

The Word of God



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

In this series:

The Word of God

*The Covenant: Its Meaning and Origin
and Our Attitude Toward It*

The Significance of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation

Youth Can Move the World

The Spiritual Conquest of the Planet

The Journey of the Soul

Prepared by the National Teaching Committee
of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States.

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1-561-697-9823

1-561-697-9815 (fax)

palabrapub@aol.com

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The Word of God

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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 from books by Bahá’ís; usually 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 side 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 on a weekly basis for discussion of the quotations and questions. As a third alternative, 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 Word of God.

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

National Teaching Committee
August 1987

*The Word of God hath set the heart of the world afire;
how regrettable if ye fail to be enkindled with its flame!*

—Bahá'u'lláh

1

Words

Introduction

We cannot gain understanding about the Word of God through our own unaided efforts. The Word of God, Bahá'u'lláh says, is “far higher and superior to that which the senses can perceive.”¹ We must learn about the nature of the Word by turning to the means God has provided—statements within the Word of God itself. This will be our method throughout the six lessons of this book.

We begin our study of the Word of God with a more familiar topic—the words of human beings. By exploring statements in the Bahá'í Writings we will learn about the qualities and influence that words possess. On this basic understanding of the nature of words we can build, in lessons two and three, an understanding of the nature of the Word of God.

¹ *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 140

Overview

“Every word,” Bahá’u’lláh says, “is endowed with a spirit.”² This spirit gives words influence and produces effects that can continue for a long time.

Words, such as those used for backbiting or gossip, can produce harmful effects. Words can also produce positive effects. They can inspire and uplift; they can unify people and promote the progress of civilization.

In every circumstance, words must be carefully selected to fit the situation. The same words do not suit the young child and the educated adult. Carelessly chosen words will have no effect, or worse, a negative effect. Words presented at the right time and suited to the hearer are more likely to produce the desired result.

To have their most positive influence words must be shared with wisdom and kindness. Such words can bring spiritual life to human hearts.

Explanation

We can better understand the characteristics of words by means of a concrete example. The effect of food on the body is similar to the effect of words on the mind and soul. For example:

- Food nourishes and helps build our bodies. Our diet can affect our health, our energy, even our mood. It can produce effects on the body that last a lifetime.

Words influence the development of our minds and souls. They influence our attitudes and behavior, and our interactions with other individuals and other societies. Bahá'u'lláh notes that the effects of words may “endure a century.”³

- Foods can have harmful or beneficial results. If food is spoiled, or if we eat too much of a rich or spicy type, we can become ill. A proper diet—with the right supply of vitamins, fiber, and other vital nutrients—promotes good health.

Harm or benefit also results from words. “One word is like unto springtime,” Bahá'u'lláh says, “. . . another word is even as a deadly poison.”⁴ Our use of words can range from backbiting, which “quencheth the light of the heart, and extinguisheth the life of the soul”⁵ to teaching the Faith, which can “stir up the souls of all men and incline their hearts unto this most blessed and all-glorious Court.”⁶

- We must receive the proper foods at the proper times to develop our full potential. Protein, for example, is necessary for the development of a child’s brain in the womb.

Words also have a proper time and place. “Say not that which the ears cannot bear to hear, for such speech is like luscious food given to small children,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states. “However palatable, rare and rich the food may be, it cannot be assimilated by the digestive organs of a suckling child.”⁷

3 *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 193

4 *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 173

5 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 193

6 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 303

7 *The Individual and Teaching* 13

Readings

1. “No man of wisdom can demonstrate his knowledge save by means of words. This showeth the significance of the Word. . . . For it is through its potency and animating spirit that the people of the world have attained so eminent a position. Moreover words and utterances should be both impressive and penetrating. However, no word will be infused with these two qualities unless it be uttered wholly for the sake of God and with due regard unto the exigencies of the occasion and the people.

“The Great Being saith: Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation. As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure. As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets.

“Every word is endowed with a spirit, therefore the speaker or expounder should carefully deliver his words at the appropriate time and place. . . . The Great Being saith: One word may be likened unto fire, another unto light, and the influence which both exert is manifest in the world. Therefore an enlightened man of wisdom should primarily speak with words as mild as milk, that the children of men may be nurtured and edified thereby and may attain the ultimate goal of human existence which is the station of true understanding and nobility. And likewise He saith: One word is like unto springtime causing the tender saplings of the rose-garden of knowledge to become verdant and flourishing, while another word is even as a deadly poison. It behoveth a prudent man of wisdom to speak with utmost leniency and forbearance so that the sweetness of his words may induce everyone to attain that which befitteth man’s station.”

—Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh 172-73

2. “Utterance must needs possess penetrating power. For if bereft of this quality it would fail to exert influence. And this penetrating influence dependeth on the spirit being pure and the heart stainless. Likewise it needeth moderation, without which the hearer would be unable to bear it, rather he would manifest opposition from the very outset. And moderation will be obtained by blending utterance with the tokens of divine wisdom which are recorded in the sacred Books and Tablets. Thus when the essence of one’s utterance is endowed with these two requisites it will prove highly effective and will be the prime factor in transforming the souls of men. . . . Whoso attaineth thereto is invested with the power to teach the Cause of God. . . .”

—Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh 198-99

The Power and Influence of Words

potency: power, might

animating: imparting life, energy, movement

impressive: capable of making a strong impression on the mind; inspiring awe or admiration

penetrating: to go or enter into; pervade; to affect deeply, to affect the emotions deeply

exigencies: demands or needs of a given situation

moderation: staying within reasonable bounds; not extreme; restraint

endowed: furnished with; provided; enriched
edified: instructed, benefited

verdant: covered with green vegetation

prudent: showing the ability to govern oneself through reason; using skill or good judgement

leniency: exertion of a soothing influence; mild and tolerant disposition

forbearance: patience, indulgence; self-restraint

induce: influence, persuade

essence: individual, real, or ultimate nature of a thing

3. “How great the multitude of truths which the garment of words can never contain! How vast the number of such verities as no expression can adequately describe, whose significance can never be unfolded, and to which not even the remotest allusions can be made! How manifold are the truths which must remain unuttered until the appointed time is come! Even as it hath been said: ‘Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it.’”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 176

verities: fundamental truths; inevitably true values

allusions: indirect reference; slight mention or suggestion of something

manifold: various; diverse

4. “He [the true seeker] must . . . observe silence, and refrain from idle talk. For the tongue is a smouldering fire, and excess of speech a deadly poison. Material fire consumeth the body, whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart and soul. The force of the former lasteth but for a time, whilst the effects of the latter endure a century.

“That seeker should also regard backbiting as grievous error, and keep himself aloof from its dominion, inasmuch as backbiting quenches the light of the heart, and extinguisheth the life of the soul.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 193

aloof: at a distance; purposely apart

dominion: supreme authority; area of influence

5. “If any soul speak ill of an absent one, the only result will clearly be this: he will dampen the zeal of the friends and tend to make them indifferent. For backbiting is divisive, it is the leading cause among the friends of a disposition to withdraw. If any individual should speak ill of one who is absent, it is incumbent on his hearers, in a spiritual and friendly manner, to stop him. . . .

“If, however, a person setteth about speaking well of another, opening his lips to praise another, he will touch an answering chord in his hearers and they will be stirred up by the breathings of God.”

—*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 230-31

incumbent: obligation of; duty of

6. “A kindly tongue is the lodestone of the hearts of men. It is the bread of the spirit, it clotheth the words with meaning, it is the fountain of the light of wisdom and understanding. . . .”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 289

lodestone: magnet; person or thing that attracts

7. “Arise for the triumph of My Cause, and, through the power of thine utterance subdue the hearts of men. . . .” —Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 92

8. “The things He hath reserved for Himself are the cities of men’s hearts. . . . Open, O people, the city of the human heart with the key of your utterance.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 304

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 67.

Illustrations

“One day a rich lady went to a saintly man to ask his advice. She said that she wished to be a saintly woman, but there was one fault which she found difficult to overcome. The saint told her that there was no fault one could not overcome if one wanted to overcome it.

“Then the lady told the saint how she was in the habit of gossiping about others and how she had failed to overcome that fault although she had tried very hard.

““Can you help me?” she asked the holy man. ‘I will do anything you ask me to do.’

““Very well,’ answered the holy man, ‘go to the market and buy a fowl. On your way back home, pluck the fine feathers of the fowl and throw them on the street as you walk along. Come and see me after you have done this.’

“The rich lady was surprised to hear this, but she respected the holy man. So she did as she was told and faithfully obeyed his orders.

“The next day she went and told the holy man that she had obeyed his commands.

““Very good,’ answered the saint. ‘You have done the first part of your task very well. Now comes the second part. Go to the market and walk along the street again and try to pick up the feathers which you threw on the road yesterday.’

““That’s impossible!’ said the rich lady. ‘The wind has already blown them in all directions. How can I collect the feathers again?’

““That is so,’ answered the holy man. ‘The same happens when you gossip about others. Your words are passed from mouth to mouth and it is impossible to stop the evil spreading, once it has started. The best thing to do is not to start it.’”

—Taafaki, *Thoughts: Education for Peace and One World* 5-6

Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl is one of the greatest of the early Bahá'í scholars. The following incident which occurred before he became a Bahá'í demonstrates the power of words uttered for the sake of God:

“One Friday afternoon, Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, in company with a few mullás, left the city to visit a certain shrine in the countryside in the vicinity of the capital. . . .

“It so happened that on the way out one of the donkeys lost a shoe, so the party called at the nearest blacksmith shop for help. Noticing the long beard and large turban of Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl—indications of his vast knowledge—the blacksmith Ustád Ḥusayn-i-Na'l-Band (shoeing smith), who was illiterate, was tempted to enter into conversation with the learned man. He said to Mírzá that since he had honored him with his presence, it would be a great privilege for him if he could be allowed to ask a question which had perplexed his mind for some time. When permission was granted he said, ‘Is it true that in the Traditions of Shí'ah Islám⁸ it is stated that each drop of rain is accompanied by an angel from heaven? And that this angel brings down the rain to the ground?’ ‘This is true,’ Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl responded. After a pause, the blacksmith begged to be allowed to ask another question to which Mírzá gave his assent. ‘Is it true,’ the blacksmith asked, ‘that if there is a dog in a house no angel will ever visit that house?’ Before thinking of the connection between the two questions, Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl responded in the affirmative. ‘In that case,’ commented the blacksmith, ‘no rain should ever fall in a house where a dog is kept.’ Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, the noted learned man of Islám, was now confounded by an illiterate blacksmith. His rage knew no bounds, and his companions noticed that he was filled with shame. They whispered to him, ‘This blacksmith is a Bahá'í!’

“This incident left a deep impression on Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl.”

—Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. III 92-94

8 From Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. III 93: “It must be pointed out that the majority of the so-called traditions of Shí'ah Islám are man-made and consist of trivial sayings. However, there are some authentic and weighty utterances by the Holy Imáms that are in conformity with the form and spirit of the Qur'án. . . .”

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 67 and additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Tablet to Siyyid-i-Mihdíy-i-Dahají, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, 193-202
A Tablet describing teaching and the power of utterance.

