetings, children's classes, and firesides? Are there obstacles to our service that we could work together to overcome? Are there victories to celebrate?
- What results are we seeing from our efforts to memorize the Word of God and integrate daily prayers and readings in our lives and in our family life?
- What results are we seeing from our efforts to develop the art of storytelling in ourselves and in our communities?

- Who would like to share a brief report from your study of *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*?

Jigsaw Activity

Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

1. Organize your study circle into small groups so that each group studies a portion of the letter from the Universal House of Justice entitled “Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.” Consider assigning each group an equal number of pages or paragraphs so that the entire document can be studied.
2. In your group, carefully read aloud your designated paragraphs and discuss answers to the corresponding questions.
3. After about 30 minutes, reconvene and then form new groups so that each new group includes one member of each of the previous study groups. In your new group, share both your questions and answers, highlighting the text where the answers can be found.
4. After sharing your questions and answers, come up with one specific example of true liberty in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Prepare to share your example in the form of a 2-minute story: What happened? Who was involved? What was the outcome? How does this example express true liberty? Please tell your story in a way that could attract the heart of a seeker. As you share your story consider presenting it in the form of a 4-minute role play, in which a seeker presents a natural opportunity for a teacher to tell the story, perhaps raises a question or two, and responds favorably to this new and wonderful expression of true liberty.
5. Share your examples in the whole group. Applaud all contributions!
6. Briefly discuss the questions: How do the concepts of individual rights and freedoms in a Bahá'í context compare and contrast with the concept of rights and freedoms prevalent in American culture? What are some of the ways we can share these ideas with seekers? What brief quotation or stories would help us explain these ideas to others? Could we each find a way to explore these ideas with another person before the next session?



INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS IN THE WORLD ORDER OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

Letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the United States of America, 29 December 1988

What capacities
of American
Bahá'ís have
been praised by
'Abdu'l-Bahá?

How has Shoghi
Effendi cautioned
the friends?

1. We have noticed with concern evidences of a confusion of attitudes among some of the friends when they encounter difficulties in applying Bahá'í principles to questions of the day. On the one hand, they acknowledge their belief in Bahá'u'lláh and His teachings; on the other, they invoke Western liberal democratic practices when actions of Bahá'í institutions or of some of their fellow Bahá'ís do not accord with their expectations. At the heart of this confusion are misconceptions of such fundamental issues as individual rights and freedom of expression in the Bahá'í community. The source of the potential difficulties of the situation appears to us to be an inadequacy of Bahá'í perspective on the part of both individual believers and their institutions.
2. Recognizing the immense challenge you face to resolve such confusion, we pause to reflect with you on these issues in search of a context in which relevant fundamental questions may be discussed and understood in the community.
3. The extraordinary capacities of the American nation, as well as the superb stewardship of the Bahá'í community within it, have repeatedly been extolled in the writings of our Faith. In His Tablets and utterances, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Center of the Covenant, projected a compelling vision of the world-embracing prospects of that richly endowed country. "The American nation", He averred, "is equipped and empowered to accomplish that which will adorn the pages of history, to become the envy of the world, and be blest in both the East and the West for the triumph of its people." In another assertion addressed to the Bahá'í community itself, He uttered words of transcendent importance: ". . . your mission", He affirmed, "is unspeakably glorious. Should success crown your enterprise, America will assuredly evolve into a centre from which waves of spiritual power will emanate, and the throne of the Kingdom of God will, in the plenitude of its majesty and glory, be firmly established."
4. Shoghi Effendi, in various statements, celebrated the remarkable achievements and potential glories of that specially blessed community, but was moved to issue, in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, a profound warning which is essential to a proper understanding of the relation of that Bahá'í community to the nation from which it has sprung. "The glowing tributes", he solemnly wrote, "so repeatedly and deservedly paid to the capacity, the spirit, the conduct, and the high rank, of the American believers, both individually and as an organic community, must, under no circumstances, be confounded with the characteristics and nature of the people from which God has raised them up. A sharp distinction between that community and that people must be made, and resolutely and fearlessly upheld, if we wish to give due recognition to the transmuting power of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, in its impact on the lives and standards of those who have chosen to enlist under His banner. Otherwise, the

supreme and distinguishing function of His Revelation, which is none other than the calling into being of a new race of men, will remain wholly unrecognized and completely obscured.” It is the far-reaching, transformative implications of this distinction which we especially invite you to contemplate.

5. The vantage point that gives us perspective and is the foundation of our belief and actions rests on our recognition of the sovereignty of God and our submission to His will as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, His supreme Manifestation for this promised Day. To accept the Prophet of God in His time and to abide by His bidding are the two essential, inseparable duties which each soul was created to fulfill. One exercises these twin duties by one's own choice, an act constituting the highest expression of the free will with which every human being has been endowed by an all-loving Creator.
6. The vehicle in this resplendent Age for the practical fulfillment of these duties is the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh; it is, indeed, the potent instrument by which individual belief in Him is translated into constructive deeds. The Covenant comprises divinely conceived arrangements necessary to preserve the organic unity of the Cause. It therefore engenders a motivating power which, as the beloved Master tells us, “like unto the artery, beats and pulsates in the body of the world”. “It is indubitably clear”, He asserts, “that the pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant.” Through it the meaning of the Word, both in theory and practice, is made evident in the life and work of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, the appointed Interpreter, the perfect Exemplar, the Center of the Covenant. Through it the processes of the Administrative Order—“this unique, this wondrous System”—are made to operate.
7. In emphasizing its distinctiveness, Shoghi Effendi has pointed out that “this Administrative Order is fundamentally different from anything that any Prophet has previously established, inasmuch as Bahá'u'lláh has Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions, appointed the person to interpret His Word and conferred the necessary authority on the body designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances”. In another statement, he maintains that, “It would be utterly misleading to attempt a comparison between this unique, divinely-conceived Order and any of the diverse systems which the minds of men, at various periods of their history, have contrived for the government of human institutions.” “Such an attempt,” he felt, “would in itself betray a lack of complete appreciation of the excellence of the handiwork of its great Author.”
8. The lack of such appreciation will detract from the perspective of anyone who measures Bahá'í administrative processes against practices prevalent in today's society. For notwithstanding its inclination to democratic methods in the administration of its affairs, and regardless of the resemblance of some of its features to those of other systems, the Administrative Order is not to be viewed merely as an improvement on past and existing systems; it represents a departure both in origin and in concept. “This new-born Administrative Order,” as Shoghi Effendi has explained, “incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three recognized forms of secular government, without being in any sense a mere replica of any one of

What is the highest expression of individual free will?

What are some of the important features of the Covenant and Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh?

them, and without introducing within its machinery any of the objectionable features which they inherently possess. It blends and harmonizes, as no government fashioned by mortal hands has as yet accomplished, the salutary truths which each of these systems undoubtedly contains without vitiating the integrity of those God-given verities on which it is ultimately founded.”

Why do we find it valuable to review these fundamental principles of our Faith?

9. You are, no doubt, conversant with the Guardian’s expatiations on this theme. Why, then, this insistent emphasis? Why this repeated review of fundamentals? This emphasis, this review, is to sound an appeal for solid thinking, for the attainment of correct perspectives, for the adoption of proper attitudes. And these are impossible without a deep appreciation of Bahá’í fundamentals. The great emphasis on the distinctiveness of the Order of Bahá’u’lláh is not meant to belittle existing systems of government. Indeed, they are to be recognized as the fruit of a vast period of social evolution, representing an advanced stage in the development of social organization. What motivates us is the knowledge that the supreme mission of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, the Bearer of that Order, is, as Shoghi Effendi pointed out, “none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations”, indicating the “coming of age of the entire human race”. The astounding implication of this is the near prospect of attaining an age-old hope, now made possible at long last by the coming of Bahá’u’lláh. In practical terms, His mission signals the advent of “an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced”. It is a fresh manifestation of the direct involvement of God in history, a reassurance that His children have not been left to drift, a sign of the outpouring of a heavenly grace that will enable all humanity to be free at last from conflict and contention to ascend the heights of world peace and divine civilization. Beyond all else, it is a demonstration of that love for His children, which He knew in the depth of His “immemorial being” and in the “ancient eternity” of His Essence, and which caused Him to create us all. In the noblest sense, then, attention to the requirements of His World Order is a reciprocation of that love.
10. It is this perspective that helps us to understand the question of freedom and its place in Bahá’í thought and action. The idea and the fact of freedom pervade all human concerns in an infinitude of notions and modes. Freedom is indeed essential to all expressions of human life.
11. Freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of action are among the freedoms which have received the ardent attention of social thinkers across the centuries. The resulting outflow of such profound thought has exerted a tremendous liberating influence in the shaping of modern society. Generations of the oppressed have fought and died in the name of freedom. Certainly the want of freedom from oppression has been a dominant factor in the turmoil of the times: witness the plethora of movements which have resulted in the rapid emergence of new nations in the latter part of the twentieth century. A true reading of the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh leaves no doubt as to the high importance of these freedoms to constructive social processes. Consider, for instance, Bahá’u’lláh’s proclamation to the kings and rulers. Can it not be deduced from this alone that attainment of freedom is a significant purpose of His Revelation? His denunciations of tyranny and His urgent appeals on behalf

What is the importance of freedom to constructive social progress?

of the oppressed provide unmistakable proof. But does not the freedom foreshadowed by His Revelation imply nobler, ampler manifestations of human achievement? Does it not indicate an organic relationship between the internal and external realities of man such as has not yet been attained?

12. In his summary of significant Bahá'í teachings, Shoghi Effendi wrote that Bahá'u'lláh “inculcates the principle of ‘moderation in all things’; declares that whatsoever, be it ‘liberty, civilization and the like’, ‘passeth beyond the limits of moderation’ must ‘exercise a pernicious influence upon men’; observes that western civilization has gravely perturbed and alarmed the peoples of the world; and predicts that the day is approaching when the ‘flame’ of a civilization ‘carried to excess’ ‘will devour the cities’.”
13. Expounding the theme of liberty, Bahá'u'lláh asserted that “the embodiment of liberty and its symbol is the animal”; that “liberty causeth man to overstep the bounds of propriety, and to infringe on the dignity of his station”; that “true liberty consisteth in man’s submission unto My commandments”. “We approve of liberty in certain circumstances,” He declared, “and refuse to sanction it in others.” But He gave the assurance that, “Were men to observe that which We have sent down unto them from the Heaven of Revelation, they would, of a certainty, attain unto perfect liberty.” And “Mankind in its entirety must firmly adhere to whatsoever hath been revealed and vouchsafed unto it. Then and only then will it attain unto true liberty.”
14. Bahá'u'lláh’s assertions clearly call for an examination of current assumptions. Should liberty be as free as is supposed in contemporary Western thought? Where does freedom limit our possibilities for progress, and where do limits free us to thrive? What are the limits to the expansion of freedom? For so fluid and elastic are its qualities of application and expression that the concept of freedom in any given situation is likely to assume a different latitude from one mind to another; these qualities are, alas, susceptible to the employment alike of good and evil. Is it any wonder, then, that Bahá'u'lláh exhorts us to submission to the will of God? Since any constructive view of freedom implies limits, further questions are inevitable: what are the latitudes of freedom in the Bahá'í community? How are these to be determined? Because human beings have been created to “to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization”, the exercise of freedom, it may be deduced, is intended to enable all to fulfill this purpose in their individual lives and in their collective functioning as a society. Hence whatever in principle is required to realize this purpose gauges the latitudes or limits of freedom.
15. Contemplating Bahá'u'lláh’s warning that “whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence”, we come to appreciate that the Administrative Order He has conceived embodies the operating principles which are necessary to the maintenance of that moderation which will ensure the “true liberty” of humankind. All things considered, does the Administrative Order not appear to be the structure of freedom for our Age? ‘Abdu’l-Bahá offers us comfort in this thought, for He has said that “the moderate freedom which guarantees the welfare of the world of mankind and

In what ways is moderation essential to true liberty?

maintains and preserves the universal relationships, is found in its fullest power and extension in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh”

What are some of the ways that freedom is expressed in the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh?

