

Youth Can Move the World

Melanie Smith and Paul Lample



Part of a Series on Major Themes of the Creative Word

“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.” —Bahá’u’lláh

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The Significance of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation

Youth Can Move the World

The Spiritual Conquest of the Planet

The Journey of the Soul

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Preface

A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi states: “The principles, administration and fundamentals of the Faith are well known, but the friends need greatly to study the more profound works which would give them spiritual maturity to a greater degree, unify their community life, and enable them to better exemplify the Bahá’í way of living. . . .”¹

This book is part of a series whose purpose is to draw the reader into a study of the profound concepts found in the Bahá’í Revelation. It is also intended to serve as a bridge leading to expanded study of the writings of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi.

The book can be used for individual or group study. Each lesson is divided into a number of possible segments that can be used selectively:

- Introduction** An introduction to the lesson.
- Overview** A general presentation of new information.
- Explanation** Details of the “Overview” with quotes and examples.
- Readings** Quotations from the writings on the lesson topic.
- Illustrations** Excerpts on the lesson topic, usually from books by Bahá’ís; often includes stories of Bahá’í history.
- Further Study** Three ways to explore the lesson topic in more depth.
- Questions** Questions that review the lesson material.
- Answers** Answers to the questions.
- Discussion** Questions for group discussion.
- Exercise** An exercise that explores the topic in more depth.
- Feedback** Suggested answers for the exercise.

Note in the “Readings” section that some words in the passages from the writings are defined in the margins for your convenience. Words having a specific meaning in a Bahá’í context are underlined and defined with that meaning. Pronunciation of Bahá’í and Islamic terms is also provided.

¹ *The Importance of Deepening* 45–46

To use this book for individual study, create your own study plan by choosing the sections you want to cover in each lesson. Depending on your personal preference you may wish to skip some of the sections. However, please do not skip the “Readings” section, since this provides a chance to read the Word of God and comments by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice. Use the right margins on each page to make notes and record ideas. You may find it most convenient to study a lesson—or just one lesson segment—with your daily prayers in the morning or evening.

The book can also be used to create a plan for group study. For example, each lesson can be read and discussed section by section. Or, group members can read the lesson on their own, then come together weekly for discussion of the quotations and questions. As a third option, a group leader can summarize the “Overview,” “Explanation,” and “Illustration” sections in a ten to fifteen minute presentation before the group reads and discusses the quotations.

At the end of the book is an index with references that go beyond the quotations covered in the lessons. The index offers a valuable starting point for an extended study of the role of youth in the Cause.

Beyond personal and group deepenings, this book can be used as a resource for preparing for firesides, public talks, or seminar work at Bahá’í schools. We hope you find it useful, educational, and uplifting.

Foreword

A message to Bahá'í youth:

In the dark and foul-smelling confinement of the Síyáh-Chál, Bahá'u'lláh endured four months of pain and anguish. Two massive chains bound Him, at all times, to His fellow prisoners. So heavy were these chains that any movement by one prisoner caused pain to all; the deep cuts inflicted on Bahá'u'lláh left scars that lasted His entire life.

No light pierced the gloom of the underground prison. Most of the prisoners had no clothing or bedding. Each day the guards took away one or more of the prisoners to be tortured and executed. Yet, this was only the beginning of a lifetime of sacrifice and suffering which Bahá'u'lláh willingly endured for each one of us.

It was in the Síyáh-Chál that Bahá'u'lláh received the first realization of His station as the supreme Manifestation of God and His Mission to transform humanity. “One night, in a dream,” He states, “these exalted words were heard on every side: ‘Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy Pen. Grieve Thou not for that which hath befallen Thee, neither be Thou afraid, for Thou art in safety. Erelong will God raise up the treasures of the earth—men who will aid Thee through Thyself and through Thy name, wherewith God hath revived the hearts of such as have recognized Him.’”

Are you one of the “treasures of the earth” that are to be raised up to aid Bahá'u'lláh and assure the triumph of His Cause?

Each believer—man or woman; adult, youth or child—has a choice to make. Each must ask: “What is my connection to Bahá'u'lláh? Is my love for Him as great as His love for me? What can I do to befittingly serve Him?”

This book is created for those who, out of their love for Bahá'u'lláh, have made their choice to disregard their weaknesses and to strive to serve Him. It attempts to address those issues that can help us move beyond merely calling ourselves Bahá'ís to actually becoming one of the “treasures of the earth” that embody Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings.

Four avenues of service are addressed:

- strengthening our spiritual connection to God;
- developing a true Bahá'í character;
- serving the Faith and humanity; and particularly
- teaching His Cause, the “paramount purpose of all Bahá'í activity.”

Each of these lines of action calls for a lifetime of endeavor to practice and refine. Yet it is precisely through this effort—day by day—that we grow and become channels for spiritual power. This enables us to achieve our purpose for ourselves and for the progress of humanity.

This book can at best be an introduction to each of these areas of service. The chapters cannot contain, for example, a description of the many qualities of Bahá'í character or detailed guidance on how to teach as provided in the Writings. Additional guidance is provided to find books and references in the Writings to explore in more detail the topics introduced in each chapter.

Yet the focus of this book is on action, not simply study. It is through action that we perfect the application of the guidance of Bahá'u'lláh to change ourselves and the world around us.

In age after age youth—through their idealism—have rejected the world and its injustices as presented to them by their elders. Some generations sought to make a change. But no generation has been better prepared with the tools, the foundation, and the opportunity to make as dramatic a change in the destiny of humanity as that available to this generation. The tools are the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. The foundation is the extent of the spread of the Faith throughout the world and establishment of Bahá'í communities and administration. The opportunity is the climax of the twin processes of integration and disintegration at the end of this century.

Again, it is a matter of individual choice. You can choose to drop out. You can choose to seek your own comfort. Or you can accept the challenge and use the tools, the foundation, and the opportunity to change the world for the better—once and for all time.

“. . . it is within your power to contribute significantly to shaping the societies of the coming century; youth can move the world.”

*“Dost Thou wail, or shall I wail? Rather shall I weep
at the fewness of Thy champions. . . .”*

—The Fire Tablet

1

The Battle of Darkness and Light

Introduction

Youth have always played an essential role in the progress of the Cause. In a message to Bahá'í youth the Universal House of Justice called for an “army” of “spiritually awakened and determined youth” who would arise to devote “in ever greater measure their valued energies” to promote the Cause of “their All-Watchful and Expectant Lord.”¹

The need for such an army has never been greater. For as the century draws to a close, the impact of the forces of darkness that characterize the old world order and the forces of light that characterize the new World Order of Bahá'u'lláh is destined to reach its climax. Both inside and outside the Faith great changes are revolutionizing the fate of humanity. It is the army of Bahá'u'lláh, the army of light, that is in the forefront of this battle.

This book will explore the role of youth during this most critical moment in human history. Chapters 1 and 2 will explore the circumstances of this epic battle of light and darkness, and of the role of those young men and women who arise to become spiritual “warriors”² in the army of light. Chapters 3–6 will examine specific responsibilities of these spiritual warriors, and chapters 7 and 8 will focus on the campaign of action.

¹ The Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 31

² The term “warrior” is used by Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and particularly by Shoghi Effendi; see the references in the index on page 93.

Overview

Shoghi Effendi described two processes at work in the world.³ The first is the great plan of God. It is a basically a process of disintegration which is disrupting the old world order and preparing the way for the new World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. The second process is the process of integration. This is the work of the Bahá'ís to raise the pattern of the new World Order.

The two processes of integration and disintegration are nearing a climax at the end of this century. The forces released by Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation—the forces of light—are destined to clash with the dark forces of a fast declining order.

The forces released by Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation need individuals who will serve as pure channels to do the work of the Cause. From the very beginning of the Faith, youth have arisen to serve in this way. Now, at so crucial a moment in the unfoldment of the Cause and the history of humanity, Bahá'í youth are again summoned to heroic deeds as spiritual warriors in the army of light.

Explanation

'Abdu'l-Bahá described the twentieth century as the “century of light.”⁴ He explained to the believers that the forces released by Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation were transforming the world in accordance with His teachings. He also foresaw the “dire contests destined to range the Army of Light against the forces of darkness.”⁵

Shoghi Effendi explained that the processes of integration and disintegration are accelerating every day and are relentlessly moving towards a climax.⁶ He promised the Bahá'ís that “the hour of their mightiest exertions and the supreme opportunity for their greatest exploits must coincide with the apocalyptic upheaval marking the lowest ebb in mankind's fast declining fortunes.”⁷

The unfoldment of this drama will first lead to the establishment of the Lesser Peace by the nations of the world.⁸ This “momentous and historic step,” will next “bring in its wake the spiritualization of

The Climactic Finish of the Century of Light

apocalyptic: portend of future disaster; relating to the apocalypse—the final battle prophesied in the Book of Revelations of the Bible in which the Army of God would defeat the forces of evil and usher in a new age of righteousness

3 *Wellspring of Guidance* 133–34

4 *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 66

5 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World* 123

6 *Messages to America* 13

7 *Citadel of Faith* 58

8 *The Promised Day Is Come* 121

the masses” as a result of the recognition and acknowledgment of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. This will be the essential condition for “that ultimate fusion of all races, creeds, classes, and nations which must signalize the emergence of His New World Order.”⁹

The Universal House of Justice noted that “from the very beginning of the Bahá’í Era, youth have played a vital part in the promulgation of God’s Revelation.”¹⁰ The Báb was only twenty-five years old when He declared His mission. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá served His Father from a very young age. Shoghi Effendi was a student when he assumed his responsibilities as Guardian at the age of twenty-two. And a host of other youth sacrificed themselves as martyrs and teachers for the Cause.

Youth again have a very important role to play as the processes of integration and disintegration reach their climax. “Having rejected the values and standards of the old world,” the Universal House of Justice states, “Bahá’í youth are eager to learn and adapt themselves to the standards of Bahá’u’lláh and so offer the Divine Program to fill the gap left by the abandonment of the old order.”¹¹

The characteristics of a spiritual warrior should not be confused with any concept of earthly conflict or sovereignty. “. . . The heroic band of the warriors of Bahá’u’lláh,” Shoghi Effendi explains, is “battling in His Name and by His aid for the purification, the unification and the spiritualization of a morally and spiritually bankrupt society, now hovering on the brink of self-destruction. . . .”¹²

To play their part in this battle, youth cannot simply identify themselves as Bahá’ís. They cannot be content to be passive participants in the activities of the Bahá’í community. Youth need to become transformed, disciplined warriors in the army of light. They must conquer themselves and the hearts of humanity to transform the world for their Lord. “Undoubtedly,” the Universal House of Justice affirmed, “it is within your power to contribute significantly to shaping the societies of the coming century; youth can move the world.”¹³

9 *The Promised Day Is Come* 123

10 *Wellspring of Guidance* 92

11 The Universal House of Justice, *Ridván* 1973

12 *Messages to the Bahá’í World* 120

13 *Unrestrained as the Wind* 183

Youth in the Vanguard

Becoming a Spiritual Warrior

Readings

1. “Behold the disturbances which, for many a long year, have afflicted the earth, and the perturbation that hath seized its peoples. . . . Though the world is encompassed with misery and distress, yet no man hath paused to reflect what the cause or source of that may be.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 218

2. “A twofold process, however, can be distinguished, each tending, in its own way and with an accelerated momentum, to bring to a climax the forces that are transforming the face of our planet. The first is essentially an integrating process, while the second is fundamentally disruptive. . . . The constructive process stands associated with the nascent Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, and is the harbinger of the New World Order that Faith must ere long establish. The destructive forces that characterize the other should be identified with a civilization that has refused to answer to the expectation of a new age, and is consequently falling into chaos and decline.

“A titanic, a spiritual struggle, unparalleled in its magnitude yet unspeakably glorious in its ultimate consequences, is being waged as a result of these opposing tendencies, in this age of transition....”

—Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* 170

3. “We are told by Shoghi Effendi that two great processes are at work in the world: the great Plan of God, tumultuous in its progress, working through mankind as a whole, tearing down barriers to world unity and forging humankind into a unified body in the fires of suffering and experience. This process will produce, in God’s due time, the Lesser Peace, the political unification of the world. . . . The second process, the task of breathing life into this unified body —of creating true unity and spirituality culminating in the Most Great Peace—is that of the Bahá’ís, who are laboring consciously, with detailed instructions and continuing Divine guidance, to erect the fabric of the Kingdom of God on earth. . . .”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 133–34

4. “The observable acceleration, during the past decade, of the two processes described by our beloved Guardian, the disintegration of the old order and the progress and consolidation of the new World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, may well come to be regarded by future historians as one of the most remarkable features of this period. The recent increase in this very acceleration is even more remarkable. Both within and without the Cause of God, powerful forces are operating to bring to a climax the twin tendencies of this portentous century.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Ridván* 140 B.E.

The Climactic Finish of the Century of Light

perturbation: disturbance, confusion

nascent: coming into existence; beginning to develop

harbinger: forerunner

tumultuous: marked by violent upheaval and agitation

Lesser Peace: the first of two major stages in which Bahá’ís believe peace will be established, resulting from a binding treaty among the nations for the political unification of the world

Most Great Peace: the second of two major stages in which Bahá’ís believe peace will be established; the practical consequence of the spiritualization of the world and the fusion of races, creeds, classes, and nations

culminating: reaching the climactic or decisive point

portentous: filled with prophetic significance

Youth in the Vanguard

delineated: laid out in detail

indulgence: satisfaction of one's desires, often in excess

futile: useless; having no useful result

remedial: intending to correct something; especially a defect

restorative: tending to renew or restore

helm: position of leadership or control

arduous: hard to accomplish; requiring great labor and effort

quicken: reviving; bringing to life

5. “The working out of God’s Major Plan proceeds mysteriously in ways directed by Him alone, but the Minor Plan that He has given us to execute, as our part in His grand design for the redemption of mankind, is clearly delineated. It is to this work that we must devote all our energies, for there is no one else to do it.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 134

6. “The dark horizon faced by a world which has failed to recognize the Promised One, the Source of its salvation, acutely affects the outlook of the younger generations; their distressing lack of hope and their indulgence in desperate but futile and even dangerous solutions make a direct claim on the remedial attention of Bahá’í youth, who, through their knowledge of that Source and the bright vision with which they have thus been endowed, cannot hesitate to impart to their fellow youth the restorative joy, the constructive hope, the radiant assurances of Bahá’u’lláh’s stupendous Revelation.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 187

7. “This generation of Bahá’í youth enjoys a unique distinction. You will live your lives in a period when the forces of history are moving to a climax, when mankind will see the establishment of the Lesser Peace, and during which the Cause of God will play an increasingly prominent role in the reconstruction of human society. It is you who will be called upon in the years to come to stand at the helm of the Cause in face of conditions and developments which can, as yet, scarcely be imagined.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 85

8. “The endurance of youth under arduous conditions, their vitality and vigor, and their ability to adapt themselves to local situations, to meet new challenges, and to impart their warmth and enthusiasm to those they visit, combined with the standard of conduct upheld by Bahá’í youth, make them potent instruments for the execution of the contemplated projects. Indeed, through these distinctive qualities they can become the spearhead of any enterprise and the driving force of any undertaking in which they participate, whether local or national. Our expectant eyes are fixed on Bahá’í youth!”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 104

9. “With love and utmost longing we call upon you to immerse yourselves in the Divine Teachings, champion the Cause of God and His Law, and arise for the quickening of mankind.”

—The Universal House of Justice, July 4, 1983 to the European Youth Conference in Innsbruck

Becoming a Spiritual Warrior

10. “O peoples of the earth! Haste ye to do the pleasure of God, and war ye valiantly, as it behooveth you to war, for the sake of proclaiming His resistless and immovable Cause. We have decreed that war shall be waged in the path of God with the armies of wisdom and utterance, and of a goodly character and praiseworthy deeds. Thus hath it been decided by Him Who is the All-Powerful, the Almighty.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 24

11. “The blessed Person of the Promised One is interpreted in the Holy Book as the Lord of Hosts—the heavenly armies. By heavenly armies those souls are intended who are entirely freed from the human world, transformed into celestial spirits and have become divine angels. Such souls are the rays of the Sun of Reality who will illumine all the continents. Each one is holding in his hand a trumpet, blowing the breath of life over all the regions. They are delivered from human qualities and the defects of the world of nature, are characterized with the characteristics of God, and are attracted with the fragrances of the Merciful. Like unto the apostles of Christ, who were filled with Him, these souls also have become filled with His Holiness Bahá’u’lláh; that is, the love of Bahá’u’lláh has so mastered every organ, part and limb of their bodies, as to leave no effect from the promptings of the human world.

celestial: heavenly

“These souls are the armies of God and the conquerors of the East and the West. Should one of them turn his face toward some direction and summon the people to the Kingdom of God, all the ideal forces and lordly confirmations will rush to his support and reinforcement. . . . Singly and alone he will attack the armies of the world, defeat the right and left wings of the hosts of all the countries, break through the lines of the legions of all the nations and carry his attack to the very center of the powers of the earth. This is the meaning of the Hosts of God. . . .

“Behold the portals which Bahá’u’lláh hath opened before you! Consider how exalted and lofty is the station you are destined to attain, how unique the favors with which you have been endowed.

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan* 47–48

12. “Once again I appeal to members of all communities to arise and enlist, ere the present opportunity is irretrievably lost, in the army of Bahá’u’lláh’s crusaders. . . .

“Would to God that Bahá’í warriors . . . will promptly arise and enroll themselves to achieve the goals. . . .

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World* 49

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 93.

