



Arising to Serve

Ruhi Institute



Book 2

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Books in the Series:

- Book 1 *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*
includes: "Understanding the Bahá'í Writings"
 "Prayer"
 "Life and Death"
- Book 2 *Arising to Serve*
includes: "The Joy of Teaching"
 "Deepening Themes"
 "Introducing Bahá'í Beliefs"
- Book 3 *Teaching Children's Classes, Grade 1*
includes: "Some Principles of Bahá'í Education"
 "Lessons for Children's Classes, Grade 1"
 "Conducting Classes for Children"
- Book 4 *The Twin Manifestations*
includes: "The Greatness of this Day"
 "The Life of the Báb"
 "The Life of Bahá'u'lláh"
- Book 5 *Teaching Children's Classes, Grades 2 and 3*
includes: "Lessons for Children's Classes, Grade 2"
 "Lessons for Children's Classes, Grade 3"
- Book 6 *Spiritual Growth*
includes: "The Spiritual Path"
 "Becoming a Tutor for Books 1-5"
- Book 7 *Family Prosperity*
includes: "Bahá'í Family Life"
 "Giving: The Spiritual Basis for Prosperity"
- Book 8 *The Covenant*
includes: "The Covenant of God"
 "The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh"

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TO THE COLLABORATORS

The units of the Ruhi Institute aim, in their entirety, at achieving three overall objectives: providing insights into spiritual matters, imparting knowledge about the Faith, and helping to develop skills for specific acts of service. A given unit may, of course, place emphasis on one or another of these three objectives. The units of Book 1 basically seek to help the students gain insights into certain spiritual matters. Book 2 is largely concerned with skills and abilities for specific acts of service.

The basic concept underlying all the units of the Ruhi Institute, irrespective of the particular emphasis of each, is that of "walking a path of service". Those who enter the program of the Institute set out on a path of personal spiritual growth and service to others. The various courses assist them by presenting to them the relevant concepts, by focusing them on the development of their own spiritual qualities and their attitudes, and by equipping them with the skills and abilities they need to trace their own path of service. This path necessarily begins with very simple acts of service, which then grow in complexity as the capacities of the participants increase.

The first act of service is introduced in the second unit of this book, "Deepening Themes", which is designed to help the students develop the capability of making periodic visits to the homes of newly enrolled believers and sharing with them a number of themes—the Eternal Covenant of God, the life of Bahá'u'lláh, love and unity in the Bahá'í community, Bahá'í meetings and the Nineteen Day Feast, the significance of contributing to the Fund, and teaching the Cause. Each theme is followed by a series of questions and exercises. Some of these are aimed at enhancing the students' understanding of the theme itself. Others are designed to help them develop the skills of how to present the content to the families they visit. Yet another set of exercises is concerned with the spiritual qualities and attitudes which should adorn this act of service.

For most of the students, this unit will provide the first opportunity to study these particular themes at any depth. It is important to note that the knowledge they are acquiring is gained in the context of sharing it with others. It is hoped that this will set the stage for a life in which personal growth and service to others are seen as an integrated whole, and not as separate and sometimes conflicting ends.

As with all the courses of the Ruhi Institute, if there are many students in the class, the tutor should divide them into small groups. The units they have studied before basically consisted of short quotations, followed by questions and exercises that helped them to gain insights into the quotations. In this unit, the deepening themes are presented in relatively long passages with quotations inserted throughout. After the first reading of a given theme, some of the participants will probably have retained little, and it will be necessary for them to go back and read the entire passage several times, paragraph by paragraph, ask one another questions, and repeat the ideas in their own words. Having done this, the students then move on to the exercises that follow, which will help them gain further insights into the quotations and think about presenting the theme as an act of service to others.

Of course, in order to develop the necessary skills and abilities, it is not enough for the participants to simply study the themes in this unit and complete the corresponding exercises. Opportunities need to be created for them to put the skills they are acquiring into practice. What would be most desirable is for them to visit, either in groups or individually

in the company of a more experienced friend, the homes of nearby families for this purpose. If this is not possible, then it is suggested that they perform role playing exercises, in which one acts as the visiting teacher and the others as the members of a family newly enrolled in the Faith.

The third unit of this book, "Introducing Bahá'í Beliefs", is concerned with some of the skills related to teaching the Cause. As one gains experience in teaching the Faith, one acquires a number of skills and abilities. At a first simple level, this unit is concerned with helping the students develop the ability to introduce Bahá'í ideas into a conversation. To do this, the unit presents to them a number of short passages on various subjects, which, though not exact quotations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, are based on His talks and Tablets and contain many of the words and phrases He used. As with the previous unit, the students should read the passages carefully and study them in small groups so that they become well familiar with the ideas presented and can express them with ease in their own words. The exercises which follow each passage are designed to help the students think about how to introduce the ideas they have learned into a conversation and how to respond to questions. It is hoped that, by studying these passages, the participants will develop a pattern of thinking in harmony with the Teachings. This unit should help them acquire the habit of looking towards 'Abdu'l-Bahá's mode of expression as the example of how to teach the Faith. Again, as with the second unit, putting their new skills into practice will be an essential component in the students' learning process.

When the Ruhi Institute first began offering the content of what is now the second unit of this book, it was noticed that some of the participants would continue visiting families, sharing deepening themes with them, while others soon lost enthusiasm. Many consultative meetings were held to try to discover the reason. As a result, it was realized that the main difference lied in the believers' relative consciousness of the source of the joy one derives from teaching the Faith. Those who found satisfaction in momentary excitement, or sought recognition or praise for what they did, would usually not persevere in their efforts. The friends who were consistently visiting families found joy in the act of teaching itself. The first unit in this book, "The Joy of Teaching", tries to convey the implications of this important difference. The sequence of ideas presented in the unit is as follows:

1. When we teach the Cause we partake of a special blessing—that of sharing with others the Word of God revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. This blessing fills us with profound spiritual joy.
2. Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation can be compared to an ocean in the depths of which lie pearls of divine guidance. We should make every effort to reach the shores of this ocean and to receive its benefits.
3. The ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is astonishingly near to us. If we but wish it, we can reach its shore in the twinkling of an eye.
4. Having received the bounty of recognizing Bahá'u'lláh, we wish to share the pearls of divine guidance contained in His Revelation with others. In doing so, we use the power of His own Word; it alone can transform the hearts of men.
5. Of all the activities that occupy us in our daily lives, those that involve ~~sharing the~~ Word of God with others are special.

6. The joy that fills our hearts when we teach the Cause comes from the act of teaching itself—sharing with others the Word of God revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. Being concerned with other things, such as praise and recognition, spoils this joy. Detachment is a requirement of joyful teaching.
7. We must also be willing to exert effort and make sacrifices. We should remember that, in doing so, we are gaining spiritual happiness and furthering our spiritual progress. Sacrifice involves renouncing that which is lower for that which is higher. Though it entails pain, it is in reality the bearer of joy.



The Joy of Teaching

Purpose

To understand that the joy of teaching is in the very act of sharing with others the Word of God, independent of immediate results.

SECTION 1

Now that you have completed a few basic courses offered by the Ruhi Institute and have gained insights into certain fundamental spiritual matters, it is time to pause and think systematically about your future services to the Cause. As you analyze the needs of the Faith and try to discover how you can respond to them, you may find it helpful to think of yourself as walking along a path of service with joy and wonderment. As you advance on this path, you receive your portion of God's immeasurable bounties, and your efforts are continually blessed with divine confirmations. At the beginning, the acts of service you perform are simple and easily accomplished, but as your knowledge grows and your capacities develop, you are able to participate in more demanding areas of service. Walking the path of service, of course, brings many tests and trials. But if you remember to be thankful to God for the opportunities He offers you to serve Him, if you never cease to be humble before Him and before His creatures, the final result of every effort you make will be a victory for the Cause, whether big or small.

Many of the activities you carry out as you walk this path of service will be in the field of teaching. You will guide new souls to the Faith. You will conduct children's classes. You will help deepen Bahá'í friends and will participate in the consolidation of local communities. In all of these activities, you will partake of a special blessing—that of sharing with others the Word of God revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. This blessing will fill you with profound spiritual joy.

Exercises:

1. By teaching the Cause do we only mean enrolling new believers? _____

2. In the list of activities below, mark those that can be considered teaching activities.
_____ Sharing with a friend the glad-tidings of the coming of Bahá'u'lláh.
_____ Helping a new believer deepen in the Faith.
_____ Holding a fireside at your home.
_____ Participating in an expansion and consolidation campaign.
_____ Opening a new locality to the Faith.
_____ Conducting a Bahá'í class for a small group of children.
_____ Helping to form a Bahá'í youth group.
_____ Helping a community to celebrate the Nineteen Day Feast.
_____ Giving a talk about the Faith at a school or another public institution.
3. Of what special blessing do we partake when we teach? _____

4. What is one of the sources of profound spiritual joy for those who teach? _____

5. In your group, consult about what motivates Bahá'ís to teach the Cause of God.

6. Memorize the following quotation:

“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.”¹

SECTION 2

We know that sharing with others the Word of God revealed by Bahá'u'lláh is a source of immense joy in all our teaching activities. We should each, therefore, reflect often on the grandeur of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and try to discover the priceless gems contained therein. Let us begin by studying the following quotation from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh:

“O My servants! 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.”²

Exercises:

1. To what may the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh be compared? _____

2. Some of the pearls hidden in the depths of the ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation are:

The pearl of _____
The pearl of _____
The pearl of _____
The pearl of _____
3. Complete the following sentences:
 - a. It is our duty to _____ ourselves and _____ to _____ the _____ of the ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.

b. We should strive to attain the shores of the ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation so that we may, _____ to the _____ of our search and the _____ we have exerted, _____ of such _____ as have been pre-ordained in God's irrevocable and hidden Tablets.

4. What does it mean to "bestir" oneself? _____

5. What does it mean to "strive to attain" something? _____

6. What should every seeker strive to attain? _____

7. What does it mean for one thing to be "in proportion" to another? _____

8. Bahá'u'lláh tells us we will receive the benefits of the ocean of His Revelation in proportion to the efforts we exert.

a. Give some examples of the efforts we make in order to receive these benefits.

b. Give some examples of the benefits we receive. _____

SECTION 3

Knowing that Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is like an ocean in whose depths lie pearls of great value, we each exert the utmost effort to partake of its benefits and to help others reach its shores. But how far a journey is it to the shores of this ocean? Bahá'u'lláh says:

"O My servants! The one true God is My witness! This most great, this fathomless and surging ocean is near, astonishingly near, unto you. Behold it is closer to you than your life-vein! Swift as the twinkling of an eye ye can, if ye but wish it, reach and partake of this imperishable favor, this God-given grace, this incorruptible gift, this most potent and unspeakably glorious bounty."³

Exercises:

1. Complete the following sentences:
 - a. The most great ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is near, _____, unto us.
 - b. The ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is _____ to us than our life-vein.
 - c. Swift as the _____, we can, if we only wish it, _____ and _____ of the ocean of His Revelation.
 - d. Swift as the twinkling of an eye, we can, _____, reach and partake of the ocean of His Revelation.
2. To what does the phrase "this most great, this fathomless surging ocean" refer? _____
3. How close is this ocean to us? _____
4. How quickly can we reach this ocean? _____

SECTION 4

Having recognized Bahá'u'lláh's greatness and being conscious of our nearness to the ocean of His Revelation in the depths of which lie invaluable pearls, we fill our souls with the spirit of faith and share these pearls of divine guidance with others, pearls that we continually discover in our own study, prayer and meditation. In doing so, we use the power of His own Word. It is important, then, that we meditate deeply on the power of the Word of God and its effect on the human heart. The following quotation of Bahá'u'lláh will help us to appreciate this great power:

"The Word of God may be likened unto a sapling, whose roots have been implanted in the hearts of men. It is incumbent upon you to foster its growth through the living waters of wisdom, of sanctified and holy words, so that its root may become firmly fixed and its branches may spread out as high as the heavens and beyond."⁴

Exercises:

1. To what may the Word of God be compared? _____

2. Where have the roots of the tree of the Word of God been planted? _____

3. How should we foster the growth of this tree? _____

4. Mention some of the qualities we will show forth when the Word of God is firmly established in our hearts. _____

5. What does the phrase “its branches may spread out as high as the heavens and beyond” mean? _____

6. Explain in a few sentences why sharing the Word of God is of the utmost importance.

SECTION 5

Now think of the various activities which occupy us in our daily lives. We nourish our bodies. We work and gain our sustenance. We participate in sports and other recreations. We study to acquire new knowledge and to expand our mental capacities. We develop skills to help us improve the conditions of our lives. Numerous activities like these, all important for our intellectual progress and material well-being, occupy a large portion of our time. But how would we compare the time spent in these activities with those moments charged with spirituality, when we pray, when we deepen, when we share the Word of God with our fellow human beings? Are not the hours we dedicate to studying the Writings of our Faith alone or with friends, the time we devote to teaching children, ensuring that the roots of the tree of the Word of God are firmly implanted in their hearts, and the moments in which God bestows upon us the bounty of guiding souls to the shores of the ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and helping them discover the pearls that are hidden therein—are not these moments precious beyond measure? Is there any greater joy than being able to partake of these heavenly blessings? We should always remember how 'Abdu'l-Bahá dedicated His energies to teaching and longed to take His Father's Faith to every corner of the world.

