

Abuse Recovery 101

By Susan Gammage ¹

Many people asked me what I've done to recover from childhood abuse, so I synthesized what I've learned in the hopes that it might help others in their healing journey

When I became pregnant with my son 30 years ago, my marriage was in trouble and I thought a baby would fix it. Instead, it fixed me! I went looking for marriage counselling and the floodgates opened and I began having flashbacks of childhood abuse which I had blocked for many years.

Finding therapy was challenging, as "false memory syndrome" was on everyone's minds. A lot of therapists dropped me when they learned what I was dealing with; and I had no choice but to turn to God. I thought that if Bahá'u'lláh truly was who he said He was, and had a blueprint for the world to get out of the mess it was in; His blueprint ought to include how to recover from the trauma of violence and abuse. I was disappointed I couldn't find it; and angry at a Bahá'í therapist who suggested I might be the one to write it! By reading the Bahá'í Writings morning and night, I gradually came across quotes which touched on every aspect of my recovery, which I compiled and published as "Violence and Abuse: Reasons and Remedies.

I remember asking one therapist for the name of someone I could talk to, who had gone through the turmoil and pain of dealing with these issues, and come out the other side; but nobody was able to do this for me. I made a promise, that if I ever got to the other side, I'd share what worked for me, with others.

Stabilize First

If you are just starting to recover your memories and are having flashbacks, the first thing you need to do, is to stabilize. If you are feeling suicidal, please get help immediately by calling the nearest crisis line; or mental health service; or abused women's shelter.

I hope this article will provide a spiritual counterpart to the material help they will offer.

In order to recover from abuse, you'll need to use both material and spiritual means. The best results for the healing process are found when the spiritual approach is combined with the remedy offered by competent doctors. 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us:

There are two ways of healing sickness, material means and spiritual means. The first is by the treatment of physicians; the second consisteth in prayers offered by the spiritual ones to God and in turning to Him. Both means should be used and practised.

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Illnesses which occur by reason of physical causes should be treated by doctors with medical remedies; those which are due to spiritual causes disappear through spiritual means. Thus an illness caused by affliction, fear, nervous impressions, will be helped more effectively by spiritual rather than by physical treatment. Hence, both kinds of treatment should be followed; they are not contradictory. Therefore thou shouldst also accept physical remedies inasmuch as these too have come from the mercy and favour of God, Who hath revealed and made manifest medical science so that His servants may profit from this kind of treatment also. Thou shouldst give equal attention to spiritual treatments, for they produce marvelous effects.

Now, if thou wishes to know the true remedy which will heal man from all sickness and will give him the health of the divine kingdom, know that it is the precepts and teachings of God. Focus thine attention upon them. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 151-152)

I recommend 3 tools:

1. Use of Doctors

The House of Justice advises you to persevere in your efforts to secure good medical assistance, from psychiatrists or others, and to follow the advice of these specialists. (Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 26 July, 1988)

2. Use of the Divine Physician

The world of man is sick, and that competent Physician knoweth the cure, arising as He doth with teachings, counsels and admonishments that are the remedy for every pain, the healing balm to every wound. It is certain that the wise physician can diagnose his patient's needs at any season, and apply the cure. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 59)

3. 5 Steps of Prayer

You can find them here: <https://www.thebahaiprayers.com/subject/5-steps-solving-problems>

The House of Justice has recommended several practical steps we can take in our healing:

The House of Justice advises you to persevere in your efforts to secure good medical assistance, from psychiatrists or others, and to follow the advice of these specialists. It also suggests that through daily prayer, and specially by observing the daily obligatory prayers, through study of the Writings, through active participation in teaching efforts and in the activities of the community, and through constant effort to sacrifice for the Faith you love so well, you will obtain a spiritual counterpart to the professional help you will receive from the experts. In general, the best results for the healing process are found when the spiritual approach is combined with the remedy offered by competent doctors. (Universal House of

Justice to an individual believer, 26 July, 1988. https://bahai-library.com/compilation_psychology_knowledge_self)

