



**Core Curriculum
for Spiritual Education
and Training**

Blessed is he who in the prime of his youth and the heyday of his life will arise to serve the Lord of the beginning and of the end and adorn his heart with His love.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

Contents

Introduction: The Day of God	p. 1
Module One: The Blessed Beauty, Bahá'u'lláh	p. 13
Module Two: The Choices Time in Human Life	p. 33
Module Three: Transforming Civilization	p. 79
Appendix	p. 123
Journal	

Youth Empowerment

A New Cycle of Human Power

Prepared by the

National Bahá'í Education Task Force
NATIONAL CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND
RESEARCH CENTER

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Preface

O ye illumined youth, strive by night and by day to unravel the mysteries of the mind and spirit, and to grasp the secrets of the Day of God. Inform yourselves of the evidences that the Most Great Name hath dawned. Open your lips in praise. Adduce convincing arguments and proofs. Lead those who thirst to the fountain of life; grant ye true health to the ailing. Be ye apprentices of God; be ye physicians directed by God, and heal ye the sick among humankind. Bring those who have been excluded into the circle of intimate friends. Make the despairing to be filled with hope. Waken them that slumber; make the heedless mindful.

Such are the fruits of this earthly life. Such is the station of resplendent glory.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 1, P. 292

Acknowledging the noble station of youth as outlined by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Youth Empowerment program offers youth the opportunity to explore their role as leaders in the Bahá’í community and in society. Through careful study of the Bahá’í sacred writings, participants learn to appreciate their true identity as “apprentices of God” and to catalyze positive change through service to each other and to all humanity.

This program invites youth to carry forward God’s great plan by deepening their love for Bahá’u’lláh, mastering the spiritual prerequisites for success in teaching, and assessing and overcoming social pressures. By creating a youth network for collaboration, encouragement, and strength, participants are empowered to implement Bahá’í teachings in daily life and engage others in this process of individual and social transformation.

The Core Curriculum Youth Empowerment program was first introduced in 1999 as part of the comprehensive Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education and Training, a process for the spiritual education of children, youth, and families. Developed by the National Bahá’í Education Task Force through a continuous process of refinement and development, this course reflects the diverse experiences of the youth it serves.

Established in 1991 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States, the National Children’s Education and Research Center at Louhelen Bahá’í School in Davison, Michigan, works closely with the National Bahá’í Education Task Force for the ongoing development of this curriculum. Information about facilitator training for this Youth Empowerment program, additional courses for youth, and the full scope of the Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education and Training is available on the Core Curriculum website, www.core-curriculum.org, or by contacting the National Children’s Education and Research Center by email at NCERC@usbnc.org or by telephone at 810-653-5033.

The National Bahá’í Education Task Force
November 2005



**Core Curriculum
for Spiritual Education
and Training**

1. Welcome, Devotions, and Introduction
2. Contributing Our Gems
3. The Light of Unity
4. The Power of Growth
5. The Core Curriculum Learning Model

Youth Empowerment

A New Cycle of Human Power

INTRODUCTION

Welcome, Devotions, and Introductions

Welcome to this Youth Empowerment course—A New Cycle of Human Power.

Purpose:

Create a joyful, loving, and spiritually oriented atmosphere.

Share logistical information regarding the training.

Devotions

As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has explained that “there is nothing sweeter in the world of existence than prayer,” we will begin each session of this training program with devotions. For this first session consider using the devotional passages on the following pages, in addition to other prayers, readings, and music of your choice.

Logistics

Please review any necessary logistical information such as cost for materials, location of washrooms, refreshments available, schedule of future sessions, or other details that will assist your workshop to function smoothly.

1 The time foreordained unto the peoples and kindreds of the earth is now come. The promises of God, as recorded in the holy Scriptures, have all been fulfilled. Out of Zion hath gone forth the Law of God, and Jerusalem, and the hills and land thereof, are filled with the glory of His Revelation. . . .

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, PP. 12–13

2 Great indeed is this Day! The allusions made to it in all the Sacred Scriptures as the Day of God attest its greatness. The soul of every Prophet of God, of every Divine Messenger, hath thirsted for this wondrous Day. All the Divers kindreds of the earth have likewise, yearned to attain it.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P. 11

3 All glory be to this Day, the Day in which the fragrances of mercy have been wafted over all created things, a Day so blest that past ages and centuries can never hope to rival it, a Day in which the countenance of the Ancient of Days hath turned towards His holy seat. . . .

He that was hidden from mortal eyes is come! His all-conquering sovereignty is manifest; His all-encompassing splendor is revealed. . . . Verily this is the Day in which both land and sea rejoice at this announcement, the Day for which have been laid up those things which God, through a bounty beyond the ken of mortal mind or heart, hath destined for revelation.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, PP. 3–5

4 “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. . . .” “This is the Day in which God’s most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things. . . .” “A fleeting moment, in this Day, excelleth centuries of a bygone age. . . .” “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. . . . Well is it with him that hath lived to see this Day, and hath recognized its station. . . .” “This Day a different Sun hath arisen, and a different Heaven hath been adorned with its stars and its planets. The world is another world and the Cause another Cause. . . .” “Peerless is this Day, for it is as the eye to past ages and centuries and as a light unto the darkness of the times. . . .” “Should the greatness of this Day be revealed in its fullness, every man would forsake a myriad lives in his longing to partake, though it be for one moment, of its great glory. . . .”

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, QUOTED IN SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE ADVENT OF DIVINE JUSTICE*, PP. 77–79

1 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 behooveth every man to blot out the trace of every idle word from the tablet of the 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, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, pp. 10–11

2 Glorified be God! All the heavenly scriptures of the past attest to the greatness of this Day, the greatness of this Manifestation, the greatness of His signs, the greatness of His Word, the greatness of His constancy, the greatness of His preminent station. . . . Indeed all the Prophets have yearned to attain this Day.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, pp. 258–59

3 Each of the Divine Manifestations has . . . a cycle, and during the cycle His laws and commandments prevail and are performed. When His cycle is completed by the appearance of a new Manifestation, a new cycle begins. In this way cycles begin, end and are renewed, until a universal cycle is completed in the world. . . .

A universal cycle in the world of existence signifies a long duration of time, and innumerable . . . periods and epochs. In such a cycle the Manifestations appear with splendor in the realm of the visible until a great and supreme Manifestation makes the world the center of His radiance. His appearance causes the world to attain maturity, and the extension of His cycle is very great. Afterward, other Manifestations will arise under His shadow. . . .

We are in the cycle which began with Adam, and its supreme Manifestations is Bahá'u'lláh.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SOME ANSWERED QUESTIONS*, pp. 160–61

1. In the whole group, read aloud the following quotations:

Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P. 162

The Purpose of the one true God, exalted be His glory, in revealing Himself unto men is to lay bare those gems that lie hidden within the mine of their true and inmost selves.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P. 287

2. Observe that each person is a mine rich in gems. Some gifts come from our culture, or our environment, and we bring those gifts to this training. We also bring gifts that are unique to our personalities, precious gems that we can share with others. Please take turns at this time to introduce yourself and mention a gift—a personal characteristic given by God—to share with your fellow participants.

Purpose:

Become acquainted with others in the group and appreciate the gifts each individual brings to this training.

Build a unified sense of community.

The Light of Unity

Purpose:

Create a unified sense of community.

1. After all have introduced themselves, read aloud the following quotation:

Consider the visible sun; although it shineth with one radiance upon all things, and at the behest of the King of Manifestation bestoweth light on all creation, yet in each place it becometh manifest and sheddeth its bounty according to the potentialities of that place. For instance, in a mirror it reflecteth its own disk and shape, and this is due to the sensitivity of the mirror; in a crystal it maketh fire to appear, and in other things it showeth only the effect of its shining, but not its full disk. . . .

In like manner, colors become visible in every object according to the nature of that object. For instance, in a yellow globe, the rays shine yellow; in a white the rays are white; and in a red, the red rays are manifest. Then these variations are from the object, not from the shining light. And if a place be shut away from the light, as by walls or a roof, it will be entirely bereft of the splendor of the light, nor will the sun shine thereon. . . .

In sum, the differences in objects have now been made plain. Thus when the wayfarer gazeth only upon the place of appearance—that is, when he seeth only the many-colored globes—he beholdeth yellow and red and white; hence it is that conflict hath prevailed among the creatures, and a darksome dust from limited souls hath hid the world. And some do gaze upon the effulgence of the light; and some have drunk of the wine of oneness and these see nothing but the sun itself. . . .

○ My Brother! A pure heart is as a mirror; cleanse it with the burnish of love and severance from all save God, that the true sun may shine within it and the eternal morning dawn.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *SEVEN VALLEYS AND FOUR VALLEYS*, pp. 18–21

2. Then briefly discuss the following questions:
 - What does Bahá'u'lláh say is the source of unity? What does He say is the source of diversity? And what is the source of conflict?
 - What are some ways that we as individuals can each promote the principle of unity in diversity while we're together in this group?
 - How would we like to organize our community life while we're together so that everyone's gems reflect the light?
3. Please record your ideas so you can refer back to them as desired in future sessions.

Process the Activity

Why is it important to set community standards to establish a true community in which the contributions of each person can be honored?

A New Cycle of Human Power: The Youth Empowerment Program

Program Overview

The Core Curriculum Youth Empowerment training program was created under the direction of the National Spiritual Assembly to empower youth as teachers of the Cause, consecrated servants of humanity, and heroic champions of Bahá'u'lláh's Plan for the transformation of human civilization.

Topics covered in this course include:

- Knowing and loving Bahá'u'lláh
- Exploring the power of youth to carry forward God's great plan
- Mastering the spiritual prerequisites for success in teaching
- Assessing and overcoming social pressures
- Fostering individual empowerment in the creative plan of God

Throughout the program we will:

- Use the Bahá'í writings as our primary source for understanding the real conditions in the world today and the creative power of youth to transform this world into a better one.
- Practice implementing Bahá'í teachings in daily life.
- Create a youth network for collaboration, encouragement, and strength.
- Engage others in this process of individual and social transformation.

Purpose:

Become acquainted with the content of the course.

Process the Activity

In what ways does this training program address the goals of the Plans of the Universal House of Justice?

The Power of Growth

Purpose:

Perceive the power of growth in our lives.

Consider one of Bahá'u'lláh's frequently used metaphors for the new power of growth available to us at this stage in our lives and at this stage in human history.

Process the Activity

As you complete your exploration of the power of growth, identify in the whole group which parts of this activity assist us to gain:

Knowledge _____

Wisdom _____

Spiritual Perception _____

Eloquent Speech _____

1 Man is like unto a tree. If he be adorned with fruit, he hath been and will ever be worthy of praise and commendation. Otherwise a fruitless tree is but fit for fire. The fruits of the human tree are exquisite, highly desired and dearly cherished. Among them are upright character, virtuous deeds and a goodly utterance. The springtime for earthly trees occurreth once every year, while the one for human trees appeareth in the Days of God—exalted be His glory. Were the trees of men’s lives to be adorned in this divine Springtime with the fruits that have been mentioned, the effulgence of the light of Justice would, of a certainty, illumine all the dwellers of the earth and everyone would abide in tranquillity and contentment beneath the sheltering shadow of Him Who is the Object of all mankind. The Water for these trees is the living water of the sacred Words uttered by the Beloved of the world. In one instant are such trees planted and in the next their branches shall, through the outpourings of the showers of divine mercy, have reached the skies.

BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH*, p. 257

2 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.

BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 1, p. 247

3 O Thou Lord of wondrous grace! Bestow upon us new blessings. Give to us the freshness of the spring. We are saplings which have been planted by the fingers of Thy bounty and have been formed out of the water and clay of Thy tender affection. We thirst for the living waters of Thy favours and are dependent upon the outpourings of the clouds of Thy generosity. Abandon not to itself this grove wherein our hopes aspire, nor withhold therefrom the showers of Thy loving-kindness. Grant that from the clouds of Thy mercy may fall copious rain so that the trees of our lives may bring forth fruit and we may attain the most cherished desire of our hearts.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *LET THY BREEZE REFRESH THEM*, pp. 27–28

The Core Curriculum Learning Model

Purpose:

Understand the Core Curriculum learning model.

This Youth Empowerment course assists us to learn and practice some very practical skills for drawing on this new source of power for. As a first step, let's explore the learning model that we will use to learn and then practice these skills. This learning model is organized in accordance with the following statement of Bahá'u'lláh:

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.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION*, REV. ED. 1999, NO. 9, P. 3

While it is not possible to fully define the meaning of these powerful words, a learning process inspired by this statement of Bahá'u'lláh can assist us to internalize spiritual principles and translate them into action.

Let's look together at some possible meanings for some of the words used in this quotation. We recognize that these words can have many meanings. At the same time, these many meanings include the following:

KNOWLEDGE (*I Know*)

To gain **information** about facts, spiritual principles, or sacred writings on a topic. What is the new input from this experience?

WISDOM (*I Understand*)

To gain **deeper understanding** of facts, principles, or writings through consultation and reflection. How is my new knowledge connected to the other things I already know?

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION (*I Perceive, I Plan*)

To **reflect on the application** of facts, principles, or writings in one's own life and one's service to others. How does my new learning change me? How does it change the way I see the world? How could I apply this learning in my own life?

ELOQUENT SPEECH (*I Teach, I Serve*)

To **articulate** or **demonstrate**, through words and deeds, understanding and application of facts, principles, and writings. What am I doing? What am I saying?

Read aloud the words of Bahá'u'lláh again, then briefly discuss the following questions:

- How does this quotation assist us to understand the role of volition in the learning process?
- How does it assist us to appreciate human diversity?
- How does it assist us to understand the importance of spiritual education and training?
- What might be some examples of inner and outer perfections?
- What are some inner and outer perfections that might be important for parents?

The learning objectives for each session in this, and other Core Curriculum training programs, are organized around this learning framework. The book *Foundations for a Spiritual Education* provides more information about the Core Curriculum learning model, which is used throughout a broad range of spiritual education and training programs available produced by the United States National Spiritual Assembly.

Summary: Personal Journal

The pages at the end of this workbook may be used as a personal journal for your thoughts and experiences during this course. Journaling provides:

- time to reflect and process the events, new concepts, and activities we experience together
- a place to record ideas, insights, questions, and concerns
- a place to recognize understanding, consider past events, and engage in self-evaluation
- a place to describe your hopes, plans, and action steps

To begin this process, reflect on the following question, then turn to your journal and record your thoughts, using words, pictures, or a combination:

- Why have I chosen to participate in this Youth Empowerment course?

Consider listening to soft music during your journal writing.



**Core Curriculum
for Spiritual Education
and Training**

1. Fulfilling Our Purpose
2. The Blessed Beauty, Bahá'u'lláh
3. Freedom and Maturity

Youth Empowerment

A New Cycle of Human Power

MODULE ONE The Blessed Beauty, Bahá'u'lláh

Module One Themes

Fulfilling Our Purpose

The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence. To this most excellent aim, this supreme objective, all the heavenly Books and the divinely-revealed and weighty Scriptures unequivocally bear witness.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, pp. 70–71

Loving Bahá'u'lláh

The Prophets and Messengers of God have been sent down for the sole purpose of guiding mankind to the straight Path of Truth. The purpose underlying Their revelation hath been to educate all men, that they may, at the hour of death, ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, pp. 156–157

Freedom and Maturity

All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 149

Module One Objectives

KNOWLEDGE

- To know the purpose of human life.
- To know some of the basic facts of Bahá'u'lláh's life and teachings.

WISDOM

- To understand the revolutionary changes that Bahá'u'lláh is using us to achieve.

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- To perceive our role in Bahá'u'lláh's plan to transform the earth.
- To perceive the power of individual choice.
- To perceive the newly awakened power of youth.

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- To explain to others some aspects of Bahá'u'lláh's life and teachings.
- To memorize a prayer for youth.

1. Organize your group into small teams. In your team, think of a machine of great importance to humanity. Then consult with the members of your team to make a model of this machine, using your own bodies to represent the moving parts.
2. After some time for preparation, demonstrate your team's model of an important machine while the other teams guess the purpose of this machine.
3. After all teams have demonstrated their machines, briefly discuss: How were you able to discern the purpose of these models?
4. Return to your small teams to study the passages on the following page that address the purpose of human life. Work together to define or look up the meanings of new words in a dictionary, then reread the passage. After reading all the passages, discuss the focus questions.
5. After this period of study, return to the whole group and share highlights from your discussion.
6. Then, reflect individually on a time when you felt in touch with your own purpose, when you were aware of reflecting the signs of God in you, and being moved by His power to be of genuine service to the people around you.
7. After a few moments of silent reflection, turn to the person beside you and briefly share your memory. Listen carefully while your sharing partner speaks uninterruptedly for one minute; then switch roles so that each person has time to listen and to share.

Purpose:

Know the purpose of human life.

Process the Activity

How does it feel when we're in touch with our own purpose?

FULFILLING OUR PURPOSE

Focus Questions: What is God's purpose for creating me? What must I do to fulfill my purpose in life? Given the fact that I don't choose the time, place or circumstances of my birth, how can I be responsible for fulfilling my purpose?

1 The Purpose of the one true God, exalted be His glory, in revealing Himself unto men is to lay bare those gems that lie hidden within the mine of their true and inmost selves.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 287

2 The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 260

3 The Prophets and Messengers of God have been sent down for the sole purpose of guiding mankind to the straight Path of Truth. The purpose underlying Their revelation hath been to educate all men, that they may, at the hour of death, ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, pp. 156–57

4 The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence. To this most excellent aim, this supreme objective, all the heavenly Books and the divinely-revealed and weighty Scriptures unequivocally bear witness. Whoso hath recognized the Day Spring of Divine guidance and entered His holy court hath drawn nigh unto God and attained His Presence, a Presence which is the real Paradise, and of which the loftiest mansions of heaven are but a symbol. . . . Whoso hath failed to recognize Him will have condemned himself to the misery of remoteness, a remoteness which is naught but utter nothingness and the essence of the nethermost fire. Such will be his fate, though to outward seeming he may occupy the earth's loftiest seats and be established upon its most exalted throne.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, pp. 70–71

5 Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation. . . . Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 65

6 Know thou that all men have been created in the nature made by God, the Guardian, the Self-Subsisting. Unto each one hath been prescribed a pre-ordained measure, as decreed in God's mighty and guarded Tablets. All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 149

1. Bahá'u'lláh, described by the Universal House of Justice as “the most precious Being ever to have drawn breath on this planet,” brought a Message that is revolutionizing the planet and everything on it. When we align our purpose with His Will, we become more and more powerful agents for positive change in the world. Work together to prepare a powerful and reverent presentation of some significant events in the life of Bahá'u'lláh.
2. Organize yourselves into small teams so that each team studies one of the following topics:
Topic 1: “The Childhood and Youth of Bahá'u'lláh”
Topic 2: “The Experience of Bahá'u'lláh in the Síyáh-Chál”
Topic 3: “The Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh in the Garden of Ridván”
Topic 4: “The Exile of Bahá'u'lláh to the Holy Land”
3. In your small group, carefully read aloud your selected quotations and discuss the focus questions. Then prepare a short presentation (approximately 5 minutes) of the most important points in a way that touches the hearts of your fellow participants. Prepare your presentation as a contribution to a devotional meeting that members of your group prepare for each other.
4. Then share your presentations with each other in a devotional spirit.
5. After sharing your presentations with each other, note that research indicates that the most important factor in the decisions of young people to participate in a devotional meeting or a religious gathering is an invitation from someone they know. Please discuss as a group:
 - How, when, and where could we share these presentations with the people we know—our friends, neighbors, family, or others?
 - Who can we invite to this gathering? How will we invite them?
 - Is there a regularly scheduled devotional meeting to which we could contribute or do we prefer to convene our own gathering?
 - What else would we like to do to share these experiences with others?

Purpose:

Know some of the basic facts of Bahá'u'lláh's life and teachings.

Understand the revolutionary changes that Bahá'u'lláh is using us to achieve.

Perceive our role in Bahá'u'lláh's plan to transform the earth.

Explain to others some aspects of Bahá'u'lláh's life and teachings.

Process the Activity

Turn to your journals and write or draw your reflections on the topic “Bahá'u'lláh and Me.” Record your memory of a time when you clearly felt the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in your own life. If desired, share your reflections with the whole group.

THE BLESSED BEAUTY, BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

The Childhood and Youth of Bahá'u'lláh

In your working group, read through the learning objectives for your topic. Then read the quotations provided for your reflection on the topic. Allow some time for silent reflection. Next, consult as a group: How could you share the most important ideas in a way that will touch the hearts of others? Your presentation should be creative, reverent, and involve each person in your group. You may use one or more of the quotations provided, as well as other quotations, stories, simple drama (remembering not to portray the Manifestation of God), music, reverent movement, or visual art.

Learning Objectives	Our Plans to Share these Concepts
<p>To know stories about the childhood and youth of Bahá'u'lláh.</p>	
<p>To deeply comprehend the early evidences of the Station of Bahá'u'lláh in His early years prior to His Declaration.</p>	
<p>To perceive in the events in the early life of Bahá'u'lláh the greatness of His future Station.</p> <p>To gain an understanding of the importance of one's early years as a preparation for one's future.</p>	
<p>To recount some events in the childhood and youth of Bahá'u'lláh.</p> <p>To explain the relationship of these events to the Station of Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God.</p>	

1 There was born a Child in an ancient and noble family of Núr, whose father was Mírzá Abbás, better known as Mírzá Buzurg, a favoured minister of the Crown. That Child was Bahá'u'lláh. At the hour of dawn, on the second day of Muharram, in the year 1233 A.H. the world, unaware of its significance, witnessed the birth of Him who was destined to confer upon it such incalculable blessings.¹

NABÍL-I-A'ZAM, *THE DAWN-BREAKERS*, PP. 12-13

2 When Bahá'u'lláh was still a child, the Vazír, His father, dreamed a dream. Bahá'u'lláh appeared to him swimming in a vast, limitless ocean. His body shone upon the waters with a radiance that illumined the sea. Around His head, which could distinctly be seen above the waters, there radiated, in all directions, His long, jet-black locks, floating in great profusion above the waves. As he dreamed, a multitude of fishes gathered round Him, each holding fast to the extremity of one hair. Fascinated by the effulgence of His face, they followed Him in whatever direction He swam. Great as was their number, and however firmly they clung to His locks, not one single hair seemed to have been detached from His head, nor did the least injury affect His person. Free and unrestrained, He moved above the waters and they all followed Him.

The Vazír, greatly impressed by this dream, summoned a soothsayer, who had achieved fame in that region, and asked him to interpret it for him. This man, as if inspired by a premonition of the future glory of Bahá'u'lláh, declared: "The limitless ocean that you have seen in your dream, O Vazír, is none other than the world of being. Single-handed and alone, your son will achieve supreme ascendancy over it. Wherever He may please, He will proceed unhindered. No one will resist His march, no one will hinder His progress. The multitude of fishes signifies the turmoil which He will arouse amidst the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Around Him will they gather, and to Him will they cling. Assured of the unfailing protection of the Almighty, this tumult will never harm His person, nor will His loneliness upon the sea of life endanger His safety."

That soothsayer was subsequently taken to see Bahá'u'lláh. He looked intently upon His face, and examined carefully His features. He was charmed by His appearance, and extolled every trait of His countenance. Every expression in that face revealed to his eyes a sign of His concealed glory. So great was his admiration, and so profuse his praise of Bahá'u'lláh, that the Vazír, from that day, became even more passionately devoted to his son. The words spoken by that soothsayer served to fortify his hopes and confidence in Him. Like Jacob, he desired only to ensure the welfare of his beloved Joseph, and to surround Him with his loving protection.

NABÍL-I-A'ZAM, *THE DAWN-BREAKERS*, PP. 119-20

¹ Bahá'u'lláh was born November 12, 1817 in Tíhrán, Persia.

3 From childhood He was extremely kind and generous. He was a great lover of outdoor life, most of His time being spent in the garden or the fields. He had an extraordinary power of attraction, which was felt by all. People always crowded around Him. Ministers and people of the Court would surround Him, and the children also were devoted to Him. When He was only thirteen or fourteen years old He became renowned for His learning. He would converse on any subject and solve any problem presented to Him.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, QUOTED IN J.E. ESSELMONT, *BAHÁ’U’LLÁH AND THE NEW ERA*, PP. 23–24

4 When Bahá’u’lláh was twenty-two years old, His father died, and the Government wished Him to succeed to His father’s position in the Ministry, as was customary in Persia, but Bahá’u’lláh did not accept the offer. Then the Prime Minister said: “Leave him to himself. Such a position is unworthy of him. He has some higher aim in view. I cannot understand him, but I am convinced that he is destined for some lofty career. His thought are not like ours. Let him alone.”