“O that I could travel, even though on foot and in the utmost poverty, to these regions, and, raising the call of ‘Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá’ in cities, villages, mountains, deserts and oceans, promote the divine teachings! This, alas, I cannot do. How intensely I deplore it! Please God, ye may achieve it.”⁵

Exercises:

1. **Make a list of some of the things you have to do in your life, whether you want to or not.**

2. **Think of the things you like to do and list them in order according to the joy they bring you.** _____

3. **Undoubtedly, the things you enjoy doing are beneficial to you and to others. Does the joy you derive from them come only from the results they bring or also from the act of doing them?** _____

SECTION 6

We have decided that, of all the things we do in our lives, the moments we spend sharing the Word of God with others are invested with special blessings. But we should always remember that the joy we feel when we teach comes from the act of teaching itself, from being engaged in discussion and reflection on the Word of God. If we forget this, other thoughts will be allowed to diminish and even extinguish the light of joy in our hearts. If we give too much importance to how others respond to the Teachings of the Faith, if we are overly affected by other people’s criticisms, if we expect praise for what we do, then we lose the joy of teaching. That which should inspire us to teach is the love of God, not the desire to have success, to receive benefits, to gain recognition or to be praised by others. Detachment from all these things is a requirement of joyful teaching. Studying the following quotations will help you reflect on this all-important theme:

“O Man of Two Visions! Close one eye and open the other. Close one to the world and all that is therein, and open the other to the hallowed beauty of the Beloved.”⁶

“O Friends! Abandon not the everlasting beauty for a beauty that must die, and set not your affections on this mortal world of dust.”⁷

“O Son of Utterance! Turn thy face unto Mine and renounce all save Me; for My sovereignty endureth and My dominion perisheth not. If thou seekest another than Me, yea, if thou searchest the universe forevermore, thy quest will be in vain.”⁸

“O Befriended Stranger! The candle of thine heart is lighted by the hand of My power, quench it not with the contrary winds of self and passion. The healer of all thine ills is remembrance of Me, forget it not. Make My love thy treasure and cherish it even as thy very sight and life.”⁹

“Detachment is as the sun; in whatsoever heart it doth shine it quencheth the fire of covetousness and self. He whose sight is illumined with the light of understanding will assuredly detach himself from the world and the vanities thereof. . . . Let not the world and its vileness grieve you. Happy is he whom riches fill not with vain-glory, nor poverty with sorrow.”¹⁰

Exercises:

1. Does being detached from this world mean living like a hermit? _____
2. Is it possible to be detached from this world and to possess things at the same time?

3. Is a person who dedicates practically every hour of his life to his work detached from the things of the world? _____
4. Is a person who works only enough to satisfy his basic needs and spends the rest of his time doing nothing detached from this world? _____
5. There are many things to which we can be attached besides material possessions. To what would you be attached if you were a person who:
 - a. Feels sad when he performs a service to the Faith and no one recognizes it? ____

 - b. Feels demoralized when someone does not accept the Message he is offering?

 - c. Only goes to teach in a nearby village if one of his friends takes him in his car?

 - d. Does not let people know he is a Bahá'í if he thinks they will reject him? ____

- e. Often spends money to go on outings and picnics, but never has money to go to Bahá'í conferences? _____
6. We know that we should not seek praise for our services to the Cause. Nevertheless, it is important for us to share with others stories of our teaching experiences. In doing so, however, we should be careful not to brag about our own accomplishments. Below are a few statements one might make after participating in a teaching campaign. Mark those you would make without feeling that you were overstepping the bounds of modesty.
- _____ I have so much experience in teaching campaigns that it's easy for me to enroll 15 or 20 new believers in a day.
- _____ Today I met a woman with such profound spiritual insight that, with little explanation, she accepted the Faith. Most of the time I spent with her was in deepening her, rather than in convincing her of the truth of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.
- _____ Doreen has become such a good teacher. I really taught her the Faith well.
- _____ I knew that if I didn't come along with the teaching team they wouldn't enroll very many new believers, so I took the day off work to participate in the campaign.
- _____ My heart was filled with joy when I saw Mario, one of the new believers we enrolled last week, teaching the Faith to his family.
- _____ I finally figured out how to present the Faith so that people just can't say "no".
- _____ Each time I participate in a teaching campaign, I am amazed at the transforming power of the Word of God.
- _____ I'm still overcome by emotion because when I began to explain the Teachings to this older couple, the man said he had had a dream earlier in the week that someone would come to them with a Message from God.
7. So important is detachment for a teacher of the Cause that it is suggested you memorize all of the quotations in this section.

SECTION 7

Another condition which helps us maintain joy in our services to the Cause is our willingness to exert effort and to sacrifice. We use the word "sacrifice" frequently in our daily lives. If a good friend is departing on a trip at dawn, we wake up early to be with him before he leaves. We say that we have sacrificed a few hours of sleep. Someone dear to us may be sick; we sacrifice a few hours of our favorite pastime to care for him. We say that we are sacrificing our comfort if we have to walk a long distance to school every day and that we are sacrificing money we would normally spend on our family when we contribute to a worthy cause.

Service to the Faith also involves sacrifice. We have to take time away from other things to attend Bahá'í activities. We have to accept discomfort, expend some of our material means, and even renounce some of our plans and dreams. However, we should understand that, in doing so, we are leaving behind the things of this world and gaining spiritual happiness and furthering our spiritual progress. God forbid, we should ever think we are doing Him a favor when we serve the Faith. The opportunities of service with which we are presented are bestowed upon us by God, and our attitude in service should be one of humble gratitude and thankfulness. Bahá'u'lláh says:

“Labor is needed, if we are to seek Him; ardor is needed, if we are to drink of the honey of reunion with Him; and if we taste of this cup, we shall cast away the world.”¹¹

'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

“. . . rest ye not, seek ye no composure, attach not yourselves to the luxuries of this ephemeral world, free yourselves from every attachment, and strive with heart and soul to become fully established in the Kingdom of God. Gain ye the heavenly treasures. Day by day become ye more illumined. Draw ye nearer and nearer unto the threshold of oneness.”¹²

We should always remember that the true nature of sacrifice is to renounce that which is lower for that which is higher. Therefore, although sacrifice involves pain, it is in reality the bearer of joy. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

“Until a being setteth his foot in the plane of sacrifice, he is bereft of every favor and grace; and this plane of sacrifice is the realm of dying to the self, that the radiance of the living God may then shine forth.”¹³

Exercises:

1. A young boy has a pocket full of stones. He comes across someone who offers him a handful of gems. He must throw away the stones in order to receive the gems. What is he sacrificing? _____
2. A farmer has an orchard of old trees which no longer bear fruit. He must cut them down in order to plant new ones. What is he sacrificing? _____

3. The seed accepts to be broken apart when it germinates. Why is it sacrificing itself? _____
4. Below are some phrases a person may say or only think to himself. For each pair, mark the phrase that you like best.
_____ I sacrificed the entire day to go teaching.
_____ I had the joy and privilege of teaching all day.

- I will sacrifice three hours of study to go to the Nineteen Day Feast.
- Today I will study later than usual because I am going to the Nineteen Day Feast.
- I will sacrifice buying an extra pair of shoes so that I can give the money to the Fund.
- I will contribute the money I have saved for an extra pair of shoes to the Fund. Of course, I won't mention it to anyone.
- Today I was working so hard for the Faith that I sacrificed having my lunch, even though I was very hungry, and ate only a small piece of bread.
- I was concentrating so much on my work for the Faith that, even though I was hungry, a piece of bread was enough for me.

5. In order to achieve our objectives, effort is needed. Below are listed several objectives of the Bahá'í community. Under each are some related activities which reflect varying degrees of effort. For each objective, mark the activity that best reflects the amount of effort needed to achieve it.

The spiritual education of children:

- Having a children's conference once a year.
- Gathering the children of each village together for a half an hour whenever a visiting teacher passes through.
- Training, every year, a number of youth from the villages so that they can hold regular weekly classes for children of various ages.

The strengthening of local communities:

- Visiting local communities once a year at Ridván to assist them in electing their Local Spiritual Assemblies.
- Providing each Local Spiritual Assembly with a list of duties it should perform.
- Accompanying each local community and its Local Spiritual Assembly in their development, helping with matters such as holding Nineteen Day Feasts, conducting children's classes, establishing the local fund, and carrying out local teaching plans.

The deepening of large numbers of believers:

- Calling a conference every few months at which the members of the institutions and other experienced friends give talks.
- Reminding the friends at every opportunity that it is important to study the Writings.
- Developing a systematic program for deepening believers which includes appropriate materials and teachers trained to use them.

The enrollment of individuals through personal teaching:

- _____ Giving someone who shows interest in the Faith a handful of literature to read.
- _____ Explaining with great enthusiasm the essential verities of the Faith to someone and, the minute he enrolls, leaving him to himself to continue studying if he wishes.
- _____ Familiarizing oneself with an individual interested in the Faith, deciding how best to present the Message to him, showering him with kindness, nurturing him and aiding him to proclaim his acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh, and deepening him and assisting him until he reaches a stage where he himself arises to teach other souls.

SECTION 8

Below are some ideas for a skit called "positive-negative". Choose a friend and, after each learning a part, either "positive" or "negative", perform the skit before the group. Do not be content with these few examples, but consult and write some other situations to include in your skit.

- Positive:** I'm a Bahá'í, and it brings me the greatest happiness to share Bahá'u'lláh's Message with others. Every time I teach the Faith, my heart overflows with joy.
- Negative:** I'm a Bahá'í and truly like to teach. But, oh! What a pain! I have to get up so early to go to the village where the committee has asked me to teach.
- Positive:** Teaching children is important and something I very much like to do. The children in the villages I visit are very special and I consider them to be among my best friends.
- Negative:** Teaching children is very important, but it seems to me an impossible task. Today's children behave poorly and nobody can stand to be around them.
- Positive:** I have a weekly children's class that is going very well. Of course, my children are not angels. Sometimes there are problems, and I have trouble teaching them. But by following the counsels of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and with love and patience, everything works out. What joy to see the progress these children have made in the year I have been teaching them.
- Negative:** Well, one of the things I have to do is to teach children. But they don't respond. I started with a class of thirty, and it soon became twenty. Now only five come. And what are these few going to learn from the classes I teach every now and then whenever I feel like it?

- Positive:** The other day I went to visit a Bahá'í family to give them their news bulletin. They weren't home, but I met a relative of theirs I did not know before. I took advantage of the opportunity and taught him the Faith. He accepted.
- Negative:** The other day I went to visit a Bahá'í family to give them their news bulletin. One of their relatives, whom I had never met before, told me they were not at home. I was disappointed and left.
- Positive:** In this region it is a bit difficult to get people to meet regularly. But, with perseverance, you can. A year ago we started a deepening class in my community on Wednesday evenings. At the beginning two people came. But we didn't get discouraged. We never had negative thoughts about those who did not attend. We continued visiting the friends and sharing with them what we had studied at the meetings. During the last few months, ten Bahá'ís have been coming to the class regularly, and the number is still growing.
- Negative:** Look, people don't come to meetings! They don't meet! They just don't meet!

SECTION 9

We have reflected on the grandeur of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and have seen how important it is for us to share His Word with others. We understand fully that the joy of teaching is in the act of sharing His Word. In order to maintain this joy we must be detached from the things of this world, from the want of praise and recognition, and be willing to exert effort and make sacrifices.

In the quotations below Bahá'u'lláh tells us that we should arise to guide souls to His Cause. He assures us that, when we do so, the hosts of divine inspiration descend upon us and assist us. Confident in the unfailing assistance of Bahá'u'lláh, we should detach ourselves from all things, be unrestrained as the wind, and spread the glad-tidings of His Revelation in every direction. It is suggested that you end this course by memorizing these quotations.

“Gird up the loins of thine endeavor, that haply thou mayest guide thy neighbor to the law of God, the Most Merciful. Such an act, verily, excelleth all other acts in the sight of God, the All-Possessing, the Most High.”¹⁴

“By the righteousness of God! Whoso openeth his lips in this Day and maketh mention of the name of his Lord, the hosts of Divine inspiration shall descend upon him from the heaven of My name, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.”¹⁵

“Whoso ariseth to teach Our Cause must needs detach himself from all earthly things, and regard, at all times, the triumph of Our Faith as his supreme objective.”¹⁶

“Be unrestrained as the wind, while carrying the Message of Him Who hath caused the Dawn of Divine Guidance to break.”¹⁷

“When the victory arriveth, every man shall profess himself as believer and shall hasten to the shelter of God’s Faith. Happy are they who in the days of world-encompassing trials have stood fast in the Cause and refused to swerve from its truth.”¹⁸

“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.”¹⁹

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Deepening Themes

Purpose

To develop the capability of making periodic visits to the homes of newly enrolled believers and sharing with them a number of deepening themes.

