

Family: The Seeds of World Peace



*Firesides to accompany
the video
“Family: The Seeds of World Peace”*

A collaborative project by the National Education Task Force,
the National Education and Schools Office,
and the National Teaching Committee

Introduction

Family: The Seeds of World Peace Firesides

Firesides to Accompany “Family: The Seeds of World Peace” Videotape



In order to make the greatest possible use of the nation-wide broadcasts of “Family: The Seeds of World Peace” video, the National Spiritual Assembly has developed and distributed five firesides to be used in conjunction with the video. Each fireside workshop is approximately 90 minutes in length, including time to view the “Family” videotape. If the friends gathered have recently seen the video, it is not required to show it again.

These firesides are intended to help create an awareness of the ways parents model behavior in positive and negative ways, the importance of establishing a spiritual home environment, and understanding the relationship between world peace and harmonious family life.

We encourage the fireside host and/or workshop facilitator to read about the different methods of teaching and learning suggested by the Writings in our Faith in the book, *Foundations for a Spiritual Education*, available through the Bahá’í Distribution Service. We also suggest that you contact any Core Curriculum Trainers to assist with the facilitation of these workshops. Please contact the National Teacher Training Center at Louhelen Bahá’í School if you need help identifying Core Curriculum trainers in your area.

We suggest that the fireside host or workshop facilitator carefully consider how to create an atmosphere to facilitate spiritual learning. While there is much flexibility in how this might be achieved, we have found that advance preparation of the devotional readings and the environment creates a more reverent and relaxed atmosphere for Bahá’ís and seekers alike to receive the Word of God.

The host or facilitator may wish to have some related resources available to the fireside guests on the topic of family. Consider sharing these titles:

- *Bahá’í Marriage and Family Life*, compilation of Bahá’í Writings (available from the Bahá’í Distribution Service 1-800-999-9019)
- *Violence Free Society—A Gift to Our Children* by Dr. Hossain Danesh (booklet, available from Special Ideas 1-800-326-1197)
- *The Family in a World Community*--for the 1994 International Year of the Family (pamphlet available from the Distribution Service)

Many of the fireside ideas and activities come from the Core Curriculum Parenting Program or the Core Curriculum Marriage and Family Life Program. For more information on either of these programs, or to identify trainers in your area who can offer a complete training program, please contact the National Teacher Training Center at Louhelen Bahá’í School, telephone: (810) 653-5033, or send an e-mail message to: <louhelen@usbnc.org>

Some specific guidelines for facilitating these workshops:

Use the Master as our example. Constantly bringing to mind the life and words of our beloved 'Abdu'l-Bahá will assist you to respond in a loving manner to these precious friends. Please feel free to personally study and reflect upon some of the writings and prayers of 'Abdu'l-Bahá before you begin so that you will have His image clearly in mind when delivering the workshops.

Use the Sacred Texts as a basis for your answers. When answering questions, try to refer to the answers that can be found in the Writings.

Be sensitive to varying levels of literacy. If the amount of reading or number of quotations suggested in the workshops becomes a burden to the friends, select 2-3 quotations to study rather than an entire page. If the friends are not comfortable reading in English, either memorize (as a group) one quotation for each activity that can become the basis for that activity, or team readers with non-readers for group activities.

Keep your comments brief. Creating an atmosphere where the participants themselves feel free to share their views and concerns necessitates that the facilitators keep their presentations and answers brief. Allow the participants to have the opportunity to connect their hearts to Bahá'u'lláh through use of the Sacred Texts.

Practice patience and sensitivity. All participants come with something unique to offer and assisting them to realize that their contributions are important is part of making people feel welcome.

Be happy! An uplifting environment will always make learning easier and a cheerful presenter can really make all the difference. You will find your own Faith renewed as you joyfully assist the friends to come to a deeper understanding of the mystery of prayer and meditation.

Allow time for fellowship. Following the structured parts of the fireside gathering, encourage informal conversation to occur so that friends of the Faith can raise additional questions in a less formal setting.

Make liberal use of music. Selections from a diverse array of musical styles may enhance spiritual learning and appeal to people of many different backgrounds. Some sources include: music of the Bahá'í Gospel Choir; music from the Bahá'í World Congress; *Songs of the Ancient Beauty*, parts I and II; and music from these artists: Narges, Red Grammer, El Viento Canta, Kevin Locke, Matthew Levine, Mary Davis, Seaforth and Jenkins, Kiu Haghighi, Paul Parrish (*Hidden Words* put to music), Remembrance Ensemble (a cappella *Hidden Words* renderings), and instrumental jazz pieces, as well as classical music, are possibilities.