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, QUOTED IN J.E. ESSELMONT, *BAHÁ’U’LLÁH AND THE NEW ERA*, P. 24

5 He was most generous, giving abundantly to the poor. None who came to Him were turned away. The doors of His house were open to all. He always had many guests. This unbounded generosity was conducive to greater astonishment from the fact that He sought neither position nor prominence. In commenting upon this His friends said He would become impoverished, for His expenses were many and His wealth becoming more and more limited. “Why is he not thinking of his own affairs?” they inquired of each other; but some who were wise declared, “This personage is connected with another world; he has something sublime within him that is not evident now; the day is coming when it will be manifested.” In truth, the Blessed Perfection was a refuge for every weak one, a shelter for every fearing one, kind to every indigent one, lenient and loving to all creatures.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, PP. 25–26

THE BLESSED BEAUTY, BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

The Experience of Bahá'u'lláh in the Síyáh-Chál

In your working group, read through the learning objectives for your topic. Then read the quotations provided for your reflection on the topic. Allow some time for silent reflection. Next, consult as a group: How could you share the most important ideas in a way that will touch the hearts of others? Your presentation should be creative, reverent, and involve each person in your group. You may use one or more of the quotations provided, as well as other quotations, stories, simple drama (remembering not to portray the Manifestation of God), music, reverent movement, or visual art.

Learning Objectives	Our Plans to Share these Concepts
<p>To know the circumstances under which Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in the Síyáh-Chál.</p> <p>To know the conditions of His confinement in the Síyáh-Chál.</p> <p>To know that Bahá'u'lláh received the first intimations of His Divine Mission while imprisoned in the Síyáh-Chál.</p>	
<p>To understand the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's experience in the Síyáh-Chál.</p>	
<p>To relate the suffering of Bahá'u'lláh to one's own personal daily struggles and to derive hope and inspiration from this connection.</p>	
<p>To describe to others the circumstances of Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment in the Síyáh-Chál.</p>	

THE EXPERIENCE OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH IN THE SÍYÁH-CHÁL

In August 1852, because of His belief in the Revelation of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh was arrested, placed in heavy chains, and cast into a dungeon. This dungeon—the Black Pit or Síyáh-Chál—had no sanitary facilities, was deep in filth, infested with vermin, and filled with criminals and innocent victims of prejudice. Each day one or more prisoners was taken out to be tortured and executed. Bahá'u'lláh describes this experience in the following words:

1 Those days were troublous days, and the fires of hatred burned high. Many were arrested, among them this Wronged One. . . . They apprehended Us, and . . . conducted Us, on foot and in chains, with bared head and bare feet, to the dungeon of Tíhrán. A brutal man, accompanying Us on horseback, snatched off Our hat, whilst We were being hurried along by a troop of executioners and officials. 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!

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *EPISTLE TO THE SON OF THE WOLF*, PP. 20–21

2 We were all huddled together in one cell, our feet in stocks, and around our necks fastened the most galling of chains. The air we breathed was laden with the foulest impurities, while the floor on which we sat was covered with filth and infested with vermin. No ray of light was allowed to penetrate that pestilential dungeon or to warm its icy-coldness. We were placed in two rows, each facing the other. We had taught them to repeat certain verses which, every night, they chanted with extreme fervour. 'God is sufficient unto me; He verily is the All-sufficing!' one row would intone, while the other would reply: 'In Him let the trusting trust.' The chorus of these gladsome voices would continue to peal out until the early hours of the morning.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, QUOTED BY NABÍL-I-A'ZAM, *THE DAWN-BREAKERS*, PP. 631–32

3 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."

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *EPISTLE TO THE SON OF THE WOLF*, P. 21

4 While engulfed in tribulations I heard a most wondrous, a most sweet voice, calling above My head. Turning My face, I beheld a Maiden—the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord—suspended in the air before Me. So rejoiced was she in her very soul that her countenance shone with the ornament of the good pleasure of God, and her cheeks glowed with the brightness of the All-Merciful. Betwixt earth and heaven she was raising a call which captivated the hearts and minds of men. She was imparting to both My inward and outer being tidings which rejoiced My soul, and the souls of God’s honoured servants.

Pointing with her finger unto My head, she addressed all who are in heaven and all who are on earth, saying: By God! This is the Best-Beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within you, could ye but understand. This is the Mystery of God and His Treasure, the Cause of God and His glory unto all who are in the kingdoms of Revelation and of creation, if ye be of them that perceive. This is He Whose Presence is the ardent desire of the denizens of the Realm of eternity, and of them that dwell within the Tabernacle of glory, and yet from His Beauty do ye turn aside.

BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, *SUMMONS OF THE LORD OF HOSTS*, PP. 5–6

5 During the days I lay in the prison of Tihrán, though the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear.

BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, *EPISTLE TO THE SON OF THE WOLF*, P. 21

THE BLESSED BEAUTY, BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

The Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh in the Garden of Ridván

In your working group, read through the learning objectives for your topic. Then read the quotations provided for your reflection on the topic. Allow some time for silent reflection. Next, consult as a group: How could you share the most important ideas in a way that will touch the hearts of others? Your presentation should be creative, reverent, and involve each person in your group. You may use one or more of the quotations provided, as well as other quotations, stories, simple drama (remembering not to portray the Manifestation of God), music, reverent movement, or visual art.

Learning Objectives	Our Plans to Share these Concepts
<p>To know the circumstances surrounding the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh in the Garden of Ridván.</p> <p>To know that this occasion is known as the “Most Great Festival” and as the “King of Festivals” and is celebrated from sunset on April 20 through sunset on April 21.</p>	
<p>To understand the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's public Declaration.</p>	
<p>To feel the joy of this Most Great Festival, and to acknowledge one's gratitude for Bahá'u'lláh's Declaration.</p>	
<p>To apply one's gratitude and joy to one's heroic championing of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh that will generate a new age of peace and prosperity for all people.</p>	

The Persian government exiled Bahá'u'lláh to the city of Baghdád in 1853. In April 1863 He was further exiled—first to Constantinople (Istanbul) and shortly afterward to Adrianople (Edirne) in Turkey. Shortly before Bahá'u'lláh's departure, He declared His Mission to His companions in the garden of Ridván. This twelve-day period was described by Nabíl:

1 Every day ere the hour of dawn, the gardeners would pick the roses which lined the four avenues of the garden, and would pile them in the centre of the floor of His blessed tent. So great would be the heap that when His companions gathered to drink their morning tea in His presence, they would be unable to see each other across it. All these roses Bahá'u'lláh would, with His own hands, entrust to those whom He dismissed from His presence every morning to be delivered, on His behalf, to His Arab and Persian friends in the city. . . . One night, the ninth night of the waxing moon, I happened to be one of those who watched beside His blessed tent. As the hour of midnight approached, I saw Him issue from His tent, pass by the places where some of His companions were sleeping, and begin to pace up and down the moonlit, flower-bordered avenues of the garden. So loud was the singing of the nightingales on every side that only those who were near Him could hear distinctly His voice. He continued to walk until, pausing in the midst of one of these avenues, He observed: 'Consider these nightingales. So great is their love for these roses, that sleepless from dusk till dawn, they warble their melodies and commune with burning passion with the object of their adoration. How then can those who claim to be afire with the rose-like beauty of the Beloved choose to sleep?' For three successive nights I watched and circled round His blessed tent. Every time I passed by the couch whereon He lay, I would find Him wakeful, and every day, from morn till eventide, I would see Him ceaselessly engaged in conversing with the stream of visitors who kept flowing in from Baghdad.

NABÍL-I-A'ZAM, QUOTED BY ADIB TAHERZADEH, *THE REVELATION OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, VOL. 1, P. 275

Bahá'u'lláh made three important statements to His followers on the first of these twelve days: The first was to forbid the use of the sword (or other weapons) in the defense of the Faith. The second statement was that there would not be another Manifestation of God for a full thousand years. The third statement was that in this Day of God, He infused a new capacity into all created things. Bahá'u'lláh wrote about His Declaration:

2 The Best-Beloved is come. In His right hand is the sealed Wine of His name. Happy is the man that turneth unto Him, and drinketh his fill, and exclaimeth: “Praise be to Thee, O Revealer of the signs of God!” By the righteousness of the Almighty! Every hidden thing hath been manifested through the power of truth. All the favors of God have been sent down, as a token of His grace. The waters of everlasting life have, in their fullness, been proffered unto men. Every single cup hath been borne round by the hand of the Well-Beloved. Draw near, and tarry not, though it be for one short moment.

Blessed are they that have soared on the wings of detachment and attained the station which, as ordained by God, overshadoweth the entire creation, whom neither the vain imaginations of the learned, nor the multitude of the hosts of the earth have succeeded in deflecting from His Cause. Who is there among you, O people, who will renounce the world, and draw nigh unto God, the Lord of all names? Where is he to be found who, through the power of My name that transcendeth all created things, will cast away the things that men possess, and cling, with all his might, to the things which God, the Knower of the unseen and of the seen, hath bidden him observe? Thus hath His bounty been sent down unto men, His testimony fulfilled, and His proof shone forth above the Horizon of mercy. Rich is the prize that shall be won by him who hath believed and exclaimed: “Lauded art Thou, O Beloved of all worlds! Magnified be Thy name, O Thou the Desire of every understanding heart!”

Rejoice with exceeding gladness, O people of Bahá, as ye call to remembrance the Day of supreme felicity, the Day whereon the Tongue of the Ancient of Days hath spoken, as He departed from His House, proceeding to the Spot from which He shed upon the whole of creation the splendors of His name, the All-Merciful.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 34–35, XIV

THE BLESSED BEAUTY, BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

The Exile of Bahá'u'lláh to the Holy Land

In your working group, read through the learning objectives for your topic. Then read the quotations provided for your reflection on the topic. Allow some time for silent reflection. Next, consult as a group: How could you share the most important ideas in a way that will touch the hearts of others? Your presentation should be creative, reverent, and involve each person in your group. You may use one or more of the quotations provided, as well as other quotations, stories, simple drama (remembering not to portray the Manifestation of God), music, reverent movement, or visual art.

Learning Objectives

Our Plans to Share these Concepts

To know the circumstances of Bahá'u'lláh's exile to the Holy Land.	
To understand the significance of the events of this period for the establishment of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.	
To discern one's commitment to Bahá'u'lláh through understanding the suffering and triumphs of Bahá'u'lláh, the Holy Family, and the pilgrims during this period of Bahá'í history.	
To use the knowledge of the events of this period to gain inspiration for serving Bahá'u'lláh. To gain spiritual strength by realizing the sufferings and the triumph of Bahá'u'lláh during this period in His Life.	

THE EXILE OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH TO THE HOLY LAND

Bahá'u'lláh's final exile was to the prison fortress in 'Akka, Israel. Arriving in August 1868, Bahá'u'lláh and His companions were led through a hostile mob to a foul-smelling, crowded, filthy prison barracks, that were extremely hot and infested with fleas, contamination, and disease. They were given no food or drinkable water that first night.

1 Know thou that upon Our arrival at this Spot, We chose to designate it as the "Most Great Prison." Though previously subjected in another land (Tíhrán) to chains and fetters, We yet refused to call it by that name. Say: Ponder thereon, O ye endued with understanding!

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, QUOTED IN SHOGHI EFFENDI, *GOD PASSES BY*, p. 185

2 According to what they say, it is the most desolate of the cities of the world, the most unsightly of them in appearance, the most detestable in climate, and the foulest in water. It is as though it were the metropolis of the owl, within whose precincts naught can be heard save the echo of its cry.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE SUMMONS OF THE LORD OF HOSTS*, p. 133

3 Upon our arrival, we were surrounded by guards and confined together, men and women, young and old alike, in the army barracks. The first night all were deprived of either food or drink, for the sentries were guarding the gate of the barracks and permitted no one to leave. No one gave a thought to the plight of these wronged ones. They even begged for water, and were refused.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE SUMMONS OF THE LORD OF HOSTS*, p. 163

4 From the foundation of the world until the present day a cruelty such as this hath neither been seen nor heard of. . . . None knoweth what befell Us, except God, the Almighty, the All-Knowing.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE SUMMONS OF THE LORD OF HOSTS*, p. 164, 172

5 Meditate on the world and the state of its people. He, for Whose sake the world was called into being, hath been imprisoned in the most desolate of cities, by reason of that which the hands of the wayward have wrought. From the horizon of His prison-city He summoneth mankind unto the Dayspring of God, the Exalted, the Great.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE SUMMONS OF THE LORD OF HOSTS*, pp. 81–82

6 We were welcomed with banners of light, whereupon the Voice of the Spirit cried out saying: “Soon will all that dwell on earth be enlisted under these banners.”

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, QUOTED IN SHOGHI EFFENDI, *GOD PASSES BY*, P. 184

7 The Ancient Beauty 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. He hath drained to its dregs the cup of sorrow, that all the peoples of the earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness. This is of the mercy of your Lord, the Compassionate, the Most Merciful. We have accepted to be abased, O believers in the Unity of God, that ye may be exalted, and have suffered manifold afflictions, that ye might prosper and flourish. He Who hath come to build anew the whole world, behold, how they that have joined partners with God have forced Him to dwell within the most desolate of cities!

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, PP. 99–100, XLV

8 While in prison We have revealed a Book which We have entitled “The Most Holy Book.” We have enacted laws therein and adorned it with the commandments of thy Lord, Who exerciseth authority over all that are in the heavens and on the earth. Say: Take hold of it, O people, and observe that which hath been sent down in it of the wondrous precepts of your Lord, the Forgiving, the Bountiful. It will truly prosper you both in this world and in the next and will purge you of whatsoever ill beseemeth you. He is indeed the Ordainer, the Expounder, the Giver, the Generous, the Gracious, the All-Praised.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P. 262

9 We remember every one of you, men and women, and from this Spot—the Scene of incomparable glory—regard you all as one soul and send you the joyous tidings of divine blessings which have preceded all created things, and of My remembrance that pervadeth everyone, whether young or old. The glory of God rest upon you, O people of Bahá. Rejoice with exceeding gladness through My remembrance, for He is indeed with you at all times.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, P. 264

Purpose:

Perceive the power of individual effort.

Perceive the newly awakened power of youth.

1. In your whole group discuss the questions:
 - What is freedom?
 - How do you really know when you are free?
 - Is it possible for someone make you do something you don't want to do?
 - When you choose what to do, what influences your choice?
 - How do you know what is influencing your choices?
2. After discussing these questions, read the following passages aloud in the whole group and discuss the focus questions.
3. Participate in an experiential activity introduced by your facilitator. Then, read aloud the following quotation. Reflect individually and record your responses to the reflection question in your journal.

Be not despondent. After the revelation of this blessed verse it is as though thou hast been born anew from thy mother's womb. Say: Thou art free from sin and error. Truly God hath purged thee with the living waters of His utterance in His Most Great Prison. We entreat Him—blessed and exalted is He—to graciously confirm thee in extolling Him and in magnifying His glory and to strengthen thee through the power of His invisible hosts. Verily, He is the Almighty, the Omnipotent.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, P. 77

4. Reflect: What is the importance of our own efforts to develop our spiritual powers? What does this quotation tell us about the power of God to assist us to make a new beginning?

Process the Activity

How does this experiential activity illustrate the importance of our own efforts to transform ourselves and fulfill our purpose of serving God and serving humanity?

Focus Questions: What distinguishes the period of youth from childhood and from full maturity? What are the implications of spiritual maturity in the life of an individual? How is it possible to refine our characters once puberty is passed? What is the role of volition in this process?

1 All that which ye potentially possess can . . . be manifested only as a result of your own volition.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 149

2 From the beginning to the end of his life man passes through certain periods, or stages, each of which is marked by certain conditions peculiar to itself. For instance, during the period of childhood his conditions and requirements are characteristic of that degree of intelligence and capacity. After a time he enters the period of youth, in which his former conditions and needs are superseded by new requirements applicable to the advance in his degree. His faculties of observation are broadened and deepened; his intelligent capacities are trained and awakened; the limitations and environment of childhood no longer restrict his energies and accomplishments. At last he passes out of the period of youth and enters the stage, or station, of maturity, which necessitates another transformation and corresponding advance in his sphere of life activity. New powers and perceptions clothe him, teaching and training commensurate with his progression occupy his mind, special bounties and bestowals descend in proportion to his increased capacities, and his former period of youth and its conditions will no longer satisfy his matured view and vision.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, p. 438

3 It is extremely difficult to teach the individual and refine his character once puberty is passed. By then, as experience hath shown, even if every effort be exerted to modify some tendency of his, it all availeth nothing. He may, perhaps, improve somewhat today; but let a few days pass and he forgetteth, and turneth backward to his habitual condition and accustomed ways. Therefore it is in early childhood that a firm foundation must be laid. While the branch is green and tender it can easily be made straight.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ*, p. 137

4 “The Báb,” Abdu’l-Bahá, moreover, has written, “hath said: ‘Should a tiny ant desire, in this day, to be possessed of such power as to be able to unravel the abstrusest and most bewildering passages of the Qur’an, its wish will no doubt be fulfilled, inasmuch as the mystery of eternal might vibrates within the innermost being of all created things.’ If so helpless a creature can be endowed with so subtle a capacity, how much more efficacious must be the power released through the liberal effusions of the grace of Bahá’u’lláh!”

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE ADVENT OF DIVINE JUSTICE*, p. 46

The Power of Choice

Purpose:

Perceive the power of individual choice.

1. In the whole group, read aloud the following quotation:
. . . The individual . . . must make a conscious decision as to what he or she will do to serve the Plan, and as to how, where and when to do it. This determination enables the individual to check the progress of his actions and, if necessary, to modify the steps being taken. Becoming accustomed to such a procedure of systematic striving lends meaning and fulfillment to the life of any Bahá'í.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, RIDVÁN 155
2. Read it a second time silently and individually. Then choose an image from the pictures provided—or create your own image—that represents you as you see yourself today and also select or create another image that represents you making powerful contributions to a better world. Share your images with each other.
3. Working with the person sitting next to you, brainstorm possibilities for the first steps in a line of action that can lead to that powerful contribution to humanity. Identify several possibilities for each person in your little teams.
4. Then, individually select one action step to take in the next few days. Decide:
 - What will you do?
 - How, where, and when will you do it?
 - How will you know that you're moving toward success?
 - How would you decide, if necessary, to modify the steps being taken?Record your action plan in your journal.
5. In the whole group discuss:
 - What are some practical ways that we can encourage each other and support each other so that we're successful in our efforts?
6. Conclude Module One with prayers for the success of your efforts.



**Core Curriculum
for Spiritual Education
and Training**

1. Introduction to Module Two
2. Fruit on the Tree of Life
3. The Choicest Time in Human Life
4. Making Decisions, Seizing Opportunities, Addressing Challenges, Overcoming Tests
5. Establishing the Kingdom
6. Prerequisites for Success: A Double Crusade
7. Rectitude of Conduct
8. A Chaste and Holy Life
9. Spiritualizing Our Lives
10. The Temple of Being
11. Overcoming Stereotypes
12. Complete Freedom from Racial Prejudice
13. Expressing True Liberty
14. Arising to Serve Memorization
15. Illumined Youth—Transforming Ourselves
16. The Power of Transformation

Youth Empowerment

A New Cycle of Human Power

MODULE TWO The Choicest Time in Human Life

Devotions

Open module two with devotions and music.

Module Two Themes

The Choicest Time in Human Life

Blessed is he who in the prime of his youth and the heyday of his life will arise to serve the Cause of the Lord of the beginning and of the end, and adorn his heart with His love. The manifestation of such a grace is greater than the creation of the heavens and of the earth. Blessed are the steadfast and well is it with those who are firm.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, P. 415

Spiritualizing Our Lives

O Son of Man! The temple of being is My throne; cleanse it of all things, that there I may be established and there I may abide.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC NO. 58

Establishing the Kingdom

Undoubtedly, it is within your power to contribute significantly to shaping the societies of the coming century; youth can move the world.

MESSAGES FROM THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, P. 615

KNOWLEDGE

- To become familiar with the Bahá'í writings addressing youth
- To know three fields of service open to young Bahá'ís
- To identify the spiritual prerequisites for success in teaching and other service
- To know some of the writings on the issues related to the care of the body
- To identify actions that promote racial unity

WISDOM

- To understand that the period of youth is a time of decisions, opportunities, challenges and tests
- To understand the spiritual significance of caring for our bodies
- To understand the meaning of true liberty
- To understand the value of youth in teaching and advancing civilization

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- To perceive that each person is a unique creation of God
- To perceive the powerful role of youth in this Faith
- To perceive that a chaste and holy life requires an accurate understanding of the spiritual reality of the universe
- To perceive the importance of overcoming stereotypes

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- To express the connection between spiritual perception and moral rectitude
- To demonstrate strategies for living a chaste and holy life in the context of contemporary society
- To plan specific methods to promote racial unity in our daily lives
- To memorize 'Abdu'l-Bahá's encouragement to youth
- To create an individual spiritual transformation plan

Reflections on Module One

As a group, reflect on your experiences since Module One: What are some successes that we experienced as we took steps to carry our plans into action? Any challenges? How did we address them? Any particular outcomes from collaboration?

Please also reflect on your devotional meeting: What were some high points? How could we build on this experience: are there particular individuals that we could invite to the next devotional meeting? When would we like to plan and host our next devotional meeting?

Fruit on the Tree of Life

Purpose:

Perceive that each person is a unique creation of God.

Practice the skill of paying attention to details.

Sometimes when people think about youth, they imagine that if they've seen one, they've seen them all.

1. Working in teams of two, each select one piece of fruit from the bowl provided by your facilitators. Become thoroughly acquainted with your piece of fruit by observing it carefully and discussing its qualities with your partner.
2. After two minutes, return your fruit to the bowl.
3. Then, spreading out all the fruit on a large tray, find your fruit. After careful observation, many groups have successfully achieved 100% recognition of their original fruit.
4. Then in the whole group briefly discuss:
 - How do you know that you actually found your own fruit?
 - How does the skill of close observation assist us to know ourselves and to know others?
 - How and when are we taught to pay close attention to each other?
 - How can paying careful attention to each other assist us to fulfill our purpose and build the Kingdom of God on earth?

Process the Activity

Record your responses to these questions in your journal:

How did you feel when you were able to successfully find your own fruit?

How does it feel when others see the uniqueness in us?

How can we learn to better see the uniqueness in each other?

1. In the whole group, identify the terms that society at large uses to refer to human beings at the stage of youth. Then brainstorm a list of what ordinary people might think when first hearing the words “adolescent” or “teenager.” Record these words and concepts on a flip chart.
2. Notice that social science research¹ even reflects some of these concepts:
 - In the early part of the 20th century, the view of adolescence was dark and dim: “In all civilized worlds, criminal statistics show two sad and significant facts: First, that there is a marked increase of crime at the age of 12 to 14. . . . Second . . . that the proportion of juvenile delinquents seems to be everywhere increasing.” (Hall, 1904)
 - This was further supported by theorists such as Anna Freud (1937) who held that during adolescence, aggressive impulses and unruliness are intensified to the point of criminal behavior.
 - There is a persistent bias towards research on the negative aspects of adolescence such as risk-taking and adolescent turmoil, especially in the case of Black and Latino youth in North America.
3. In the whole group, eloquently read the quotations from the Bahá’í writings on youth. Then, take turns so that each person shares one fact from these readings about the capabilities of youth.
4. In the whole group, briefly discuss:
 - How do these quotations contrast with the “old world order” ideas about youth?
 - How do these quotations describe the power of youth to move forward an ever-advancing civilization?
 - Where would we be if, throughout the history of humanity, youth had blindly followed social patterns without challenging the status quo?
 - What are some ways that we can use the Words of God to transform society?

Purpose:

Become familiar with some aspects of maturation patterns of youth.

Understand the uniqueness of the period of youth.

Understand the value of youth in teaching and advancing civilization.

Process the Activity

How can this knowledge of the true function of youth assist us to fulfill our mission in life?

¹ Saba Ayman-Nolley and Lora L. Taira, “Obsession with the Dark Side of Adolescence: A Decade of Psychological Studies,” *Journal of Youth Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 1, 35–48, 2000

THE CHOICEST TIME IN HUMAN LIFE

1 Blessed is he who in the prime of his youth and the heyday of his life will arise to serve the Cause of the Lord of the beginning and of the end, and adorn his heart with His love. The manifestation of such a grace is greater than the creation of the heavens and of the earth. Blessed are the steadfast and well is it with those who are firm.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, P. 415

2 O loved ones of 'Abdu'l-Bahá!

Man's life has its springtime and is endowed with marvelous glory. The period of youth is characterized by strength and vigour and stands out as the choicest time in human life. Therefore you should strive day and night so that endowed with heavenly strength, inspired with brilliant motives and aided by His celestial power and heavenly grace and confirmation, you may become the ornaments of the world of humanity, and pre-eminent among those who are initiated into true learning and the love of God. You must be distinguished amidst men by your sanctity and detachment, loftiness of purpose, magnanimity, determination, noble-mindedness, tenacity, the elevation of your aims and your spiritual qualities; that you may become the means of exaltation and glory for the Cause of God and the dawning places of His heavenly bestowals; that you may conduct yourselves in conformity with the counsels and exhortations of the Blessed Beauty—may my life be offered up for His loved ones—and by reflecting Bahá'í qualities and attributes, you may stand out distinguished from others. 'Abdu'l-Bahá eagerly anticipates that each one of you may become even as a fearless lion moving in the pastures of human perfection and a musk-laden breeze wafting over the meads of virtue.