Practice

Visit a few families and study with them at least the first three themes presented in this unit.

SECTION 1

One of the simplest acts of service in which you can engage, as you trace a path of service for yourself, is to visit newly enrolled believers and, together, deepen your knowledge of the Teachings of the Faith. The account that follows, which is based on the experiences of Bahá'í friends from various localities, will help you organize your thoughts and decide how you will carry out this meritorious act of service.

Let us imagine that you have just finished participating in a highly successful teaching campaign. The campaign was organized by your Local Spiritual Assembly which, with the help of the Area Teaching Committee, invited a few experienced teachers from nearby communities to assist in the expansion and consolidation of the Faith in your community. Although physically tired from many days of constant activity, you feel exhilarated and your mind is fully alert. You remember vividly the joy of participating in the diverse activities of the campaign in the company of experienced teachers—visits to the leaders of the community in order to win their friendship and help them gain respect for the Faith, repeated visits to homes during which entire families were taught and deepened, classes for children that made you wish you were a child again and could take part, community meetings in the evenings that raised souls to higher and higher levels of spirituality, and deepening sessions held among the visiting teachers which you also had the opportunity to attend. And you have the fondest memories of those occasions when the Local Assembly would meet with the participants of the campaign and give you loving and illuminating guidance.

The thought that most persistently occupies your mind now is how to deepen the considerable number of believers who joined the community in a span of some thirty days. You still remember the words of an experienced teacher who kept emphasizing the importance of visiting the homes of newly enrolled believers in order to establish strong bonds of friendship with them and assist them in their deepening. Having thought and prayed about this matter for some time, you choose a few families you more or less know and decide to visit them regularly.

The first family, the Sanchezes, is well known and highly respected throughout the towns and villages in the area. Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez belong to a large extended family that has lived in the area for generations. They are in their sixties and, having raised their sons and daughters, live alone in a house near you.

Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez are literate but have not received a great deal of schooling. They have gained respect in the community through their deeds and by the purity of motive they have shown in their interactions with others. You, of course, are not one to judge people by their wealth or degrees. You will never allow yourself to have feelings of superiority because of your own education or position in life. Nor will you allow yourself to fall prey to that terrible and subtle enemy of the Bahá'í teacher, the patronizing attitude. One of the greatest lessons you learned during the campaign from the more experienced teachers is that, in the name of simplicity, one does not water down the Teachings, and one does not use the language of children to address adults who, literate or illiterate, possess a wisdom that life itself has bestowed upon them. Humbly, and with a prayerful attitude, then, you sit down to organize your thoughts about the first deepening theme which you have carefully

chosen, the Eternal Covenant of God. Since you are somewhat nervous about your first meeting of this kind, you decide to write a few paragraphs on the subject, not to read to the families you visit, but to help increase your own confidence.

Exercises:

1. As you can gather from the above statement, your thoughts and attitudes when visiting the homes of new believers will be important factors in determining your success. It would be useful for you to pause, then, and consider how some of your thoughts can help make your visits more fruitful. Let us suppose you are on your way to visit the Sanchezes. Below are some of the thoughts that might be running through your mind about the visit, the Sanchezes, and the way you will explain things to them. Mark those which would most likely contribute to the success of your efforts to help deepen these friends.

About the visit:

- _____ It's my job to instruct them in the Faith and make sure they learn a great deal.
- _____ What a privilege it is to be able to spend some time with this wonderful family and share with them passages from the Writings.
- _____ I know it is important to help deepen new believers and I'm happy to do it. Still, I hope this doesn't take long because I have other things to do today.
- _____ I have a long list of things I want to present to the Sanchezes today, and I will make sure to tell them every single point.

About the Sanchezes:

- _____ The Sanchezes are good, pure-hearted people, but ignorant. They may have accepted Bahá'u'lláh, but what could they have possibly understood about the Faith.
- _____ I'll have to be very careful when I speak to the Sanchezes and make sure I don't bring up anything difficult. Most of the ideas in the Faith are probably too difficult for them. What is important is to show them love. After all, I understand they have had very little schooling.
- _____ The poor Sanchezes! At their age what can they possibly learn.
- _____ Every new believer brings new talents to the community. As the Sanchezes become imbued with the love of Bahá'u'lláh, and as their knowledge increases, they will render more and more valuable services to the community.

About the way you will explain things to them:

_____ They are adults. They can read. I'll just leave some short quotations with them to study by themselves.

_____ Now I'll have to remember that I should sit down and patiently explain every word to them, for otherwise they won't be able to understand these difficult ideas.

_____ It is most important for me to establish a dialogue with them. When presenting ideas, I will have to pause often so that we can study the quotations together and consult about them.

_____ Let's see. I'll begin by telling them all my ideas and then, at the end, ask them if they have any questions.

2. In small groups, and with the assistance of your tutor, think about your first visit to a family like the Sanchezes. Each member of the group should perform a short skit showing how he will enter their house, how he will greet them, and how he will present to them the idea of deepening on the theme of the Covenant. The group should evaluate each member's presentation in terms of politeness, kindness, and humility. After everyone has performed their skit, the group should, together, come up with the greeting and introductory remarks it feels are most appropriate.

SECTION 2

The brief explanation below of the theme, the Eternal Covenant of God, is probably like the one you have written for your own visits to newly enrolled believers:

The Creator of all things is God, the One, the Incomparable, the Self-Subsisting. He has created the heavens and the earth with its mountains and valleys, its forests, meadows, deserts, rivers and seas. God has caused every living thing to come into being. He has made man and has engraved on him His image.

Bahá'u'llah teaches us that the essence of God is incomprehensible to the human mind, for the finite cannot comprehend the infinite. The representations that the followers of various religions make of Him are but fruits of their own imaginations. God is not a man, and He is not a mere force spread throughout the universe. The words we must necessarily use to refer to the Source of our being, such as the Heavenly Father, the Heavenly Power, the Great Spirit, each express one of His names and attributes in the human tongue, which is totally inadequate to describe Him.

In the Hidden Words, we read:

"O Son of Man! I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life." ¹

According to these words of Bahá'u'lláh, God's love for us is the very reason for our existence. We must be ever conscious of this love which protects us, sustains us, and

fills us with the spirit of life. In moments of difficulty or ease, of sadness or joy, we must remember that His love is continually being showered upon us.

From the Bahá'í Teachings, we learn that having created us out of His love, God has established with us a Covenant which is to last throughout the ages. The word "covenant" means pact or promise between two or more people. According to the Eternal Covenant, the All-Bountiful Creator never abandons us, and, from time to time, makes His Will and His Purpose known to us through one of His Manifestations.

The verb "manifest" means to reveal, to show something that was not known before. The Manifestations of God are those special Beings who reveal to us the Word of God. They are Universal Educators who teach us how to live according to the Will of God and how to achieve true happiness. Among these Manifestations are Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Christ, Muḥammad, and, of course, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, the twin Manifestations of God for this age.

A pact has two parts; it is made between two parties each of whom promises to act in a certain way. In the Eternal Covenant of God, His part has always been fulfilled. But how can we make sure that we fulfill our part in this mighty Covenant?

The Covenant calls upon us to recognize the Manifestation of God and to submit to His Will. We should remember that the purpose of our lives is to know and to worship God. This is explained in numerous passages of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. The short obligatory prayer is the most familiar example.

"I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth.

"There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting." ²

Since we can only know God through His Manifestations, we can only fulfill the purpose of our lives by recognizing His Manifestation for our day. Those of us who have had the bounty of accepting Bahá'u'lláh should be grateful to live in a day when all the promises of the past are being fulfilled. We should be thankful to God for having bestowed upon us the precious gift of recognizing Bahá'u'lláh at a time when the majority of the earth's inhabitants are unaware of His glory. Bahá'u'lláh says:

"This is the Day in which God's most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things. It is incumbent upon all the peoples of the world to reconcile their differences, and, with perfect unity and peace, abide beneath the shadow of the Tree of His care and loving-kindness." ³

How sad it would be if today someone were to hear the glad tidings of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, but accept Him not and decide to follow the traditions of the past. He would join those who in every age have hoped for the coming of a Promised One, but when He appeared, have rejected Him and, unfaithful to the Eternal Covenant of God, have clung to their own superstitions.

Having accepted Bahá'u'lláh, we must remain constant and firm in His Faith and obey His commandments. We cannot allow the criticisms of the wayward among men to steer us away from the true path we have chosen. We must stay firm and steadfast in the Covenant. Bahá'u'lláh says:

“The first and foremost duty prescribed unto men, next to the recognition of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, is the duty of steadfastness in His Cause. Cleave thou unto it, and be of them whose minds are firmly fixed and grounded in God.”⁴

Our resolve to be firm in the Covenant will grow stronger if, especially in times of tests, we remember Bahá'u'lláh's life, both His sufferings and His extraordinary victories, and remind ourselves of the unlimited love He had for every human being. Let these words be engraved in our minds and hearts:

“The Ancient Beauty hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner within this most mighty Stronghold that the whole world may attain unto true liberty. He hath drained to its dregs the cup of sorrow, that all the peoples of the earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness. This is of the mercy of your Lord, the Compassionate, the Most Merciful. We have accepted to be abased, O believers in the Unity of God, that ye may be exalted, and have suffered manifold afflictions, that ye might prosper and flourish. He Who hath come to build anew the whole world, behold, how they that have joined partners with God have forced Him to dwell within the most desolate of cities!”⁵

Exercises:

1. Unlike the previous units you have studied, this unit presents you with long passages on various themes. If this is the first time you have studied the theme, the Eternal Covenant of God, you should read the above explanation several times in your group, paragraph by paragraph, so that you learn to present the ideas in your own words. There are different ways you can help one another learn the content. For example, you can read a paragraph two or three times and then ask each other questions, the answers to which are found in the paragraph itself. Of course, learning the quotations well is especially important, for sharing quotations from the Writings will form a major part of your consultations on any subject with newly enrolled believers. The following exercises will help you reflect on the meaning of the quotations in this section:
 - a. Who is the Creator of all things? _____
 - b. Is there anything God has not created? _____
 - c. Why did God create humanity? _____
 - d. What does the word “covenant” mean? _____
 - e. Why did God make a Covenant with man? _____

- f. Is it correct to say that if we do not love God, His love will not reach us? _____

- g. Is it correct to say that if we do not love God, He will not love us? _____
- h. Will God ever abandon us? _____
- i. What is the purpose of our lives? _____
- j. Is it possible for us to ever know the essence of God? _____
- k. If we can never know the essence of God, what does it mean that the purpose of our lives is to know God? _____
- l. What does the word "manifest" mean? _____
- m. Mention some of the Manifestations of God. _____

- n. Complete the following sentences:
- In this Day, God's _____ have been poured out upon humanity.
- In this Day, God's _____ has been infused into all created things.
- In this Day, we should _____ our differences, and, with perfect unity and peace, _____

- o. What is required of us if we are to fulfill our part in the Covenant? _____

- p. Is it correct to say that when we accept Bahá'u'lláh, we are giving up the earlier Manifestations of God? _____
- q. Why does reflecting on the sufferings of Bahá'u'lláh help us to remain firm in the Covenant? _____

- r. Why did Bahá'u'lláh consent to be bound with chains? _____

- s. Why did BaM'u'lldh accept to be made a prisoner?
- t. Why did Bah£'u'lldh drink the cup of sorrow?.
- u. Why did Bahi'u'llali accept to be abased?
- v. Why did Bahd'u'llali suffer so many afflictions?
- w. Did Bahd'u'lldh accept to suffer because He was powerless to do otherwise?___
- x. If Baha'u'llali was not powerless before His enemies, then why did He accept to suffer?_____
- y. Why should we accept suffering and hardship in serving the Cause of God?___

In sharing a deepening theme with those you visit, you need to have clear in your mind the essential points you wish to convey to them. What are the essential ideas contained in the above presentation? Can you make a list of them?

In order to be well understood, ideas have to be presented in a logical sequence. If you have not already done so, make sure that your list presents a logical sequence of ideas by numbering them.

Share with your group a story, either from the early history of the **Faith** or based on recent events familiar to you, that demonstrates firmness **in** the **Covenant**. **Some** stories may lend themselves to being acted out in skits.