Illustration

The forces of light and darkness shaking the foundations of human society have also had their effect upon the Bahá'ís. The Bahá'í community has been subjected to periodic persecutions in Irán from the birth of the Faith in 1844. A new outbreak of persecution began in the late 1970s at the hands of the Islamic clergy that continues, in some measures, even today. As a result, a new generation of spiritual warriors have arisen to champion the Cause of God. In one incident on June 18, 1983, ten Bahá'í women, ranging in age from 18 to 25, were hanged because they refused to give up their belief in Bahá'u'lláh. One of these women was Zarrin Muqimi. This is the story of the trial before her martyrdom:

“When Zarrin was taken to the religious magistrate to recant her Faith, and was told as usual either to recant or to be prepared for execution, she said in reply, ‘I have found the way to reality, and I am not prepared to give it away for any price. Therefore, I submit to the Court’s verdict.’ On another occasion the judge asked Zarrin, ‘To what extent are you prepared to adhere to your belief?’ Zarrin answered, ‘I hope to remain firm in my belief to the last moment.’ ‘But you must give up your belief!’ retorted the judge. Zarrin, annoyed by the repetition of the same proposal, exclaimed, ‘Your honor, you have been conducting my trial for many days, and have asked the same question, and I have given you a definite and satisfactory answer. I don’t think repeating the same thing is necessary!’ But the judge rudely repeated the same proposal. Dear Zarrin started crying and with a loud voice said, ‘In what language do you want me to tell you? Why don’t you leave me alone? My whole being is Bahá'u'lláh! My love is Bahá'u'lláh! My heart is dedicated to Bahá'u'lláh!’ The infuriated judge shouted, ‘I will pull out your heart from your chest!’ Zarrin replied, ‘Then my heart will call and cry out “Bahá'u'lláh! Bahá'u'lláh!”’ The judge, moved by this display of sentiment, left the room.”¹⁴

—*Unrestrained as the Wind* 53

¹⁴ The persecution of the Iranian believers during this period was itself a catalyst for the release of spiritual forces that led to the emergence of the Faith from obscurity. The Universal House of Justice wrote: “Every drop of blood shed by the valiant martyrs, every sigh heaved by the silent victims of oppression, every supplication for divine assistance offered by the faithful, has released, and will continue mysteriously to release, forces over which no antagonist of the Faith has any control, and which, as marshalled by an All-Watchful Providence, have served to noise abroad the name and fame of the Faith to the masses in all continents. . . . The current persecution has resulted in bringing the name and character of our beloved Faith to the attention of the world as never before in history.” (January 26, 1982 to the Bahá'ís of the World)

Further Study

Select one of the passages from the “Readings” section.

What does the passage say?	In what specific ways can this passage be applied in your life?
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List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 93 and the additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

1. 2. 3. 4.

God Passes By, by Shoghi Effendi

A history of the first hundred years of the Faith by the Guardian, illustrating the contest of the forces of light and darkness over that period.

Unrestrained as the Wind, by the Bahá'í National Youth Committee

A compilation containing references describing the role and responsibilities of youth in creating a life of service dedicated to Bahá'u'lláh.

The Forces of Light and Darkness, by Hooper Dunbar

Audio tapes of a summer school class available from the Louhelen Bahá'í School.

**Personal
Reflection**

**Remaining
Questions**

**Additional
Reading and
Resources**

Questions

The following questions review parts of the content of the lesson for use in individual study. Refer to the Discussion section on the next page for questions to consider in group study.

1. Circle the factors associated with God's Great Plan (major plan):

- a. the Lesser Peace or the Most Great Peace
- b. integration or disintegration
- c. work of the world or work of the Bahá'ís
- d. declining civilization or New World Order

2. List four of the six characteristics of youth identified by the Universal House of Justice which enable them to become "the spearhead of any enterprise and the driving force of any undertaking in which they participate."

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

3. List three objectives for which Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual warriors are battling:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

Answers

The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotes, you may have different answers. Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. God's major plan refers to the processes "working through mankind as a whole" while the minor plan is "that of the Bahá'ís. The Lesser Peace, the processes of disintegration, and a declining civilization characterize the unfoldment of God's major plan. See #1–#4 on page 8, and #5 on page 9.
2. See #8 on page 9. The six possibilities are:
 - the "endurance of youth under arduous conditions,"
 - "their vitality and vigor,"
 - "their ability to adapt themselves to local situations,"
 - their ability "to meet new challenges,"
 - their ability "to impart their warmth and enthusiasm," and
 - "the standard of conduct upheld by Bahá'í youth."
3. See page 7. Shoghi Effendi describes the objectives as:
 - the purification;
 - the unification; and
 - the spiritualization of a morally bankrupt society

Discussion

Describe in your own words the processes of integration and disintegration now at work in the world. What is happening as the century draws to a close? What evidences do you see of these two processes? (Refer to #1–#4 on page 8, and #5 on page 9.)

What is the unique distinction of the Bahá'í youth of this generation? (Refer to #7 on page 9.)

What are the responsibilities of Bahá'í youth at this critical time? (Refer to #5–#12 on pages 9–10.)

What are the qualities of a spiritual warrior? What does it mean to wage spiritual warfare? How is this similar to actual warfare? How is it different? (Refer to #9–#12 on page 10.)

2

Disciplines of the Spiritual Warrior

Introduction

Shoghi Effendi wrote: “The friends must, at all times, bear in mind that they are, in a way, like soldiers under attack. The world is at present in an exceedingly dark condition spiritually; hatred and prejudice, of every sort, are literally tearing it to pieces. We, on the other hand, are the custodians of the opposite forces, the forces of love, of unity, of peace and integration, and we must constantly be on guard . . . lest through us these destructive, negative forces enter into our midst.”¹

A strong army requires disciplined soldiers. The army of light is no exception. Those who arise to become spiritual warriors in the battle of light and darkness must take responsibility for strengthening their relationship with God, striving for spiritual transformation, and performing worthy deeds of service to His Cause.

Achieving such goals is a gradual process, requiring discipline and consistent effort from the individual. This chapter introduces the disciplines needed to overcome the forces of darkness.

The next four chapters will focus on four paths of service for youth. Each of these paths of service must be vigorously pursued. Success in each depends on the foundation of spiritual discipline discussed in this chapter.

¹ written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Living the Life* 26

Overview

Upon the shoulders of youth, Shoghi Effendi states, rests “all the responsibilities for the progress” of the Faith.² To fulfill this lofty obligation, Bahá’í youth should become transformed, spiritual warriors — “incarnate light.”³

The battle of darkness and light involves the clash of forces shaping the world. Materialism, prejudice, nationalism, irreligion, and other dark forces are contesting with love, unity, and spirituality for the hearts and destiny of humanity.

The weapons used in this battle are essentially spiritual in nature. These weapons are the elements of self-discipline and transformation described in the Bahá’í Writings. Bahá’í youth can use these weapons to attract spiritual power to overcome the forces of darkness and to become a pure channel for the forces of light that are building the new world order.

Explanation

Shoghi Effendi noted the “beginnings of a world upheaval,” which had unleashed “forces” that are “gravely deranging the social, the religious, the political, and the economic equilibrium of organized society.”⁴ Among these dark forces, he explains, are “racialism,”⁵ “atheism, nationalism, secularism and materialism.”⁶

We cannot hope to triumph in the battle against these forces of darkness as our own weak selves. We have to be transformed. This occurs through action and reflection based on Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings.

The purpose of every Revelation, Bahá’u’lláh explains, is to transform the character of each human being.⁷ The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh has released potent spiritual forces which can come to our aid and change us. Through these forces the “sorry gnat” becomes an “eagle,” the “sparrow” becomes a “royal falcon.”⁸ Through them a humble youth becomes a spiritual warrior.

² *Centers of Bahá’í Learning* 14

³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan* 48

⁴ *The Advent of Divine Justice* 3

⁵ *Messages to the Bahá’í World* 37

⁶ *Messages to the Bahá’í World* 169

⁷ *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 240

⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 23

The process by which one becomes transformed is necessarily slow. It requires patience and persistence to struggle and systematically apply the Bahá'í Teachings in our daily lives.

In one quotation, 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls upon Bahá'í youth to be "apprentices of God."⁹ What does this mean? Consider the case of an apprentice in a tailor shop. The apprentice learns from a master tailor. This learning takes place through action and guidance, not simply by reading a book.

The apprentice makes progress day by day by practicing the actual skills of a tailor. First, the apprentice learns to sew; next, to measure someone and cut material. Finally the day comes when the apprentice puts many skills together and makes an entire suit. It is not the perfect suit of the master tailor—but with more practice, it becomes better.

The would-be spiritual warrior, as an "apprentice of God," engages in the work of the Kingdom. Day by day he struggles with the forces of darkness. Day by day she¹⁰ perfects her spiritual skills: overcoming her shortcomings, transforming her character, growing closer to God through prayer, study, teaching, and service to humanity. Through the aid of God he attracts the forces of light that operate to change the world.

"Before the eyes of the warriors enlisting under its banner," Shoghi Effendi wrote, "stretch fields of exploration and consolidation of such vastness as might well dazzle the eyes and strike awe into the heart of any soul less robust than those who have arisen to identify themselves with its Cause. The heights its champions must scale are indeed formidable. The pitfalls that bestrew their path are still numerous. The road leading to ultimate and total victory is tortuous, stony and narrow. Theirs, however, is the emphatic assurance, revealed by the Pen of the Most High . . . that 'Whosoever ariseth to aid our Cause God will render him victorious over ten times ten thousand souls, and, should he wax in his love for Me, him will We cause to triumph over all that is in heaven and all that is on earth.'"¹¹

⁹ *Bahá'í Education* 53

¹⁰ The image of a spiritual warrior is applied to both women and men in the Bahá'í Writings; see *Women* 40–41 (United Kingdom edition).

¹¹ *Messages to the Bahá'í World* 101

Readings

1. “The friends must realize the Power of the Holy Spirit which is manifest and quickening them at this time through the appearance of Bahá’u’lláh. There is no force of heaven or earth which can affect them if they place themselves wholly under the influence of the Holy Spirit and under its guidance.”

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Power of Divine Assistance* 24

2. “These same people . . . as soon as they drank the immortal draught of faith, from the cup of certitude, at the hand of the Manifestation of the All-Glorious, were so transformed that they would renounce for His sake their kindred, their substance, their lives, their beliefs, yea, all else save God! So overpowering was their yearning for God . . . that the world and all that is therein faded before their eyes into nothingness. . . . A single warrior of that host would face and fight a multitude! And yet, how could they, but for the transformation wrought in their lives, be capable of manifesting such deeds which are contrary to the ways of men and incompatible with their worldly desires?”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 155–56

3. “The Kingdom of God is possessed of limitless potency. Audacious must be the army of life if the confirming aid of that Kingdom is to be repeatedly vouchsafed unto it. . . . Vast is the arena, and the time ripe to spur on the charger within it. Now is the time to reveal the force of one’s strength, the stoutness of one’s heart and the might of one’s soul.”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Messages to America* 17

4. “His Holiness the Báb hath said: ‘Should a tiny ant desire in this day to be possessed of such power as to be able to unravel the abstrusest and most bewildering passages of the Qur’án, its wish will no doubt be fulfilled, inasmuch as the mystery of eternal might vibrates within the innermost being of all created things.’ If so helpless a creature can be endowed with so subtle a capacity, how much more efficacious must be the power released through the liberal effusions of the grace of Bahá’u’lláh! . . .

“Wherefore, O ye illumined youth, strive by night and by day to unravel the mysteries of the mind and spirit, and to grasp the secrets of the Day of God. Inform yourselves of the evidences that the Most Great Name hath dawned. Open your lips in praise. Adduce convincing arguments and proofs. Lead those who thirst to the fountain of life; grant ye true health to the ailing. Be ye apprentices of God; be ye physicians directed by God, and heal ye the sick among humankind.”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Education* 52–53

Channeling the Forces of Light

draught: the portion poured out for drinking; dose

incompatible: cannot exist together in harmony

audacious: daring; adventurous; bold

vouchsafed: granted

stoutness: resolute or bold in character, valiant; strong and vigorous

efficacious: effective; capable of producing a desired effect

effusions: unrestrained outpouring

adduce: cite; advance

apprentice: one who learns a trade under the guidance of a skilled craftsman

5. “No true and faithful Bahá’í should in this day remain idle or seek what would give him comfort or even satisfaction. We should be constantly assailing the forces of darkness that have enveloped the earth and hasten the dawn of the new day foretold by Bahá’u’lláh.”

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, April 19, 1933

6. “Neither the local nor national representatives of the community, . . . nor even the Guardian himself, . . . can decide where the duty of the individual lies. . . . The individual alone must alone assess its character, consult his conscience, prayerfully consider all its aspects, manfully struggle against the natural inertia that weighs him down in his effort to arise, shed, heroically and irrevocably, the trivial and superfluous attachments which hold him back, empty himself of every thought that may tend to obstruct his path, mix . . . with men and women, in all walks of life . . . and win them over tactfully, lovingly, prayerfully and persistently, to the Faith he himself has espoused.

“The gross materialism that engulfs the entire nation at the present hour; the attachment to worldly things that enshrouds the souls of men; the fears and anxieties that distract their minds; the pleasure and dissipations that fill their time, the prejudices and animosities that darken their outlook, the apathy and lethargy that paralyze their spiritual faculties—these are among the formidable obstacles that stand in the path of every would-be warrior in the service of Bahá’u’lláh, obstacles which he must battle against and surmount in his crusade for the redemption of his own countrymen.

“To the degree that the home front crusader is himself cleansed of these impurities, liberated from these petty preoccupations and gnawing anxieties, delivered from these prejudices and antagonisms, emptied of self, and filled by the healing and the sustaining power of God, will he be able to combat the forces arrayed against him, magnetize the souls of those whom he seeks to convert, and win their unreserved, their enthusiastic and enduring allegiance to the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.

“Delicate and strenuous though the task may be, however arduous and prolonged the effort required, whatsoever the nature of the perils and pitfalls that beset the path of whoever arises to revive the fortunes of a Faith struggling against the rising forces of materialism, nationalism, secularism, racialism, ecclesiasticism, the all-conquering potency of the grace of God, vouchsafed through the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, will, undoubtedly, mysteriously and surprisingly, enable whosoever arises to champion His Cause to win complete and total victory.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 148–49

Overcoming the Forces of Darkness

assailing: attacking

inertia: resistance to move, act or change

irrevocably: in a way that cannot be changed

superfluous: more than what is necessary; extra

espouse: give loyalty or support to

dissipations: wasteful use of time, money, or energy

lethargy: drowsy or sluggish indifference; apathy

formidable: difficult to overcome

surmount: overcome

materialism: excessive regard for worldly or material concerns

nationalism: devotion to the interests or culture of a particular nation

secularism: indifference to or rejection of religion and religious considerations

racialism: racism; the belief that some races are better than others

ecclesiasticism: excessive attachment to the principles, practices, and organization of the church

7. “Let each morn be better than its eve and each morrow richer than its yesterday.”
—Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 138

8. “Recite ye the verses of God every morning and evening. Whoso reciteth them not hath truly failed to fulfill his pledge to the Covenant of God and His Testament. . . .” —Bahá’u’lláh, *Spiritual Foundations* 1

9. “The Guardian particularly appreciates the fact that you have been faithfully observing Bahá’u’lláh’s injunction regarding the recital of the daily obligatory prayers, and have thereby set such a high example before your Bahá’í fellow-youth. These daily prayers have been endowed with a special potency which only those who regularly recite them can adequately appreciate.”
—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations* 16

10. “The principles of the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh should be carefully studied, one by one, until they are realized and understood by mind and heart—so will you become strong followers of the light, truly spiritual, heavenly soldiers of God, acquiring and spreading the true civilization in Persia, in Europe, and in the whole world.”
—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Importance of Deepening* 15

11. “What every believer, new or old, should realize is that the Cause has the spiritual power to re-create us if we make the effort to let that power influence us. . . . We must supplicate Bahá’u’lláh to assist us to overcome the failings in our own characters, and also exert our own will power in mastering ourselves.”
—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations* 17–18

12. “Set before thine eyes God’s unerring Balance and, as one standing in His Presence, weigh in that Balance thine actions every day, every moment of thy life. Bring thyself to account ere thou art summoned to a reckoning. . . .”
—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 236

13. “Such a chaste and holy life . . . demands daily vigilance in the control of one’s carnal desires and corrupt inclinations.”
—Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* 30

14. “He should consume every wayward thought with the flame of His loving mention, and, with the swiftness of lightning, pass by all else save Him.”
—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 265

A Pattern of Spiritual Discipline

Prayer and Use of the Word of God

injunction: command

potency: powerful, possessing strength; having a strong effect or influence

Self-Mastery: Fighting Spiritual Battles

reckoning: determination of what is due; judgment

vigilance: alert watchfulness

carnal: of the flesh; sensual desires

15. “Chant the Words of God and, pondering over their meaning, transform them into actions!” — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Importance of Deepening* 14

16. “Prayer and meditation are very important factors in deepening the spiritual life of the individual, but with them must go also action and example, as these are the tangible results of the former. Both are essential.” — written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations* 17

17. “You should rest assured that your strict adherence to the laws and observances enjoined by Bahá’u’lláh is the one power that can effectively guide and enable you to overcome the tests and trials of your life, and help you to continually grow and develop spiritually.” — written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations* 16

18. “Never must they let a day pass without teaching some soul, trusting to Bahá’u’lláh that the seed will grow.” — written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Individual and Teaching* 35

19. “His brotherly advice to you, and to all loyal and ardent young believers like you, is that you should deepen your knowledge of the history and of the tenets of the Faith, not merely by means of careful and thorough study, but also through active, whole-hearted and continued participation in all the activities, whether administrative or otherwise, of your community. The Bahá’í community life provides you with an indispensable laboratory where you can translate into living and constructive action, the principles which you imbibe from the teachings.” — written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 36–37

20. “Perseverance is an essential condition. In every project firmness and steadfastness will undoubtedly lead to good results; otherwise it will exist for some days, and then be discontinued.” — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Education* 51–52

21. “It is not sufficient to pray diligently for guidance, but this prayer must be followed by meditation as to the best methods of action and then action itself. Even if the action should not immediately produce results, or perhaps not be entirely correct, that does not make so much difference, because prayers can only be answered through action and if someone’s action is wrong, God can use that method of showing the pathway which is right.” — written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Individual and Teaching* 40

Putting the Teachings into Action

ponder: to consider carefully; to meditate, reflect

adherence: faithful attachment; loyalty; devotion

tenets: basic principles, doctrines held by a person or an organization

indispensable: cannot be managed without

imbibe: to receive or absorb into the mind

Perseverance in Action

perseverance: holding to a course, belief, purpose without giving way; steadfastness

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 93.