The glory of glories rest upon you.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *LET THY BREEZE REFRESH THEM*, PP. 19–20

3 Wherefore, O ye illumined youth, strive by night and by day to unravel the mysteries of the mind and spirit, and to grasp the secrets of the Day of God. Inform yourselves of the evidences that the Most Great Name hath dawned. Open your lips in praise. Adduce convincing arguments and proofs. Lead those who thirst to the fountain of life; grant ye true health to the ailing. Be ye apprentices of God; be ye physicians directed by God, and heal ye the sick among humankind.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, P. 415

4 O Lord! Make this youth radiant and confer Thy bounty upon this poor creature. Bestow upon him knowledge, grant him added strength at the break of every morn and guard him within the shelter of Thy protection so that he may be freed from error, may devote himself to the service of Thy Cause, may guide the wayward, lead the hapless, free the captives and awaken the heedless, that all may be blessed with Thy remembrance and praise. Thou art the Mighty and the Powerful.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, PP. 415–16

Making Decisions, Seizing Opportunities, Addressing Challenges, Overcoming Tests

1. In the whole group, take turns reading aloud the 10 June 1966 letter of the Universal House of Justice addressed to the Bahá'í youth in every land. As you read, pause after each paragraph to identify the key points made in that paragraph, and look up any new words, as desired.
2. After the entire letter has been read, discuss the following questions:
 - What important questions does this letter answer? How can we apply these answers in our own lives?
 - What examples can we identify from our own lives or from people who we know personally, of the three fields of service mentioned by the Universal House of Justice?
 - How can this letter assist us to create patterns of living that help us to fulfill our purpose in life?
3. Participate in an interactive activity introduced by your facilitator.

Purpose:

Know three fields of service open to young Bahá'ís.

Understand that the period of youth is a time of decisions, opportunities, challenges and tests.

Process the Activity

How does this activity illustrate the role of youth in this Day of God?

MAKING DECISIONS, SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES, ADDRESSING CHALLENGES, OVERCOMING TESTS

10 June 1966

To the Bahá'í Youth in every Land

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In country after country the achievements of Bahá'í youth are increasingly advancing the work of the Nine Year Plan and arousing the admiration of their fellow believers. From the very beginning of the Bahá'í Era, youth have played a vital part in the promulgation of God's Revelation. The Báb Himself was but twenty-five years old when He declared His mission, while many of the Letters of the Living were even younger. The Master, as a very young man, was called upon to shoulder heavy responsibilities in the service of His Father in Iraq and Turkey, and His brother, the Purest Branch, yielded up his life to God in the Most Great Prison at the age of twenty-two that the servants of God might "be quickened, and all that dwell on earth be united." Shoghi Effendi was a student at Oxford when called to the throne of his guardianship, and many of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, who won imperishable fame during the Ten Year Crusade, were young people. Let it, therefore, never be imagined that youth must await their years of maturity before they can render invaluable services to the Cause of God.

A Time of Decision

For any person, whether Bahá'í or not, his youthful years are those in which he will make many decisions which will set the course of his life. In these years he is most likely to choose his life's work, complete his education, begin to earn his own living, marry and start to raise his own family. Most important of all, it is during this period that the mind is most questing and that the spiritual values that will guide the person's future behavior are adopted. These factors present Bahá'í youth with their greatest opportunities, their greatest challenges, and their greatest tests—opportunities to truly apprehend the Teachings of their Faith and to give them to their contemporaries, challenges to overcome the pressures of the world and to provide leadership for their and succeeding generations, and tests enabling them to exemplify in their lives the high moral standards set forth in the Bahá'í Writings. Indeed the Guardian wrote of the Bahá'í youth that it is they "who can contribute so decisively to the virility, the purity, and the driving force of the life of the Bahá'í community, and upon whom must depend the future orientation of its destiny, and the complete unfoldment of the potentialities with which God has endowed it."

An Opportunity Unique in Human History

Those who now are in their teens and twenties are faced with a special challenge and can seize an opportunity that is unique in human history. During the Ten Year Crusade—the ninth part of that majestic process described so vividly by our beloved Guardian—the Community of the Most Great name spread with the speed of lightning over the major territories and islands of the globe, increased manifoldly its manpower and resources, saw the beginning of the entry of the peoples by troops into the Cause of God, and completed the structure of the Administrative Order of

Bahá'u'lláh. Now, firmly established in the world, the Cause, in the opening years of the tenth part of that same process, is perceptibly emerging from the obscurity that has for the most part, shrouded it since its inception, and is arising to challenge the outworn concepts of a corrupt society and proclaim the solution for the agonizing problems of a disordered humanity. During the lifetime of those who are now young the condition of the world, and the place of the Bahá'í Cause in it, will change immeasurably, for we are entering a highly critical phase in this era of transition.

Three Fields of Service

Three great fields of service lie open before young Bahá'ís, in which they will simultaneously be remaking the character of human society and preparing themselves for the work that they can undertake later in their lives.

First, the foundation of all their other accomplishments is their study of the teachings, the spiritualization of their lives and the forming of their characters in accordance with the standards of Bahá'u'lláh. As the moral standards of the people around us collapse and decay, whether of the centuries-old civilizations of the East, the more recent cultures of Christendom and Islam, or of the rapidly changing tribal societies of the world, the Bahá'ís must increasingly stand out as pillars of righteousness and forbearance. The life of a Bahá'í will be characterized by truthfulness and decency; he will walk uprightly among his fellowmen, dependent upon none save God, yet linked by bonds of love and brotherhood with all mankind; he will be entirely detached from the loose standards, the decadent theories, the frenetic experimentation, the desperation of present-day society, will look upon his neighbors with a bright and friendly face and be a beacon light and a haven for all those who would emulate his strength of character and assurance of soul.

The second field of service, which is linked intimately with the first, is teaching the Faith, particularly to their fellow-youth, among whom are some of the most open and seeking minds in the world. Not yet having acquired all the responsibilities of a family or a long-established home and job, youth can the more easily choose where they will live and study or work. In the world at large young people travel hither and thither seeking amusement, education and experiences. Bahá'í youth, bearing the incomparable treasure of the Word of God for this Day, can harness this mobility into service for mankind and can choose their places of residence, their areas of travel and their types of work with the goal in mind of how they can best serve the Faith.

The third field of service is the preparation by youth for their later years. It is the obligation of a Bahá'í to educate his children; likewise it is the duty of the children to acquire knowledge of the arts and sciences and to learn a trade or profession whereby they, in turn, can earn their living and support their families. This, for a Bahá'í youth, is in itself a service to God, a service moreover, which can be combined with teaching the Faith and often with pioneering. The Bahá'í community will need men and women of many skills and qualifications; for, as it grows in size the sphere of its activities in the life of society will increase and diversify. Let Bahá'í youth, therefore, consider the best ways in which they can use and develop their native abilities for the service of mankind and the Cause of

God, whether this be as farmers, teachers, doctors, artisans, musicians or any one of the multitude of livelihoods that are open to them.

When studying at school or university Bahá'í youth will often find themselves in the unusual and slightly embarrassing position of having a more profound insight into a subject than their instructors. The Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh throw light on so many aspects of human life and knowledge that a Bahá'í must learn, earlier than most, to weigh the information that is given to him rather than to accept it blindly. A Bahá'í has the advantage of the divine Revelation for this Age, which shines like a searchlight on so many problems that baffle modern thinkers; he must therefore develop the ability to learn everything from those around him, showing proper humility before his teachers, but always relating what he hears to the Bahá'í teachings, for they will enable him to sort out the gold from the dross of human error.

Bahá'í Consultation—Tracing New Paths of Human Corporate Action

Paralleling the growth of his inner life through prayer, meditation, service and study of the teachings, Bahá'í youth have the opportunity to learn in practice the very functioning of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Through taking part in conferences and summer schools as well as Nineteen Day Feasts, and in service on committees, they can develop the wonderful skill of Bahá'í consultation, thus tracing new paths of human corporate action. Consultation is no easy skill to learn, requiring as it does the subjugation of all egotism and unruly passions, the cultivation of frankness and freedom of thought as well as courtesy, openness of mind and wholehearted acquiescence in a majority decision. In this field Bahá'í youth may demonstrate the efficiency, the vigor, the access of unity which arise from true consultation and, by contrast, demonstrate the futility of partisanship, lobbying, debate, secret diplomacy and unilateral action which characterize modern affairs. Youth also take part in the life of the Bahá'í community as a whole and promote a society in which all generations—elderly, middle-aged, youth, children—are fully integrated and make up an organic whole. By refusing to carry over the antagonisms and mistrust between the generations which perplex and bedevil modern society they will again demonstrate the healing and life-giving nature of their religion.

The Nine Year Plan has just entered its third year. The youth have already played a vital part in winning its goals. We now call upon them, with great love and highest hopes and the assurance of our fervent prayers, to consider, individually and in consultation, wherever they live and whatever their circumstances, those steps which they should take now to deepen themselves in their knowledge of the divine message, to develop their characters after the pattern of the Master, to acquire those skills, trades and professions in which they can best serve God and man, to intensify their service to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and to radiate its message to the seekers among their contemporaries.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

1. In the whole group, consider passages from the Bahá'í writings, printed on the following two pages. Listen carefully as they are read aloud, and mark the most powerful phrases or words that you hear. You may wish to pay attention to categories of words, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives or adverbs, or other categories such as responsibilities of youth, conditions of the world, etc.
2. Then working in teams of two, share with another person the words or phrases you identified.
3. Still working in this team of two, create a poem using the words and phrases you identified to convey the message of the passages. The goal is to use powerful words or phrases from the Bahá'í writings to convey the message of those writings in the form of a poem.
4. Then create a visual display of your poem, perhaps incorporating images to illustrate its meaning.
5. After the visual piece is completed, display your work for viewing as you would view art in a gallery.
6. Using small pieces of note paper, write encouraging comments about each work of art and leave them for the artists to read.

Purpose:

Know the responsibility of youth for teaching.

Perceive the powerful role of youth in this Faith.

Process the Activity

Why is it important for youth to accurately perceive their weighty responsibilities in this Day?

ESTABLISHING THE KINGDOM

Focus Questions: What are the responsibilities of youth? How is it possible to fulfill these responsibilities?

1 The youth must grow and develop and take the place of their fathers, that this abundant grace . . . may day by day increase, until in the end it shall yield its fruit on earth and in Heaven.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, P. 415

2 The obligation to teach is essentially the responsibility of young believers. Their whole training should therefore be directed in such a way as to make them competent teachers. It is for this very purpose that Bahá’í summer schools, which constitute the very basis upon which the Bahá’í universities of the future will be established, should be widely attended by young believers.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, P. 427

3 The tasks which will face the present generation of Bahá’í Youth—and are indeed already beginning to face them—are stupendous. They cannot but expect to find themselves most severely tested in the days to come—tested as to their characters, their faith, the strength of their convictions, and their complete adherence to the Laws of Bahá’u’lláh.

Shoghi Effendi’s greatest hope, and his prayer, is that they may so distinguish themselves in the eyes of their fellow-countrymen that it will become increasingly evident what a Bahá’í is and what he stands for. How wonderful it would be to witness the time when the actions and words of the Bahá’ís will have become so well known that people will say, “Ah! That must be a Bahá’í—they are like that!” and mean it as a compliment.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, PP. 429–30

4 If ever it could be said that a religion belonged to the youth, then surely the Bahá’í Faith today is that religion. The whole world is suffering, it is sunk in misery, crushed beneath its heavy problems. The task of healing its ills and building up its future devolves mainly upon the youth. . . . So their task is very great and their responsibility very grave.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, P. 430

5 Life is not easy for the young people of this generation. They enter life with a heart full of hope, but find before themselves nothing but failures, and see in the future nothing but darkness. What they need is the light manifested by Bahá’u’lláh, for that brightens their soul and stimulates their vigour in facing difficulties.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, P. 423

6 This Cause, although it embraces with equal esteem people of all ages, has a special message and mission for the youth of your generation. It is their charter for their future, their hope, their guarantee of better days to come.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, P. 430

7 The Movement is in need of young people, who have been spiritually awakened, to arise and stem the tide of a material civilization that has brought mankind to the verge of ruin. Should the forces, now playing havoc with society, be let loose, should we neglect our duty to check them and bring them under our control, no man dare imagine what the future will bring.

It is upon the young people that the greatest suffering will fall. They should, therefore, mobilize their ranks, and, with one accord, arise and consummate their task and establish the Kingdom of God upon the earth.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, PP. 422-23

Prerequisites for Success: A Double Crusade

Purpose:

Identify the spiritual prerequisites for success in teaching and other service.

1. Shoghi Effendi, appointed as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith at the age of twenty-four, provided the key to success in our noble mission to build the Kingdom of God on earth by identifying the spiritual weapons that we can use to transform ourselves and transform the world. Read aloud the following brief quotations. After a brief pause for reflection, read them aloud again.

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. . . . These requirements are none other than a high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities, absolute chastity in their individual lives, and complete freedom from prejudice in their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or color.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE ADVENT OF DIVINE JUSTICE*, PP. 21–22

Dearly beloved friends! . . . These are the weapons which the American believers can and must wield in their double crusade, first to regenerate the inward life of their own community, and next to assail the long-standing evils that have entrenched themselves in the life of their nation.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE ADVENT OF DIVINE JUSTICE*, P. 41

2. In the whole group, briefly identify examples of rectitude of conduct, a chaste and holy life, and complete freedom from racial prejudice.
3. Discuss:
 - What is the importance of these spiritual weapons of the warriors of love in the army of light?

1. Listen while the following story is read aloud:

A well-developed conscience does not translate, necessarily, into a morally courageous life. Nor do well-developed powers of philosophical thinking and moral analysis necessarily translate into an everyday willingness to face down the various evils of this world. I was once helped in the effort at clarification by a black woman whom I suppose I'd have to call illiterate. She pointed out that "there's a lot of people who talk about doing good, and a lot of people who argue about what's good and what's not good." Then she added that "there are a lot of people who always worry about whether they're doing right or doing wrong." Finally, there are some other folks: "They just put their lives on the line for what's right, and they may not be the ones who talk a lot or argue a lot or worry a lot; they just do a lot!"

Her daughter happened to be Ruby Bridges, one of the Black children, who, at age six, initiated school desegregation in New Orleans against terrible, fearful odds. For days that turned into weeks and weeks that turned into months, this child had to brave murderously heckling mobs, there in the morning and there in the evening, hurling threats and slurs and hysterical denunciations and accusations. Federal marshals took her to school and brought her home. She attended school all by herself for a good part of a school year, owing to a total boycott by white families. Her parents, of sharecropper background, had just recently arrived in the great, cosmopolitan port city—yet another poor black family of rural background trying to find a slightly better deal in an urban setting. They were unemployed, and, like Ruby, in jeopardy; mobs threatened them, too.

Still, Ruby persisted, and so did her parents. Ruby's teachers began to wonder how come—about the continuing ability of such a child to bear such adversity, and with few apparent assets in her family background. . . . Then there was this bit of information: "I was standing in the classroom, looking out the window, and I saw Ruby coming down the street, with the federal marshal on both sides of her. The crowd was there, shouting, as usual. A woman spat at Ruby but missed; Ruby smiled at her. A man shook his fist at her; Ruby smiled at him. Then she walked up the stairs, and she stopped and turned and smiled one more time! You know what she told one of the marshals? She told him she prays for those people, the ones in the mob, every night before she goes to sleep!"

. . . I asked Ruby, after a while, about her prayers—first telling her what I'd heard from the teacher. Ruby was cheerful and matter-of-fact, if terse, in her reply: "Yes, I do pray for them."

"They keep coming and saying the bad words, but my momma says they'll get tired after a while and they'll stop coming. They'll stay home. The minister came to our house and he said the same thing, and not to worry, and I don't. The minister said God is watching and He won't forget, because He never does. The minister says if I forgive the people, and smile at them and pray for them, God will keep a good eye on everything and He'll be our protection."

Purpose:

Understand the spiritual foundation of reality.

Describe the connection between spiritual perception and moral rectitude.

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2. Then briefly discuss the questions:
 - In what way does Ruby accurately describe the relationship between the physical and the spiritual aspects of life?
 - How can we know that there is, in fact, reality beyond what we can see and hear?
 - What evidence have you personally experienced that spiritual reality is true reality?
 - How does an accurate perception of spiritual reality assist us to develop moral rectitude?
 - What does rectitude mean? How exactly would you describe moral rectitude?
3. Then, in small groups, read aloud the selection from the book *The Advent of Divine Justice* reprinted on the following page. Work as a group to write a short paragraph answering the focus questions.
4. Share your written responses in the whole group. Applaud all!

Process the Activity

In what way is rectitude of conduct an important prerequisite for success in teaching?

Focus Questions: What does it mean to have rectitude of conduct? How can we develop rectitude of conduct?

This rectitude of conduct, with its implications of justice, equity, truthfulness, honesty, fair-mindedness, reliability, and trustworthiness, must distinguish every phase of the life of the Bahá'í community. "The companions of God," Bahá'u'lláh Himself has declared, "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." "I swear by Him Who is the Most Great Ocean!" He again affirms, "Within the very breath of such souls as are pure and sanctified far-reaching potentialities are hidden. So great are these potentialities that they exercise their influence upon all created things." "He is the true servant of God," He, in another passage has written, "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. I swear by the Sun of Truth! The breath of such a man is endowed with potency, and his words with attraction." "By Him Who shineth above the Dayspring of sanctity!" He, still more emphatically, has revealed, "If the whole earth were to be converted into silver and gold, no man who can be said to have truly ascended into the heaven of faith and certitude would deign to regard it, much less to seize and keep it. . . . 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. . . ."

"O army of God!" writes Abdu'l-Bahá, "Through the protection and help vouchsafed by the Blessed Beauty—may my life be a sacrifice to His loved ones—ye must conduct yourselves in such a manner that ye may stand out distinguished and brilliant as the sun among other souls. Should any one of you enter a city, he should become a center of attraction by reason of his sincerity, his faithfulness and love, his honesty and fidelity, his truthfulness and loving-kindness towards all the peoples of the world, so that the people of that city may cry out and say: 'This man is unquestionably a Bahá'í, for his manners, his behavior, his conduct, his morals, his nature, and disposition reflect the attributes of the Bahá'ís.'

Not until ye attain this station can ye be said to have been faithful to the Covenant and Testament of God.” “The most vital duty, in this day,” He, moreover, has written, “is to purify your characters, to correct your manners, and improve your conduct. The beloved of the Merciful must show forth such character and conduct among His creatures, that the fragrance of their holiness may be shed upon the whole world, and may quicken the dead, inasmuch as the purpose of the Manifestation of God and the dawning of the limitless lights of the Invisible is to educate the souls of men, and refine the character of every living man. . . .”

“Truthfulness,” He asserts, “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.”

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE ADVENT OF DIVINE JUSTICE*, pp. 23–27

1. Read together the following story from the childhood of Bahá'u'lláh, in the words of the Blessed Beauty Himself, as He describes a puppet show mocking the Sultan:

I was sitting in one of the upper rooms of the building and observing the scene. Presently a tent was pitched in the courtyard, and before long some small human-like figures, each appearing to be no more than about a hand's span in height, were seen to emerge from it and raise the call: "His Majesty is coming! Arrange the seats at once!" Other figures then came forth, some of whom were seen to be engaged in sweeping, others in sprinkling water, and thereafter another, who was announced as the chief town crier, raised his call and bade the people assemble for an audience with the king. Next, several groups of figures made their appearance and took their places, the first attired in hats and sashes after the Persian fashion, the second wielding battleaxes, and the third comprising a number of footmen and executioners carrying bastinados. Finally there appeared, arrayed in regal majesty and crowned with a royal diadem, a kingly figure, bearing himself with the utmost haughtiness and grandeur, at turns advancing and pausing in his progress, who proceeded with great solemnity, poise and dignity to seat himself upon his throne.

At that moment a volley of shots was fired, a fanfare of trumpets was sounded, and king and tent were enveloped in a pall of smoke. When it had cleared, the king, ensconced upon his throne, was seen surrounded by a suite of ministers, princes, and dignitaries of state who, having taken their places, were standing at attention in his presence. A captured thief was then brought before the king, who gave the order that the offender should be beheaded. Without a moment's delay the chief executioner cut off the thief's head, whence a blood-like liquid came forth. After this the king held audience with his court, during which intelligence was received that a rebellion had broken out on a certain frontier. Thereupon the king reviewed his troops and despatched several regiments supported by artillery to quell the uprising. A few moments later cannons were heard booming from behind the tent, and it was announced that a battle had been engaged.

This Youth regarded the scene with great amazement. When the royal audience was ended, the curtain was drawn, and, after some twenty minutes, a man emerged from behind the tent carrying a box under his arm.

"What is this box," I asked him, "and what was the nature of this display?"

"All this lavish display and these elaborate devices," he replied, "the king, the princes, and the ministers, their pomp and glory, their might and power, everything you saw, are now contained within this box."

Purpose:

Perceive that a chaste and holy life requires an accurate understanding of the spiritual reality of the universe.

Demonstrate strategies for living a chaste and holy life in the context of contemporary society.

I swear by My Lord Who, through a single word of His Mouth, hath brought into being all created things! Ever since that day, all the trappings of the world have seemed in the eyes of this Youth akin to that same spectacle. They have never been, nor will they ever be, of any weight and consequence, be it to the extent of a grain of mustard seed. How greatly I marvelled that men should pride themselves upon such vanities, whilst those possessed of insight, ere they witness any evidence of human glory, perceive with certainty the inevitability of its waning. . . .

It behoveth everyone to traverse this brief span of life with sincerity and fairness. Should one fail to attain unto the recognition of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, let him at least conduct himself with reason and justice. Erelong these outward trappings, these visible treasures, these earthly vanities, these arrayed armies, these adorned vestures, these proud and overweening souls, all shall pass into the confines of the grave, as though into that box. In the eyes of those possessed of insight, all this conflict, contention and vainglory hath ever been, and will ever be, like unto the play and pastimes of children. Take heed, and be not of them that see and yet deny.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE SUMMONS OF THE LORD OF HOSTS*, PP. 165–68

2. Then discuss the questions:
 - How does this story illustrate the limitations of the material world?
 - What aspects of the material world would advertisers like us to focus on?
 - Why is it important to understand that the material world reflects our underlying spiritual reality?
3. Using pictures cut from magazines, individually choose one picture that illustrates a materialistic view of reality and another picture that illustrates a spiritual view of reality. Share your two pictures with the rest of the group and briefly describe the reasons for your choices. Then in the whole group briefly discuss the question:
 - How can we share this view of reality with others?
4. Work in teams to read aloud the excerpt from *The Advent of Divine Justice* on the following page, look up the meaning of new words, and discuss the focus questions.
5. Then, create a 2–3 minute skit that demonstrates application of the principles of a chaste and holy life to everyday experiences in the life of a youth in your city or neighborhood today.
6. Present the skits in the whole group. Applaud all!

Process the Activity

Why is a chaste and holy life an important prerequisite for success in teaching?

Focus Questions: In what way does an accurate perception of the spiritual reality of the universe assist us to lead a chaste and holy life? How can a chaste and holy life “be made the controlling principle in the behavior and conduct of all Bahá’ís?” Exactly how can we lead “such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness” in today’s culture?

A chaste and holy life must be made the controlling principle in the behavior and conduct of all Bahá’ís, both in their social relations with the members of their own community, and in their contact with the world at large. It must adorn and reinforce the ceaseless labors and meritorious exertions of those whose enviable position is to propagate the Message, and to administer the affairs, of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. It must be upheld, in all its integrity and implications, in every phase of the life of those who fill the ranks of that Faith, whether in their homes, their travels, their clubs, their societies, their entertainments, their schools, and their universities. It must be accorded special consideration in the conduct of the social activities of every Bahá’í summer school and any other occasions on which Bahá’í community life is organized and fostered. It must be closely and continually identified with the mission of the Bahá’í youth, both as an element in the life of the Bahá’í community, and as a factor in the future progress and orientation of the youth of their own country.

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.

“By the righteousness of God!” writes Bahá’u’lláh, “The world, its vanities and its glory, and whatever delights it can offer, are all, in the sight of God, as worthless as, nay even more contemptible than, dust and ashes. Would that the hearts of men could comprehend it. 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.” “O ye My loved ones!” He thus exhorts His followers, “Suffer not the hem of My sacred vesture to be smirched and mired with the things of this world, and follow not the promptings of your evil and corrupt desires.” And again, “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.” “Disencumber yourselves,” He thus commands them, “of all attachment to this world and the vanities thereof. Beware that ye approach them not, inasmuch as they prompt you to walk after your own lusts and covetous desires, and hinder you from entering the straight and glorious Path.” “Eschew all manner of wickedness,” is His commandment, “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 among the purified.” “A race of men,” is His written promise, “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 from water and clay.” “The civilization,” is His grave warning, “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. . . . If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation.” “He hath chosen out of the whole world the hearts of His servants,” He explains, “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. . . .”