5. As we have said before, in addition to the content of your consultations with newly enrolled believers, your own feelings and attitudes will be important factors in making your visits fruitful. It will be especially important for you to maintain a prayerful attitude throughout your consultations. As you consult with others during your visit, you should constantly be turning towards God, asking Him to illumine your mind and heart and those of everyone present. There are many phrases and sentences from prayers that you can memorize and let run through your mind. These are only a few:

“Illumine our hearts, grant us discerning eyes and attentive ears.”⁶

“O Lord! Grant Thine infinite bestowals, and let the light of Thy guidance shine.”⁷

“Unlock the gates of true understanding and let the light of faith shine resplendent.”⁸

“Illumine, O Lord, the faces of Thy servants, that they may behold Thee . . .”⁹

“O our Lord! Turn our faces unto Thy merciful countenance . . .”¹⁰

SECTION 3

Your first visit to the Sanchez home filled you with joy. As you expected, they were hospitable and anxious to learn. The care you took in preparing yourself for the occasion proved to be rewarding. You were able to present your ideas with clarity and engage in a fruitful discussion of the quotations you had chosen. You approached questions presented to you with an attitude of humility, and quite often admitted that you had to speak to more knowledgeable believers and search in the Writings for the appropriate answers.

A most pleasant surprise was to have present at this first meeting Beatrice, one of Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez's granddaughters who was spending a few weeks with them. You were most impressed by the way she participated in the consultation. Although only fifteen years old, she showed a great capacity to understand profound matters, beyond what is common at her age. Therefore, you decided to pay more attention to Beatrice and help her deepen her knowledge of the Faith at a pace proportionate to her interest and capacity. You were delighted when she accepted to study a few pages on the life of Bahá'u'lláh and, with your help, make a presentation on the subject during your next visit. In her excitement, she assured you that she would even invite a few of her friends to that occasion.

Below is a short account of the life of Bahá'u'lláh like the one Beatrice would have studied to prepare for her talk:

Bahá'u'lláh was born on 12 November 1817 in Tīhran, the capital city of Persia. From childhood He showed extraordinary qualities, and His behavior convinced His parents that He was destined for greatness. Bahá'u'lláh's father, a distinguished minister in the court of the king, had immense love for his Son. One night he dreamt that Bahá'u'lláh was swimming in a limitless ocean, His body shining and illuminat-

ing the vast sea. Around His head radiated His long jet-black hair, floating in all directions. A multitude of fish gathered around Him, each holding on to one hair. Great as was the number of fish, not a single hair was detached from Bahá'u'lláh's head. Free and unrestrained, He moved above the waters and they all followed Him. Bahá'u'lláh's father asked a man renowned for his wisdom to explain the dream. He was told that the limitless ocean was the world of being. Alone and single-handed, Bahá'u'lláh would achieve sovereignty over it. The multitude of fish represented the turmoil which He would arouse among the peoples of the world. He would have the unflinching protection of the Almighty, and nothing would harm Him.

By the time Bahá'u'lláh was fourteen, He was famous in the court of the king for His wisdom and learning. He was twenty-two years old when His father died and the government offered Him the same high position. But Bahá'u'lláh had no intention of spending His time in the management of worldly affairs. He left behind the court and its ministers to follow the path set for Him by the Almighty. He spent His time helping the oppressed, the sick and the poor, and soon He became known as a champion of the cause of justice.

At the age of twenty-seven, Bahá'u'lláh received, through a special messenger, some of the Writings of the Báb Who was proclaiming the nearness of the Day of God, the Day when a new Manifestation of God would bring to the world the peace, unity and justice long-awaited by humanity. Bahá'u'lláh immediately accepted the Message of the Báb and became one of His most enthusiastic followers. But alas, those who ruled over the people of Persia, blinded by their own selfish desires, set out to persecute the followers of the Báb with great savagery. Bahá'u'lláh, despite being known for His nobility, was not spared. A little over eight years after the Báb's Declaration, and two years after the Báb Himself had been martyred, He was thrown into a dark dungeon called the Black Pit. The chains put around His neck were so heavy that He could not lift His head. Here Bahá'u'lláh spent four terrible months of severe hardship. Yet it was in this same dungeon that the Spirit of God filled His soul and revealed to Him that He was the Promised One of all ages. From this dark prison, the Sun of Bahá'u'lláh rose illuminating the entire creation.

After four months in the Black Pit, Bahá'u'lláh was stripped of all His possessions and He and His family were sent into exile. In the bitter cold of winter, they traveled along the western mountains of Persia towards Baghdád, then a city in the Ottoman Empire and today the capital of 'Iráq. Words cannot describe their sufferings as they walked hundreds of miles on snow and ice-covered ground on their way to that fate-laden city.

The fame of Bahá'u'lláh soon spread throughout Baghdád and other cities of the region, and more and more people came to the door of this exiled Prisoner to receive His blessings. But there were a few who became jealous of His fame. Among them was Bahá'u'lláh's own half-brother Mírzá Yahyá, who was living under His loving care. Mírzá Yahyá opposed Bahá'u'lláh thinking that the Bábís, who at the time showed him great respect, would accept him as their leader. Little did he know that by turning against the Manifestation of God, he would bring about his own downfall. For when a Divine Manifestation appears, only those who live in servitude to Him can hope for true greatness. Even His closest relatives cannot forget that He stands apart from all other human beings and has a station which no one else can share.

Mírzá Yahyá's plotting caused disunity among the followers of the Báb and brought great sadness to Bahá'u'lláh. One night, without telling anyone, He left His home and went to the mountains of Kurdistán. There He lived a secluded life engaged in prayer and meditation. He stayed in a small cave and subsisted on the simplest of foods. No one knew His origin and no one knew His name. But, then, gradually the people of the region began to speak of the "Nameless One", a great Saint who had knowledge bestowed upon Him by God. When the news of this Holy Personage reached Bahá'u'lláh's oldest Son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, He immediately recognized the signs of His beloved Father. Letters were sent with a special messenger entreating Bahá'u'lláh to return to Baghdád. This He accepted, bringing to an end a period of painful separation that had lasted two years.

During Bahá'u'lláh's absence, the conditions of the Bábí community had declined rapidly. Bahá'u'lláh set out to fill the persecuted and confused followers of the Báb with a new spirit. Although He had not yet announced His own great Station, the power and wisdom of His words began to win the loyalty of an increasing number of Bábís and the admiration of people of every walk of life. But the fanatical Muslim clergy and His jealous brother Mírzá Yahyá could not bear to see the tremendous influence Bahá'u'lláh had on such a large number of souls. They complained and complained to the authorities until the government of Persia joined hands with some of the officials of the Ottoman Empire to remove Bahá'u'lláh farther away from His homeland, this time to the city of Constantinople.

April of 1863 was a month of great sadness for the population of Baghdád. The One Whom they had grown to love was leaving their city, heading for what to them was an unknown destination. A few days before His departure, Bahá'u'lláh moved to a garden on the outskirts of the city, raised His tent and for twelve days received the stream of visitors who came to say farewell. The followers of the Báb came to this garden with heavy hearts; some would accompany Bahá'u'lláh on this next stage of His exile, but many would have to stay behind and be deprived of close association with Him. But God had not willed that this occasion would be one of sadness. The doors of His infinite bounty were opened wide, and Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed to those around Him that He was the One foretold by the Báb—He Whom God would make manifest. Sadness gave way to boundless joy; hearts were uplifted and souls were enkindled with the fire of His love. For centuries to come, these twelve days, from 21 April to 2 May, will be celebrated by Bahá'ís everywhere as the Festival of Riḍván, the anniversary of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh of His world-embracing Mission.

Constantinople was the seat of the Ottoman Empire. Here again, Bahá'u'lláh's great wisdom and personal charm began to attract an increasing number of people. "He must not stay in Constantinople any longer," murmured the fanatical Muslim clergy who convinced the authorities to exile Him to the town of Adrianople. In Adrianople, Bahá'u'lláh wrote Tablets to the kings and the rulers of the world calling them to abandon the ways of oppression and dedicate themselves to the welfare of their people. Then, His enemies conceived a most cruel punishment. He and His family would be exiled to 'Akká, which at the time was the worst penal colony in the entire empire. Surely He would perish in the harsh conditions of that prison-city, thought the feeble-minded men who imagined they could stop what God Himself had set in motion.

“They who are the beloved of God, in whatever place they gather and whomsoever they may meet, must evince, in their attitude towards God, and in the manner of their celebration of His praise and glory, such humility and submissiveness that every atom of the dust beneath their feet may attest the depth of their devotion. The conversation carried by these holy souls should be informed with such power that these same atoms of dust will be thrilled by its influence. They should conduct themselves in such manner that the earth upon which they tread may never be allowed to address to them such words as these: ‘I am to be preferred above you. For witness, how patient I am in bearing the burden which the husbandman layeth upon me. I am the instrument that continually imparteth unto all beings the blessings with which He Who is the Source of all grace hath entrusted me. Notwithstanding the honor conferred upon me, and the unnumbered evidences of my wealth—a wealth that supplieth the needs of all creation—behold the measure of my humility, witness with what absolute submissiveness I allow myself to be trodden beneath the feet of men. . . .’”¹²

SECTION 4

Beatrice’s presentation on the life of Bahá’u’lláh was excellent, beyond your expectations. She spoke with sweetness and conviction. Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez were visibly touched. The two friends she had invited to the occasion, although they giggled a lot, became clearly interested in the Faith. You are greatly encouraged by the results of your two visits to the Sanchez home and wish to continue with this approach to deepening newly enrolled believers. The question now is what direction these short and pleasant meetings should take. What are some of the themes that will help Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez to become confirmed and active members of the Bahá’í community and contribute to its progress? This question has occupied your mind for days. On the one hand, there are themes like prayer, the life of the soul, the true meaning of sacrifice, that you wish to discuss with them so that their spiritual life may be established on firm foundations. On the other hand, you know how important it is to help new believers become integrated into the community and participate in its activities. After all, you will not make these regular visits to the Sanchez home forever; that would make them dependent on you and would not help them become Bahá’ís who can, through their own initiative, serve the Faith. “But all things in good time,” you say to yourself. “For now, what I have to think about is the theme for the next visit which will be in a couple of days.”

The answer to your dilemma comes to you in an unexpected way. At a Bahá’í meeting you attend one evening, you feel a great deal of tension among the friends. It is as if dark clouds have covered the skies and the brightness of joy has disappeared. The reason is obvious: disunity, that great enemy of the Cause, has crept into the community. “Love and unity in the Bahá’í community,” you say to yourself, “that will be the theme of my next visit.”

You are so anxious to tell the Sanchezes about the evils of disunity that in your next visit you nearly break the rules of courtesy. After a short greeting you ask them abruptly: “Do you know what can do most harm to the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh?” Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez are taken aback by the manner you have put the question to them, but by now they love you enough not to become upset by your behavior. “We can see that you are somewhat agitated,” says Mrs. Sanchez with a smile. “Your question is an important one, and I think we have an

answer. When we accepted this Faith, we understood that Bahá'u'lláh has come to unite the human race. So nothing can do more harm to His Cause, as you call it, than disunity among the Bahá'ís."

The serenity and love with which Mrs. Sanchez has spoken bring you back to your usual calm and composure. "I apologize for my abruptness," you say in a low voice. "I have brought with me a number of quotations on the subject of unity. Is it all right if we study them together?" You thus enter into a very pleasant consultation on this all-important theme. Here is a list of ideas that you would probably cover in your consultations:

- For a Bahá'í community to be truly united, every believer must flee from strife and contention. Bahá'u'lláh says:

"Nothing whatever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause than dissension and strife, contention, estrangement and apathy, among the loved ones of God. Flee them, through the power God and His sovereign aid, and strive ye to knit together the hearts of men, in His Name, the Unifier, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise." ¹³

- We should love all the believers in our community, and this we should do entirely for the love of God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

"Be in perfect unity. Never become angry with one another. . . . Love the creatures for the sake of God and not for themselves. You will never become angry or impatient if you love them for the sake of God. Humanity is not perfect. There are imperfections in every human being, and you will always become unhappy if you look toward the people themselves. But if you look toward God, you will love them and be kind to them, for the world of God is the world of perfection and complete mercy." ¹⁴

- If, with all the love we feel for one another, tensions arise among us, we should immediately remember this counsel of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

"I charge you all that each one of you concentrate all the thoughts of your heart on love and unity. When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love. Thoughts of war bring destruction to all harmony, well-being, restfulness and content. Thoughts of love are constructive of brotherhood, peace, friendship, and happiness." ¹⁵

- And if, having made every effort to control them, we see our passions overtaking us and find ourselves entering into conflict, these words of Bahá'u'lláh will help us through moments of weakness:

"If any differences arise amongst you, behold Me standing before your face, and overlook the faults of one another for My name's sake and as a token of your love for My manifest and resplendent Cause." ¹⁶

- The spiritual discipline of overlooking the faults of others, focusing on their praiseworthy qualities and abstaining totally from backbiting, is a most effective measure against disunity. We should remember that we tend not to see the faults of those we love and have no difficulty looking upon them with a sin-covering eye. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

"The imperfect eye beholds imperfections. The eye that covers faults looks toward the Creator of souls. He created them, trains and provides for them, endows them with capacity and life, sight and hearing; therefore, they are the signs of His grandeur. You must love and be kind to everybody, care for the poor, protect the weak, heal the sick, teach and educate the ignorant."¹⁷

Bahá'u'lláh says:

"O Companion of My Throne! Hear no evil, and see no evil, abase not thyself, neither sigh and weep. Speak no evil, that thou mayest not hear it spoken unto thee, and magnify not the faults of others that thine own faults may not appear great; and wish not the abasement of anyone, that thine own abasement be not exposed. Live then the days of thy life, that are less than a fleeting moment, with thy mind stainless, thy heart unsullied, thy thoughts pure, and thy nature sanctified, so that, free and content, thou mayest put away this mortal frame, and repair unto the mystic paradise and abide in the eternal kingdom forevermore."¹⁸

- Unity, of course, is not merely the absence of strife and dissension, and love is not to be expressed in words alone. We can only claim that true unity exists in our Bahá'í community if our love for one another is translated into service, and if our activities are governed by a spirit of cooperation and mutual aid. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

"Some of the creatures of existence can live solitary and alone. A tree, for instance, may live without the assistance and cooperation of other trees. Some animals are isolated and lead a separate existence away from their kind. But this is impossible for man. In his life and being, cooperation and association are essential. Through association and meeting we find happiness and development, individual and collective."¹⁹

- A most important key to successful community action is frank and loving consultation on all matters. Through consultation, the various ways we each look at an issue merge together and we discover the best direction we should follow in our collective actions. Through consultation, we achieve unity of thought, and with our thoughts and views united, we create imaginative plans for the growth of our communities. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says of those who consult:

". . . they must, when coming together, turn their faces to the Kingdom on high and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. The honored members must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another, nay, he

must with moderation set forth the truth, and should differences of opinion arise a majority of voices must prevail, and all must obey and submit to the majority.”²⁰

- Unity of thought is unfulfilled if it is not translated into unity of action. Acting in unity does not mean that we all do the same thing. On the contrary, when a community devises a plan of unified action, then the diverse talents of every individual are used to the fullest. Our powers multiply and even a small community is enabled to achieve what most large and powerful organizations in the world are incapable of accomplishing. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

“The supreme need of humanity is cooperation and reciprocity. The stronger the ties of fellowship and solidarity amongst men, the greater will be the power of constructiveness and accomplishment in all the planes of human activity.”²¹

Exercises:

1. After having carefully read through the above ideas, point by point, several times in your group, you should complete the following exercises which will help you reflect on the meaning of the quotations in this section:
 - a. Complete the following sentences:

Nothing whatever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause than _____ and strife, contention, estrangement and apathy, among the loved ones of God.

Nothing whatever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause than dissension and _____, contention, estrangement and apathy, among the loved ones of God.

_____ whatever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause than dissension and strife, contention, estrangement and apathy, among the loved ones of God.

Nothing whatever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause than dissension and strife, contention, estrangement and _____, among the loved ones of God.

Nothing whatever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause than dissension and strife, _____, estrangement and apathy, among the loved ones of God.

Nothing whatever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause than dissension and strife, contention, _____ and apathy, among the loved ones of God.

Nothing whatever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this _____ than dissension and strife, contention, estrangement and apathy, among the loved ones of God.

b. Make a list of things you can do to help prevent disunity in your community.

c. How can we make sure that we always love people and are kind to them? _____

d. In the second quotation, 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that:

We must live in perfect _____.

We must never become _____ with _____.

We must love all people for the _____ and not for themselves.

We will never become _____ or _____ if we love people for the _____.

Humanity is not _____.

We will always become _____ if we look toward _____

_____.

If we look toward _____, we will _____ people and be _____ to them.

e. In the third quotation, 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that:

We must each concentrate all the thoughts of our heart on _____

and _____.

When a thought of war comes, we should oppose it by _____

_____.

A thought of hatred can be destroyed by _____

_____.

Thoughts of war bring destruction to _____

_____.

Thoughts of love are _____

_____.

f. What should you do when you see differences arising between yourself and others in the community? _____

g. Describe the spiritual discipline that helps you contribute towards unity in your community. _____

h. Decide whether the following actions are in agreement with the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh:

Looking at the shortcomings of others. Yes No

Overlooking the faults of others. Yes No

Telling the Local Spiritual Assembly about another person's wrongdoing. Yes No

Commenting on the shortcomings of another person to a friend. Yes No

Exaggerating or changing a story to make another person look bad. Yes No

Thinking of the faults of others. Yes No

i. Why do we criticize some people when they make a mistake, but not others when they do the exact same thing? _____

j. Is it possible to have unity in a situation where people are backbiting about one another? Why not? _____

k. To purposefully tell a lie about someone is obviously wrong. But is it all right to make critical remarks about someone to others for something he or she has actually done? _____

l. What effect does gossiping have on the spiritual progress of those who engage in it?

m. What is the difference between gossiping, backbiting and criticizing? _____

n. How can we eliminate these habits from our lives? _____

o. What can we do when someone begins to speak to us of another person's faults?

p. Should we remain silent when we are aware that a Bahá'í is doing something wrong, for example, lying or stealing, even if we know that his actions are making other people suffer? If not, what should we do? _____

q. What effects do gossiping and backbiting have on a Bahá'í community? _____

r. What would happen if we only spoke about people as though they were present?

s. If we backbite in front of children, what effect will it have on them? _____

t. Why do you think we have a tendency to backbite about one another? _____

u. Love is not merely expressed in words. What else is needed? _____

v. What is the most important key to successful community action? _____

w. Mention some of the principal enemies of successful community action? _____

x. Complete the following phrases with words from the quotation in this section on consultation:

When coming together to consult, we must turn our faces to _____
_____ and must ask aid from _____

We must then proceed with utmost _____, _____
_____, _____ and _____ to
express our views.

We must in every matter _____
and not _____, for _____
_____ in one's views will lead ultimately to
_____ and _____ and the _____
will remain _____

We must with all freedom _____

It is not permissible for us to belittle _____

I know we are not wealthy, but we used to contribute to our church before and they did not mind receiving our small contributions.” Having been taken aback a little by these statements, you decided to prepare yourself for a discussion on the Nineteen Day Feast and the Bahá’í Fund with the Sanchezes. In fact, since Beatrice was planning to stay with her grandparents for a couple of more weeks, you asked her if she would be willing to present a few ideas on the Fund during your next visit. She eagerly accepted, and you helped her to prepare a short presentation.

“What Mrs. Sanchez said about meetings,” you say once you have all settled down to begin your study, “is extremely important, and with your permission, I would like to present to you some ideas about Bahá’í meetings, especially the Nineteen Day Feast. As to Mr. Sanchez’s comment on contributions, I have asked Beatrice to prepare a short presentation on the Fund which we can listen to and then discuss.” You then proceed to set forth a series of ideas on Bahá’í meetings based on passages from the Writings, and help your small group to consult on the meaning of each passage. Here are some of the ideas you would most likely address:

- In the Bahá’í community, the believers meet often, among themselves and with others, for a variety of reasons—to pray, to study the Faith, to teach the Faith, to celebrate special occasions, to consult on community affairs, to create plans and projects, to implement their plans and to consult about what they have learned from their united actions and how they can improve them. And, of course, sometimes Bahá’ís meet just to be together in love and harmony, to enjoy the good company of one another. What is important to remember at all times is that Bahá’í meetings are spiritual in their essence and therefore endowed with spiritual potency. Bahá’u’lláh says:

“By My life and My Cause! Round about whatever dwelling the friends of God may enter, and from which their cry shall rise as they praise and glorify the Lord, shall circle the souls of true believers and all the favored angels.”²²

‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

“Every meeting which is organized for the purpose of unity and concord will be conducive to changing strangers into friends, enemies into associates, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá will be present in his heart and soul with that meeting.”²³

- To hold such spiritual meetings, no matter how small, brings untold blessings to the homes of Bahá’ís. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá once wrote to a believer:

“We hear that thou hast in mind to embellish thy house from time to time with a meeting of Bahá’ís, where some among them will engage in glorifying the All-Glorious Lord. . . Know that shouldst thou bring this about, that house of earth will become a house of heaven, and that fabric of stone a congress of the spirit.”²⁴

- The reading of passages from the Bahá’í Writings in the gatherings of the friends is the source of utmost joy and is indispensable for the progress of the Cause. Bahá’u’lláh has enjoined upon us the following:

“It behooveth the friends in whatever land they be, to gather together in meetings, and therein to speak wisely and with eloquence, and to read the verses of God; for it is God’s Words that kindle love’s fire and set it ablaze.”²⁵

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written:

“Hold meetings and read and chant the heavenly teachings, so that city may be illumined with the light of reality and that country become a veritable paradise by the strength of the Holy Spirit, for this cycle is the cycle of the Glorious Lord and the melody of oneness and solidarity of the world of mankind must reach the ears of the East and West.”²⁶

- The conversation of the friends in Bahá’í meetings must be focused entirely on spiritual matters and on the progress of the Cause. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has said:

“Today it behooveth one and all to forgo the mention of all else, and to disregard all things. . . . let them concentrate all their thoughts, all their words, on teaching the Cause of God and spreading the Faith of God, and inspiring all to characterize themselves with the characteristics of God; on loving mankind; on being pure and holy in all things, and spotless in their public and private life; on being upright and detached, and fervent, and afire.”²⁷

- From among all Bahá’í meetings the Nineteen Day Feast, the gathering of the friends once every 19 days, has special significance. The Bahá’í calendar consists of 19 months of 19 days each, and Bahá’u’lláh Himself has enjoined upon all to observe this monthly meeting:

“Verily, it is enjoined upon you to offer a feast, once in every month, though only water be served; for God hath purposed to bind hearts together, albeit through both earthly and heavenly means.”²⁸

- The Nineteen Day Feast consists of three parts. The first is the devotional part during which prayers are recited and passages from the Sacred Writings of the Faith are read. The second is the administrative part during which the friends consult on the affairs of the community. The third part is the material feast, the social meeting of the friends.
- We get a glimpse of the importance of the devotional part of the Nineteen Day Feast from the following words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

“O ye loyal servants of the Ancient Beauty! In every cycle and dispensation, the feast hath been favored and loved, and the spreading of a table for the lovers of God hath been considered a praiseworthy act. This is especially the case today, in this dispensation beyond compare, this most generous of ages, when it is highly acclaimed, for it is truly accounted among such gatherings as are held to worship and glorify God. Here the holy verses, the heavenly odes and laudations are intoned, and the heart is quickened, and carried away from itself.”²⁹

- During the administrative part of the Feast, the friends hear reports of the activities of Bahá'í communities near and far, consult upon the affairs of the Faith in their own community and reflect on its progress, become familiar with the guidance received from the Universal House of Justice, and make suggestions to the Local Assembly to be considered by it or to be passed on to the National Spiritual Assembly and, if necessary, even to the House of Justice. The consultations at the Nineteen Day Feast are of the utmost importance, for it is by this means that every individual believer participates in the affairs of the worldwide Bahá'í community.
- As to the social part of the Feast, this is time for comradeship, hospitality, and love. Music can be played, uplifting talks be given, presentations be made by the children, in short, carefully selected expressions of culture which are dignified and joyful can be used to bring life to this part of the Feast.
- The Nineteen Day Feast is a unique feature of the Administrative Order of the Faith. It brings together the devotional, administrative and social aspects of community life. All these aspects should be equally emphasized, for the success of the Feast depends on the right balance among these three components. In a message written in August 1989 to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the world the Universal House of Justice states:

“The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh encompasses all units of human society; integrates the spiritual, administrative and social processes of life; and canalizes human expression in its varied forms towards the construction of a new civilization. The Nineteen Day Feast embraces all these aspects at the very base of society. Functioning in the village, the town, the city, it is an institution of which all the people of Bahá are members. It is intended to promote unity, ensure progress, and foster joy.”³⁰

- Such an important event as the Nineteen Day Feast cannot be put together in haste. Through prayer and reflection, each believer must spiritually prepare himself or herself for the Feast, and during the event itself, everyone should participate with heart and mind, whether reading in the devotional part or merely listening to the passages being recited, whether giving reports, receiving guidance, or making suggestions, whether acting as the host or simply as one who partakes of hospitality with radiance and joy. In the same letter on the Nineteen Day Feast, the Universal House of Justice states:

“Important aspects of the preparation of the Feast include the proper selection of readings, the assignment, in advance, of good readers, and a sense of decorum both in the presentation and the reception of the devotional program. Attention to the environment in which the Feast is to be held, whether indoors or outdoors, greatly influences the experience. Cleanliness, arrangement of the space in practical and decorative ways—all play a significant part. Punctuality is also a measure of good preparation.

