The Authenticity Project
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I. What is the Authenticity Project?
>A. an effort to integrate Bahá'í ethical principles and the psychological dynamics of growth
>B. an interdisciplinary group
>C. potentially a Bahá'í inspired non-profit initiative which will share the dynamics of moral authenticity with that part of the larger community seeking solutions to pressing problems that require an integration of ethics and psychology.

II. Why integrate ethics and psychology? Because a failure to integrate has led to moral chaos, an increase in violence, and a failure to take into account the central role of values in human life.
>A. because ethical principles must be translated into action to be meaningful and because a knowledge of the dynamics of growth is essential in that translation
>B. the major challenge to psychology at this time is its conflicts with regard to values
>>1. on the one hand, noted psychologists have recognized the relationship between mental health and values:
>>>a. Jung said that he had never seen a patient over 40 whose fundamental problem was not religious, and he argued that in the individuation process, a person must develop a transcendent function that allows one to move beyond the self-centered ego;
>>>b. Frankl indicated that illness is relegated to the soma and psyche, but not to the noetic, or spiritual domain;
>>>c. Assagioli proposed psychosynthesis: the discovery and formation of a dynamic relationship of the personality with a spiritual Self;
>>>d. in a recent letter to the editor in <u>The American Psychologist</u>, Naji Abi-Hashem argues that " . . .. *now Western psychologists are coming full circle to rediscover the place of hope, the importance of spirituality, and the centrality of connections within the realm of community.*"
>>2. other psychologists fear that the introduction to values in psychology will inhibit freedom of conscience, causing particular cultural values to be imposed either in the realm of psychological research or in a definition of health which will then be used to sanction individual differences.

III. How do the Bahá'í teachings resolve this polarization?
>A. Scientific truth
>>1. The harmony of science and religion:

The Bahá'í teachings assert that science and religion are different approaches to the same truth; "*truth is one but the ignorant have multiplied it.*" They suggest that God does not exist because we believe in Him; rather, He exists, whether we believe in Him or not. The laws of cause and effect function in both material reality and spiritual reality, and while spiritual reality is not directly observable in the manner of physical reality, unbiased investigation will lead any fair-

minded seeker to the same truths.

2. Values as an essential aspect of reality:

Among those truths is this: values are built into the structure of the universe—they function in both the material and spiritual worlds. Science has begun to recognize this, for example, by accepting that the human being is the most sophisticated organism in the universe, that is, that humans stand at the apex of creation. Creation is ordered according to a hierarchy, with God at the top and the mineral world at the bottom. Human beings, therefore, bridge the material and spiritual worlds and possess the highest value in all creation, by virtue of their possessing a soul, which can mirror God's attributes and reflect His perfection.

3. Human beings in the hierarchy of values:

All the religions have taught this truth; that man occupies the position of highest value. Moral laws require that the value of each human being be recognized through our deeds. All religious ethical systems require that lower values be sacrificed to higher values. For this reason, the minerals sacrifice themselves to serve the vegetable kingdom, the vegetables the animal, the animal the human. Humans stand at the apex of the material universe, but they must be subservient to God, who is the Source of all values.

B. Religious and spiritual truth

1. Moral Confusion and values

a. the decline of religion

Moral confusion is, in essence, an uncertainty about values. What is the most important thing? What is the next most important thing? What is of lower value and therefore must be sacrificed to a higher value? These are the core ethical questions with which human beings struggle and which are bewildering in the absence of religion. As Bahá'u'lláh said: *"Should the lamp of Religion be hidden, chaos and confusion will ensue."*

b. ideology and a confusion re values

Our uncertainty about values has been amplified by the emergence of ideologies which have systematically elevated loyalty to doctrine and dogma above the value of a human being. Shoghi Effendi said: *"The chief idols in the desecrated temple of mankind are none other than the triple gods of Nationalism, Racialism and Communism, at whose altars governments and peoples, whether democratic or totalitarian, at peace or at war, of the East or of the West, Christian or Islamic, are, in various forms and in different degrees, now worshiping."* In the Kitáb-i-Iqán, Bahá'u'lláh lays responsibility for this distortion of truth on the divines who rejected all of the Manifestations of God.