You can draw on these powers by your prayers as well as your participation in the work of the faith and the life of the Bahá'í community; through this effort, and through your consultation with competent professionals having expertise in your area of need, you can promote your healing from the damaging effects of your past experiences, and can find happiness and tranquillity. (Universal House of Justice to me, 9 September, 1992)

Regarding your question about methods of healing which involve temporarily re-experiencing or remembering events, these are complex medical matters and as stipulated in the Teachings, believers should seek the best medical advice which is available and follow it. Experience seems to suggest that the healing process can often be a lengthy and stressful one requiring the close guidance and help of trained professionals. Advice given by well-meaning believers to the effect that you should seek to transcend psychological problems does not qualify as competent advice on what is essentially a medical issue. (Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 23 October, 1994. https://bahai-library.com/uhj_ritual_childhood_abuse)

From these quotes I glean the following steps:

- secure good medical assistance, from psychiatrists or others
- follow the advice of these specialists
- daily prayer
- observing the daily obligatory prayers
- study of the Writings
- active participation in teaching efforts and in the activities of the community
- constant effort to sacrifice for the Faith
- healing can often be a lengthy and stressful
- advice given by well-meaning believers that you should transcend psychological problems does not qualify as competent advice!

The supreme need of the world today is for spiritual healing. Life in this world is so short that we need to focus our energy in preparation for our eternal life.

However much the need may be for physical healing, the supreme need of the world today is for spiritual healing. Life in this world is so relatively short—and at present it is fraught with a thousand difficulties and dangers; whereas life in the true sense is eternal, and for this eternal life people need some preparation in these turbulent times. (Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 281, #942)

Take God Seriously

Although we are required to follow the advice of our therapist, we also MUST take God seriously, and adhere to every clause of His advice too.

Full recognition of the station of the Forerunner, the Author, and the True Exemplar of the Bahá'í Cause, as set forth in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's testament; unreserved acceptance of, and submission to, whatsoever has been revealed by their Pen; loyal and steadfast adherence to every clause of our Beloved's sacred Will... (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 73, #255)

We stay stuck in pain when we forget that all healing comes from God, not from therapy:

It is incumbent upon everyone to seek medical treatment and to follow the doctor's instructions, for this is in compliance with the divine ordinance, but, in reality, He Who giveth healing is God. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 156, #136)

If we forget to turn to Him, and follow His advice, we're delaying our healing unnecessarily. We know that the Bahá'í Writings are referred to as the "Creative Word of God", which means that by immersing ourselves in the Ocean of His Writings, we are being "re-created".

O wayfarer in the path of God! Take thou thy portion of the ocean of His grace, and deprive not thyself of the things that lie hidden in its depths. Be thou of them that have partaken of its treasures. A dewdrop out of this ocean would, if shed upon all that are in the heavens and on the earth, suffice to enrich them with the bounty of God, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. With the hands of renunciation draw forth from its life-giving waters, and sprinkle therewith all created things, that they may be cleansed from all man-made limitations and may approach the mighty seat of God, this hallowed and resplendent Spot. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXIX, pp. 279-280)

Recite ye the verses of God every morning and evening. Whoso reciteth them not hath truly failed to fulfil his pledge to the Covenant of God and His Testament and whoso in this day turneth away therefrom, hath indeed turned away from God since time immemorial. Fear ye God, O My servants, obe and all. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 73, #149)

My holy, My divinely ordained Revelation may be likened unto an ocean in whose depths are concealed innumerable pearls of great price, of surpassing luster. It is the duty of every seeker to bestir himself and strive to attain the shores of this ocean, so that he may, in proportion to the eagerness of his search and the efforts he hath exerted, partake of such benefits as have been pre-ordained in God's irrevocable and hidden Tablets. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLIII, p. 326)

May your souls be illumined by the light of the Words of God, and may you become repositories of the mysteries of God, for no comfort is greater and no happiness is

sweeter than spiritual comprehension of the divine teachings. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 460)

...the Teachings of God are as healing balm, a medicine for the conscience of man. They clear the head, so that a man can breathe them in and delight in their sweet fragrance. They waken those who sleep. They bring awareness to the unheeding, and a portion to the outcast, and to the hopeless, hope. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 23)