“To a very large extent, the success of the Feast depends on the quality of the preparation and participation of the individual. The beloved Master offers the following advice: ‘Give ye great weight to the Nineteen Day gatherings, so that on these occasions the beloved of the Lord and the

handmaids of the Merciful may turn their faces toward the Kingdom, chant the communes, beseech God's help, become joyfully enamored each of the other, and grow in purity and holiness, and in the fear of God, and in resistance to passion and self. Thus will they separate themselves from this elemental world, and immerse themselves in the ardors of the spirit.”” 31

Exercises:

1. As always, you should read through the above ideas several times and discuss them in your group so that you will learn to say them in your own words. The following exercises will help you gain insights into the meaning of the quotations in this section:

a. What characterizes every dwelling in which the friends are gathered together to praise and glorify the Lord? _____

b. What are some of the effects of meetings that are organized for the purpose of unity and concord? _____

c. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that a home in which the friends meet from time to time to glorify God will become a “house of heaven”. What image does the phrase “house of heaven” bring to your mind?” _____

d. When we come together in meetings, we should:

- speak _____ and with _____

- read _____

- forgo _____

- concentrate all our thoughts and all our words on _____

the Cause of God and _____ the Faith of God,

and _____ all to _____ them-

selves with the characteristics of God; on _____ mankind; on

being _____ and _____ in all things, and

_____ in our _____ and _____

_____ ; on being _____ and _____

and _____, and _____.

e. How many months are there in the Bahá’í calendar? _____

f. How many days are in each month? _____

g. What special gathering takes place among the Bahá'ís once a month? _____

h. What are the three parts of the Nineteen Day Feast? _____

i. Are the parts of the Nineteen Day Feast carried out in any order? _____

j. What is the purpose of the devotional part of the Feast? _____

k. What is the purpose of the administrative part of the Feast? _____

l. What is the purpose of the social part of the Feast? _____

m. Which of the following topics would it be appropriate to discuss during the administrative part of the Feast?

The progress of the local teaching campaign. Yes No

The needs of the Fund. Yes No

The scores of the national football team. Yes No

How to solve a disagreement between two members of the Bahá'í community. Yes No

The schedule for the members of the community to clean the Bahá'í Center. Yes No

The pioneering goals set by the National Assembly. Yes No

The education of the children of the Bahá'í community. Yes No

The education of the children of the entire village or town. Yes No

The meaning of a passage from the Writings one of the members of the community was studying earlier in the week, but did not understand. Yes No

2. Discuss the following question with your group: Why is the balance among the three parts of the Feast so important?

3. Now discuss the following questions:

a. How would you prepare for the Feast if you were hosting it?

b. How would you prepare for the Feast if you were merely participating in it?

4. According to our account, you chose the theme of your consultations based on some of the comments made by Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez during your previous visit. In doing so, you have demonstrated one of the most important qualities of a Bahá'í teacher: to listen carefully to those whom one teaches and bring forth truths enshrined in the Writings that address their specific needs and interests. Mention some of the spiritual qualities that characterize someone who is a good listener and is sensitive to the needs of others.

SECTION 6

Your extensive consultations on the theme of Bahá'í meetings and the Nineteen Day Feast left little time for the discussion of the Fund. To your relief, Beatrice, who was highly animated by the ideas being discussed, suggested to postpone her presentation, as she would be staying with her grandparents for a few more days. This gives you the opportunity to once again go over the ideas she plans to present:

The civilization we Bahá'ís are trying to build will be a prosperous one, both materially and spiritually. Wealth is acceptable only if certain conditions are met. We should acquire it through honest work. We should spend it for the good of humanity. And the entire community should be uplifted; it is not acceptable for a few to be extremely rich while the majority are in want of the bare necessities of life.

To build a society that is free from injustice and misery, we must all be generous and giving. No matter how poor we are, we should still contribute something for the progress of humanity, for true prosperity can only be achieved through giving. Generosity is a quality of the human soul and has nothing to do with whether we are poor or wealthy. In the Hidden Words, Bahá'u'lláh says:

“To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.” ³²

We should remember that the real source of whatever wealth we may possess is God, the All-Bountiful. He provides us with our means of existence; He makes it possible for us to progress, and when we contribute to the Fund, we are spending for His Cause, a portion of what He has given us. Therefore, giving to the Funds of the Faith is not only a matter of generosity; it is also a spiritual bounty and a great individual responsibility. The Guardian has told us that we should be like a fountain that is continually emptying itself of all that it possesses and is continually being refilled from an invisible source.

There are a number of Bahá'í Funds each supporting the work of the Faith at a particular level. Thus we have the Local Fund, the National Fund, the Continental Fund, and the International Fund. The individual Bahá'í has the privilege of contributing to every one of these Funds, and only Bahá'ís have the right to do so. Contributing to the Fund is a voluntary act. Moreover, it is confidential in the sense that it is a matter between the individual and the institutions of the Faith; contributions are not announced to the community. Also certain practices of many religions that result in undue pressure on the believers to contribute are avoided. The institutions make general appeals to the friends, remind them of the importance of the Fund, and discuss with them its needs. Not infrequently, a community will set a contribution goal for itself. But amounts are never fixed for individuals, and money is not solicited. It is left to the believers themselves to decide how much they should contribute to the various Funds according to their own understanding of the principles involved.

“If no one ever tells us how much to contribute to the Fund,” we may ask ourselves, “then how are we to know what is expected of us? How can we decide whether God is pleased with the way we are contributing to His Cause?” The answer to these questions lies in one phrase: the mystery of sacrifice. In the Bahá'í Faith a single coin contributed by a believer of little means can be as precious as a large sum contributed by a wealthy believer; what determines the worth of the contribution is the sacrifice with which it is made. Of course, no one can judge the degree of the sacrifice of another. Each of us must reflect in our own heart on the nature of sacrifice when determining how much to contribute to the Fund.

We should remember that when we make sacrifices for the Cause of God we are not doing Him a favor. God does not need us. The money we contribute to the Fund is for the construction of a better world. It represents one of the ways we discharge our duties towards society. Sacrifice is giving up that which is lower to receive that which is higher. Sacrifice causes pain, but in reality it brings joy and true happiness. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has said:

On the appointed day, about seven people gather at the Sanchez home. You are somewhat disappointed at the small number but, remembering your consultations on the theme of Bahá'í meetings, you realize that other souls will be attracted if the gatherings are held in a truly spiritual atmosphere. But how are you to ensure that such an atmosphere is created and maintained? In the visits to the homes of the believers, the conversation was basically between you and two or three other people, and in a certain sense you could control its direction. In these meetings, you will have to allow the participants to interact with one another without too much interference from you. Yet you realize that someone has to facilitate the consultations, otherwise chaos will set in and the friends will become disillusioned. "Let us have faith that everything will turn out well," you say to yourself. "We will learn by doing. As long as our conversations are centered on the Writings, we are bound to achieve our purpose."

The quotations you have chosen for study in this first session are all related to teaching. Your hope is that by the end of the meeting each participant will have come to the firm decision to teach the Cause. As always, you have carefully selected a number of passages from the Writings according to a sequence of ideas that you feel will help the friends explore the theme. Teaching the Faith is a vast subject and, in this first session, you do not pretend to cover more than a few essential points that may motivate the friends to action. You realize, of course, that you will have to be flexible in the way you facilitate the discussion, for the dynamics of the meeting may take you away from the sequence of ideas you have chosen:

- The purpose of teaching is to open the hearts of men to Bahá'u'lláh with the key of utterance. Bahá'u'lláh says:

"The things He hath reserved for Himself are the cities of men's hearts, that He may cleanse them from all earthly defilements, and enable them to draw nigh unto the hallowed Spot which the hands of the infidel can never profane. Open, O people, the city of the human heart with the key of your utterance. Thus have We, according to a pre-ordained measure, prescribed unto you your duty."³⁴

- The greatest power in this world is the power of the Word of God. In the act of teaching the power of the Creative Word penetrates into the listener's soul and begins its transformation. Bahá'u'lláh says:

"Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth."³⁵

- Teaching is a sacred duty enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh on each and every believer. Bahá'u'lláh says:

"God hath prescribed unto every one the duty of teaching His Cause. Whoever ariseth to discharge this duty, must needs, ere he proclaimeth His Message, adorn himself with the ornament of an upright and praiseworthy character, so that his words may attract the hearts of such as are receptive to his call."³⁶

- The teacher of the Cause is like a burning candle, shedding the light of knowledge in all directions. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá once wrote to a believer who had been in His presence:

“I am expecting the results of this meeting, that I may see thee lighted as a candle and burning thyself as a moth with the fire of the love of God, weeping like unto the cloud by the greatness of love and attraction, laughing like unto the meadow and stirred into cheerfulness like unto the young tree by the wafting of the breeze of the Paradise of Abhá!” ³⁷

- The teacher of the Cause is unrestrained as the wind, carrying Bahá’u’lláh’s Message everywhere. Bahá’u’lláh says:

“Be unrestrained as the wind, while carrying the Message of Him Who hath caused the Dawn of Divine Guidance to break. Consider, how the wind, faithful to that which God hath ordained, bloweth upon all the regions of the earth, be they inhabited or desolate. Neither the sight of desolation, nor the evidences of prosperity, can either pain or please it. It bloweth in every direction, as bidden by its Creator. So should be every one that claimeth to be a lover of the one true God. It behooveth him to fix his gaze upon the fundamentals of His Faith, and to labor diligently for its propagation. Wholly for the sake of God he should proclaim His Message, and with that same spirit accept whatever response his words may evoke in his hearer. He who shall accept and believe, shall receive his reward; and he who shall turn away, shall receive none other than his own punishment.” ³⁸

- Animated by the power of love, the teacher of the Cause labors in the path of God with inexhaustible energy. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us:

“When you call on the Mercy of God waiting to reinforce you, your strength will be tenfold. Look at me: I am so feeble, yet I have had the strength given me to come amongst you: a poor servant of God, who has been enabled to give you this message! I shall not be with you long! One must never consider one’s own feebleness, it is the strength of the Holy Spirit of Love, which gives the power to teach. The thought of our own weakness could only bring despair. We must look higher than all earthly thoughts; detach ourselves from every material idea, crave for the things of the spirit; fix our eyes on the everlasting bountiful Mercy of the Almighty, who will fill our souls with the gladness of joyful service to His command ‘Love One Another’.” ³⁹

- We must all arise with courage and confidence to teach the Cause. We must not hesitate. We must not falter. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

“Speak, therefore; speak out with great courage at every meeting. When thou art about to begin thine address, turn first to Bahá’u’lláh, and ask for the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, then open thy lips and say whatever is suggested to thy heart; this, however, with the utmost courage, dignity and conviction.” ⁴⁰

And the Guardian tells us:

“The Bahá’í teacher must be all confidence. Therein lies his strength and the secret of his success. Though single-handed, and no matter how great the apathy of the people around you may be, you should have faith that the hosts of the Kingdom are on your side, and that through their help you are bound to overcome the forces of darkness that are facing the Cause of God. Persevere, be happy and confident, therefore.”⁴¹

Exercises:

1. To attend meetings with your friends, in which you study the Writings and consult on them, will always be an important part of your Bahá’í life. With the members of your group, hold such a meeting in which you consult on the theme of teaching based on the above ideas and quotations. In the space below, write down some of the outstanding ideas that emerge in your consultations.

2. One of the desired outcomes of such meetings is that the participants make concrete decisions about their future actions in the field of service. What were some of the decisions made by the participants in your meeting?

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Introducing Bahá'í Beliefs

Purpose

To acquire the ability to introduce
Bahá'í ideas into a conversation.

SECTION 1

You already know that, as you advance along your path of service to the Cause, you will derive immeasurable joy from sharing with others the Word of God revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. Opportunities to share the priceless gems of wisdom enshrined in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation come to you in many ways. You may have a meeting at your home in which you introduce some of your friends to the Teachings. You may give a talk about the Faith to a local organization. You may participate in teaching campaigns in localities near and far. You may visit newly enrolled believers and study with them selected passages from the Writings. And if you are inclined towards the education of children, you may hold classes for them and help them learn to pattern their lives according to Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings.

Many of your opportunities to teach will arise in everyday conversations with friends. As you converse on different topics, you will be able to share with your friends insights you have gained from the Writings and help them to see things in the light of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. The way you introduce Bahá'í ideas into a conversation should never appear unnatural or forced. Sometimes you may present your insights without mentioning the Faith at all. On most occasions, you can introduce your ideas by saying, for example, "Bahá'u'lláh teaches that . . ." or "'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that . . ." In making these remarks, you need not feel obliged to explain who Bahá'u'lláh is, or what the Bahá'í Faith is about. If you express your ideas freely and mention the source of your insights in a natural way, the opportunity to speak directly on the Faith will arise sooner than you expect.

In this unit, you will be presented with a number of passages which, though not exact quotations, are all based on the talks and Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and include many of the phrases He used. You should read the passages several times, study them carefully, and practice saying the same ideas in your own words. It is hoped that, in this way, you will begin to develop the capability of explaining the Teachings to others accurately, always remaining true to the explicit meaning of statements made by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi.

You should realize, however, that the study on which you are now to embark will not be a substitute for memorizing the Creative Word, which has a special power and penetrates the hearts of men. Therefore, you will want to be able to quote passages from the Writings often when you teach. But quoting the Writings excessively can be counterproductive. As in so many aspects of Bahá'í life, what is needed is moderation—in this case, balance between quoting directly from the Writings and using your own words to explain the Faith. To achieve this balance, of course, you need to devote much time and energy to the study of the Writings and allow them to shape your thoughts and feelings.