16. Within this framework of freedom a pattern is set for institutional and individual behavior which depends for its efficacy not so much on the force of law, which admittedly must be respected, as on the recognition of a mutuality of benefits, and on the spirit of cooperation maintained by the willingness, the courage, the sense of responsibility, and the initiative of individuals—these being expressions of their devotion and submission to the will of God. Thus there is a balance of freedom between the institution, whether national or local, and the individuals who sustain its existence.
17. Consider, for example, the Local Spiritual Assembly, the methods of its formation and the role of individuals in electing it. The voter elects with the understanding that he is free to choose without any interference whomever his conscience prompts him to select, and he freely accepts the authority of the outcome. In the act of voting, the individual subscribes to a covenant by which the orderliness of society is upheld. The Assembly has the responsibility to guide, direct and decide on community affairs and the right to be obeyed and supported by members of the community. The individual has the responsibility to establish and maintain the Assembly through election, the offering of advice, moral support and material assistance; and he has the right to be heard by it, to receive its guidance and assistance, and to appeal from any Assembly decision which he conscientiously feels is unjust or detrimental to the interests of the community.
18. But occupation with the mechanics of Bahá'í Administration, divorced from the animating spirit of the Cause, leads to a distortion, to an arid secularization foreign to the nature of the Administration. Equally significant to the procedures for election—to further extend the example—is the evocation of that rarefied atmosphere of prayer and reflection, that quiet dignity of the process, devoid of nominations and campaigning, in which the individual's freedom to choose is limited only by his own conscience, exercised in private in an attitude that invites communion with the Holy Spirit. In this sphere, the elector regards the outcome as an expression the will of God and those elected as being primarily responsible to that will, not to the constituency which elected them. An election thus conducted portrays an aspect of that organic unity of the inner and outer realities of human life which is necessary to the construction of a mature society in this new Age. In no other system do individuals exercise such a breadth of freedom in the electoral process.
19. The equilibrium of responsibilities implied by all this presupposes maturity on the part of all concerned. This maturity has an apt analogy in adulthood in human beings. How significant is the difference between infancy and childhood, adolescence and adulthood! In a period of history dominated by the surging energy, the rebellious spirit and frenetic activity of adolescence, it is difficult to grasp the distinguishing elements of the mature society to which Bahá'u'lláh beckons all humanity. The models of the old world order blur vision of that which must be perceived; for these models were, in many instances, conceived in rebellion and retain the characteristics of the revolutions peculiar to an

adolescent, albeit necessary, period in the evolution of human society. The very philosophies which have provided the intellectual content of such revolutions—Hobbes, Locke, Jefferson, Mill, come readily to mind—were inspired by protest against the oppressive conditions which revolutions were intended to remedy.

20. These characteristics are conspicuous, for example, in the inordinate skepticism regarding authority, and consequently, in the grudging respect which the citizens of various nations show toward their governments; they have become pronounced in the incessant promotion of individualism, often to the detriment of the wider interests of society. How aptly, even after the lapse of half a century, Shoghi Effendi's views, as conveyed by his secretary, fit the contemporary scene: "Our present generation, mainly due to the corruptions that have been identified with organizations, seem to stand against any institution. Religion as an institution is denounced. Government as an institution is denounced. Even marriage as an institution is denounced. We Bahá'ís should not be blinded by such prevalent notions. If such were the case, all the divine Manifestations would not have invariably appointed someone to succeed Them. Undoubtedly, corruptions did enter those institutions, but these corruptions were not due to the very nature of the institutions but to the lack of proper directions as to their powers and nature of their perpetuation. What Bahá'u'lláh has done is not to eliminate all institutions in the Cause but to provide the necessary safeguards that would eliminate corruptions that caused the fall of previous institutions. What those safeguards are is most interesting to study and find out and also most essential to know."
21. We make these observations not to indulge in criticism of any system, but rather to open up lines of thought, to encourage a reexamination of the bases of modern society, and to engender a perspective for consideration of the distinctive features of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh. What, it could be asked, was the nature of society that gave rise to such characteristics and such philosophies? Where have these taken mankind? Has their employment satisfied the needs and expectations of the human spirit? The answers to such questions could lay the ground for a contrasting observation of the origin and nature of the characteristics and philosophy underlying that Order.
22. As to freedom of expression, a fundamental principle of the Cause, the Administrative Order provides unique methods and channels for its exercise and maintenance; these have been amply described in the writings of the Faith, but they are not yet clearly understood by the friends. For Bahá'u'lláh has extended the scope and deepened the meaning of self-expression. In His elevation of art and of work performed in the service of humanity to acts of worship can be discerned enormous prospects for a new birth of expression in the civilization anticipated by His World Order. The significance of this principle, now so greatly amplified by the Lord of the Age, cannot be doubted; but it is in its ramifications in speech that keen understanding is urgently needed. From a Bahá'í point of view, the exercise of freedom of speech must necessarily be disciplined by a profound appreciation of both the positive and negative dimensions of freedom, on the one hand, and of speech, on the other.

How does the Bahá'í view of freedom contrast with other contemporary and historic views of freedom?

How could you respond to the questions in paragraph 21?

How is freedom of expression both encouraged and moderated in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh?

23. Bahá'u'lláh warns us that “the tongue is a smouldering fire, and excess of speech a deadly poison.” “Material fire consumeth the body,” He says in elaborating the point, “whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart and soul. The force of the former lasteth but for a time, whilst the effects of the latter endureth a century.” In tracing the framework of free speech, He again advises “moderation”. “Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation”, He states, adding: “As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure. As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets.”
24. Also relevant to what is said, and how, is when it is said. For speech, as for so many other things, there is a season. Bahá'u'lláh reinforces this understanding by drawing attention to the maxim that, “Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it.”
25. Speech is a powerful phenomenon. Its freedom is both to be extolled and feared. It calls for an acute exercise of judgement, since both the limitation of speech and the excess of it can lead to dire consequences. Thus there exist in the system of Bahá'u'lláh checks and balances necessary to the beneficial uses of this freedom in the onward development of society. A careful examination of the principles of Bahá'í consultation and the formal and informal arrangements for employing them offer new insights into the dynamics of freedom of expression.
26. As it is beyond the scope of this letter to expatiate upon these principles, let it suffice to recall briefly certain of the requisites of consultation, particularly for those who serve on Spiritual Assemblies. Love and harmony, purity of motive, humility and lowliness amongst the friends, patience and long-suffering in difficulties—these inform the attitude with which they proceed “with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views”, each using “perfect liberty” both in so doing and in “unveiling the proof of his demonstration”. “If another contradicts him, he must not become excited because if there be no investigation or verification of questions and matters, the agreeable view will not be discovered neither understood.” “The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions.” If unanimity is not subsequently achieved, decisions are arrived at by majority vote. Once a decision has been reached, all members of the consultative body, having had the opportunity fully to state their views, agree wholeheartedly to support the outcome. What if the minority view is right? “If they agree upon a subject,” ‘Abdu'l-Bahá has explained, “even though it be wrong, it is better than to disagree and be in the right, for this difference will produce the demolition of the divine foundation. Though one of the parties may be in the right and they disagree that will be the cause of a thousand wrongs, but if they agree and both parties are in the wrong, as it is in unity the truth will be revealed and the wrong made right.” Implicit in this approach to the social utility of thought is the profundity of the change in the standard of public discussion intended by Bahá'u'lláh for a mature society.

27. The qualities by which the individual can achieve the personal discipline necessary to successful consultation find their full expression in what Shoghi Effendi regarded as the “spirit of a true Bahá’í”. Ponder, for instance, the appealing remark addressed to your own community in one of his earliest letters: “Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá’í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candor, and courage on the other.” This was an appeal to the maturity and the distinction towards which he repeatedly directed their thoughts.
28. Because the Most Great Peace is the object of our longing, a primary effort of the Bahá’í community is to reduce the incidence of conflict and contention, which have categorically been forbidden in the Most Holy Book. Does this mean that one may not express critical thought? Absolutely not. How can there be the candor called for in consultation if there is no critical thought? How is the individual to exercise his responsibilities to the Cause, if he is not allowed the freedom to express his views? Has Shoghi Effendi not stated that “at the very root of the Cause lies the principle of the undoubted right of the individual to self-expression, his freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views”?
29. The Administrative Order provides channels for expression of criticism, acknowledging, as a matter of principle, that “it is not only the right, but the vital responsibility of every loyal and intelligent member of the community to offer fully and frankly, but with due respect and consideration to the authority of the Assembly, any suggestion, recommendation or criticism he conscientiously feels he should in order to improve and remedy certain existing conditions or trends in his local community”. Correspondingly, the Assembly has the duty: “to give careful consideration to any such views submitted to them”.
30. Apart from the direct access which one has to an Assembly, local or national, or to a Counsellor or Auxiliary Board member, there are specific occasions for the airing of one’s views in the community. The most frequent of these occasions for any Bahá’í is the Nineteen Day Feast which, “besides its social and spiritual aspects, fulfills various administrative needs and requirements of the community, chief among them being the need for open and constructive criticism and deliberation regarding the state of affairs within the local Bahá’í community”. At the same time, Shoghi Effendi’s advice, as conveyed by his secretary, goes on to stress the point that “all criticisms and discussions of a negative character which may result in undermining the authority of the Assembly as a body should be strictly avoided. For otherwise the order of the Cause itself will be endangered, and confusion and discord will reign in the community.”
31. Clearly, then, there is more to be considered than the critic’s right to self-expression; the unifying spirit of the Cause of God must also be preserved, the authority of its laws and ordinances safeguarded, authority being an indispensable aspect of freedom. Motive, manner, mode, become relevant; but

What are some channels provided by the Administrative Order for constructive self-expression or criticism?

there is also the matter of love: love for one's fellows, love for one's community, love for one's institutions.

32. The responsibility resting on the individual to conduct himself in such way as to ensure the stability of society takes on elemental importance in this context. For vital as it is to the progress of society, criticism is a two-edged sword: it is all too often the harbinger of conflict and contention. The balanced processes of the Administrative Order are meant to prevent this essential activity from degenerating to any form of dissent that breeds opposition and its dreadful schismatic consequences. How incalculable have been the negative results of ill-directed criticism: in the catastrophic divergences it has created in religion, in the equally contentious factions it has in political systems, which have dignified conflict by institutionalizing such concepts as the "loyal opposition" which attach to one or another of the various categories of political opinion: conservative, liberal, progressive, reactionary, and so forth.
33. If Bahá'í individuals deliberately ignore the principles imbedded in the Order which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has established to remedy divisiveness in the human family, the Cause for which so much has been sacrificed will surely be set back in its mission to rescue world society from complete disintegration. May not the existence of the Covenant be invoked again and again, so that such repetition may preserve the needed perspective? For, in this age, the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh has been protected against the baneful effects of the misuse of the process of criticism; this has been done by the institution of the Covenant and by the provision of a universal administrative system which incorporates within itself the mechanisms for drawing out the constructive ideas of individuals and using them for the benefit of the entire system. Admonishing the people to uphold the unifying purpose of the Cause, Bahá'u'lláh, in the Book of His Covenant, addresses these poignant words to them: "Let not the means of order be made the cause of confusion and the instrument of union an occasion for discord."
34. Such assertions emphasize a crucial point; it is this: In terms of the Covenant, dissidence is a moral and intellectual contradiction of the main objective animating the Bahá'í community, namely, the establishment of the unity of mankind.
35. We return to the phenomenal characteristics of speech. Content, volume, style, tact, wisdom, timeliness are among the critical factors in determining the effects of speech for good or evil. Consequently, the friends need ever to be conscious of the significance of this activity which so distinguishes human beings from other forms of life, and they must exercise it judiciously. Their efforts at such discipline will give birth to an etiquette of expression worthy of the approaching maturity of the human race. Just as this discipline applies to the spoken word, it applies equally to the written word; and it profoundly affects the operation of the press.
36. The significance and role of the press in a new world system are conspicuous in the emphasis which the Order of Bahá'u'lláh places on accessibility to information at all levels of society. Shoghi Effendi tells us that Bahá'u'lláh makes "specific reference to 'the swiftly appearing newspapers', describes them as 'the mirror of the world' and as 'an amazing and potent phenomenon', and

How does the Covenant protect freedom of expression while also preserving unity?

prescribes to all who are responsible for their production the duty to be sanctified from malice, passion and prejudice, to be just and fair-minded, to be painstaking in their inquiries, and ascertain all the facts in every situation”.