Personal Reflection

Remaining Questions

Additional Reading and Resources

Questions

1. (Circle the best answer.) Influence through words primarily depends upon:
 - a. a pure heart
 - b. unity
 - c. proper timing
 - d. goodly deeds

2. (Circle one answer.) Moderation in using words depends upon:
 - a. silence
 - b. fewness of words
 - c. wisdom
 - d. detachment

3. (Circle one answer.) What is the result of backbiting?
 - a. the life of the soul is extinguished
 - b. disunity among Bahá'ís
 - c. praising other people stops
 - d. a and b
 - e. b and c

4. (Circle one answer.) The highest goal of speech is to:
 - a. have influence
 - b. seek spiritual truth
 - c. create unity
 - d. give life to souls

Answers

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

1. **a.** On page 8, the quotes state that influence “is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts that are detached and pure” and “influence dependeth on the spirit being pure and the heart stainless.” All the answers might arguably affect the influence of words. However, without perfect unity, timing, or deeds our words can still have some influence, while without purity of heart words will be ineffective.
2. **c.** See the quotations on page 8. Note that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá defines wisdom in teaching as “not that wisdom which requireth one to be silent and forgetful of such an obligation, but rather that which requireth one to display divine tolerance, love, kindness, patience, a goodly character, and holy deeds.”⁸
3. **d.** The second and third quotations on page 9 address the effect of backbiting on the soul and on unity.
4. **d.** Bahá’u’lláh emphasizes the importance of using words to quicken souls in the last three quotes on page 9. Unity, “c,” is the ultimate outcome of giving spiritual life to souls. Note “b,” is the opposite of the correct answer, since the seeker “must observe silence, and refrain from idle talk” (second quote, page 9).

Discussion

What are some examples of how words can influence the interaction between individuals? Between societies?

According to the references on pages 8 and 9, what are the effects of words? What qualities must words possess to transform souls? How can you achieve each of these qualities?

What are constructive ways of dealing with backbiting?

What do you think Bahá’u’lláh means by “every word is endowed with a spirit?” (Refer to the first quotation on page 8.)

⁸ *The Individual and Teaching* 12

2

The Cause of Creation

Introduction

As we have seen, words are more than just sounds and syllables. They possess power and influence. They can do good or harm depending upon the spirit with which they are spoken.

The Word of God, Bahá'u'lláh says, is “the king of words.”¹ It is an utterance that “mortal man can never rival.”² It, too, possesses power and influence, but far beyond that of the words of men.

We most often think of the Word of God in terms of the Holy Books brought by God’s Manifestations. But the Word of God is much more. In Islam, it is stated that God created the universe through a single word—“Be.” Bahá'u'lláh also refers to this in His Tablets,³ and states directly that the Word of God is the “Cause of the entire creation.”⁴ The Word clearly possesses a nature and a power beyond our full understanding.

In this lesson we will examine statements of Bahá'u'lláh that describe the Word in its broadest sense—beyond the limitations of the physical world. In the next lesson we will look more closely at statements of Bahá'u'lláh that describe the nature of the Word in its revealed form.

1 *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 173

2 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 286

3 For example, see the Long Obligatory Prayer, *Bahá'í Prayers* 13, and the Tablet of Visitation, *Bahá'í Prayers* 230

4 *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 140

Overview

The Bahá'í Writings describe three levels of reality: the world of God, the world of the “Kingdom”⁵ or “Command of God”⁶—which is the world of the Word of God—and the world of creation. The Word of God acts as a link or intermediary between God and creation. Through the Word the attributes of God are expressed in the world; “every created thing” can then reflect these attributes according to its “capacities and limitations.”⁷

The Word is an entity greater than any idea people can hold about it, “sanctified,” Bahá'u'lláh states, “from any property or substance.”⁸ The Word has always been, and always will be. It is the first emanation from God. Through the Word all other things were created.

The Bahá'í Writings also equate the Word of God with the Manifestation of God.⁹ The Word is the identity, or station, that is common to all the Manifestations. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains: “The third station [of the Manifestation] . . . is the Word of God, the Eternal Bounty, the Holy Spirit. . . . The reality of prophethood . . . is the Word of God and the perfect state of manifestation. . . .”¹⁰ The individual Manifestations as They appear in the world—Jesus, Bahá'u'lláh, and Others—are mirrors that perfectly reflect the light of the Word.¹¹

5 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 295

6 *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 141

7 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 142

8 *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 140-41

9 A Manifestation of God is a Messenger of God through whom God’s perfections and attributes are expressed. Examples are Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muḥammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh.

10 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 152

11 For a detailed examination of the relationship between the Word and the Manifestation see *The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings* by Juan Ricardo Cole, published by the Association for Bahá'í Studies.

Explanation

While the Word is, like God Himself, unknowable to humanity, the Writings offer us some aid in understanding. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes the nature of the Word by comparing it to the rays of the sun.¹²

God is like the sun. As long as the sun has existed, so have the rays. However, the existence of the rays depend upon the sun. Just as the sun emanates its rays without dividing itself, God emanates the Word without sharing His essence. When the rays shine upon a perfect mirror (the individual Manifestation) the qualities of the sun appear.

The Word is the cause of creation, and it continues to exert power and influence in the world. It is “the penetrating power in all things, the mover of souls and the binder and regulator in the world of humanity.”¹³ It serves as a “collective center”¹⁴—a point of unity—around which humanity can gather. It is a “power above and beyond the powers of nature,”¹⁵ that “embraceth and comprehendeth all things,”¹⁶ and has “never been withheld from the world of being.”¹⁷

To assist us in our effort to understand the Word of God and the way it influences creation, Bahá’u’lláh commonly uses metaphors in His Writings. These metaphors—figures of speech that create verbal pictures for us—associate the Word of God with things we already know.

For example, Bahá’u’lláh describes His Revelation as “an ocean in whose depths are concealed innumerable pearls of great price.”¹⁸ “Ocean” is a metaphor, a figure of speech, that tells us about the nature of His Revelation. Since we already know that an ocean is very large, we learn that Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation is vast. We also learn that in His Revelation there are valuable teachings—the “pearls of great price.” Each Bahá’í must explore the “ocean” to find and use the “pearls.”

Because the reader must draw conclusions about the two things being compared, metaphors are useful for conveying many levels of meaning at one time.¹⁹

12 *Some Answered Questions* 202-03

13 *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 292

14 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan* 93-97

15 *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 53

16 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 257

17 *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 141

18 *Gleanings* 326

19 For a more detailed explanation of metaphor see chapter 3 of *The Nature of Physical Reality* by John Hatcher, especially pages 78-83.

Readings

1. “The first thing which emanated from God is that universal reality, which the ancient philosophers termed the ‘First Mind,’ and which the people of Bahá call the ‘First Will.’”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 203

2. “. . . there is the world of God, the world of the Kingdom, and the world of creation: three things. The first emanation from God is the bounty of the Kingdom, which emanates and is reflected in the reality of the creatures, like the light which emanates from the sun and is resplendent in creatures; and this bounty, which is the light, is reflected in infinite forms in the reality of all things. . . .”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 295

3. “. . . by a word of His command all that are in heaven and on earth have come to exist, and by His wish, which is the Primal Will itself, all have stepped out of utter nothingness into the realm of being, the world of the visible. . . .”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 98

4. “But the proceeding through manifestation . . . is the proceeding and the appearance of the Holy Spirit and the Word, which is from God. As it is said in the Gospel of John, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God;’ then the Holy Spirit and the Word are the appearance of God. The Spirit and the Word mean the divine perfections that appeared in the Reality of Christ, and these perfections were with God. . . . The perfections of Christ are called the Word because all the beings are in the condition of letters, and one letter has not a complete meaning, while the perfections of Christ have the power of a word because a complete meaning can be inferred. . . .”

“And know that the proceeding of the Word and the Holy Spirit from God . . . must not be understood to mean that the Reality of Divinity had been divided into parts. . . . If a pure fine mirror faces the sun, the light and heat, the form and the image of the sun will be resplendent in it. . . . Nevertheless, the mirror is the mirror, and the sun is the sun. . . .”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 206-07

5. “The third station [of the Manifestation] is that of the divine appearance and heavenly splendor: it is the Word of God, the Eternal Bounty, the Holy Spirit. It has neither beginning nor end, for these things are related to the world of contingencies, and not to the divine world. . . . In the same way the Word of God is purified from all these conditions and is exempt from the boundaries, the laws, and the limits of the world of contingency.”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 152

The Word of God

emanate: to come forth or issue from a source

contingency: one occurrence that is dependent on or conditioned by another; an event that is possible but not certain to occur

6. "... the irresistible Word ... is the Cause of the entire creation, while all else besides His Word are but the creatures and effects thereof...

"Know thou, moreover, that the Word of God . . . is higher and far superior to that which the senses can perceive, for it is sanctified from any property or substance. It transcendeth the limitations of known elements and is exalted above all the essential and recognized substances. It became manifest without any syllable or sound and is none but the Command of God which pervadeth all created things. It hath never been withheld from the world of being. It is God's all-pervasive grace, from which all grace doth emanate. It is an entity far removed above all that hath been and shall be. . . .

"Every thing must needs have an origin and every building a builder. Verily, the Word of God is the cause which hath preceded the contingent world. . . ."

—*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 140-41

7. "The Word of God is the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable. It hath ever dominated and will continue to dominate the realm of being. The Great Being saith: The Word is the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked. . . . It is an ocean inexhaustible in riches, comprehending all things. Every thing which can be perceived is but an emanation therefrom."

—*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 173

8. "... the moment the word expressing My attribute 'The Omniscient' issueth forth from My mouth, every created thing will, according to its capacity and limitations, be invested with the power to unfold the knowledge of the most marvelous sciences, and will be empowered to manifest them in the course of time at the bidding of Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Knowing. Know thou of a certainty that the Revelation of every other Name is accompanied by a similar manifestation of Divine power. Every single letter proceeding out of the mouth of God is indeed a mother letter, and every word uttered by Him Who is the Well Spring of Divine Revelation is a mother word, and His Tablet a Mother Tablet."—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 142

9. "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."

—*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 93-94

sanctified: purified, freed from; set apart as holy

transcend: to rise above or go beyond the limits of; above the physical world

pervade: to pass through or spread through every part of

emanate: to come forth from a source; to give out, emit

grace: divine favor; mercy

entity: a distinct existing thing

potency: power, might

omniscient: all-knowing

manifest: make obvious, apparent to the senses; demonstration

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 67.

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 67 and additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Tablet of Wisdom, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, 135-152

A Tablet that refers, in part, to the power of the Word of God.

The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings, by Juan Cole

An essay that includes a discussion of the relationship between the Manifestation of God and the Word of God.