Exercise:

1. Not all conversations offer you the opportunity to share Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings with others. In fact, too much of what people speak about is trivial, or even harmful. This does not mean that all conversations should focus on weighty subjects. Some should also be light-hearted. However, you need to be wary of idle talk and make certain that your interactions with your friends are uplifting to your spirit and your mind. Think of some of the conversations you have had with your friends over the

past few weeks. Make a list of those which focused on uplifting topics. In which ones could you have introduced the Teachings of the Faith?

SECTION 2

Before you begin studying the passages presented in this unit, it is necessary to pause and reflect briefly on the station 'Abdu'l-Bahá occupies in Bahá'u'lláh's Dispensation. On other occasions in your studies, of course, you will read in detail about His life and receive a greater and greater share of the wisdom His words impart.

'Abdu'l-Bahá is a most unique Figure in human history, and no previous religion has been blessed with such a Personage. That Bahá'u'lláh should have left the Bahá'í community after His passing under the shelter of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Most Great Branch, is a bounty that words cannot describe. Not only did Bahá'u'lláh give humanity His most sublime Revelation, but He also gave it His own Son, through Whose knowledge and wisdom, He said, humanity would be illumined. It is difficult to get even a glimpse of the greatness of this Cause without being aware of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's unique station.

First, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant. The power of this Covenant holds the Bahá'í community together and protects it from the attacks of enemies, from division and disintegration. It is the power of this Covenant that ensures final victory.

Fundamentally, the Covenant Bahá'u'lláh has made with His followers requires that we all direct our hearts towards a Center and be entirely loyal to it. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is that Center, and according to His Will and Testament, after Him, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith, is the Center to which all should turn. Today, the Center of the Faith is the Universal House of Justice, which has been established in accordance with the explicit command of Bahá'u'lláh and the clear instructions given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian.

Second, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the unerring Interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's Word. So vast is the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, so profound the meanings enshrined in every one of His utterances, that He deemed it necessary to leave behind an interpreter Whom He Himself would inspire. Thus for generations to come, humanity will be able to understand Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings by studying the interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His numerous Tablets and in the authenticated transcripts of His talks. The Guardian is the Interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's

Teachings after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; with him the task of interpretation was complete, and no one has the authority to interpret Bahá’u’lláh’s Words for the remainder of His Dispensation.

Again, we should be aware that, by leaving behind an interpreter appointed by Himself, Bahá’u’lláh has bestowed upon the Bahá’í community a most great bounty. In the past, every religion has been afflicted with divisions into many sects for the lack of an authoritative source to which the believers could turn when they disagreed on the meaning of passages from their Holy Books. But in this Dispensation, when there is uncertainty about the meaning of a statement of Bahá’u’lláh, everyone turns to the interpretations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian. If uncertainty remains, one can turn to the Universal House of Justice for clarification. No room is left, then, for conflict over the meaning of the Teachings and the unity of the Faith is protected.

Third, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the perfect Exemplar of His Father’s Teachings. Although we can never hope to reach such a degree of perfection, we should always have Him before our eyes and strive to follow His example. When you read in the Writings about love, turn to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and you will see the very essence of love and kindness. When you read about purity, justice, rectitude, joy and generosity, turn to Him, think of His life, and you will see how He manifested these qualities in the utmost perfection.

The mark of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s life is, of course, His servitude. You know that the name “‘Abdu’l-Bahá” means the servant of Bahá, and is the title ‘Abdu’l-Bahá preferred to all the titles the believers wished to attribute to Him. The following words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are the expression of His ardent desire to serve, and if you memorize them, they will always be a guide to you as you walk your own path of service:

“My name is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. My qualification is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. My reality is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. My praise is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Thralldom to the Blessed Perfection is my glorious and refulgent diadem, and servitude to all the human race my perpetual religion . . . No name, no title, no mention, no commendation have I, nor will ever have, except ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This is my longing. This is my greatest yearning. This is my eternal life. This is my everlasting glory.”¹

As mentioned in the preceding section, the passages you will study in this unit are not exact quotations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá but are based on His many talks and Tablets. As you gain experience in teaching the Cause, you will want to fill your mind with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words and learn the way He explained ideas. You will undoubtedly wish to memorize entire passages from His talks and Tablets. We hope that this unit will help you embark on that endeavor.

SECTION 3

The first passage you are being asked to study, which will help you often in your conversations, concerns the need for an Educator:

When we consider life in all its aspects, we see that, invariably, there is need for an educator. If a man is left alone in the wilderness, he will take on the ways of the animal. If he is educated, he can reach the greatest heights of accomplishment. Were it not for educators, there would be no civilization.

Education is of three kinds: material, human and spiritual. Material education is concerned with the development of the body. Human education is about civilization and progress. It deals with government, administration, charitable works, trades, arts and handicrafts, sciences, great inventions and discoveries. Spiritual education consists in acquiring divine perfections. This is true education, for by its aid the spiritual, the higher nature of the human being is developed.

In order to progress, humanity needs an educator who has clear authority as a material, human and spiritual educator. If someone should say, "I possess perfect intelligence, and I have no need of such an educator," he would be denying that which is clear and evident. It would be like a child saying, "I have no need of education; I will act according to my reason and intelligence, and will reach perfection by myself."

Humanity has always been in need of such a perfect educator, one who can help it organize matters related to the nourishment and health of the body, inspire it to advance in knowledge, invention and discovery, and, most importantly, breathe into it the real life of the spirit. No ordinary human being can achieve these formidable tasks. Only the Manifestations of God have the power to accomplish them. These are chosen Souls who are sent by God from time to time to be the Universal Educators of humanity.

Exercises:

1. Read the above passage several times in your group and help one another learn its content well. As in other courses, you should ask each other questions related to the ideas presented in the passage and practice expressing them in your own words.
2. Some conversations would be more suitable than others for you to introduce the ideas presented in this passage. Below is a list of topics of conversation. Mark the ones into which you could introduce the above ideas in a natural way. It would be helpful for you to discuss in your group how you would go about doing this.

- _____ The conditions of society today
- _____ Life after death
- _____ Literacy
- _____ The need for one to have a trade or profession in life

3. Statements made in conversation, on subjects such as the one you have just studied, often lead to a discussion of some aspect of the Faith. What would you answer if someone asked: "Who are some of these Educators you are talking about?" _____

4. Below are a few quotations from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh related to the ideas presented in the above paragraphs. Reflect on them and make every effort to memorize them. In this way, you will be able to weave passages from the Writings into your speech and thus influence the hearts of your listeners.

"All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization." ²

“The Purpose of the one true God, exalted be His glory, in revealing Himself unto men is to lay bare those gems that lie hidden within the mine of their true and inmost selves.”³

“God’s purpose in sending His Prophets unto men is twofold. The first is to liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance, and guide them to the light of true understanding. The second is to ensure the peace and tranquility of mankind, and provide all the means by which they can be established.”⁴

“Men at all times and under all conditions stand in need of one to exhort them, guide them and to instruct and teach them.”⁵

SECTION 4

The following ideas on the subject, the independent investigation of truth, will be useful to you on many occasions:

We must be lovers of light no matter from what lamp it appears. We must be lovers of the rose no matter in what garden it blooms. We must be seekers of truth no matter from what source it comes. Attachment to one lamp can prevent us from appreciating the light when it shines in another. Attachment to the outer forms and practices of religion can deprive us from understanding the truth of all religions. We must abandon prejudice and outmoded traditions if we are to succeed in finding the truth. There is a difference between dogma, superstition and prejudice on the one hand, and truth on the other. If we understand this, we will be able to see that the Divine Light of Truth shone in all the Manifestations of God—in Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá’u’lláh.

In seeking the truth, we must free ourselves of all our opinions and preconceived ideas. We must give up our prejudices and trivial notions. An open receptive mind is needed. If our cup is full of self, there is no room in it for the water of life. The fact that we think we are right and everyone else wrong is the greatest obstacle in the path to unity. And unity is necessary if we are to reach the truth, for truth is one.

Exercises:

1. As in the preceding section, you should read the above passage several times in your group, ask one another questions related to the ideas, and practice saying them in your own words.
2. The above ideas could be worked into some conversations more easily than others. In the list of topics of conversation below, mark those into which you could introduce the ideas in a natural way, and discuss in your group how you would go about doing this.

- _____ Traditional agricultural practices versus new technologies
- _____ Environmental disasters
- _____ Religious conflict
- _____ The equality of men and women

3. Sharing the ideas presented in this passage in a conversation with your friends could open up the possibility for you to discuss some aspect of the Faith with them in more detail. How would you reply if one of them asked you the following question: "What are some of the truths common to all religions?" _____

4. It is suggested you memorize the following quotations of Bahá'u'lláh in order that you may work some or all of them into your speech:

"There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God." ⁶

"Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship." ⁷

"The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race . . ." ⁸

"The religion of God is for love and unity; make it not the cause of enmity or dissension." ⁹

SECTION 5

The following paragraphs describe how God can only be known through His Manifestations and will be helpful to you when conversing with friends:

Consider the infinite universe. Is it possible that it could have been created without a Creator? Or that the Creator of this infinite world should be without intelligence? Materialists say that man has been brought forth by nature itself. But nature has no intelligence. Is it possible that it can create a human being, who has intelligence?

If we observe the entire creation, we see that whatever is lower is unable to comprehend the power of that which is higher. So the stone, the tree, the animal, however much they may evolve, cannot comprehend the reality of man and cannot imagine his power. Therefore how can man, the created, understand the reality of the Creator?

Although man's understanding can never reach God, he is not deprived of knowing Him. From time to time a Human Being appears on earth who is the Manifestation of God. All the perfection, the bounty, and the splendor that come from God are visible in the Holy Manifestation, like the sun which is resplendent in a clear polished mirror. To say that these Mirrors are the Manifestation of the Sun of Truth

does not mean that the Sun has descended from Its heights of glory and become incorporated into the Mirror. What is meant is this: All that humanity knows, discovers, and understands of the names and attributes and perfections of God refers to His Holy Manifestations.

Exercises:

1. After reading this passage several times in your group and answering questions posed by one another about its content, you should practice putting it into your own words.

2. Below is a list of topics of conversation. Mark the ones into which you could introduce the above ideas with ease, and discuss in your group how you would do this.

- _____ The creation of the universe
- _____ The advantages of solar energy
- _____ The existence of God
- _____ The power of human intelligence

3. Suppose that, in a conversation with your friends, you have an opportunity to present the subject you have just studied. How would you reply if someone asked you the following question: "What are some of the things we know about God through His Manifestations?" _____

4. You may wish to memorize the following passages from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh so that you can quote them when you speak to friends on this subject:

"The knowledge of Him, Who is the Origin of all things, and attainment unto Him, are impossible save through knowledge of, and attainment unto, these luminous Beings who proceed from the Sun of Truth." ¹⁰

"No man, however acute his perception, can ever hope to reach the heights which the wisdom and understanding of the Divine Physician have attained." ¹¹

"The Person of the Manifestation hath ever been the representative and mouth-piece of God. He, in truth, is the Day Spring of God's most excellent Titles, and the Dawning-Place of His exalted Attributes." ¹²

"Be ye assured, moreover, that the works and acts of each and every one of these Manifestations of God, nay whatever pertaineth unto them, and whatsoever they may manifest in the future, are all ordained by God, and are a reflection of His Will and Purpose." ¹³

SECTION 6

At times, you will need to speak briefly about Bahá'u'lláh's life and Mission; the following passage will assist you in doing so:

About 150 years ago, Bahá'u'lláh appeared in Persia and devoted Himself to the upliftment and education of the people. He proclaimed the oneness of the world of humanity and taught that all are created and nourished by the one loving and merciful God. He promoted principles such as the equality of men and women, the abolition of prejudices, the agreement between science and religion, and the need for universal education.

The kings of the East and the priesthood of Persia arose against Him, for they did not find their personal interests advanced by His Teachings. He was persecuted, mocked and put in chains. In Persia, His properties and possessions were taken away. First, there was banishment from Persia to Baghdád, then to Constantinople, then to Adrianople, finally to the prison-fortress of 'Akká.

Throughout all these ordeals, He was cheerful. His enemies made every effort to lessen His greatness, but His fame grew day by day. Surrounded by enemies, He did nothing to protect Himself; on the contrary, in His spiritual might and power He was at all times visible before the faces of men.

During His lifetime He was intensely active. His energy was unlimited. Scarcely one night was passed in restful sleep. He suffered in order that selflessness and service should be made manifest in the world of humanity, that the Most Great Peace should be established, that human faith should be strengthened, that the human mind might be developed to its fullest capacity, and that man might become the reflection and likeness of God. Bahá'u'lláh was truly a Manifestation of God and a Universal Educator of humanity.

Exercises:

1. As always, read the passage several times in your group, paragraph by paragraph, and ask one another questions until you learn the content well and can present it in your own words.
2. In the list of topics of conversation below, mark those which you feel are most suitable for the introduction of a short account of Bahá'u'lláh's life. Discuss in your group how you would introduce this subject into the conversation.