Bahá'ís are generally encouraged to use the Creative Word, including those prayers and Tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá which are authenticated and published in our Bahá'í literature. (The Universal House of Justice, 2001 Sep 19, Devotional Meetings Compilation, https://bahai-library.com/uwj_devotional_meetings_compilation)

The greatest miracle of the Manifestation of God is that He changes the hearts of people and creates a new civilization merely through the influence of His word. Every word that He utters is creative and endowed with such potency that all the powers of the world will not be able to resist the world-vivifying forces that are released through it. Like the animating energies of the spring season which are let loose in abundance and penetrate to the core of all living things, the creative Word of the Manifestation of God revolutionizes human society and by its resistless force breaks down man-made barriers of opposition, creating a new race of men and a new civilization. (Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh v 3, p. 44)

From these quotes we learn that the Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

- enrich us with the bounty of God
- cleanse us from all man-made limitations
- enable us to approach the mighty seat of God
- allow us to partake of God's benefits
- are a healing balm and medicine for us
- clear the head
- waken those who sleep
- bring awareness to the unheeding
- bring a portion to the outcast
- bring hope to the hopeless
- change hearts
- create a new civilization merely through their influence
- revolutionizes human society
- break down man-made barriers of opposition
- create a new race of men and a new civilization
- no comfort is greater
- no happiness is sweeter
- every word is creative and endowed with such potency that all the powers of the world will not be able to resist the world-vivifying forces that are released through it

- if we don't, we fail to fulfil our pledge to the Covenant of God

God Has Chosen Us to Be His Army of Light

When I was in the midst of the pain of all the hurt and betrayal I felt when I was first dealing with my abuse memories, I was caught in the material pain of the lies told to me by my lower nature. I thought I had a right to feel my feelings (in fact I was told that by many therapists), but this only kept me stuck in the pain, locked in the prison of self. God doesn't want us to dwell there! From all of humanity, He has chosen us to occupy the front ranks of His Army of Light:

From amongst all mankind hath He chosen you, and your eyes have been opened to the light of guidance and your ears attuned to the music of the Company above; and blessed by abounding grace, your hearts and souls have been born into new life. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 35)

You are a community of victors; you occupy the front ranks of Bahá'u'lláh's invincible army of light; indeed, you must remain in the vanguard of its thrust. (A Wider Horizon, Selected Messages of The Universal House of Justice, 1983-1992, p. 25)

He has chosen us to be His messengers of love throughout the world; and we can't do this while we're steeped in the mire of hurt, anger, bitterness, fear and self-pity:

For I say unto you that He has chosen you to be His messengers of love throughout the world, to be His bearers of spiritual gifts to man, to be the means of spreading unity and concord on the earth. Thank God with all your hearts that such a privilege has been given unto you. For a life devoted to praise is not too long in which to thank God for such a favour. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 68)

There are so few of us; and we must be the leaven for the world. As leaven, our job is to lighten, enliven, modify or transform, and we can't do this if we're immersed in the ocean of pain from what happened to us:

The people of the world are teeming millions, the Bahá'ís only a handful, yet they are the precious leaven that must leaven the lump. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 281, #942)

Bahá'u'lláh warns us not to forfeit so precious a favor; or belittle so remarkable a token of His grace; or to abandon the incorruptible benefits He's given to us. He asks us lift up the veil that obscures our vision, and dispel the darkness which envelops us when we choose to stay trapped in our story:

Behold how the manifold grace of God, which is being showered from the clouds of Divine glory, hath, in this day, encompassed the world. For whereas in days past every lover besought and searched after his Beloved, it is the Beloved Himself Who now is calling His lovers and is inviting them to attain His presence. Take heed lest

ye forfeit so precious a favor; beware lest ye belittle so remarkable a token of His grace. Abandon not the incorruptible benefits, and be not content with that which perisheth. Lift up the veil that obscureth your vision, and dispel the darkness with which it is enveloped, that ye may gaze on the naked beauty of the Beloved's face, may behold that which no eye hath beheld, and hear that which no ear hath heard. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLI, p. 320)