Further Study

Select one of the passages from the “Readings” section.

What does the passage say?	In what specific ways can this passage be applied in your life?
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List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 93 and the additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

1. 2. 3. 4.

Spiritual Foundations

The Importance of Deepening

The Individual and Teaching

Living the Life

Compilations containing references on basic Bahá'í disciplines such as prayer, meditation, deepening, teaching, and living a Bahá'í life.

The Forces of Light and Darkness, by Hooper Dunbar

Audio tapes of a summer school class available from the Louhelen Bahá'í School.

**Personal
Reflection**

**Remaining
Questions**

**Additional
Reading and
Resources**

Questions

The following questions review parts of the content of the lesson for use in individual study. Refer to the Discussion section on the next page for questions to consider in group study.

1. List four of the forces of darkness described by the Guardian:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

2. (Circle all that apply.) Which of the following does Shoghi Effendi describe as an obstacle in the path of the “would-be” warriors in the service of Bahá’u’lláh:

- a. materialism
- b. ecclesiasticism
- c. pleasures and dissipations
- d. apathy and lethargy

3. (Circle all that apply.) Which activities should Bahá’ís engage in **every day** as part of their personal spiritual discipline:

- a. praying
- b. reading the Writings
- c. taking account of their actions
- d. teaching the Faith

Answers

The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotes, you may have different answers. Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. Those listed in this chapter include materialism, nationalism, secularism, racialism, ecclesiasticism, and atheism. See page 16 and 19.
2. **a, c, and d.** See #6, page 19. Shoghi Effendi describes choice “b” as one of the forces of darkness, but does not list it as one of the personal obstacles that have to be overcome by the would-be warriors in the service of Bahá’u’lláh.
3. **a, b, c, and d.** See #8, #9, and #12 on page 20 and #18 on page 21. The passages on pages 20 and 21 also discuss other practices that should be part of the regular spiritual discipline of a spiritual warrior in the army of light.

Discussion

What does it mean to be an “apprentice of God?” How does this assist us to become a channel for divine power?

How is audacity related to attracting divine power? (Refer to #3 on page 18.)

List the forces of darkness described in this chapter. What are each of these forces? Give examples of how each is operating in the world. (Refer to pages 16 and 19.)

Describe, in your own words, the individual struggle to overcome the forces of darkness described by Shoghi Effendi on page 19. What action must the individual take? What are the obstacles to overcome? How will the individual triumph? What are the implications of this passage for your own personal situation?

What are the elements of a daily personal spiritual discipline? Consider, for yourself, whether you are engaged in each of these activities? What can you do to change your pattern of spiritual activities to include the actions called for in the Writings? (Refer to pages 20–21.)

Exercise

The warrior of God receives directions for action from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice. Being an effective warrior depends on your ability to identify the directives in what you've read, then acting on them. The following exercise will give you practice in this task.

The directives for action are easily identified. Usually they are action verbs followed by a few words that expand the meaning. Often there are several such commands in a row. These directives are frequently accompanied by the results of obedience. In the passages below, find the directives for action and underline them. The first few are done for you. Next, list the directives in your own words and give ways you can act on them.

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh:

1. "O ye beloved of God! Repose not yourselves on your couches, nay bestir yourselves as soon as ye recognize your Lord, the Creator, and hear of the things which have befallen Him, and hasten to His assistance. Unloose your tongues, and proclaim unceasingly His Cause. This shall be better for you than all the treasures of the past and of the future, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth."

—*Gleanings* 330

2. "Beware, O people of Bahá, lest ye walk in the ways of them whose words differ from their deeds. Strive that ye may be enabled to manifest to the peoples of the earth the signs of God, and to mirror forth His commandments. Let your acts be a guide to all mankind. . . . It is through your deeds that ye can distinguish yourselves from others. Through them the brightness of your light can be shed upon the whole earth."

—*Gleanings* 305

From the Writings of Shoghi Effendi:

3. "The individual alone must . . . consult his conscience, prayerfully consider all its aspects, manfully struggle against the natural inertia that weighs him down in his effort to arise, shed, heroically and irrevocably, the trivial and superfluous attachments which hold him back, empty himself of every thought that may tend to obstruct his path, mix, in obedience to the counsels of the Author of His Faith, and in imitation of the One Who is its true Exemplar, with men and women, in all walks of life, seek to touch their hearts, through the distinction which characterizes his thoughts, his words and his acts, and win them over tactfully, lovingly, prayerfully and persistently, to the Faith he himself has espoused."

—*Citadel of Faith* 148

Feedback

The following are suggested answers to the exercise on the previous page. The plans for action will, of course vary from person to person.

1. “O ye beloved of God! Repose not yourselves on your couches, nay bestir yourselves as soon as ye recognize your Lord, the Creator, and hear of the things which have befallen Him, and hasten to His assistance. Unloose your tongues, and proclaim unceasingly His Cause. This shall be better for you than all the treasures of the past and of the future, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth.”

Directives:

- don't lay around doing nothing
- now that you've recognized Bahá'u'lláh, get up and get moving
- hurry to assist Bahá'u'lláh by teaching
- don't be silent about the Faith—teach

Actions:

- watch less television—1 hour per day
- participate in the community's teaching plan—call Marcia and offer to help
- make plans to help—immediately!
- try to teach Emily, Joseph, May and my history teacher

2. “Beware, O people of Bahá, lest ye walk in the ways of them whose words differ from their deeds. Strive that ye may be enabled to manifest to the peoples of the earth the signs of God, and to mirror forth His commandments. Let your acts be a guide to all mankind. . . . It is through your deeds that ye can distinguish yourselves from others. Through them the brightness of your light can be shed upon the whole earth.”

Directives:

- don't be like others whose words and deeds don't match
- try to show the signs of God
- reflect, through obedience and action, the laws
- let your actions be an example to others

Actions:

- do what I say I believe
- love is a sign of God—I will try to be more loving to people by being of service
- obey Bahá'í laws—no more backbiting
- if I don't backbite, and don't listen to others' backbiting, eventually it should lessen

3. “The individual alone must . . . consult his conscience, prayerfully consider all its aspects, manfully struggle against the natural inertia that weighs him down in his effort to arise, shed, heroically and irrevocably, the trivial and superfluous attachments which hold him back, empty himself of every thought that may tend to obstruct his path, mix, in obedience to the counsels of the Author of His Faith, and in imitation of the One Who is its true Exemplar, with men and women, in all walks of life, seek to touch their hearts, through the distinction which characterizes his thoughts, his words and his acts, and win them over tactfully, lovingly, prayerfully and persistently, to the Faith he himself has espoused.”

Directives:

- consult your conscience about what to do for the Faith
- struggle against the pull to do nothing
- get rid of unnecessary attachments that hold you back
- change negative thinking about obstacles—be positive
- mix with a variety of people, try to touch their hearts by good character and actions, and teach them

Actions:

- set aside time to pray and meditate on it
- get up 15 minutes early each day to prepare for teaching
- spend less time and money on staying fashionable
- make myself a sign—Think positively; see obstacles as challenges to be overcome
- make friends outside my “group” and invite them to a fireside; teach my ill neighbor, Mr. Lee, by caring for his yard

3

Strengthening the Spirit

Introduction

This chapter looks at the first of four lines of action for Bahá'í youth: strengthening the spirit.

“How to attain spirituality,” the Guardian noted, “is indeed a question to which every young man and woman must sooner or later try to find a satisfactory answer. It is precisely because no such satisfactory answer has been given or found, that modern youth finds itself bewildered, and is being consequently carried away by the materialistic forces that are so powerfully undermining the foundations of man’s moral and spiritual life. Indeed, the chief reason for the evils rampant in society is the lack of spirituality.”¹

Thus, the first weapon of the spiritual warrior to combat the forces of darkness is a powerful spirit resulting from an unshakable connection to the Source of divine power. In this way the spiritual warrior becomes a channel² for the divine forces of light.

¹ written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations* 13–14

² written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Power of Divine Assistance* 20

Overview

“. . . the core of religious faith,” Shoghi Effendi writes, “is that mystic feeling which unites man with God.”³ Our first task as spiritual warriors is to bind our hearts to God so that we may draw the divine power that is the life-blood of our spiritual existence.

Shoghi Effendi emphasizes at least four interrelated actions that flow from this spiritual connection. They include loving God, being firm in the Covenant, interacting with the Word of God, and relying on God. In each of these ways our hearts are bound more strongly to God.

By strengthening our spiritual connection with God and His will through prayer and obedience to the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, we become a more effective channel for spiritual power.

Explanation

Shoghi Effendi makes the following appeal to the spiritual warriors of Bahá’u’lláh: “Putting on the armor of His love, firmly buckling on the shield of His mighty Covenant, mounted on the steed of steadfastness, holding aloft the lance of the Word of the Lord of Hosts, and with unquestioning reliance on His promises as the best provision for their journey, let them set their faces towards those fields that still remain unexplored and direct their steps to those goals that are as yet unattained. . . .”⁴

This quotation emphasizes four actions that come from our attachment to God and that equip us for spiritual battle. Each affects our ability to draw spiritual power.

- **Loving God** attracts God’s love to ourselves and helps burn away the “veils of the satanic self”⁵ that stand in the way of our spiritual growth.
- **Being firm in the Covenant** means being steadfast and obedient to the laws and the institutions of the Faith. Firmness protects us from tests and attracts the “breaths of the Spirit.”⁶

³ written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations* 14

⁴ *Messages to the Bahá’í World* 102

⁵ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys* 11

⁶ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 683

- **Interacting with the Word of God** connects our hearts to God,⁷ arms us with “the power of true knowledge,”⁸ and can “cleanse”⁹ the heart.
- **Relying on God** is trusting that God’s promises of assistance and ultimate victory will be met, enabling us to act without being paralyzed by our personal weaknesses.¹⁰

It is the responsibility of each spiritual warrior to strengthen the connection to God and become a channel for the “mysterious forces”¹¹ of “incalculable . . . potency”¹² that Bahá’u’lláh has released into the world. The result is a greater flow of power with which to combat the forces of darkness.

“Just one mature soul, with spiritual understanding and a profound knowledge of the Faith,” Shoghi Effendi writes, “can set a whole country ablaze—so great is the power of the Cause to work through a pure and selfless channel.”¹³ That more can be accomplished with the assistance of tremendous energy is obvious. A far greater tract of farmland can be tilled with a horse and plow than with human hands alone. If a tractor replaces the horse, the effect is multiplied!

Nurturing our relationship with God—our “inner spiritual development”—is “the very foundation and purpose of the religion of God.”¹⁴ It must be carefully cultivated in our daily spiritual disciplines. This process is similar to the operation of a radio.

Information is transmitted by radio waves beamed into the air by a radio station. The energy is there, but the listener is affected only if the radio is turned on and tuned to the correct channel. The more accurately the radio is tuned to the radio waves being transmitted, the less static there is and the clearer the reception. In like manner the receptive soul, through prayer and other spiritual practices, can become an accurately tuned channel connected to God and His divine power. This soul is then empowered to influence others.

7 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 92

8 Bahá’u’lláh, *The Importance of Deepening* 2

9 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 164

10 reported words of the Báb, *The Dawnbreakers* 94

11 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* 103

12 Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* 16

13 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Power of Divine Assistance* 23

14 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations* 14–15

Readings

1. “It is not sufficient for a believer merely to accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality which he can acquire chiefly by means of prayer. The Bahá’í Faith, like all other Divine Religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character. Its chief goal is the development of the individual and society, through the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers. It is the soul of man which has first to be fed.”

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations* 14

2. “The endowments which distinguish the human race from all other forms of life are summed up in what is known as the human spirit; the mind is its essential quality. These endowments have enabled humanity to build civilizations and to prosper materially. But such accomplishments alone have never satisfied the human spirit, whose mysterious nature inclines it towards transcendence, a reaching towards an invisible realm, towards the ultimate reality, that unknowable essence of essences called God. The religions brought to mankind by a succession of spiritual luminaries have been the primary link between humanity and that ultimate reality, and have galvanized and refined mankind’s capacity to achieve spiritual success together with social progress.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace* 17

3. “. . . the believers . . . are after all but mere channels through which God carries His Message to Mankind. They are instruments, whereby He communicates His will to His people. . . . They should have confidence in the divine assistance promised to them by Bahá’u’lláh, and strengthened and revived by such an assurance they should continue to toil till the very end of their lives.”

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Power of Divine Assistance* 20

4. “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.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words* 4

5. “. . . it is my hope . . . that day by day ye will love God in ever greater measure, and become more tightly bound to the Beauty that abideth forever. . . . For love of God and spiritual attraction do cleanse and purify the human heart . . . and once the heart is entirely attached to the Lord, and bound over to the Blessed Perfection, then will the grace of God be revealed.”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 202-03

Connection to God: Source of Divine Power

cultivate: to form and refine

transcendence: that which exists above and independent of physical reality

luminaries: notable persons, in this case the Manifestations of God

galvanize: to arouse to awareness or action

Through Loving God

6. “Follow not, therefore, your earthly desires, and violate not the Covenant of God, nor break your pledge to Him. With firm determination, with the whole affection of your heart, and with the full force of your words, turn ye unto Him, and walk not in the ways of the foolish. . . . Break not the bond that uniteth you with your Creator, and be not of those that have erred and strayed from His ways.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 328

7. “. . . in the beginning the believers must make their steps firm in the Covenant so that the confirmations of Bahá’u’lláh may encircle them from all sides, the cohorts of the Supreme Concourse may become their supporters and helpers, and the exhortations and advices of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, like unto the pictures engraved on stone, may remain permanent and ineffaceable in the tablets of all hearts.”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Covenant* 15

8. “Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 136

9. “. . . every believer must continually study the sacred Writings and the instructions of the beloved Guardian, striving always to attain a new and better understanding of their import to him and to his society. He should pray fervently for Divine Guidance, wisdom and strength to do what is pleasing to God, and to serve Him at all times and to the best of his ability.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *A Chaste and Holy Life* 2

10. “He that giveth up himself wholly to God, God shall, assuredly, be with him; and he that placeth his complete trust in God, God shall, verily, protect him from whatsoever may harm him, and shield him from the wickedness of every evil plotter.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 233

11. “. . . he would advise you to persevere in the task you have set your heart to accomplish, confident that through Divine assistance you will be able, sooner or later, to attain your goal. Reliance on God is indeed the strongest and safest weapon which the Bahá’í teacher can carry. For by its means no earthly power can remain unconquered, and no obstacle become insuperable.”

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Power of Divine Assistance* 51

Through Firmness in the Covenant

cohorts: companions; a group or band united in some struggle

Through Interacting with the Word of God

Through Relying on God

insuperable: cannot be overcome; insurmountable

Cultivating the Spiritual Bond through Prayer and Meditation

12. “For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling that unites man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer. . . .

“The believers, particularly the young ones, should therefore fully realize the necessity of praying. For prayer is absolutely indispensable to their inner spiritual development. . . .”

— written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations* 14

13. “The obligatory prayers are binding inasmuch as they are conducive to humility and submissiveness, to setting one’s face toward God and expressing devotion to Him. Through such prayer man holdeth communion with God, seeketh to draw near unto Him, converseth with the true Beloved of one’s heart, and attaineth spiritual stations.”

— ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Spiritual Foundations* 8

14. “You have asked whether our prayers go beyond Bahá’u’lláh: it all depends whether we pray to Him directly or through Him to God. We may do both, and also can pray directly to God, but our prayers would certainly be more effective and illuminating if they are addressed to Him through His Manifestation, Bahá’u’lláh.”

— written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations* 15

15. “Recite ye the verses of God in such measure that ye be not overtaken with fatigue or boredom. Burden not your souls so as to cause exhaustion and weigh them down, but rather endeavor to lighten them, that they may soar on the wings of revealed Verses unto the dawning-place of His signs. This is conducive to nearer access unto God, were ye to comprehend.”

— Bahá’u’lláh, *Spiritual Foundations* 1

16. “When one supplicates to his Lord, turns to Him and seeks bounty from His Ocean, this supplication brings light to his heart, illumination to his sight, life to his soul and exaltation to his being. . . .

“By these attractions one’s ability and capacity increase. When the vessel is enlarged the water increases, and when the thirst grows the bounty of the cloud becomes agreeable to the taste of man.”

— ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Spiritual Foundations* 11

17. “The true worshiper, while praying, should endeavor not so much to ask God to fulfill his wishes and desires, but rather to adjust these and make them conform to the Divine Will. Only through such an attitude can one derive that feeling of inner peace and contentment which the power of prayer alone can confer.”

— written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations* 16

conducive: tending to cause, promote, or help bring about

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 93.

Illustration

“Shoghi Effendi was a very remarkable young man, and of course he just worshipped ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. And when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá passed away, the whole world became dark for him. All light had gone out. When he returned to the Holy Land, he had in mind, from the things which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had said to him—and I am now telling you what he said—he said ‘I had in mind that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would give me the honor of . . . calling together the great conclave which would elect the Universal House of Justice. And I thought in His Will and Testament that that was probably what He was instructing be done.’

“‘But,’ he said, ‘instead of that I found that I was appointed the Guardian of the Cause of God. . . . I didn’t want to be the Guardian of the Cause. [In the] first place, I didn’t think that I was worthy. Next place, I didn’t want to face these responsibilities. . . . I didn’t want to be the Guardian. I knew what it meant. I knew that my life as a human being was over.’ He said ‘I didn’t want it and I didn’t want to face it.’