2. Spiritual laws of cause and effect and their relation to values:

Spiritual laws are laws of cause and effect. They posit that if we behave unjustly, substituting lower values for higher ones, our growth and the growth of others will be stunted. Therefore, moral laws are not simply what we *should* do; they are descriptions of the operations of the force of love in our lives. They describe what happens when we love and when we are loved, and they warn of what happens when we do not love and are not loved. Without love, we will not grow and develop. Love provides the motivation and energy for our growth; justice provides the structure and framework for healthy development. Love is the spirit and justice is the form. Love is the recognition of true value; justice is the application of that recognition. Unity is the result.

3. The lower self and the higher Self

In the Hidden Words, Bahá'u'lláh refers to us as the *"man of two visions,"* calling upon us to

"close one eye and open the other." He is referring to the fact that human beings are animals possessed of the spiritual powers of consciousness. Animals without consciousness have no choices, but human beings possess the power of choice between responding to the animal self or to the prompting of the soul. When human beings recognize the higher voice within themselves and appreciate its position in the hierarchy of values, they turn to it. Therefore, self-mastery is the result of a proper understanding of our place in the hierarchy of values.

        3. Mental health and values

Unity manifests itself at the level of the individual psyche as well as within relationships. An individual who is inwardly disunited, who does not want to do what he knows he should do, or who does not know how to do what he should do, or even who does not know how to want to do what he should do — we say that such a person lacks integrity. He is not integrated within. Therefore, a full understanding of the hierarchy of values is essential to mental health. We must recognize true value, love it, and serve it in order to be a healthy human being.

     C. the independent investigation of truth

        1. The true seeker in science and religion

Freedom from bias is recognized by both science and religion as a precondition for finding truth. An individual willing to do these things is more likely to find the truth:

           a. to discard tradition and acquired knowledge
           b. to examine reality with an open mind and heart
           c. to recognize the role of love and hate in distorting truth
           d. to engage in self-discipline in pursuit of truth
           e. to abandon self-interest and to seek a truth which serves all

        2. Convergence

The Bahá'í teachings suggest that any people willing to seek out truth with these parameters in place will arrive at the same truth as any other seeker equally willing to search. Scientific and spiritual truth seeking, therefore, end up at the same place.

IV. How does an understanding of values assist in personal transformation?

     A. The nature of the human soul and the psyche

The Bahá'í teachings pose that the human soul possesses three capacities which have often been subsumed under the idea of "self" or psyche. These are the mind, the heart, and the spirit.

the capacity	mind	heart	will
its manifestation	ideas, thoughts	feelings, emotions	intentions, actions
in the mirror-like Soul	truth	love	service
in the ego	falsehood (a false perception of reality)	egocentric desire & passion	competition for value & power seeking

     B. The process of growth

Human emotional and spiritual growth is the process of expanding our conscious awareness, within the limits of our God-given capacities. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, *"By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds."*

The process of development is one in which our consciousness is expanding. The initial stage of development is one of experiencing the world and perfecting our capacity for observation. A later stage involves an emerging awareness of our identity as a person. A final stage involves taking responsibility for the development of the self through our interactions with the world. Through these developmental stages, we acquire the skills associated with self-reflection. Critical to the proper exercise of responsible self-reflection is an understanding of *love, power, justice,* and *unity*.

C. Self-Mastery and the Inner Model

Every human being has an *inner model of reality* to which no other human being has access. This inner model is the source of all of our interactions with reality, for it is based upon this model of ourselves, others, and the universe that we experience emotions and take actions. If this inner model is faulty and does not reflect an accurate perception of reality, our actions are ineffective. A proper or *authentic* understanding of reality not only includes an accurate perception of the value of things, but also an understanding of the laws of cause and effect. As our understanding of the spiritual laws of cause and effect is perfected, we achieve greater self-mastery, or autonomy. An accurate inner model bestows *inner freedom;* we no longer need affirmation from others when our inner model reflects true value. Therefore, both *authenticity* and *autonomy* are essential to spiritual development.

V. What is the relationship of mental health and spiritual development?

Spiritual development and emotional and mental development follow the same trajectory of growth and respond to the same developmental forces of love and justice. The soul's development, however, is not dependent upon the health, mental or physical, of the individual. *"...mental illness is not spiritual, although its effects may indeed hinder and be a burden in one's striving toward spiritual progress.*" People possess different degrees of dysfunction based upon their physical health, their environment, their experiences; but all must grow spiritually.

A. The body and mental health

Illness in the body may veil the spirit; in order for the spiritual capacities of a human being to be fully evident, a healthy body is necessary.