37. In His social treatise, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá offers insight as to the indispensability of the press in future society. He says it is “urgent that beneficial articles and books be written, clearly and definitely establishing what the present-day requirements of the people are, and what will conduce to the happiness and advancement of society”. Further, He writes of the “publication of high thoughts” as the “dynamic power in the arteries of life”, “the very soul of the world”. Moreover, He states that, “Public opinion must be directed toward whatever is worthy of this day, and this is impossible except through the use of adequate arguments and the adducing of clear, comprehensive and conclusive proofs.”
38. As to manner and style, Bahá’u’lláh has exhorted “authors among the friends” to “write in such a way as would be acceptable to fair-minded souls, and not lead to caviling by the people”. And He issues a reminder: “We have said in the past that one word hath the influence of spring and causeth hearts to become fresh and verdant, while another is like unto blight which causeth the blossoms and flowers to wither.”
39. In the light of all this, the code of conduct of the press must embrace the principles and objectives of consultation as revealed by Bahá’u’lláh. Only in this way will the press be able to make its full contribution to the preservation of the rights of the people and become a powerful instrument in the consultative processes of society, and hence for the unity of the human race.
40. Some of the friends have suggested that the emergence of the Faith from obscurity indicates the timeliness of ceasing observance in the Bahá’í community of certain restraints; particularly are they concerned about the temporary necessity of review before publishing.
41. That the Faith has emerged from obscurity on a global scale is certain. This definitely marks a triumphant stage in the efforts of the community to register its existence on the minds of those who influence world events. Consider how, because of the sufferings and sacrifices of the friends in Iran, the concerns of the community in these respects have become a matter of discussion in the most influential parliaments and the most important international forums on earth. That this emergence frees the Cause to pursue objectives hitherto unreachable is also undeniable; but that it marks the attainment of the community’s anticipated maturity is entirely doubtful.
42. How could it have attained maturity, when we know from the clear guidance of the beloved Guardian that obscurity is but one of the many stages in the long evolution towards the Faith’s golden destiny? Has he not advised us all that the subsequent stage of oppression must precede the stages of its emancipation and its recognition as a world religion? Can the friends forget the oft-quoted warning of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá concerning the bitter opposition that will confront the Cause in various lands on all continents? In the case of the American believers, has Shoghi Effendi not alluded to this coming fury in his description of them as

How can the press become a powerful instrument for the unity of the human race?

the “invincible Army of Bahá’u’lláh, who in the West, and at one of its potential storm centers is to fight, in His name and for His sake, one of its fiercest and most glorious battles”?

How can Bahá’í authors and publishers assist the struggle of the infant Faith of God to thrive in the present age?

43. Those who are anxious to relax all restraint, who invoke freedom of speech as the rationale for publishing every and any thing concerning the Bahá’í community, who call for the immediate termination of the practice of review now that the Faith has emerged from obscurity—are they not aware of these sobering prospects? Widespread as has been the public revulsion to the current persecutions in Iran, let there be no mistake about the certainty of the opposition which must yet be confronted in many countries, including that which is the Cradle of the Administrative Order itself.
44. The Faith is as yet in its infancy. Despite its emergence from obscurity, even now the vast majority of the human race remains ignorant of its existence; moreover, the vast majority of its adherents are relatively new Bahá’ís. The change implied by this new stage in its evolution is that whereas heretofore this tender plant was protected in its obscurity from the attention of external elements, it has now become exposed. This exposure invites close observation, and that observation will eventually lead to opposition in various quarters. So, far from adopting a carefree attitude, the community must be conscious of the necessity to present a correct view of itself and an accurate understanding of its purpose to a largely skeptical public. A greater effort, a greater care must now be exercised to ensure its protection against the malice of the ignorant and the unwisdom of its friends.
45. Let us all remember that the struggle of the infant Faith of God to thrive is beset with the Let us all remember that the struggle of the infant Faith of God to thrive is beset with the turmoil of the present age. Like a tender shoot just barely discernible above ground, it must be nurtured to strength and maturity and buttressed as necessary against the blight of strong winds and deadly entanglements with weeds and thistles. If we to whose care this plant has been entrusted are insensitive to its tenderness, the great tree which is its certain potential will be hindered in its growth towards the spreading of its sheltering branches over all humankind. From this perspective we must all consider the latent danger to the Cause of ill-advised actions and exaggerated expectations; and particularly must we all be concerned about the effects of words, especially those put in print. It is here that Bahá’í authors and publishers need to be attentive and exert rigorous discipline upon themselves, as well as abide by the requirements of review at this early stage in the development of the Faith.
46. The right of the individual to self-expression has permeated the foregoing comments on the various freedoms, but, even so, a word more might be said about individual freedom. The fundamental attitude of the Faith in this respect is best demonstrated by statements of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá concerning the family. “The integrity of the family bond”, He says,” must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. . . . All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one, the honor of all.”

47. The individual's relation to society is explained by Shoghi Effendi in the statement that, "The Bahá'í conception of social life is essentially based on the principle of the subordination of the individual will to that of society. It neither suppresses the individual nor does it exalt him to the point of making him an anti social creature, a menace to society. As in everything, it follows the golden mean."
48. This relationship, so fundamental to the maintenance of civilized life, calls for the utmost degree of understanding and cooperation between society and the individual; and because the need to foster a climate in which the untold potentialities of the individual members of society can develop, this relationship must allow "free scope" for "individuality to assert itself" through modes of spontaneity, initiative and diversity that ensure the viability of society. Among the responsibilities assigned to Bahá'í institutions which have a direct bearing on these aspects of individual freedom and development is one which is thus described in the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice: "to safeguard the personal rights, freedom and initiative of individuals". A corollary is: "to give attention to the preservation of human honor".
49. How noteworthy that in the Order of Bahá'u'lláh, while the individual will is subordinated to that of society, the individual is not lost in the mass but becomes the focus of primary development, so that he may find his own place in the flow of progress, and society as a whole may benefit from the accumulated talents and abilities of the individuals composing it. Such an individual finds fulfillment of his potential not merely in satisfying his own wants but in realizing his completeness in being at one with humanity and with the divinely ordained purpose of creation.
50. The quality of freedom and of its expression—indeed, the very capacity to maintain freedom in a society—undoubtedly depends on the knowledge and training of individuals and on their ability to cope with the challenges of life with equanimity. As the beloved Master has written: "And the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men? No, by the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight."
51. The spirit of liberty which in recent decades has swept over the planet with such tempestuous force is a manifestation of the vibrancy of the Revelation brought by Bahá'u'lláh. His own words confirm it. "The Ancient Beauty", He wrote in a soul-stirring commentary on His sufferings, "hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner within this most mighty Stronghold that the whole world may attain unto true liberty."
52. Might it not be reasonably concluded, then that "true liberty" is His gift of love to the human race? Consider what Bahá'u'lláh has done: He revealed laws and principles to guide the free, He established an Order to channel the actions of the free, He proclaimed a Covenant to guarantee the unity of the free.

How do the Bahá'í writings describe the relationship between the individual and society?

How has Bahá'u'lláh brought true liberty to the world?

53. Thus, we hold to this ultimate perspective: Bahá'u'lláh came to set humanity free. His Revelation is, indeed, an invitation to freedom—freedom from want, freedom from war, freedom to unite, freedom to progress, freedom in peace and joy.
54. You, who live in a land where freedom is so highly prized, have not, then, to dispense with its fruits, but you are challenged and do have the obligation to uphold and vindicate the distinction between the license that limits your possibilities for genuine progress and the moderation that ensures the enjoyment of true liberty.

Individual Acts of Teaching, Service, and Study
Choose one or more of these extended activities to complete before the next session.

1. Reread the entire text of the 29 December 1988 letter to the Bahá'ís of the United States and meditate on its importance in assisting us to build the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Share your reflections in a 2-minute report at the next session.
2. Share the ideas in this letter with a young person in your community. Could you also share a quotation or story to attract their hearts?
3. Select and memorize passages from the document “Individual Rights and Freedoms,” such as:

“The tongue is a smouldering fire, and excess of speech a deadly poison.”

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in paragraph 23

“Material fire consumeth the body whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart and soul. The force of the former lasteth but for a time, whilst the effects of the latter endureth a century.”

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in paragraph 23

“Mankind in its entirety must firmly adhere to whatsoever hath been revealed and vouchsafed unto it. Then and only then will it attain unto true liberty.”

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in paragraph 13

4. Continue your leadership with devotional meetings, firesides, and children's classes. Involve seekers and new believers in this path of service.
5. Prepare to simply but eloquently tell one of the stories on pp. 119 or 120 for the next session.

Personal Teaching Plan

Enjoy listening to quiet music as you complete your Personal Teaching Plan.

Closing Devotions

Conclude your session with prayers for firmness in the Covenant and group singing.



BLAZON HIS NAME: A PERSONAL TEACHING PLAN

Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 137

What specific steps can I take this week...?



To take initiative; to seize opportunities; to form friendships; to interact personally with others; to build relationships?

How can I draw upon...?



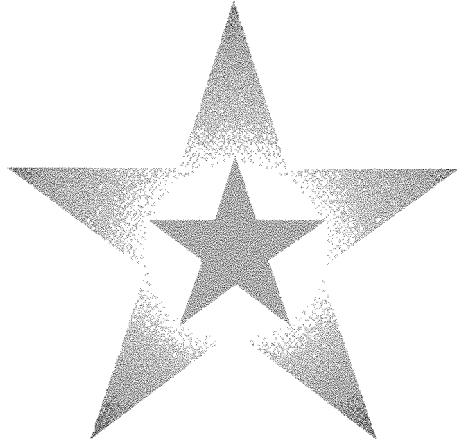
My love for Bahá'u'lláh; the power of the Covenant; the dynamics of prayer; the inspiration and education derived from regular reading and study of the Holy Texts?



The transformative forces that operate upon my soul as I strive to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles?



In addition, how can I attract the particular blessings promised by Bahá'u'lláh to the one who mentions His name?



*T*his is the Day that shall not be followed by night,
nor shall it be bounded by any praise,
would that ye might understand!

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

To Serve the Covenant

COURSE FIVE

Some
Fundamental
Verities of the
Bahá'í Faith

Session 10

A Day Not
Followed by Night

Opening Devotions

Welcome! Begin your study circle with music, prayers, and the following quotation:

The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation. Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 109

Objectives of the Session

In the group, read aloud the learning objectives for this session.

Knowledge

To know that every period of Bahá'í history has been disturbed by individuals who have chosen to disobey the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, and have actively tried to cause disunity and division among the Friends.

Wisdom

To understand the power of the Covenant to protect the Bahá'í community from the activities of Covenant-breakers.

Spiritual Perception

To realize that one's service to the Faith must be undertaken out of love for Bahá'u'lláh, not for the satisfaction of one's ego.

Eloquent Speech

To be able to explain the concept of the Covenant and the meaning of firmness in the Covenant.

Consultation About Individual Acts of Teaching and Service

- What are some highlights from our devotional meetings, firesides, and support for children's classes? What bounties, joys, and confirmations do we perceive from our participation in the Divine Plan? Are there challenges that we could address or overcome together? How can we build on our strengths?
- Who was able to share your reflections about the meaning of true liberty with another person? What engaged the interest or attracted the heart of that friend?

Consultation About Individual Study

- Who would like to share reflections following your renewed study of the Individual Rights and Freedoms letter of the Universal House of Justice?
- Who would like to share a memorized passage from that document?
- If you've prepared one of the stories for this session, we'll look forward to hearing it a little later in this session.

Activity *A Day Not Followed by Night*

1. In the whole group, read aloud the passages entitled "A Day Not Followed by Night" and discuss the following questions:
 - What is the meaning of a Covenant?
 - What is the purpose and significance of the Covenant?
 - What should be our response to the Covenant?
 - What is Covenant-breaking?
 - What should be our response to Covenant-breaking?
2. If additional questions arise, please refer them to your Auxiliary Board Member who will be happy to assist you to find answers to these important questions.
3. Enjoy listening to the stories of the Covenant, pp. 119-20, as told by one of the participants in your study circle. Then, briefly discuss:
 - What important distinctions do we see between the confusion of the devoted believer, Mr. MacNutt, and the malicious attacks of Covenant-breakers seeking to destroy the Faith itself?
 - How can these contrasting stories inspire our confidence in the power of the Covenant?
 - Why is it important for us to understand the power of the Covenant and to be able to accurately describe it to others?



A DAY NOT FOLLOWED BY NIGHT

1 This is the Day that shall not be followed by night, nor shall it be bounded by any praise, would that ye might understand!

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 33

2 The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation. Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 109

3 The first condition is firmness in the Covenant of God. For the power of the Covenant will protect the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh from the doubts of the people of error. It is the fortified fortress of the Cause of God and the firm pillar of the religion of God. Today no power can conserve the oneness of the Bahá'í world save the Covenant of God; otherwise differences like unto a most great tempest will encompass the Bahá'í world. It is evident that the axis of the oneness of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant and nothing else. Had the Covenant not come to pass, had it not been revealed from the Supreme Pen and had not the Book of the Covenant, like unto the ray of the Sun of Reality, illuminated the world, the forces of the Cause of God would have been utterly scattered and certain souls who were the prisoners of their own passions and lusts would have taken into their hands an axe, cutting the root of this Blessed Tree. Every person would have pushed forward his own desire and every individual aired his own opinion! Notwithstanding this great Covenant, a few negligent souls galloped with their chargers into the battlefield, thinking perchance they might be able to weaken the foundation of the Cause of God: but praise be to God all of them were afflicted with regret and loss, and ere long they shall see themselves in poignant despair. Therefore, in the beginning the believers must make their steps firm in the Covenant so that the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh may encircle them from all sides, the cohorts of the Supreme Concourse may become their supporters and helpers, and the exhortations and advices of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, like unto the pictures engraved on stone, may remain permanent and ineffaceable in the tablets of all hearts.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, pp. 51-52

4 "The lamp of the Covenant is the light of the world, and the words traced by the Pen of the Most High a limitless ocean." "The power of the Covenant is as the heat of the sun which quickeneth and promoteth the development of all created things on earth. The light of the Covenant, in like manner, is the educator of the minds, the spirits, the hearts and souls of men.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, quoted in *God Passes By*, pp. 238-239

5 O thou who art firm in the Covenant! Three consecutive letters have been received from thee. From their contents it became known that in [that city] the hearts are afflicted by the murky breaths of the Covenant-breakers and harmony hath decreased among the friends. Gracious God! A hundred times it hath been foretold that the violators are lying in ambush and by every means desire to cause dissension among the friends so that this dissension may end in violation of the Covenant. How is it that, notwithstanding this warning, the friends have neglected this explicit statement?