“The drinking of wine,” writes Abdu’l-Bahá, “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.” “Drink ye, O handmaidens of God,” Bahá’u’lláh Himself has affirmed, “the Mystic Wine from the cup of My words. Cast away, then, from you that which your minds abhor, for it hath been forbidden unto you in His Tablets and His Scriptures. Beware lest ye barter away the River that is life indeed for that which the souls of the pure-hearted detest. 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. Thus hath the sun of My commandment shone forth above the horizon of My utterance, that the handmaidens who believe in Me may be illumined.”

It must be remembered, however, that the maintenance of such a high standard of moral conduct is not to be associated or confused with any form of asceticism, or of excessive and bigoted puritanism. The standard inculcated by Bahá'u'lláh seeks, under no circumstances, to deny anyone the legitimate right and privilege to derive the fullest advantage and benefit from the manifold joys, beauties, and pleasures with which the world has been so plentifully enriched by an All-Loving Creator. “Should a man,” Bahá'u'lláh Himself reassures us, “wish to adorn himself with the ornaments of the earth, to wear its apparels, or partake of the benefits it can bestow, no 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.”

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE ADVENT OF DIVINE JUSTICE*, pp. 29–33

Purpose

Develop techniques for regular care of one's body.

1. Read the following quotation aloud:

O Son of Man! The temple of being is My throne; cleanse it of all things, that there I may be established and there I may abide.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC NO. 58

2. Throughout our lives, from conception and birth until our physical death, we are continually preparing the temple of our being as the home of our Beloved. In what ways is the cleaning and purification of our bodies to receive the Spirit like the preparation of a reed for the music of a musician?
3. Organize yourselves into groups so that each group studies one or more sections of the following pages, *SPIRITUALIZING OUR LIVES*, and reports on that section to the other groups. As you study, keep in mind that there are ample passages in the Bahá'í writings, especially in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, regarding care of the body, and that this compilation is only a drop from that ocean.
4. Read the quotations carefully, then discuss the focus question for your assigned topic.
5. In your small group, develop a specific plan that could assist yourselves and others to establish physical health and well-being.
6. Share your group's plan with the other groups. Applaud all!

Process the Activity

How can we assist our friends and peers in the community to appreciate the importance of caring for their bodies as the temple of their souls? What are some ways that we can share these ideas with the people we know?

Focus Questions: How can we care for our bodies as the temple of our souls? Why is this care so essential to our spiritual development?

Prayer and Fasting

We have commanded you to pray and fast from the beginning of maturity; this is ordained by God, your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers. He hath exempted from this those who are weak from illness or age, as a bounty from His Presence, and He is the Forgiving, the Generous. God hath granted you leave to prostrate yourselves on any surface that is clean, for We have removed in this regard the limitation that had been laid down in the Book; God, indeed, hath knowledge of that whereof ye know naught. Let him that findeth no water for ablution repeat five times the words “In the Name of God, the Most Pure, the Most Pure”, and then proceed to his devotions. Such is the command of the Lord of all worlds. In regions where the days and nights grow long, let times of prayer be gauged by clocks and other instruments that mark the passage of the hours. He, verily, is the Expounder, the Wise.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDÁS*, PP. 22–23

Purity and Cleanliness

God hath enjoined upon you to observe the utmost cleanliness, to the extent of washing what is soiled with dust, let alone with hardened dirt and similar defilement. Fear Him, and be of those who are pure. Should the garb of anyone be visibly sullied, his prayers shall not ascend to God, and the celestial Concourse will turn away from him. Make use of rose-water, and of pure perfume; this, indeed, is that which God hath loved from the beginning that hath no beginning, in order that there may be diffused from you what your Lord, the Incomparable, the All-Wise, desireth.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDÁS*, P. 47

My meaning is this, that in every aspect of life, purity and holiness, cleanliness and refinement, exalt the human condition and further the development of man's inner reality. Even in the physical realm, cleanliness will conduce to spirituality, as the Holy Writings clearly state. And although bodily cleanliness is a physical thing, it hath, nevertheless, a powerful influence on the life of the spirit.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ*, PP. 146–47

Make ye then a mighty effort, that the purity and sanctity which, above all else, are cherished by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, shall distinguish the people of Bahá; that in every kind of excellence the people of God shall surpass all other human beings; that both outwardly and inwardly they shall prove superior to the rest; that for purity, immaculacy, refinement, and the preservation of health, they shall be leaders in the vanguard of those who know. And that by their freedom from enslavement, their knowledge, their self-control, they shall be first among the pure, the free and the wise.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, p. 150

Focus Questions: How can we care for our bodies as the temple of our souls? Why is this care so essential to our spiritual development?

Avoiding Drugs and Alcohol

Gambling and the use of opium have been forbidden unto you. Eschew them both, O people, and be not of those who transgress. Beware of using any substance that induceth sluggishness and torpor in the human temple and inflicteth harm upon the body. We, verily, desire for you naught save what shall profit you, and to this bear witness all created things, had ye but ears to hear.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDÁS*, PARAGRAPH 155, P. 75

Beware lest ye exchange the Wine of God for your own wine, for it will stupefy your minds, and turn your faces away from the Countenance of God, the All-Glorious, the Peerless, the Inaccessible. Approach it not, for it hath been forbidden unto you by the behest of God, the Exalted, the Almighty.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDÁS*, NOTE 144, P. 227

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that the Aqdas prohibits *“both light and strong drinks”*, and He states that the reason for prohibiting the use of alcoholic drinks is because *“alcohol leadeth the mind astray and causeth the weakening of the body”*.

THE KITÁB-I-AQDÁS, NOTE 144, P. 227

'Abdu'l-Bahá has written:

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

O ye lovers of God! In this, the mighty cycle of Almighty God, violence and force, constraint and oppression, are one and all condemned. It is, however, mandatory that the use of opium be prevented by any means whatsoever, that perchance the human race may be delivered from this most powerful of plagues. And otherwise, woe and misery to whoso falleth short of his duty to his Lord.

In one of His Tablets ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated concerning opium: “the user, the buyer, the seller are all deprived of the bounty and grace of God”.

In yet another Tablet, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written:

Regarding hashish you have pointed out that some Persians have become habituated to its use. Gracious God! This is the worst of all intoxicants, and its prohibition is explicitly revealed. Its use causeth the disintegration of thought and the complete torpor of the soul. How could anyone seek the fruit of the infernal tree, and by partaking of it, be led to exemplify the qualities of a monster? How could anyone use this forbidden drug, and thus deprive himself of the blessings of the All-Merciful?

Alcohol consumeth the mind and causeth man to commit acts of absurdity, but this opium, this foul fruit of the infernal tree, and this wicked hashish extinguish the mind, freeze the spirit, petrify the soul, waste the body and leave man frustrated and lost.

THE KITÁB-I-AQDÁS, NOTE 170, PP. 238–39

Focus Questions: How can we care for our bodies as the temple of our souls? Why is this care so essential to our spiritual development?

Chastity

“Say,” He proclaims, “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. Thus instructeth you the Pen of the Ancient of Days, as bidden by your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful.” “They that follow their lusts and corrupt inclinations,” is yet another warning, “have erred and dissipated their efforts. They indeed are of the lost.” “It behooveth the people of Bahá,” He also has written, “to die to the world and all that is therein, to be so detached from all earthly things that the inmates of Paradise may inhale from their garment the sweet smelling savor of sanctity. . . . They that have tarnished the fair name of the Cause of God by following the things of the flesh—these are in palpable error!” “Purity and chastity,” He particularly admonishes, “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 the worlds of the spirit, and its fragrance is wafted even unto the Most Exalted Paradise.” “God,” He again affirms, “hath verily made chastity to be a crown for the heads of His handmaidens. Great is the blessedness of that handmaiden that hath attained unto this great station.” “We, verily, have decreed in Our Book,” is His assurance, “a goodly and bountiful reward to whosoever will turn away from wickedness, and lead a chaste and godly life. He, in truth, is the Great Giver, the All-Bountiful.” “We have sustained the weight of all calamities,” He testifies, “to sanctify you from all earthly corruption and ye are yet indifferent. . . . We, verily, behold your actions. If We perceive from them the sweet smelling savor of purity and holiness, We will most certainly bless you. Then will the tongues of the inmates of Paradise utter your praise and magnify your names amidst them who have drawn nigh unto God.”

BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, QUOTED BY SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE ADVENT OF DIVINE JUSTICE*, PP. 26–27

Concerning your question whether there are any legitimate forms of expression of the sex instinct outside of marriage; according to the Bahá'í Teachings no sexual act can be considered lawful unless performed between lawfully married persons. Outside of marital life there can be no lawful or healthy use of the sex impulse. The Bahá'í youth should, on the one hand, be taught the lesson of self-control which, when exercised, undoubtedly has a salutary effect on the development of character of personality in general, and on the other should be advised, nay even encouraged, to contract marriage while still young and in full possession of their physical vigour. Economic factors, no doubt, are often a serious hindrance to early marriage, but in most cases are only an excuse, and as such should not be overstressed.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. I, p. 56

. . . . By holiness in our Bahá'í teachings is meant attachment to God, His Precepts and His Will. We are not ascetics in any sense of the word. On the contrary, Bahá'u'lláh says God has created all the good things in the world for us to enjoy and partake of. But we must not become attached to them and put them before the spiritual things. Chastity in the strict sense means not to have sexual intercourse, or sexual intimacies, before marriage. In the general sense it means not to be licentious. This does not mean we Bahá'ís believe sexual relations to be impure or wrong. On the contrary they are natural and should be considered one of God's many blessings.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE LIGHT OF DIVINE GUIDANCE*, VOL.2, p. 71

Briefly stated the Bahá'í conception of sex is based on the belief that chastity should be strictly practiced by both sexes, not only because it is in itself highly commendable ethically, but also due to its being the only way to a happy and successful marital life.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 1, p. 56

1. In this activity we will create a symbolic representation of the temple of the soul.
2. Use the art materials provided to create and decorate your temple, making it beautiful to become worthy of holding the words of the Blessed Beauty.
3. As you work, reflect upon the close connection between the physical and spiritual realms, and how we use physical entities to have access to the spiritual realities.
4. Place the following Hidden Word of Bahá'u'lláh and prayer of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on a card that will fit inside your temple, or print them using your best penmanship.

Purpose:

Understand the spiritual significance of caring for our bodies.

O Son of Man! The temple of being is My throne;
cleanse it of all things, that there I may be established and
there I may abide.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, ARABIC NO. 58

O Divine Providence! Bestow Thou in all things purity and cleanliness upon the people of Bahá. Grant that they be freed from all defilement, and released from all addictions. Save them from committing any repugnant act, unbind them from the chains of every evil habit, that they may live pure and free, wholesome and cleanly, worthy to serve at Thy Sacred Threshold and fit to be related to their Lord. Deliver them from intoxicating drinks and tobacco, save them, rescue them, from this opium that bringeth on madness, suffer them to enjoy the sweet savours of holiness, that they may drink deep of the mystic cup of heavenly love and know the rapture of being drawn ever closer unto the Realm of the All-Glorious. For it is even as Thou has said: 'All that thou hast in thy cellar will not appease the thirst of my love—bring me, O cup-bearer, of the wine of the spirit a cup full as the sea!'

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ*, p. 149

Process the Activity

In the whole group, please listen while each individual shares one comment upon the interrelationship of the physical and spiritual realms of being.

Overcoming Stereotypes

Purpose:

Perceive the importance of overcoming stereotypes.

1. Participate in a brief role-play introduced by your facilitators.
2. After the role-play, debrief the experience:
 - How did the experience make you feel?
 - What were common ways people treated you?
 - How did you treat others?
 - In what ways do we consciously or unconsciously treat people as if they are their “role”?
 - How does it feel to be treated as if we’re no more than a particular “role” in society?
 - How does it feel to be treated as if our race, ethnicity, or gender can sum up our identity?
3. Individually reflect and recall a time in which you consciously resisted stereotyping other people or yourself, or a time that you clearly affirmed the spiritual reality of another person.
4. After this moment of reflection, turn to the person sitting beside you and share your memory with your neighbor.

Process the Activity

How does it feel to know that each of us is capable of resisting stereotyping and affirming the spiritual reality of a human being?

Complete Freedom from Racial Prejudice

1. In the whole group, read aloud the quotations on the following pages, COMPLETE FREEDOM FROM RACIAL PREJUDICE. Then discuss:
 - Why is overcoming racial prejudice the most vital and challenging issue facing America today?
 - What are the unique responsibilities assigned to each racial group?
 - What are the shared responsibilities of both groups?
 - How can we use Shoghi Effendi's instructions to promote unity with people of backgrounds other than black or white, including individuals of mixed heritage?
 - How can we apply Shoghi Effendi's instructions to promote the equality of women and men?
2. Briefly write your own responses to the following question. Then share your ideas in the whole group.
 - What *specific actions* can we take to promote racial unity in our homes?

business offices?

schools and colleges?

social parties and recreation grounds?

Bahá'í meetings, conferences, conventions, summer schools and Assemblies?

3. Finally, turn to your journals and record the specific lines of action that you personally will take to promote this important Bahá'í principle.

Purpose:

Identify actions that promote racial unity.

Plan specific methods to promote racial unity in our daily lives.

Process the Activity

Why is complete freedom from racial prejudice an important prerequisite for teaching others?

1 As to racial prejudice, the corrosion of which, for well-nigh a century, has bitten into the fiber, and attacked the whole social structure of American society, it should be regarded as constituting the most vital and challenging issue confronting the Bahá'í community at the present stage of its evolution. The ceaseless exertions which this issue of paramount importance calls for, the sacrifices it must impose, the care and vigilance it demands, the moral courage and fortitude it requires, the tact and sympathy it necessitates, invest this problem, which the American believers are still far from having satisfactorily resolved, with an urgency and importance that cannot be overestimated. White and Negro, high and low, young and old, whether newly converted to the Faith or not, all who stand identified with it must participate in, and lend their assistance, each according to his or her capacity, experience, and opportunities, to the common task of fulfilling the instructions, realizing the hopes, and following the example, of Abdu'l-Bahá. Whether colored or noncolored, neither race has the right, or can conscientiously claim, to be regarded as absolved from such an obligation, as having realized such hopes, or having faithfully followed such an example. A long and thorny road, beset with pitfalls, still remains untraveled, both by the white and the Negro exponents of the redeeming Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. On the distance they cover, and the manner in which they travel that road, must depend, to an extent which few among them can imagine, the operation of those intangible influences which are indispensable to the spiritual triumph of the American believers and the material success of their newly launched enterprise. . . .

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE ADVENT OF DIVINE JUSTICE*, PP. 33-36

2 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. . . .

“O ye discerning ones!” Bahá'u'lláh has written, “Verily, the words which have descended from the heaven of the Will of God are the source of unity and harmony for the world. Close your eyes to racial differences, and welcome all with the light of oneness.” “We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations,” He proclaims, “. . . 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 hath said,” writes Abdu’l-Bahá, “that the various races of humankind lend a composite harmony and beauty of color to the whole. Let all associate, therefore, in this great human garden even as flowers grow and blend together side by side without discord or disagreement between them.” “Bahá’u’lláh,” Abdu’l-Bahá moreover has said, “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. . . .”

A tremendous effort is required by both races if their outlook, their manners, and conduct are to reflect, in this darkened age, the spirit and teachings of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. Casting away once and for all the fallacious doctrine of racial superiority, with all its attendant evils, confusion, and miseries, and welcoming and encouraging the intermixture of races, and tearing down the barriers that now divide them, they should each endeavor, day and night, to fulfill their particular responsibilities in the common task which so urgently faces them. Let them, while each is attempting to contribute its share to the solution of this perplexing problem, call to mind the warnings of Abdu’l-Bahá, and visualize, while there is yet time, the dire consequences that must follow if this challenging and unhappy situation that faces the entire American nation is not definitely remedied.

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 the solution of so vast a problem is a matter that exclusively concerns the other. 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. 36–41

Expressing True Liberty

Purpose:

Understand the meaning of true liberty.

1. Listen to two brief stories to illustrate the concept of true liberty.
2. After hearing these stories, work with the person sitting beside you to study the following excerpt from a letter of the Universal House of Justice. After reading, work with your partner to discuss the questions embedded in the letter.
3. Then, combine your team with another team to make groups of four. In these larger groups share the highlights of your previous discussion and come up with a real-life example of an individual demonstrating true liberty in a way that illustrates the principles of Bahá'u'lláh to others.
4. Share these examples in the whole group. Applaud all!

Process the Activity

How does understanding the true meaning of freedom assist us to fulfill our purpose of transforming ourselves and transforming society?

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.”

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? Since human beings are created “to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization,” the exercise of freedom, it maybe 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.

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

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. . . .

The equilibrium of responsibilities implied by all this presupposes maturity on the part of all concerned. This maturity as 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 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.”

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.

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 unity, freedom to progress, freedom in peace and joy.

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.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *A WIDER HORIZON, SELECTED LETTERS 1983-1992*, p. 219

1. In the whole group, write the following passage on a chalkboard or chart paper. Work together to identify and then sketch simple illustrations of some of the key words in the space above the words on the board.
2. Read through the entire passage several times in the whole group, then continue to read as you cover every fourth word. In this way, the passage will be memorized by the whole group in a short time.

Purpose:

Memorize Bahá'u'lláh's encouragement to youth.

Blessed is he who in the prime of his youth and the
heyday of his life will arise to serve the Cause of the
Lord of the beginning and of the end and adorn his
heart with His love.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL 2, P. 415

3. Invite those who wish to also recite individually. Applaud all efforts!

Process the Activity

How does it feel to know that we can memorize the words of Bahá'u'lláh so quickly and easily? In what ways can the memorization of such powerful words help us to transform ourselves and transform the world?

Purpose:

Create an individual spiritual transformation plan.

1. In the whole group, call to mind and then list on chart paper some of the unique roles, responsibilities and station of youth.
2. Briefly discuss: What are some examples of goals that could lead to fulfillment of these responsibilities “little by little, day by day.” Record your ideas on chart paper.
3. In the whole group read through the sample spiritual development plan on the following page that illustrates how one person took steps toward the goal of teaching the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh to friends. Notice how framing the steps toward achieving the goal within the learning framework of Knowledge, Wisdom, Spiritual Perception, and Eloquent Speech can aid the process. Discuss:
 - How can this sort of systematic process help us to internalize our goals and then translate them into action?
4. Then, individually read the quotations ILLUMINED YOUTH: TRANSFORMING OURSELVES on pp. 74–75.
5. After taking time to read and reflect, use the blank Spiritual Transformation Plan on p. 76 to create for yourself a spiritual transformation plan that assists you to fulfill your purpose of transforming yourself and transforming the world.
6. Play meditative music and work in silence to prepare your plan.
7. After all have had time to create their plans, consider sharing your ideas with the person beside you.
8. In the whole group briefly discuss: What are some ways that we could encourage and support each other as we work toward our goals?

SETTING PERSONAL GOALS WITHIN THE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

Sample Personal Goal: To teach my friends the Faith

<p>KNOWLEDGE <i>(I Know)</i> To gain information about facts, spiritual principles, or sacred writings on a topic. What is the new input from this experience?</p>	<p>Know what the Bahá'í writings say about the prerequisites to success in teaching. Post quotations around the house to focus my attention on teaching the Faith.</p>
<p>WISDOM <i>(I Understand)</i> To gain deeper understanding of facts, principles, or writings through consultation and reflection. How is my new knowledge connected to the other things I already know?</p>	<p>Understand what leads to success in teaching by reading and reflecting upon stories of people who successfully teach the Faith, by observing people who are teaching, and by discussing with others. Understand the relationship between achieving the prerequisites for success in teaching and actual success in the teaching work.</p>
<p>SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION <i>(I Perceive, I Plan)</i> To reflect on the application of facts, principles, or writings in one's own life and one's service to others. How does my new learning change me? How does it change the way I see the world? How could I apply this learning in my own life?</p>	<p>Consciously look for positive examples of moral rectitude, a chaste and holy life, and true racial unity in myself and in my friends. Recognize and take advantage of teaching opportunities. Discern where I have and where I have not taken advantage of teaching opportunities by bringing myself to account each day concerning teaching.</p>
<p>ELOQUENT SPEECH <i>(I Teach, I Serve)</i> To articulate or demonstrate, through words and deeds, understanding and application of facts, principles, and writings. What am I doing? What am I saying?</p>	<p>Praise and encourage my friends when I see them demonstrating moral rectitude, a chaste and holy life, and racial unity. Recite memorized Writings about teaching on a daily basis. Turn to God for assistance. Seize opportunities to tell my friends about the Faith in everyday conversation. Prepare and invite my friends to a short devotional meeting or fireside presentation on the Faith.</p>

1 . . . Is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions?

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-ÍQÁN*, p. 240

2 Wherefore, O ye illumined youth, strive by night and by day to unravel the mysteries of the mind and spirit, and to grasp the secrets of the Day of God. Inform yourselves of the evidences that the Most Great Name hath dawned. Open your lips in praise. Adduce convincing arguments and proofs. Lead those who thirst to the fountain of life; grant ye true health to the ailing. Be ye apprentices of God; be ye physicians directed by God, and heal ye the sick among humankind. Bring those who have been excluded into the circle of intimate friends. Make the despairing to be filled with hope. Waken them that slumber; make the heedless mindful. Such are the fruits of this earthly life. Such is the station of resplendent glory. Upon you be Bahá'u'l-Abhá.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*: VOL. 2, p. 415

3 “How to attain spirituality,” the Guardian noted, “is indeed a question to which every young man and woman must sooner or later try to find a satisfactory answer. It is precisely because no such satisfactory answer has been given or found, that modern youth finds itself bewildered, and is being consequently carried away by the materialistic forces that are so powerfully undermining the foundations of man’s moral and spiritual life. Indeed, the chief reason for the evils rampant in society is the lack of spirituality.”

His brotherly advice to you, and to all loyal and ardent young believers like you, is that you should deepen upon 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.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE IMPORTANCE OF DEEPENING*, pp. 36–37

4 Undoubtedly, it is within your power to contribute significantly to shaping the societies of the coming century; youth can move the world.

MESSAGES FROM THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, p. 615

5 Bahá'u'lláh has stated quite clearly in His Writings the essential requisites for our spiritual growth, and these are stressed again and again by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His talks and Tablets. One can summarize them briefly in this way:

The recital each day of one of the Obligatory Prayers with pure-hearted devotion.

The regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures, specifically at least each morning and evening, with reverence, attention and thought.

Prayerful meditation on the Teachings, so that we may understand them more deeply, fulfill them more faithfully, and convey them more accurately to others.

Striving every day to bring our behaviour more into accordance with the high standards that are set forth in the Teachings.

Teaching the Cause of God.

Selfless service in the work of the Cause and in the carrying on of our trade or profession.

MESSAGES FROM THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, p. 589

SETTING PERSONAL GOALS WITHIN THE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

Identify Your Personal Goal: _____

<p>KNOWLEDGE (<i>I Know</i>) To gain information about facts, spiritual principles, or sacred writings on a topic. What is the new input from this experience?</p>	
<p>WISDOM (<i>I Understand</i>) To gain deeper understanding of facts, principles, or writings through consultation and reflection. How is my new knowledge connected to the other things I already know?</p>	
<p>SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION (<i>I Perceive, I Plan</i>) To reflect on the application of facts, principles, or writings in one's own life and one's service to others. How does my new learning change me? How does it change the way I see the world? How could I apply this learning in my own life?</p>	
<p>ELOQUENT SPEECH (<i>I Teach, I Serve</i>) To articulate or demonstrate, through words and deeds, understanding and application of facts, principles, and writings. What am I doing? What am I saying?</p>	

1. Read aloud the following quotation in your whole group:

To labour in the arena of service, the individual draws upon his love for Bahá'u'lláh, the power of the Covenant, the dynamics of prayer, the inspiration and education derived from regular study of the Holy Texts, and the transformative forces that operate upon his soul as he strives to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles. . . .

The role of the individual is of unique importance in the work of the Cause. . . . It is incumbent upon the individual to seize opportunities, form friendships, build relationships, and win the cooperation of others in common service to the Faith and society.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *THE INSTITUTION OF THE COUNSELLORS*, p. 11

Purpose:

Appreciate the power of collective action.

2. Now that you've considered your role and prepared your plan for spiritual transformation, enjoy a demonstration of the collective power of individual action.
3. After the demonstration, briefly review the themes and objectives for Module Two and then conclude the session with prayers for divine assistance that we all may achieve our goals.



**Core Curriculum
for Spiritual Education
and Training**

1. Introduction to Module Three
2. Fellowship and Love
3. Trees of Our Lives
4. The Environment and the Human Heart
5. Overcoming Oppression
6. Investigating Reality
7. Storming the Gates of Heaven
8. A New Cycle of Human Power
9. Heroes, Heroines and Hands
10. Transforming Humanity, Spiritual Revolution: A Handbook
11. Teaching the Cause of God
12. Empowering Community Life
13. Systematic Training for Youth Empowerment
14. Concluding the Training
15. Naming Our Gifts
16. Review Objectives for Module Three
17. Evaluation of the Training
18. Closure

Youth Empowerment

A New Cycle of Human Power

MODULE THREE Transforming Civilization

Opening Devotions

Purpose:

Set a vibrant spiritual atmosphere.