Personal Reflection

Remaining Questions

Additional Reading and Resources

Questions

1. (Circle all that apply.) The Word of God is:
 - a. beyond our complete understanding
 - b. the same as the words of human beings
 - c. described by Bahá'u'lláh
 - d. easy to define

2. (Circle all that apply.) The Word of God is the:
 - a. cause of creation
 - b. same as the Manifestation of God
 - c. same as God
 - d. Holy Books

3. (Circle all that apply.) The Word of God:
 - a. pervades all created things
 - b. has never been withheld
 - c. is God's grace
 - d. is God's commandments

4. (Circle all that apply.) A metaphor is a:
 - a. definition of the Word of God
 - b. way to describe the qualities of something
 - c. tool used in writing
 - d. verbal picture

Answers

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

1. **a** and **c**. Rather than easy to define, the Word is “higher and far superior to that which the senses can perceive, for it is sanctified from any property or substance.” See quote #6 on page 19.
2. **a**, **b**, and **d**. Regarding “c,” God is independent of all things. For “d”, in the Bahá’í view it may be impossible to determine the authentic aspects of the Holy Scriptures of past religions.
3. **a**, **b**, **c**, and **d**. The Word is God’s “grace” and “Command” at the same time. The purpose of the commandments is not to control us but to give true freedom. See quote #6 on page 19.
4. **b**, **c**, and **d**. See page 17.

Discussion

What are the similarities and differences between the Word of God and the words of human beings? (If necessary, refer to lesson 1.) Do you think the Word of God can produce harmful results?

Describe your understanding of the relationship between the worlds of Divinity (world of God), Command, and Creation. (See pages 16 and 18. Also, if you wish, see page 9 of the book in footnote 11.)

The Word of God “pervadeth all created things.” (Refer to #6 on page 19.) How should the Word of God pervade (spread through every part of) our lives?

Bahá’u’lláh states that “the Word is the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked.” How is the Word like a master key? How is a person’s heart like heaven?

What does it mean when Bahá’u’lláh says: “The Word of God may be likened unto a sapling, whose roots have been implanted in the hearts of men?” (Refer to #9 on page 19.) How do we “foster” the “growth” of this tree?

Exercise

Bahá'u'lláh uses many metaphors in His Writings to help us understand what the Word of God is. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which an image, or word picture, is used to suggest a similarity or likeness between two things (see page 17). Read each of the following quotes from the Writings. Then list the qualities of the thing that is used to help describe the Word of God. What do these qualities tell us about the Word of God? An example of how to complete the exercise is given.

<p style="text-align: center;">Metaphors</p> <p>Images or pictures that help describe the nature of the Word.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Qualities</p> <p>The characteristics or properties that the image has.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Implications</p> <p>What the qualities of the image tell us about the Word of God.</p>
<p>“The Word of God is the king of words. . . .”¹⁹</p>	<p><i>A king stands above others. He governs a kingdom or nation.</i></p>	<p><i>The Word is superior to words of humanity; it should govern our words.</i></p>
<p>“Every single letter proceeding out of the mouth of God is indeed a mother letter, and every word . . . a mother word. . . .”²⁰</p>		
<p>“the Divine Elixir . . . through whose potency the crude metal of human life hath been transmuted into purest gold. . . .”²¹</p>		
<p>“The utterance of God is a lamp. . . .”²²</p>		
<p>“That city [of certitude] is none other than the Word of God revealed in every age. . . .”²³</p>		
<p>“Indeed it is the sovereign remedy for every disease. . . .”²⁴</p>		
<p>“God Who has given the revelation to His Prophets will surely give of His abundance daily bread to all those who ask. . . .”²⁵</p>		

19 *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 173

20 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 142

21 Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations* 54

22 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 288

23 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Iqán* 199

24 *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 73

25 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 57

Feedback

The following are suggested answers to the exercise. You may have other answers that are also appropriate.

<p style="text-align: center;">Metaphors</p> <p>Images or pictures that help describe the nature of the Word.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Qualities</p> <p>The characteristics or properties that the image has.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Implications</p> <p>What the qualities of the image tell us about the Word of God.</p>
<p>“The Word of God is the king of words. . . .”</p>	<p><i>A king stands above others. He governs a kingdom or nation.</i></p>	<p><i>The Word is superior to words of humanity; it should govern our words.</i></p>
<p>“Every single letter proceeding out of the mouth of God is indeed a mother letter, and every word . . . a mother word. . . .”</p>	<p><i>A mother is the source of new life and the primary source of education.</i></p>	<p><i>The Word is a source of spiritual life; the Word of God is also the source of the progress, ideas, and words of humanity.</i></p>
<p>“the Divine Elixir . . . through whose potency the crude metal of human life hath been transmuted into purest gold. . . .”</p>	<p><i>An elixir is a preparation that was thought to change metals to gold.</i></p>	<p><i>The Word has the power to transform human life from being materially directed to being spiritually directed.</i></p>
<p>“The utterance of God is a lamp. . . .”</p>	<p><i>A lamp provides light.</i></p>	<p><i>The Word provides teachings that cast light on our problems and guide us to spiritual well-being.</i></p>
<p>“That city [of certitude] is none other than the Word of God revealed in every age. . . .”</p>	<p><i>A city is a place to live where all physical needs can be met.</i></p>	<p><i>The Word is a safe refuge where we can live securely. It provides all we need for our spiritual life.</i></p>
<p>“Indeed it is the sovereign remedy for every disease. . . .”</p>	<p><i>A remedy is the cure for a disease. Sovereign means the highest.</i></p>	<p><i>The Word provides the best solutions to the problems (ills) of individuals and society.</i></p>
<p>“God Who has given the revelation to His Prophets will surely give of His abundance daily bread to all those who ask. . . .”</p>	<p><i>Bread is one of the basic foods of life, that sustains our physical existence.</i></p>	<p><i>The Word is the basic item on which we feed spiritually.</i></p>

3

The Revealed Word of God

Introduction

In the world of creation the Word of God is revealed in every age through the Manifestation of God and His Book. “In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus the Gospel; in the days of Muḥammad the Messenger of God the Qur’án; . . . and in the dispensation of Him Whom God will make manifest His own Book. . . .”¹

In this lesson we will examine the nature and purpose of the revealed Verses of God.

¹ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 199; “Him Whom God will make manifest” and “His own Book” refer to Bahá’u’lláh and His Writings.

Overview

The Word of God in its revealed form has distinct qualities related to:

- the manner in which the Word is presented to humanity;
- the ability of each person to recognize and understand it; and
- the purpose of the Word for individuals and society.

The Word comes to humanity from One Source—God. It is revealed progressively through a series of Divine Educators—the Manifestations of God. Its outward form reflects the language and culture of the people to whom the Word is sent. The measure of each Revelation is fitted to the needs of humanity and to the capacity of the people to understand. Its influence unfolds gradually.

All have the capacity to recognize the truth of the Word of God. However, the Word attracts the pure in heart and at the same time repels those who cannot accept it. The meaning of the Word of God can never be exhausted. Understanding it is not dependent on human learning, but on purity of heart and submission to God.

God’s purpose in revealing His Word is to educate humanity, both spiritually and materially. The individual learns about the divine qualities hidden in the soul and how to develop them. Society learns how to establish a higher degree of unity and peace.

Explanation

The appearance of the Word is like the appearance of the sun. “Consider the sun,” Bahá’u’lláh writes. “How feeble its rays the moment it appeareth above the horizon. How gradually its warmth and potency increase as it approacheth its zenith, enabling meanwhile all created things to adapt themselves to the growing intensity of its light.”²

The principle of progressive unfoldment of truth applies to the successive Revelations that God sends to humanity. His Messengers include Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muḥammad, the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh and others. Each of these Manifestations presents “the light of Divine Revelation” to “men in direct proportion to their spiritual capacity.”³ Each Revelation is limited to “a definitely prescribed mission.”⁴

The Manner of Revelation

² *Gleanings* 87-88

³ Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 87

⁴ Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 52

The gradual unfoldment of the light also applies within each Revelation. Bahá'u'lláh revealed His laws and teachings over more than two decades. These obligations have been applied over time to the believers by the designated head of the Faith. The Teachings will guide humanity for at least 1000 years. The power of the Word of God as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh is gradually changing society. It will continue until the oneness of mankind—with all its implications of world unity and peace—is established.

Every human being is given the ability to recognize the Manifestation of God and His Revelation. “Had he not been endowed with such a capacity, how could he be called to account for his failure?”⁵ The light of the Revelation reacts on the mirror of the soul. The result depends on how pure the mirror is. Believers are guided by the light; those who disbelieve see no light, but find discomfort from the heat. “Marvel not if in the Qur’án the unbeliever perceiveth naught but the trace of letters, for in the sun, the blind findeth naught but heat.”⁶

Many truths lie hidden in the Word of God. Its meaning is inexhaustible. We can acquire understanding in proportion to our efforts at study, meditation, and prayer. “The understanding of His words and the comprehension of the utterances of the Birds of Heaven are in no wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit.”⁷

When ground is cleared and cultivated it produces crops. When a tree is pruned and nurtured it bears fruit. If an animal is trained it can serve humanity. People are also in need of a trainer, an educator, who can guide their progress in spiritual, social, and material affairs. The Manifestation of God is the Divine Educator and the revealed Word of God is the tool He uses to cultivate the soil of the heart.

“Is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind,” Bahá'u'lláh asks, “a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions? For if the character of mankind be not changed, the futility of God’s universal Manifestation would be apparent.”⁸

Recognizing and Understanding the Word of God

The Purpose of the Word of God

5 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 143
6 Quoted in *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 209

7 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 211
8 Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 25

Readings

1. ". . . every age requireth a fresh measure of the light of God. Every Divine Revelation hath been sent down in a manner that befitted the circumstances of the age in which it hath appeared."

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 81

2. "It is clear and evident to thee that all the Prophets are the Temples of the Cause of God, Who have appeared clothed in divers attire. If thou wilt observe with discriminating eyes, thou wilt behold Them all abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, . . . uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith. . . .

"The other station is the station of distinction, and pertaineth to the world of creation. . . . It is because of this difference in their station and mission that the words and utterances flowing from these Well Springs of Divine knowledge appear to diverge and differ. Otherwise . . . all their utterances are, in reality, but the expressions of one Truth."

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 52-53

3. ". . . the fundamental principle which constitutes the bedrock of Bahá'í belief, [is] the principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is orderly, continuous and progressive and not spasmodic or final." —Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 115

4. "Contemplate with thine inward eye the chain of successive Revelations that hath linked the Manifestation of Adam with that of the Báb. . . . Each one of these Manifestations hath been sent down through the operation of the Divine Will and Purpose, . . . each hath been the bearer of a specific Message, . . . each hath been entrusted with a divinely-revealed Book. . . . The measure of the Revelation with which every one of them hath been identified had been definitely fore-ordained."

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 74

5. "Know of a certainty that in every Dispensation the light of Divine Revelation hath been vouchsafed unto men in direct proportion to their spiritual capacity. Consider the sun. . . . Were it, all of a sudden, to manifest the energies latent within it, it would, no doubt, cause injury to all created things. . . . In like manner, if the Sun of Truth were suddenly to reveal, at the earliest stages of its manifestation, the full measure of the potencies which the providence of the Almighty hath bestowed upon it, the earth of human understanding would waste away and be consumed; for men's hearts would neither sustain the intensity of its revelation, nor be able to mirror forth the radiance of its light."