The point at issue is clear, direct and of utmost brevity. Either Bahá'u'lláh was wise, omniscient and aware of what would ensue, or was ignorant and in error. He entered, by His supreme pen, into such a firm Covenant and Testament with all the Bahá'ís, first with the Aghsán, the Afnán and His kindred, and commanded them to obey and turn toward Him. By His supreme pen He hath explicitly declared that the object of the following verse of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is the Most Great Branch:

'When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.' Its meaning briefly is this: that after My ascension it is incumbent upon the Aghsán, the Afnán and the kindred, and all the friends of God, to turn their faces to Him Who hath branched from the Ancient Root.'

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 213

6 Now some of the mischief-makers, with many stratagems, are seeking leadership, and in order to reach this position they instill doubts among the friends that they may cause differences, and that these differences may result in their drawing a party to themselves. But the friends of God must be awake and must know that the scattering of these doubts hath as its motive personal desires and the achievement of leadership.

Do not disrupt Bahá'í unity, and know that this unity cannot be maintained save through faith in the Covenant of God.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 214-215

7 [T]hou hast asked some questions; that why the blessed and spiritual souls, who are firm and steadfast, shun the company of degenerate persons [Covenant Breakers]. This is because, that just as the bodily diseases are contagious, likewise the spiritual diseases are also infectious. If a consumptive should associate with a thousand safe and healthy persons, the safety and health of these thousand persons would not affect the consumptive and would not cure him of his consumptions. But when this consumptive associates with those thousand souls, in a short time the disease of consumption will infect a number of those healthy persons. This is a clear and self-evident question.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *Star of the West*, Vol. XII, No. 14, p. 233

8 A Covenant in the religious sense is a binding agreement between God and man, whereby God requires of man certain behaviour in return for which He guarantees certain blessings, or whereby He gives man certain bounties in return for which He takes from those who accept them an undertaking to behave in a certain way.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. I, p. 111

9 There is, though, a great difference between this and previous Dispensations, for Bahá'u'lláh has written that this is 'the Day which shall not be followed by night' (*God Passes By*, p. 245). He has given us His Covenant which provides for a continuing centre of divine guidance in the world. The Bahá'í Faith has not lacked for ambitious men who would seize the reins of authority and distort the Faith for their own ends, but in every case they have broken themselves and dashed their hopes on the rock of the Covenant.

On behalf of THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 1, pp. 119-120

10 When a person declares his acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God he becomes a party to the Covenant and accepts the totality of His Revelation. If he then turns round and attacks Bahá'u'lláh or the Central Institution of the Faith he violates the Covenant. If this happens every effort is made to help that person to see the illogicality and error of his actions, but if he persists he must, in accordance with the instructions of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, be shunned as a Covenant-breaker.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, quoted in *The Power of the Covenant*, Part II, pp. 7-8

11 The Bahá'í Dispensation is described in the words of its Founder as "a day that shall not be followed by night". Through His Covenant, Bahá'u'lláh has provided an unailing source of divine guidance that will endure throughout the Dispensation. Authority to administer the affairs of the community and to ensure both the integrity of the Word of God and the promotion of the Faith's message is conferred upon the Administrative Order to which the Covenant has given birth. It is solely by the process of free election or by unsought appointment that the members of the institutions of this Order are assigned to their positions in it. There is no profession in either the teaching of the Faith or its administration for which one can train or to which a believer can properly aspire. Cautionary words of Bahá'u'lláh are particularly relevant:

Ever since the seeking of preference and distinction came into play, the world has been laid waste. It has become desolate....

Indeed, man is noble, inasmuch as each one is a repository of the sign of God. Nevertheless, to regard oneself as superior in knowledge, learning or virtue, or to exalt oneself or seek preference is a grievous transgression.

ON BEHALF OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, Letter, 10 Dec. 1992



Howard MacNutt's Victory

On November 18, at the Kinneys' house, the Master put Howard MacNutt through a severe ordeal, an inevitable ordeal.

Mr. MacNutt had been one of the few who, when I first came to New York, had taught that the Master was "like Peter"—just a glorified disciple. But for years he had never mentioned this point of view, and I thought he had gotten over it.

In Chicago there are some so-called Bahá'ís who are still connected with Kheiralla, the great Covenant-breaker, and last week the Master sent Mr. MacNutt to Chicago to see them and try to persuade them to give up Kheiralla; otherwise he was to cut them off from the faithful believers. He—Mr. MacNutt—wrote Zia Baghdadi that he had found these people "angels," and did nothing about the situation.

He had just returned to New York and was to meet the Master at the Kinneys' house that evening, November 18, for the first time since his unfruitful trip. I was in the second-floor hall with the Master and Carrie Kinney when he arrived. The Master took him to His own room. After some time they came out together into the hall.

An immense crowd had gathered by then on the first floor, which is open the whole length of the house.

I heard the Master say to Mr. MacNutt: "Go down and tell the people: 'I was like Saul. Now I am Paul, for I see.'"

"But I don't see," said poor Howard.

"Go down and say: 'I was like Saul.'"

I pulled his coat tail. "For God's sake," I said, "go down."

"Let me alone," he replied in his misery.

"GO DOWN," commanded the Master.

Mr. MacNutt turned and went down, and his back looked shrunken. The Master leaned over the stair rail, His head thrown far back, His eyes closed, in anguished prayer. I sat with Carrie on the top step, watching Him. This is like Christ in Gethsemane, I thought.

We could hear the voice of Howard MacNutt stumbling through his confession: "I was like Saul." But he seemed to be saying it by rote, dragging through it still unconvinced. Nevertheless when he came upstairs again, the Master deluged him with love.

By that time the Master was back in His room and as Mr. MacNutt appeared at the door, He ran forward to meet him. Our Lord was all in white that night and as He ran with His arms wide open He looked like a great flying bird. He enfolded Howard in a close embrace, kissed his face and neck, welcomed with ecstasy this broken man who, even though bewildered, had obeyed Him.

Excerpted from *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, pp. 369-372

The Destiny of Those Who Opposed the Covenant

[Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí, half-brother of 'Abdu'l-Bahá] who, from the moment the Divine Covenant was born until the end of his life, showed a hatred more unrelenting than that which animated the afore-mentioned adversaries of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who plotted more energetically than any one of them against Him, and afflicted his Father's Faith with a shame more grievous than any which its external enemies had inflicted upon it . . . was condemned to witness . . . the frustration of his evil designs, the evaporation of all his hopes, the exposition of his true motives and the complete extinction of his erstwhile honor and glory. His brother, Mírzá Díyá'u'lláh, died prematurely; Mírzá Aqá Jan, his dupe, followed that same brother, three years later, to the grave; and Mírzá Badí'u'lláh, his chief accomplice, betrayed his cause, published a signed denunciation of his evil acts, but rejoined him again, only to be alienated from him in consequence of the scandalous behavior of his own daughter. Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí's half-sister, Furúghíyyih, died of cancer, whilst her husband, Siyyid 'Alí, passed away from a heart attack before his sons could reach him, the eldest being subsequently stricken in the prime of life, by the same malady. Muhammad-Javád-i-Qazvíní, a notorious Covenant-breaker, perished miserably. Shu'á'u'lláh who, as witnessed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will, had counted on the murder of the Center of the Covenant, and who had been dispatched to the United States by his father to join forces with Ibráhím Khayru'lláh, returned crestfallen and empty-handed from his inglorious mission. Jamál-i-Burújirdí, Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí's ablest lieutenant in Persia, fell a prey to a fatal and loathsome disease; Siyyid Mihdíy-i-Dahají, who, betraying 'Abdu'l-Bahá, joined the Covenant-breakers, died in obscurity and poverty, followed by his wife and his two sons; Mírzá Husayn-'Alíy-i-Jahrumí, Mírzá Husayn-i-Shírázíy-i-Khurtúmí and Hájí Muhammad-Husayn-i-Káshání, who represented the arch-breaker of the Covenant in Persia, India and Egypt, failed utterly in their missions; whilst the greedy and conceited Ibráhím-i-Khayru'lláh, who had chosen to uphold the banner of his rebellion in America for no less than twenty years . . . met his death soon after he had uttered these denunciations. . . .

As to those who had openly espoused the cause of this arch-breaker of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, or who had secretly sympathized with him, whilst outwardly supporting 'Abdu'l-Bahá, some eventually repented and were forgiven; others became disillusioned and lost their faith entirely; a few apostatized, whilst the rest dwindled away, leaving him in the end, except for a handful of his relatives, alone and unsupported. Surviving 'Abdu'l-Bahá by almost twenty years, he who had so audaciously affirmed to His face that he had no assurance he might outlive Him, lived long enough to witness the utter bankruptcy of his cause, leading meanwhile a wretched existence within the walls of a Mansion that had once housed a crowd of his supporters; was denied by the civil authorities, as a result of the crisis he had after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing foolishly precipitated, the official custody of his Father's Tomb; was compelled, a few years later, to vacate that same Mansion, which, through his flagrant neglect, had fallen into a dilapidated condition; was stricken with paralysis which crippled half his body; lay bedridden in pain for months before he died; and was buried according to Muslim rites, in the immediate vicinity of a local Muslim shrine, his grave remaining until the present day devoid of even a tombstone—a pitiful reminder of the hollowness of the claims he had advanced, of the depths of infamy to which he had sunk, and of the severity of the retribution his acts had so richly merited.

Excerpted from **SHOGHI EFFENDI**, *God Passes By*, pp. 319-320

Memorization
Firmness in the Covenant

1. Working in pairs or small groups, select a passage, or a portion of a passage, or a prayer to memorize about the power of the Covenant.
2. Then, recite your passage or prayer in the whole group. Applaud all efforts!

Individual Acts of Service, Teaching, and Study
Choose one or more of these activities to complete before the next session.

1. Select a favorite story from the Core Curriculum storybook series, *The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh*, Volume One, Two, or Three. Practice reading or re-telling this story, then share it with a young person in your community either informally or at a devotional meeting or fireside. Strive to attract the heart of this young person through your own love. Be prepared to briefly describe your experience at the next session.
2. Memorize a prayer for firmness in the Covenant or the Tablet of Visitation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Recite it daily. How do you notice your heart responding?
3. Read Chapter 21, 22, or 23 in *God Passes By*. Prepare a 2-minute report to share at the next session.
4. Think of the Bahá'ís, seekers, and individuals you know and the power of Bahá'u'lláh to create one human family. Who could you visit to show this love? Could you share a favorite quotation or story about one of the Central Figures during your visit? Could you take a young person with you for this visit?
5. Persevere in your efforts to widen your circle of friends and foster warm and unified family life within your own family as an expression of your love for the Cause of God.
6. Persevere in your service through devotional meetings, firesides, and support for children's classes. Could you invite a seeker or new believer, youth or adult, to collaborate with you in this service?

Personal Teaching Plan

Enjoy listening to quiet music as you prayerfully complete your Personal Teaching Plan.

Closing Devotions

Conclude your session with singing and prayers for firmness in the Covenant.



BLAZON HIS NAME: A PERSONAL TEACHING PLAN

Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 137

What specific steps can I take this week...?



To take initiative; to seize opportunities; to form friendships; to interact personally with others; to build relationships?

How can I draw upon...?



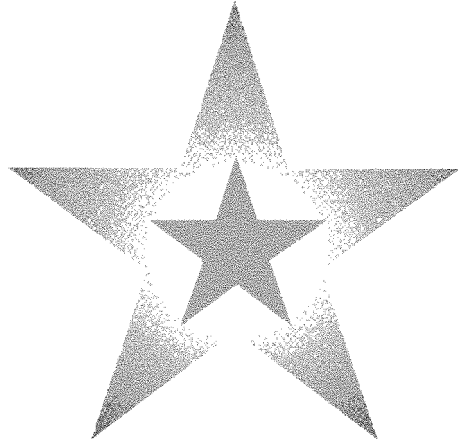
My love for Bahá'u'lláh; the power of the Covenant; the dynamics of prayer; the inspiration and education derived from regular reading and study of the Holy Texts?



