

Ways to Break the Cycle of Violence and Abuse

By Susan Gammage ¹

I've put the list first; and the quotes where I got the ideas below.

1. Every day, in the morning, compare today with yesterday to determine your spiritual condition
2. Pray and supplicate God to help you overcome the failings in your character
3. Implore and ask for help and assistance that you may become better than yesterday so that you may continue to make progress
4. Ask for an increase in the qualities of love, belief, detachment and occupation with God
5. Repent for all that you have done which is wrong
6. Thank God
7. Understand that the most pressing task is the purification of your character, the reforming of your morals and the rectification of your conduct
8. Shed the attachments which hold you back
9. Empty yourself of every thought which may obstruct your path
10. Set yourself free from old patterns of thought
11. Cultivate the distinctive qualities and characteristics that are indispensable to effective participation in the redemptive work of the Faith
12. Allow your heart's ambitions to ascend to a more glorious goal
13. Make efforts to seize whatever opportunities exist in your lives
14. Develop and use your allotted talents
15. Develop and demonstrate your God given potential in action
16. Direct your energies to the acquisition of excellence
17. Remember that intention brings attainment
18. Know yourself
19. Recognize what leads to loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty
20. Education
21. Effort
22. Exert willpower in mastering yourself
23. Exert your spiritual faculties
24. Allow spiritual power to influence and re-create you
25. Make efforts to let in the influence of the power of the Cause
26. Fasten your eyes on whatever the Manifestation of God reveals
27. Obedience to the divine laws
28. Let go of the traditions of bygone ages
29. Weed out the faults, habits, and tendencies which have been inherited
30. Look at committing an evil deed as the harshest of all punishments
31. Consider the sinful act itself to be far more grievous than any prison sentence
32. Ever increasing service to the Faith

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33. Consultation employing full and frank discussion, animated by awareness of the need for moderation and balance
34. Focus attention on your own selves, your own needs, your own personal deficiencies and weaknesses, rather than those of others
35. Observe the fast
36. Assess your character
37. Consult your conscience
38. Struggle against the natural inertia which weighs down your efforts to arise
39. Knowledge, will and action
40. Subdue your human will and submit it to the will of God
41. Sincerity
42. Justice
43. Humility
44. Severance
45. Love for the believers of God
46. Allow your mental activity to rise to higher levels
47. Hold the vision of celestial perfection in your soul
48. Prepare a dwelling place for the inexhaustible bounty of the divine spirit
49. Keep your eyes directed to the Manifestation of God
50. Fear God
51. Praiseworthy deeds and upright character
52. Remembrance of God
53. Accept the help of the Holy Spirit
54. Turn away from evil and turn towards good
55. Resolute efforts, including medical ones where necessary
56. Hang the Most Great Name in your dwelling
57. Wear the ring of the Most Great Name on your finger
58. Place the picture of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in your home
59. Recite the prayers written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá
60. Train the individual from infancy
61. Host a systematic program of education in the Baha'i community on
 - the implications of the principle of the equality of men and women with focus on the status and role of women
 - the positive aspects of the marriage relationship described in the Bahá'í teachings
62. Teach good character, morals and good conduct
63. Focus all of your attention on these new principles

Breaking out of the Cycle of Abuse and Violence

It is therefore important to appreciate that God in His bounty has endowed every created thing, however humble, "with the capacity to exercise a particular influence, and been made to possess a distinct virtue". And, reminiscent of the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), Bahá'u'lláh, in the "Gleanings", (p.149) draws attention to the need to make efforts to develop and demonstrate in action our God given potential ... All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition. Your own acts testify to this truth.

(Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 2 December 1985.
https://bahai-library.com/uhj_oppression_children)

Is it not an evidence of the justice of God that each of us, irrespective of family background, is assessed in terms of the efforts we have made to seize whatever opportunities existed in our lives, to develop and use our allotted talent, be it large or small? "Each shall receive his share from thy Lord", is Bahá'u'lláh's assurance." (Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 2 December 1985)

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 ... (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXII p. 260)

There can be no doubt whatever that, in consequence of the efforts which every man may consciously exert and as a result of the exertion of his own spiritual faculties, this mirror can be so cleansed from the dross of earthly defilements and purged from satanic fancies as to be able to draw nigh unto the meads of eternal holiness and attain the courts of everlasting fellowship. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXIV, p. 262)

The individual must be educated to such a high degree that he would rather have his throat cut than tell a lie, and would think it easier to be slashed with a sword or pierced with a spear than to utter calumny or be carried away by wrath. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. p. 136)