Materials Checklist for Workshop Facilitators

Advance Preparation and Materials Needed for All Workshops:

- photocopy the set of pages for the workshop you are facilitating for each participant or guest
- TV/VCR and video: *Family: The Seeds of World Peace* (optional if seen recently)
- prayer book(s)
- copies of small prayer books and/or copies of small booklet: *The Light of Unity—The Family* to offer to each participant; resource materials on family (optional)--see introduction
- flip chart and markers
- blank paper for recording personal notes and reflections
- pens/pencils

Creating a Spiritual Environment:

- special touches—flowers, candles, a picture of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá—may set the tone and signal that this is going to be special
- extensive use of diverse music to set the tone before the fireside or workshop gets started and at any appropriate time during the program
- refreshments—something very simple such as coffee, tea, cookies—to offer either during a break or following the workshop

Specific Workshop Materials:

Fireside #1

- copies of quotes “The Power of Example” for each participant
- copy of family scenarios, “Demonstrate the Power of Example,” cut apart

Fireside #2

- carefully cut out magazine pictures:** pictures from *National Geographic Magazine*, or any magazine or calendar with pictures from nature, e.g. birds, animals, insects, waterfalls, mountains, etc.
- copies of quotes “A Spiritual Environment in the Home” for each participant

Fireside #3

- copies of quotes “The Principle of Oneness” and questionnaire “Teaching Children about Oneness” for each participant

Fireside #4

- copies of quotations “Family Life in an Ever Advancing Civilization” for each participant
- sets of Tinker Toys, Legos, or other simple construction materials for each group of 3-5 participants

Fireside #5

- one copy of story for each small group of 4-7 participants
- simple arts and crafts supplies, e.g. markers, glue, different kinds of paper, feathers, etc. available for groups to use
- selection of instrumental music—jazz, classical, etc. available for use

Family Life in an Ever Advancing Civilization

Purpose:

To understand the relationship between family life and the peace of nations.

Fireside/Workshop/Meeting
90 minutes

Carefully prepare the learning environment to reflect hospitality, beauty, friendliness and love. Lovingly greet the guests as they arrive. You may also wish to have soft, instrumental music playing as the guests come in.

Opening prayer(s). When possible, include the use of music.

Introduction

Begin by explaining to the guests that the purpose of the gathering is to begin to understand how a healthy family life relates to peace in the world.

Family: The Seeds of World Peace Video

Have the guests watch the video (or telecast) of "Family: The seeds of World Peace (approximately 30 minutes).

Learning Experience

- » In small groups, study the selected quotations and answer the focus questions:
 - What practical expressions of cooperation, mutual aid and reciprocity strengthen family life?
 - How can families assist children to learn the attitudes and habits that foster equality, harmony and unity in the family, and that transfer those attitudes and habits to the workplace, political life, and international relations?

Please be as specific as possible in your answers.

- » In small groups, create a dynamic model (a model with moving parts) using tinker toys or other construction materials to show the relationship of family life to the peace, prosperity and well-being of nations. How can a simple model show this relationship?
- » Invite each group to display and explain their model to the whole group.

Closing

- » Discuss these questions: What steps will I take to foster equality, harmony and unity in my own family? What steps will I take today?
- » Conclude by mentioning again the Bahá'í perspective that harmony and unity on a national and international level has its roots in the family. Invite participants to investigate the Bahá'í Faith.
- » Close the session with prayer, either spoken, chanted or sung.

Family Life in an Ever Advancing Civilization

Focus Questions:

- What practical expressions of co-operation, mutual aid and reciprocity strengthen family life?
- How can families assist children to learn the attitudes and habits that foster equality, harmony and unity in the family, and that transfer those attitudes and habits to the workplace, political life, and international relations?

Please be as specific as possible in your answers.