Begin the opening devotions with vibrant music, such as your drumming or a recording of African drumming. Then consider playing Chinese meditative music or other music while members of your group read each passage aloud, with a significant pause for reflection before each reading.

Glory be to Thee, O God, for Thy manifestation of love to mankind! O Thou Who art our Life and Light, guide Thy servants in Thy way, and make us rich in Thee and free from all save Thee.

O God, teach us Thy Oneness and give us a realization of Thy Unity, that we may see no one save Thee. Thou art the Merciful and the Giver of bounty!

O God, create in the hearts of Thy beloved the fire of Thy love, that it may consume the thought of everything save Thee.

Reveal to us, O God, Thine exalted eternity—that Thou hast ever been and wilt ever be, and that there is no God save Thee. Verily, in Thee will we find comfort and strength.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *BAHÁ'Í PRAYERS (UK)*, pp. 59–61

Now is the time to cheer and refresh the down-cast through the invigorating breeze of love and fellowship, and the living waters of friendliness and charity.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 7

The Divine Messengers have been sent down, and their Books were revealed, for the purpose of promoting the knowledge of God, and of furthering unity and fellowship amongst men.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *EPISTLE TO THE SON OF THE WOLF*, p. 12

We shall always be with you; if We inhale the perfume of your fellowship, Our heart will assuredly rejoice, for naught else can satisfy Us.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 316

O My Son! The company of the ungodly increaseth sorrow, whilst fellowship with the righteous cleanseth the rust from off the heart. He that seeketh to commune with God, let him betake himself to the companionship of His loved ones; and he that desireth to hearken unto the word of God, let him give ear to the words of His chosen ones.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 56

O Son of Dust! Beware! Walk not with the ungodly and seek not fellowship with him, for such companionship turneth the radiance of the heart into infernal fire.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 57

O Son of My Handmaid! Wouldst thou seek the grace of the Holy Spirit, enter into fellowship with the righteous, for he hath drunk the cup of eternal life at the hands of the immortal Cup-bearer and even as the true morn doth quicken and illumine the hearts of the dead.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORDS*, PERSIAN NO. 58

The proof is clear that in all degrees and kingdoms unity and agreement, love and fellowship are the cause of life, whereas dissension, animosity and separation are ever conducive to death.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, p. 269

God desires unity and love; He commands harmony and fellowship. Enmity is human disobedience; God Himself is love.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, p. 300

Love and fellowship are absolutely needful to win the good pleasure of God, which is the goal of all human attainment. We must be united. We must love each other. We must ever praise each other. We must bestow commendation upon all people, thus removing the discord and hatred which have caused alienation amongst men. Otherwise, the conditions of the past will continue, praising ourselves and condemning others; religious wars will have no end, and religious prejudice, the prime cause of this havoc and tribulation, will increase. This must be abandoned, and the way to do it is to investigate the reality which underlies all the religions. This underlying reality is the love of humanity. For God is one and humanity is one, and the only creed of the Prophets is love and unity.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, p. 410

The divine friends must be attracted to and enamored of each other and ever be ready and willing to sacrifice their own lives for each other. Should one soul from amongst the believers meet another, it must be as though a thirsty one with parched lips has reached to the fountain of the water of life, or a lover has met his true beloved. For one of the greatest divine wisdoms regarding the appearance of the holy Manifestations is this: The souls may come to know each other and become intimate with each other; the power of the love of God may make all of them the waves of one sea, the flowers of one rose garden, and the stars of one heaven.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *TABLETS OF THE DIVINE PLAN*, p. 52

O Thou Kind Bestower, O Nourisher of our souls and hearts! We have no aim, except to walk Thy path; we have no wish, except to bring Thee joy. Our souls are united, and our hearts are welded, each to each. In offering Thee our thanks and praise, in following Thy ways and soaring in Thy skies, we are all one. We are helpless, stand Thou by us, and give us strength.

Thou art the Protector, the Provider, the Kind.

PRAYER OF THE GREATEST HOLY LEAF IN *BAHIYYIH KHANUM*, p. 156

Fellowship and Love

Purpose:

Identify the transforming power of fellowship and love.

1. Play three or four cooperative games, initiated by your facilitators.
2. After playing the games, reflect on a specific time in your own life when you contributed to the spirit of fellowship and love in a group. What was happening? Who was involved? What were you doing? What were others doing? What did this power of fellowship assist that group to achieve?
3. Then turn to the person beside you and briefly describe that experience. Carefully listen without speaking while each person speaks for one full minute, then switch roles so that each person has time to listen and time to speak. Your facilitators may signal when it is time to switch roles.
4. Reconvene in the whole group, then briefly discuss the questions:
 - In what ways do games assist us to establish true bonds of fellowship and love?
 - In what ways do fellowship and love assist us to fulfill our purpose?
 - What are some other methods of establishing fellowship and love?

Process the Activity

Turn to your journal and record your response to the question:

How can I contribute to the spirit of fellowship and love in this group today?

After these introductory activities, read aloud the themes and learning objectives for Module Three of this Youth Empowerment course: A New Cycle of Human Power.

Module Three Themes

Investigating Reality

. . . I have perfected in every one of you My creation, so that the excellence of My handiwork may be fully revealed unto men. It follows, therefore, that every man hath been, and will continue to be, able of himself to appreciate the Beauty of God, the Glorified. Had he not been endowed with such a capacity, how could he be called to account for his failure?

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 143–44

Transforming Humanity

The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDÁS*, PARAGRAPH 181, p. 85

Teaching the Cause of God

. . . The individual . . . must make a conscious decision as to what he or she will do to serve the Plan, and as to how, where and when to do it. This determination enables the individual to check the progress of his actions and, if necessary, to modify the steps being taken. Becoming accustomed to such a procedure of systematic striving lends meaning and fulfillment to the life of any Bahá'í.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, RIDVÁN 155

KNOWLEDGE

- Identify the transforming power of fellowship and love
- Identify some of the social pressures we face in contemporary society
- Know the importance of individual investigation of truth
- Know some of the contributions of the heroes, heroines, and Hands of the Cause of God
- Know some of strategies in the Bahá'í writings for transforming ourselves and society

WISDOM

- Understand the human capacity for change
- Understand the power of prayer
- Appreciate the wealth of guidance in the Bahá'í writings
- Appreciate the many heroes and heroines in our Faith
- Understand the role of the community in empowering youth
- Understand the importance of planning to achieve our purpose in life

SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION

- Perceive how our connections with others affect us and allow us to affect others
- Perceive how our cultural environment seeks to influence our perceptions
- Perceive the power of divine assistance
- Perceive how to build on current conditions to create an even more empowering community life
- Gain a vision of a lifetime of contributions to the Cause of God

ELOQUENT SPEECH

- Plan a devotional gathering
- Practice applying the power of the teachings in daily life
- Prepare a handbook of inspiring quotations
- Memorize one inspiring passage to use it regularly in our daily lives
- Teach the Cause of God
- Create an ongoing plan for training, teaching, and transformation

1. Using a large blank piece of paper, take a few minutes to sketch your personal family tree, showing as many generations as you can. Then add branches of the tree to show your connections to your friends, your school or place of work, and any group to which you feel you belong. Make the tree as large and as complex as it takes to show your connections with other people and groups of people.
2. After you have had a chance to work independently, work in small groups to share these trees of your selves. Begin by thinking of a time when you felt grateful to be a member of a certain group, or a time when it was painful to be a member of a certain group, or one thing you wish people would never say about a group to which you belong.¹ Then listen carefully to the others in your group while all share their stories in turn.
3. When everyone in your small group has completed sharing, reconvene in the entire group. Then read aloud the quotations on the following page, TREES OF OUR LIVES.
4. Briefly discuss:
 - How do our own experiences help us to appreciate the truth of these writings?
 - How can the trees of our individual lives bring forth the fruit of unity in all our connections with other individuals and groups?

Purpose:

Perceive how our connections with others affect us and allow us to affect others.

Process the Activity

In your journals record one action that you can take to promote the fruit of unity in your connections with the individuals and groups in your life. Decide how, when, and where you can take this action. And how might this one action lead to another?

¹ McIntosh, Peggy and Emily Style, "Social, Emotional, and Political Learning," *Educating Minds and Hearts*, Jonathan Cohen, ed., 1999

1 Ye are the saplings which the hand of Loving-kindness hath planted in the soil of mercy, and which the showers of bounty have made to flourish. He hath protected you from the mighty winds of misbelief, and the tempestuous gales of impiety, and nurtured you with the hands of His loving providence. Now is the time for you to put forth your leaves, and yield your fruit. The fruits of the tree of man have ever been and are goodly deeds and a praiseworthy character. Withhold not these fruits from the heedless. If they be accepted, your end is attained, and the purpose of life achieved.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *EPISTLE TO THE SON OF THE WOLF*, p. 25–26

2 The utterance of God is a lamp, whose light is these words: Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. He Who is the Day Star of Truth beareth Me witness! So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth. The one true God, He Who knoweth all things, Himself testifieth to the truth of these words.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 288

3 We have created you from one tree and have caused you to be as the leaves and fruit of the same tree, that haply ye may become a source of comfort to one another.

THE BÁB, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE BÁB*, p. 129

4 Let this gathering be a foreshadowing of what will, in very truth, take place in this world, when every child of God realizes that they are leaves of one tree, flowers in one garden, drops in one ocean, and sons and daughters of one Father, whose name is love!

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, p. 30

The Environment and The Human Heart

1. Individually select one advertisement from the collection provided. In the whole group, show your advertisement and answer the questions:
 - What message does this advertisement project about the purpose of human life?
 - Why would this company want to project this message?
2. After all have shared their advertisements along with their assessment of its purpose, discuss the questions:
 - What sort of spiritual environment do these advertisements create for the human spirit?
 - What are other sorts of messages in the environment? Give examples.
 - Are these other messages the same as or different from the message in the paid advertising?
 - In general, how would you describe the spiritual environment of this society? How do you perceive this environment affecting the people you know?
3. While still in the whole group read aloud the following passage:

We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.

No movement in the world directs its attention upon both these aspects of human life and has full measures for their improvement, save the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. And this is its distinctive feature. If we desire therefore the good of the world we should strive to spread those teachings and also practice them in our own life. Through them will the human heart be changed, and also our social environment provides the atmosphere in which we can grow spiritually and reflect in full the light of God shining through the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 1, PP. 84–85

4. Thinking about all our connections with each other, with various groups, and with society as a whole, what are some of the influences of the social environment on us? Record your responses on chart paper.
5. Then discuss the questions:
 - Which of these influences help us?
 - Which influences harm us?
 - How can we learn to tell the difference?

Purpose:

Perceive how our cultural environment seeks to influence our perceptions.

Process the Activity

Why is it important to identify the environmental influences on our lives and on the lives of others?

Overcoming Oppression

Purpose:

Identify some of the social pressures we face in contemporary society

1. In the whole group, read aloud the words of Bahá'u'lláh:

The Ancient Beauty 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. He hath drained to its dregs the cup of sorrow, that all the peoples of the earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 99

2. Briefly discuss the questions:

- What is the true liberty that Bahá'u'lláh has brought to humanity?
- How is this quest for true liberty expressed in human society?
- How can Bahá'ís most effectively contribute to the cause of true liberty?

3. Then read Bahá'u'lláh's definition of "oppression":

. . . By "oppression" is meant the want of capacity to acquire spiritual knowledge and apprehend the Word of God.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-ÍQÁN*, p. 32

What "oppression" is more grievous than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it?

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-ÍQÁN*, p. 31

4. Discuss the question:

- How does Bahá'u'lláh's definition of "oppression" assist us to see ways that we can contribute to the process of setting humanity free?

5. Call to mind the connections with others that we identified as branches of the "trees of our lives." Keeping in mind our connections with others, and taking into account the total social environment of our culture, identify some of the pressures that we face in our daily lives. List these pressures on chart paper.

6. Then describe how these pressures affect us directly:

- What exactly is happening when we feel this sense of pressure: How does it look? How does it feel?
- What are some possible responses: An easy response? A courageous response? A creative response?
- What makes it possible for us to respond creatively or courageously in oppressive circumstances?

7. Share the following passage from Shoghi Effendi:

The gross materialism that engulfs the entire nation at the present hour; the attachment to worldly things that enshrouds the souls of men; the fears and anxieties that distract their minds; the pleasure and dissipations that fill their time, the prejudices and animosities that darken their outlook, the apathy and lethargy that paralyze their spiritual faculties - these are among the formidable obstacles that stand in the path of every would-be warrior in the service of Bahá'u'lláh, obstacles which he must battle against and surmount in his crusade for the redemption of his own countrymen.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *CITADEL OF FAITH*, p. 149

8. Briefly discuss: Are the obstacles listed by Shoghi Effendi—gross materialism, attachment to worldly pursuits, fears and anxieties, pleasures and dissipations, prejudices and animosities, apathy and lethargy—still factors that affect us as we strive to be a force for freedom today?
9. Conclude the activity as suggested by your facilitators.

Process the Activity

How does it feel to express ourselves and respond to others by passing notes that will not be shared in the whole group?

Purpose:

Know the importance of individual investigation of truth.

Understand the human capacity for change.

1. Recall the advertising messages we discussed in an earlier activity. Let's take another look at advertising and discuss how it, and mass media in general, affects us.

2. Consider the following statistic:

By age 16, the average child will have witnessed an estimated 200,000 acts of violence and by age 18, approximately 40,000 sexually titillating scenes.

LIKONA, *EDUCATING FOR CHARACTER*, P. 5

3. Take a moment to recall one of your earliest memories of watching a violent, racist or sexually inappropriate scene on television. If desired, briefly describe that experience for the rest of the group: How did you feel on that occasion?

4. Observe your facilitators demonstrating how these experiences affect us.

5. In the whole group, share the following story of the first white youth to speak to a black student in one of Atlanta's desegregated high schools.

He was from a family all too easily labeled . . . "redneck," He was a tough athlete, a poor student, not a well-read boy of fourteen. . . .

Nevertheless, the young man found himself, inexplicably and suddenly, . . . impelled to help out [his fellow student]. He described the incident (and himself) in this way: "I didn't want any part of them here. They belong with their own, and we belong with our own—that's what we all said. Then those two kids came here, and they had a tough time. They were all to themselves. The school had to get police protection for them. We didn't want them, and they knew it. But we told them so, in case they were slow to get the message. I didn't hold back, no more than anyone else. I said, 'Go, [expletive], go,' with all the others. I meant it. But after a few weeks, I began to see a kid, not [an expletive]—a guy who knew how to smile when it was rough going, and who walked straight and tall, and was polite. I told my parents, 'It's a real shame that someone like him has to pay for the trouble caused by all those federal judges.'

"Then it happened. I saw people cuss at him. 'The dirty [expletive],' they kept on calling him, and soon they were pushing him in a corner, and it looked like trouble, bad trouble. I went over and broke it up. I said, 'Hey, cut it out.' They all looked at me as if I was crazy, my white buddies and the [other student], too. But my buddies stopped and the [student] left. Before he left, though, I spoke to him. I didn't mean to, actually! It just came out of my mouth. I was surprised to hear the words myself: 'I'm sorry.' As soon as he was gone, my friend gave it to me: 'What do you mean, "I'm sorry!"' I didn't know what to say. I was as silent as the [person] they stopped. After a few minutes, we went to basketball practice. That was the strangest moment of my life."

His life had, in fact, changed. In no time, it seems, he was beginning to talk more consciously (more self-consciously, actually) to the black youth. Soon, he was championing him personally, while still decrying "integration." Finally, he would become a friend of the black youth's and advocate "an end to the whole lousy business of segregation."

. . . He told me: "I'd be as I was, I guess, but for being there in school that year and seeing that kid—seeing him behave himself, no matter what we called him, and seeing him being insulted so bad, so real bad. Something in me just drew the line, and something in me began to change, I think."

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6. Briefly discuss the questions:
 - In what way did the black youth display the same powerful rectitude of character that we saw earlier in the story about Ruby Bridges?
 - What was the impact of his character on the white youth?
 - What is the source of that power?
 - How did the white youth use his own power to individually investigate the truth to overcome years of false messages from his family and his culture?
7. Work in small groups to read the quotations INVESTIGATING REALITY and answer the focus questions.
8. In your small group, select one story from those shared to bring back and tell in the whole group.

Process the Activity:

How can we use the power of individual investigation of reality in our daily lives?

INVESTIGATING REALITY

Focus Questions: Why is it important for each person to investigate reality for himself or herself? What is an example from your own life, or from the life of someone you know personally, of individually investigating the truth? What changed as a result of that individual investigation?

1 Tear asunder, in My Name, the veils that have grievously blinded your vision, and, through the power born of your belief in the unity of God, scatter the idols of vain imitation. Enter, then, the holy paradise of the good-pleasure of the All-Merciful. Sanctify your souls from whatsoever is not of God, and taste ye the sweetness of rest within the pale of His vast and mighty Revelation, and beneath the shadow of His supreme and infallible authority. Suffer not yourselves to be wrapt in the dense veils of your selfish desires, inasmuch as I have perfected in every one of you My creation, so that the excellence of My handiwork may be fully revealed unto men. It follows, therefore, that every man hath been, and will continue to be, able of himself to appreciate the Beauty of God, the Glorified. Had he not been endowed with such a capacity, how could he be called to account for his failure? If, in the Day when all the peoples of the earth will be gathered together, any man should, whilst standing in the presence of God, be asked: “Wherefore hast thou disbelieved in My Beauty and turned away from My Self,” and if such a man should reply and say: “Inasmuch as all men have erred, and none hath been found willing to turn his face to the Truth, I, too, following their example, have grievously failed to recognize the Beauty of the Eternal,” such a plea will, assuredly, be rejected. For the faith of no man can be conditioned by any one except himself.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, PP. 143–44

2 God has given man the eye of investigation by which he may see and recognize truth. He has endowed man with ears that he may hear the message of reality and conferred upon him the gift of reason by which he may discover things for himself. This is his endowment and equipment for the investigation of reality. Man is not intended to see through the eyes of another, hear through another's ears nor comprehend with another's brain. Each human creature has individual endowment, power and responsibility in the creative plan of God. Therefore, depend upon your own reason and judgment and adhere to the outcome of your own investigation; otherwise, you will be utterly submerged in the sea of ignorance and deprived of all the bounties of God. Turn to God, supplicate humbly at His threshold, seeking assistance and confirmation, that God may rend asunder the veils that obscure your vision. Then will your eyes be filled with illumination, face to face you will behold the reality of God and your heart become completely purified from the dross of ignorance, reflecting the glories and bounties of the Kingdom.

Holy souls are like soil which has been plowed and tilled with much earnest labor, the thorns and thistles cast aside and all weeds uprooted. Such soil is most fruitful, and the harvest from it will prove full and plenteous. In this same way man must free himself from the weeds of ignorance, thorns of superstitions and thistles of imitations that he may discover reality in the harvests of true knowledge. Otherwise, the

discovery of reality is impossible, contention and divergence of religious belief will always remain, and mankind, like ferocious wolves, will rage and attack each other in hatred and antagonism. We supplicate God that He may destroy the veils which limit our vision and that these becloudings, which darken the way of the manifestation of the shining lights, may be dispelled in order that the effulgent Sun of Reality may shine forth. We implore and invoke God, seeking His assistance and confirmation. Man is a child of God, most noble, lofty and beloved by God, his Creator. Therefore, he must ever strive that the divine bounties and virtues bestowed upon him may prevail and control him. Just now the soil of human hearts seems like black earth, but in the innermost substance of this dark soil there are thousands of fragrant flowers latent. We must endeavor to cultivate and awaken these potentialities, discover the secret treasure in this very mine and depository of God, bring forth these resplendent powers long hidden in human hearts. Then will the glories of both worlds be blended and increased and the quintessence of human existence be made manifest.

We must not be content with simply following a certain course because we find our fathers pursued that course. It is the duty of everyone to investigate reality, and investigation of reality by another will not do for us. If all in the world were rich and one man poor, of what use are these riches to that man? If all the world be virtuous and a man steeped in vice, what good results are forthcoming from him? If all the world be resplendent and a man blind, where are his benefits? If all the world be in plenty and a man hungry, what sustenance does he derive? Therefore, every man must be an investigator for himself. Ideas and beliefs left by his fathers and ancestors as a heritage will not suffice, for adherence to these are but imitations, and imitations have ever been a cause of disappointment and misguidance. Be investigators of reality that you may attain the verity of truth and life.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *THE PROMULGATION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE*, pp. 293–94

3 . . . The root cause of prejudice is blind imitation of the past. . . .

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ*, p. 247

4 When studying at school or university Bahá’í youth will often find themselves in the unusual and slightly embarrassing position of having a more profound insight into a subject than their instructors. The Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh throw light on so many aspects of human life and knowledge that a Bahá’í must learn, earlier than most, to weigh the information that is given to him rather than to accept it blindly. A Bahá’í has the advantage of the divine Revelation for this Age, which shines like a searchlight on so many problems that baffle modern thinkers; he must therefore develop the ability to learn everything from those around him, showing proper humility before his teachers, but always relating what he hears to the Bahá’í teachings, for they will enable him to sort out the gold from the dross of human error.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *LIGHTS OF GUIDANCE*, p. 215

Storming the Gates of Heaven

Purpose:

Perceive the power of divine assistance.

Plan a devotional gathering.

1. In the whole group, read aloud the passages on the following pages and discuss the questions:
 - What are our own experiences with the power of divine assistance?
 - What are our most powerful experiences of prayer?
 - How can we collectively draw on the power of divine assistance to transform ourselves and our society?
2. While still in the whole group, plan a devotional meeting, considering such factors as:
 - How can we create a spiritual environment and minimize distractions, so that we are able to more fully concentrate on our prayers?
 - How can we prepare ourselves physically and spiritually for prayer?
 - Exactly when and where will we convene this gathering?
 - Who will we invite? How will we invite them?
 - How will we make our friends welcome and comfortable when they arrive?
3. With your friends in your minds and hearts, carefully select prayers, readings, music and plan the environment for your devotional meetings open to all.
4. Share these prayers, readings, and music, etc. among yourselves while you're together and then again at the time and place you've selected.
5. Remember to debrief the experience after your devotional meeting open to all: What are the highlights? How can we build on this experience in the future? What would be our next steps?

Focus Questions: How does Bahá'u'lláh describe His power? What are our own experiences with the power of divine assistance? What are our most powerful experiences of prayer? How can we collectively draw on the power of divine assistance to transform ourselves and society?

1 “By the righteousness of the one true God! If one speck of a jewel be lost and buried beneath a mountain of stones, and lie hidden beyond the seven seas, the Hand of Omnipotence will assuredly reveal it in this day, pure and cleansed from dross.” “He that partaketh of the waters of My Revelation will taste all the incorruptible delights ordained by God from the beginning that hath no beginning to the end that hath no end.” “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.” “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 splendor, 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.” “We are possessed of such power which, if brought to light, will transmute the most deadly of poisons into a panacea of unfailing efficacy.”

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, QUOTED IN SHOGHI EFFENDI, *WORLD ORDER OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 107

2 Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men. Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul. Thus have the mysteries of the Revelation of God been decreed by virtue of the Will of Him Who is the Source of power and wisdom.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 295

3 It is seemly that the servant should, after each prayer, supplicate God to bestow mercy and forgiveness upon his parents. Thereupon God's call will be raised: “Thousand upon thousand of what thou hast asked for thy parents shall be thy recompense! Blessed is he who remembereth his parents when community with God. There is, verily, no God but Him, the Mighty, The Well-Beloved.”

THE BÁB, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE BÁB*, p. 94

4 The simplicity characterizing the offering of Bahá'í prayers, whether obligatory or otherwise, should be maintained. Rigidity and rituals should be strictly avoided.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, P. 236

5 We may well emulate Bahá'í youth whose recent surge forward into the van of proclamation and teaching is one of the most encouraging and significant trends in the Faith, and who storm the gates of heaven for support in their enterprises by long-sustained, precedent and continuing prayer. We are all able to call upon Bahá'u'lláh for His Divine, all-powerful aid, and He will surely help us. For He is the Hearer of prayers, the Answerer.

MESSAGES OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, P. 214

1. Working in teams of two, identify specific situations in your daily lives that represent challenges to live or to teach the Bahá'í principles. Write out one challenging scenario on a 3" x 5" card. Place all the cards in a basket.
2. After all the cards have been gathered, read all the situations aloud in the whole group. Then organize yourselves into small groups, with each group selecting one of these situations to address.
3. In your working groups, read aloud the NEW CYCLE OF HUMAN POWER quotations and discuss how one or more of these powers can be applied to your group's scenario. Prepare a brief role-play that portrays the difficult scenario and transforms it through the power of the teachings.
4. Share your role-plays in the whole group. After each role play has been shared, discuss the question:
 - What strategies did this role-play illustrate that we can apply to difficult situations in our own lives?