What every believer, new or old, should realize is that the Cause has the spiritual power to re-create us if we make the effort to let that power influence us, and the greatest help in this respect is prayer. We must supplicate Bahá'u'lláh to assist us to overcome the failings in our own characters, and also exert our own will power in mastering ourselves. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 115, #394)

If the broad structure of society is to remain intact, resolute efforts, including medical ones, as necessary, should be made to curb acts of aggression within families, particularly their extreme forms of wife beating and child abuse by parents. This is a matter of fundamental importance ... (Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, pp.221-222, #740)

The House of Justice suggests that your efforts to eliminate any traces of domestic violence from the Bahá'í community might well be founded on a systematic programme to educate all elements of the Bahá'í community in the implications of the principle of the equality of men and women as set forth in the compilation on Women prepared by the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre early in 1986. Such an educative process focussed on the status and role of women, as well as the positive aspects of the marriage relationship described in the Bahá'í teachings, would assist Bahá'í couples to construct marriages which are entirely devoid of abuse or violence, as well as psychological or emotional manipulation,

and which are a model to a society searching for harmonious domestic relations. (Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 25 September 1987)

The power of God can entirely transmute our characters and make of us beings entirely unlike our previous selves. Through prayer and supplication, obedience to divine laws Bahá'u'lláh has revealed, and ever increasing service to His Faith, we can change ourselves. (Shoghi Effendi, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 240, #1770)

Bahá'u'lláh also stressed the importance of consultation. We should not think this worthwhile method of seeking solutions is confined to the administrative institutions of the Cause. 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. Wives should not attempt to dominate their husbands, nor husbands their wives... (Universal House of Justice, The Compilation of Compilations, vol. II, p.383, #2160)

Therefore must the individual be trained from his infancy in such a way that he will never undertake to commit a crime, will, rather, direct all his energies to the acquisition of excellence, and will look upon the very commission of an evil deed as in itself the harshest of all punishments, considering the sinful act itself to be far more grievous than any prison sentence. For it is possible so to train the individual that, although crime may not be completely done away with, still it will become very rare. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 263, #590)

Therefore I say that man must travel in the way of God. Day by day he must endeavour to become better, his belief must increase and become firmer, his good qualities and his turning to God must be greater, the fire of his love must flame more brightly; then day by day he will make progress, for to stop advancing is the means of going back. The bird when he flies soars ever higher, and higher, for as soon as he stops flying he will come down. Every day, in the morning when arising you should compare today with yesterday and see in what condition you are. If you see your belief is stronger and your heart more occupied with God and your love increased and your freedom from the world greater, then thank God and ask for the increase of these qualities. You must begin to pray and repent for all that you have done which is wrong and you must implore and ask for help and assistance that you may become better than yesterday so that you may continue to make progress. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 376, #795)

How great, therefore, how staggering the responsibility ... of the American believers, at this early stage in their spiritual and administrative evolution, to weed out, by every means in their power, those faults, habits, and tendencies which they have inherited from their own nation, and to cultivate, patiently, and prayerfully, those distinctive qualities and characteristics that are so indispensable to their effective participation in the great redemptive work of their Faith. Incapable as yet,

in view of the restricted size of their community and the limited influence it now wields, of producing any marked effect on the great mass of their countrymen, let them focus their attention, for the present, on their own selves, their own individual needs, their own personal deficiencies and weaknesses, ever mindful that every intensification of effort on their part will better equip them for the time when they will be called upon to eradicate in their turn such evil tendencies from the lives and hearts of the entire body of their fellow-citizens. (Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 20-21)

Today the most pressing of all tasks is the purification of character, the reforming of morals, the rectification of conduct. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 10)

Fasting is symbolic, a reminder of abstinence from selfish and carnal desires. (Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 233, #775)

The individual alone must assess its character, consult his conscience, prayerfully consider all its aspects, manfully struggle against the natural inertia that weighs him down in his efforts to arise, shed, heroically and irrevocably, the trivial and superfluous attachments which hold him back, empty himself of every thought that may tend to obstruct his path... (Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 148)

All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition. Your own acts testify to this truth. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 149)

The attainment of any object is conditioned upon knowledge, volition and action. Unless these three conditions are forthcoming there is no execution or accomplishment. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*. p. 101)

Will is the centre or focus of human understanding. We must will to know God, just as we must will in order to possess the life He has given us. The human will must be subdued and trained into the will of God. It is a great power to have a strong will, but a greater power to give that will to God. The will is what we do, the understanding is what we know. Will and understanding must be one in the Cause of God. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Scriptures*, p. 503)

The people, therefore, must be set completely free from their old patterns of thought, that all their attention may be focused upon these new principles, for these are the light of this time and the very spirit of the age. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 253)