“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, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.157)

“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, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 230)

“According to the teachings of Baha'u'llah, the family, being a human unit, must be educated according to the rules of sanctity. All the virtues must be taught the family. 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, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 168)

“Were one to observe with an eye that discovereth the realities of all things, it would become clear that the greatest relationship that bindeth the world of being together lieth in the range of created things themselves, and that co-operation, mutual aid and reciprocity are essential characteristics in the unified body of the world of being, inasmuch as all created things are closely related together and each is influenced by the other or deriveth benefit therefrom, either directly or indirectly. ... The more this inter-relationship is strengthened and expanded, the more will human society advance in progress and prosperity. Indeed without these vital ties it would be wholly impossible for the world of humanity to attain true felicity and success.”

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Compilations: Volume 1*, pp. 509-10)

“The denial of...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.”

(The Universal House of Justice, *The Compilations: Volume 2*, p. 392)

Standards of Parents

Purpose:

To develop awareness of ways we positively and negatively model behavior.
To illustrate the power of parental example.

Fireside/Workshop/Meeting
90 minutes

Carefully prepare the learning environment to reflect hospitality, beauty, friendliness and love. Lovingly greet the guests as they arrive. You may also wish to have soft, instrumental music playing as the guests come in.

Opening prayer(s). When possible, include the use of music.

Introduction

Begin by explaining to the guests that the purpose of the gathering is to explore the ways we model both positive and negative behavior and the role of parental example.

Family: The Seeds of World Peace Video

Have the guests watch the video (or telecast) of “Family: The Seeds of World Peace” (approximately 30 minutes).

Learning Experience

- » Divide into groups of three or four people.
Read the quotes, “The Power of Example,” aloud within each group.
Discuss the focus topics:
 - Based on the Holy Writings, how do we teach our children through example?
 - What are the implications of poor modeling?
- » Provide each group with a family scenario. Have each group role play for the large group their scenario, demonstrating how the positive example of parents can transform difficult situations. (Allow 10-15 minutes to prepare.) Instruct the groups to be as subtle or as overt as they wish, but note that subtle complexities may inspire deeper discussions.

Closing

- » In the large group discuss this question: Why is understanding the power of example important?
- » Conclude by mentioning again the Bahá’í perspective on the power of parental example. Invite the participants to investigate the Bahá’í Faith.
- » Close the session with prayer, either spoken, chanted or sung.

The Power of Example

Focus Questions:

- Based on the Holy Writings, how do we teach our children through example?
- What are the implications of poor modeling?



“O SON OF MY HANDMAID! Guidance hath ever been given by words, and now it is given by deeds. Every one must show forth deeds that are pure and holy, for words are the property of all alike, whereas such deeds as these belong only to Our loved ones. Strive then with heart and soul to distinguish yourselves by your deeds. In this wise We counsel you in this holy and resplendent tablet.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh, Persian*, p. 76)

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

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 287)

“Whoso ariseth among you to teach the Cause of his Lord, let him, before all else, teach his own self, that his speech may attract the hearts of them that hear him. Unless he teacheth his own self, the words of his mouth will not influence the heart of the seeker. Take heed, O people, lest ye be of them that give good counsel to others but forget to follow it themselves. The words of such as these, and beyond the words the realities of all things, and beyond these realities the angels that are nigh unto God, bring against them the accusation of falsehood.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 277)

“Let your acts be a guide unto all mankind, for the professions of most men, be they high or low, differ from their conduct. It is through your deeds that ye can distinguish yourselves from others. Through them the brightness of your light can be shed upon the whole earth.”

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 25)

“It is primarily through the potency of noble deeds and character, rather than by the power of exposition and proofs, that the friends of God should demonstrate to the world that what has been promised by God is bound to happen, that it is already taking place and that the divine glad-tidings are clear, evident and complete. For unless some illustrious souls step forth into the arena of service and shine out resplendent in the assemblage of men, the task of vindicating the truth of this Cause before the eyes of enlightened people would be formidable indeed. However, if the friends become embodiments of virtue and good character, words and arguments will be superfluous. Their very deeds will well serve as eloquent testimony, and their noble conduct will ensure the preservation, integrity and glory of the Cause of God.”

(Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated 19 December 1923)

Demonstrate the Power of Example

1. The family is attending an athletic event. During the game the coach continually paces, smokes, and yells, "Get your act together!" shaking his head disgustedly. Other parents are picking up the coach's habits and mumbling about the need for better playing and/or coaching.

How can this situation be transformed?