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 87-88

The Manner of Revelation

Revelation: presentation by God of His Will and Truths to humanity; the measure of Divine Truth brought by each Manifestation

befit: to be suitable or appropriate for

abiding: to remain stable or fixed in a state; to continue in a place

tabernacle: place of worship

diverge: to be different in character or form

constitutes: to make up, form, compose

relative: having meaning only in connection with something else; comparative

progressive: moving forward, especially by steps or degrees

spasmodic: sudden but short-lived; proceeding fitfully

fore-ordained: appointed in advance; predestined;

vouchsafed: granted; conceded

Recognizing and Understanding the Word of God

reconciled to: to bring one to accept something unpleasant or unwanted

Bayán (buy-awn): one of the central books of the Báb; title given by the Báb to His Revelation, particularly His Books

malevolent: wishing evil to others; spiteful

touchstone: stone used to test the quality of gold or silver; a standard for testing quality

apprehend: understand, grasp

Qá'im (caw-'em): literally, He Who ariseth; reference to One awaited by Islam; the Báb

intricacies: complexities

abstruse: hard to understand; obscure

6. “The One true God may be compared unto the sun and the believer unto a mirror. No sooner is the mirror placed before the sun than it reflects its light. The unbeliever may be likened unto a stone. No matter how long it is exposed to the sunshine, it cannot reflect the sun. . . . Indeed, if God willeth, He is potent to turn the stone into a mirror, but the person himself remaineth reconciled to his state. Had he wished to become a crystal, God would have made him to assume crystal form. For on that Day whatever cause prompteth the believer to believe in Him, the same will also be available to the unbeliever. . . . Thus, as is clearly evident today, those who have set their faces toward God, the True One, have believed in Him because of the Bayán, while such as are veiled have been deprived because of it.”

—*Selections from the Writings of the Báb* 103

7. “. . . the Birds of Heaven and Doves of Eternity speak a twofold language. One language, the outward language, is devoid of allusions, is unconcealed and unveiled; that it may be a guiding lamp. . . . The other language is veiled and concealed, so that whatever lieth hidden in the heart of the malevolent may be made manifest. . . . This is the divine standard, this is the Touchstone of God, where-with He proveth His servants. None apprehendeth the meaning of these utterances except them whose hearts are assured, whose souls have found favor with God, and whose minds are detached from all else but Him. In such utterances, the literal meaning, as generally understood by the people, is not what hath been intended. Thus it is recorded: ‘Every knowledge hath seventy meanings, of which one only is known amongst the people. And when the Qá'im shall arise, He shall reveal unto men all that which remaineth.’”

—Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 254-55

8. “. . . just as thou firmly believest that the Word of God, exalted be His glory, endureth for ever, thou must, likewise, believe with undoubting faith that its meaning can never be exhausted.”

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 175

9. “. . . it is therefore incumbent upon every one to seek enlightenment from the illumined in heart and from the Treasuries of divine mysteries regarding the intricacies of God's Faith and the abstruse allusions in the utterances of the Daysprings of Holiness. Thus will these mysteries be unraveled, not by the aid of acquired learning, but solely through the assistance of God and the outpourings of His grace.”

—Bahá'u'lláh, *The Importance of Deepening* 6

10. “The ordinances of God have been sent down from the heaven of His Most august Revelation. . . . Man’s supreme distinction, his real advancement, his final victory, have always depended, and will continue to depend, upon them. Whoso keepeth the commandments of God shall attain everlasting felicity.” —Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 289

11. “God has sent forth the Prophets for the purpose of quickening the soul of man into higher and divine recognitions. He has revealed the heavenly Books for this great purpose. . . . This divine and ideal power has been bestowed upon man in order that he may purify himself from the imperfections of nature and uplift his soul to the realm of might and power. The mission of the Prophets of God has been to train the souls of humanity and free them from the thralldom of natural instincts and physical tendencies. They are like unto Gardeners, and the world of humanity is the field of Their cultivation. . . .” —‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 310

12. “The purpose underlying the revelation of every heavenly Book, nay, of every divinely-revealed verse, is to endue all men with righteousness and understanding, so that peace and tranquillity may be firmly established amongst them. . . .” —Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 206

13. “The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men.” —Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 215

14. “Every man of insight will, in this day, readily admit that the counsels which the Pen of this wronged One hath revealed constitute the supreme animating power for the advancement of the world and the exaltation of its peoples.” —Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 93

15. “If these obstructing veils had not intervened Persia would, in some two years, have been subdued through the power of utterance. . . . In short, sometimes in explicit language, at other times by allusion, We said whatever had to be said. Thus, once Persia had been rehabilitated, the sweet savors of the Word of God would have wafted over all countries, inasmuch as that which hath streamed forth from the Most exalted Pen is conducive to the glory, the advancement and education of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Indeed it is the sovereign remedy for every disease, could they but comprehend and perceive it.” —*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 73

The Purpose of the Word of God

ordinances: commands, laws

diligently: steadily, earnestly and energetically make an effort

felicity: great happiness

thralldom: condition of servitude; mental or moral bondage

cultivation: preparation for growth; improvement by care or labor

righteousness: justice; virtue; morals

exaltation: raising in rank, station or dignity; glorification

stronghold: a fort; a place of security or survival

explicit: clearly stated; definite

conducive: lead to, contribute to

sovereign: supreme, chief

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 67.

Illustration

“The revealed Word has an inner spirit and an outer form. The inner-most spirit is limitless in its potentialities; it belongs to the world of the uncreated and is generated by the Holy Spirit of God. The outer form of the Word of God acts as a channel through which the stream of God’s Holy Spirit flows.

“. . . the Bearer of the Message of God influences the outer form of the Word of God. . . . Because Bahá’u’lláh was a Persian, the Word of God in this age is revealed in both the Persian and Arabic languages. The personality of Bahá’u’lláh, the style of His Writings, the nature of the Persian language, its idioms and its proverbs, the stories He relates of the lives of His contemporaries in that country and the lands to which He was exiled, all contribute to the form of the revealed Word in this Dispensation.

“Although Bahá’u’lláh did not attend any of the schools for the divines or learned classes, yet men of letters have testified that His Writings both in Arabic and Persian, viewed solely from the literary point of view, are unsurpassed in their beauty, richness and eloquence. Although unfamiliar with the Arabic language, its vast vocabulary and the complexities of its grammar, which normally took the divines a lifetime to master, Bahá’u’lláh has so enriched Arabic literature with His Writings that He has created, as Muḥammad did in His day, a style which has inspired Bahá’í scholars and writers ever since. . . .

“In order to write, any writer must rely on his knowledge and learning. He will have to meditate on the subject and undertake research. After much work he may produce a book in which always there will be ample room for improvement, and not infrequently he will feel it necessary to rewrite the entire book. This is not so in the case of the Manifestations of God Who do not rely on Their own human accomplishments. . . .

“The Qur’án, the Holy Book of Islám, consists of approximately six thousand three hundred verses. It was revealed by Muḥammad during the course of twenty-three years. In this Dispensation, however, the outpouring of Divine Revelation has been vouchsafed to humanity in such profusion that, within the span of one hour, the equivalent of one thousand verses was revealed by Bahá’u’lláh. . . .

“. . . The Writings of Bahá’u’lláh . . . are so vast in their range that, as attested by Himself, they would, if fully compiled, amount to no less than one hundred volumes.”

—Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*, Vol. I 21-24

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 67 and additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, by Adib Taherzadeh

A series of four volumes that examines the scope of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation of the Word of God. Includes a chapter on the concept of the Word of God (chapter 3, volume I).

The Metaphorical Nature of Physical Reality, by John Hatcher

An essay on the meaning of physical reality that sheds light on the concept of the depths of meaning in the revealed Word of God.

Personal Reflection

Remaining Questions

Additional Reading and Resources

Questions

1. (Circle all that apply.) Regarding the way the Word of God is revealed to humanity, it is:
 - a. limited by the knowledge of the Manifestation
 - b. fitted to the needs of the age
 - c. progressive and orderly
 - d. sudden and complete

2. (Circle all that apply.) Regarding the recognition of the truth of the Word of God:
 - a. all will recognize it
 - b. the Word is a barrier to recognition for some
 - c. God can help anyone to believe
 - d. God distinguishes between people

3. (Circle all that apply.) Greater understanding of the Word of God depends upon:
 - a. a pure heart
 - b. acquired learning
 - c. asking spiritually learned individuals
 - d. the assistance of God

4. (Circle all that apply.) The purpose of the Word of God is to:
 - a. transform individuals
 - b. establish peace
 - c. advance civilization
 - d. raise the station of peoples

Answers

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

1. **b** and **c**. See quotations #1, #3, and #4 on page 28. The Message is limited by the capacity of humanity—not by the knowledge of the Manifestation. Each Message is suited to the world’s needs and is progressive and orderly rather than sudden and complete.
2. **b**, **c**, and **d**. See #6, #7, and #8 on page 29. Answer “a” is not correct, since although all *can* recognize the truth of the Revelation, some *will* not.
3. **a**, **c**, and **d**. See page 27 and quotation #9 on page 29. Note for “c” that “it is incumbent upon everyone to seek enlightenment from the illumined in heart. . . .”
4. **a**, **b**, **c**, and **d**. See the quotations on page 30. They refer to “the advancement and education of all the peoples,” the “peace and tranquillity” of “all men,” the “real advancement,” “final victory,” and “everlasting felicity” of man, and other such results which it is the purpose of the Word of God to produce.

Discussion

Describe how the gradual unfoldment of truth applies to progressive revelation from one Manifestation to the next. How does it apply within each Revelation?

In *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Bahá’u’lláh notes that the Word of God, which is “sharp as the sword of God,” has “separated the faithful from the infidel, and severed father from son.” At the same time He speaks of the “binding force of the Word of God, which uniteth the hearts. . . .”⁹ How can the Word of God both unite and divide? (Refer also to the last sentence #9 on page 29.)

Explain the purpose of the Word of God. How does the Word help individuals progress? How does it help society progress?

⁹ *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 112

4

Powers of the Word of God

Introduction

The purpose of the Word of God is to exert influence on people and on the physical world. How the Word of God produces these effects is the topic of this lesson.

It is not possible to present a complete list of the powers of the Word of God. However, there are three important powers of the Word that show how it draws spiritual power for use in the material world.

In this lesson we will examine how the Word of God acts through its creative power, through its magnetic power, and through its evolutionary power to draw spiritual forces that cause change in the physical world.¹

¹ This lesson is based on ideas presented in a talk entitled "The Creative Word" given by Peter Khan in Wilmette on June 26, 1981.

Overview

Some of the principles that operate in nature help us understand how the Word of God acts in the world to cause change. These include:

- the principle of creation;
- the principle of magnetism; and
- the principle of evolution.

The Word of God has a creative power. It can influence the interaction between matter and spirit to bring about a new creation.

The Word of God has a magnetic power. It draws spiritual power that then has an attractive and binding influence in the world. We can tap the magnetic power of the Word of God through prayer, meditation, reading, study, memorization, or service to the Faith.