_____ Human rights
_____ The lack of justice in the world today
_____ The situation in the Middle East
_____ Great figures in history
3. How would you respond if someone asked you the following question: "Why do we need Bahá'u'lláh, when we already have the Teachings of the Manifestations that came before Him?" _____

4. It is suggested that you memorize the following passages so that you can quote them when you speak of Bahá'u'lláh:

“The Eternal Truth is now come. He hath lifted up the Ensign of Power, and is now shedding upon the world the unclouded splendor of His Revelation.”¹⁴

“He it is Who is the Manifestation of Him Who is the Unknowable, the Invisible of the Invisibles, could ye but perceive it.”¹⁵

“This is the Day whereon the All-Merciful hath come down in the clouds of knowledge, clothed with manifest sovereignty.”¹⁶

SECTION 7

Humanity's coming of age is the subject of the next passage you will study:

From the beginning to the end of its life, every living thing in this world passes through different stages. Each stage has its own conditions and presents its own requirements. In the life of the human being, the conditions and requirements of infancy, of childhood, of adolescence, of youth and maturity are not the same. Each stage prepares us for the next, sharpening our faculties and training our intelligence.

Similarly there are periods and stages in the life of humanity as a whole. Humanity is now leaving behind its childhood and entering the long-awaited period of maturity. That which could meet the needs of its early history does not satisfy the demands of this day. The playthings of infancy and childhood no longer satisfy the adult mind.

From every standpoint the world of humanity is undergoing revolutionary change, whether in government or law, in science or industry. Old standards of ethics, moral codes and methods of living in the past are not adequate for the present age of advancement and progress.

This is the time of maturity and reformation in religion as well. Bigotry and dogmatic imitations of ancient beliefs have become the source of animosity. They must pass and give way to heavenly teachings which have been revealed for the advancement of humanity in this age. This reformation and renewal of the fundamental reality of religion constitute the true spirit of modernism, the unmistakable light of the world, and the divine remedy for all the ills of humanity.

Exercises:

1. To help you learn the ideas presented in this passage well, you should, as always, read it several times in your group and ask one another questions, the answers to which are found in the passage itself.
2. Below is a list of topics of conversation. Mark the ones into which you could introduce the above ideas in a natural way, and discuss in your group how you would go about doing this.

- _____ History
- _____ Modern literature
- _____ Humanity's future
- _____ Social unrest in today's world

3. What would you answer if someone asked you the following question: "How do we know that humanity is reaching the stage of maturity?" _____

4. You may wish to memorize the following words of Bahá'u'lláh:

"Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration. The remedy the world needeth in its present-day afflictions can never be the same as that which a subsequent age may require."¹⁷

"Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements."¹⁸

"A new life is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth; and yet none hath discovered its cause or perceived its motive."¹⁹

SECTION 8

The establishment of peace is on everyone's mind, and the following paragraphs will help you introduce the Bahá'í point of view on this subject into a conversation:

Today there is no greater challenge to humanity than the establishment of peace. Peace is light; war is darkness. Peace is life; war is death. More than a century ago, Bahá'u'lláh declared the cause of universal peace. He brought a number of Teachings that, together, make the establishment of peace possible.

Among these Teachings is the independent investigation of reality. If people are allowed to investigate truth, they will come to see the oneness of humanity. Truth is one and by its means the unity of the world can be realized. Prejudices of all kinds—race, class, color, creed, nation, sex and degree of material civilization—are causes

of strife. If we accept to investigate reality rather than blindly imitate the beliefs of the past, we will arise to abolish every form of prejudice.

Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings on religion make a clear distinction between true religion and superstition. True religion must be in harmony with science and reason. Religion must be the cause of fellowship and love. If it becomes the cause of discord and hatred, then it is better to be without it. Also among Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings is the equality of men and women. We may think of the world of humanity as a bird—one wing is women and the other men. Both wings have to be equally developed for the bird to fly. Other Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh shed light on the importance of universal education, the benefits of adopting a universal language, and the necessity of seeking spiritual solutions to economic problems.

Humanity must be freed from the captivity of the world of nature. It was created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. But there are two aspects of civilization—material and spiritual—and unless they become combined, human happiness will not be attained. Until justice is allowed to govern human affairs, all things will be in disorder and remain imperfect.

Exercises:

1. After studying this passage in your group, mark the topics of conversation below into which the above ideas could be introduced in a natural way. In your group, discuss how you would work these ideas into the conversation.

_____ The banning of weapons of mass destruction
_____ The spread of anarchy and terrorism in the world
_____ The brutality of war
_____ Things that bring us happiness

2. If someone asked you the following question, how would you respond: "War has always existed. What makes you think peace is possible now?" _____

3. It is suggested that you memorize the following quotations of Baha'u'lláh:

"The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquillity of peoples, and the peace of all who dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances of God." ²⁰

"Religion is verily the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world and of tranquillity amongst its peoples." ²¹

"The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established." ²²

SECTION 9

The oneness of humanity is a theme so central to the Bahá'í Teachings that you will often want to bring it up in your conversations:

A garden in which all the plants are of the same shape and color lacks in beauty; it is dull and monotonous. The garden that is pleasing to the eye is one in which flowers of every color and fragrance grow side by side. It is the joyous contrast of color that gives the garden its beauty and charm. And though different, each flower is refreshed by the same rain and receives the warmth of the one sun. This is also true of humanity. It is made up of many races and colors. But all come from the same God, and all have the same origin. The diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music; different notes blend together to make a perfect chord.

Unity is necessary to existence. Love is the very cause of life. In the material world, all things owe their existence to unity. Their elements are held together by the law of attraction. The law of attraction brings together certain elements in the form of a beautiful flower. But when that attraction is taken away, the flower will decompose and cease to exist. So it is with humanity. Attraction, harmony, and unity are the forces that hold humanity together.

Bahá'u'lláh has made a design for the uniting of all the peoples of the world. We should make every effort to draw them into this circle of unity. When we meet people of different races, nationalities, religions, and opinions, we should not allow these differences to become barriers between us. We should think of them as different colored roses growing in the beautiful garden of humanity, and be glad to be among them.

Exercises:

1. Study the above passage in your group and then mark the topics of conversation below into which it would be suitable for you to introduce the ideas you have learned. Discuss in your group how you would weave the ideas into the conversation.

_____ Gardening
_____ Diversity
_____ The beauty of nature
_____ Class prejudice

2. How would you respond if someone asked you the following question: "What can we do to help unify the peoples of the world?" _____

3. You may wish to memorize the following quotations so that you can refer to them when you speak on this subject with your friends:

“The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch.”²³

“So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.”²⁴

“Set your faces towards unity, and let the radiance of its light shine upon you. Gather ye together, and for the sake of God resolve to root out whatever is the source of contention amongst you.”²⁵

“It behooveth man to adhere tenaciously unto that which will promote fellowship, kindness and unity.”²⁶

SECTION 10

Justice is another matter of great interest to most people, and the following passage will help you share some of the Teachings on this all-important subject with those you meet:

Difference of capacity in individuals is fundamental to human existence. It is not possible for all to be alike, for all to be equal. Yet human affairs, in their entirety, should be governed by the principle of justice.

Justice is not limited; it is a universal quality. It must operate at all levels of society. Justice must be sacred, and the rights of all people must be guarded. The laws of society must be formulated and enforced in such a way that it is not possible for a few to amass wealth and for others to be destitute. Among the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is the elimination of the extremes of wealth and poverty.

Each member of society should enjoy the benefits of civilization, because every individual is a member of the body of humanity. If one member of this body is in anguish or distress, all the other members must necessarily suffer. How can one member be afflicted and the others be at ease? Yet today because of the lack of harmonious relations, some members of society are satisfied, living in the utmost comfort and luxury, while others are in want of food and shelter. Today's society lacks the necessary reciprocity and symmetry; it is not well arranged. Laws and principles are needed that will ensure the well-being and happiness of all the members of the human family.

Justice is established on the pillars of reward and punishment. People are motivated to be just by the hope for reward and the fear of punishment. These two sentiments are necessary if oppression is to be prevented. The legislators and administrators of the laws must be aware of the spiritual consequences of their decisions. When an official knows that he will be held responsible for his actions beyond this earthly life, he will be inspired to act with justice. The ruler who knows his judgments will be weighed in the balance of Divine Justice will surely avoid oppression.

Exercises:

1. After reading through this passage and studying it in your group, mark the topics of conversation which would lend themselves to the introduction of the ideas it contains. Discuss in your group how you would work the ideas into the conversation.

- _____ Human rights
- _____ Oppression
- _____ The elimination of poverty
- _____ Unemployment

2. What would you answer if someone who heard you speak on this subject asked you the following question: "How can the elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty be achieved?" _____

3. It is suggested that you memorize the following quotations:

"The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men." ²⁷

"No radiance can compare with that of justice. The organization of the world and the tranquillity of mankind depend upon it." ²⁸

"That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the sources of life to the world." ²⁹

SECTION 11

When conversing with friends, you will often be able to draw upon the ideas in the following passage about the equality of men and women:

The physical sun, through its light and heat, reveals the reality of all things on earth. Without its rays, these realities would be shrouded in darkness. Likewise, the Sun of Bahá'u'lláh, shining in full splendor in the spiritual sky, has made manifest realities that were not apparent in the past. One such reality is the equality of men and women. Through the rays of the Sun of Truth, the capacities of women have been so illumined that the equality of men and women is now an established fact.

Bahá'u'lláh has stated in the clearest terms that in the sight of God there is no distinction between men and women. The condition of inequality that has existed throughout the ages is not the result of the superiority of men; it is simply that

women have not been given the same opportunity to develop all their potentialities. In spite of the prejudice against them, however, history records the lives of numerous women who have achieved the greatest of accomplishments.

The first woman to accept the Truth of God's new Revelation was the Persian poetess, Táhirih. As she witnessed the dawn of a new Day, she became fully aware of the reality of the equality of men and women and dedicated her energies to proclaiming this truth. Her knowledge and eloquence baffled the most learned men of her time. Although all the forces of an oppressive king and an ignorant and proud clergy were against her, not for a moment did she hesitate to speak the truth. And in the end, she gave her life for the new Faith she had so firmly embraced.

To believe in that which God has not intended is ignorance and superstition. Today women should be allowed every opportunity to become educated and to assume a position of equality with men in all fields of human endeavor. Until the equality of men and women becomes a reality in this world, as it is in the spiritual realm, the real progress of humankind is not possible.

Exercises:

1. You should, as always, study this passage in your group and then mark the topics of conversation below into which you could introduce the above ideas in a natural way. Discuss in your group how you would work the ideas into the conversation.

- _____ Family life
- _____ The establishment of peace
- _____ Great women in history
- _____ Human progress

2. How would you respond if someone asked you the following question: "If women assume an equal position with men in all fields of endeavor, who will take care of the children?" _____

3. It would be useful for you to memorize the following quotations of Bahá'u'lláh related to this subject:

"Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God."³⁰

"Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other."³¹

"In this Day the Hand of divine grace hath removed all distinctions. The servants of God and His handmaidens are regarded on the same plane."³²

SECTION 12

The final passage you are being asked to study is on the subject of universal education:

One of the principles that Bahá'u'lláh has emphasized in His Teachings is universal education. The promotion of education is a most urgent requirement of our time. No nation can achieve prosperity unless it makes education one of its central concerns. The primary reason for the decline of peoples is ignorance. Education brings honor, prosperity, independence and freedom to a government and its people.

Education must begin at infancy. It is the duty of the father and mother to strive with every means to educate their children, refine their characters according to spiritual and moral laws, and train them in the arts and sciences. Mothers are the first educators of humankind; they watch over the child in the cradle and nurse him at the breast of knowledge. Every child must be educated; this is not a matter that can be neglected. If the parents are able to take care of the expense, they must do so. Otherwise the community must provide the means for the education of the child.

Education should develop in every human being the desire to achieve excellence. Man should become enamored of human perfection and pursue it with passion. He should aspire to spiritual distinction, to become known for the virtues of the human world—for sincerity, loyalty, service to humanity, love and justice. He must seek to be distinguished by his efforts to promote peace and unity and to foster learning. To guide people on such a path is the real task of education.

Exercises:

1. After studying this passage in your group, mark the topics of conversation below into which you would be most likely to introduce the above ideas. Discuss in your group how you would weave the ideas into the conversation.

_____ Child-rearing
_____ Social progress
_____ The power of science
_____ The school system

2. What would you answer if someone asked you the following question: "How do you propose to bring education to the billions of people that inhabit the earth today?"

3. It is suggested that you memorize the following quotations from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh:

"It is not desirable that a man be left without knowledge or skills, for he is then but a barren tree."³³

“Bend your minds and wills to the education of the peoples and kindreds of the earth . . .”³⁴

“Arts, crafts and sciences uplift the world of being, and are conducive to its exaltation. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent.”³⁵

“In truth, knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and a source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him.”³⁶

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