God knows that we are undergoing severe and unparalleled tests, and yet we are but a mere handful of people, among all the seething masses of humanity, who have been chosen by God to contribute to His mission, which is vital to the fate of humanity:

Let us pray to God that in these days of world-encircling gloom, when the dark forces of nature, of hate, rebellion, anarchy and reaction are threatening the very stability of human society, when the most precious fruits of civilization are undergoing severe and unparalleled tests, we may all realize, more profoundly than ever, that though but a mere handful amidst the seething masses of the world, we are in this day the chosen instruments of God's grace, that our mission is most urgent and vital to the fate of humanity, and, fortified by these sentiments, arise to achieve God's holy purpose for mankind. (Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration, p. 52)

Being chosen by God does not come without a price! Much is required of us:

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 136, #454)

We may think of ourselves as ordinary and even unimportant, but in the future, we will see the effects of our efforts on the world:

Reflect ye upon the chosen ones of God in the earlier ages! How their worth was unknown during their days; how they were known by people as but ordinary individuals and unimportant persons! Afterwards, their arguments appeared, their lights scintillated, their stars beamed, their trees became lofty, their mysteries gleamed forth, their fruits were praised, their reservoirs became overflowing, their gardens adorned, their birds warbled and their joy became perfect in the Kingdom of their Beneficent Lord. (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v2, pp. 274-275)

Our job is to stop looking at the depraved conditions of the society in which we live; and the evidences of moral degradation which have affected us. Instead, we must set the counsels and exhortations of God as our supreme goal:

The chosen ones of God... should not look at the depraved conditions of the society in which they live, nor at the evidences of moral degradation and frivolous conduct which the people around them display. They should not content themselves merely with relative distinction and excellence. Rather they should fix their gaze upon

nobler heights by setting the counsels and exhortations of the pen of Glory as their supreme goal. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 137, #457)

To the extent that we are able to do this, we will be blessed and protected, happy and satisfied:

They cannot be the chosen people of God,—the ones who have received the bounty of accepting Him in His Day, the recipients of the Master’s Divine Plan—and do nothing about it. The obligation to teach is the obligation of every Bahá’í, and particularly, the obligations of the American Bahá’ís towards humanity are great and inescapable. To the degree to which they discharge them will they be blessed and protected, happy and satisfied. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 136, #454)

Therein lies the secret to our healing!

He needs us to be fully functioning so that we can be fit for service.

Purpose of Life

As part of an awakened life, it’s important to know our purpose in life. We were created to:

- Know and worship God
- Acquire virtues
- Receive God’s grace
- Bear and Endure

Tests and Severe Mental Tests

We all have stories! God has given each of us tests and difficulties, uniquely designed to help us achieve our purpose in life.

You are encouraged to continue to keep in mind the spiritual dimension of your struggles. We are assured by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the following words: “The more difficulties one sees in the world the more perfect one becomes. The more you plough and dig the ground the more fertile it becomes. The more you cut the branches of a tree the higher and stronger it grows. The more you put the gold in the fire the purer it becomes. The more you sharpen the steel by grinding the better it cuts. Therefore, the more sorrows one sees the more perfect one becomes. That is why, in all times, the Prophets of God have had tribulations and difficulties to withstand. The more often the captain of a ship is in the tempest and difficult sailing the greater his knowledge becomes. Therefore I am happy that you have had great tribulations and difficulties... Strange it is that I love you and still I am happy that you have sorrows. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Star of the West, Vol. XIV, No. 2, p. 41)

There are before you so many temptations, trials, afflictions, calamities and difficulties because you have to be purified through fire and sifted through the sieve in order to separate the wheat from the tares. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Scriptures, p. 443, #808)

And those of us in the West have been promised severe mental tests; of which I believe recovery from abuse entails.

And yet, how often we seem to forget the clear and repeated warnings of Our beloved Master, Who, in particular during the concluding years of His mission on earth, laid stress on the "severe mental tests" that would inevitably sweep over His loved ones of the West — tests that would purge, purify and prepare them for their noble mission in life. (Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration, p. 50)

The imagery used by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in the Tablets addressed to the American believers referred to above, to describe the process of testing is very graphic. It is evident that the tests envisaged are severe. They are of a psychological and intellectual nature. (The Universal House of Justice, 1995 Mar 12, Mental Tests, https://bahai-library.com/uhj_mental_tests)

It's important for us to understand the purpose of our tests in the context of our purpose of life, since the very future of the Cause depends on our passing our tests!