The transformative forces that operate upon my soul as I strive to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles?



In addition, how can I attract the particular blessings promised by Bahá'u'lláh to the one who mentions His name?



*T*he companions of God are, in this day, the lump that
must leaven the peoples of the world.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

To Serve the Covenant

COURSE FIVE

Some
Fundamental
Verities of the
Bahá'í Faith

Session 11

To Serve the
Covenant

Opening Devotions

Welcome! Begin your study circle with music, singing, prayers for the triumph of the Cause, and the following quotation if desired:

The companions of God are, in this day, the lump that must leaven the peoples of the world. They must show forth such trustworthiness, such truthfulness and perseverance, such deeds and character that all mankind may profit by their example.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. I, p. 367

Objectives of the Session

In the group, read aloud the learning objectives for this session.

Knowledge

To identify the spiritual prerequisites for successful service to the Cause of God.

Wisdom

To understand the spiritual significance of virtuous conduct for the progress of the Cause.

Spiritual Perception

To perceive individual actions that will promote the progress of the Cause.

Eloquent Speech

To demonstrate firmness in the Covenant through constant effort to follow the laws and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Consultation About Individual Teaching and Service

- What progress are we seeing with our constant efforts to make new friends, strengthen existing friendships, and foster loving family life?
- Who was able to show the love of Bahá'u'lláh by visiting another person? How did your friend respond? Are there success stories that we'd like to share with each other about our efforts to develop the art of storytelling in our lives and in our communities?
- Who was able to share a story about Bahá'u'lláh with another person? What can we learn from that person's response?
- What progress are we seeing in our service to others through our devotional meetings, firesides, and children's classes?

- Who would like to recite a recently memorized prayer or quotation?
- Who would like to share a brief report from *God Passes By*?

Activity

Spiritual Prerequisites for Success in Teaching and Serving the Cause of God

As we know, Bahá'u'lláh states: “To assist Me is to teach My Cause.”⁶

To assure success in this service, Shoghi Effendi reminds us:

Of these spiritual prerequisites of success, which constitute the bedrock on which the security of all teaching plans, Temple projects, and financial schemes, must ultimately rest, the following stand out as preeminent and vital, which the members of the American Bahá'í community will do well to ponder. . . . These requirements are none other than a high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities, absolute chastity in their individual life, and complete freedom from prejudice in their dealing with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or color.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 21-22

Today we will explore these three prerequisites for success in teaching and other service.

1. Organize your study circle into three groups.
2. In your group, study the quotations under one of the following prerequisites for success in teaching and other service:
 - A High Sense of Moral Rectitude
 - A Chaste and Holy Life
 - Complete Freedom from Prejudice
3. After reading and discussing the quotations, create a brief and positive dramatic sketch showing how the application of this principle promotes the teaching work by attracting the human heart.
4. Share your dramatic sketch with the whole group. Applaud all efforts!
5. Briefly discuss: What new insights have we gained about the link between individual conduct and the teaching work? Could we think of examples from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s life that illustrate these principles or share these ideas with others in the form of a story?

⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 196



A HIGH SENSE OF MORAL RECTITUDE

1 The companions of God are, in this day, the lump that must leaven the peoples of the world. They must how forth such trustworthiness, such truthfulness and perseverance, such deeds and character that all mankind may profit by their example.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 23

2 He is the true servant of God, . . . who in this day, were he to pass through cities of silver and gold, would not deign to look upon them, and whose heart would remain pure and undefiled from whatever things can be seen in this world, be they its goods or its treasures.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 23

3 They who dwell within the Tabernacle of God, and are established upon the seats of everlasting glory, will refuse, though they be dying of hunger, to stretch their hands, and seize unlawfully the property of their neighbor, however vile and worthless he may be. The purpose of the one true God in manifesting Himself is to summon all mankind to truthfulness and sincerity, to piety and trustworthiness, to resignation and submissiveness to the will of God, to forbearance and kindness, to uprightness and wisdom. His object is to array every man with the mantle of a saintly character, and to adorn him with the ornament of holy and goodly deeds.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 24

4 The light of a good character surpasseth the light of the sun and the radiance thereof.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Tablets of Babá'u'lláh*, p. 24

5 Say: O people of God! That which can insure the victory of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, His hosts and helpers on earth, have been set down in the sacred Books and Scriptures, and are as clear and manifest as the sun. These hosts are such righteous deeds, such conduct and character, as are acceptable in His sight. Whoso ariseth, in this Day, to aid Our Cause, and summoneth to his assistance the hosts of a praiseworthy character and upright conduct, the influence from such an action will, most certainly, be diffused throughout the whole world.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 24

6 The betterment of the world . . . can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 24-25

7 Be fair to yourselves and to others that the evidences of justice may be revealed through your deeds among Our faithful servants.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 25

8 Let your eye be chaste, your hand faithful, your tongue truthful, and your heart enlightened.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 25

9 Let truthfulness and courtesy be our adorning. . . . Beware, O people of Bahá, lest ye walk in the ways of them whose words differ from their deeds. Strive that ye may be enabled to manifest to the peoples of the earth the signs of God, and to mirror forth His commandments. Let your acts be a guide unto all mankind, for the professions of most men, be they high or low, differ from their conduct. It is through your deeds that ye can distinguish yourselves from others.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 25

10 Truthfulness . . . is the foundation of all human virtues. Without truthfulness progress and success, in all the worlds of God, are impossible for any soul. When this holy attribute is established in man, all the divine qualities will also be acquired.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 26

11 Observe equity in your judgment, ye men of understanding heart! He that is unjust in his judgment is destitute of the characteristics that distinguish man's station.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 25

12 The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity amongst men.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Tablets of Babá'u'lláh*, pp. 66-67

13 Know thou, of a truth, . . . these great oppressions that have befallen the world are preparing it for the advent of the Most Great Justice.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 27

14 That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the sources of life to the world.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 28

15 Such a rectitude of conduct must manifest itself, with ever-increasing potency, in every verdict which the elected representatives of the Bahá'í community, in whatever capacity they may find themselves, may be called upon to pronounce. It must be constantly reflected in the business dealings of all its members, in their domestic lives, in all manner of employment, and in any service they may, in the future, render their government or people. It must be exemplified in the conduct of all Bahá'í electors, when exercising their sacred rights and functions. It must characterize the attitude of every loyal believer towards non-acceptance of political posts, non-identification with political parties, non-participation in political controversies, and non-membership in political organizations and ecclesiastical institutions. . . .

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 26



A CHASTE AND HOLY LIFE

1 Wash yourselves thoroughly, O people of Bahá, from the defilement of the world, and of all that pertaineth unto it. God Himself beareth Me witness! The things of the earth ill beseem you. Cast them away unto such as may desire them, and fasten your eyes upon this most holy and effulgent Vision.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 30-31

2 O ye the beloved of the one true God! Pass beyond the narrow retreats of your evil and corrupt desires, and advance into the vast immensity of the realm of God, and abide ye in the meads of sanctity and of detachment, that the fragrance of your deeds may lead the whole of mankind to the ocean of God's unfading glory.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 31

3 Eschew all manner of wickedness, for such things are forbidden unto you in the Book which none touch except such as God hath cleansed from every taint of guilt, and numbered with the purified.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 31

4 A race of men, . . . incomparable in character, shall be raised up which, with the feet of detachment, will tread under all who are in heaven and on earth, and will cast the sleeve of holiness over all that hath been created of water and clay.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 31

5 The civilization so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 31

6 He hath chosen out of the whole world the hearts of His servants and made them each a seat for the revelation of His glory. Wherefore sanctify them from every defilement, that the things for which they were created may be engraven upon them. This indeed is a token of God's bountiful favor.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 31-32

7 He is not to be numbered with the people of Bahá who followeth his mundane desires, or fixeth his heart on things of the earth. He is My true follower who, if he come to a valley of pure gold will pass straight through it aloof as a cloud, and will neither turn back, nor pause. Such a man is assuredly of Me. From his garment the Concourse on high can inhale the fragrance of sanctity. . . . And if he met the fairest and most comely of women, he would not feel his heart seduced by the least shadow of desire for her beauty. Such an one indeed is the creation of spotless chastity.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 32

8 They that follow their lusts and corrupt inclinations have erred and dissipated their efforts. They indeed are of the lost.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 32

9 Purity and chastity have been, and still are, the most great ornaments for the handmaidens of God. God is My Witness! The brightness of the light of chastity sheddeth its illumination upon worlds of the spirit, and its fragrance is wafted even unto the Most Exalted Paradise.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 32

10 The drinking of wine is, according to the text of the Most Holy Book, forbidden; for it is the cause of chronic diseases, weakeneth the nerves, and consumeth the mind.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 33

11 Become ye intoxicated with the wine of the love of God, and not with that which deadeneth your minds, O ye that adore Him! Verily, it hath been forbidden unto every believer, whether man or woman.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 33

12 Should a man wish to adorn himself with the ornaments of the earth, to wear its apparels, or partake of the benefits it can bestow, now harm can befall him, if he alloweth nothing whatever to intervene between him and God, for God hath ordained every good thing, whether created in the heavens or in the earth, for such of His servants as truly believe in Him. Eat ye, O people, of the good things which God hath allowed you, and deprive not yourselves from His wondrous bounties. Render thanks and praise unto Him, and be of them that are truly thankful.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 33

13 Such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations. It demands daily vigilance in the control of one's carnal desires and corrupt inclinations. It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures. It requires total abstinence from all alcoholic drinks, from opium, and from similar habit-forming drugs. It condemns the prostitution of art and of literature, the practices of nudism and of companionate marriage, infidelity in marital relationships, and all manner of promiscuity, of easy familiarity, and of sexual vices. It can tolerate no compromise with the theories, the standards, the habits, and the excesses of a decadent age. Nay rather it seeks to demonstrate, through the dynamic force of its example, the pernicious character of such theories, the falsity of such standards, the hollowness of such claims, the perversity of such habits, and the sacrilegious character of such excesses.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 30



COMPLETE FREEDOM FROM PREJUDICE

1 Close your eyes to racial differences, and welcome all with the light of oneness.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 37

2 We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations, . . . that all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 37

3 Bahá'u'lláh once compared the colored people to the black pupil of the eye surrounded by the white. In this black pupil is seen the reflection of that which is before it, and through it the light of the spirit shineth forth.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 37

4 God maketh no distinction between the white and the black. If the hearts are pure both are acceptable unto Him. God is no respecter of persons on account of either color or race. All colors are acceptable unto Him, be they white, black, or yellow. Inasmuch as all were created in the image of God, we must bring ourselves to realize that all embody divine possibilities.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 37

5 The diversity of the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord. If you meet those of a different race and color from yourself, do not mistrust them and withdraw yourself into your shell on conventionality, but rather be glad and show them kindness.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *Paris Talks*, p. 53

6 Strive earnestly . . . and put forth your greatest endeavor toward the accomplishment of this fellowship and the cementing of this bond of brotherhood between you. Such an attainment is not possible without will and effort on the part of each; from one, expressions of gratitude and appreciation; from the other, kindness and recognition of equality. Each one should endeavor to develop and assist the other toward mutual advancement. . . . Love and unity will be fostered between you, thereby bringing about the oneness of mankind. For the accomplishment of unity between the colored and white will be an assurance of the world's peace.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 39

7 This question of the union of the white and the black is very important . . . for if it is not realized, ere long great difficulties will arise, and harmful results will follow.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 39

8 If this matter remaineth without change, . . . enmity will be increased day by day, and the final result will be hardship and may end in bloodshed.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 39

9 Freedom from racial prejudice, in any of its forms, should, at such a time as this when an increasingly large section of the human race is falling a victim to its devastating ferocity, be adopted as the watchword of the entire body of the American believers, in whichever state they reside, in whatever circles they move, whatever their age, traditions, tastes, and habits. It should be consistently demonstrated in every phase of their activity and life, whether in the Bahá'í community or outside it, in public or in private, formally as well as informally, individually as well as in their official capacity as organized groups, committees and Assemblies. It should be deliberately cultivated through the various and everyday opportunities, no matter how insignificant, that present themselves, whether in their homes, their business offices, their schools and colleges, their social parties and recreation grounds, their Bahá'í meetings, conferences, conventions, summer schools and Assemblies.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 36

10 Let the white make a supreme effort in their resolve to contribute their share to the solution of this problem, to abandon once for all their usually inherent and at times subconscious sense of superiority, to correct their tendency towards revealing a patronizing attitude towards the members of the other race, to persuade them through their intimate, spontaneous and informal association with them of the genuineness of their friendship and the sincerity of their intentions, and to master their impatience of any lack of responsiveness on the part of a people who have received, for so long a period, such grievous and slow-healing wounds. Let the Negroes, through a corresponding effort on their part, show by every means in their power the warmth of their response, their readiness to forget the past, and their ability to wipe out every trace of suspicion that may still linger in their hearts and minds. Let neither think that such a problem can either easily or immediately be resolved. Let neither think that they can wait confidently for the solution of this problem until the initiative has been taken, and the favorable circumstances created, by agencies that stand outside the orbit of their Faith. Let neither think that anything short of genuine love, extreme patience, true humility, consummate tact, sound initiative, mature wisdom, and deliberate, persistent, and prayerful effort, can succeed in blotting out the stain which this patent evil has left on the fair name of their common country. Let them rather believe, and be firmly convinced, that on their mutual understanding, their amity, and sustained cooperation, must depend, more than on any other force or organization operating outside the circle of their Faith, the deflection of that dangerous course so greatly feared by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the materialization of the hopes He cherished for their joint contribution to the fulfillment of that country's glorious destiny.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 40-41

Memorization

1. In pairs, select one of the quotations studied in this session. Memorize it by:
 - Setting the words to music or a rhythm and then singing or chanting the passage until memorized.
 - Creating visual images to represent the words. Recite the passage, replacing words with images.
 - Create dignified movements or gestures as memory aids.
 - Write or recite the passage repeatedly until memorized.
2. Share your quotation in the whole group. Applaud all contributions!
3. Briefly discuss: What are some opportunities for sharing these words with others?