The Word of God has an evolutionary power. It transforms things to a higher level of order. The spirit drawn from the Word's magnetic power acts to help things grow and develop.

Explanation

'Abdu'l-Bahá says that the world of creation is composed of two elements, spirit and matter. He states that spirit is an active, creative force that permeates all matter. He describes matter as inactive, self-existent, and filling all space.² The act of creation is the interaction of the active force (which from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's description might be considered spirit) with the receptive element (matter).³

For example, in nature a new plant is created when matter, the seed, acquires the vegetable spirit. A new human being is created when matter, the fertilized egg, is joined with the human spirit.

The creative power of the Word of God operates on many levels. In its form that transcends the physical world (lesson 2), the Word is the "Cause of the entire creation."⁴

In the form of the language of men—the verses of God's Manifestation—the Word is also creative. Bahá'u'lláh's Writings have the power to recreate a soul or a society. Spiritual rebirth begins when people recognize their Lord, and are joined with the spirit of faith.

² *Bahá'í Scriptures* 301

³ *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 140

⁴ *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 140

The Creative Power

The Magnetic Power

The magnetic power is the power of attraction. Consider a magnet. It is, at first glance, like any other rock. But because of its special structure it can attract certain objects, such as steel or iron. The attractive power of a magnet creates greater harmony, unity and arrangement around it.

Outwardly, the revealed Word of God is made up of ordinary words that can be found in a dictionary. But because it has a special form arranged by the Manifestation of God, the divine verses have a power that differs from the words of men—the power of the Holy Spirit. By using the Word of God and by translating its instructions into action we draw the power of the Holy Spirit to ourselves. “It is only by the breath of the Holy Spirit that spiritual development can come about,”⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states.

Also, just as one magnet attracts another, people can be drawn together through the spirit of the Word of God. “Through the power of the words He hath uttered,” Bahá’u’lláh informs us, “the whole human race can be illumined with the light of unity. . . .”⁶

The evolutionary power is a transforming power—a power that causes change, allowing potential to unfold. In nature, a single plant or animal gets energy from its environment to help it grow and to develop new powers. A tree, for example, goes from seed, to sapling, to tree. In the process it grows leaves, branches, and eventually, fruit.

People grow spiritually under the influence of the Word of God. We develop greater capacity to act with divine virtues, such as justice or kindness. “Man is like unto a tree,” Bahá’u’lláh states. “The fruits of the human tree are exquisite, highly desired and dearly cherished. Among them are upright character, virtuous deeds and a goodly utterance. . . . The Water for these trees is the living water of the sacred Words. . . .”⁷

The three powers described work in harmony to produce spiritual growth. The creative power lays down the seed for future growth by creating new spiritual capacities. The magnetic power attracts a measure of spirit. The spirit then influences the expression of the potential that lies within the soul.

The Evolutionary Power

⁵ *Paris Talks* 133

⁶ *Gleanings* 286

⁷ *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 257

Readings

1. “O my God... Thou art that King by Whose commanding word the whole creation hath been called into being.” —Bahá’u’lláh, *Bahá’í Prayers* 146

2. “Every single letter proceeding from Our mouth is endowed with such regenerative power as to enable it to bring into existence a new creation—a creation the magnitude of which is inscrutable to all save God.”
—Bahá’u’lláh, quoted in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* 107

3. “Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth. All the wondrous works ye behold in this world have been manifested through the operation of His supreme and most exalted Will, His wondrous and inflexible Purpose. Through the mere revelation of the word ‘Fashioner,’ issuing forth from His lips and proclaiming His attribute to mankind, such power is released as can generate, through successive ages, all the manifold arts which the hands of man can produce. This, verily, is a certain truth. No sooner is this resplendent word uttered, than its animating energies, stirring within all created things, give birth to the means and instruments whereby such arts can be produced and perfected. All the wondrous achievements ye now witness are the direct consequences of the Revelation of this Name. In the days to come, ye will, verily, behold things of which ye have never heard before.”
—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 141-42

4. “Through the movement of Our Pen of glory We have . . . breathed a new life into every human frame, and instilled into every word a fresh potency. All created things proclaim the evidences of this world-wide regeneration.”
—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 92-93

5. “Consider the hour at which the supreme Manifestation of God revealeth Himself unto men. Ere that hour cometh, the Ancient Being, Who is still unknown of men and hath not as yet given utterance to the Word of God, is Himself the All-Knower in a world devoid of any man that hath known Him. He is indeed the Creator without a creation. For at the very moment preceding His Revelation, each and every created thing shall be made to yield up its soul to God.”
—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 151

6. “The words of Bahá’u’lláh and the Master, however, have a creative power and are sure to awaken in the reader the undying fire of the love of God.” —written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 34-35

The Creative Power

regenerative: able to fill with new life; able to make better; reform; able to renew spiritually.

inscrutable: hard to grasp; mysterious

generate: to bring into existence; to produce.

devoid: entirely without; lacking.

The Magnetic Power

elixir: a substance believed to prolong life indefinitely and to change metals into gold

talisman: figure cut in metal or stone supposed to possess magical powers; a charm used to protect against evil, amulet

lodestone: magnet; person or thing that attracts

celestial: heavenly, divine

concord: harmony, agreement; agreement by stipulation, compact, or covenant

7. “. . . the divine magnet—the power of the Word of God—will attract the hearts and bestow ecstasy and enthusiasm upon souls!”

—*Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Vol. II 358*

8. “. . . these holy verses are the most potent elixir, the greatest and mightiest talisman. . . . This Revelation is endowed with such a power that it will act as the lodestone for all nations and kindreds of the earth.”

—*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh 200*

9. “Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul. Thus have the mysteries of the Revelation of God been decreed by virtue of the Will of Him Who is the Source of power and wisdom.”

—*Bahá’u’lláh, Gleanings 295*

10. “In the contingent world there are many collective centers which are conducive to association and unity. . . . For example, patriotism . . . nationalism . . . identity of interests . . . political alliance . . . , and the prosperity of the world of humanity is dependent upon the organization and promotion of the collective centers. Nevertheless, all the above institutions are, in reality, the matter and not the substance, accidental and not eternal. . . . Consequently, the real Collective Center is the body of the divine teachings, which include all degrees and embrace all the universal relations. . . . Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men.”

—*‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Tablets of the Divine Plan 93-95*

11. “. . . today . . . from all sects, races, tribes, nations and communities souls have come together in the light of the Word, assembled, united and agreed in perfect harmony. . . . Verily, this is from the penetrative power of the Word of God! If all the forces of the universe were to combine they would not be able thus to gather a single assemblage so imbued with the sentiments of love, affection, attraction and enkindlement . . . and to raise up . . . a voice that shall dispel war and strife, uproot dissension and disputation, usher in the era of universal peace and establish unity and concord amongst men.”

—*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 292*

12. “During thy supplications to God and thy reciting, ‘Thy Name is my healing,’ consider how thine heart is cheered, thy soul delighted by the spirit of the love of God, and thy mind attracted to the Kingdom of God! 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

13. “. . . strive to follow the counsels of these Blessed Books . . . that ye may, following the examples set before you, become yourselves the saints of the Most High!”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 61-62

14. “If in this day a soul shall act according to the precepts and the counsels of God, he will serve as a divine physician to mankind . . . he will call the dead of this contingent world to life. . . . Thus shall a sorry gnat become an eagle in the fullness of his strength, and a feeble sparrow change to a royal falcon in the heights of ancient glory.”

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

15. “. . . a power above and beyond the powers of nature must needs be brought to bear, to change this black darkness into light, and these hatreds and resentments, grudges and spites, these endless wrangles and wars, into fellowship and love amongst all the peoples of the earth. This power is none other than the breathings of the Holy Spirit and the mighty inflow of the Word of God.”

—*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 53

16. “Can any power withstand the penetrative influence of the Word of God? Nay, by God! . . . For these divine injunctions tame every ferocious beast, transform the creeping insect into a soaring bird, cause human souls to become angels of the Kingdom, and make the human world a focus for the qualities of mercy.”

—*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 293

17. “Is it within human power . . . 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 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

The Evolutionary Power

supplication: prayer or humble request; earnest request.

precepts: rules of action or moral conduct.

sorry: inspiring sorrow, pity, scorn, or ridicule; worthless

transformation: act of changing

transmute: to change from one form, substance, nature, or class to another.

satanic: characterized by extreme cruelty or viciousness

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 67.

Illustration

The following story demonstrates the Word's transforming power. It is about a new Bahá'í who carried a very bad habit with him into the Faith. He was a liar. Lying was a natural part of his life and the life of his family, used as a tool to survive a hostile society.

"As a Bahá'í he discovers that 'truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues.'⁸ He vows to change, but how to do it?

"Realizing that through deepening and prayer he can be endowed with a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, and a new mind,"⁹ he decides to deepen every day—in the morning and evening as Bahá'u'lláh prescribes. . . .

"So he begins to deepen, making time in the morning before going to work, and making time in the evening before going to bed. . . . A week after he starts deepening, he's tested at work. His foreman asks a question, and he lies . . . without hesitating an instant. But when the foreman leaves, he realizes he lied, something he would never have concerned himself with in the past. His new awareness is not only a sign of progress in overcoming a character flaw, but also signifies the development of the young man's conscience.

"A month later—still deepening every day—he's tested again. This time he hesitates before answering. . . . He succumbs to the pull of the past and lies, and for a few minutes feels bad. . . .

"He continues to deepen regularly. Three weeks later, he's faced with another test. He lies again, but this time, before he utters a word, his chest and throat tighten and he can't look at the person. Afterwards he berates himself for more than an hour. . . .

"Three months go by. Still faithfully deepening, he's confronted by a former friend. . . . He wishes he could disappear . . . but he lies. For the remainder of the day he is conscience-stricken, even has difficulty sleeping.

"After a year of deepening . . . he's tested again. This time he is seized with pain in his chest and begins to sweat. . . . In torment, he sits down, placing his head in his hands. He wants desperately to tell the truth, yet feels the tug of the past.

"Suddenly, he . . . tells the truth. The pain in his chest disappears. There is a glow in his eyes. The foreman is perplexed, wondering if the young man is on some kind of narcotic. . . . It is a victory only the young man can appreciate, a feeling of liberation he has never experienced before. He is not what he was before he started deepening. . . . Could he ever go back to what he was? Never! For he has sensed the fragrance of the Abhá Kingdom."

—Rutstein, *Spirit in Action: Teaching the Bahá'í Faith* 88-90

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 67 and additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

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The Creative Word, by Peter Khan

A taped talk given by Dr. Peter Khan in Wilmette on June 26, 1981.