“‘So . . . remember I left the Holy Land, and I went up into the mountains of Switzerland, and I fought with myself until I conquered myself. Then I came back and I turned myself over to God and I was the Guardian.’ ‘Now,’ he said, ‘every Bahá’í in the world, every person in the world has to do exactly that same thing. Whether you are a Hand of the Cause, whether you are a Knight of Bahá’u’lláh, whether you are a member of a National Assembly, whether you are a teacher, whether you are a pioneer, whether you are an administrator, regardless of what you are, whatever you are doing in the Cause, every Bahá’í must fight with himself and conquer himself. And when he has conquered himself, then he becomes a true instrument for the service of the Cause of God—and not until that. And he will not achieve as great a success until he has done it. And this is what every Bahá’í in the world should know.’

“And this is one of the main things I want you to get out of this talk tonight and bear out of this talk: the Guardian’s instructions that every individual must fight with himself, must conquer himself, must overcome his lower nature, must overcome himself, and turn himself over to God so that the Holy Spirit can function through you. And when the Holy Spirit functions through you then you will gain victory after victory. Because the Holy Spirit is the creative aspect of God and it cannot do other than win victories and make successes for the Cause.”

—from a talk given by Hand of the Cause of God Leroy Ioas, *In the Days of the Guardian*

Further Study

Select one of the passages from the “Readings” section.

What does the passage say?	In what specific ways can this passage be applied in you life?
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List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 93 and the additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

1. 2. 3. 4.

Prayers and Meditations, by Bahá’u’lláh

A compilation of prayers by Bahá’u’lláh. Especially fascinating are those passages which are an expression of Bahá’u’lláh’s personal communion with God.

Spiritual Foundations, a compilation

A compilation of the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi on prayer, meditation, and the devotional attitude.

Unrestrained as the Wind, Chapter 2, pages 7–20

This chapter from the compilation prepared by the National Youth Committee addresses our relationship with God.

**Personal
Reflection**

**Remaining
Questions**

**Additional
Reading**

Questions

The following questions review parts of the content of the lesson for use in individual study. Refer to the Discussion section on the next page for questions to consider in group study.

1. What are four ways in which individuals make a spiritual connection to God in order to become a channel for Divine Power?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

2. Which of the following statements about prayer are true:

- a. communion with God takes place through prayer
- b. prayer is indispensable for spiritual growth
- c. you should pray as long as you can
- d. in prayer you converse with God
- e. you can ask God for whatever you want
- f. prayer increases your capacity

Answers

The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotes, you may have different answers. Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. Through interaction with the Word of God, the love of God, firmness in the Covenant, and reliance upon God.
2. **a, b, d, e, and f** are true. For “a,” see #12; for “b,” see #12; for “d,” see #13; and for “f,” see #16, all on page 32. Regarding “c,” Bahá’u’lláh advises against prayers of such duration that they burden or fatigue the soul. See #15, page 32. Regarding “e,” while Shoghi Effendi does say that it is best to pray to bring oneself into conformity with the will of God (#17, page 32) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, does say that we can “Beseech . . . from God’s infinite grace whatsoever thou desirest.” Yet the Master also advises: “But wert thou to heed my advice thou wouldst desire naught save entrance into the Abhá Kingdom, and seek naught save the bounties of the Beauty of the All-Glorious. . . .” (*Spiritual Foundations* 7.)

Discussion

Discuss the nature of the four aspects of our bond with God raised in this chapter. How do they relate to one another. Do you see any special significance to the metaphor Shoghi Effendi applied to each aspect in the quotation on page 28? (For example, the Word of God as a lance, etc. . . .)

Discuss the Bahá’í view of prayer. Why do we pray?

What does Bahá’u’lláh mean by “Recite ye the verses of God in such measure that ye be not over-taken with fatigue or boredom?” How does this apply to your own prayers? (Refer to #15, page 32.)

What is meditation? How do you meditate? (A helpful quote can be found in *Paris Talks*, pages 174–76 or *Spiritual Foundations*, #31, page 10–11. See also *Spiritual Foundations* #50, page 17.)

For yourself: evaluate the state of the “mystic feeling” between you and God. What can you do to strengthen this bond?

4

Praiseworthy Character

Introduction

A spiritual warrior must be clothed in a good character. “Whoso ariseth, in this Day, to aid Our Cause,” Bahá’u’lláh states, “and summoneth to his assistance the hosts of a praiseworthy character and upright conduct, the influence flowing from such an action will, most certainly, be diffused throughout the whole world.”¹

The means required to achieve a good character are those spiritual disciplines described in chapter 2. The disciplines of prayer and study, fighting daily spiritual battles, struggling to apply the teachings, and persevering in action must all be applied so that divine virtues are acquired and applied in practice. This chapter will consider a number of related issues concerning the nature and purpose of a true Bahá’í character.

This chapter is the second of four lines of action required of spiritual warriors in the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh. These four paths are not independent of one another. A good character has an impact on our relationship with God (chapter 3), and our efforts to serve (chapter 5) and teach (chapter 6). And, it is impossible to acquire divine attributes without participation in these three areas. Thus, character development is not something achieved in isolation. In fact, excessively dwelling on specific shortcomings outside of the context of a full Bahá’í life can impede our spiritual progress.²

¹ *Gleanings* 287

² The Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 150

Overview

If we call ourselves Bahá'ís, and our characters are not being transformed, then Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, his life, and his sacrifices are all in vain. For it is the purpose of the Manifestation of God to transform human souls and adorn them with heavenly virtues.³ “. . . if the character of mankind not be changed, the futility of God's universal Manifestations would be apparent.”⁴

“The most vital duty, in this day,” Bahá'u'lláh has written, “is to purify your characters, to correct your manners, and improve your conduct.”⁵ “. . . youth, in particular,” Shoghi Effendi indicated, “must constantly and determinedly strive to exemplify a Bahá'í life.” For the “world is tired of words; it wants example, and it is up to the Bahá'í youth to furnish it.”⁶

This chapter will consider the following issues related to achieving a Bahá'í character:

- why we should have a good character;
- the Bahá'í standard of good character;
- the process of acquiring a good character; and
- avoiding hypocrisy: our deeds must our match words.

Explanation

“The sword of a virtuous character and upright conduct is sharper than blades of steel.”⁷ With this weapon, a spiritual warrior can accomplish “the betterment of the world”⁸ and can achieve “the purpose of this life” which is “to prepare the soul for the next.”⁹

The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh which govern a good character can be compared to the laws of nature that govern the ecology. If the ecological balance is upset by pollution or the destruction of the environment, disastrous consequences result to individuals and society. If the guidelines governing good character are ignored, the effect is felt on the spiritual development of individuals and the progress of society.

3 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 299

4 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 240–41

5 in *The Advent of Divine Justice* 25

6 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Living the Life* 25, 26

7 Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 29

8 Bahá'u'lláh, in *The Advent of Divine Justice* 23

9 *Messages from the Universal House of Justice* 105

The Purpose of Good Character

The Writings contain many passages that outline the standard of Bahá'í character. Bahá'u'lláh exhorts the believers to conduct themselves “with all those qualities, in fine, that will serve to bring forth man’s true station in the world of being.”¹⁰

The Bahá'í Standard

Acquiring a good character is a lifelong endeavor that takes effort and spiritual discipline. To an individual who asked how to achieve the many qualities required of a Bahá'í, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá replied: “‘*Kam Kam. Rúz bih rúz*’—little by little; day by day.”¹¹

Acquiring a Good Character

“The road is stony, and there are many tests; but . . . if the friends will learn to live according to Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, they will discover that they work indeed in mysterious and forceful ways; and that there is always help at hand, that obstacles are overcome, and that success is assured in the end.”¹²

“Whatever a man’s tongue speaketh,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states, “that let him prove by his deeds. If he claimeth to be a believer, then let him act in accordance with the precepts of the Abhá Kingdom.”¹³

Deeds Must Match Words

Beautiful words with no action behind them are like a mirage in the desert. To someone stranded in the desert the appearance of a lake offers hope that thirst can be quenched and life sustained. Unfortunately, if the lake is a mirage hope falters and the next promise of water is greeted with pessimism. If the lake is real, however, thirst can be quenched, spirits revived, and hope restored.

“The Bahá'í standard,” Shoghi Effendi tells us, “is very high, more particularly when compared to the thoroughly rotten morals of the present world.”¹⁴ This often makes it difficult to live up to the teachings. Yet, the present requirements of the Faith as it emerges from obscurity “impose an inescapable duty on the youth to ensure that their lives reflect to a marked degree the transforming power of the new Revelation. . . . How is His healing Message to be acknowledged by a skeptical humanity if it produces no noticeable effect upon the young, who are seen to be among the most energetic, the most pliable and promising elements in any society?”¹⁵

10 *Trustworthiness* 7

11 Annamarie Honnold, *Vignettes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 27

12 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Living the Life* 36

13 *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 139

14 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *A Chaste and Holy Life* 4

15 The Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 187

Readings

1. “The purpose of the one true God in manifesting Himself is to summon all mankind to truthfulness and sincerity, to piety and trustworthiness, to resignation and submissiveness to the Will of God, to forbearance and kindness, to uprightness and wisdom. His object is to array every man with the mantle of a saintly character, and to adorn him with the ornament of holy and goodly deeds.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 299

2. “We ask God, exalted be His glory, to confirm each one of the friends in that land in the acquisition of such praiseworthy characteristics as shall conduce to the spread of justice and equity among the peoples of the world. The first, the fundamental purpose underlying creation hath ever been, and will continue to be, none other than the appearance of trustworthiness and godliness, of sincerity and goodwill amongst mankind, for these qualities are the cause of peace, security and tranquillity. Blessed are those who possess such virtues.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Trustworthiness* 7

3. “... Bahá’ís must make the utmost effort to uphold Bahá’í standards, no matter how difficult they may seem at first. Such efforts will be made easier if the youth will understand that the laws and standards of the Faith are meant to free them from untold spiritual and moral difficulties in the same way that a proper appreciation of the laws of nature enables one to live in harmony with the forces of the planet.” —written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *A Chaste and Holy Life* 2

4. “The foundation-stone of a life lived in the way of God is the pursuit of moral excellence and the acquisition of a character endowed with qualities that are well-pleasing in His sight. The Bahá’ís should adorn themselves with this holy raiment; with this mighty sword they should conquer the citadels of men’s hearts.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Trustworthiness* 19

5. “O people of God! Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men. This can best be achieved through pure and holy deeds, through a virtuous life and a goodly behavior. Valiant acts will ensure the triumph of this Cause, and a saintly character will reinforce its power. Cleave unto righteousness, O people of Bahá! This, verily, is the commandment which this Wronged One hath given unto you, and the first choice of His unrestrained Will for every one of you.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 86

The Purpose of Good Character

piety: devotion and reverence

resignation: acceptance

submissiveness: the yielding to the authority of another

forbearance: tolerant or patient

adorn: to decorate with; enhance

conduce: promote

raiment: clothing

citadel: stronghold, fortress

rehabilitate: to restore the rank of; to restore to useful life

valiant: brave, courageous

cleave: to adhere, to cling; to be faithful to

righteousness: that which is morally right or just

The Bahá'í Standard

6. “The virtues and attributes pertaining unto God are all evident and manifest, and have been mentioned and described in all the heavenly Books. Among them are trustworthiness, truthfulness, purity of heart while communing with God, forbearance, resignation to whatever the Almighty hath decreed, contentment with the things His Will hath provided, patience, nay, thankfulness in the midst of tribulation, and complete reliance, in all circumstances, upon Him. These rank, according to the estimate of God, among the highest and most laudable of all acts. All other acts are, and will ever remain, secondary and subordinate unto them. . . .” —Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 290

7. “The rectitude of conduct, with its implications of justice, equity, truthfulness, honesty, fair-mindedness, reliability, and trustworthiness, must distinguish every phase of the life of the Bahá'í community.” —Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* 23

8. “. . . absolute chastity . . . is mainly and directly concerned with the Bahá'í youth, who can contribute so decisively to the virility, the purity, and the driving force of the life of the Bahá'í community, and upon whom must depend the future orientation of its destiny, and the complete unfoldment of the potentialities with which God has endowed it. . . .

“Such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations. It demands daily vigilance in the control of one's carnal desires and corrupt inclinations. It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures. It requires total abstinence from all alcoholic drinks, from opium, and from similar habit-forming drugs. . . .

—Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* 22, 30

9. “The words, the deeds, the attitudes, the lack of prejudice, the nobility of character, the high sense of service to others—in a word, those qualities and actions which distinguish a Bahá'í must unfailingly characterize their inner life and outer behavior, and their interactions with friend or foe.

“. . . May they resolve to elevate the very atmosphere in which they move, whether it be in the school rooms or halls of higher learning, in their work, their recreation, their Bahá'í activity or social service.” —The Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 187

virility: strength, vigor, energy

temperance: the condition of being moderate; total abstinence from alcoholic beverages

avocations: leisure activities engaged in for pleasure such as hobbies

10. “To deepen their knowledge, to perfect themselves in the Bahá’í standards of virtue and upright conduct, should be the paramount duty of every young Bahá’í.”—on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 43

11. “. . . the friends must observe the specific times for the remembrance of God, meditation, devotion and prayer. . . . One can hardly imagine what a great influence genuine love, truthfulness and purity of motives exert on the souls of men. But these traits cannot be acquired unless every believer makes a daily effort to gain them.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *The Individual and Teaching* 15

12. “. . . one must remember that the purpose of this life is to prepare the soul for the next. Here one must learn to control and direct one’s animal impulses, not to be a slave to them. Life in this world is a succession of tests and achievements, of falling short and of making new spiritual advances. Sometimes the course may seem very hard, but one can witness, again and again, that the soul who steadfastly obeys the law of Bahá’u’lláh, however hard it may seem, grows spiritually, while the one who compromises with the law for the sake of his own apparent happiness is seen to have been following a chimera: he does not attain the happiness he sought, he retards his spiritual advance and often brings new problems upon himself.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice* 106

13. “It is neither possible nor desirable for the Universal House of Justice to set forth a set of rules covering every situation. Rather is it the task of the individual believer to determine, according to his own prayerful understanding of the Writings, precisely what his course of conduct should be in relation to situations which he encounters in his daily life. If he is to fulfill his true mission in life as a follower of the Blessed Perfection, he will pattern his life according to the Teachings. The believer cannot attain this objective merely by living according to a set of rigid regulations. When his life is oriented toward service to Bahá’u’lláh, and when every conscious act is performed within this frame of reference, he will not fail to achieve the true purpose of his life.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *A Chaste and Holy Life* 2

14. “The power of God can entirely transmute our characters and make us beings entirely unlike our previous selves. Through prayer and supplication, obedience to the divine laws Bahá’u’lláh has revealed, and ever-increasing service to His Faith, we can change ourselves.”

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations* 17

Acquiring a Good Character

paramount: of greatest importance or concern

chimera: impossible or foolish fantasy

transmute: to change from one form or state into another; transform

Deeds Must Match Words

15. “Say: Beware, O people of Bahá, lest ye walk in the ways of them whose words differ from their deeds.” —Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 305

16. “Guidance hath ever been given by words, and now it is given by deeds. Every one must show forth deeds that are pure and holy, for words are the property of all alike, whereas such deeds as these belong only to Our loved ones. Strive then with heart and soul to distinguish yourselves by your deeds.” —Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words* 48–49

17. “The present trend in modern society and its conflict with our challenging principles of moral conduct, far from influencing the believers to compromise their resolve to adhere undeviatingly to the standards of purity and chastity set forth for them by their Faith, must stimulate them to discharge their sacred obligations with determination and thus combat the evil forces undermining the foundations of individual morality.” —The Universal House of Justice, *A Chaste and Holy Life* 17

adhere: to hold fast to

*undeviatingly:
unswervingly*

18. “In this day, the one thing that can deliver the world from its travail and attract the hearts of its peoples is deeds, not words; example, not precept; saintly virtues, not statements and charters issued by governments and nations on socio-political affairs. In all matters, great or small, word must be the complement of deed, and deed the companion of word: each must supplement, support and reinforce the other. It is in this respect that the Bahá’ís must seek distinction. . . .” —Shoghi Effendi, *A Chaste and Holy Life* 16–17

travail: tribulation or agony

*precept: a rule of conduct
or procedure*

19. “He hopes that you will develop into Bahá’ís in character as well as in belief. The whole purpose of Bahá’u’lláh is that we should become a new kind of people, people who are upright, kind, intelligent, truthful, and honest and who live according to His great laws laid down for this new epoch in man’s development. To call ourselves Bahá’ís is not enough; our inmost being must become ennobled and enlightened through living a Bahá’í life.”

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to Junior Youth, *Living the Life* 21

*ennobled: invested with
nobility, exalted*

20. “. . . children must needs be made aware in their very heart and soul that ‘Bahá’í’ is not just a name but a truth. Every child must be trained in the things of the spirit, so that he may embody all the virtues and become a source of glory to the Cause of God. Otherwise, the mere word ‘Bahá’í,’ if it yield no fruit, will come to nothing.”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Education* 26–27

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 93.

Illustrations

“A ‘Mrs. C’ was an early believer who went to ‘Akká. She belonged to a wealthy and fashionable group of people in New York. Her life had been conventional and rather unsatisfying. She had been a sincere Christian, but somehow had not gained much comfort from her religion. She had become somewhat melancholy. While travelling abroad, she had learned about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. She eagerly grasped His message and headed to the prison-city. Having arrived, she was fascinated by everything, most especially by the Master. She noticed that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá always greeted her with ‘Be happy!’ The other members of the party were not addressed in the same way by Him. This troubled her. Finally she asked someone to ask the Master why He addressed her in this way. With ‘His peculiarly illuminating smile,’ He replied, ‘I tell you to be happy because we cannot know the spiritual life unless we are happy!’”

“Then Mrs. C’s dismay was complete, and her diffidence vanished with the fullness of her despair.

“‘But tell me, what is the spiritual life?’ she cried, ‘I have heard ever since I was born about the spiritual life, and no one could ever explain to me what it is!’”