2. Father comes home from work and immediately mentions that he is really tired and hungry (implying that dinner should be ready and served). As time goes by it is apparent that women are serving men continuously in this family. Men choose family TV viewing. Men initiate dinner conversation and talk about men they work with and meet on the golf course. Females are given "cute" nicknames and males have "reliable" names.

How can this situation be transformed?

3. The family is sitting down for dinner, discussing an issue with one of the children. A research paper is due Monday, but in order to complete this assignment the teenager must decline social and teaching opportunities over the weekend. The teenager's solution is to miss school Monday and/or lie to the teacher to obtain an extension. The parents uphold the virtue of honesty. The phone rings. The teenager answers, and relays the message, "It's for _____" (one of the parents). The parent asks the teen to respond that they're "not home" and "to make up an excuse for not returning the call."

How can this situation be transformed?

4. The daughter asks dad for permission to go out for pizza and fun despite the fact that it is a school night. The answer is no. The daughter then goes to mother (in the other room) and makes the same request. The answer is yes. As the daughter prepares to leave, she is confronted by her father who then demands an explanation from the mother. Mother sticks to her easy-going position.

How can this situation be transformed?

Nurturing a Spiritual Environment in the Home

Purpose:

To comprehend the importance of a spiritual home environment.

To identify one strategy to establish a spiritual environment in the home.

Fireside/Workshop/Meeting
90 minutes

Carefully prepare the learning environment to reflect hospitality, beauty, friendliness and love. Lovingly greet the guests as they arrive. You may also wish to have soft, instrumental music playing as the guests come in.

Opening prayer(s). When possible, include the use of music.

Introduction

Begin by explaining to the guests that the purpose of the gathering is to investigate the importance of establishing a spiritual home environment for both children and adults.

Family: The Seeds of World Peace Video

Have the guests watch the video (or telecast) of “Family: The Seeds of World Peace” (approximately 30 minutes).

Learning Experience

- » Prepare in advance a set of images cut from magazines, calendars, etc., that include families of birds, animals, insects, waterfalls, mountains, sunsets; i.e., a variety of images from nature. Place the pictures in a suitable location.
- » Have the whole group read aloud the handout “A Spiritual Environment in the Home.”
- » Discuss this question: Why is it important to establish a spiritual environment in the home?
- » From the magazine pictures, invite the friends to choose an image that represents an attribute such as unity, beauty, respect, service, etc. that they would like to nurture or develop in their homes.
- » Allow participants to share their pictures with the group, then to share one strategy they have used to nurture this attribute within their family.

- » Invite the friends to record one new strategy they plan to take to strengthen or enhance the spiritual environment in their home.

Closing

- » Conclude by mentioning again the Bahá'í perspective on the importance of nurturing a spiritual environment in the home.
- » Invite the participants to investigate the Bahá'í Faith.
- » Close the session with prayer, either spoken, chanted or sung.

A Spiritual Environment in the Home



“Blessed is the house that hath attained unto My tender mercy, wherein My remembrance is celebrated, and which is ennobled by the presence of My loved ones, who have proclaimed My praise, cleaved fast to the cord of My grace and been honored by chanting My verses. Verily they are the exalted servants whom God hath extolled in the Qayyumu'l-Asma' and other scriptures. Verily He is the All-Hearing, the Answerer, He Who perceiveth all things.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Family Life*, p. 3)

“Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world. Their concerns are in order, they enjoy comfort and tranquillity, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but addeth to its stature and its lasting honor, as day succeedeth day.”

(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 279)

“I beseech God to graciously make of thy home a centre for the diffusion of the light of divine guidance, for the dissemination of the Words of God and for enkindling at all times the fire of love in the hearts of His faithful servants and maidservants. Know thou of a certainty that every house wherein the anthem of praise is raised to the Realm of Glory in celebration of the Name of God is indeed a heavenly home, and one of the gardens of delight in the Paradise of God.”

(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Family Life*, (Canada) p. 10, (India) p. 17)

“My home is the home of peace. My home is the home of joy and delight. My home is the home of laughter and exultation. Whosoever enters through the portals of this home, must go out with gladsome heart. This is the home of light; whosoever enters here must become illumined.”