**Personal
Reflection**

**Remaining
Questions**

**Additional
Reading and
Resources**

Questions

1. (Circle one answer.) In this lesson, when we say the Word of God is creative, we mean it has power to:
 - a. create something from nothing
 - b. cause something to come into being
 - c. change something over time
 - d. unify two things

2. (Circle one answer.) Another name for the magnetic power of the Word of God is:
 - a. quickening
 - b. attracting
 - c. illuminating
 - d. transforming

3. (Circle one answer.) Another name for the evolutionary power of the Word of God is:
 - a. quickening
 - b. attracting
 - c. illuminating
 - d. transforming

4. Associate the following effects of the Word of God with one of its three powers:

example: creates unity magnetic

 - a. individual spiritual rebirth _____
 - b. maturing of Bahá'í institutions _____
 - c. drawing closer to God _____
 - d. gaining detachment _____

Answers

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

1. **b.** ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that “absolute nonexistence cannot become existence.”¹⁰ Note in this lesson we are referring to the creative power. In various statements in the Writings the Word of God is called the Creative Word. In this sense “Creative” implies all the powers of the Word, including “c” and “d.”
2. **b.** The magnetic power attracts and unifies.
3. **d.** The evolutionary power produces change or transformation.
4. **a. Creative.** We are recreated—joined with the spirit of faith—and given new spiritual potential. This is a more dramatic change than the evolutionary process related to our spiritual growth.
b. Evolutionary.
c. Magnetic. Our hearts are bound and drawn toward God. Love is part of this unifying power.
d. Evolutionary. This is the process of acquiring virtues.

Discussion

How do the creative, magnetic, and evolutionary powers of the Word work together to produce change in an individual? in society?

What is “satanic strength?” What is “heavenly power?” (Refer to #17 on page 40.) How can we convert our own satanic strength into heavenly power?

Refer to #6 page 38. In your opinion, how are the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá like those of Bahá’u’lláh? How are they different?

What do you think Bahá’u’lláh means by a “Creator without a creation?” (Refer to #5 on page 38.)

¹⁰ Some Answered Questions 180

5

Using the Revealed Word

Introduction

The first three lessons addressed the question of what the Word of God is. The fourth lesson looked at what the Word of God does. The next two lessons deal with how we interact with the Word of God.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that the Cause of God is like a college. The believers are the students. “If . . . the scholars are not educated the object of the college is not achieved.” It is necessary that we make use of what we learn. “Now the friends must so live and conduct themselves as to bring greater glory and results to the religion of God. To them the cause of God must be as a dynamic force transforming the lives of men. . . .”¹

Successfully drawing on the power of the Word of God is the key to positive change in our own lives and the lives of others. We must first learn the ways to tap this power. Then we must learn to put this power into action.

¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Importance of Deepening* 18-19

Overview

It is possible to use the power of the Word of God for the betterment of ourselves, and of those around us—our family, community, those we teach, and all humanity. Power is tapped through prayer, meditation, study, reading, memorization, and service to the Faith.

Each of us must establish a personal pattern for use of the Word of God. The degree to which we can effectively draw on the power of the Word is directly related to our regular use, firm will, and consistent effort to translate the Word into action.

Explanation

We can compare the power of the Word to the power of electricity. Early man was awed by the power of electricity shown by lightning. But humanity could not use the power until effort was made to learn the laws governing it. Today the power of electricity is easily tapped for many purposes. The power of the Word is similarly available to us, and can transform our lives if we learn to draw upon it.

Bahá'u'lláh teaches us the following ways to tap the Word's power:

- **Prayer**, which strengthens “that mystic feeling that unites man with God” and which is “absolutely indispensable to . . . inner spiritual development. . . .”²
- **Meditation**, or thinking deeply about the divine verses. “Through meditation the doors of deeper knowledge and inspiration may be opened.”³
- **Reading** of the divine verses “with joy and radiance,” that they “attract you unto God and will enable you to detach yourselves from all else save Him.”⁴
- **Study**, or deepening, which is “to read the writings . . . so thoroughly as to be able to give it to others in its pure form.”⁵ “Study the teachings profoundly,” Shoghi Effendi states, “that the light of Divine Guidance may illumine your path. . . .”⁶

² Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations* 14

³ Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations* 18

⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Importance of Deepening* 2

⁵ Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 28

⁶ *The Importance of Deepening* 22

Drawing Power from the Word of God

- **Memorization** or “learning by heart of the Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb” which “the Master used to attach much importance to. . . .”⁷
- **Service to the Cause** or to “exalt” the “Word”⁸ through teaching, developing good character,⁹ supporting the Fund, and other efforts.

We use the power of the Word of God to promote our spiritual development—to draw closer to God, or to receive protection from tests. Power can also be drawn to assist others. For example, in our family life it assists training of our children; in our communities, it builds unity through the Feast; in society, it opens the hearts of people to the message of Bahá’u’lláh and heals the ills of humanity.

Using the power of the Word of God is not as easy as flipping a light switch. Effort is needed. “It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding,” Bahá’u’lláh states, “to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action. . . .”¹⁰ Efforts require:

- **Regularity.** For example, Bahá’u’lláh instructs us to carefully read “every day the verses revealed by God”¹¹ and recite “the verses of God every morning and evening.” He states: “Whoso reciteth them not hath truly failed to fulfill his pledge to the Covenant of God. . . .”¹²
- **Willpower,** or volition—our determination to use the Word to transform ourselves and others. “All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition.”¹³
- **Perseverance**—to keep trying despite difficulties. “Thou must exert much effort and show forth perseverance and constancy,”¹⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá urges us. At the same time, the goal is to uplift, not overburden ourselves. “Burden not your souls so as to cause exhaustion and weigh them down,” Bahá’u’lláh writes, “but rather endeavor to lighten them, that they may soar on the wings of revealed Verses. . . .”¹⁵

Effort is Needed to Move from Words to Deeds

7 Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 34

8 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 137

9 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 272

10 *Gleanings* 250

11 *The Importance of Deepening* 2

12 *The Importance of Deepening* 1

13 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 149

14 *The Importance of Deepening* 8-9

15 *Spiritual Foundations* 1

Readings

1. “When a person becomes a Bahá’í ... the seed of the spirit starts to grow in the human soul. This seed must be watered by the outpourings of the Holy Spirit. These gifts of the spirit are received through prayer, meditation, study of the Holy Utterances and service to the Cause of God.” —Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 51

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

“The believers . . . 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

3. “Meditate upon that which hath streamed forth from the heaven of the Will of thy Lord, He Who is the Source of all grace, that thou mayest grasp the intended meaning which is enshrined in the sacred depths of the Holy Writings.” —*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 143

4. “It is my hope that you may put forth your most earnest endeavor to accomplish this end [drawing closer to God], that you may investigate and study the Holy Scriptures word by word so that you may attain knowledge of the mysteries hidden therein. Be not satisfied with words, but seek to understand the spiritual meanings hidden in the heart of the words.” —‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 458-59

5. “If one arise to promote the Word of God with a pure heart, overflowing with the love of God and severed from the world, the Lord of Hosts will assist him with such power as will penetrate the core of existent beings.” —*Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, Vol. II 348

6. “. . . if an avowed follower of Bahá’u’lláh were to immerse himself in, and fathom the depths of, the ocean of these heavenly teachings, and with the utmost care and attention deduce from each of them the subtle mysteries and consummate wisdom that lie enshrined therein, such a person’s life, materially, intellectually and spiritually, will be safe from toil and trouble, and unaffected by setbacks and perils, or any sadness or despondency.” —Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 20

Drawing Power from the Word of God

Personal Transformation

mystic: having a spiritual meaning or reality not readily apparent to the senses or the intellect; relating to an individual’s communication with God

acquisition: the act of acquiring; getting

meditate: to think deeply about; reflect upon; consider carefully

avowed: openly declared

fathom: to measure; to come to understand

deduce: to derive a conclusion from a general principle using reason

despondency: hopelessness

Using the Word in Interaction with Others

wax: to increase in size, power or degree; to become gradually

odes: a poem that expresses in an exalted style the poet's feelings and thoughts

laudations: high praises

quicken: to bring life to; to revive, give new life to

recite: to repeat aloud from memory

veritable: actual; real, genuine

vacillation: wavering back and forth; being indecisive

enmity: hostility; deep seated resentment, ill will, or malice

7. “These children are even as young plants, and teaching them the prayers is as letting the rain pour down upon them, that they may wax tender and fresh, and the soft breezes of the love of God may blow over them. . . .”

—*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 139

8. “In every cycle and Dispensation, the Feast hath been favored and loved. . . . Here the holy verses, the heavenly odes and laudations are intoned, and the heart is quickened, and carried away from itself.”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Meetings and the Nineteen Day Feast* 17

9. “Gather ye together with the utmost joy and fellowship and recite the verses revealed by the merciful Lord. By doing so the doors to true knowledge will be opened to your inner beings, and ye will then feel your souls endowed with steadfastness and your hearts filled with radiant joy.”

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

10. “Hold meetings and read and chant the heavenly teachings, so that city may be illumined with the light of reality and that country become a veritable paradise by the strength of the Holy Spirit. . . .”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Importance of Deepening* 14

11. “That which can insure the victory of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, His hosts and helpers on earth, have been set down in the sacred Books and Scriptures. . . . These hosts are such righteous deeds, such conduct and character, as are acceptable in His sight. Whoso ariseth, in this Day, to aid Our Cause, and summoneth to his assistance the hosts of a praiseworthy character and upright conduct, the influence from such an action will, most certainly, be diffused throughout the whole world.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice* 24

12. “From the texts of the wondrous, heavenly Scriptures they should memorize phrases and passages bearing on various instances, so that in the course of their speech they may recite divine verses whenever the occasion demandeth it. . . . So potent is their influence that the hearer will have no cause for vacillation.”

—*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 143

13. “Now is the moment in which to cleanse thyself with the waters of detachment that have flowed out from the Supreme Pen, and to ponder, wholly for the sake of God, those things which, time and again, have been sent down or manifested, and then to strive, as much as lieth in thee, to quench, through the power of wisdom and the force of thy utterance, the fire of enmity and hatred which smouldereth in the hearts of the peoples. . . .”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 12

14. “There is a vast difference between the soul who merely reads the words of Bahá’u’lláh and the one who tries to live them.”

—‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Importance of Deepening* 18

15. “It is easy to read the Holy Scriptures, but it is only with a clean heart and a pure mind that one may understand their true meaning. Let us ask God’s help to enable us to understand the Holy Books. Let us pray for eyes to see and ears to hear. . . .” —‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 56-57

16. “It is the duty of every seeker to bestir himself and strive to attain the shores of this ocean, so that he may, in proportion to the eagerness of his search and the efforts he hath exerted, partake of such benefits as have been pre-ordained in God’s irrevocable and hidden Tablets.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 326

17. “There can be no doubt whatever that, in consequence of the efforts which every man may consciously exert and as a result of the exertion of his own spiritual faculties, this mirror [‘the mirror of His beauty in the world of creation’] can be so cleansed from the dross of earthly defilements and purged from satanic fancies as to be able to draw nigh unto the meads of eternal holiness and attain the courts of everlasting fellowship.”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 262

18. “No matter how strong the measure of Divine grace, unless supplemented by personal, sustained and intelligent effort it cannot become fully effective. . . .”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Living the Life* 15

19. “. . . the untapped sources of celestial strength . . . will unhesitatingly pour forth their energizing influences if the necessary daily effort be made and the required sacrifices be willingly accepted.”

—Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 85

20. “Naturally there will be periods of distress and difficulty, and even severe tests; but if that person turns firmly toward the divine Manifestation, studies carefully His spiritual teachings and receives the blessings of the Holy Spirit, he will find that in reality these tests and difficulties have been the gifts of God to enable him to grow and develop.”

—Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 51

21. “Arise, O people, and, by the power of God’s might, resolve to gain the victory over your own selves, that haply the whole earth may be freed and sanctified from its servitude to the gods of its idle fancies. . . .”

—Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 93

Effort is Needed to Move from Words to Deeds

bestir: to rouse oneself to vigor and action

irrevocable: incapable of being repealed or undone

dross: any worthless matter

satanic: spiteful, malicious; selfish

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 67.

Illustration

“How can we systematize the development of our spiritual nature?...

“One American worked out a system of spiritual development for himself based on his personality, nature and understanding of the Teachings. It not only helped him to grow but provided him with a sharper focus in identifying and solving his problems and in dealing with the world. . . . He’s more secure, confident, optimistic, caring, happy to serve others and is developing a teaching state of mind. . . .

“Before meeting his Lord in prayer, he washes his hands and face, as Bahá’u’lláh prescribes; then goes to a special spot in the house where he won’t be disturbed. . . .

“After praying, which includes saying the long obligatory prayer, he deepens himself by reading a page or paragraph, sometimes a sentence from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh or ‘Abdu’l-Bahá—and meditates on what he’s read. The prayers and deepening usually take about twenty minutes. Rarely much longer, because he’s taken to heart Bahá’u’lláh’s teaching that prayer should refresh, not tire, the soul.

“He goes to work after eating breakfast, fortified to face a world that doesn’t operate on a spiritual level. Two hours later . . . [i]t’s coffee break time . . . but he spends half of the fifteen-minute break alone, reciting the Greatest Name ninety-five times. And he needs to do that, because despite his early morning session with God, he’s been exposed to backbiting, gossip, lying, cheating, office politics, discourtesy, insensitivity and rudeness. . . . To make sure he gets through the day, he looks for an opportunity to share the Message, directly or indirectly, with someone during lunchtime. During the afternoon coffee break, he recites the Remover of Difficulties for however long he feels it is necessary.

“About half an hour before going to sleep, he retreats to his special spot in the house where he’ll bring himself to account, evaluating his day, thinking of how he could have been a more effective human being. At times he’ll look into the Writings for guidance on how to correct his mistakes, or improve his attitude. Then he’ll pray and deepen, going to sleep with his mind focused on the soul-purifying words of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. . . .

“Although it was difficult to start the system, mainly because he had never done anything like it before, the more he did it, the easier it was to do, until it was totally integrated into his life’s daily routine. The system of developing his spiritual nature became as necessary to him as meeting his daily food requirements. And he learned that it took less time to nurture his spiritual nature every day than to eat breakfast, lunch, supper and the two coffee breaks—about an hour altogether. . . .”

—Rutstein, *Spirit in Action: Teaching the Bahá’í Faith* 48-50

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 67 and additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.3.4.5.
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The Importance of Deepening Our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith

A compilation that focuses on the use of the Creative Word.

Personal Reflection

Remaining Questions

Additional Reading and Resources

Questions

1. We can draw the power of the Word of God through:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
 - f. _____

2. Our efforts to use the Word of God to produce change in our lives require:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

3. In what meetings should the Word of God be used to bind together the hearts of the believers? (Circle all that apply):
 - a. Feast
 - b. dawn prayers
 - c. meetings held just for this purpose
 - d. Holy Day observances

Answers

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

1. Prayer, meditation, reading, study, memorization, and service to the Cause. See pages 46 and 47.
2. Regularity, willpower, and perseverance. See page 47.
3. **a, b, c, and d.** For “c,” see quotation #10 on page 49. For “d,” while Holy Day observances do not require use of the Word of God, its use would be welcome, especially since we are now very aware of the power of the Word of God to unite and inspire the hearts of the believers.

Discussion

A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi states: “He thinks it would be wiser for the Bahá’ís to use the Meditations given by Bahá’u’lláh, and not any set form of meditation recommended by anyone else; but the believers must be left free in these details and allowed to have personal latitude in finding their own level of communion with God.”¹⁶ What is meditation? How does someone meditate? How do you, or how can you, use meditation regularly?

How can the Word of God be used to better promote the education and spiritual development of children in your community? (Refer to the #7 on page 49, but don’t limit your ideas to this.)

How can we use the Word of God more effectively at Feast and other Bahá’í gatherings to bind together the hearts of the believers?

What do you think the Guardian means by: “The Bahá’í Faith . . . is . . . fundamentally mystic in character?” (Refer to #1 on page 48.)

What part does the power of the Word of God play in teaching? What impact does it have on the teacher? the seeker? the new believer? (Refer to page 48 and to #12 on page 49.)

¹⁶ *Spiritual Foundations* 20

Exercise

The Bahá'í Writings describe many specific effects produced by the Word of God. Complete the following exercise which will help to determine practical goals for using the Word to produce desired changes. Indicate ways you personally can apply the Word of God. An example is given.

Statement A quote about a change resulting from the power of the Word.	Effect What effect is produced? How does the Word produce this effect?	Application How can you apply this effect in your life, family, or community?
"Through each and every one of the verses which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed, the doors of love and unity have been unlocked. . . ."15	<i>The effect produced is love and unity. The spirit drawn by the Word binds the hearts of individuals.</i>	<i>By saying prayers as a family in the morning and evening.</i>
"It is my hope . . . that through the power of the Word of God ye will bring life to the dead now buried in the graves of their sensual desires. . . ."16		
". . . let your ears be attentive unto His Word, so that ye may . . . drink your fill from the crystal waters of constancy, and become as steadfast and immovable as the mountain in His Cause."17		
"Every verse which this Pen hath revealed is a bright and shining portal that discloseth the glories of a saintly and pious life, of pure and stainless deeds."18		
"There is no greater means to bring about affection between the white and the black than the influence of the Word of God."19		
". . . the establishment of peace is unachievable save through the power of the Word of God."20		

15 *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 87

16 *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 36-37

17 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 13

18 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 96

19 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Power of Unity* 55

20 *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 296

Feedback

The following are suggested answers—you may have a different response. In each category one sample answer is given. You may have a number of answers based on different situations to which the quotation may apply. Select one of the means for applying the Word of God that you described in your answers to the exercise. Try to begin to put this goal into practice in the coming week.

Statement A quote about a change resulting from the power of the Word.	Effect What effect is produced? How does the Word produce this effect?	Application How can you apply this effect in your life, family, or community?
“Through each and every one of the verses which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed, the doors of love and unity have been unlocked. . . .”	<i>The effect produced is love and unity. The spirit drawn by the Word binds the hearts of individuals.</i>	<i>By saying prayers as a family in the morning and evening.</i>
“It is my hope . . . that through the power of the Word of God ye will bring life to the dead now buried in the graves of their sensual desires. . . .”	<i>The effect is that souls are quickened. The Word is spiritual food that attracts the hungry. It then creates a new being through igniting the spirit of faith.</i>	<i>Memorize quotations from the Word of God that can be used at a monthly fireside.</i>
“. . . let your ears be attentive unto His Word, so that ye may . . . drink your fill from the crystal waters of constancy, and become as steadfast and immovable as the mountain in His Cause.”	<i>The effect produced is certitude. The Word of God draws us closer to God and can transform us, providing greater spiritual capacities.</i>	<i>Rise 15 minutes early each day to read regularly from the Word of God.</i>
“Every verse which this Pen hath revealed is a bright and shining portal that discloseth the glories of a saintly and pious life, of pure and stainless deeds.”	<i>The effect produced is pure deeds. The Word teaches us how to live and the qualities we need to obtain, then helps us become transformed so we can live the life.</i>	<i>Establish a plan for weekly study of the Word which includes setting goals based on Divine Teachings.</i>
“There is no greater means to bring about affection between the white and the black than the influence of the Word of God.”	<i>The effect produced is the end of prejudice between black and white. This occurs, in part, through individual transformation.</i>	<i>Study the Bahá’í Writings on race unity. Then befriend and associate closely with a person or family of another race, working to apply what was learned.</i>
“. . . the establishment of peace is unachievable save through the power of the Word of God.”	<i>The effect produced is world peace. The Word achieves this, in part, by outlining the basic requirements to establish a peaceful world society.</i>	<i>Work with a local peace group, sharing, when the opportunity is presented, the Bahá’í Teachings on the establishment of peace.</i>

6

Avoiding Pitfalls

Introduction

The Word of God is a potent force operating in the spiritual and physical worlds. We must therefore approach the Word of God with the proper humility and care. A number of pitfalls await those who approach the Word of God without the proper respect for its true nature. We must understand these pitfalls to guard against losing the great blessings God provides for us through His Word.

Overview

The Writings outline at least five pitfalls¹ which can come between us and the truths enshrined in the Word of God. These pitfalls are:

- holding preconceptions;
- overemphasizing individual interpretations;
- demonstrating intellectual pride;
- using study as an excuse for inaction; and
- treating the Word of God like the words of men

Explanation

Most of us have found something in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh different from what we previously believed. Such preconceptions can be a problem if they become a barrier to accepting what the Word of God has to teach us. We may be tempted to take one or two verses that prove our point, and ignore other verses that say something else. We would be bending the Word to fit our own beliefs, rather than letting the Word lead us.

For example, the Qur'án indicates that the earth goes around the sun. When people believed the earth was the center of the universe, they mocked the teachings of the Qur'án. Some Moslems even went to great lengths to try to explain away the verses of God with wild interpretations. Instead of accepting the Word, they tried to make it match their false preconceptions. The Word is the standard of truth; our beliefs must be measured against this standard.²

Individual interpretations of the Word are welcomed in the Bahá'í teachings. They are “the fruit of man’s rational power and conducive to better understanding.”³ However, these interpretations are limited. We have to be aware that we may make an incorrect interpretation. And we cannot impose our personal interpretation on anyone else.

Most importantly, individual interpretation must not be confused with the authorized interpretations of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings by 'Abdu'l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi. Their interpretations are binding on all Bahá'ís.

¹ These categories are based on a talk given by Peter Khan in Wilmette on June 26, 1981

² Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 198

³ The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 88

Holding Preconceptions

Overemphasizing Individual Interpretations

Demonstrating Intellectual Pride

Knowledge can be a veil that prevents the learned person from ever recognizing the truth of God’s Word. Intellectual pride may even cause a person to attack the new teachings, as the clergy have done with each Revelation. After accepting Bahá’u’lláh, intellectual pride may lead us to believe that our opinion is the best, that others have little or nothing to contribute, or that the progress of the Faith depends on following our personal viewpoint.

“Blessed are the learned,” Bahá’u’lláh says, “that pride not themselves on their attainments.”⁴ Great learning does not excuse someone from obeying teachings on humility, courteousness, wisdom, and tolerance for the views of others—for all knowledge comes from God.