“‘Abdu’l-Bahá looked at His questioner again with that wonderful smile of His, and said gently: ‘Characterize thyself with the characteristics of God, and thou shalt know the spiritual life!’—few words, but they were sufficient. Mrs. C began to wonder what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá meant. The characteristics of God? They must be such attributes as love and beauty, justice and generosity.

“All day long her mind was flooded with the divine puzzle, and all day long she was happy. She did not give a thought to her duties, and yet when she arrived at the moment of her evening’s reckoning, she could not remember that she had left them undone.

“At last she began to understand. If she was absorbed in Heavenly ideals, they would translate themselves into deeds necessarily, and her days and nights would be full of light. From that moment she never quite forgot the divine admonition that had been granted her: ‘Characterize thyself with the characteristics of God!’

“And she learned to know the spiritual life.”

—Annamarie Honnold, ed., *Vignettes from the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 116–17

Badí‘ was one of the nineteen Apostles of Bahá’u’lláh. He was a youth of seventeen who carried the message of Bahá’u’lláh to the Sháh. After successfully delivering the message he received three days of torture at the hands of the Sháh’s men before his head was crushed and his body thrown into a pit. Once a troubled youth interested only in himself, Badí‘ was transformed by Bahá’u’lláh:

“In one of the Tablets . . . it is stated that Badí‘ was ushered into the Presence of Bahá’u’lláh alone on two occasions. No one knew what was happening in these audiences except that Bahá’u’lláh had said that God was about to create a new creation and Badí‘ himself was unaware of it. In another Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh states that He created him anew with the hands of power and might and sent him out as a ball of fire. . . .

“When Badí‘ learnt that Bahá’u’lláh was looking for someone to deliver a special tablet to Náṣiri’d-Dín Sháh [the ruler of Persia], he begged to be allowed to carry out this service, knowing full well that he would have to lay down his life. Bahá’u’lláh accepted him for this important mission. . . .

“In a Tablet to the father of Badí‘, Bahá’u’lláh recounts in moving language the exciting events which took place when his son attained his presence. He indicates that when He desired to create a new creation He summoned Badí‘ to come to his room and uttered ‘one word’ to him, a word which caused his whole being to tremble. . . . Then the Hand of Omnipotence, according to Bahá’u’lláh’s description, began to create him anew and breathed into him the spirit of might and power. So great was the infusion of this might, as attested by Bahá’u’lláh, that single and alone he could have conquered the world through the power of God, had he been ordered to do so. . . .”

“[Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-‘Alí] has written the following account given by a certain believer, Ḥájí ‘Alí, who met Badí‘ on his way to Persia and travelled with him for some distance:

““He was a very happy person, smiling, patient, thankful, gentle and humble. All that we knew about him was that he had attained the presence of Bahá’u’lláh and was now returning to his home in Khurásán. Many a time he could be seen walking about a hundred feet from the road in either direction, turning his face towards ‘Akká, prostrating himself to the ground saying: ‘O God! do not take back through Thy justice what thou hast vouchsafed unto me through Thy bounty and grant me strength for its protection.’”

—Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*, Vol. III, 179–84

Further Study

Select one of the passages from the “Readings” section.

What does the passage say?	In what specific ways can this passage be applied to your life?
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List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 93 and the additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

1. 2. 3. 4.

The Hidden Words, by Bahá’u’lláh

‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote: “Read thou the Hidden Words. Ponder over their meanings and embody the behests into thy life.”

A Chaste and Holy Life

Trustworthiness

Excellence in all Things

These compilations provide guidance on Bahá’í qualities and the conduct of individual lives.

Unrestrained as the Wind, chapter 3, pages 21–29

This chapter of the compilation of the National Youth Committee covers references on the distinctive Bahá’í life.

**Personal
Reflection**

**Remaining
Questions**

**Additional
Reading**

Questions

The following questions review parts of the content of the lesson for use in individual study. Refer to the Discussion section on the next page for questions to consider in group study.

1. (Circle all that apply.) Which of the following describe the purpose of a good character:
 - a. it is your purpose in life
 - b. it is the purpose of creation
 - c. it frees you from difficulties
 - d. it assists the spread of the Faith

2. List four fundamental virtues that are part of a Bahá'í character:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____

3. (Circle all that apply.) Achieving a praiseworthy character requires:
 - a. a one-time effort
 - b. eliminating your animal impulses
 - c. adhering to the rules laid down
 - d. service to the Faith

Answers

The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotes, you may have different answers. Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. **a, b, c, and d.** Regarding “a,” see #1, page 40; for “b,” see #2, page 53; for “c,” see #3, page 40; and for “d,” see #4 and #5, page 53.
2. Bahá’u’lláh cites trustworthiness, truthfulness, purity of heart, forbearance, resignation to the will of God, patience and thankfulness during hardships, and reliance on God in quotation #6 on page 41. Other quotations on page 41 list additional virtues.
3. **d.** Regarding “d,” see #14 on page 42. “a” is incorrect, since the effort required is slow and ongoing. See page 39 and #11, page 42. “b,” is incorrect; Shoghi Effendi explains we must “control” and “direct” our impulses not eliminate them. See #12, page 42. These impulses have a purpose, and we are permitted to enjoy the good things of life, but we are to control our impulses—they are not supposed to control us. “c” is also incorrect. See #13, page 42. The teachings offer principles and laws—it is impossible to have a set of rules for every situation.

Discussion

Is it important to you to have a praiseworthy character? Why?

What happens when we compromise with Bahá’í laws? (Refer to #12 on page 42.)

How do you know how to act as a Bahá’í in any situation that may arise in daily life? How is this different than applying a set of rules? (Refer to #13 on page 42.) Are there any situations you currently face that you aren’t sure how to handle? How can you begin to address this situation?

What is hypocrisy? How does it affect our efforts to achieve a praiseworthy character? How do we combat this problem? How can we deal with hypocrisy in those Bahá’ís around us? (Refer to the quotations on page 43.)

5

A Life of Service

Introduction

“Blessed is he,” Bahá’u’lláh wrote, “who in the prime of his youth and the heyday of his life will arise to serve the Cause of the Lord of the beginning and of the end, and adorn his heart with His love. The manifestation of such a grace is greater than the creation of the heavens and of the earth. Blessed are the steadfast and well is it with those who are firm.”¹

Shoghi Effendi also emphasized the importance of service for youth: “It is on young and active Bahá’ís, like you, that the Guardian centers all his hopes for the future progress and expansion of the Cause, and it is on their shoulders that he lays the responsibility for the upkeep of the spirit of selfless service among their fellow-believers. Without that spirit no work can be successfully achieved. With it triumph, though hardly won, is but inevitable.”²

This chapter presents the third of four lines of action for youth: leading a life of service to Bahá’u’lláh.

¹ *Unrestrained as the Wind* x

² written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Individual and Teaching* 21

Overview

A life of service for a Bahá'í involves two intimately related areas: service to humanity and service to the Cause of God. Service to humanity centers around applying Bahá'u'lláh's healing remedy to the ills facing humanity. Service to the Cause involves a variety of tasks for the growth and development of the Faith and can be directed toward the home front or overseas through pioneering.³

Youth is a special time when preparation is made for future service in both of these areas. “The transformation which is to occur in the functioning of society,” the Universal House of Justice noted, “will certainly depend to a great extent on the effectiveness of the preparations the youth make for the world they will inherit.”⁴ The Supreme Body indicated that preparation for youth includes studying the teachings, spiritualizing their lives and forming their characters in accordance with the standards of Bahá'u'lláh, acquiring knowledge of the arts and sciences, and learning a trade or profession.⁵

However, “let it . . . never be imagined that youth must await their years of maturity before they can render invaluable services to the Cause of God.”⁶ Youth are needed to serve immediately through full participation in community life,⁷ teaching—especially teaching their peers,⁸ and development or service projects.⁹ So important is this immediate service to the strength of the Bahá'í world that the Universal House of Justice has called for youth to devote a set period of time to some Bahá'í service.¹⁰

3 “Young people, being—for the most part—freer than the older believers, are in a position to arise as pioneers and move to new towns as settlers. A great number of the pioneers in America, who left their native cities, and often their native land . . . were young people—some of them so young that the Spiritual Assemblies they helped to establish, they were themselves not yet old enough to be elected to!” (written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance* 514–15)

4 The Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 188

5 *Wellspring of Guidance* 94–95

6 The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 92

7 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 36–37

8 The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 94–95; see chapter 6 for an in-depth look at the topic of youth and teaching

9 The Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 186

10 *Unrestrained as the Wind* 186

Explanation

The believers, Shoghi Effendi indicated, are the “chosen instruments of God’s grace.”¹¹ Indeed, youth in particular, because of their special qualities, are “potent instruments”¹² for carrying out the work of the Cause.

Consider the qualities of an instrument. It is a tool with no will or value of its own. In the hands of a skilled user, however, it enables work to be done with efficiency and effectiveness. Similarly, a believer willing to be an instrument in the hand of God can be a powerful tool for achieving God’s purpose for humanity.

Furthermore, a tool of high quality and sophistication increases the worker’s effectiveness in getting the job done. In rearranging earth for a building project, for example, a person driving a bulldozer is able to get far more work done than someone with a shovel. In like manner, the better trained a believer is, the more effectively he or she can be used to accomplish God’s work.

Arising to serve the Cause of God as an instrument of His will draws a potent source of energy. “Service is the magnet,” the Guardian wrote, “which draws the divine confirmations.”¹³ This spiritual power aids the believer’s efforts in serving the Cause and humanity, and promotes individual spiritual growth.

Shoghi Effendi likened service to a “plough which ploughs the physical soil when seeds are sown. It is necessary that the soil be ploughed up, so that it can be enriched, and thus cause a stronger growth of the seed. In exactly the same way the evolution of the spirit takes place through ploughing up the soil of the heart so that it is a constant reflection of the Holy Spirit. In this way the human spirit grows and develops by leaps and bounds.”¹⁴

11 Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration* 52

12 The Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 104

13 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Living the Life* 34

14 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Living the Life* 35

1. “For any person, whether Bahá’í or not, his youthful years are those in which he will make many decisions which will set the course of his life. In these years he is most likely to choose his life’s work, complete his education, begin to earn his own living, marry, and start to raise his own family. Most important of all, it is during this period that the mind is most questing and that the spiritual values that will guide the person’s future behavior are adopted. These factors present Bahá’í youth with their greatest opportunities, their greatest challenges, and their greatest tests—opportunities to truly apprehend the teachings of their Faith and to give them to their contemporaries, challenges to overcome the pressures of the world and to provide leadership for their and succeeding generations, and tests enabling them to exemplify in their lives the high moral standards set forth in the Bahá’í writings.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 92–93

2. “Bahá’í youth should be encouraged to think of their studies and of their training for a trade or profession as part of their service to the Cause of God and in the context of a lifetime that will be devoted to advancing the interests of the Faith.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 103

3. “Imbued with this excellence and a corresponding humility, with tenacity and a loving servitude, today’s youth must move towards the front ranks of the professions, trades, arts and crafts which are necessary to the further progress of humankind—this to ensure that the spirit of the Cause will cast its illumination on all these important areas of human endeavor.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 187

4. “Although still young in age, you should endeavor from now, through close association with your fellow-believers, and through your faithful application to your Bahá’í studies, to prepare yourself for that day when you will be called upon, as a grown-up and responsible member of the Community, to take full part in the activities of the Cause, and thus prove yourself worthy of being a member of this world-wide Fellowship created by Bahá’u’lláh.”

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 41–42

5. “I strongly urge you to devote, while you are pursuing your studies, as much time as you possibly can to a thorough study of the history and teachings of our Beloved Cause. This is the prerequisite of a future successful career of service to the Bahá’í Faith. . . .”

—Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 21

Preparation for Service

*imbued: inspired,
permeated, filled*

6. “Service to humanity is service to God.”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 8

7. “It is my wish that they may be assisted to become servants of the heavenly Kingdom, captives in the service of the will of God. This captivity is freedom; this sacrifice is glorification; this labor is reward; this need is bestowal. For service in love for mankind is unity with God. He who serves has already entered the Kingdom and is seated at the right hand of his Lord.”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 186

8. “Think ye at all times of rendering some service to every member of the human race. . . . Let each one of God’s loved ones center his attention on this: to be the Lord’s mercy to man; to be the Lord’s grace. Let him do some good to every person whose path he crosseth, and be of some benefit to him. Let him improve the character of each and all, and reorient the minds of men.

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 3

9. “Ultimately, the call to action [in the area of social and economic development] is addressed to the individual friends, whether they be adult or youth, veteran or newly-enrolled. Let them step forward to take their places in the arena of service where their talents and skills, their specialized training, their material resources, their offers of time and energy and, above all, their dedication to Bahá’í principles, can be put to work in improving the lot of man.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 176

lot: one’s fortune or fate

10. “Again, is there any deed in the world that would be nobler than service to the common good? Is there any greater blessing conceivable for a man, than that he should become the cause of the education, the development, the prosperity and honor of his fellow-creatures? No, by the Lord God! The highest righteousness of all is for blessed souls to take hold of the hands of the helpless and deliver them out of their ignorance and abasement and poverty, and with pure motives, and only for the sake of God, to arise and energetically devote themselves to the service of the masses, forgetting their own worldly advantage and working only to serve the general good. . . . ‘The best of men are those who serve the people; the worst of men are those who harm the people.’” —‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* 103

11. “Happy the soul that shall forget his own good, and like the chosen ones of God, vie with his fellows in service to the good of all. . . .”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* 116

vie: to strive for superiority, contend

12. “We have brought thee into being to serve Me, to glorify My Word and to proclaim My Cause. Center thine energies upon that wherefore thou hast been created by virtue of the Will of the Supreme Ordainer, the Ancient of Days.”—Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 246

13. “Bahá’í youth, now rendering exemplary and devoted service in the forefront of the army of life, must be encouraged, even while equipping themselves for future service, to devise and execute their own teaching plans among their contemporaries.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván* 1984

14. “Paralleling the growth of his inner life through prayer, meditation, service, and study of the teachings, Bahá’í youth have the opportunity to learn in practice the very functioning of the Order of Bahá’u’lláh. Through taking part in conferences and summer schools as well as Nineteen Day Feasts, and in service on committees, they can develop the wonderful skill of Bahá’í consultation, thus tracing new paths of human corporate action. . . . Youth also take part in the life of the Bahá’í community as a whole and promote a society in which all generations—elderly, middle-aged, youth, children—are fully integrated and make up an organic whole.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 96–97

15. “Further to these aspirations is the need for a mighty mobilization of teaching activities reflecting regularity in the patterns of service rendered by young Bahá’ís. . . . One pattern of this mobilization could be short-term projects, carried out at home or in other lands, dedicated to both teaching the Faith and improving the living conditions of people. Another could be that, while still young and unburdened by family responsibilities, you give attention to the idea of volunteering a set period, say, one or two years, to some Bahá’í service, on the home front or abroad, in the teaching or development field. It would accrue to the strength and stability of the community if such patterns could be followed by succeeding generations of youth. Regardless of the modes of service, however, youth must be understood to be fully engaged, at all times, in all climes and under all conditions. In your varied pursuits you may rest assured of the loving support and guidance of the Bahá’í institutions operating at every level.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 185–86

16. “Vie ye with each other in the service of God and of His Cause. This is indeed what profiteth you in this world, and in that which is to come.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, in *The Advent of Divine Justice* 83

Service to the Cause

exemplary: worthy of imitation; an outstanding example

corporate: collective; of the entire body

organic: having the properties of a living organism

accrue: come as a gain or increase; increase by regular growth

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 93.

Illustration

“Those of us who knew her before she left were amazed at the change. Before, a shy, young woman—a believer, to be sure, but one whose place in the community was tentatively defined in her own mind. Her parents were illustrious. ‘Who am I?’ seemed to be written on her posture. But tonight, she sat erect, beautiful, and assured, in her seat of honor and spoke softly to us of her experiences as a Black American youth in Africa. Story after story flowed from the deep well of her experience. ‘It changed my life,’ she said quietly. ‘The people I met, people who had nothing, taught me the true nature of faith in Bahá’u’lláh.’ Later, she sent me this story:

“A teaching trip took us deep into the Kalahari Desert. Deeper than any of us had gone on our many trips across southern Africa. Only Rockey, a native of Botswana, knew his deserts as we knew our city streets back home. Rockey drove us past the brush and salt pans that stretched for miles like white lakes looking for some of his old Bahá’í friends. We rode in a truck packed with eleven youth, our luggage, food and water supplies, and one angry chicken. The chicken was a gift from the last village we had left just that morning.

“After a long and bumpy ride Rockey stopped the car in front of a hut standing alone in the middle of the desert and embraced the woman who emerged. Out of her mouth came sounds like tiny footsteps.

““She is saying . . .” Rockey said, his face strained from listening “that her husband is not well.” It wasn’t until then that I noticed her husband sitting sunken against the fence surrounding the hut. From the waist up, he was well built and strong, but from the waist down his body was shriveled and shrunken.

““She says,” Rockey continued, “that he has been through much pain and hasn’t spoken a word for weeks. Yesterday she was so distressed that she said a special prayer. A healing prayer. And today, here we are.”

““We looked over at her husband. He was involved in an animated conversation with one of the youth from California—a conversation in two entirely different languages, since neither of them knew the language of the other.

““When it was time to go, Rockey asked the wife if there was anything they needed. Her husband answered: “We have Bahá’u’lláh. There is nothing more we could ever need.””

—written by Melanie Smith from an account of
Kemba Thomas’ period of service in Africa

Further Study

Select one of the passages from the “Readings” section.

What does the passage say?	In what specific ways can this passage be applied in your life?
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List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 93 and the additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
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Wellspring of Guidance, pages 92–97

Unrestrained as the Wind, pages 183–88

These sections of the books contain letters from the Universal House of Justice describing the opportunities for service open to Bahá'í youth.

Unrestrained as the Wind, chapter 5, pages 56–73

Chapter 5 of this compilation outlines the role of education of youth in preparation for service.