(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. 9, No. 3, p. 40)

“In this glorious Cause the life of a married couple should resemble the life of the angels in heaven—a life full of joy and spiritual delight, a life of unity and concord, a friendship both mental and physical. The home should be orderly and well-organized. Their ideas and thoughts should be like the rays of the sun of truth and the radiance of the brilliant stars in the heavens. Even as two birds they should warble melodies upon the branches of the tree of fellowship and harmony. They should always be elated with joy and gladness and be a source of happiness to the hearts of others. They should set an example to their fellow-men, manifest a true and sincere love towards each other and educate their children in such a manner as to blazon the fame and glory of their family.”

(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Family Life*, (Canada) pp. 15-16, (India) p. 28)

Love in the Human Family

Teaching Children about Oneness

Purpose:

To appreciate the importance of raising children who appreciate diversity.
To articulate plans for creating a love of diversity in our children.

Fireside/Workshop/Meeting
90 minutes

Carefully prepare the learning environment to reflect hospitality, beauty, friendliness and love. Lovingly greet the guests as they arrive. You may also wish to have soft, instrumental music playing as the guests come in.

Opening prayer(s). When possible, include the use of music.

Introduction

Begin by explaining to the guests that the purpose of the gathering is to look at the importance of teaching children to appreciate and love diversity.

Family: The Seeds of World Peace Video

Have the guests watch the video (or telecast) of “Family: The Seeds of World Peace (approximately 30 minutes).

Learning Experience

- » Divide into small groups to read the quotations “The Principle of Oneness” and the questionnaire “Teaching Children about Oneness.”
- » Read the quotations and generate answers to the questionnaire.
- » Have each group create a short skit or mime to demonstrate a specific action they can share with their children to promote the principle of oneness and cultivate the love of diversity.

Closing

- » Bring the group back together and discuss this question: What is one action I will take with my children to promote the principle of oneness and a love of diversity?
- » Share with the participants the Bahá’í concept of oneness and invite everyone to investigate the Bahá’í Faith.
- » Close the session with prayer, either spoken, chanted or sung.

The Principle of Oneness



“O Children of Men! Know ye not why We have 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 upon 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 fruits of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, Arabic, p. 20)

“He Who is your Lord, the All-Merciful, cherisheth in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and one body.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 213)

“Wherefore must the loved ones of God associate in affectionate fellowship with stranger and friends alike, showing forth to all the utmost loving-kindness, disregarding the degree of their capacity, never asking whether they deserve to be loved.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 12)

“Be thou a summoner to love, and be thou kind to all the human race. Love thou the children of men and share in their sorrows. Be thou of those who foster peace. Offer thy friendship, be worthy of trust. Be thou a balm to every sore, be thou a medicine for every ill. Bind thou the souls together.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 26)

“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.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 169)

“Cleanse ye your eyes, so that ye behold no man as different than yourselves. See ye no strangers; rather see all men as friends, for love and unity come hard when ye fix your gaze on otherness.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 24)

Teaching Children about Oneness

- ◆ What do children need to know in order to embrace the teaching of the oneness of humanity?

- ◆ How can parents assist children to acquire this divine knowledge?

- ◆ How can children come to understand that they have a capacity and are capable of assisting the human race to become united?

- ◆ How can parents help children to perceive what unity and diversity “look like” and to discern their role in advancing the process of unity and diversity?

- ◆ What family programs, activities, habits, routines and environments could be conducive to children becoming prejudice-free and united with their fellow human beings?

Glimpses of the Holy Family

Purpose:

To discover how members of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's family cared for each other.

To apply this understanding to our own families.

Fireside/Workshop/Meeting
90 minutes

Carefully prepare the learning environment to reflect hospitality, beauty, friendliness and love. Lovingly greet the guests as they arrive. You may also wish to have soft, instrumental music playing as the guests come in.

Opening prayer(s). When possible, include the use of music.

Introduction

Open by explaining to the guests that the purpose of the gathering is to look at the ways that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's family (the Holy Family) related to each other and to catch a glimpse of how they cared for one another.

Family: The Seeds of World Peace Video

Have the guests watch the video (or telecast) of "Family: The Seeds of World Peace (approximately 30 minutes).

Learning Experience

» Introduce the activity by reading aloud the following passage from 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

My home is the home of peace. My home is the home of joy and delight. My home is the home of laughter and exultation. Whosoever enters through the portals of this home, must go out with gladsome heart. This is the home of light; whosoever enters here must become illumined....

