

On the Need for One-on-One Mentoring

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In my opinion, the current Nine Year Plan needs to be supplemented with a process of one-on-one mentoring of new Bahá'ís or those who are “standing at the threshold” of becoming a member of the Bahá'í community. A dictionary definition of “mentor” is “a trusted guide or counselor.”¹ I was fortunate to have Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, Olivia Kelsey, as my mentor. She was not assigned to me. I became a Bahá'í on my own via independent study. I sought her out after signing my card. Fortunately, she lived close to where I did. Perhaps deepened, experienced, veteran Bahá'ís could voluntarily sign-up via a spiritual assembly or area teaching committee to serve as mentors to “deepen” new Bahá'ís and those who are close to the Faith in person or via the Internet.

In the following passage from *Promoting Entry by Troops*,² a 1993 compilation, Shoghi Effendi is quoted regarding, what appears to me, to be a one-on-one, mentoring, deepening process that includes “reading” or “diagnosing” a friend or acquaintance, choosing a direct or indirect teaching method, deepening and inspiring until “maturity” as a Bahá'í is reached, introduction to the community, and training for a life of sacrificial service. The integration of this deepening with the training program of the institute process, that is, with study circles and their training components for specific services such as children class teachers, junior youth animators, and study circle tutors, would, no doubt, have to be an organic one.¹

Shoghi Effendi advises the Bahá'í teacher to advance the process of deepening for a person who is attracted to the Faith: “Let him [the Bahá'í teacher/mentor] consider the degree of his hearer's receptivity, and decide for himself the suitability of either the direct or indirect method of teaching, whereby he can impress upon the seeker the vital importance of the Divine Message, and persuade him to throw in his lot with those who have already embraced it. Let him remember the example set by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and His constant admonition to shower such kindness upon the seeker, and exemplify to such a degree the spirit of the teachings he hopes to instil into him, that the recipient will be spontaneously impelled to identify himself with the Cause embodying such teachings. Let him refrain, at the outset, from insisting on such laws and observances as might impose too severe a strain on the seeker's newly awakened faith, and endeavour to nurse him, patiently, tactfully, and yet determinedly, into full maturity, and aid him to proclaim his unqualified acceptance of whatever has been ordained by Bahá'u'lláh. Let him, as soon as that stage has been attained, introduce him to the body of his fellow-believers,

¹ In his talk (2011) titled “The American Bahá'í Community” Ali Nakhjavani (timecode 36:00) refers to the coordination between such mentoring and the spiritual child's participation in the core activities: YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rlywd5WOiN0&list=WL&index=37&t=501s>.

and seek, through constant fellowship and active participation in the local activities of his community, to enable him to contribute his share to the enrichment of its life, the furtherance of its tasks, the consolidation of its interests, and the co-ordination of its activities with those of its sister communities. Let him not be content until he has infused into his spiritual child so deep a longing as to impel him to arise independently, in his turn, and devote his energies to the quickening of other souls, and the upholding of the laws and principles laid down by his newly adopted Faith.” (Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette, IL, Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1990), 51-52.)

During a gathering of mostly veteran Bahá’ís in Ashland, Oregon in 2014,³ the elder Bahá’ís who referred to themselves as the “old geezers”ⁱⁱ were exploring their possible roles in the new Framework for Actionⁱⁱⁱ which places emphasis on the leadership of youth in children’s classes, junior youth groups, and study circles. Participants offered examples of the support they were giving which included: providing financial support, preparing food for groups of youth, sponsoring or supporting devotional meetings, reactivating firesides and deepening classes, going back to offering talks on favorite subjects to other communities (travel teaching), and tutoring youth to improve their reading skills. An additional option would be personal mentoring. The content could be based on the sixteen subjects prescribed for the new Bahá’ís in Latin America by the beloved Guardian in his letters published in *Citadel of Faith* (the numbering of different topics and the emphases are added):

. . . familiarize the Latin American believers with the (1) *administrative duties and functions* they will be called upon to discharge and to enrich and deepen their knowledge of the essentials of their Faith, its (2) *ideals*, its history, its (3) *requirements* and its (4) *problems*, must be carried out with ever-increasing energy . . .⁴

The highly salutary and spiritually beneficent experiment of encouraging a more active participation by these newly won supporters of the Faith in Latin America, and a greater assumption of administrative responsibility on their part, in the ever expanding activities to be entrusted wholly to their care in the years to come, should be, in particular, developed, systematized and placed on a sure and unassailable foundation. Above all, the paramount duty of (5) *deepening the spiritual life* of these newly fledged, these precious and highly esteemed co-workers, and of enlightening their minds regarding the (6) *essential verities* enshrined in their Faith, its (7) *fundamental institutions*, its (8) *history and genesis*—the (subsumed under Nos. 6, 7 & 8: [9] *twin Covenants of Bahá’u’lláh and of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, the [10] *present Administrative Order*, the [11] *future World Order*, the [12] *Laws of the Most Holy Book*, the [13] *inseparable institutions of the Guardianship and of the Universal House of Justice*, the [14] *salient events of*

ⁱⁱ Timecodes: 1:12 and 1:32:34

ⁱⁱⁱ Timecode: 1:07:45

the Heroic and Formative Ages of the Faith, and its [15] relationship with the Dispensations that have preceded it, its [16] attitude toward the social and political organizations by which it is surrounded—must continue to constitute the most vital aspect of the great spiritual Crusade launched by the champions of the Faith from among the peoples of their sister republics in the South.⁵

For each of these topics, deepening and training materials could be created by Bahá'í scholars and educationists at various reading levels along with guidelines for mentors in a particular language and then translated to other languages.^{iv}

End Notes

¹ See: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mentor>

² Shoghi Effendi and Universal House of Justice, "Promoting Entry by Troops" in *Compilation of Compilations*, Volume 3, compiled by Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (Mona Vale, Australia: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 2000), 154-202.

³ "Questions & Answers (Part 2)," YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_Lqwlp48rY&t=4188s.

⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America 1947–1957* (Bahá'í Publishing Trust: Wilmette, IL, 1965), 61.

⁵ *Ibid.* 76-77.

^{iv} See my commentary "On How to Improve Ruhi Institute's Course Organization and Educational Approach to Deepening New and Young Believers and Human Resource Training"