Personal Reflection

Remaining Questions

Additional Reading

Questions

The following questions review parts of the content of the lesson for use in individual study. Refer to the Discussion section on the next page for questions to consider in group study.

1. What are three ways in which youth can prepare for future service?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

2. In what two areas are we encouraged as Bahá'ís to compete with one another?

a. _____

b. _____

3. List four ways in which youth can serve now:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

Answers

The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotes, you may have different answers. Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. Youth can prepare for future service by acquiring a trade or profession that can serve humanity or the Cause (#2 on page 52); moving to the forefront of the arts, trades, and professions to prepare to shed the light of the teachings on that field (#3, page 52); and thoroughly study the history and teachings of the Faith (#4 and #5, page 52).
2. The friends are encouraged to vie with each other in service to humanity (#11, page 53) and service to the Cause (#16, page 54).
3. Youth can serve now through teaching their peers (#1, page 52 and #13, page 54), actively participating in community life (#14, page 54), participating in projects (#15, page 54), engaging in a period of service (#15, page 54), helping those who cross their path (#8, page 53), participating in social and economic development efforts (#9–#10, page 53), and providing other services to humanity (#6–#11, page 53).

Discussion

In what ways are you currently serving humanity? Is there anything you or your group of friends can do to expand these efforts?

In what ways are you currently serving the Faith? How can you—individually or with your group of Bahá'í peers—expand these efforts? What additional steps can you take now to better prepare yourself for future service to the Cause?

How will you choose and prepare for your trade or profession so that it will enable you to better serve humanity and the Faith?

What is your personal plan for a period of service? What steps can you take now to begin to make that plan a reality?

6

Teaching

Introduction

“Of all the gifts of God,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote, “the greatest is the gift of Teaching. It draweth unto us the Grace of God and is our first obligation. Of such a gift how can we deprive ourselves? Nay, our lives, our goods, our comforts, our rest, we offer them all as a sacrifice for the Abhá Beauty and teach the Cause of God.”¹

Teaching is just one of the many services a Bahá’í renders to the Cause. Yet this service is unique and takes a foremost position over all others. For if the individual does not arise to teach, Bahá’u’lláh’s purpose for humanity is blocked.² If teaching does not occur, then the hearts of humanity cannot be illumined by the forces of light.

The responsibility to teach particularly applies to youth. Therefore, the entire chapter will focus on this topic. However, teaching—though in one sense quite simple—is a vast topic which has received a great deal of attention in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice. This chapter can, at best, only introduce the topic. To grow as a teacher will require of each youth a continuing study of the Writings on teaching, prayers for divine assistance, and persistent action to practice and develop teaching skills.

¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Bahá’í Administration* 12

² Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 131

Overview

“The paramount purpose of all Bahá’í activity,” the Universal House of Justice stated, “is teaching.”³ Teaching is the ‘front line’ of the spiritual battle of light and darkness. Through teaching a heart is opened to the spirit of faith and the knowledge of Bahá’u’lláh.

According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, youth have a special responsibility toward the teaching work. The progress of the Cause is dependent on their action. So vital is this responsibility that all the training of youth should be directed toward making them effective teachers.⁴

Teaching involves:

- teaching yourself,⁵
- finding receptive souls,⁶
- delivering the message with wisdom,⁷
- guiding the seeker to acceptance,⁸ and
- confirming the new believer to active service to the Cause.⁹

To be an effective teacher requires adherence to the guidance on teaching provided in the Bahá’í writings. These are the skills of the spiritual warriors who set out to conquer the hearts of humanity for their Lord.

3 Ridván 1988

4 Shoghi Effendi, *Centers of Bahá’í Learning* 15

5 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 277

6 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Individual and Teaching* 29

7 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Individual and Teaching* 12

8 Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 148

9 Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 116

Explanation

Teaching is a spiritual act. It is God's work. Those who participate in it are assisting God.¹⁰

Bahá'u'lláh indicates that God does not desire any of the material things that people prize. "That which He hath reserved for Himself are the cities of men's hearts." The believers, Bahá'u'lláh explains, are the "keys" to those hearts.¹¹ Through teaching a Bahá'í unlocks a heart to the spirit of faith and the love of Bahá'u'lláh.

Bahá'u'lláh compares the change made through teaching to the transformation of copper to gold. "Is it within human power," Bahá'u'lláh asks, ". . . to effect in the . . . particles of matter so complete a transformation as to transmute it into purest gold? Perplexing and difficult as this may appear, the still greater task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that we have been empowered to accomplish."¹²

This transformation, Bahá'u'lláh explains, is accomplished through the Word of God. Those who have embraced His Cause are entrusted with the "Divine Elixir" that can change "into purest gold the dross of the world." They "have been empowered to administer the infallible remedy for all the ills that afflict the children of men."¹³

Thus, teaching is assisting God to achieve His purpose: transforming souls. We teach because of our love for Bahá'u'lláh. When teaching, we connect a person's heart to Bahá'u'lláh and the power of His Revelation. The forces of light then are available to that soul for its transformation. In addition, a new spiritual warrior is born: teaching is not complete until the new believer arises to undertake the responsibilities of teaching, spiritual development, and service.

If we fail to be involved in teaching, we are cut off from the forces of light.¹⁴ The spiritual warrior becomes powerless. In the same way, if we fail to use the Divine Elixir appropriately, it does not have the desired effect. The forces of light are unfocused. To be effective in teaching, we should, as best we can, 'follow the directions' by applying the guidance on teaching given in the Writings.

10 Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 196

11 *Gleanings* 241

12 *Gleanings* 200

13 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 183

14 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Individual and Teaching* 20

Readings

1. “Teaching is the food of the spirit; it brings life to unawakened souls and raises the new heaven and the new earth; it uplifts the banner of a unified world; it ensures the victory of the Covenant and brings those who give their lives to it the supernal happiness of attainment to the good pleasure of their Lord.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván* 1988

2. “Say: To assist Me is to teach My Cause. . . . This is the changeless commandment of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. Comprehend this, O ye men of insight.” —Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 196

3. “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.” —Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 304

4. “Do you think it is the teachers who make converts and change human hearts? No, surely not. They are only pure souls who take the first step, and then let the spirit of Bahá’u’lláh move them and make use of them. . . . The criterion is the extent to which we are ready to have the will of God operate through us.”

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Individual and Teaching* 20–21

5. “Is it within human power, O Ḥakím, to effect in the constituent elements of any of the minute and indivisible particles of matter so complete a transformation as to transmute it into purest gold? Perplexing and difficult as this may appear, the still greater task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish. The Force capable of such a transformation transcendeth the potency of the Elixir itself. The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 200

6. “The Book of God is wide open, and His Word is summoning mankind unto Him. No more than a mere handful, however, hath been found willing to cleave to His Cause, or to become the instruments for its promotion. These few have been endued with the Divine Elixir that can, alone, transmute into purest gold the dross of the world, and have been empowered to administer the infallible remedy for all the ills that afflict the children of men.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 183

The Spiritual Nature of Teaching

supernal: heavenly

defilement: corruptions

infidel: one who is not a believer in the unity of God

profane: to treat something sacred with abuse

effect: cause

constituent: parts of a whole

transmute: to change from one form, nature, or condition to another

satanic: fiendishly cruel or evil; in a Bahá’í sense, deriving from the insistent self or material side of a person

elixir: a medicine believed to cure all ills, a panacea

cleave to: hold fast to, cling to

infallible: without mistake; cannot fail

Youth and Teaching

7. “It is on young and active Bahá’ís, like you, that the Guardian centers all his hopes for the future progress and expansion of the Cause.

“ . . . every one of them is able, in his own measure, to deliver the Message.... Everyone is a potential teacher. He has only to use what God has given him and thus prove that he is faithful to his trust.”

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Individual and Teaching* 21

8. “The obligation to teach is essentially the responsibility of young believers. Their whole training should therefore be directed in such a way as to make them competent teachers.”

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Centers of Bahá’í Learning* 15

competent: properly or well qualified, capable

9. “The vast reservoir of spiritual energy, zeal and idealism resident in Bahá’í youth, which so effectively contributed to the success of the Nine Year Plan, must be directed and lavishly spent for the proclamation, teaching, and consolidation of the Cause. Spiritual Assemblies are urged to provide consultation and the offer of guidance to Bahá’í youth who seek to plan their lives in such a way as to be of utmost service to the Cause of God.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván* 1974

10. “The incalculable value of Bahá’í youth in the service of our Faith cannot be overlooked. They should be enlisted as travelling teachers, going on foot when necessary, in the mountains and jungles to visit, teach and encourage the local Bahá’ís. . . . The youth should be encouraged to hold youth classes, to convey to their peers the Message of Bahá’u’lláh, to learn to give courses and lectures on the Teachings, above all, to exemplify by their high moral behavior that which makes the Bahá’ís outstanding in a corrupt and decadent society.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance* 636

11. “It is our hope that in the international travel teaching program now being launched the youth will assume a major role by devoting time during their vacations, and particularly during the long vacation at the end of the academic year, to the promotion of the teaching work in all its aspects, not only within their own national communities but farther afield.” —The Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 103–04

12. “. . . the younger Bahá’í generation . . . surely can achieve a great deal. It is upon their shoulders that the Master has laid the tremendous work of teaching. They are the ones to raise the call of the Kingdom and arouse the people from slumber. If they fail the Cause is doomed to stagnation.”

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 28

stagnation: a condition of failing to change or develop

How to Teach Effectively

13. “Every individual believer—man, woman, youth and child—is summoned to this field of action; for it is on the initiative, the resolute will of the individual to teach and to serve, that the success of the entire community depends. Well-grounded in the mighty Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh, sustained by daily prayer and reading of the Holy Word, strengthened by a continual striving to obtain a deeper understanding of the divine Teachings, illumined by a constant endeavor to relate these Teachings to current issues, nourished by observance of the laws and principles of His wondrous World Order, every individual can attain increasing measures of success in teaching.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván* 1988

14. “Now is an opportunity to awaken the interest, set afire the hearts and enlist the active support of young people of every nation, class and creed in that continent. The key to success in this endeavor is, firstly, to deepen your understanding of the Teachings of the Cause so that you will be able to apply them to the problems of individuals and society, and explain them to your peers in ways that they will understand and welcome; secondly to strive to model your behavior in every way after the high standards of honesty, trustworthiness, courage, loyalty, forbearance, purity and spirituality set forth in the Teachings; and, above all, to live in continual awareness of the presence and all-conquering power of Bahá’u’lláh, which will enable you to overcome every temptation and surmount every obstacle.”

—Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 85

15. “Success will crown the efforts of the friends on the home front, when they meditate on the teachings, pray fervently for divine confirmations for their work, study the teachings so they may carry their spirit to the seeker, and then act; and above all persevere in action. When these steps are followed, and the teaching work carried on sacrificially and with devoted enthusiasm, the Faith will spread rapidly.”

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 52

16. “Having . . . obtained a clear understanding of the true character of our mission, the methods to adopt, the course to pursue, and having attained sufficiently the individual regeneration—the essential requisite of teaching—let us arise to teach His Cause with righteousness, conviction, understanding and vigor. Let this be the paramount and most urgent duty of every Bahá’í. Let us make it the dominating passion of our life.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *The Individual and Teaching* 15

forbearance: patience, tolerance

regeneration: state of being spiritually or morally revitalized

requisite: necessary

righteousness: justice, moral right

paramount: of greatest concern or importance; supreme in rank

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 93.

Illustration

“When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1913, He related an incident from His early childhood: ‘It is good to be a spreader of the Teachings of God in childhood. I was a teacher in this Cause at the age of this child (eight or nine years). This reminds me of a story. There was a man, highly educated, but not a Bahá’í. I, but a child, was to make of him a believer. The brother of this man brought him to me. I stayed with him, to teach him. He said “I am not convinced, I am not satisfied.” I answered, “If water were offered to a thirsty one, he would drink and be satisfied. He would take the glass. But you are not thirsty. Were you thirsty, then you too would be satisfied. A man with seeing eyes sees. I can speak of the sun to every seeing one, and say it is a sign of the day; but a blind person would not be convinced because he cannot see the sun. If I say to a man with good hearing, listen to the beautiful music, he would then listen and be made happy thereby. But if you play the most beautiful music in the presence of a deaf man, he would hear nothing. Now go and receive seeing eyes and hearing ears, then I will speak further with you on this subject.” He went; but later he returned. Then he understood and became a good Bahá’í. This happened when I was very young.’”

—Annamarie Honnold, ed., *Vignettes from the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 103

Further Study

Select one of the passages from the “Readings” section.

What does the passage say?	In what specific ways can this passage be applied in your life?
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List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 93 and the additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

1. 2. 3. 4.

Tablet to Siyyid-i-Mihdíy-i-Dahají, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 196–201
This is a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to a teacher of the Faith describing the nature of teaching.

The Individual and Teaching

This compilation of passages from Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi addresses the topic of individual teaching.

Effective Teaching, workbook and instructor’s guide

This booklet is a study guide for group or individual deepening that focuses on the nature of teaching, the elements of effective teaching discussed in the Writings, and the example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Personal Reflection

Remaining Questions

Additional Reading

Questions

The following questions review parts of the content of the lesson for use in individual study. Refer to the Discussion section on the next page for questions to consider in group study.

1. (Circle all that apply.) Which of the following statements accurately describe the nature of teaching:
 - a. teaching is the food of the spirit
 - b. teaching is assisting God
 - c. the teacher creates new believers
 - d. the Word of God transforms hearts

2. (Circle all that apply.) Which of the following correctly describe the role of youth in teaching:
 - a. responsibility for teaching is given to youth
 - b. the whole training of youth should make them competent teachers
 - c. youth should hold youth classes
 - d. youth should travel to teach during vacations

3. List five elements of effective teaching discussed in this chapter:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____

Answers

The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotes, you may have different answers. Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. **a, b and d.** Regarding “a,” see #1, page 62; for “b,” see #2, page 62; and for “d,” see #5, page 62. Choice “c,” is incorrect. The teacher does not make new believers, it is the influence of divine power—the Holy Spirit. See #4 and #5, page 62.
2. **a, b, c, and d.** For “a,” see #7, #8, and #12, page 63; for “b,” see #8, page 63; for “c,” see #10, page 63; and for “d,” see #11, page 63.
3. A number of answers are provided on page 64, including: solid grounding in the Covenant; daily prayer, meditation, and reading of the Word of God; continual efforts to understand the teachings; relating the teachings to current issues; observing the laws and principles; modeling personal behavior to the standard in the teachings, living in awareness of the power of Bahá’u’lláh to overcome every obstacle; reflection on the teachings; and perseverance in action.

Discussion

Describe the spiritual nature of teaching. What is the role of the teacher in this process?

What are the special responsibilities of youth in teaching?

How can you apply the elements of effective teaching discussed on page 64 in your personal or group teaching efforts?

How can you make teaching the “dominating passion” of your life?

Exercise

One process which can assist believers in their efforts to develop their skills as teachers and to initiate and sustain systematic efforts for teaching is an evolutionary approach to the establishment of a teaching institute.

In its initial stages a teaching institute (or teaching group) involves a small core of believers around which a program of understanding and action develops. The believers select a specific population to teach. The believers in the institute then make plans to reach that population, and put the plans into action. Future gatherings of the institute are held to pray for the success of the effort, to deepen in the Writings, to select or develop materials to reach the selected population, to reflect upon the progress of the teaching efforts, and to revise the plans when necessary for greater effectiveness.

The evolutionary approach to teaching institutes provides an excellent opportunity for youth to join with other youth to develop teaching skills and implement teaching plans. You can get assistance in this effort from your Auxiliary Board member or Local Assembly. A booklet, *Further Thoughts on Teaching Institutes* (which can be obtained from the US Bahá'í Distribution Service) and other messages of the International Teaching Centre are available to guide the efforts of the institute.

Use the following questions in consultation with your core group members to guide you through the process of starting a teaching institute (the quotations are extracts of letters from the International Teaching Centre):

1. How does a teaching institute work?

“This kind of institute would function as a small group of people around which a program of understanding and action evolves continuously. It would not stop. It would not be a single weekend event, or a five day event, but a process which seeks to create human resources for the Faith, and to raise up servants who fully accept the gift of teaching with all of its ecstasy, sacrifice, and spiritual discipline, a process which attracts and sustains the incoming stream of new believers.” —letter of November 14, 1988

A teaching institute in its embryonic form is a product of individual grass roots initiative. You don't need to be appointed by a local assembly—just get your group of individuals together and act! The core group should meet on a regular basis: weekly, every two weeks, once a month—whatever schedule best suits the teaching work. The meetings will consist of spiritual nourishment through prayer and deepening and consultation about how to best teach the chosen population. You can make individual or group teaching plans and, as time goes on, revise those plans based on your experience and study of the Writings. The most important function of a teaching group, however, is what takes place between the meetings. Teach! Put the consultation and spiritual power into action. Use the meetings as a chance to build unity, draw divine guidance and assistance, refine your action plans.

Above all—don't stop! There is no barrier that cannot be overcome by perseverance and a greater measure of divine assistance. Crisis and victory are part of one whole process. You can't achieve the victories unless you are willing to pray, study, think, consult, and work your way through the crises.

2. What is the main purpose of a teaching institute?

“. . . unless the number of teachers increases constantly and keeps pace with rapid expansion, it becomes almost impossible to carry out the necessary deepening of the new believers or to ensure sustained efforts for the expansion of the Faith. — letter of November 29, 1988

“. . . one third of its effort and resources should focus on spiritual development, one third on teaching, and one third on developing materials appropriate to . . . expansion.” — letter of November 14, 1988

The main purpose of a teaching institute is to raise up human resources for the Faith—new teachers and administrators to do Bahá’u’lláh’s work. New believers are wonderful, but new workers for the Cause are essential if growth is to continue and accelerate. Therefore the institute must concern itself with deepening the new believers and involving them in the work. Materials for teaching and deepening should be carefully selected from existing materials to meet the needs of the selected population; if necessary new materials can be developed.