Good character must be taught. Light must be spread afar, so that, in the school of humanity, all may acquire the heavenly characteristics of the spirit, and see for themselves beyond any doubt that there is no fiercer hell, no more fiery abyss, than to possess a character that is evil and unsound; no more darksome pit nor

loathsome torment than to show forth qualities which deserve to be condemned. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 136)

Training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning. A child that is cleanly, agreeable, of good character, well-behaved - even though he be ignorant - is preferable to a child that is rude, unwashed, ill-natured, and yet becoming deeply versed in all the sciences and arts. The reason for this is that the child who conducts himself well, even though he be ignorant, is of benefit to others, while an ill-natured, ill-behaved child is corrupted and harmful to others, even though he be learned. If, however, the child be trained to be both learned and good, the result is light upon light. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 135-136)

... sincerity, justice, humility, severance and love for the believers of God will purify the mirror and make it radiant with reflected rays from the Sun of Truth. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 244)

The heart's ambitions should ascend to a more glorious goal, mental activity should rise to higher levels. Men should hold in their souls the vision of celestial perfection, and there prepare a dwelling place for the inexhaustible bounty of the Divine Spirit. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 99)

This is the Day when the loved ones of God should keep their eyes directed towards His Manifestation, and fasten them upon whatsoever that Manifestation may be pleased to reveal. Certain traditions of bygone ages rest on no foundations whatever, while the notions entertained by past generations, and which they have recorded in their books, have, for the most part, been influenced by the desires of a corrupt inclination. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXXXVI, p. 171)

The fear of God hath ever been the prime factor in the education of His creatures. Well is it with them that have attained thereunto! (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 27)

Our purpose is to show that should the loved one of God sanctify their hearts and their ears from the vain sayings that were uttered aforesaid, and turn with their inmost souls to Him Who is the Day Spring of His Revelation, and to whatsoever things he hath manifested, such behaviour would be regarded as highly meritorious in the sight of God.... (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXXXVI, p. 172)

In this Revelation the hosts that can render it victorious are the host of praiseworthy deeds and upright character. The leader and commander of these hosts hath ever been the fear of God, a fear that encompasseth all things and reigneth over all things. (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 126)

Remembrance of Me cleanseth all things from defilement, could ye but perceive it. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXXVI, pp. 294-295)

The attainment of any object is conditioned upon knowledge, volition and action. Unless these three conditions are forthcoming there is no execution or accomplishment. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity, p. 101)

The people, therefore must be set completely free from their old patterns of thought, that all their attention may be focused upon these new principles, for these are the light of this time and the very spirit of the age. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 253)

Man cannot free himself from the rage of the carnal passions except by the help of the Holy Spirit. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 92)

Whoever believed in Him and acknowledged His Faith, was endowed with the grace of a new life. (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 154)

...you must yourself determine to resist wayward impulses each time they arise and the House of Justice feels that there is no better way than to turn to the Writings to divert our thoughts into spiritual channels, perhaps to concentrate on what we may do to help others along the way to discovering the Bahá'í Faith. The more we occupy ourselves with teaching the Cause and serving our fellow-man in this way, the stronger we become in resisting that which is abhorrent to our spiritual selves. (Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 367, #1228)

However, it should be recognized that the ultimate solution to the problems of humanity lies not in penalties and punishments, but rather in spiritual education and illumination. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written: "It is incumbent upon human society to expend all its forces on the education of the people, and to copiously water men's hearts with the sacred streams that pour down from the Realm of the All-Merciful, and to teach them the manners of Heaven and spiritual ways of life, until every member of the community of man will be schooled, refined, and exalted to such a degree of perfection that the very committing of a shameful act will seem in itself the direst infliction and most agonizing of punishments, and man will fly in terror and seek refuge in his God from the very idea of crime, as something far harsher and more grievous than the punishment assigned to it." (Universal House of Justice, https://bahai-library.com/uhj_violence_against_women)

The first Taráz and the first effulgence which hath dawned from the horizon of the Mother Book is that man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty. (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 34-35)

It is the bounden duty of parents to rear their children to be staunch in faith, the reason being that a child who removeth himself from the religion of God will not act in such a way as to win the good pleasure of his parents and his Lord. For every praiseworthy deed is born out of the light of religion, and lacking this supreme

bestowal the child will not turn away from any evil, or will he draw nigh unto any good. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 372, #2127)

If you seek immunity from the sway of the forces of the contingent world, hang the Most Great Name in your dwelling, wear the ring of the Most Great Name on your finger, place the picture of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in your home and always recite the prayers that I have written; then you will behold the marvellous effect they produce. Those so called forces will prove but illusions and will be wiped out and exterminated. ('Abdu'l-Bahá cited by the Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance, p. 520, #1769)