Applaud all!

Purpose:

Know some of the strategies in the Writings for transforming ourselves and society.

Understand the wealth of guidance in the Bahá'í writings.

Practice applying the power of the teachings to daily life.

Process the Activity

Turn to your journals and select one of the strategies to apply in my own life?
When, where and how will you take the first steps?

Power of Love

What a power is love! It is the most wonderful, the greatest of all living powers.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, p. 179

One can hardly imagine what a great influence genuine love, truthfulness and purity of motives exert on the souls of men.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, p. 2

Power of Unity

Welcome all with the light of oneness.

BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, QUOTED IN *THE ADVENT OF DIVINE JUSTICE*, p. 37

Bring those who have been excluded into the circle of intimate friends.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, p. 415

Power of Self Control

Each of us is responsible for one life only, and that is our own. Each of us is immeasurably far from being “perfect as our heavenly father is perfect” and the task of perfecting our own life and character is one that requires all our attention, our will-power and energy. If we allow our attention and energy to be taken up in efforts to keep others right and remedy their faults, we are wasting precious time. We are like ploughmen each of whom has his team to manage and his plough to direct, and in order to keep his furrow straight he must keep his eye on his goal and concentrate on his own task. If he looks to this side and that to see how Tom and Harry are getting on and to criticize their ploughing, then his own furrow will assuredly become crooked.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, PP. 3–4

Power of Example

Guidance hath ever been given by words, and now it is given by deeds.

BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, *THE HIDDEN WORD*, PERSIAN NO. 76

One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely, the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *BAHÁ’Í ADMINISTRATION*, p. 66

Power of Perception

One must see in every human being only that which is worthy of praise. When this is done, one can be a friend to the whole human race. If, however, we look at people from the standpoint of their faults, then being a friend to them is a formidable task.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ*, p. 169

Power of Consultation

Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.

BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH*, p. 168

Power of Cooperation

Indeed, the believers have not yet fully learned to draw on each other’s strength and consolation in time of need. The Cause of God is endowed with tremendous powers, and the reason the believers do not gain more from it is because they have not learned to draw fully on these mighty forces of love and strength and harmony generated by the Faith.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *DIRECTIVES OF THE GUARDIAN*, p. 27

Power of Divine Assistance

O thou who art turning thy face towards God! Close thine eyes to all things else, and open them to the realm of the All-Glorious. Ask whatsoever thou wishest of Him alone; seek whatsoever thou seekest from Him alone. With a look He granteth a hundred thousand hopes, with a glance He healeth a hundred thousand incurable ills, with a nod He layeth balm on every wound, with a glimpse He freeth the hearts from the shackles of grief. He doeth as He doeth, and what recourse have we? He carrieth out His Will, He ordaineth what He pleaseth. Then better for thee to bow down thy head in submission, and put thy trust in the All-Merciful Lord.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ*, p. 51

Power of Joy and Happiness

Joy gives us wings! In times of joy our strength is more vital, our intellect keener, and our understanding less clouded. We seem better able to cope with the world and to find our sphere of usefulness. But when sadness visits us we become weak, our strength leaves us, our comprehension is dim and our intelligence veiled.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *PARIS TALKS*, p. 109

In a time to come, morals will degenerate to an extreme degree. It is essential that children be reared in the Bahá’í way, that they may find happiness both in this world and the next. If not, they shall be beset by sorrows and troubles, for human happiness is founded upon spiritual behaviour.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ*, p. 127

Power of the Word of God

Is it within human power, O Hakím, to effect in the constituent elements of any of the minute and indivisible particles of matter so complete a transformation as to transmute it into purest gold? Perplexing and difficult as this may appear, the still greater task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish. The Force capable of such a transformation transcendeth the potency of the Elixir itself. The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 200

Power of Utterance

Therefore an enlightened man of wisdom should primarily speak with words as mild as milk, that the children of men may be nurtured and edified thereby and may attain the ultimate goal of human existence which is the station of true understanding and nobility.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 173

Power of Obedience to Authority

There can be no protection for the Faith unless the friends are willing to submit to their administrative bodies, especially when these are acting in good faith; and the individual believers are not in a position to judge their National Body. If any wrong has been done, we must leave it in the hands of God, knowing, as 'Abdu'l-Baha said, that He will right it, and in the mean time not disrupt the Cause of God by constantly harping on these matters.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, p. 114

The parents have the inescapable duty to educate their children—but not vice versa; the children have the duty to obey their parents—the parents do not obey the children.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 1, p. 414

. . . Authority must in general be expressed with love, humility and a genuine respect for others. Thus exercised, authority strikes a natural note and accords with that which is acceptable to spiritually attuned and fairminded souls.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, 19 MAY 1994 LETTER

Power of Justice

O people of God! 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, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 27

The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, p. 67

Power of Discipline

Discipline of some sort, whether physical, moral or intellectual, is indeed indispensable, and no training can be said to be complete and fruitful if it disregards this element. The child when born is far from being perfect. It is not only helpless, but actually is imperfect, and even is naturally inclined towards evil. He should be trained, his natural inclinations harmonized, adjusted and controlled, and if necessary suppressed or regulated, so as to ensure his healthy physical and moral development.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 1, p. 303

Power of Flexibility

It is neither possible nor desirable for the Universal House of Justice to set forth a set of rules covering every situation.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 1, p. 47

A Personal Story: Power of Listening

'Abdu'l-Bahá seemed to listen with my ears. . . . And when, under His encouraging sympathy, the interviewer became emptied of his words, there followed a brief interval of silence. There was no instant and complete outpouring of explanation and advice. He sometimes closed His eyes a moment as if He sought guidance from above Himself; sometimes He sat and searched the questioner's soul with a loving, comprehending smile that melted the heart.

HOWARD COLBY IVES, *PORTALS TO FREEDOM*, pp. 194–95

Heroes, Heroines and Hands

Purpose:

Know some of the contributions of heroes, heroines, and Hands of the Cause of God.

Appreciate the many heroes and heroines in our Faith.

Describe to others our own attraction to one hero, heroine, or Hand of the Cause of God.

1. Silently, walk through the portrait gallery arranged by your facilitators. Individually circulate among these portraits and select one that particularly attracts your heart. Spend time looking at the portrait you selected and read the short biography on the back of the photograph.
2. Then choose a partner with whom you have not yet spent much time in this training program. Introduce your partner to your chosen hero, heroine, or Hand of the Cause of God, by saying, “I would like to introduce you to. . .” and then explain what it is about this particular picture that attracted you, and thing that attracts you to this person, based on the biographical information you read on the back of the portrait.

Optional extension activity:

If desired, conduct additional research of the heroic life that touches your heart and prepare a presentation that will inspire other people also to arise to perform heroic deeds of service to humanity. Consider sharing these presentations at an upcoming devotional meeting or fireside.

Process the Activity

Record in your journal your reflections on the question:

How can I draw on the example of my hero, heroine, or Hand of the Cause of God to more powerfully live and teach the transformative message of Bahá'u'lláh?

1. In your whole group read aloud the following words of Bahá'u'lláh:

The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *THE KITÁB-I-AQDÁS*, p. 85

I testify that no sooner had the First Word proceeded, through the potency of Thy will and purpose, out of His mouth, and the First Call gone forth from His lips than the whole creation was revolutionized, and all that are in the heavens and all that are on earth were stirred to the depths. Through that Word the realities of all created things were shaken, were divided, separated, scattered, combined and reunited, disclosing, in both the contingent world and the heavenly kingdom, entities of a new creation, and revealing, in the unseen realms, the signs and tokens of Thy unity and oneness. Through that Call Thou didst announce unto all Thy servants the advent of Thy most great Revelation and the appearance of Thy most perfect Cause.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS*, pp. 295–96

2. As a group, identify some of the revolutionary changes that Bahá'u'lláh has created in the world.
3. Individually reflect on your own role as an activist in Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual revolution: How can we become powerful agents for the transformation of human society?
4. Using the materials supplied by your facilitators, create your own Handbook for Spiritual Revolution. You may work individually or in small teams and to read, reflect on, and (if desired) discuss the passages provided as you place them in your books.
5. After having time to work on your books, choose one of the quotations, and select a partner with whom to memorize that quotation.
6. Share your completed handbooks and your memorized quotations in the whole group.

Purpose:

Prepare a handbook of inspiring quotations.

Memorize one of these passages to use it regularly in our daily lives.

Process the Activity

What are the most effective ways that we can use our handbooks to become more powerful agents for the transformation of human society?

Teaching the Cause of God: Jigsaw Activity

Purpose:

Prepare to teach the Cause of God.

1. Organize yourselves into three small groups approximately equal in size. In your small study group, read one of the sections of the TABLET TO SIYYID MIHDÍY-I-DAHÁJÍ, an important Tablet that describes the process of teaching the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. In your small group read the selection aloud and answer the focus questions. Consider incorporating brief quotations from the Tablet in your answer. Each member of your group will need to share your group's answer with others.
2. After completing the study of your group's portion of the Tablet, reconvene in the whole group. Then organize yourselves into new groups, so that each new group includes at least one member of each of the three previous groups.
3. In your new groups, share results of your study in your previous group.
4. Again gather as a whole group and share your new insights on the teaching process. Then, discuss the questions:
 - Why do we teach?
 - Who can we teach?
 - Where and when can we teach?
 - Exactly how can we teach?
5. Once again, consider this important guidance from the Universal House of Justice:

. . . The individual . . . must make a conscious decision as to what he or she will do to serve the Plan, and as to how, where and when to do it. This determination enables the individual to check the progress of his actions and, if necessary, to modify the steps being taken. Becoming accustomed to such a procedure of systematic striving lends meaning and fulfillment to the life of any Bahá'í.

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, RIDVÁN 155
6. Review the personal transformation plan you created in Module One. In light of your experiences working toward your goal and your study of this important Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh, create your new personal teaching plan. As you work, consider the following questions:
 - What are my friends' interests, needs, troubles, or hopes?
 - What aspects of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings address *one* of my friends' interests, needs, troubles or hopes?
 - What passage or phrase from the Bahá'í writings can I memorize to share with my friends?
 - How, where, and when will I share these words of Bahá'u'lláh with my friends?

Process the Activity

How will I continue to develop my plan? How will I check my progress, build on it, and modify my steps in light of my experiences?

Focus Question: What exactly is Bahá'u'lláh asking us to do? What are some other important point in this selection?

He is the Most Holy, the Most Great, the Most Exalted, the Most High.

O My Name!* Yield thou praise unto God for having graciously chosen thee to be a shower of bounty for that which We have sown in the pure and blessed soil and enabled thee to serve as a springtime of tender mercy for the wondrous and sublime trees We have planted. Indeed so great is this favour that of all created things in the world of existence, none can ever hope to rival it. We have moreover given thee to drink the choice wine of utterance from the chalice of the heavenly bestowals of thy merciful Lord, which is none other than this Tongue of holiness—a Tongue that, as soon as it was unloosed, quickened the entire creation, set in motion all beings and caused the Nightingale to pour forth its melodies. This is the Fountain of living water for all that dwell in the realm of being.

Oftentimes have We wafted upon thee the sweet savours of the All-Merciful from this Branch which moveth over the Tablet of thy Lord, the Mighty, the Unconstrained. By the righteousness of the One true God! Were all created things, visible and invisible, to direct themselves towards Him, thou wouldst find them winging their flight unto the Supreme Goal, the Spot wherein the divine Lote-Tree exclaimeth: Verily, no God is there but Me, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful.

Great is thy blessedness, inasmuch as thou hast been journeying throughout the lands of God, and been the embodiment of joy and assurance for the people of Bahá who have renounced all else but Him, and set their hearts towards this Court which hath shed its radiance upon all realms, and sprinkled them with the surging waters of this Ocean wherewith thou thyself hast been sprinkled—an Ocean which hath encompassed all created things.

Indeed thou didst grasp the significance of rendering assistance unto God and didst arise to achieve this through the power of wisdom and utterance. Say: To assist Me is to teach My Cause. This is a theme with which whole Tablets are laden. This is the changeless commandment of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. Comprehend this, O ye men of insight. They that have passed beyond the bounds of wisdom fail to understand the meaning of assisting God as set forth in the Book. Say: Fear ye God and sow not the seeds of dissension amongst men. Observe ye that which hath been enjoined upon you by your Lord, the Almighty,

* *Siyyid Mihdíy-i-Dahájí, to whom this Tablet was addressed, had been given by Bahá'u'lláh the title Ismu'llahí'l-Mihdí, 'The Name of God, Mihdi. He later broke the Covenant.*

the All-Knowing. He knoweth the reality of victory and hath taught it to you with an utterance that the vain imaginings of them that rove distraught in the wilderness of doubt can never corrupt.

O My Name! Suffer all created things to quaff once again from this chalice which hath caused the seas to rise. Kindle then in the hearts the blazing fire which this crimson Tree hath ignited, that they may arise to extol and magnify His Name amidst the adherents of all Faiths.

Numerous letters from thee have been presented before Our Throne. We have perused them as a token of grace on Our part, and for each name thou didst mention therein We have revealed that which will stir the minds of men and will cause the spirits to soar. Moreover We have repeatedly enabled thee to hearken unto the warblings of the birds of heaven and to incline thine ear to the songs of the nightingales pouring forth their melodies upon the branches. Thus was the Pen of God set in motion in thy remembrance that thou mightest admonish men through the power of this utterance which is divinely ordained to be the revealer of the signs of His glory.

Blessed is the spot wherein the anthem of His praise is raised, and blessed the ear that hearkeneth unto that which hath been sent down from the heaven of the loving-kindness of thy Lord, the All-Merciful.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, PP. 195–97

Focus Questions: What exactly is Bahá'u'lláh asking us to do? What are some other important points in this selection?

Exhort thou the servants of God unto that whereunto We have exhorted thee that they may abstain from whatsoever is forbidden them in the Mother Book. Those who perpetrate deeds that would create turmoil among the people have indeed strayed far from helping God and His Cause and are numbered with the mischief-makers in the Tablet which God hath designated to be the dawning-place of all Tablets.

Say: 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.

Say: Fear ye God and commit not such deeds as would cause My loved ones on earth to lament. Thus biddeth you this Pen which hath set the Pen of Glory in motion within the arena of wisdom and true understanding.

Convey My greetings unto those whose faces mirror forth the radiance of Bahá, then mention to them this utterance which cheereth the eyes of the righteous. The glory of God rest upon thee and upon such as have firmly clung to the Cord of God, the Revealer of verses. . . .

Restrain thou the inhabitants of those regions from provocative acts, from strife, dissension or aught else that would create trouble. That which is praiseworthy in these days is the promotion of the Cause. For instance if those people who pursue certain aims were to dedicate themselves to the teaching of the Cause, all the dwellers of those regions would, ere long, be invested with the mantle of faith.

Should anyone perceive the sweetness of the following passage in the Tablet revealed in honour of Nabil of Qa'in,* he would readily comprehend the significance of assistance: Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation. 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

* *Nabil-i-Akbar*

to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets.

O My Name! Utterance must needs possess penetrating power. For if bereft of this quality it would fail to exert influence. And this penetrating influence dependeth on the spirit being pure and the heart stainless. Likewise it needeth moderation, without which the hearer would be unable to bear it, rather he would manifest opposition from the very outset. And moderation will be obtained by blending utterance with the tokens of divine wisdom which are recorded in the sacred Books and Tablets. Thus when the essence of one's utterance is endowed with these two requisites it will prove highly effective and will be the prime factor in transforming the souls of men. This is the station of supreme victory and celestial dominion. Whoso attaineth thereto is invested with the power to teach the Cause of God and to prevail over the hearts and minds of men.

O My Name! The Day-Star of utterance, shining resplendent from the dayspring of divine Revelation, hath so illumined the Scrolls and Tablets that the kingdom of utterance and the exalted dominion of understanding vibrate with joy and ecstasy and shine forth with the splendour of His light, yet the generality of mankind comprehend not.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, PP. 197–99

Focus Questions: What exactly is Bahá'u'lláh asking us to do? What are some other important points in this selection?

The reason why the subject of aid and assistance hath time and again streamed and will continue to stream from the Pen of Providence is to warn the friends of God lest they engage in activities that would give rise to strife and turmoil. It is incumbent upon them, one and all, to diligently seek ways to help the Cause of God in such manner as We have explained. This is but a token of His grace especially conferred upon His loved ones that every one of them may attain the station characterized by the words: 'Whoso quickeneth a soul hath verily quickened all mankind.'

Temporal ascendancy hath been and will continue to be under the shadow of this station. Its appointed hour is pre-ordained in the Book of God. He is truly cognizant thereof and it will be manifested through the potency of His might. Verily He is the Powerful, the All-Subduing, the Omnipotent, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

The sanctified souls should ponder and meditate in their hearts regarding the methods of teaching. From the texts of the wondrous, heavenly Scriptures they should memorize phrases and passages bearing on various instances, so that in the course of their speech they may recite divine verses whenever the occasion demandeth it, inasmuch as these holy verses are the most potent elixir, the greatest and mightiest talisman. So potent is their influence that the hearer will have no cause for vacillation. I swear by My life! This Revelation is endowed with such a power that it will act as the lodestone for all nations and kindreds of the earth. Should one pause to meditate attentively he would recognize that no place is there, nor can there be, for anyone to flee to.

In such manner hath the Kitáb-i-Aqdas been revealed that it attracteth and embraceth all the divinely appointed Dispensations. Blessed those who peruse it. Blessed those who apprehend it. Blessed those who meditate upon it. Blessed those who ponder its meaning. So vast is its range that it hath encompassed all men ere their recognition of it. Ere long will its sovereign power, its pervasive influence and the greatness of its might be manifested on earth. Verily, thy God is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.

O My Name! Harken thou unto My Voice coming from the direction of My Throne. He wisheth to make mention of thy name at all times inasmuch as thou hast proved thyself steadfast in extolling His virtues amongst men. Indeed thy Lord loveth fidelity as found in the realm of creation, and He hath given it precedence over most of the praiseworthy qualities. Verily, He is Potent and Powerful.

Know thou moreover that We have heard the praise thou hast uttered in thy communion with God, thy Lord, the Exalted, the Gracious. Great indeed is the blessedness awaiting thee, inasmuch as thou hast curtailed thine own affairs in favour of this inviolable, this mighty and enlightened Cause. We entreat God to make thy call a magnet which will attract the embodiments of names in the world of existence that all beings may spontaneously hasten to heed it. No God is there besides Him, the Exalted, the Pre-Eminent, the Ever-Blessed, the Sublime, the Most August, the Most Glorious, the Most Bountiful, the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, *TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH*, PP. 199–201

Identify Your Teaching Goal: _____

<p>KNOWLEDGE (<i>I Know</i>) To gain information about facts, spiritual principles, or sacred writings on a topic. What is the new input from this experience?</p>	
<p>WISDOM (<i>I Understand</i>) To gain deeper understanding of facts, principles, or writings through consultation and reflection. How is my new knowledge connected to the other things I already know?</p>	
<p>SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION (<i>I Perceive, I Plan</i>) To reflect on the application of facts, principles, or writings in one's own life and one's service to others. How does my new learning change me? How does it change the way I see the world? How could I apply this learning in my own life?</p>	
<p>ELOQUENT SPEECH (<i>I Teach, I Serve</i>) To articulate or demonstrate, through words and deeds, understanding and application of facts, principles, and writings. What am I doing? What am I saying?</p>	

Purpose:

Understand the role of the community in empowering youth.

Perceive ways to build on current conditions to create an even more empowering community life.

1. Keep in mind that we are not alone in this work. Read aloud in your whole group the following quotation:

. . . As we read in one of the letters written on behalf of the Guardian: “Until the public sees in the Bahá’í Community a true pattern, in action, of something better than it already has, it will not respond to the Faith in large numbers.” When people embrace the Cause, they should then, through the Teachings, develop their relationships with each other and with their fellow-citizens to gradually produce a truly Bahá’í community, a light and haven for the bewildered.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, RIDVAN 1994

2. Not only are youth powerful teachers of the Cause of God, but they contribute to the building of ideal Bahá’í communities that will attract the hearts of large numbers of people. Read the following passages aloud in the whole group:

The old and the young have each something specific to contribute to the progress and welfare of the Bahá’í community. The energy of youth should be tempered and guided by the wisdom of old age.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, *THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS*, VOL. 2, PP. 426–27

A community is of course more than the sum of its membership; it is a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders; it is a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress. Since Bahá’ís everywhere are at the very beginning of the process of community building, enormous effort must be devoted to the tasks at hand.

As we have said in an earlier message, the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behaviour: those patterns by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly are manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth. This calls for the integration of the component elements—adults, youth and children—in spiritual, social, educational and administrative activities; and their engagement in local plans of teaching and development. It implies a collective will and sense of purpose to perpetuate the Spiritual Assembly through annual elections. It involves the practice of collective worship of God. Hence, it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Bahá’í centres, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, RIDVÁN 153

3. Then organize yourselves into small groups and circulate among the following consultation stations to explore the meaning of those quotations.

4. **Gather with your fellow small group members at one of the Consultation Stations** and write, or use images to express, your answers to the questions on the paper sheet at your station.
 - **Station #1—Current Achievements:** What do you see that the Bahá'í community is already doing, or has already achieved, that reflects the principles of youth empowerment, as we have studied in the passages throughout this course? What passages from the Holy Writings guide and inspire these positive actions that currently occur?
 - **Station #2—Vision of the Future:** Imagine the Bahá'í community nine years in the future, having experienced significant growth in size and in spirit, and now increasingly reflecting youth empowerment. Imagine scenes from the teaching field, community life, and outreach and service to the community as a whole. What is happening that makes this future community such a happy, healthy, and productive place? What passages from the Bahá'í writings are helpful in inspiring and guiding action toward this bright future?
 - **Station #3—Current Needs and Opportunities:** Consider all the youth that are associated one way or another with our Bahá'í community today. Identify practical needs that exist, including those of Bahá'ís, other friends, and the community of interest. Do youth have appropriate ways to learn to teach and serve the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and to serve humanity? Are there specific youth that would benefit from tutoring, practical support, or special encouragement to help assure that they advance and serve the Cause? Are there other pressing needs in local communities that would benefit from the contributions of youth?
 - **Station #4—Specific Action Steps:** Consider the future ideal Bahá'í community that will be effectively and beautifully manifesting the power of youth to teach, promote unity, and transform patterns of Bahá'í community life. Identify specific steps toward this vision that would represent significant progress— focus especially on ideas that could reasonably be achieved within the coming few weeks or months. Reflect on the spiritual, human and material resources of the community. What specific lines of action would you suggest? What specific line of action do you feel that you can work to achieve? What do you see as your first steps? What could we do together that would be more powerful than what we could do alone?

5. **With your small group, cycle through each station** and add your own contributions onto the sheet at each station.

6. **When each group has had a chance to work** at each station, spend 5 minutes as an individual to circulate freely to each station and consider the various contributions on each sheet. Using markers or stickers, mark up to five contributions (total across all sheets) that you personally feel are the most important.
7. **Using your journal or the space below**, select one specific—simple and doable—line of action that you feel confident that you can achieve within the next few weeks or months.
 - How will you begin?
 - How will the local Bahá'í community, or community at large, be touched?
 - What time frame will be needed?
 - How will you know when you are successful?
 - Who will you be able to work with?
 - How will family, school, work, and other responsibilities harmonize with your plan?
 - What forms of approval or assistance may be needed from the Local Spiritual Assembly or other institutions of the Faith?
8. Share your plans in the whole group. After all have shared their plans, consult as a group:
 - How can we encourage and support each other so that we're all successful in our lines of action?
 - Would we like to integrate some of these lines of action into a group plan? If so, what would be our first steps?
9. Conclude the activity with prayers for divine assistance. Then find a way to immediately take your first step in your action plan.

1. Enjoy a demonstration about the power of systematic planning, action, and reflection.
2. In the whole group carefully read aloud the following guidance of the Universal House of Justice:

The individual alone can exercise those capacities which include the ability to take initiative, to seize opportunities, to form friendships, to interact personally with others, to build relationships, to win the cooperation of others in common service to the Faith and society, and to convert into action the decisions made by consultative bodies. . . .

To optimize the use of these capacities, the individual draws upon his 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, and the transformative forces that operate upon his soul as he strives to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles. . . .

To effect the possibilities of expansion and consolidation implied by entry by troops, a determined, worldwide effort to develop human resources must be made. . . . It is therefore of paramount importance that systematic attention be given to devising methods for 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. There should be no delay in establishing permanent institutes designed to provide well-organized, formally conducted programmes of training on a regular schedule. . . .

These centres of Bahá'í learning will have as their goal one very practical outcome, namely, the raising up of large numbers of believers who are trained to foster and facilitate the process of entry by troops with efficiency and love.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, RIDVÁN 153

3. Briefly discuss:
 - What is the relationship between the expansion and consolidation of the Bahá'í Faith and the transformation of human society?
 - As individuals, what do we see as our most important responsibilities in this process?
 - How does our earlier demonstration emphasize these points?
4. As a group, please also consider your ongoing study, action, and reflection. Your facilitators will be able to share information about courses of study available in your area.