3. What population should we teach?

“It is important that real love for diversity be fostered and that the many ethnic groups . . . be reached and welcomed into the communities soon.” — letter of November 14, 1988

“The International Teaching Centre is thinking at this time especially of that group between the ages of ten to sixteen. . . . [I]f thousands upon thousands were invited into the Cause, and assisted to become deepened teachers of the Faith, they could in turn rescue their peers. — letter of December 5, 1988

The teaching group can choose any population to teach. It can be a geographic region or location (such as a school or university), an age group, a culture of race of peoples, a peer group, etc. The importance of choosing a population is that the efforts of the group become focused. Once there is a focus, specific strategies and materials can be selected and customized for the population. After selecting your population, consideration should be given to addressing youth and children (if applicable) since these souls are often the most open to change and can be active workers for the Faith.

4. What do we do when the number of new believers grows?

“. . . the attention of a core group will be focused initially on the preparation of the believers themselves for teaching among the population, and the actual implementation of teaching plans. As the number of believers increases in the region, the most urgent matter before the institute is the deepening of the new believers so that they also participate in teaching and help achieve a sustained rate of expansion. Gradually, other concerns will also have to be addressed as the institute begins to take on the more formal characteristics of institutes for the development of human resources similar to those that are evolving in areas of large-scale expansion.” — letter of November 2, 1989

As your teaching group is successful in attracting new believers you should involve them immediately in the deepening and teaching efforts of the core group. Don’t continually break the institute into small groups—one institute should reach the entire population. If the numbers grow significantly you will need to become more formal in your operations. The local assembly and the Auxiliary Board can assist in guiding this process. With tens or hundreds of new believers, a core committee can be appointed by the assembly to continue to guide the planning process and the development of organized classes.



The Field of Action: Discourse

Introduction

The final two chapters of the book focus on the larger campaign of action through which youth can move the world. This chapter addresses an element of strategy—a plan for shaping the structure and direction of future society.

From its birth, the purpose of Bahá'u'lláh Revelation has been to transform society into the kingdom of God on earth. Its first task—like a seed freshly planted in the ground—was to grow and develop. Its energies were spent in expansion throughout the world. In the mid 1980s, the Bahá'í Faith achieved a new level in its organic development. It could now begin to systematically reach out and change the world around it. Nourished by the sacrifices of the persecuted believers in Iran, the Bahá'í community achieved its emergence from obscurity,¹ initiated efforts to nurture the social and economic development of peoples,² and addressed leaders of thought at all levels of society on the establishment of world peace.³

“The time has come,” the Universal House of Justice stated in 1985, “for the Bahá'í community to become more involved in the life of society around it. . . .”⁴ The field of action for youth in this day is not only to continue to support the growth of the Cause but also to apply Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to resolve the problems of humanity.

1 The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 1985

2 The Universal House of Justice, October 20, 1983

3 The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*

4 Riḍván 1985

Overview

Youth can move the world. But how? How can we change the structure and direction of society to free it from the forces of darkness?

In His Writings, Bahá'u'lláh provides a framework for addressing the problems of humanity. He advises us to “be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in.”⁵ He also urges that we “strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action.”⁶

To combat the forces of darkness Bahá'í youth must address, on a profound level, the problems facing humanity in light of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. The level of consultation among youth needs to be raised to achieve in-depth discussion and analysis on all matters of concern to humanity.

By associating with a wide variety of peoples, by listening and learning from them in a spirit of pure intent and humility, by fostering an analysis of their concerns in light of deeper Bahá'í principles, youth will contribute toward building a new perspective that can defeat the forces of darkness at the heart of society's ills.

Explanation

The world faces many grievous problems in the age of transition from darkness to light. Many well-intentioned groups and individuals have proposed practical approaches to such problems and have committed vast financial and human resources to implement these solutions—yet results have been few. Often, attempted solutions have only deepened the problem.

Solutions to the world's problems are not delivered in neat packages. The consciousness of the people confronting these problems must be raised in order to understand the root of the problem and the principles involved. Only then can effective solutions be derived.

The Universal House of Justice expressed the hope that “an increasing number of believers will be able to analyze the problems of mankind in every field and show how the teachings solve them.”⁷ The Supreme Body specifically urged youth to “deepen your understanding of the Teachings of the Cause so that you will be able to

⁵ *Gleanings* 213

⁶ *Gleanings* 250

⁷ January 12, 1983

apply them to the problems of individuals and society, and explain them to your peers in ways they will understand and welcome.”⁸

To achieve this goal, the discourse of Bahá’í youth must be raised to a profound level. Youth should attempt to identify a problem or need and examine it in light of the teachings through “application of spiritual principles . . . and the practice of the art of consultation.”⁹

discourse: talk, conversation; a formal treatment of a subject in speech or in writing

Consultation that implements this approach might explore the following questions:

1. What are the “problems of humanity” that are of major concern to a specific group or population of people?
2. What are the fundamental issues at the heart of these problems?
3. What Bahá’í teachings or principles are relevant to these issues?
4. How can this analysis be used to devise a means of presenting the Bahá’í Faith to the people so that they see the relevance of the teachings to these needs?¹⁰

If Bahá’í youth can develop their capacity to analyze and understand issues and help people see their problems in a different light, then they will have developed the most essential attribute that will contribute to the solution of human problems. From the basis of these new perspectives, solutions can ultimately be derived and enacted through a process of action and reflection. This includes an ongoing process of consulting on issues (as described above); proposing solutions; acting on suggested solutions; reflecting on the progress of efforts; and revising the efforts in light of experience and a deeper understanding of spiritual principles.

The most essential step, however, is to create a new discourse among youth. Groups of Bahá’í youth and their friends can begin this effort in their informal discussions or in written statements, in their leisure activities or school classes, in their local community activities or in special national or international projects. As they consult with one another on the problems of humanity, youth will initiate a process that deepens their understanding of the Teachings, attracts their peers and the masses of humanity to the Faith, and moves the world toward its destined goal ordained by Bahá’u’lláh.

⁸ The Universal House of Justice, July 4, 1983

⁹ The Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 175

¹⁰ Adapted from the article “Relating the Bahá’í Faith to Current Issues” by Dr. Peter J. Khan. See the exercise on page 81.

1. “There can be no doubt that the progress of the Cause from this time onward will be characterized by an ever increasing relationship to the agencies, activities, institutions and leading individuals of the non-Bahá’í world. . . . Our preparation for and response to this situation must be a continual deepening of our faith, an unwavering adherence to its principles of abstention from partisan politics and freedom from prejudices, and above all an increasing understanding of its fundamental verities and relevance to the modern world.”
—The Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván* 1984

2. “The present condition of the world—its economic instability, social dissensions, political dissatisfaction and international distrust—should awaken the youth from their slumber and make them enquire what the future is going to bring. It is *surely they* who will suffer *most* if some calamity sweep over the world. They should therefore open their eyes to the existing conditions, study the evil forces that are at play and then with a concerted effort arise and bring about the necessary reforms—reforms that shall contain within their scope the spiritual as well as social and political phases of human life.”
—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 24

3. “Young men and women in the Faith must be deep and thoughtful scholars of its teachings, so that they can teach in a way that will convince people that all the problems facing them *have* a remedy.”
—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 45

4. “If you read the utterances of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with selflessness and care and concentrate upon them, you will discover truths unknown to you before and will obtain an insight into the problems that have baffled the great thinkers of the world.”
—Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 21

5. “. . . study the teachings themselves deeper. Bahá’í scholarship is needed really more than worldly scholarship, for one is spiritual and the other more or less transient. There is a real lack in the Cause of people who know the teachings *thoroughly*, especially their deeper truths. . . .”
—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 51

6. “. . . we know that the deeper teachings, the capacity of His projected world order to re-create society, are new and dynamic. It is these we must learn to present intelligently and enticingly. . . .”
—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 49

Youth Should Address the Problems of Humanity

abstention: a condition of not doing something

partisan: having to do with one party, cause, faction, person, or idea, as opposed to others

Study the Teachings at Deeper Levels

transient: passing away with time, transitory

enticingly: attract in a way that arouses hope or desire

7. “I urge them [youth] to study profoundly the revealed utterances of Bahá’u’lláh and the discourses of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and not to rely unduly on the representation and interpretation of the Teachings given by Bahá’í speakers and teachers.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 22

8. “Should the friends desire to take the lead in informing the world, they should start by educating themselves and understand what the troubles and problems really are which baffle the minds of men.”

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Centers of Bahá’í Learning* 2

9. “. . . Bahá’ís . . . need to be much better informed and able to discuss intelligently, intellectually, the present condition of the world and its problems. We need Bahá’í scholars, not only people far, far more deeply aware of what our teachings really are, but also well read and well educated people, capable of correlating our teachings to the current thoughts of the leaders of society.”

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 49

10. “There are many aspects of western thinking which have been exalted to a status of unassailable principle in the general mind, that time may well show to have been erroneous or, at least, only partially true.”

—written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, March 27, 1983

11. “The Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh throw light on so many aspects of human life and knowledge that a Bahá’í must learn, earlier than most, to weigh the information that is given to him rather than to accept it blindly. . . . [H]e must therefore develop the ability to learn everything from those around him, showing proper humility before his teachers, but always relating what he hears to the Bahá’í teachings, for they will enable him to sort out the gold from the dross of human error.”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 96

12. “As the Bahá’í community grows it will acquire experts in numerous fields—both by Bahá’ís becoming experts and by experts becoming Bahá’ís. As these experts bring their knowledge and skill to the service of the community and, even more, as they transform their various disciplines by bringing to bear upon them the light of the Divine Teachings, problem after problem now disrupting society will be answered.”

—on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, August 21, 1977

profoundly: in great depth; in a way that penetrates what is superficial or obvious

Mastering and Redefining Human Learning

baffle: puzzle; thwart

Bahá’í scholarship: “The description of the kind of Bahá’í scholar of which the Faith stands in such need at this time places emphasis upon belief, devotion to the Faith, a profound understanding of the Teachings and a strong desire to share them with others. A distinctive feature of such Bahá’í scholarship, which is also reiterated in other passages of the writings of the Guardian, is that of relating the Bahá’í teachings to the present-day concerns and thought of the people around us. . . . From the passage of the Guardian’s writings dealing with the attributes to which a Bahá’í scholar should aspire, it is evident that Bahá’í scholarship is an endeavor accessible to all members of the Bahá’í community, without exception.” (The International Teaching Centre, August 9, 1984)

unassailable: not capable of being disputed or disproved, undeniable

13. “A Bahá’í has the advantage of the Divine Revelation for this age, which shines like a searchlight on so many problems that baffle modern thinkers. . . .” —The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 96

14. “There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures.” —The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace* 28

15. “The problems which confront the believers at the present time, whether social, spiritual, economic or administrative will be gradually solved as the number and the resources of the friends multiply and their capacity for service and for the application of Bahá’í principles develops. They should be patient, confident and active in utilizing every possible opportunity that presents itself within the limits now necessarily imposed upon them.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 176

16. “He does not ask us to follow Him blindly; as He says in one of His Tablets, God had endowed man with a mind to operate as a torchlight and guide him to truth. Read His words, consider His teachings, and measure their value in the light of contemporary problems. . . .” —written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 35

17. “From the beginning of His stupendous mission, Bahá’u’lláh urged upon the attention of nations the necessity of ordering human affairs in such a way as to bring into being a world unified in all the essential aspects of its life. . . . Now, after all the years of constant teaching activity, the Community of the Greatest Name has grown to the stage at which the process of this development must be incorporated into its regular pursuits. . . . The steps to be taken must necessarily begin in the Bahá’í community itself, with the friends endeavoring, through their application of spiritual principles, their rectitude of conduct and the practice of the art of consultation, to uplift themselves. . . . In the process and as a consequence, the friends will undoubtedly extend the benefits of their efforts to society as a whole, until all mankind achieves the progress intended by the Lord of the Age.”

—The Universal House of Justice, October 20, 1983

Applying Spiritual Principles

immanent: inherent, existing or remaining within

aspiration: a strong desire for high achievement; an object of this desire

rectitude: moral uprightness; regarding the rectitude of conduct called for here see the Guardian’s detailed description in The Advent of Divine Justice, pages 23–29

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 93.

Illustration

“Bahá’í strategies for social and economic development focus on whole problems. If poverty is to be eliminated, it is not enough for people to learn income-generating skills. They also need confidence, a sense of self-worth, honest middlemen and, ultimately, a change of attitude and behavior on the part of the ultra-rich. A successful literacy campaign requires good organization and capable teachers but also a belief in human capacity and love for the students. Spiritual strategies make a powerful contribution to development because human problems are not just material problems. . . .

“Bahá’ís who belong to an indigenous group gathered in a large meeting to consult on a statement in the Bahá’í Writings: that the indigenous people would lead their continent. How could they achieve that destiny? The discussion went on day and night without stopping. Everyone listened intently. ‘We have to stop thinking of ourselves the way other people in this country think of us.’ ‘We know we are Bahá’u’lláh’s people.’ ‘Education is the way forward for our children.’ ‘We should bring back the tradition of our people to act with unity when a decision has been reached.’ Serious and intense consultations were held all over the region where this people live. They created a plan for the rehabilitation of their culture. Members of the group were trained as teachers. They opened schools. These believers are continuing their systematic program for the education and upliftment of their whole people.”

—Vick, *Social and Economic Development: A Bahá’í Approach* 38, 54–55

Further Study

Select one of the passages from the “Readings” section.

What does the passage say?	In what specific ways can this passage be applied in your life?
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List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 93 and the additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

1. 2. 3.

The Importance of Deepening

This compilation presents quotations on the importance of a deeper study of the teachings and on specific topics inside and outside the Faith that should be studied.

“Relating the Faith to Current Issues,” by Dr. Peter J. Khan

This paper outlines an approach to relate the teachings to current thoughts and problems of humanity. The article was printed in a variety of publications, including *Glory*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1987.

Social and Economic Development, by Holly Hanson Vick

This book examines ideas and examples related to the Bahá’í approach to social and economic development, which seeks to uplift the condition of humanity through the application of spiritual principles and the release of spiritual potential.

**Personal
Reflection**

**Remaining
Questions**

**Additional
Reading**

Questions

The following questions review parts of the content of the lesson for use in individual study. Refer to the Discussion section on the next page for questions to consider in group study.

1. Define what is meant by discourse as presented in this chapter:

2. What are four questions around which a Bahá'í discussion on the problems of humanity might center:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____

3. (Circle all that apply.) Which of the following are aspects of the Bahá'í approach to addressing the problems of humanity:
 - a. following the guidance of prominent Bahá'í speakers
 - b. education in fields of human learning
 - c. redefining the fields of human learning
 - d. blindly applying Bahá'í principles

Answers

The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotes, you may have different answers. Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. Discourse is the entire body of the interaction of Bahá'í youth—their conversations and writings—as they consider the problems facing humanity in light of the Bahá'í teachings.
2. Refer to the proposed questions on page 73.
3. **b** and **c**. Regarding “b,” see #8, #9 and #12 on page 75. More direct quotations can be found in *The Importance of Deepening*, especially #119 and #148. Regarding “c,” see #10–#12 on page 75. These two actions are interdependent, since addressing the problems of humanity in light of the teachings is more than just applying existing knowledge from fields of human endeavor and since one cannot critique and transform existing disciplines without understanding them thoroughly. Choice “a” is incorrect; a profound understanding of the teachings is required through direct study (see #4–#7 on pages 74 and 75; of course this does not mean that we ignore sound guidance given by Bahá'í speakers). Choice “d” is also incorrect; while we must apply Bahá'í principles (#13–#17 on page 76) this is not a simple matter of blind obedience or a one time act. We must often struggle with a number of practical efforts through a series of crises and victories before we are able to successfully apply the teachings to resolve an actual problem. To say “don't be prejudiced” and to readily accept the truth of such a principle is a far cry from removing prejudice in society.

Discussion

What is Bahá'í scholarship? Who can be a Bahá'í scholar? How does Bahá'í scholarship serve the needs of humanity? How does it serve the needs of the Faith? (Refer to quotations #3 and #5 on page 74 and #9 and #12 on page 75. See also the definition in the margin on page 75.)

What is one of the problems of humanity faced by your peers or the population in which you live? Initiate a discussion on this issue.

Exercise

Through consultation problems are identified and analyzed at a deep level in light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. This deep level of analysis and application of spiritual principles creates the opportunity to understand problems beyond the political or social solutions often proposed in society.

Consider the example of world peace. In the mid 1980s, a widespread concern about nuclear war led peace activists world-wide to organize demonstrations and influence politicians to establish a nuclear freeze—a proposal for holding the level of nuclear weapons constant. While there were a range of other proposals, including the idea that peace was related to social justice, the idea of a nuclear freeze became the dominant voice for peace. A Bahá'í, analyzing the issue of world peace at a simple level in the Writings, might have suggested that instead of a nuclear freeze, what was needed was a world conference of nations that would establish a world government.

While this idea is not incorrect, the Universal House of Justice in the *Promise of World Peace* offers a deeper analysis and presentation of the Bahá'í position. The House of Justice notes that the problem of peace lies in our understanding of human nature. It identifies barriers to peace, including such issues as racism and the equality of women and men. While still offering Bahá'u'lláh's proposals for World Order, the Universal House of Justice offers the Bahá'í experience as a model for study and encourages believers to interact with people at all levels of society to create a vision of the hope and expectation of world peace. In this way, the Supreme Body acknowledges that the effort toward world peace is a process, not a one time event.

We can imitate the model offered by the Universal House of Justice in our efforts to develop discussions on the problems confronting humanity—particularly the issues we can address in our local population. Here we have the chance not only to analyze a problem, but to work with other well-intentioned peoples to develop practical solutions based on spiritual principles.

How does this process work? It involves several ongoing steps that often occur simultaneously:

- Identify a problem of concern to people in the area, including you and your peers.
- Acquire information about the problem and probable causes.
- Analyze the deeper issues underlying the problem.
- Identify the Bahá'í principles that apply to the problem.
- Interact with the population and figure out how to apply the principles to the problem in a practical manner
- Act on the decisions.
- Get feedback about the results from those affected by the problem.
- Reflect on the results of the actions and adjust your activities to fit your new insights.