There is always an important difference between friends and tested friends. No matter how precious the first type may be, the future of the Cause rests upon the latter. (Shoghi Effendi, The Light of Divine Guidance, vol. 1, p. 34)

Our experience in passing all the tests resulting from abuse and violence is the fodder with which we will achieve our purpose in life; so that we can be a force for change in the world!

May they be granted the celestial strength to pass, over and over again, the mental tests which 'Abdu'l-Bahá promised He would send to them to purify them, thus enabling them to achieve their divinely conferred potential as a force for change in the world. (The Universal House of Justice, 1995 Mar 12, Mental Tests, https://bahai-library.com/uhj_mental_tests)

What happened to us in the past isn't nearly as important as what we plan to do with our future:

Our past is not the thing that matters so much in this world as what we intend to do with our future. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 209, #701)

Plough Own Field

When we're hurt by others, it's tempting to point a finger and say "look what he did to me". Bahá'ís are called to a higher standard.

We are ALL sinners, every one of us!

We are all sinners, and Thou art the Forgiver of sins, the Merciful, the Compassionate. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 176)

Our full time job is to perfect our own life:

... 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. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 92, #318)

We must keep our eyes on our own tasks, without looking to see how other people are doing with theirs:

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. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 92, #318)

To those who have hurt us, we are called on to treat them as friends; love them, praise them, give him the choicest honey, and be their "roses and sweet herbs".

Should any come to blows with you, seek to be friends with him; should any stab you to the heart, be ye a healing salve unto his sores; should any taunt and mock at you, meet him with love. Should any heap his blame upon you, praise ye him; should he offer you a deadly poison, give him the choicest honey in exchange; and should he threaten your life, grant him a remedy that will heal him evermore. Should he be pain itself, be ye his medicine; should he be thorns, be ye his roses and sweet herbs. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 34)

Even if someone has murdered us, we are to see that person as our friend:

Bahá'u'lláh has clearly said in His Tablets that if you have an enemy, consider him not as an enemy. Do not simply be long-suffering; nay, rather, love him. Your treatment of him should be that which is becoming to lovers. Do not even say that he is your enemy. Do not see any enemies. Though he be your murderer, see no enemy. Look upon him with the eye of friendship. Be mindful that you do not consider him as an enemy and simply tolerate him, for that is but stratagem and hypocrisy. To consider a man your enemy and love him is hypocrisy. This is not becoming of any soul. You must behold him as a friend. You must treat him well. This is right. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 267)

When we can achieve this standard, we'll change this dark world into light; make this dusty earth turn heavenly; and make war and strife pass away and be no more:

Perchance such ways and words from you will make this darksome world turn bright at last; will make this dusty earth turn heavenly, this devilish prison place become a royal palace of the Lord -- so that war and strife will pass and be no more, and love and trust will pitch their tents on the summits of the world. Such is the essence of God's admonitions; such in sum are the teachings for the Dispensation of Bahá. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 34)

Lower and Higher Natures

It's an odd thing that God created us with both a higher and lower nature; made us all sinners; and yet He tells us that His work is perfect!

With the hands of power I made thee and with the fingers of strength I created thee; and within thee have I placed the essence of My light. Be thou content with it and seek naught else, for My work is perfect and My command is binding. Question it not, nor have a doubt thereof. (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words 12)

We've all been given free will, to act from our lower natures; or from our higher:

Certain matters are subject to the free will of man, such as acting with justice and fairness or injustice and inequity - in other words, the choice of good and evil actions. It is clear and evident that the will of man figures greatly in these actions. But there are certain matters where man is forced and compelled, such as sleep, death, sickness, fading powers, misfortune and material loss. These are not subject to the will of man, and he is not accountable for them, for he is compelled to endure them. But he is free in the choice of good and evil actions, and it is of his own accord that he performs them.