Individual Acts of Teaching, Study, and Service

Throughout this sequence of courses, we have focused our energy on the acts of service directly related to the growth of the Cause of God. As we have learned, sharing the healing message of Bahá'u'lláh with our friends, family members, neighbors, and co-workers, brings joy to their hearts and to our own selves. We have planned and hosted devotional meetings and firesides and we have offered our support to children's classes. We have taken steps to kindle our own hearts and to foster love and unity in our families. We have broadened our circle of friends and made new friends. We have followed the guidance of the Universal House of Justice in the unfolding Divine Plan:

Devotional meetings begin to flourish as consciousness of the spiritual dimension of human existence is raised among the believers in an area through institute courses. Children's classes, too, are a natural outgrowth of the training received early in the study of the main sequence. As both activities are made open to the wider community through a variety of well-conceived and imaginative means, they attract a growing number of seekers, who, more often than not, are eager to attend firesides and join study circles. Many go on subsequently to declare their faith in Bahá'u'lláh and, from the outset, view their role in the community as that of active participants in a dynamic process of growth. . . .

It is evident, then, that a systematic approach to training has created a way for Bahá'ís to reach out to the surrounding society, share Bahá'u'lláh's message with friends, family, neighbours and co-workers, and expose them to the richness of His teachings. This outward-looking orientation is one of the finest fruits of the grassroots learning taking place. The pattern of activity that is being established in clusters around the globe constitutes a proven means of accelerating expansion and consolidation. Yet this is only a beginning.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, 2003 Jan 17, Letter to the Bahá'ís of the World

In your study circle, discuss the following questions:

- How have we seen our knowledge, spiritual insights, and skills of service increase as a result of our engagement in this dynamic process of growth?
- How have we seen our capability increase to share the beautiful stories of God's new Day?
- What are some of the joys of service that we have experienced? What have been some surprises along the way?
- In what ways have we noticed the Blessed Beauty confirming our efforts? Through the confirming grace of God, how have we noticed our service and our teaching bringing joy to the hearts of others?
- What are some of the ways that we've been able to support each other in this process?
- How have we noticed the power of Bahá'u'lláh to strengthen our family lives as we strive to serve Him, little by little, day by day?
- When would we like to begin course six in the Fundamental Verities Sequence of Courses?

Personal Teaching Plan

As you complete your Personal Teaching Plan, please also consider the following questions:

- How could you continue to develop the art of storytelling as a path of service to God and to humanity?
- How could you sustain your acts of teaching and service while fostering family life and continuously seeking to expand your circle of friends?

Evaluation and Closing Devotions

Complete the evaluation form and share this important information with your facilitator, your Regional Training Institute, and the National Teacher Training Center.

Conclude Course Five with uplifting music, prayers, the beautiful quotations on the following pages, and one or two of your favorite stories about the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, or 'Abdu'l-Bahá.



CLOSING DEVOTIONS

1 Be not dismayed, O peoples of the world, when the day star of My beauty is set, and the heaven of My tabernacle is concealed from your eyes. Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Babá'u'lláh*, p. 137

2 Let not your hearts be perturbed, O people, when the glory of My Presence is withdrawn, and the ocean of My utterance is stilled. In My presence amongst you there is a wisdom, and in My absence there is yet another, inscrutable to all but God, the Incomparable, the All-Knowing. Verily, We behold you from Our realm of glory, and shall aid whosoever will arise for the triumph of Our Cause with the hosts of the Concourse on high and a company of Our favoured angels.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Babá'u'lláh*, p. 139

3 Dost thou believe thou hast the power to frustrate His Will, to hinder Him from executing His judgement, or to deter Him from exercising His sovereignty? Pretendest thou that aught in the heavens or in the earth can resist His Faith? No, by Him Who is the Eternal Truth! Nothing whatsoever in the whole of creation can thwart His Purpose. . . . Know thou, moreover, that He it is Who hath, by His own behest, created all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth. How can, then, the thing that hath been created at His bidding prevail against Him?

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Babá'u'lláh*, p. 220

4 Great is the blessedness of him who hath in this Day cast away the things current amongst men and hath clung unto that which is ordained by God, the Lord of Names and the Fashioner of all created things, He Who is come from the heaven of eternity through the power of the Most Great Name, invested with so invincible an authority that all the powers of the earth are unable to withstand Him. Unto this beareth witness the Mother Book, calling from the Most Sublime Station.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Tablets of Babá'u'lláh*, p. 48

5 This is the most great, the most joyful tidings imparted by the Pen of this Wronged One to mankind. Wherefore fear ye, O My well-beloved ones? Who is it that can dismay you? A touch of moisture sufficeth to dissolve the hardened clay out of which this perverse generation is moulded. The mere act of your gathering together is enough to scatter the forces of these vain and worthless people.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Tablets of Babá'u'lláh*, pp. 84-85

6 The source of courage and power is the promotion of the Word of God, and steadfastness in His Love.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 156

7 He, verily, will aid everyone that aideth Him, and will remember everyone that remembereth Him. To this beareth witness this Tablet that hath shed the splendor of the loving-kindness of your Lord, the All-Glorious, the All Compelling. . . .

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 76

8 Every single letter proceeding from Our mouth is endowed with such regenerative power as to enable it to bring into existence a new creation—a creation the magnitude of which is inscrutable to all save God. He verily hath knowledge of all things. . . .

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 80

9 It is in Our power, should We wish it, to enable a speck of floating dust to generate, in less than the twinkling of an eye, suns of infinite, of unimaginable splendour, to cause a dewdrop to develop into vast and numberless oceans, to infuse into every letter such a force as to empower it to unfold all the knowledge of past and future ages. . . .

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 80-81

10 We are possessed of such power which, if brought to light, will transmute the most deadly of poisons into a panacea of unailing efficacy.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 81

11 Say: Beware, O people of Bahá, lest the strong ones of the earth rob you of your strength, or they who rule the world fill you with fear. Put your trust in God, and commit your affairs to His keeping. He, verily, will, through the power of truth, render you victorious, and He, verily, is powerful to do what He willeth, and in His grasp are the reins of omnipotent might. . . .

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 82

12 By the righteousness of God, should a man, all alone, arise in the name of Bahá and put on the armor of His love, him will the Almighty cause to be victorious, though the forces of earth and heaven be arrayed against him. . . .

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, Quoted in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 106

13 By God besides Whom is none other God! Should any one arise for the triumph of our Cause, him will God render victorious though tens of thousands of enemies be leagued against him. And if his love for Me wax stronger, God will establish his ascendancy over all the powers of earth and heaven. Thus have We breathed the spirit of power into all regions.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, quoted in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 106



BLAZON HIS NAME: A PERSONAL TEACHING PLAN

Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 137

What specific steps can I take this week...?



To take initiative; to seize opportunities; to form friendships; to interact personally with others; to build relationships?

How can I draw upon...?



My love for Bahá'u'lláh; the power of the Covenant; the dynamics of prayer; the inspiration and education derived from regular reading and study of the Holy Texts?



The transformative forces that operate upon my soul as I strive to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles?



In addition, how can I attract the particular blessings promised by Bahá'u'lláh to the one who mentions His name?

Fundamental Verities Course—Course Five To Serve the Covenant

Location: _____ Facilitator(s): _____ Ending Date: _____

Session(s) Attended:

- | | | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> All | <input type="checkbox"/> Session 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Session 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> Session 7 | <input type="checkbox"/> Session 10 |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Session 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Session 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> Session 8 | <input type="checkbox"/> Session 11 |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Session 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> Session 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> Session 9 | |

Please candidly share your feelings and reactions. This information will assist in improving this course.

What sessions were most informative and why?

What type of activity did you most enjoy and why?

What session was the least informative and why?

What activity did you least enjoy and why?

What type of extended after-class activity did you most enjoy and why?

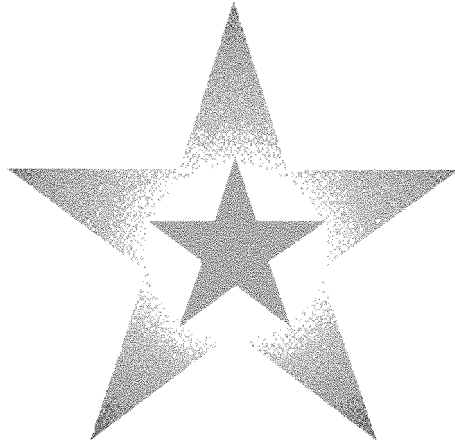
(Check one of the boxes for each question.)

	Exceptional	Very Good	Fair	Poor
The presenters were organized and clear in their presentation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The purpose of each session was made clear.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Materials supported the sessions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How would you rate the after-class extended activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please take time to expand on any of the items listed above, particularly if any are rated fair or poor so that we might improve the course. Also, please let us know what you would change or add to this course.

Please return this form to:

National Teacher Training Center, Louhelen Bahá'í School, 3208 S. State Rd., Davison, MI 48423.



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Suggestions for Facilitators, Lists of Materials	p. 148

The Seeker's Quest

COURSE THREE

Some
Fundamental
Verities of the
Bahá'í Faith

Appendix

Facilitation Guidelines

If you would like to arrange a course, *The Art of Facilitation*, to train friends to effectively serve as facilitators in the Fundamental Verities Sequence of Courses, please contact your Regional Training Institute or the National Teacher Training Center by phone at 810-653-5033, or email: NTTC@usbnc.org. Courses may be offered at the NTTC and at other locations.

Some specific guidelines which may be helpful in facilitating these workshops:

- Use the Master as our example. Constantly bring to mind the life and words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as an example of how to respond in a loving manner to the friends. Personally study and reflect upon some of the writings and prayers of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá before you begin so that you will have His image clearly in mind when offering the workshops.
- Use the Sacred Texts as the basis for all consultation. When answering questions, refer to the answers that can be found in the Writings. Inspire confidence in the answers and advice in the Bahá’í writings that we can then translate into action in our daily lives.
- Be sensitive to the varying levels of literacy. If the amount of reading or number of quotations suggested in the workshops becomes a burden to the friends, select 2 or 3 quotations to study rather than an entire page. If the friends are not comfortable reading in English, either memorize (as a group) one quotation for each activity that can become the basis for that activity, or team readers with non-readers for group activities.
- Keep your own comments brief. Creating an atmosphere where all participants feel free to share their views and concerns necessitates that the facilitators keep their presentations and answers brief.
- Practice patience and sensitivity. The workshop topics can engender deep emotions. All participants come with something unique to offer and assisting them to realize that their contributions are important is part of making people feel welcome.
- Be happy! An uplifting environment makes learning easier. You may find your own Faith renewed as you joyfully assist the friends to understand the magnificence of this New Day and the privilege of recognizing Bahá’u’lláh as that Manifestation of God awaited by all the peoples of the earth.

Devotions and Spiritual Atmosphere

The environment sets the tone for study:

- Carefully prepare the learning environment so that it reflects the principles of hospitality, beauty, cleanliness, dignity and refinement.
- Arrive early and say prayers in the room.
- Lovingly greet each of the friends as they arrive.
- Consider displaying a portrait of the Master, photographs of Holy Places, and framed quotations.
- Consider playing music as the friends enter.
- Plan the opening devotions for a reverent, uplifting beginning to each session of this course sequence on fundamental verities of the Bahá'í Faith.
- Include prayers for teaching, and sung or recorded music relevant to the week's topic as part of the opening devotions.
- Consider playing quiet background music during individual and group work.