Purpose:

Understand the importance of planning to achieve our purpose in life.

Create an ongoing plan for training, teaching and transformation.

5. In addition to continuing your systematic study, please consider hosting a regular series of devotional meetings or firesides using the Fireside Series of short workshops created to accompany videos generated by the National Teaching Committee on the topics:

- The Power of Race Unity
- The Power of Prayer
- Family Life: The Seeds of World Peace
- Two Wings of a Bird: The Equality of Women and Men



Plans for additional youth-friendly short learning experiences are available online at www.core-curriculum.org/downloads. Sample firesides are included in the appendix of this course book. Please take a few moments to familiarize yourselves with these materials.

6. Consult as a group about the following questions:

- Considering the lines of action we've already developed, how would we like to continue reaching out to the people we know? How could the text-based firesides included in the appendix or available online assist us in this outreach?
- When and where would we like to schedule our next devotional meeting or fireside?
- Who will we invite? How will we invite them? How can we support each other in this process?

Process the Activity

Reflect in your journal on the question: How do I plan to continue to develop my capacity to teach and serve humanity?

1. Individually and silently reflect on the times of study, reflection, action planning, and prayer that we have enjoyed together in this training program, designed to release the power of youth to move the world.
2. Then convene a sharing circle to share with the whole group your response to the question:
 - What do you value most about yourself, your family members and friends, and the community as a whole, as we work together to release the spiritual power of youth to transform ourselves, our communities, and the world?
3. Individually reflect again: Do you know why you were given your name, what the name means, or if you were named for a particular person or to express a particular spiritual quality?
4. Also reflect on the changes in your life as you moved from childhood to spiritual maturity.
5. Now imagine yourself at some point in the future, when you are the age of your parents or your grandparents: How would you like to be known at that time? What actions or principles do you want your name to stand for as you actively move in the world?
6. Conclude the activity with a sharing circle in which you share your reflections on your own names and listen carefully to the reflections of others.

Purpose:

Reflect upon the knowledge, spiritual insights, and skills gained in this training program.

Gain a vision of a lifetime of contributions to the Cause of God.

Reflect on the Training

1. Briefly review the content as well as the acts of service that you have completed during this course. Discuss as a group: What have been your most important accomplishments?
2. Considering your overall action plan for continued study, service, and teaching, do you feel that you have clarity about your next few steps? If not please adjust your plans as needed.
3. Please complete the evaluation form on the following page, or provided by your facilitators.

Purpose:

Reflect on the training process.

Provide a sense of closure for the course.

Suggest ways to improve the training program.

Process the activity:

What is the value of pausing to reflect on these important questions? What is the value of listening to the reflections of others?

**Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education
Youth Empowerment Course Two**

held on _____
 in _____
 facilitated by _____
 sponsored by _____

Evaluation

This opportunity to work with you has truly been a pleasure. Please candidly share your feelings and reactions. This information will be most valuable for the ongoing evaluation of this Youth Empowerment program.

	Exceptional	Very good	Fair	Poor
The presenters were organized and clear in their presentation.				
The purpose of the training and the individual modules was made clear.				
The materials supported of the presentations.				
Adequate time was provided to reflect upon and record your observations.				
The training demonstrated the use of different teaching methods and learning tools.				
The Sacred Writings were sufficiently utilized to elevate the spirit of the participants and lay the foundation for the work before them.				
The powerful role of youth in the Cause of God was made clear and you have already taken some steps to transform yourself and the world.				

What new actions have you initiated since beginning this training program?

What elements of the course were most helpful to you?

What was least helpful to you?

What would you recommend for future workshops?

As we recall, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has promised that transformation is achieved “little by little, day by day.”

Conclude the course with prayers, music, and the following words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

Man’s life has its springtime and is endowed with marvelous glory. The period of youth is characterized by strength and vigour and stands out as the choicest time in human life. Therefore you should strive day and night so that endowed with heavenly strength, inspired with brilliant motives and aided by His celestial power and heavenly grace and confirmation, you may become the ornaments of the world of humanity, and pre-eminent among those who are initiated into true learning and the love of God. You must be distinguished amidst men by your sanctity and detachment, loftiness of purpose, magnanimity, determination, noble-mindedness, tenacity, the elevation of your aims and your spiritual qualities; that you may become the means of exaltation and glory for the Cause of God and the dawning places of His heavenly bestowals; that you may conduct yourselves in conformity with the counsels and exhortations of the Blessed Beauty—may my life be offered up for His loved ones—and by reflecting Bahá’í qualities and attributes, you may stand out distinguished from others. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá eagerly anticipates that each one of you may become even as a fearless lion moving in the pastures of human perfection and a musk-laden breeze wafting over the meads of virtue.

The glory of glories rest upon you.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, *LET THY BREEZE REFRESH THEM*, pp. 19–20

Appendix

Spiritual Revolution: A Handbook

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GLUE A" HERE

Look ye not upon the fewness of thy numbers, rather, seek ye out hearts that are pure. One consecrated soul is preferable to a thousand other souls. If a small number of people gather lovingly together, with absolute purity and sanctity, with their hearts free of the world, experiencing the emotions of the Kingdom and the powerful magnetic forces of the Divine, and being at one in their happy fellowship, that gathering will exert its influence over all the earth. The nature of that band of people, the words they speak, the deeds they do, will unleash the bestowals of Heaven, and provide a foretaste of eternal bliss. The hosts of the Company on high will defend them, and the angels of the Abhá Paradise, in continuous succession, will come down to their aid.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, PP. 80-81

O peoples of the earth! Haste ye to do the pleasure of God, and war ye valiantly, as it behooveth you to war, for the sake of proclaiming His resistless and immovable Cause. We have decreed that war shall be waged in the path of God with the armies of wisdom and utterance, and of a goodly character and praiseworthy deeds. Thus hath it been decided by Him Who is the All-Powerful, the Almighty. There is no glory for him that committeth disorder on the earth after it hath been made so good. Fear God, O people, and be not of them that act unjustly.

BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, EPISTLE TO THE SON OF THE WOLF, P. 24

END ↑

GLUE "B" HERE

The friends must, at all times, bear in mind that they are, in a way, like soldiers under attack. The world is at present in an exceedingly dark condition spiritually; hatred and prejudice of every sort are literally tearing it to pieces. We, on the other hand, are the custodians of the opposite forces, the forces of love, of unity, of peace and integration, and we must continually be on our guard, whether as individuals or as an Assembly or Community, lest through us these destructive, negative forces enter into our midst. In other words, we must beware lest the darkness of society become reflected in our acts and attitudes, perhaps all unconsciously. Love for each other, the deep sense that we are a new organism, the dawn-breakers of a new World Order, must constantly animate our Bahá’í lives, and we must pray to be protected from the contamination of society which is so diseased with prejudice.

SHOQHI EFFENDI, DIRECTIVES OF THE GUARDIAN, P. 41

Be not grieved if thou performest it thyself alone. Let God be all-sufficient for thee. Commune intimately with His Spirit, and be thou of the thankful. Proclaim the Cause of thy Lord unto all who are in the heavens and on the earth. Should any man respond to thy call, lay bare before him the pearls of the wisdom of the Lord, thy God, which His Spirit hath sent down unto thee, and be thou of them that truly believe. And should any one reject thine offer, turn thou away from him, and put thy trust and confidence in the Lord, thy God, the Lord of all worlds.

By the righteousness of God! Whoso openeth his lips in this Day and maketh mention of the name of his Lord, the hosts of Divine inspiration shall descend upon him from the heaven of My name, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. On him shall also descend the Concourse on high, each bearing aloft a chalice of pure light.

BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, P. 280

“A” ↑

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Be not grieved if thou performest it thyself alone. Let God be all-sufficient for thee. Commune intimately with His Spirit, and be thou of the thankful. Proclaim the Cause of thy Lord unto all who are in the heavens and on the earth. Should any man respond to thy call, lay bare before him the pearls of the wisdom of the Lord, thy God, which His Spirit hath sent down unto thee, and be thou of them that truly believe. And should any one reject thine offer, turn thou away from him, and put thy trust and confidence in the Lord, thy God, the Lord of all worlds.

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BAHA'ULLAH, GLEANINGS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'ULLAH, P. 280

O peoples of the earth! Haste ye to do the pleasure of God, and war ye valiantly, as it behooveth you to war, for the sake of proclaiming His resistless and immovable Cause. We have decreed that war shall be waged in the path of God with the armies of wisdom and utterance, and of a goodly character and praiseworthy deeds. Thus hath it been decided by Him Who is the All-Powerful, the Almighty. There is no glory for him that committeth disorder on the earth after it hath been made so good. Fear God, O people, and be not of them that act unjustly.

BAHA'ULLAH, EPISTLE TO THE SON OF THE WOLF, P. 24

“B” ↑

GLUE "D" HERE

One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely, the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATION, P. 66

The hour is indeed propitious. The ordeals and tribulations which the hungry, the dispossessed, the sick, as well as the disillusioned and restless multitudes, are now experiencing, offer the bearers of the Message of the Most Great Name, an opportunity which may never again recur. There is no time to lose. Every warrior in the ever-advancing army of Bahá'u'lláh must arise and participate in this holy crusade. The rewards and prizes to be won are inestimable.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, DAWN OF A NEW DAY, P. 128

“C” ↑

GLUE "E" HERE

Look ye not upon the fewness of thy numbers, rather, seek ye out hearts that are pure. One consecrated soul is preferable to a thousand other souls. If a small number of people gather lovingly together, with absolute purity and sanctity, with their hearts free of the world, experiencing the emotions of the Kingdom and the powerful magnetic forces of the Divine, and being at one in their happy fellowship, that gathering will exert its influence over all the earth. The nature of that band of people, the words they speak, the deeds they do, will unleash the bestowals of Heaven, and provide a foretaste of eternal bliss. The hosts of the Company on high will defend them, and the angels of the Abhá Paradise, in continuous succession, will come down to their aid.

'ABDUL-BAHÁ, SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDUL-BAHÁ, PP. 80-81

“D” ↑

The great thing is to "live the life" - to have our lives so saturated with the Divine teachings and the Bahá'í Spirit that people cannot fail to see a joy, a power, a love, a purity, a radiance, an efficiency in our character and work that will distinguish us from worldly-minded people and make people wonder what is the secret of this new life in us. We must become entirely selfless and devoted to God so that every day and every moment we seek to do only what God would have us do and in the way He would have us do it. If we do this sincerely then we shall have perfect unity and harmony with each other.

ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI, THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS, VOL. 2, P. 3

The friends must, at all times, bear in mind that they are, in a way, like soldiers under attack. The world is at present in an exceedingly dark condition spiritually; hatred and prejudice of every sort are literally tearing it to pieces. We, on the other hand, are the custodians of the opposite forces, the forces of love, of unity, of peace and integration, and we must continually be on our guard, whether as individuals or as an Assembly or Community, lest through us these destructive, negative forces enter into our midst. In other words, we must beware lest the darkness of society become reflected in our acts and attitudes, perhaps all unconsciously. Love for each other, the deep sense that we are a new organism, the dawn-breakers of a new World Order, must constantly animate our Bahá'í lives, and we must pray to be protected from the contamination of society which is so diseased with prejudice.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, DIRECTIVES OF THE GUARDIAN, P. 41

“E” ↑

All are under the shadow of the Word of God and all derive their strength from the bounties of the Lord. Therefore, do not consider thyself to be insignificant by doubting what a handmaiden living behind the veil can do. With a firm heart, a steadfast step and an eloquent tongue arise to spread the Word of God and say: "O God, although I am sitting concealed behind the screen of chastity and am restricted by the veil and exigencies of modesty, my cherished hope is to raise the banner of service and to become a maidservant at Thy Holy Threshold; to ride on a charger and penetrate the army of the ignorant, defeat the mighty regiments and subvert the foundations of error and violation. Thou art the Helper of the weak, Thou art the Sustainer of the poor, Thou art the Succourer of the handmaidens. Verily, Thou art the Almighty and All-Powerful."

'ABDUL-BAHA, THE COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS, VOL. 2, P. 395

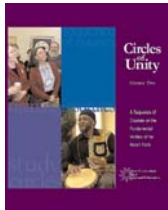
END

The Fundamental Verities Sequence of Courses



Course One: This Day of God

- Explores some of the fundamental spiritual teachings of Bahá'u'lláh about the human soul and the spiritual reality of the universe in which we live.
- Fosters habits of daily spiritual living such as prayer and meditation, study of the writings, calling ourselves to account each day.



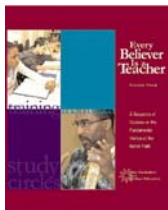
Course Two: Circles of Unity

- Introduces the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh about the great changes taking place in the world today and how we can be part of the movement for positive change.
- Applies the principle of oneness in our daily lives, our families, and in our communities.



Course Three: The Seeker's Quest

- Focuses on the attraction of the human heart to its Creator and strategies for meeting others and becoming increasingly powerful centers of attraction in our local communities.
- Explores the relationship between personal spiritual development and teaching the Faith.



Course Four: Every Believer Is a Teacher

- Provides practice planning and hosting text-based firesides to address our friends' interests.
- Provides additional practice sharing the Word of God with others, incorporating the arts in firesides and devotional meetings, creating a loving environment.



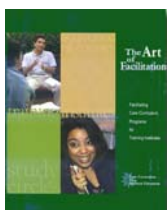
Course Five: To Serve the Covenant

- Provides skill practice in the art of storytelling to be able to effectively introduce Bahá'u'lláh to others and illustrate Bahá'í principles in action.
- Includes a rich assortment of stories about the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá to increase tools for effectively teaching the Faith.



Course Six: Building a New Civilization

- Presents an overview of the principles, structure, and process of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, the nucleus and pattern of peace and prosperity for all.
- Provides practice relating Bahá'í principles to contemporary issues.



The Art of Facilitation

- Provides valuable practical training to strengthen facilitator skills in a wide variety of settings.
- Develops the knowledge, spiritual insights, and skills to offer the Fundamental Verities branch sequence of courses.

Core Curriculum Courses for Community Development



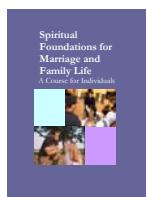
Youth Empowerment: Accepting Responsibility for the Entire Human Family

- Promote study circles and devotional meetings.
- Initiate friendships across social barriers.
- Engage peers through use of the arts.



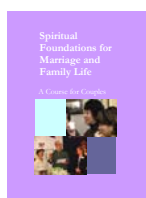
Youth Empowerment: Invincible Champions of Justice

- Take an active leadership role in the life of the Bahá'í community and in service to the community at large.
- Engage peers to address suffering and deprivation.
- Champion the principle of justice by giving particular voice to racial unity and gender equality.



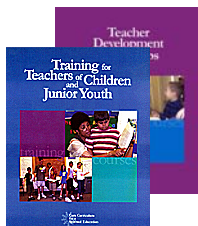
Spiritual Foundations for Marriage and Family Life: A Course for Individuals

- Relate self-knowledge to success in marriage.
- Develop the skill of consultation.
- Explore roles and relationships within marriage.
- Learn strategies for selecting the right partner.



Spiritual Foundations for Marriage and Family Life: A Course for Couples

- Strengthen marriage as the foundation for vibrant, loving, and growing communities.
- Relate self-knowledge to success in marriage.
- Develop the skill of consultation.
- Explore roles and relationships within marriage.
- Learn strategies to solve problems and preserve marriages.



Training for Teachers of Children and Junior Youth

- Learn to succeed in the systematic spiritual education of children and junior youth, using lesson planning guides, storybooks, and other materials.
- A system of careful training and hands-on practice supports teachers to become fully adept at using these materials to teach children and junior youth.
- Comprehensive 32-hour training, plus additional follow-up Teacher Development Workshops.



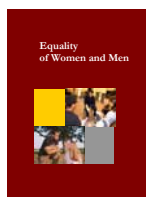
Spiritual Parenting

- Find encouragement to fulfill your role as primary educators of children.
- Establish the spiritual practices of prayer and daily readings in the home.
- Practice the skills of encouraging, guiding, educating and training their children.
- Pursue ongoing spiritual and practical development as parents.
- Also a valuable program for grandparents and other caregivers.



Race Unity

- Through direct study of the Bahá'í sacred texts, establish loving, spiritual environments for addressing the complexities of the most challenging issue in America,
- Learn to foster unity in firesides and public meetings, and in every aspect of community life.



Equality of Women and Men

- Identify and implement effective strategies for promoting equality in our communities and in the world at large.
- Explore the meaning of equality and the necessity for cooperation and mutual support among women and men.
- Foster equality in marriage and in Bahá'í community life, raise children to live out the principle of equality and teach this principle to others.



The Spirit of Equality

Four Fireside Workshops on Equality

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These sessions are intended for all people who are interested in the spirit of equality. Materials mentioned in the video, *The Bahá'ís* magazine and the *Two Wings* statement, should be available at each of the four fireside workshops described below, along with the short compilation *The Light of Unity: The Equality of Women and Men*. All these materials are available through the Bahá'í Distribution Service, 1-800-999-9019. These fireside workshops may be offered in any order.

In addition to these short workshop sessions, **Core Curriculum Equality Training**, a spiritual education and training program designed by the National Bahá'í Education Task Force in collaboration with the National Committee for the Equality of Women and Men, provides training in the skills necessary to promote unity in family and community life, as well as skills necessary to promote equality in the world at large. To participate in this training program, contact the National Children's Education and Research Center, Louhelen Bahá'í School, 3208 South State Road, Davison, Michigan 48423, email ncerc@usbnc.org or phone (810) 653-5033.

Facilitator Instructions

The four short workshops or fireside gatherings in this package support the national video broadcast of *Speaking of Gender* as an integral part of the National Teaching Plan. They foster true partnership between women and men, introduce this fundamental principle of Bahá'u'lláh to the world at large, and become an important part of a systematic campaign to advance the process of entry by troops. The following passages explain factors critical to the success of this work:

If presented properly the position of women in the Bahá'í teachings will surely attract much attention, for it is not only legal but also spiritual and educational. Our ideals are so high and at the same time so practicable that all other views will fall short if compared to them.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Volume 2, p. 369

The principle of the equality between women and men, like the other teachings of the Faith, can be effectively and universally established among the friends when it is pursued in conjunction with all the other aspects of Bahá'í life. Change is an evolutionary process requiring patience with one's self and others, loving education and the passage of time as the believers deepen their knowledge of the principles of the Faith, gradually discard long-held traditional attitudes and progressively conform their lives to the unifying teachings of the Cause.

The Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Volume 2, p. 405

Those Bahá'ís who devote themselves to promotion of the equality of the sexes, through speeches and articles, should be aware that such a process will be facilitated if it is carried out without disruption to the unity of the believers, in order that spiritual blessings are attracted to the community and its endeavours reinforced. To maintain this unity, Bahá'í men and women must work together co-operatively, in striking contrast to the adversarial and denunciatory attitudes which distinguish so much of the movement for equality of the sexes.

Bahá'ís should realize that the Bahá'í approach to truth-seeking is consultative and not adversarial, and that contention between men and women is counter-productive in the endeavour to promote equality.

Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice 5 June 1994

The oneness of mankind, which is at once the operating principle and ultimate goal of His revelation, implies the achievement of a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth.

Messages from the Universal House of Justice, p. 602

Some more specific guidelines may be helpful in facilitating these workshops:

Using ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as our example. Constantly bringing to mind the life and words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá will assist you to respond in a loving manner. Please personally study and reflect upon some of the writings and prayers of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá before you begin so you will have His image clearly in mind when facilitating these fireside workshops.

Use the Sacred Texts as a basis for your answers. When answering questions, refer to the answers in the Writings.

Keep your comments brief. Creating an atmosphere where the participants themselves feel free to share their views and concerns necessitates that the facilitators keep their comments brief.

Practice patience. It is important to realize that each of us comes to our recognition of Bahá’u’lláh through different avenues and after varying lengths of search. All come with something unique to offer and assisting them to realize that their contributions are important is part of making people feel welcomed.

Be happy! An uplifting environment can really make all the difference.

Responding to Questions

The topic of equality may stimulate highly provocative questions from participants in these spiritual gatherings. Welcome these questions, and listen with warmth to the questioner. If it is possible to provide an answer from the sacred text (some helpful resources are listed below), please respond briefly and return to the suggested activities. If it is not possible to provide a brief answer from the sacred text in the context of the gathering, promise to find an answer by the next gathering. If the friends want to carry on a longer discussion of the topic or ask general questions about the Bahá’í Faith, consider inviting them to stay after the gathering or to come to another fireside scheduled in the near future. It will be a courtesy to the participants to stay on the announced topic during the time scheduled.

Compilations prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice:

- *Women*
- *Family Life*
- *Preserving Bahá’í Marriages*
- *Divorce*

Other helpful resources:

- *Two Wings of a Bird: The Equality of Women and Men: A Statement by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States*
- *Advancement of Women, Janet and Peter Khan*

Using the Video; “Speaking of Gender”

These workshops, or spiritual gatherings, assist participants to become acquainted with the sacred writings of the Bahá’í Faith that undergird the video, *Speaking of Gender*. These workshops may be used one or more at a time and in any order. A workshop may be used following the broadcast or viewing of the video, or facilitators may choose to play the portion of the video most aligned with that particular workshop. The facilitator also may choose to coordinate the workshop without showing the video.

Fireside I



What Is Equality?

Carefully prepare the learning environment so that it reflects the principles of hospitality, beauty, cleanliness, dignity and refinement. Arrive early to say prayers in the room where this spiritual gathering is held. Lovingly greet each person at the door as she or he arrives. Consider playing recorded music as the friends arrive. Consider serving light refreshments to demonstrate the spirit of hospitality.

- Begin the spiritual gathering with carefully selected prayers and music to set a joyful tone.
- Welcome the friends, invite them to introduce themselves, ask each to share a hope for the workshop. Listen carefully to each answer.
- If desired, watch the broadcast of *Speaking of Gender*, show the video, or show the FIRST SEGMENT of the video, after which the question is raised: "What is gender equality?"
- Invite the friends to read aloud the following quotations and discuss the focus questions. (*You may photocopy the following page for participants.*)

What Is Equality?

Focus Questions

- *What is the spiritual foundation of the principle of equality of women and men?*
- *What are some of the ways that human civilization can become more balanced?*



All should know “Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God.”

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Volume 2, p. 379

God hath created all humankind in His own image, and after His own likeness. That is, men and women alike are the revealers of His names and attributes, and from the spiritual viewpoint there is no difference between them. Whosoever draweth nearer to God, that one is the most favoured, whether man or woman.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 79-80

Know thou that the distinction between male and female is an exigency of the physical world and hath no connection with the spirit; for the spirit and the world of the spirit are sanctified above such exigencies, and wholly beyond the reach of such changes as befall the physical body in the contingent world.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in Janet Kahn and Peter Kahn, *Advancement of Women*, p. 38

In former ages, men enjoyed ascendancy over women because bodily might reigned supreme and the spirit was subject to its dominion. In this radiant age, however, since the power of the spirit hath transcended that of the body and assumed its ascendancy, authority and dominion over the human world, this physical distinction hath ceased to be of consequence; and, as the sway and influence of the spirit have become apparent, women have come to be the full equals of men. Today, therefore, there is no respect or circumstance in which a person’s sex provideth grounds for the exercise of either discrimination or favor.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in Janet Kahn and Peter Kahn, *Advancement of Women*, p. 38

The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals, or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Volume 2, p. 369

The world of humanity has two wings – one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible. Not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they ought to be.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 302

That men and women differ from one another in certain characteristics and functions is an inescapable fact of nature and makes possible their complementary roles in certain areas of the life of society; but it is significant that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated that in this Dispensation “Equality of men and women, except in some negligible instances, has been fully and categorically announced.”

Universal House of Justice: *Introduction to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 7

Humanity: Balanced for Flight

Invite each individual to make a paper airplane or an origami bird. You will find directions and illustrations on the following pages. Note that it usually takes somewhat longer to fold a bird than to fold a paper airplane. To equalize the time, invite those who are making planes to experiment with more than one type of plane. Test fly each plane. Suspend each bird from a thread so that it can fly. Observe the flight pattern of each bird or plane.

Discuss the following questions:

- *What enables flight?*
- *What factors improve flight?*

Then give each person a paper clip and ask:

- *How can you place this paper clip to help or hinder flight? Invite demonstrations.*

Discuss the following questions:

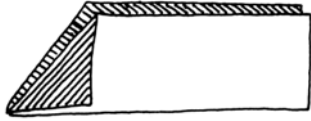
- *What does this demonstration tell us about equality and the need for balance?*
- *What can it tell us about the complementary contributions of women and men to the world of humanity?*

Then discuss:

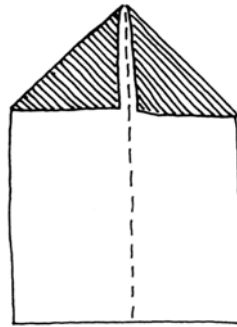
- *What practical steps can we take to make the spiritual reality of true equality known in the world?*
- *What practical steps can we take to implement the principle of equality in our own lives?*
- *What initial steps could be taken within the next week or even within the next 24 hours?*

Invite those who would like to commit to taking a single specific action to promote equality during the next day to write their promise to themselves on their bird or their plane as a reminder.