For example, should he so wish, he can pass his time in praise of God, and should he so desire he can occupy himself with that which is other than Him. He can light the candle of his heart with the flame of the love of God, and become a well-wisher of the world, or he can become an enemy of all mankind or set his affections on worldly things: he can choose to be just or iniquitous. All these deeds and actions are under his own control, and he is therefore accountable for them. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 2014 revised edition, pp. 287-288)

By the exercise of his free will, man either affirms his spiritual purpose in life or chooses to perpetuate evil by living below his highest station. The question is asked: "Is such a behaviour to be attributed to God, or to their proper selves?" And concludes: Every good thing is of God, and every evil thing is from yourselves. (Messages From The Universal House of Justice, 1963 to 1986, p. 663, #423.7)

Those who've abused us chose to act from their lower natures; and understanding this can liberate us from our anger. When dealing with my own abuse issues, the House of Justice wrote me:

As a devoted believer you are urged to strive to develop forgiveness in your heart toward your parents who have abused you in so disgraceful a manner, and to attain a level of insight which sees them as captives of their lower nature, whose actions can only lead them deeper into unhappiness and separation from God. By this means, you can liberate yourself from the anger to which you refer in your letter, and foster your own spiritual development. (The Universal House of Justice, 1985 Dec 02, Child Abuse, Psychology and Knowledge of Self)

We also act from our lower natures when we choose to hold on to our anger, bitterness, fear and self-pity.

The key to understanding whether something is coming from our lower or higher natures, is to pay attention to our thoughts. Sad to say, most of them come from our lower natures! We can tell because if they make us feel bad (angry, sad, afraid), they are coming from our lower nature. Every feeling starts with a thought; and if we want to change our feelings we need to first change our thoughts.

Often, especially if we've been abused as children, we need to make sense of what happened to us, so we give meaning to an event that holds no meaning. For example: I was sexually abused by a parent, therefore I must be unloveable. I was treated with disrespect, therefore I must be worthless. These rationalizations are lies; and keep us stuck.

When we've been abused, many of us want to punish our abusers forgetting that our job is to love and forgive:

If one of thy relations oppress thee, complain not against him before the magistrate; rather manifest magnificent patience during every calamity and hardship. Verily thy Master is the Lord of Faithfulness! Forgive and overlook the shortcomings which have appeared in that one, for the sake of love and affection. Know that nothing will benefit thee in this life save supplication and invocation unto God, service in His vineyard, and, with a heart full of love, be in constant servitude unto Him. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i World Faith, p. 375)

And God's job is to take care of the justice:

... I have pledged Myself not to forgive any man's injustice. This is My covenant which I have irrevocably decreed in the preserved tablet and sealed with My seal. (Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words Persian 64)

Anxiety and Depression (Fear and Self-Pity)

Dealing with my abuse issues put me into anxiety and depression; and as long as I believed that lie, I stayed stuck. These are medical terms which need medical solutions; and it's hard to break free. Once I looked at them as fear and self-pity, they became sins, for which I was accountable to God, and then I had something I could change!

Teaching, Service and Work

Early on in my recovery, I realized that as long as I was teaching or being of service, I had little time to feel afraid or sorry for myself. This pilgrim's note confirms it:

Be not the slave of your moods, but their master. But if you are so angry, so depressed and so sore that your spirit cannot find deliverance and peace even in prayer, then quickly go and give some pleasure to someone lowly or sorrowful, or to a guilty or innocent sufferer! Sacrifice yourself, your talent, your time, your rest to another, to one who has to bear a heavier load than you—and your unhappy mood will dissolve into a blessed, contented submission to God.