Consultation About Individual Acts of Teaching, Study, and Service

Allow time for this important consultation period. It is very important for the friends to receive the support of the group for their efforts to build friendships and to teach the Faith. This time must be kept short enough that the material for each session can be studied in the group and long enough to reinforce the teaching and service engendered by the course.

Please also make every effort to create a warm and encouraging atmosphere in which the group as a whole generates enthusiasm for sharing the Message of God, constantly and consciously learns from its experiences, and cultivates an attitude of humble fellowship with the souls it is striving to teach.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

Excerpts from Bahá'í International Community, Statement on Bahá'u'lláh, 1992

Birth of a New Revelation

Bahá'u'lláh's mission began in a subterranean dungeon in Teheran in August 1852. Born into a noble family that could trace its ancestry back to the great dynasties of Persia's imperial past, He declined the ministerial career open to Him in government, and chose instead to devote His energies to a range of philanthropies which had, by the early 1840s, earned Him widespread renown as "Father of the Poor." This privileged existence swiftly eroded after 1844, when Bahá'u'lláh became one of the leading advocates of a movement that was to change the course of His country's history. . . .

Because of His prominence in the defense of the Báb's cause, Bahá'u'lláh was arrested and brought, in chains and on foot, to Teheran. Protected in some measure by an impressive personal reputation and the social position of His family, as well as by protests which the Bábí pogroms had evoked from Western embassies, He was not sentenced to death, as influential figures at the royal court were urging. Instead, He was cast into the notorious Sáyáh-Chál, the "Black Pit", a deep, vermin-infested dungeon which had been created in one of the city's abandoned reservoirs. . . . Around Bahá'u'lláh's neck was clamped a heavy chain, so notorious in penal circles as to have been given its own name. When He did not quickly perish, as had been expected, an attempt was made to poison Him. The marks of the chain were to remain on His body for the rest of His life.

Toward the end of His life, Bahá'u'lláh's writings on His early experiences included a brief description of the conditions in the Sáyáh-Chál.

We were consigned for four months to a place foul beyond comparison. . . . The dungeon was wrapped in thick darkness, and Our fellow-prisoners numbered nearly a hundred and fifty souls: thieves, assassins and highwaymen. Though crowded, it had no other outlet than the passage by which We entered. No pen can depict that place, nor any tongue describe its loathsome smell. Most of these men had neither clothes nor bedding to lie on. God alone knoweth what befell Us in that most foul-smelling and gloomy place!

Each day the guards would descend the three steep flights of stairs of the pit, seize one or more of the prisoners, and drag them out to be executed. In the streets of Teheran, Western observers were appalled by scenes of Bábí victims blown from cannon mouths, hacked to death by axes and swords, and led to their deaths with burning candles inserted into open wounds in their bodies. It was in these circumstances, and faced with the prospect of His own imminent death, that Bahá'u'lláh received the first intimation of His mission:

One night, in a dream, these exalted words were heard on every side: "Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy Pen. Grieve Thou not for that which hath befallen Thee, neither be Thou afraid, for Thou art in safety. Erelong will God raise up the treasures of the earth—men who will aid Thee through Thyself and through Thy name, wherewith God hath revived the hearts of such as have recognized Him."

Exile

Eventually, still without trial or recourse, Bahá'u'lláh was released from prison and immediately banished from His native land, His wealth and properties arbitrarily confiscated. . . . This expulsion was the beginning of forty years of exile, imprisonment, and bitter persecution.

In the years which immediately followed His departure from Persia, Bahá'u'lláh gave priority to the needs of the Bábí community which had gathered in Baghdad, a task which had devolved on Him as the only effective Bábí leader to have survived the massacres. The death of the Báb and the almost simultaneous loss of most of the young faith's teachers and guides had left the body of the believers scattered and demoralized. When His efforts to rally those who had fled to Iraq aroused jealousy and dissension, He followed the path that had been taken by all of the Messengers of God gone before Him, and withdrew to the wilderness, choosing for the purpose the mountain region of Kurdistan. His withdrawal, as He later said, had "contemplated no return." Its reason "was to avoid becoming a subject of discord among the faithful, a source of disturbance unto Our companions." Although the two years spent in Kurdistan were a period of intense privation and physical hardship, Bahá'u'lláh describes them as a time of profound happiness during which He reflected deeply on the message entrusted to Him: "Alone, We communed with Our spirit, oblivious of the world and all that is therein."

Only with great reluctance, believing it His responsibility to the cause of the Báb, did He eventually accede to urgent messages from the remnant of the desperate group of exiles in Baghdad who had discovered His whereabouts and appealed to Him to return and assume the leadership of their community. . . .

To the dismay of the Persian consular authorities who had believed the Bábí "episode" to have run its course, the community of exiles gradually became a respected and influential element in Iraq's provincial capital and the neighboring towns. Since several of the most important shrines of Shi'ih Islam were located in the area, a steady stream of Persian pilgrims was also exposed, under the most favorable circumstances, to the renewal of Bábí influence. Among dignitaries who called on Bahá'u'lláh in the simple house He occupied were princes of the royal family. So enchanted by the experience was one of them that he conceived the somewhat naive idea that by erecting a duplicate of the building in the gardens of his own estate, he might recapture something of the atmosphere of spiritual purity and detachment he had briefly encountered. Another, more deeply moved by the experience of his visit, expressed to friends the feeling that "were all the sorrows of the world to be crowded into my heart they would, I feel, all vanish, when in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. It is as if I had entered Paradise. . . ."

The Declaration in the Ridván Garden

By 1863, Bahá'u'lláh concluded that the time had come to begin acquainting some of those around Him with the mission which had been entrusted to Him in the darkness of the Sýáh-Chál.

This decision coincided with a new stage in the campaign of opposition to His work, which had been relentlessly pursued by the Shi'ih Muslim clergy and representatives of the Persian government. Fearing that the acclaim which Bahá'u'lláh was beginning to

enjoy among influential Persian visitors to Iraq would re-ignite popular enthusiasm in Persia, the Shah's government pressed the Ottoman authorities to remove Him far from the borders and into the interior of the empire. Eventually, the Turkish government acceded to these pressures and invited the exile, as its guest, to make His residence in the capital, Constantinople. Despite the courteous terms in which the message was couched, the intention was clearly to require compliance.

By this time, the devotion of the little company of exiles had come to focus on Bahá'u'lláh's person as well as on His exposition of the Báb's teachings. A growing number of them had become convinced that He was speaking not only as the Báb's advocate, but on behalf of the far greater cause which the latter had declared to be imminent. These beliefs became a certainty in late April 1863 when Bahá'u'lláh, on the eve of His departure for Constantinople, called together individuals among His companions, in a garden to which was later given the name Ridván ("Paradise"), and confided the central fact of His mission. Over the next four years, although no open announcement was considered timely, the hearers gradually shared with trusted friends the news that the Báb's promises had been fulfilled and that the "Day of God" had dawned.

The precise circumstances surrounding this private communication are, in the words of the Bahá'í authority most intimately familiar with the records of the period, "shrouded in an obscurity which future historians will find it difficult to penetrate." The nature of the declaration may be appreciated in various references which Bahá'u'lláh was to make to His mission in many of His subsequent writings:

The purpose underlying all creation is the revelation of this most sublime, this most holy Day, the Day known as the Day of God, in His Books and Scriptures—the Day which all the Prophets, and the Chosen Ones, and the holy ones, have wished to witness.

The conditions surrounding Bahá'u'lláh's departure from Baghdad provided a dramatic demonstration of the potency of these principles. . . . By May 3, 1863, when He rode out of Baghdad, accompanied by His family and those of His companions and servants who had been chosen to accompany Him to Constantinople, Bahá'u'lláh had become an immensely popular and cherished figure. In the days immediately preceding the leave-taking a stream of notables, including the Governor of the province himself, came to the garden where He had temporarily taken up residence, many of them from great distances, in order to pay their respects. Eyewitnesses to the departure have described in moving terms the acclaim that greeted Him, the tears of many of the onlookers, and the concern of the Ottoman authorities and civil officials to do their visitor honor.

Constantinople and Adrianople

Soon after the exiles' arrival in Constantinople, it became apparent that the honors showered upon Bahá'u'lláh during His journey from Baghdad had represented only a brief interlude. The Ottoman authorities' decision to move the "Bábí" leader and His companions to the capital of the empire rather than to some remote province deepened the alarm among the representatives of the Persian government. Fearing that the developments in Baghdad would be repeated, and might attract this time not only the sympathy but perhaps even the allegiance of influential figures in the Turkish

government, the Persian ambassador pressed insistently for the dispatch of the exiles to some more distant part of the empire. His argument was that the spread of a new religious message in the capital could produce political as well as religious repercussions.

Initially, the Ottoman government strongly resisted. The chief minister, 'Alí Páshá, had indicated to Western diplomats his belief that Bahá'u'lláh was "a man of great distinction, exemplary conduct, great moderation, and a most dignified figure." His teachings were, in the minister's opinion, "worthy of high esteem" because they counteracted the religious animosities dividing the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim subjects of the empire.

Gradually, however, a degree of resentment and suspicion developed. . . .

Under pressure of these influences, the Ottoman authorities finally took the decision to transfer Bahá'u'lláh and His family to the provincial city of Adrianople. The move was made hastily, in the depth of an extremely severe winter. Housed there in inadequate buildings, lacking suitable clothing and other provisions, the exiles endured a year of great suffering. It was clear that, though charged with no crime and given no opportunity to defend themselves, they had arbitrarily been made state prisoners. . . .

Given the earlier events in Baghdad, it seems surprising that the Ottoman authorities did not anticipate what would result from the establishment of Bahá'u'lláh in another major provincial capital. Within a year of His arrival in Adrianople, their prisoner had attracted first the interest and then the fervent admiration of figures prominent in both the intellectual and administrative life of the region. To the dismay of the Persian consular representatives, two of the most devoted of these admirers were Khurshíd Páshá, the Governor of the province, and the Shaykh'l-Islám, the leading Sunni religious dignitary. In the eyes of His hosts and the public generally, the exile was a moral philosopher and saint the validity of whose teachings was reflected not only in the example of His own life but in the changes they effected among the flood of Persian pilgrims who flocked to this remote center of the Ottoman Empire in order to visit Him.

These unanticipated developments convinced the Persian ambassador and his colleagues that it was only a matter of time before the Bahá'í movement, which was continuing to spread in Persia, would have established itself as a major influence in Persia's neighboring and rival empire. . . .

When the Turkish foreign minister, Fu'ád Páshá, returned from a visit to Adrianople, his astonished reports of the reputation which Bahá'u'lláh had come to enjoy throughout the region appeared to lend credibility to the Persian embassy's suggestions. In this climate of opinion, the government abruptly decided to subject its guest to strict confinement. Without warning, early one day, Bahá'u'lláh's house was surrounded by soldiers, and the exiles were ordered to prepare for departure to an unknown destination.

The Holy Land

The place chosen for this final banishment was the grim fortress-town of 'Akká (Acre) on the coast of the Holy Land. Notorious throughout the empire for the foulness of its climate and the prevalence of many diseases, 'Akká was a penal colony used by the

Ottoman State for the incarceration of dangerous criminals who could be expected not to survive too long their imprisonment there. Arriving in August 1868, Bahá'u'lláh, the members of His family, and a company of His followers who had been exiled with Him were to experience two years of suffering and abuse within the fortress itself, and then be confined under house arrest to a nearby building owned by a local merchant. For a long time the exiles were shunned by the superstitious local populace who had been warned in public sermons against “the God of the Persians,” who was depicted as an enemy of public order and the purveyor of blasphemous and immoral ideas. Several members of the small group of exiles died of the privations and other conditions to which they were subjected.

It seems, in retrospect, the keenest irony that the selection of the Holy Land as the place of Bahá'u'lláh's forced confinement should have been the result of pressure from ecclesiastical and civil enemies whose aim was to extinguish His religious influence. Palestine, revered by three of the great monotheistic religions as the point where the worlds of God and of man intersect, held then, as it had for thousands of years, a unique place in human expectation. Only a few weeks before Bahá'u'lláh's arrival, the main leadership of the German Protestant Templar movement sailed from Europe to establish at the foot of Mount Carmel a colony that would welcome Christ, whose advent they believed to be imminent. Over the lintels of several of the small houses they erected, facing across the bay to Bahá'u'lláh's prison at 'Akká, can still be seen such carved inscriptions as “Der Herr ist nahe” (“The Lord is near”).