B. The soul and mental health

Some mental illnesses are the result of the improper use of our spiritual powers. Healing can occur when those powers are used properly. Systematic efforts to examine our thoughts, feelings, and actions can result in much spiritual progress.

C. What can be changed, and what must be accepted?

The character of an individual is manifest in their
  1. innate character — God given spiritual capacities
  2. inherited character — physical attributes, which may include temperament
  3. acquired character — through illness, health, environment, education, & choice
       a. ignorance — requires education
       b. immaturity — requires training
       c. illness — requires healing

VI. What does the Authenticity Project offer with regard to systematic spiritual development?

The Authenticity Project offers training in the use of the Virtuous Cycle, a six step process of systematic transformation which employs specific strategies to increase awareness and self-mastery. The Virtuous Cycle is a process of using one's spiritual capacities of mind, heart, and will *a) to examine that which is mirrored within the mind, heart, and will; b) to evaluate its perception of reality; c) to attempt to understand the source of its distortions and strengths; d) to make a realistic plan of action; e) to anticipate barriers to change; and f) to take action, receive feedback, and reevaluate current reality.*

Step I: Identifying Our Current Condition

Area of Investigation	*Questions*
Mind	*What am I currently thinking about this situation? Is this familiar?*
Heart	*What am I currently feeling about this situation? Is this uncomfortable? Have I felt this way before?*
Will	*What am I currently doing about this situation? Have I behaved this way before? What are my motivations and desires? Do I want to change?*

Step II: Gaining Insight and Understanding

Area of Investigation	*Questions*
Mind	*What thoughts and assumptions underlie my behavior in this situation? Are these reasonable or unreasonable? Are they conscious or unconscious? Are they healthy or unhealthy? Am I **ignorant, immature** or **ailing**?*
Heart	*What feelings and attitudes are producing my behavior? What feelings and attitudes are generated by the behavior?*
	What goals does this behavior

Will	seek to achieve? *What is the "payoff" sought?* *What needs and desires motivate the behavior?* *Are these needs and desires legitimate?*

Step III: Envisioning the Possible and the Desirable

Area of Investigation   *Questions*

Mind	*When I imagine change, what would it look like? How would my point-of-view be different?*
Heart	*What would I rather be feeling in this situation than what I am feeling? What feelings and attitudes would be more authentic, or in keeping with the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá?*
Will	*What would I rather be doing in this situation? Is there an authentic action or a more noble model for the action I wish to adopt?*

Step IV: Choosing a Realistic Plan of Action

Area of Investigation   *Questions*

Mind	*What realistic step could I take towards implementing this virtue given my current abilities and limitations? Which action would lead to the greatest autonomy and authenticity?*
Heart	*With divine assistance, can I be loving and humble enough to accomplish this action?*
Will	*What is my intention? How can I maintain a pure motive? How can I be mindful of the unconscious traps of the ego? How can I deliberately avoid*

	being competitive or seeking power in this action I've chosen?

Step V: Identifying & Anticipating Barriers to Change

Area of Investigation	*Questions*
Mind	*Do I know what to do? Have I ever done it before? What perceptions of myself will I have to give up in order to make a change? What reaction to my changed behavior do I anticipate from others? What strengths have I developed which will help me sustain change?*
Heart	*Do I feel like avoiding change? What losses will I experience by making change? What feelings about myself will I have to give up in order to make change?*
Will	*Have I the courage to act differently, regardless of my anticipated reaction from others? Am I ready to take responsibility for the consequences to my actions? What kind of internal and external support do I need to help me sustain this change?*

Step VI: Acting, Receiving Feedback, and Evaluating

Area of Investigation	*Questions*
Mind	*What thoughts went through my mind as I acted? What seemed to be the thoughts of others? What "change-back" messages*

	have I been receiving *since taking this action?*
Heart	*What emotions did I feel* *as I accomplished my action?* *What seemed to be the emotions of others?* *Did I feel the anticipated resistance* *from myself and others?* *In retrospect,* *do I feel rather good or rather bad* *about what happened?* *Why?*
Will	*How did I react (inwardly) to my action?* *How did others react (visibly) to my action?* *Has the situation now moved* *a step closer to the ideal?* *Has there been an increase* *in altruistic love and justice in this situation?*

VII: What understandings does the Authenticity Project offer in regard to issues of love, power, justice and unity?