The Research Department has found that these words were attributed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in an unpublished English translation of notes in German by Dr. Josephine Fallscheer taken on 5 August 1910. As the statement is a pilgrim note, it cannot be authenticated. (<https://bahaiquotes.com/subject/moods>)

As I mentioned above, we who are chosen by God, are needed:

The field is indeed so immense, the period so critical, the Cause so great, the workers so few, the time so short, the privilege so priceless, that no follower of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, worthy to bear His name, can afford a moment's hesitation. (Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 46)

Whenever we rise above ourselves, and center our hearts and minds on service to the Cause, every difficulty and trial will gradually be overcome:

An individual must center his whole heart and mind on service to the Cause, in accordance with the high standards set by Bahá'u'lláh. When this is done, the Hosts of the Supreme Concourse will come to the assistance of the individual, and every difficulty and trial will gradually be overcome. (Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 118, #406)

Searching for ourselves is not going to get us the assurance we're looking for. Searching for God and serving our fellow man will:

The more we search for ourselves, the less likely we are to find ourselves; and the more we search for God and serve our fellowmen, the more profoundly will we become acquainted with ourselves, and the more inwardly assured. (Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 115, #391)

Teaching is important work for those who have been chosen too; but to be totally self-serving, I loved to know that when I did, I was guaranteeing myself

- something better than all the treasures of the past and of the future
- God will remember me when I get to heaven
- I'll get confirmations

Unloose your tongues, and proclaim unceasingly His Cause. This shall be better for you than all the treasures of the past and of the future, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLIV, p. 330)

O Son of Being! Make mention of Me on My earth, that in My heaven I may remember thee, thus shall Mine eyes and thine be solaced. (Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words, Arabic 43)

It is clear that in this day, confirmations from the unseen world are encompassing all those who deliver the divine Message. Should the work of teaching lapse, these confirmations would be entirely cut off, since it is impossible for the loved ones of God to receive assistance unless they teach. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 264-265)

When I was dealing with my abuse issues, I felt like they had taken over my life; and I was unable to work, so like many abuse survivors, I went on a disability pension. Years later, I found this quote, and it rang true:

To engage in some profession is highly commendable, for when occupied with work one is less likely to dwell on the unpleasant aspects of life. (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 175)

Forgiveness

The first quote I ever read about forgiveness seemed to say it all:

If someone commits an error and wrong toward you, you must instantly forgive him. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 453)

This standard seemed pretty clear; but it didn't tell me how or why, and for a long time, I found this next quote from the House of Justice to me, a lot more comforting:

As a devoted believer you are urged to strive to develop forgiveness in your heart toward your parents who have abused you in so disgraceful a manner, and to attain a level of insight which sees them as captives of their lower nature, whose actions can only lead them deeper into unhappiness and separation from God. By this means, you can liberate yourself from the anger to which you refer in your letter, and foster your own spiritual development. The peerless example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá merits close scrutiny in your quest for a sense of forgiveness; His abiding love for humanity, despite its waywardness and perversity enabled Him to manifest sincere compassion and magnanimity to those who had brought Him distress and hardship.

(The Universal House of Justice, 1985 Dec 02, Child Abuse, Psychology and Knowledge of Self)

I liked the first part "strive to develop forgiveness in your heart", because it suggested that as long as I was moving in that direction, it was enough. But it wasn't enough to set me free. Only when I looked at the last part (following the peerless example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá) was I finally set free of all my symptoms of fear and self-pity.

I used to be a "glass half-empty" kind of person, disappointed by life and seeing only the negatives. Someone once told me that if I wasn't grateful for what God had given me, why would He give me more?! This gave me food for thought!

Be thou happy and well pleased and arise to offer thanks to God, in order that thanksgiving may conduce to the increase of bounty. (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, vol. 2, p. 483)

Now I've found that when I think of 5 things I'm grateful for, before falling asleep; and 5 more before getting out of bed in the morning, my day is a lot brighter!

We have a lot to be grateful for; not the least of which is being chosen to become a Bahá'í! For a list of things to consider, on days when everything looks black, I recommend: Bahá'í Quotes on Gratitude <https://www.bahaiquotes.com/subject/gratitude>

Happiness is a Choice

When the black cloud of depression was following me, I used to think it was never going to end. I felt totally powerless to do anything about it. I'd been a Bahá'í for more than 30 years, when all of a sudden it hit me! The prayer I'd been saying for spiritual growth, the first prayer I ever learned, was actually a prescription for happiness!