(From a Tablet, published in "Star of the West", vol. 9, no. 3, 'Abdu'l-Baha: *Family Life*, p. 397)

» Give a brief explanation of who the members of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's family are so that the stories make sense for those unfamiliar with the Bahá'í Faith.

» Then invite the friends to divide themselves into small working groups according to their interest in one of the arts: dance, music, drama, mime, poetry or visual art.

Assign each of the groups one or more of the following stories:

1. 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His Sister, the Greatest Holy Leaf
2. The Marriage of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Munírih Khánúm
3. Gifts of the Greatest Holy Leaf
4. The Children's Education

5. Shoghi Effendi's Tenderness

- » Invite the friends to read their story aloud and to reflect on the qualities the members of the Holy Family illustrate, a quality that enabled that individual to serve selflessly in the household of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

- » Request the participants to choose one of the qualities they saw in their story and then prepare a creative representation of how that quality, so beautifully demonstrated in the Holy Family, can assist us to establish "homes of joy and delight" in the world today.

- » After allowing work time in the small group, invite each working group to share with the whole group:
 - the quality they identified
 - their creative expression of how that quality can assist us to achieve equality in the world today, either through dance, music, drama, mime, poetry or visual art.

Closing

Bring the group back together and discuss these questions:

- How can the qualities illustrated by the Holy Family be expressed in my family?
- What practical steps, however small, shall I take this week to more fully express the principle of equality in my family?

Invite the participants to investigate the Bahá'í Faith.

Close the session with prayer, either spoken, chanted or sung.

Group One: 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His Sister, the Greatest Holy Leaf

Bahíyyih Khánum recalls:

The journey to Adrianople, although occupying but nine days, was the most terrible experience of travel we had thus far had. It was the beginning of winter, and very cold; heavy snow fell most of the time; and destitute as we were of proper clothing or food, it was a miracle that we survived it. We arrived at Adrianople all sick-- even the young and strong....

Our family, numbering eleven persons, was lodged in a house of three rooms just outside the city of Adrianople. It was like a prison; without comforts and surrounded by a guard of soldiers. Our only food was the prison fare allowed us, which was unsuitable for the children and the sick.

That winter was a period of intense suffering, due to cold, hunger, and, above all, to the torments of vermin, with which the house was swarming. These made even the days horrible, and the nights still more so. When they were so intolerable that it was impossible to sleep, my brother would light a lamp (which somewhat intimidated the vermin) and by singing and laughing seek to restore the spirits of the family."

(Phelps, Myron H., *The Master in 'Akka*, pp. 47-48)

'Abdu'l-Bahá provides for His sister's comfort during a later journey by writing to His daughter: O Diya! It is incumbent upon thee, throughout the journey, to be a close, a constant and cheerful companion to my honoured and distinguished sister. Unceasingly, with the utmost vigour and devotion, exert thyself, by day and night, to gladden her blessed heart; for all her days she was denied a moment of tranquillity. She was astir and restless every hour of her life. Moth-like she circled in adoration round the undying flame of the Divine Candle, her spirit ablaze and her heart consumed by the fire of His love.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahíyyih Khánum*, p. 10)

Group Two: *The Marriage of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Munírih Khánum*

Munírih Khánum recalls:

It is impossible to put into words the delight of being with the Master; I seemed to be in a glorious realm of sacred happiness whilst in His company. You have known Him in His later years, but then, in the youth of His beauty and manly vigour, with His unfailing love, His kindness, His cheerfulness, His sense of humour, His untiring consideration for everybody, He was marvelous, without equal, surely in all the earth!

For fifty years my Beloved and I were together. Never were we separated, save during His visits to Egypt, Europe, and America. O my Beloved husband and my Lord! How shall I speak of Him? You, who have known Him, can imagine what my fifty years have been--how they fled by in an atmosphere of love and joy and the perfection of that Peace which passeth all understanding, in the radiant light of which I await the day when I shall be called to join Him, in the celestial garden of transfiguration.

(spoken chronicle of Munírih Khánum, *The Chosen Highway*, pp. 89-90)

Group Three: *Gifts of the Greatest Holy Leaf*

Early pilgrims share remembrances of the Greatest Holy Leaf:

It is a charming Persian habit to wrap a gift in an embroidered silk or linen cloth, as fine in its way as the thing enclosed. So, always, she (Bahíyyih Khánum) gave a gift within the gift. You took the happy warmth of contentment you felt when you were with her and only later came to realize that this was the fine wrapping of a deeper joy, a richer core....