Final Years

In June 1877, Bahá'u'lláh at last emerged from the strict confinement of the prison-city of 'Akká, and moved with His family to “Mazra'ih”, a small estate a few miles north of the city. As had been predicted in His statement to the Turkish government, Sultán 'Abdu'l-'Aziz had been overthrown and assassinated in a palace coup, and gusts from the winds of political change sweeping the world were beginning to invade even the shuttered precincts of the Ottoman imperial system. After a brief two-year stay at Mazra'ih, Bahá'u'lláh moved to “Bahjí”, a large mansion surrounded by gardens, which His son 'Abdu'l-Bahá had rented for Him and the members of His extended family. The remaining twelve years of His life were devoted to His writings on a wide range of spiritual and social issues, and to receiving a stream of Bahá'í pilgrims who made their way, with great difficulty, from Persia and other lands.

Bahá'u'lláh died at Bahjí on May 29, 1892, in His 75th year. At the time of His passing, the cause entrusted to Him forty years earlier in the darkness of Teheran's Black Pit was poised to break free of the Islamic lands where it had taken shape, and to establish itself first across America and Europe and then throughout the world. In doing so, it would itself become a vindication of the promise of the new Covenant between God and humankind. For alone of all the world's independent religions, the Bahá'í Faith and its community of believers were to pass successfully through the critical first century of their existence with their unity firmly intact, undamaged by the age-old blight of schism and faction. Their experience offers compelling evidence for Bahá'u'lláh's assurance that the human race, in all its diversity, can learn to live and work as one people, in a common global homeland.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

Session 1

THE STORY OF THE COVENANT

Suggested Schedule of Activities

Devotions and Welcome	10 minutes
Objectives	5 minutes
The Ancient Covenant	15 minutes
God's Promises Fulfilled	20 minutes
The Art of Storytelling	25 minutes
Individual Acts of Teaching, Service, and Study	10 minutes
Personal Teaching Plan	5 minutes
Closing devotions	5 minutes

Materials Needed

- Prayer books
- Music, recorded or sung
- Prism or Crystal, if possible
- Slides, photographs, artistic images or children's drawings of a rainbow
- Slides or a video of nature, holy places from around the world, or the Bahá'í gardens and Shrines in the Holy Land, if available

Suggestions for Music

- "Arabic Hidden Word #67," "Arabic Hidden Word #41," *Selections from the Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, Remembrance Ensemble
- *The Messengers*, Jack Lenz and Ron Allen
- "Song of the Prophets," *We Are Bahá'ís*, Jack Lenz
- "The Spirit's the Same," *Sing This Melody*
- "See the Light," "Glad Tidings," "Expectation," *Music of the Bahá'í World Congress*, Live Unity
- "Bahá'u'lláh's Getting Us Ready for that Great Day," "East of Ginger Trees," *Lift Up Your Voices and Sing, Vol. 2*, Tom Price

Session 2

THE LIFE OF THE BÁB

Suggested Schedule of Activities

Devotions	5 minutes
Objectives	5 minutes
Consultation on Individual Acts of Teaching. . . .	10 minutes
The Báb: Inaugurator of the Bábí Dispensation. . . .	20 minutes
The Art of Storytelling	10 minutes
Stories of the Báb	40 minutes
Individual Acts of Teaching, Service, and Study	5 minutes
Personal Teaching Plan	5 minutes
Closing devotions	5 minutes

Materials Needed

- Prayer books
- Music, recorded or sung
- Decorations such as tablecloths, photographs of the Shrine of the Báb, candles, etc.

Suggestions for Music

- *The Messengers*, Jack Lenz and Ron Allen
- “Song of the Prophets,” *We Are Bahá’ís*, Jack Lenz
- “The Spirit’s the Same,” *Sing This Melody*

Session 3

THE LIFE OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

Suggested Schedule of Activities

Devotions	5 minutes
Objectives	5 minutes
Consultation About Teaching, Service, and Study	10 minutes
The Station of Bahá'u'lláh	15 minutes
Celebration of the Life of Bahá'u'lláh	60 minutes
Individual Acts of Teaching, Service, and Study	5 minutes
Personal Teaching Plan	5 minutes
Closing devotions	5 minutes

Materials Needed

- Prayer books
- Music, recorded or sung
- Book resources listed on page 38

Suggestions for Music

- “Have You Heard of Bahá'u'lláh,” *Lift Up Your Voices and Sing, Vol. 1*, Tom Price
- “Bahá'u'lláh's Getting Us Ready for that Great Day,” “East of Ginger Trees,” *Lift Up Your Voices and Sing, Vol. 2*, Tom Price
- “See the Light,” “Glad Tidings,” Music from the Bahá'í World Congress
- “The Kingdom of Glory,” “Glad Tidings,” *Desire of the World*, Narges
- “We Have Come to Sing Praises,” “The Spirit of the Lord is Everywhere,” *We Have Come to Sing Praises*, Bahá'í Gospel Choir
- “We Have Come to Sing Praises,” *Fruits of the Spirit*, Louhelen Bahá'í School

Session 4

THE COVENANT OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

Suggested Schedule of Activities

Devotions	10 minutes
Objectives	5 minutes
Consultation About Teaching, Service, and Study	10 minutes
The Covenant	20 minutes
The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and The Kitáb-i-Ahd	40 minutes
Individual Acts of Teaching, Service, and Study	5 minutes
Personal Teaching Plan	5 minutes
Closing devotions	10 minutes

Materials Needed

- Prayer books
- Music, recorded or sung
- *The Central Figures: Bahá'u'lláh*, volume 2, if available

Suggestions for Music

- “Have You Heard of Bahá'u'lláh,” *Lift Up Your Voices and Sing, Vol. 1*, Tom Price
- “Bahá'u'lláh's Getting Us Ready for that Great Day,” “East of Ginger Trees,” *Lift Up Your Voices and Sing, Vol. 2*, Tom Price
- “See the Light,” “Glad Tidings,” Music from the Bahá'í World Congress

Session 5

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ: THE CENTER OF THE COVENANT

Suggested Schedule of Activities

Devotions	5 minutes
Objectives	5 minutes
Consultation About Teaching, Service, and Study	10 minutes
The Most Mighty Branch	50 minutes
Memorization	10 minutes
Individual Acts of Teaching, Service, and Study	5 minutes
Personal Teaching Plan	5 minutes
Closing devotions	5 minutes

Materials Needed

- Prayer books
- Music, recorded or sung
- A small branch and sturdy vase, pot, or other means to display it, if possible

Suggestions for Music

- “Dastam Begir, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,” “Tribute to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,” and “Look at Me, Follow Me,” *Music of the Bahá’í World Congress*
- “Make Me More Like You,” *Loving Hands* audiotape
- “I Am Thy Servant,” “O Thou Who Art Turning Thy Face,” *Melodies from the Sacred Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, Nancy Ward
- “Tablet of Visitation,” *Wings of Prayer* (audiotape), Mary Davis

Session 6

THE COVENANT: AXIS OF THE ONENESS OF HUMANITY

Suggested Schedule of Activities

Devotions	10 minutes
Objectives	5 minutes
Consultation About Teaching, Service, and Study	10 minutes
The Covenant and the Principle of Oneness	60 minutes
Individual Acts of Teaching, Service, and Study	5 minutes
Personal Teaching Plan	5 minutes
Closing devotions	5 minutes
Video Presentation (optional)	10-20 minutes

Materials Needed

- Prayer books
- Music, recorded or sung
- Portrait of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
- Flowers or candle to place near the Master’s portrait (optional)
- World Congress video, Day 3, “Victories of the Covenant,” if available

Suggestions for Music

- “See the Light,” “Glad Tidings,” Music from the Bahá’í World Congress
- “The Kingdom of Glory,” “Glad Tidings,” *Desire of the World*, Narges
- “God Is One,” “The Prince of Peace,” *Lift Up Your Voices and Sing*, vol. 1, various artists
- “We Will Have One World,” “World Citizens,” *Lift Up Your Voices and Sing*, vol. 2, various artists
- “We Are One,” “One Planet, One People, Please,” *Lift Up Your Voices and Sing*, vol. 3, various artists
- “Love All the World,” “Waves of One Sea,” *Love All the World*, Tim Urbonya
- “We’re Building the Kingdom of God,” *To the Glory of God*, Eric Dozier
- “In this Day Bahá’u’lláh,” *We Have Come to Sing Praises*, Bahá’í Gospel Choir

Session 7

SHOGHI EFFENDI: GUARDIAN OF THE CAUSE OF GOD

Suggested Schedule of Activities

Devotions	10 minutes
Objectives	5 minutes
Consultation about Teaching, Service, and Study	10 minutes
The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá	35 minutes
The Will and Testament and the Appointment of Shoghi Effendi	30 minutes
Individual Acts of Teaching, Service, and Study	5 minutes
Personal Teaching Plan	5 minutes
Closing devotions	5 minutes

Materials Needed

- Prayer books
- Music, recorded or sung

Suggestions for Music

- “Let It Be this Generation,” “Unity House,” “New World Comin’,” *Encore*, Jack Lenz
- “A Sacrifice to Thee,” *Sacrifice to Thee*, Matthew Levine
- “Shoghi Effendi,” *Lote Tree*

Session 8

THE COVENANT AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Suggested Schedule of Activities

Devotions	10 minutes
Objectives	5 minutes
Consultation on Teaching, Service, and Study	10 minutes
The Covenant and the Individual	40 minutes
The Covenant and Me	20 minutes
Individual Acts of Teaching, Service, and Study	5 minutes
Personal Teaching Plan	5 minutes
Closing devotions	5 minutes

Materials Needed

- Prayer books
- Music, recorded or sung
- Poster paper, photographs of people and nature cut from magazines, other art supplies
- Assorted items to represent Covenant metaphors, such as cords, flashlight, building blocks, sea shells, toy boat, etc., if available

Suggestions for Music

- “Let It Be this Generation,” “Unity House,” *Encore*, Jack Lenz with various artists
- “This is Faith,” *This is Faith*, Lucy Shropshire
- “We’re Building the Kingdom of God,” *To the Glory of God*, Eric Dozier

Session 9

INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Suggested Schedule of Activities

Devotions	10 minutes
Objectives	5 minutes
Consultation About Teaching, Service, and Study	10 minutes
Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh	70 minutes
Individual Acts of Teaching, Service, and Study	5 minutes
Personal Teaching Plan	5 minutes
Closing devotions	5 minutes

Materials Needed

- Prayer books
- Music, recorded or sung

Suggestions for Music

- “Hollow Reed,” *Voices from the Black Men’s Gathering*, various artists
- “Look at Me, Follow Me,” *Lift Up Your Voices and Sing*, Vol. 1, various artists

Session 10

A DAY NOT FOLLOWED BY NIGHT

Suggested Schedule of Activities

Devotions	10 minutes
Objectives	5 minutes
Consultation About Teaching, Service, and Study	10 minutes
A Day Not Followed by Night	45 minutes
Memorization	15 minutes
Individual Acts of Teaching, Service, and Study	5 minutes
Personal Teaching Plan	5 minutes
Closing devotions	5 minutes

Materials Needed

- Prayer books
- Music, recorded or sung

Suggestions for Music

- “Love is the Answer,” *In a Quiet Room*, Dan Seals
- “New World Comin’,” “Who is Writing the Future?,” *Who is Writing the Future?*, Jack Lenz

Suggested Schedule of Activities

Devotions	10 minutes
Objectives	5 minutes
Consultation About Teaching, Service, and Study	10 minutes
Spiritual Prerequisites for Success in Teaching and Serving the Cause	45 minutes
Memorization	15 minutes
Individual Acts of Teaching, Service, and Study	15 minutes
Personal Teaching Plan	5 minutes
Closing devotions	5 minutes

Materials Needed

- Prayer books
- Music, recorded or sung

Suggestions for Music

- “The Call,” *Who is Writing the Future?*, Jack Lenz
- “Soldiers in God’s Army,” *Lift Up Your Voices and Sing, Vol. 1*, Van Gilmer
- “Mount Your Steeds,” *Lift Up Your Voices and Sing, Vol. 2*, various artists

Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education

Fundamental Verities Course Series

- Introductory Course: To Be a Bahá'í
- Course One: This Day of God
- Course Two: Circles of Unity
- Course Three: The Seeker's Quest
- Course Four: Every Believer Is a Teacher
- Course Five: To Serve the Covenant
- Course Six: Building a New Civilization
- The Art of Facilitation

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- Youth Empowerment
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Local Assembly Development Program

Training for Pioneers

Training for Media Representatives

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Permanent Schools and Institutes

Bosch Bahá'í School
Green Acre Bahá'í School
Louhelen Bahá'í School
Louis Gregory Bahá'í Institute
Native American Bahá'í Institute
National Teacher Training Center at Louhelen Bahá'í School
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