O God! Refresh and gladden my spirit. Purify my heart. Illumine my powers. I lay all my affairs in Thy hand. Thou art my Guide and my Refuge. I will no longer be sorrowful and grieved; I will be a happy and joyful being. O God! I will no longer be full of anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass me. I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life. O God! Thou art more friend to me than I am to myself. I dedicate myself to Thee, O Lord. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i Prayers, p. 151)

Let's have a look at the language 'Abdu'l-Bahá used, which talk about choice:

- I lay all my affairs in Thy hand
- I will no longer be sorrowful and grieved
- I will be a happy and joyful being
- I will no longer be full of anxiety
- nor will I let trouble harass me
- I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life
- I dedicate myself to Thee, O Lord.

I WILL or I WILL NOT is a decision.

Now when I'm feeling sorry for myself, I say each of these lines out LOUD! And with a stomp of defiance! And I always laugh; and I always feel better. I urge you to give it a try!

Patience and Seasons

My marriage didn't survive the final blow – remembering and having to process and deal with my abuse memories. Obviously there were problems with the marriage before the flashbacks started, but I always knew that there was one thing I needed to know, which, if I heard it, would let me hold on to the marriage. Many years later it came to me – the notion that for everything there is a season.

Let's look at how 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the seasons:

At one time it is springtime; at another the autumn season; at one point it is summer and at another it is winter.

The vernal season has rain-laden clouds and musk-scented breezes, life-giving zephyrs, and perfectly mild weather. The rain falls; the sun shines; the reviving wind blow; the world is renewed, and the breath of life reveals itself in plant, animal, and man alike. Earthly beings pass from one condition to another. All things are clothed in a new vesture. The black earth is swathed in abundant grass, mountains and plains don an emerald green robe, trees bear leaves and blossoms, gardens bring forth flowers and sweet herbs, the world becomes another world, and all creation is imbued with a new life. The earth which was a soulless body finds a new spirit, and displays the utmost beauty, grace, and charm. Thus the springtide produces a new life and infuses a new spirit.

Then comes summertime, when the heat intensifies and growth and development manifest the fullness of their power. The life force reaches its plenitude in the vegetable kingdom: Fruits and crops appear, the harvest time arrives, the seed becomes the sheaf, and provision is made for the winter months.

Then comes unrelenting autumn, when unwholesome gales blow, barren winds waft, and the season of death and want arrives. All things wither; the pleasant air becomes hard and chill; the breezes of spring turn into the blasts of fall; trees once green and verdant, become wasted and bare; flowers and herbs fade away in sorrow; and delicate gardens become darksome heaps of dust.

There follows the winter season, when cold winds blow and tempests arrive. It snows and storms, it hails and rains, it thunders and lightens, and lethargy and torpor take hold. Plants become as dead, and animals languish and waste away.

When this stage is reached, the life-giving springtide returns once again, and a new cycle is inaugurated. Springtime with its hosts of vitality and grace, and in the plenitude of its greatness and majesty pitches its tent on the mountains and plains. Once more the temples of created things are revived and the creation of contingent beings is renewed. Living bodies grow and develop, fields and plains become green and verdant, trees put forth blossoms, and last year's spring of returns once again in the height of its majesty and glory. The very existence of things must ever

depend upon, and be perpetuated through, these cycles and successions. Such are the cycles and revolutions of the material world. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 2014 revised edition, pp. 82-83)

Obviously we need them all, including winter!

How does 'Abdu'l-Bahá describe winter?

- It's cold
- There are tempests
- It snows, rains, hails, storms, thunders and lightens, freezes and congeals
- all plants die
- animals languish and are wretched

This certainly described how I was feeling in the middle of my abuse recovery. Everything seemed dead; and I couldn't ever see it getting better.

I'd forgotten that with patience, spring always comes.

There is a life after therapy. There is a life during therapy, with the right attitude! I wish I'd known all the things I'm sharing with you at the beginning. It would have saved me years of anguish!

Did you know that patience is a law in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas?

Bahá'u'lláh defines "the course that is praiseworthy" as "the exercise of patience".
(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 210, note 98)

Conclusion

So that's it! My summary of 30 years of abuse recovery in 17 pages, I hope it helps someone.