She was seldom alone.... Her room was the heart of the house. Around the glow of her brazier in winter or when she sat on her window divan in full sunlight, old and young would gather near her, filtering in one by one, slipping out again to work or play, or pausing for a moment in a busy day at the doorway for a glimpse. You left your shoes at the threshold of that room and you left, too, any outer covering of pose or manner you might have made for yourself for protection in a bleak world. Here was no need for pretense and brave showing: here in the light of her shining simplicity you became simple.

(Morten, Marjory, *The Passing of Bahíyyih Khánum in Crystallizations*, pp. 168 and 170)

Among the visitors was a widow from the Middle East, who had arrived on what seemed to be a permanent pilgrimage. I do not recall the source of this lady's permanent melancholy. True, she would help some of the people there on occasion, sitting on the floor according to the lingering custom and working on the vegetables and other ingredients of the patriarchal dinner dishes that would feed so many mouths. But she would take little part in the conversations, being mostly wrapped in unadulterated grief. One day, there she came, and sat, heaving her usual sighs, her face clouded with sorrow. Gently the Greatest Holy Leaf leaned over and addressed her. "There are not frontiers to the world of gloom," she said. "You will never get to the end of it, no matter how far and how fast you gallop your steed."

(Gail, Marzieh, *Khánum, The Greatest Holy Leaf*, p. 25)

Group Four: *The Children's Education*

From the earliest days of the small Bahá'í community centered around Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Holy Land, the education of children--both boys and girls--was emphasized, within the limits imposed by the confinement of the family and companions as prisoners of the Ottoman Turks, and by the meager facilities available to them.

The emphasis on education was constant. Lady Blomfield, an early Bahá'í, describes how, when the family of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was evacuated temporarily from Haifa to the village of Abu-Sinan during the period of World War I when Haifa was in danger of bombardment, 'Abdu'l-Bahá arranged for schools to be set up in that village to ensure that the children's education was not neglected.

(Khan, Janet A. and Peter J. Khan, *The Advancement of Women*, p. 183)

'Abdu'l-Bahá took particular care in Shoghi Effendi's education:

"At this time, the British world empire is the greatest of all and is still advancing. Its language is a world language. My Vizier shall receive his education in England itself, after acquiring the Oriental languages and the wisdom of the East in this place."

The doctor ventured to object: Would not Western education "check his active spirit," rigidly bind it, "stifle his Oriental non-rationalities and intuition into dogmas and conventionalities," so that he would turn from being a servant of the Most High and become "a slave of Western opportunism and the trite and commonplace?" A long pause. Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá stood up and said in a firm voice, "I am not giving my Elisha to the British for education: I am consecrating him to Almighty God. May His eyes watch over my child even at Oxford."

(Gail, Marzieh, *Khánum, The Greatest Holy Leaf*, pp. 33-34)

Group Five: Shoghi Effendi's Tenderness

Rúhíyyih Khánúm shares this personal story about the Guardian:

In 1940 my mother, animated by a passionate desire to render the Cause some service ... decided to go to South America and help in teaching the Faith in Argentina....The Guardian, my father and I had consented to this long journey, but at such an age, and with a heart very far from sound, it was a risk, to say the least.

The reason I record all these personal things is because behind them, in them, pervading them was the spirit of the Guardian and his tender heart,... which were all reflected in the events that followed. My mother reached Buenos Aires and died almost immediately of a heart attack. The three cables that came, one from her asking for his prayers, one from my father saying she was very ill and to prepare me, and one from my cousin Jeanne Bolles, who had accompanied her, saying she had died, were all handed by me to Shoghi Effendi. As he read them I saw his face change and he looked at me with an expression of intense anxiety and concern. Then of course, gradually, he had to tell me she was dead. I cannot conceive that any human being ever received such pure kindness as I did from the Guardian during that period of shock and grief. His praises of her sacrifice, his descriptions of her state of joy in the next world,... his vivid depiction of her as she wandered about the Abhá Kingdom making a thorough nuisance of herself because all she wanted to talk about was her beloved daughter on earth!--all combined to lift me into a state of such happiness that many times I would find myself laughing with him over the things he seemed to be actually divining.

(Rabbani, Rúhíyyih, *The Priceless Pearl*, pp. 154-155)