The crucial step, however, is analysis. Consider how the following problem might be analyzed at a variety of levels:

During school vacations unsupervised children are forming gangs and getting into fights. Property is being damaged and children not in the gangs are being threatened. There are no organized activities for the children nor a supervised place for them to spend time together. They have little or no money for leisure activities. Some parents working outside the home can not afford day-care.

Feedback

Consider the following example of a discussion of four youth on the problem from page 81:

Youth A: In looking at this problem, it seems to me that the main concern should be for the welfare of the children. Since Bahá'u'lláh gives the Local Assembly the responsibility to provide for the education and protection of the children if parents can't, I think we can infer that the city has a responsibility here. So the issue becomes how can we get the city to provide some summer programs. Maybe we could volunteer to set up a program.

Analyze this response. What other aspects of the problem might be explored?

Youth B: I've been reading the Bahá'í compilation on education and it seems clear to me that parents are directed to be fully responsible for the training and protection of their children. It's the parents who should be trying to address this problem. A lot of parents seem to be ignoring their responsibility. So the question becomes how to get the parents to keep their children out of trouble. One way might be to get the city to make parents responsible for their children's actions. Perhaps we can help pass some laws that hold parents accountable for their children's actions.

Compare this response to the first. What useful ideas have been added? Is this sufficient?

Youth C: I see what you're saying about the parents being responsible, but I'm not sure that prosecuting parents for their children's actions is going to solve the problem. Maybe there's a deeper issue here. Maybe the parents don't understand how important it is for them to protect their children and to train their children's morals. They may not realize that they have a responsibility before God to do that. Or maybe the parents see the problem, but don't know how to address it themselves. They may feel powerless. Perhaps we could meet with the parents to find out how they see the problem and how they would see us helping them.

Compare this response to the first two. What vital aspect is still missing from the discussion?

Youth D: I'm trying to see this problem from the children's viewpoint. Maybe they don't know how to resolve conflicts without fighting. Since there are no adults around during the day, maybe they feel nobody really cares about them. What incentive do they have to be good? Of course children will be destructive and wild if no one teaches them otherwise. 'Abdu'l-Bahá talks about each child being potentially the "light of the world"—if they're trained. Also, I read in *The Hidden Words*: "Noble I made thee, wherewith dost thou abase thyself?" Children need to be taught that they are a noble creation, and should have exalted goals. Perhaps we could start a program that would train children to be peacemakers. That would help them get a positive image of themselves.

What does this final statement add? Can you think of additional considerations that would deepen the analysis further? What comments would you add if you were participating?

You can initiate your own efforts to build a discussion on the problems of humanity around you. Be creative. Gather the youth in your area and begin with informal discussions and study. Or, your Bahá'í college club may wish to approach a professor to establish an independent study class on an important issue that can be analyzed using Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í sources; this combines your efforts to master fields of human learning and your Bahá'í studies. Whatever the initial efforts made, you can begin to participate in a process of analysis and action that can grow to change the world.

8

The Field of Action: Consecration

Introduction

Chapters 3–6 examine the weapons which the spiritual warrior develops through spiritual discipline. In chapter 7, we discussed how these weapons are focused to support a discourse that addresses the problems facing humanity. Despite all these areas of endeavor, there remains one more key element to successfully defeat the forces of darkness. This is the degree to which we are willing to consecrate ourselves to achieving the triumph of Bahá'u'lláh's Cause.

Consecration is dedication or commitment to a goal. On another level, consecration implies making something sacred.

The battle of light and darkness, like any battle, will have its casualties. Inertia, materialism, prejudice, and a host of other dark forces stand ready to overcome and render ineffective any careless member of the army of light. Perseverance, audacity, self-sacrifice, and heroism—the outward signs of consecration—are necessary if we are to accomplish Bahá'u'lláh's purpose for humanity.

Overview

When an army enters the field of battle, it is not skill alone that decides the outcome. The morale of the army—its attitude toward the task, its force of will and determination to achieve victory, and its willingness to sacrifice—is the most essential component.

This is also true for the army of light. Whatever the efforts made in the areas of spiritual preparation, character development, service, and teaching, if these efforts are not accompanied by the consecration of its members, there will be no lasting achievements.

The spiritual warrior must consecrate himself to the will of God. “So complete must be thy consecration,” Bahá’u’lláh states, “that every trace of worldly desire will be washed from thine heart.”¹ Until this sacrifice of self is made, the individual is powerless against the forces of darkness. Until this sacrifice of self is made, Bahá’u’lláh’s purpose for humanity cannot be achieved.

¹ Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 338

Explanation

Shoghi Effendi stated: “There are two kinds of Bahá’ís, one might say: those whose religion is Bahá’í and those who live for the Faith. Needless to say if one can belong to the latter category, if one can be in the vanguard of heroes, martyrs and saints, it is more praiseworthy in the sight of God.”²

As the world moves toward the climax of the twin processes of integration and disintegration, the army of light is in ever greater need of this second kind of Bahá’í. Souls must arise who will sacrificially serve the Cause according to its needs, rather than those who offer what is easy or comfortable to give. Youth can be this vanguard of “heroes, martyrs and saints.” You, personally, can be among these “knights of the Lord.”³

To the early believers in the West, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told a story to illustrate the difference in attitude of those who wish to sacrifice everything for their Lord. He explained: “Among the disciples of the Báb were two: His amanuensis [secretary] and a firm believer. On the eve of the Báb’s martyrdom the firm believer prayed: ‘O let me die with You!’ The amanuensis said: ‘What shall I do?’”

“‘What shall I do?’ mocked the Master. ‘What do you want me to do?’ The disciple died with the Báb, his head on the breast of the Báb, and their bodies were mingled in death. The other died in prison anyway, but think of the difference in their stations!”⁴

“O Son of Man!” Bahá’u’lláh states. “Ponder and reflect. Is it thy wish to die upon thy bed, or to shed thy life-blood on the dust, a martyr in My path, and so become the manifestation of My command and the revealer of My light in the highest paradise?”⁵

Today the Cause needs living martyrs—spiritual warriors engaged in intimate communion with their Lord, dynamic examples of a true Bahá’í character, sacrificial servants addressing the challenges facing the Cause and society, and audacious teachers that transform the souls of humanity. None of us need ask “What shall I do?” We know. “Let it now been seen what your endeavors in the path of detachment will reveal.”⁶

² written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Bahá’í Life* 18

⁵ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words* 14

³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* 17

⁶ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words* 52

⁴ Reported words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *The Diary of Juliet Thompson* 319. This believer, Muḥammad-‘Alfī-i-Zunúzí, was executed with the Báb, and his remains are interred with those of the Báb on Mt. Carmel. See page 88 and *The Dawnbreakers*, pages 507–14.

Readings

1. “If thine aim be to cherish thy life, approach not our court; but if sacrifice be thy heart’s desire, come and let others come with thee. For such is the way of Faith, if in thy heart thou seekest reunion with Bahá; shouldst thou refuse to tread this path, why trouble us? Begone!”

—Bahá’u’lláh, reported in *The Dawnbreakers* 137–38

2. “. . . arise and enlist, ere the opportunity is irretrievably lost, in the army of Bahá’u’lláh’s crusaders. The hour is ripe to disencumber themselves of worldly vanities, to mount the steed of steadfastness, unfurl the banner of renunciation, don the armor of utter consecration to God’s Cause, gird themselves with the girdle of a chaste and holy life, unsheathe the sword of Bahá’u’lláh’s utterance, buckle on the shield of His love, carry as sole provision implicit trust in His promise. . . .”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World* 49

3. “. . . much innocent blood has been shed in the past, and much, even today [1984], is being sacrificed in Iran by young and old alike. Consider, for example, the instances in *Shiráz* . . . of the six young women, their ages ranging from 18 to 25 years, whose lives were snuffed out by the hangman’s noose. . . . Look also at the accounts of the astounding fortitude shown over and over again by children and youth who were subjected to the interrogations and abuses of teachers and mullahs. . . . Might it, then, not be reasonably expected that you, the youth and young adults living at such an extraordinary time . . . would sally forth, ‘unrestrained as the wind,’ into the field of Bahá’í action?”

—The Universal House of Justice, *Unrestrained as the Wind* 184–85

4. “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. The martyr’s field is the place of detachment from self, that the anthems of eternity may be upraised. Do all ye can to become wholly weary of self, and bind yourselves to that Countenance of Splendors; and once ye have reached such heights of servitude, ye will find, gathered within your shadow, all created things. . . .”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 76–77

5. “He urges you to make up your minds to do great, *great* deeds for the Faith; the condition of the world is steadily growing worse, and your generation must provide the saints, heroes, martyrs and administrators of future years. With dedication and will power you can arise to great heights!”

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Youth* 6

Consecrate Yourself to the Cause of God

crusaders: those who engage in a concerted movement for a cause; an allusion to those involved in the religious military expeditions undertaken by Christians to recover the Holy Land in the 11–13th centuries; this is a specific reference to those who participated in the ten year World Crusade initiated by the Guardian in 1953 that spread the Faith throughout the world and ended with the formation of the Universal House of Justice

disencumber: to free from something that hinders or burdens

vanities: things that are vain, futile, or worthless

renunciation: the act of giving something up; rejection or disowning; detachment

don: to put on

consecration: dedication to a goal or service; act of making sacred

gird: to fasten; to equip or prepare for action

girdle: a belt, sash, or band worn around the waist

fortitude: strength of mind that allows one to endure pain or adversity with courage

mullahs: Islamic religious leaders

bereft: deprived of

anthems: songs of praise

6. “Bahá’u’lláh . . . hath, during His last days on earth, given the most emphatic promise that, through the outpourings of the grace of God and the aid and assistance vouchsafed from His Kingdom on high, souls will arise and holy beings appear who, as stars, would adorn the firmament of divine guidance. . . .

“These shall labor ceaselessly, by day and by night, shall heed neither trials nor woe, shall suffer no respite in their efforts, shall seek no repose, shall disregard all ease and comfort, and, detached and unsullied, shall consecrate every fleeting moment of their lives to the diffusion of the divine fragrance and the exaltation of God’s holy Word. . . . They shall reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom, and manifest unto everyone the signs of God. They shall burn brightly even as a candle in the heart of every assembly, and beam forth as a star upon every horizon. The gentle breezes wafted from the garden of their hearts shall perfume and revive the souls of men, and the revelations of their minds, even as showers, will reinvigorate the peoples and nations of the world.

“I am waiting, eagerly waiting for these holy ones to appear; and yet, how long will they delay their coming? My prayer and ardent supplication, at eventide and at dawn, is that these shining stars may soon shed their radiance upon the world. . . .”

— ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 251–52

7. “To His valiant combatants on earth, who at times may feel disheartened, our ever-victorious Commander, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, gives us the following assurance:

“O ye servants of the Sacred Threshold! The triumphant hosts of the Celestial Concourse, arrayed and marshalled in the Realms above, stand ready and expectant to assist and assure victory to that valiant horseman who with confidence spurs on his charger into the arena of service. Well is it with that fearless warrior, who armed with the power of true Knowledge, hastens unto the field, disperses the armies of ignorance, and scatters the hosts of error, who holds aloft the Standard of Divine Guidance, and sounds the Clarion of Victory. By the righteousness of the Lord! He hath achieved a glorious triumph and obtained the true victory. . . .”

“With such inspiring words as these, are we to remain any longer unmoved and inactive? His trumpet-call resounds on every side, and summons us to service; are we to tarry and hesitate? His voice is calling aloud from every land; let us march on, unfettered and unafraid, and fulfill our glorious Destiny.” —Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration* 42–43

emphatic: expressed with emphasis

vouchsafed: granted or given, as if by a favor

firmament: the heavens, sky

respite: a short interval of rest or relief; a postponement

reinvigorate: reanimate; to restore vigor or vitality to

ardent: characterized by passion, emotion or desire; burning

valiant: possessing or demonstrating valor, courageous

arrayed: arranged in order

marshalled: conducted ceremoniously

tarry: to delay or be late

unfettered: freed from bonds or restraints

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 93.

Illustrations

“I have heard Siyyid Ḥusayn [the Báb’s amanuensis] bear witness to the following: ‘That night the face of the Báb was aglow with joy, a joy such as had never shone from His countenance. . . . “Tomorrow,” He said to us, “will be the day of My martyrdom. Would that one of you might now arise and, with his own hands, end My life. I prefer to be slain by the hand of a friend rather than by that of the enemy.” Tears rained from our eyes as we heard Him express that wish. We shrank, however, at the thought of taking away with our hands so precious a life. We refused, and remained silent. Mírzá Muḥammad-Alí[y-i-Zunúzí] suddenly sprang to his feet and announced himself ready to obey whatever the Báb might desire. “This same youth who has arisen to comply with My wish,” the Báb declared . . . , “will together with Me suffer martyrdom. . . .”

“[The next day] Sám Khán ordered his men to drive a nail into the pillar . . . and to make fast two ropes to that nail, from which the Báb and His companion were to be separately suspended. Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí begged Sám Khán to be placed in such a manner that his own body would shield that of the Báb. He was eventually suspended in such a position that his head reposed on the breast of his Master. As soon as they were fastened, a regiment of soldiers ranged itself in three files, each of two hundred and fifty men, each of which was ordered to open fire in its turn until the whole detachment had discharged the volleys of its bullets. . . .

“As soon as the cloud of smoke had clear away, an astounded multitude were looking upon a scene which their eyes could scarcely believe. There standing before them alive and unhurt, was the companion of the Báb, whilst He Himself had vanished uninjured from their sight. . . . They set out in a frenzied search for Him, and found Him, eventually, seated in the same room which He had occupied the night before, engaged in completing His interrupted conversation, with Siyyid Ḥusayn. . . .

“On the same wall and in the same manner, the Báb and His companion were again suspended, while the regiment formed in line to open fire upon them. Contrariwise to the previous occasion, . . . this time their bodies were shattered and were blended into one mass of mingled flesh and bone. ‘Had you believed in Me, O wayward generation,’ were the last words of the Báb to the gazing multitude as the regiment was preparing to fire the final volley, ‘every one of you would have followed the example of this youth . . . and willingly would have sacrificed himself in My path.’”

—Nabíl, *The Dawnbreakers* 507–14

“There is a great mystery involved in the levels of service. Shoghi Effendi always advised the friends to pursue a moderate and wise course, but if they did not, and chose to rise to heights of heroism and self-sacrifice, he was immensely proud of them. After all, there is nothing either wise or moderate in being martyred—yet our crowning glory as a religion is that our first Prophet was martyred and twenty thousand people followed in His footsteps. I have tried to understand this mystery, moderation on one side and Bahá’u’lláh’s words on the other: ‘. . . *then write with that crimson ink that hath been shed in My path. Sweeter indeed is this than all else, . . .*’ and it seems to me that the best example is an aeroplane: when it trundles along on the ground on its wheels it is in the dimension of the ground, going along steadily on an earthly plane, but when it soars into the air and folds its wheels away and leaps forward at dazzling speeds, it is in a celestial realm and the values are different. When we are on the ground we get good sound earthly advice, but if we choose to spurn the soil and leap into the realms of higher service and sacrifice we do not get that kind of advice any more, we win immortal fame and become heroes and heroines of God’s Cause.”

—Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl* 127

Further Study

Select one of the passages from the “Readings” section.

What does the passage say?	In what specific ways can this passage be applied in your life?
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List any unanswered questions about the lesson you may want to explore in more depth. Use the index on page 93 and the additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

1. 2. 3. 4.

The Dawnbreakers, by Nabíl

This book presents the history of the Faith during the time of the Bábís—our model of true spiritual warriors. Shoghi Effendi wrote that this book “will show how the Faith was ushered into the world and how its early adherents heroically faced martyrdom and suffering in their desire to establish the Cause throughout the world. Knowing the life of those heroes will create in us the urge to follow their footsteps and achieve the same.”

Release the Sun, by William Sears

This book consists of stories from *The Dawnbreakers* retold in a moving and simple style.

**Personal
Reflection**

**Remaining
Questions**

**Additional
Reading**

Questions

The following questions review parts of the content of the lesson for use in individual study. Refer to the Discussion section on the next page for questions to consider in group study.

1. Define what is meant by consecration:
2. List three aspects of the meaning of self-sacrifice:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
3. List five qualities of the consecrated spiritual warrior as described in this chapter:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____

Answers

The following are suggested answers. Depending on your understanding of the quotes, you may have different answers. Consider the suggested answers a starting point for thought and discussion.

1. To dedicate yourself firmly, and even sacrificially, to a goal or service; to make a sacred commitment to a course of action.
2. To give up your personal pleasure for the sake of Bahá'u'lláh (#1, page 86); to be detached from self (#4, page 86); and to sacrifice our will for God's will (page 84).
3. A variety of possible answers are provided in the quotations on pages 86 and 87 including the qualities of self-sacrifice (#1), steadfastness (#2), a chaste and holy life (#2), trust in God (#2), renunciation (#2), detachment (#2, #4), dedication (#5), will power (#5), willingness to disregard comfort and ease (#6), ceaseless labor (#6), and fearlessness (#7).

Discussion

A spiritual warrior has to arise—but how does he or she know in which direction to go? From what sources do the spiritual warriors in the army of light get their “marching orders?”

What is self-sacrifice? What does it have to do with your service to the Cause?

What efforts can you, personally, make to arise to the level of service called for in this chapter and in this book? What are the first steps you will take to put these steps into action?

Index for the Role and Responsibilities of Bahá'í Youth

Introduction

The index provides references on topics related to youth from a wide range of Bahá'í books. Quotations used, at least in part, in this book are indicated with the corresponding page number from *Youth Can Move the World* in parenthesis.

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Index Abbreviation:

SAB

SDC

TAB

TDP

PUP

ESW

GL

HW

KI

SV

TB

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