A. Altruistic love

Genuine, altruistic love is the recognition of the intrinsic value of another — the reflection of God's image within them. When we experience genuine love for another, we seek to satisfy their legitimate needs, which, when met, contribute to their spiritual growth. Love provides the motivation to serve another. When love is not genuine, but based upon our own needs, our every interaction with another involves a subtle effort to get our needs met at the expense of the other. In a non-authentic relationship, we each seek power to compel the other to satisfy our needs.

B. Active and Passive Love

Passive love is reflected in our total acceptance of another, without preconditions or prejudgment. Active love is reflected in taking initiative to meet another's needs, in our proactive concern for another. Acceptance without concern is *tolerance*, while concern without acceptance is *conditional love*. Authentic love is both unconditional and involves total acceptance. In order to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá's expectation that we demonstrate sincerity rather than hypocrisy in our relationships, we must struggle to attain both conditions.

C. The ability to recognize value

While we are born with the capacity to know and to love, our ability to appreciate true value is dependent upon education. Therefore, if we are ignorant of genuine value, we will find it exceedingly difficult to love; we will not see value even when it is apparent to a more enlightened soul. Only once our own capacity to recognize value increases will we be able to recognize that value in others. Prayer, meditation, and study of the Revelation are means to increasing our ability to recognize genuine value.

D. Justice

Love alone is insufficient. The force of love must be channeled by justice. Justice involves knowledge of the proper uses of the power of love in order to foster the greatest growth. The Manifestations of God define these proper uses in Their laws, outlining those rights and responsibilities which contribute to the growth of individuals, communities and institutions. Much of divine law concerns itself with the proper use of power.

E. The abuse of power

Bahá'u'lláh explicitly recognized the role of the pursuit of power as the root cause of injustice: *"Ever since the seeking of preference and distinction came into play, the world has been laid waste. It hath become desolate."* (1) Note that He does not deny the value of power, which is an attribute of God Himself which we require in order to be effective in the world; He refers to the *pursuit of power.*   To pursue power is to misuse power.   This is not to say that we must avoid power; instead it is to say that all the power which we acquire must be used in service of the development of human beings, who are the highest value in creation. Genuine, altruistic love requires that we recognize the authentic value in another, feel love for that value, and offer service to the other's legitimate needs.

FF. Responses to injustice

To respond to a personal injustice by seeking revenge is to pursue power over another; this is forbidden in the Bahá'í teachings. Often we defend ourselves without any conscious awareness of our own intention; only as we become more authentically aware of our own selves can we avoid subtle manipulations in our relationships with others. Our response to an injustice to ourselves must involve the use of our power to meet the legitimate need of the wrongdoer for education. Our response should increase the likelihood that s/he gain insight into his or her own moral condition. To effectively engage in a creative response to injustice, we must possess a fair degree of authenticity and autonomy. *"Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it."* Without this skill, and without insight into our own blind spots, we may find ourselves engaging in a power struggle, which is the antithesis of a just response.

Only in a few situations are we permitted to confront a wrongdoer. It is an injustice to fail to confront thievery, tyranny, or deceit. But in most situations we are called upon to examine our own motives first and to overlook the shortcomings of others. If an innocent and weaker person is treated unjustly, we may intervene to seek justice, but never to seek moral one-upmanship or any form of power over the other.

VIII. What are the responses of the Authenticity Project to widespread bias, such as the oppression of women, racial prejudice, or the abuse of institutional power?

A. Justice

The parameters of justice with regard to these issues is well defined in the Bahá'í teachings. A systematic study of these teachings will enhance our understanding of what is called for.

B. The individual and society

It is clear that individuals are influenced by society, and society is reshaped by individuals. Authenticity and autonomy must become social norms in order to foster the fullest development of human beings, but individuals must seek the fullest possible authenticity and autonomy in order to

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1 This passage is quoted in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986,* no. 206-3a.

contribute to a culture shift in society.

.	C. Strategies

The elimination of prejudice and injustice first requires that we be aware that it exists and second, requires that we engage in self-examination to assure that we are free of it. Finally, it requires that we learn the skill of responding to injustice in such a way as to increase the likelihood of insight and learning. The Authenticate Project addresses each of these strategies systematically; 3 blind spots in the American character which require attention are: attitudes towards race, attitudes towards gender and sexuality, and attitudes towards institutional power. A careful examination of our thoughts, feelings, and actions in regard to these blind spots will produce true liberation from inauthenticity and passivity.