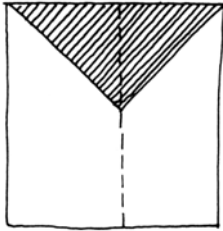
Paper Airplane



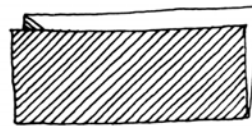
A Fold a sheet of paper lengthwise. Fold down two corners, like the start of a standard airplane.



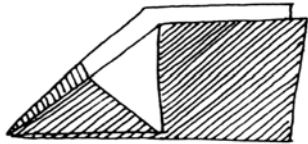
B Unfold your first fold. Your paper will look like a house.



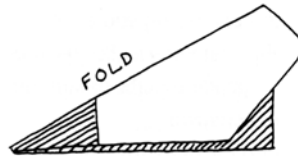
C Fold the peak of the "house" down, with the open end to the inside.



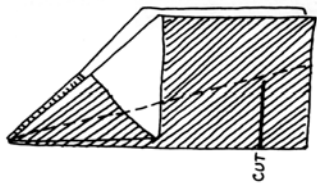
D Refold your paper lengthwise with the peak on the inside.



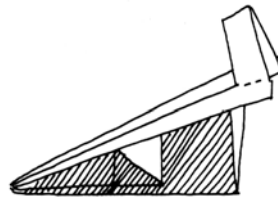
E Fold down the two corners, like the start of the plane again. Half the peak should now show.



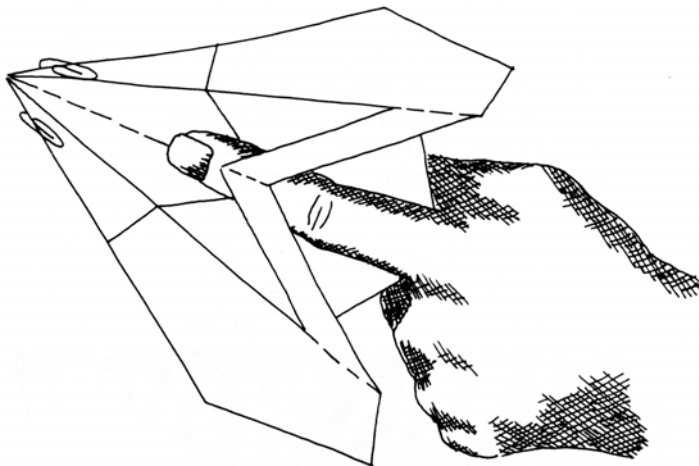
F Fold down the two wings. Line up the diagonal edges with the bottom.



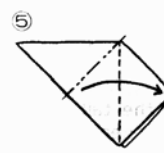
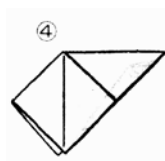
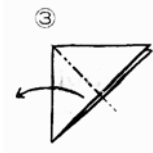
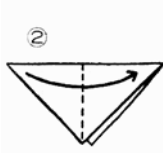
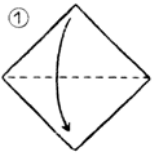
G Put the wings up again. Then cut along the back from the bottom to the wing fold, 1" from the back.



H Open the wings. Fold up the cut flap into an upside-down V.



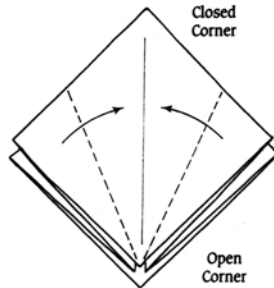
Paper Crane



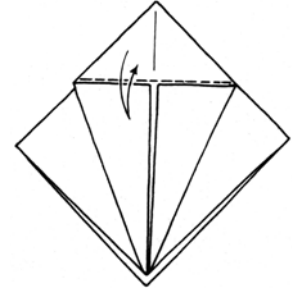
Fold a

Square Base following the small diagrams above.

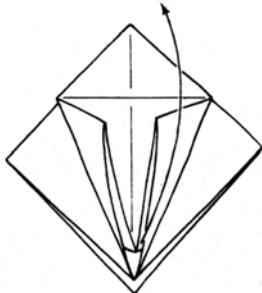
1 Place closed corner away from you. Fold the outer edges on the front flaps to the middle crease. Turn the paper over and repeat this with the two flaps on the back.



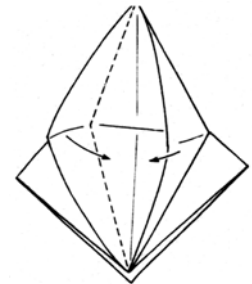
2 Draw a pencil (or imaginary) line between the ends of the creases. Fold back and forth on that line. Paper looks as before, but the crease helps you with the next step.



3 Pop the two front flaps apart. Find the loose corner at the bottom. Lift it up in the direction of the arrow.



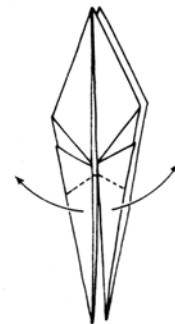
4 Bring the outside edges of the paper to the middle and flatten it into a long diamond. The trick is to keep the crease made in previous step. Turn the paper over and repeat on the back.



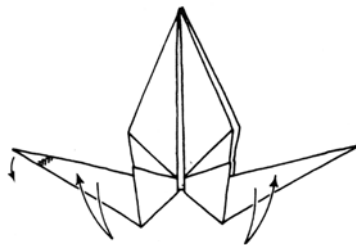
5 This diamond shape is called the Bird Base. It has two "legs" at the bottom. Fold their outer edges to the middle, first on the front flaps. Turn the paper over and repeat on the back.



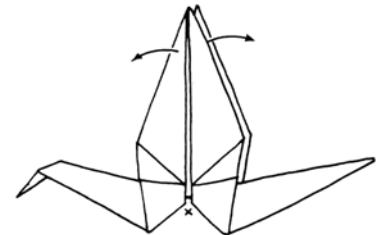
6 Make the neck and tail by folding the "legs" to the outside.



7 Fold the "legs" down again.



8 Inflate the crane by holding



Then fold them up on the creases made in the previous step, but this time in between the two main layers of paper. Fold the head down in between the two main layers of the neck.

a wing in each hand. Pull your hands apart gently and at the same time blow into the opening at point X.

Fireside II



Equality in the World at Large

Carefully prepare the learning environment so that it reflects the principles of hospitality, beauty, cleanliness, dignity and refinement. Arrive early to say prayers in the room where this spiritual gathering is held. Lovingly greet each person at the door as she or he arrives. Consider playing recorded music as the friends arrive. Consider serving refreshments to express the spirit of loving hospitality.

- Begin the spiritual gathering with carefully selected prayers and music to set a joyful tone.
- Welcome the friends, invite them to introduce themselves, ask each to share a hope for the workshop. Listen carefully to each answer.
- Invite those who feel they have observed from among those around them actions promoting equality to share those with the group.
- Watch the broadcast of *Speaking of Gender*, show the video, or show the SECOND SEGMENT of the video, if desired.

Study the following passages selected from the Bahá'í writings, then discuss the focus questions.

Equality in the World at Large

Focus Questions

- *What will be the benefits to humanity of women fulfilling their mission in all departments of life?*
- *What is the importance of education in establishing equality?*



According to the spirit of this age, women must advance and fulfill their mission in all departments of life, becoming equal to men. They must be on the same level as men and enjoy equal rights.

*‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in J. E. Esslemont, *Baha’u’llah and the New Era*, p. 147*

So it will come to pass that when women participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world, when they enter confidently and capably the great arena of laws and politics, war will cease; for woman will be the obstacle and hindrance to it.

*‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 135*

Woman must especially devote her energies and abilities toward the industrial and agricultural sciences, seeking to assist mankind in that which is most needful. By this means she will demonstrate capability and ensure recognition of equality in the social and economic equation.

*‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 283*

The difference in capability between man and woman is due entirely to opportunity and education. Heretofore woman has been denied the right and privilege of equal development. If equal opportunity be granted her, there is no doubt she would be the peer of man.

*‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 135*

. . . if woman be fully educated and granted her rights, she will attain the capacity for wonderful accomplishments and prove herself the equal of man. She is the coadjutor of man, his complement and helpmeet. Both are human; both are endowed with potentialities of intelligence and embody the virtues of humanity. In all human powers and functions they are partners and coequals. At present in spheres of human activity woman does not manifest her natal prerogatives, owing to lack of education and opportunity. Without doubt education will establish her equality with men.

*‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 136-137*

As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs.

*‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 133*

Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity of the sexes. When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed. Without equality this will be impossible because all differences and distinction are conducive to discord and strife. Equality between men and women is conducive to the abolition of warfare for the reason that women will never be willing to sanction it. Mothers will not give their sons as sacrifices upon the battlefield after twenty years of anxiety and loving devotion in rearing them from infancy, no matter what cause they are called upon to defend. There is no doubt that when women obtain equality of rights, war will entirely cease among mankind.

*‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 175*

The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world’s population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavour will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge.

*The Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Volume 2, p. 392*

Heroic Women

Remind the friends that women have displayed heroism throughout history. Although there are many heroic women in the history of the Bahá'í Faith, the “outstanding heroine of the Bahá'í Dispensation” is the Greatest Holy Leaf, Bahiyih Khanum, the daughter of Bahá'u'lláh, Prophet and Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. Briefly tell the about the life of the Greatest Holy Leaf. You may wish to show her photograph or a photograph of her shrine.

Bahiyih Khanum, the Greatest Holy Leaf, “the outstanding heroine of the Bahá'í Dispensation,” was born in 1846 in Tihran. She accompanied Bahá'u'lláh on every stage of His exiles. As a young girl she decided to devote herself to the service of the Faith of her Father; therefore she never married. Perhaps her greatest hour of service was after the passing of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá when Shoghi Effendi (newly appointed as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith), overwhelmed by the responsibilities thrust upon him, decided to leave the affairs of the Cause “under the supervision of the Holy Family and the headship of the Greatest Holy Leaf,” while he retired to recuperate and contemplate the tasks ahead.

Shoghi Effendi describes her character in these words:

A purity of life that reflected itself in even the minutest details of her daily occupations and activities; a tenderness of heart that obliterated every distinction of creed, class and color; a resignation and serenity that evoked to the mind the calm and heroic fortitude of the Báb; a natural fondness of flowers and children that was so characteristic of Bahá'u'lláh; an unaffected simplicity of manners; an extreme sociability which made her accessible to all; a generosity, a love, at once disinterested and indiscriminating, that reflected so clearly the attributes of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's character; a sweetness of temper; a cheerfulness that no amount of sorrow could becloud; a quiet and unassuming disposition that served to enhance a thousandfold the prestige of her exalted rank; a forgiving nature that instantly disarmed the most unyielding enemy - these rank among the outstanding attributes of a saintly life which history will acknowledge as having been endowed with a celestial potency that few of the heroes of the past possessed.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 194

Shoghi Effendi also describes her heroism during the darkest days of World War I:

The outbreak of the Great War gave her yet another opportunity to reveal the true worth of her character and to release the latent energies of her heart. The residence of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa was besieged, all throughout that dreary conflict, by a concourse of famished men, women and children whom the maladministration, the cruelty and neglect of the officials of the Ottoman Government had driven to seek an alleviation to their woes. From the hand of the Greatest Holy Leaf, and out of the abundance of her heart, these hapless victims of a contemptible tyranny, received day after day unforgettable evidences of a love they had learned to envy and admire. Her words of cheer and comfort, the food, the money, the clothing she freely dispensed, the remedies which, by a process of her own, she herself prepared and diligently applied – all these had their share in comforting the disconsolate, in restoring sight to the blind, in sheltering the orphan, in healing the sick, and in succouring the homeless and the wanderer.

She had reached, amidst the darkness of the war days the high water-mark of her spiritual attainments. Few, if any, among the unnumbered benefactors of society whose privilege has been to allay, in various measures, the hardships and sufferings entailed by that Fierce Conflict, gave as freely and as disinterestedly as she did; few exercised that undefinable influence upon the beneficiaries of their gifts.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahiyih Khanum*, pp. 40-41

The Greatest Holy Leaf passed away on 15 July 1932 and is buried under a shrine in the Monument Gardens on Mount Carmel.

- After sharing this brief description of the Greatest Holy Leaf, invite each participant to reflect on the contributions to the world of humanity of a woman that they themselves know, or whose life they have studied. In small groups of 5 or fewer participants, invite each to briefly (in about 2 minutes each) describe the contributions of that particular woman to the world at large and to share with the others the personal impact of that woman on themselves.

After each has had time to share, discuss the following questions with the entire group:

- What are the common elements in the contributions of these woman that have influenced us and changed the world?
- What actions, large or small, can we take to enable the contributions of more women to the world at large?

Invite each person to choose an action to enable contributions of a woman or girl that they know during coming week.

Fireside III

Equality in the Family



Carefully prepare the learning environment so that it reflects the principles of hospitality, beauty, cleanliness, dignity and refinement. Arrive early to say prayers in the room where this spiritual gathering is held. Warmly greet each person at the door as she or he arrives. Consider playing recorded music as the friends arrive. Consider offering simple refreshments to the friends and seekers.

- Begin the spiritual gathering with carefully selected prayers and music to set a joyful tone.
- Show the video or the third segment of the video *Speaking of Gender*, if desired. Invite brief comments about the video.
- Share the following short story about the family life of Bahá'u'lláh, as told by His daughter, the Greatest Holy Leaf:

Asiyih Khanum, my dear mother, was in delicate health, her strength was diminished by the hardships she had undergone, but she always worked beyond her force.

Sometimes my father himself helped in the cooking, as that hard work was too much for the dainty, refined, gentle lady. The hardships she had endured saddened the heart of her devoted husband, who was also her beloved Lord. He gave this help both before His sojourn in the wilderness of Sulaymaniyih, and after His return.

Lady Bloomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, p. 47

Study the following passages from the Bahá'í writings. Then discuss the focus questions.

Equality in the Family

Focus Questions

- How does equality promote the happiness and well-being of each member of the family?
- How does equality in the family foster habits that promote the prosperity of nations?



Compare the nations of the world to the members of a family. A family is a nation in miniature. Simply enlarge the circle of the household, and you have the nation. Enlarge the circle of nations, and you have all humanity. The conditions surrounding the family surround the nation. The happenings in the family are the happenings in the life of the nation. Would it add to the progress and advancement of a family if dissensions should arise among its members, all fighting, pillaging each other, jealous and revengeful of injury, seeking selfish advantage? Nay, this would be the cause of the effacement of progress and advancement. So it is in the great family of nations, for nations are but an aggregate of families.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 157

The world of humanity consists of two parts: male and female. Each is the complement of the other. Therefore, if one is defective, the other will necessarily be incomplete, and perfection cannot be attained. There is a right hand and a left hand in the human body, functionally equal in service and administration. If either proves defective, the defect will naturally extend to the other by involving the completeness of the whole; for accomplishment is not normal unless both are perfect. If we say one hand is deficient, we prove the inability and incapacity of the other; for single-handed there is no full accomplishment. Just as physical accomplishment is complete with two hands, so man and woman, the two parts of the social body, must be perfect. It is not natural that either should remain undeveloped; and until both are perfected, the happiness of the human world will not be realized.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 134

The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother - none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. 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.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 168

Consider the harmful effect of discord and dissension in a family; then reflect upon the favors and blessings which descend upon that family when unity exists among its various members. What incalculable benefits and blessings would descend upon the great human family if unity and brotherhood were established!

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 230

The members of a family all have duties and responsibilities towards one another and to the family as a whole, and these duties and responsibilities vary from member to member because of their natural relationships. The parents have the inescapable duty to educate their children - but not vice versa; the children have the duty to obey their parents - the parents do not obey the children; the mother - not the father - bears the children, nurses them in babyhood, and is thus their first educator; hence daughters have a prior right to education over sons. A corollary of this responsibility of the mother is her right to be supported by her husband - a husband has no explicit right to be supported by his wife.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 2, p. 384

Although the mother is the first educator of the child, and the most important formative influence in his development, the father also has the responsibility of educating his children, and this responsibility is so weighty that Bahá’u’lláh has stated that a father who fails to exercise it forfeits his rights of fatherhood. Similarly, although the primary responsibility for supporting the family financially is placed upon the husband, this does not by any means imply that the place of woman is confined to the home.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 2, p. 392

Family consultation employing full and frank discussion, and animated by awareness of the need for moderation and balance, can be the panacea for domestic conflict.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 2, p. 383

There are times when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other. Exactly under what circumstances such deference should take place, is a matter for each couple to determine.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 2, p. 385

Invite the friends to each think of a beautiful memory of loving interaction with adults from their own childhood, either within their own families or within a group that was like a family to them. Invite each friend to turn to the person beside them and share the memory in this little team of two. Invite the friends to listen with their ears and with their hearts to the memory shared by their partner.

Then in the whole group, discuss the questions:

- *What are the elements that make our memories beautiful?*
- *In what ways will the establishment of equality enhance the beauty of family life?*

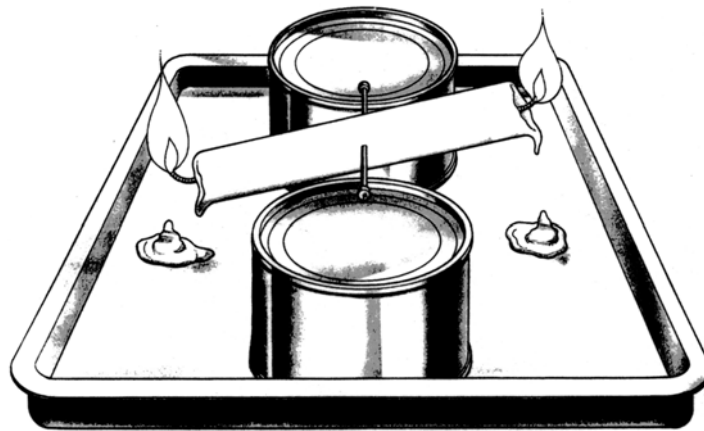
Invite each of the friends to think of example of dynamic equilibrium in nature, briefly share examples in the whole group, then discuss the questions:

- *In nature is balance always the same?*
- *Is it possible that there could be more than one strategy for promoting equality in the family?*
- *What would be common elements?*

Brainstorm a variety of options that families could use to promote equality.

Conclude the session with the following demonstration:

Place two tin cans (catfood size) in a shallow pan of water, so that an object could be balanced on the cans, above the water. Remove the wax from the flat end of a taper candle, so that there is a wick at each end of the candle. Then carefully insert a nail on each of the long sides of a candle. Carefully balance the candle above the water by resting the on the tin cans, so that the candle is free to rotate back and forth above the water. Light both ends of the candle. (See diagram below.) Notice that the candle swings back and forth in a balanced pattern that shows how each flame is lifted up alternately. Invite the friends to compare this dynamic equilibrium with the changing patterns of family life over time.



Invite each person to privately commit to an action, large or small, that will promote equality in their own families during the coming week.

Fireside IV



Transforming Human Society

Begin the spiritual gathering with music and prayers to create a joyful atmosphere. Warmly welcome the friends as they arrive. Invite each participant to briefly share actions that they have observed over the past week that promote equality either in the family or in the world at large.

If desired, watch the broadcast of *Speaking of Gender*, show the video or show the fourth segment of the video, and invite brief comments about the video.

Promoting Equality

From the time of Bahá'u'lláh until the present day, Bahá'ís have actively promoted the principle of equality. From developing the capacities of women, to fostering the involvement of women in society, to promoting equality in the family, to promoting the principle of equality in the community at large, Bahá'ís everywhere strive to respond to the directives of our Faith to establish equality. Briefly share the following two examples of current work for the advancement of women and the promotion of equality:

Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women, Indore, India

The Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women conducts residential training programs every year for needy, deserving and willing rural and tribal women. Transportation, food, accommodation, training and training materials are provided at no charge to the trainees. Women are trained as community workers, and as Area Coordinators. In addition courses are offered for married couples in such skills as mutual partnership, parental responsibilities, joint decision making through consultation, and overcoming alcoholism and domestic violence and other harmful influences on family life.

Training includes such topics as environmental education and gardening, literacy, health and hygiene, vocational and income-generating skills. All Institute courses include instruction in literacy. For example, in learning gardening the women learn to count the tools, trees and fruits, to weigh them and to write their names. In health instruction, they learn to write the names of different diseases, preventive measures, to take body weight and height. They learn to understand and record time for immunizations and for pre- and post-natal care. The newly-learned Hindi is immediately put to use in measuring cloth and the size of person for whom the garment is being made, making patterns, cutting and stitching according to measurements. Trainees learn through practical experience to write a receipt, calculate stock, estimate costs, count cash and give change. They also learn to approach a bank or a local government official for the purpose of applying for loans.

After completing a course, literacy is maintained by encouraging participants to correspond with the Institute. All the news, views and stories of the graduates, plus some educational messages, are published in a monthly newsletter, which is sent to all the former trainees. The most promising trainees are encouraged to continue their education through the open school system.

“Traditional Media as Change Agent”

A project of Bahá'í Office for the Advancement of Women in cooperation with UNIFEM in Bolivia, Cameroon, with extensions in Brazil and Nigeria

This project seeks to bring about a fundamental change in the organization of community life by involving community members in identifying their own problems through focus groups, surveys, and consultation, applying the principle of equality to address these problems; and using the traditional media of theatre, songs, and dance to promote change in the community.

In a local community, a core group of volunteers are trained in non-adversarial group decision-making, and techniques for gathering data, assessment, organization and record-keeping. This group then interviews male and female members of the community at large about issues pertaining to the role of women. Men and women may be asked to list their daily tasks, from which it becomes clear that women have twice as many duties as men! After consultation about the issues, local artists and performers are invited to prepare songs, dances, stories and plays that illustrate the issues to share with the entire population at festivals and other community events.

Surveys have indicated that this project is very successful in increasing the participation of women in family and community decision-making, increased motivation of women and girls to seek education, and greater involvement of men in domestic chores.

Transforming Society

Invite the friends to share information about local efforts that directly or indirectly support the principle of equality. Then study the following passages from the Bahá'í writings and discuss the focus questions.

After your study:

- Provide blank note cards, stamped envelopes, and art supplies (such as colored paper, scissors, pens and markers, pictures cut from magazines, etc.). Invite each person to think of a specific individual with whom he or she would like to share the importance of the principle of equality. Invite the friends to make a beautiful card, write a small note, include one or more of the passages studied, and address the card while the friends in the meeting. Invite those who wish to share their cards with the group before sealing the envelopes. Offer to mail the cards for the participants if they are already addressed.
- Then invite the friends to each create a specific plan to continue sharing these ideas with specific individuals or groups. Invite each person to consider what he or she will do, and how, when and where to do it. Invite the friends to consider how they each can encourage the others in these actions.
- Describe the training programs of the National Spiritual Assembly that are designed to promote equality and explain how individuals can participate in those programs.
- Invite the friends to participate in upcoming activities in the local Bahá'í community.

Invite participants to participate in a joyful, uplifting closing devotional program that includes music, prayers for the success of these important actions.

Transforming Society

Focus Questions:

- *In what practical ways can we encourage and support each other as together we move toward equality?*
- *How can we share these ideas with others, including children and youth, so that they too will choose to work for equality?*



The utterance of God is a lamp, whose light are these words: Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. He Who is the Day-Star of Truth beareth Me witness! So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 14

O children of men! Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest. Such is My counsel to you, O concourse of light! Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic, no. 68

O son of spirit! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic, no. 2

The assumption of superiority by man will continue to be depressing to the ambition of woman, as if her attainment to equality was creationally impossible; woman's aspiration toward advancement will be checked by it, and she will gradually become hopeless.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.76

When men own the equality of women there will be no need for them to struggle for their rights!

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 163

Divine Justice demands that the rights of both sexes should be equally respected since neither is superior to the other in the eyes of Heaven. Dignity before God depends, not on sex, but on purity and luminosity of heart. Human virtues belong equally to all!

Woman must endeavour then to attain greater perfection, to be man's equal in every respect, to make progress in all in which she has been backward, so that man will be compelled to acknowledge her equality of capacity and attainment.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 162

I appeal to you to obliterate this contention between men and women.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 2, p. 362

The position of women in the Bahá'í teachings is not only legal but also spiritual and educational.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 2, p. 369

We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 1, p. 84

Change is an evolutionary process requiring patience with one's self and others, loving education and the passage of time as the believers deepen their knowledge of the principles of the Faith, gradually discard long-held traditional attitudes and progressively conform their lives to the unifying teachings of the Cause.

The Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 1, p. 40