It is possible to become so involved in our study of the Word of God that we fail to take time to put it into action. In the past, monks and other religious people withdrew from society to study, trying to draw closer to God. Bahá’u’lláh puts supreme emphasis on action. “He whose words exceed his deeds, know verily his death is better than his life.”⁵ Shoghi Effendi indicates that to achieve success in our endeavors we must “meditate on the teachings, pray fervently for divine confirmations, . . . study the teachings, . . . and then act; and above all persevere in action.”⁶

There is a great danger in treating the Word of God like the words of men. We may find ourselves beginning to analyze the teachings for accuracy or validity. We may try to look for contradictions.

The Báb was asked by a group of Moslem clergymen to prove His claim to be a Manifestation of God by producing verses like those found in the Qur’án. He began to speak. One of the clerics, however, attacked the Báb, claiming that He was using incorrect Arabic grammar. “The Qur’án itself,” was the Báb’s reply, “does in no wise accord with the rules and conventions current amongst men. The Word of God can never be subject to the limitations of His creatures. . . . These men have, in the very texts of that holy Book, discovered no less than three hundred instances of grammatical error. . . . Inasmuch as it was the Word of God, they had no other alternative except to resign themselves to His will.”⁷

Using Study as an Excuse for Inaction

Treating the Word of God Like the Words of Men

4 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 315
5 *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 156

6 Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 52
7 Reported words of the Báb, *The Dawnbreakers* 318-19

Readings

1. “It behoveth every man to blot out the trace of every idle word from the tablet of his heart, and to gaze, with an open and unbiased mind, on the signs of His Revelation. . . .” —Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 11

2. “. . . the unbelievers have inclined their ears towards Us in order to hear that which might enable them to cavil against God. . . . And since they are unable to attain to mysteries of knowledge and wisdom from what hath been unravelled by the Source of divine splendor, they rise in protest and burst into clamor. But it is true to say that they object to that which they comprehend, not to the expositions given by the Expounder, nor the truths imparted by the One true God. . . . Their objections, one and all, turn upon themselves, and I swear by thy life that they are devoid of understanding.” —*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 141

3. “But, O my brother, when a true seeker determines to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart . . . from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge, and the allusions of the embodiments of satanic fancy . . . that no remnant of either love or hate may linger therein, lest that love blindly incline him to error, or that hate repel him away from the truth.” —Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 192

4. “Blessed is the man that hath acknowledged his belief in God and in His signs, and recognized that ‘He shall not be asked of His doings.’ “. . . Whoso hath not recognized this sublime and fundamental verity, and hath failed to attain this most exalted station, the winds of doubt will agitate him, and the sayings of the infidels will distract his soul. He that hath acknowledged this principle will be endowed with the most perfect constancy. . . .” —Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 86-87

5. “Those words uttered by the Luminaries of Truth must needs be pondered, and should their significance be not grasped, enlightenment should be sought from the Trustees of the depositories of Knowledge, that these may expound their meaning, and unravel their mystery. For it behooveth no man to interpret the holy words according to his own imperfect understanding, nor, having found them to be contrary to his inclination and desires, to reject and repudiate their truth. For such, today, is the manner of the divines and doctors of the age, who occupy the seats of knowledge and learning, and who have named ignorance knowledge, and called oppression justice.” —Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 181-82

Holding Preconceptions

cavil: to find fault without good reason

remnant: that which is left over

Overemphasizing Individual Interpretations

depositories: places where something is put for safekeeping

behoove: to be necessary or proper for; to be advantageous to

6. “A clear distinction is made in our Faith between authoritative interpretation and the interpretation or understanding that each individual arrives at for himself. . . . While the former is confined to the Guardian, the latter . . . should by no means be suppressed. In fact such individual interpretation is considered the fruit of man’s rational power and conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, provided that no disputes or arguments arise among the friends and the individual himself understands and makes it clear that his views are merely his own. Individual interpretations continually change as one grows in comprehension of the teachings. As Shoghi Effendi wrote: ‘. . . The more we read the Writings, the more truths we can find in them, the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous.’ The friends must therefore learn to listen to the views of others without being overawed or allowing their faith to be shaken, and to express their own views without pressing them on their fellow Bahá’ís.” —The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 88-89

7. “... Knowledge is of two kinds: Divine and Satanic. The one welletth out from the fountain of divine inspiration; the other is but a reflection of vain and obscure thoughts. The source of the former is God . . . the latter the whisperings of selfish desire.” —Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 69

8. “Were these [the divines] to ask the Light of Truth concerning those images which their idle fancy hath carved, and were they to find His answer inconsistent with their own conceptions and their own understanding of the Book, they would assuredly denounce Him. . . .”
—Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 182

9. “No good but only evil can come from taking the responsibility for the future of God’s Cause into our own hands and trying to force it into ways that we wish it to go regardless of the clear texts. . . .

“. . . the believers must recognize the importance of intellectual honesty and humility. In the past dispensations many errors arose because the believers in God’s Revelation were overanxious to encompass the Divine Message within the framework of their limited understanding, to define doctrines where definition was beyond their power, to explain mysteries which only the wisdom and experience of a later age would make comprehensible, to argue that something was true because it appeared desirable and necessary. Such compromises with essential truth, such intellectual pride, we must scrupulously avoid.” —The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 87-88

Demonstrating Intellectual Pride

idle: lacking worth or basis; not turned to proper use

fancy: imagining; whim; a liking formed by a sudden arbitrary change of mind rather than reason

encompass: to surround, encircle; to contain

comprehensible: understandable

scrupulously: in a manner attentive to detail, exact

10. “. . . O concourse of monks! Seclude not yourselves in your churches and cloisters. Come ye out of them by My leave, and busy, then, yourselves with what will profit you and others. Thus commandeth you He Who is the Lord of the Day of Reckoning. Seclude yourselves in the stronghold of My love. This, truly, is the seclusion that befitteth you, could ye but know it. He that secludeth himself in his house is indeed as one dead. It behooveth man to show forth that which will benefit mankind. He that bringeth forth no fruit is fit for the fire.”

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 49

11. “Knowledge is as wings to man’s life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words.”

—*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 51-52

12. “Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring balance established amongst men. In this most perfect balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it.”

—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 198

13. “Warn thou the servants of God not to reject that which they do not comprehend. Say, implore God to open to your hearts the portals of true understanding that ye may be apprised of that which no one is apprised. . . .

“Know thou of a truth that whatsoever hath been prescribed in the Book is indeed the truth, no doubt is there about it, and it is incumbent upon everyone to observe that which hath been sent down by Him Who is the Revealer, the All-Knowing. . . .”

—*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 188

14. “He feels that many of the perplexities that arise in your mind could be dissipated if you always conceived of the teachings as one great whole with many facets. Truth may, in covering different subjects, appear to be contradictory, and yet it is all one if you carry the thought through to the end. . . . He hopes you will . . . rest assured inwardly that for these things which sometimes seem difficult to understand there is usually a quite simple and reasonable explanation.”

—Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening* 47

Using Study as an Excuse for Inaction

seclude: to withdraw from others; keep away

cloister: monastery

Treating the Word of God Like the Words of Men

apprised: given notice of

prescribed: laid down as a guide, direction, or rule of action

perplexities: confusions; contradictions

dissipated: scattered; disappeared

For more quotations on topics raised in this lesson see the index, page 67.

Illustration

“The following story in the life of Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl, the outstanding scholar of the Cause and its famous apologist, is one which demonstrates that reading the Word of God with the eye of intellect can lead a man astray. He himself has recounted the story that soon after he came in contact with the believers, they gave him the Kitáb-i-Íqán to read. He read it with an air of intellectual superiority and was not impressed by it. He even commented that if the Kitáb-i-Íqán was a proof of Bahá’u’lláh’s claims, he himself could certainly write a better book.

“At that time he was the head of a theological college in Tīhrán. The following day a prominent woman arrived at the college and approached some students asking them to write an important letter for her. The students referred her to Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl saying that he was an outstanding writer, a master of eloquence and a man unsurpassed in the art of composition. Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl took up his pen to write, but found himself unable to compose the first sentence. He tried very hard but was unsuccessful. For several minutes he scribbled in the corner of the page and even drew lines on his own fingernail, until the woman realized that the learned scribe was unable to write. Losing her patience she arose to go and mockingly said to Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl, ‘If you have forgotten how to write a simple letter why don’t you say so instead of keeping me here while you scrawl?’

“Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl says that he was overcome with feelings of shame as a result of this incident, and then suddenly remembered his own comments the night before about his being able to write a better book than the Kitáb-i-Íqán. He had a pure heart and knew that this incident was nothing but a clear answer to his arrogant attitude towards that holy Book.

“However, it took Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl several years to be convinced of the truth of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh. . . . The same person who once had said he could write a better book than the Kitáb-i-Íqán, read this book many times with the eye of faith and found it to be an ocean of knowledge, limitless in scope. Every time he read it he found new pearls of wisdom within it and discovered new mysteries which he had not come across before.”

—Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*, Vol. II 219-20

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 67 and additional reading below to help you find answers to your questions.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

The Creative Word, by Peter Khan

A taped talk given by Dr. Peter Khan in Wilmette on June 26, 1981.

**Personal
Reflection**

**Remaining
Questions**

**Additional
Reading and
Resources**

Questions

1. List five potential pitfalls which can come between us and understanding the Word of God:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____

2. (Circle all that apply.) Individual interpretations of the Word of God:
 - a. promote better understanding of the teachings
 - b. can be correct
 - c. should not be applied to other people
 - d. should be suppressed

3. (Circle all that apply.) In comparing the teachings of the Word of God to the knowledge of men:
 - a. the teachings of God are a standard to examine the knowledge of men
 - b. reason is given to mankind as a tool to measure the truth of each of the divine teachings
 - c. the teachings of God may appear to be contradictory
 - d. the Word of God follows the rules of grammar

Answers

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

1. Holding preconceptions, overemphasizing individual interpretations, demonstrating intellectual pride, using study as an excuse for inaction, and treating the Word of God like the words of men.
2. **a, b, and c.** See quotation #6 on page 61. Individual interpretations “should by no means be suppressed.” They may be incorrect or correct, but personal interpretations should be stated as such by the individual, should not lead to arguments, and cannot be forced on other Bahá’ís.
3. **a and c.** See the #12, #13, and #14 on page 62. For answer “b,” while our reason does help us to recognize the truth of God’s new Manifestation, we are not to pick through the teachings one by one, rejecting some and accepting others. Note that for answer “c,” the teachings may “appear to be contradictory” but in fact are “one great whole with many facets” (#14 page 62). Regarding answer “d,” refer to the last paragraph on page 59 and to the third paragraph on page 31.

Discussion

What does Bahá’u’lláh mean by “He shall not be asked of His doings?” Why is this principle so important? (Refer to #4 on page 60.)

How can knowledge be “Satanic” when, as Bahá’ís believe, there is no devil? (Refer to #7 on page 61.)

What is the meaning of intellectual pride as discussed in the lesson? What is the proper role of intelligence and intellectuals in the Faith? How can the Bahá’í Faith avoid intellectual pride while at the same time avoiding the anti-intellectual feelings that have occurred in religion in the past?

Index for the Word of God

Introduction

The index provides references on the topic of the Word of God from a wide range of Bahá'í books. The bold page numbers indicate quotations used, at least in part, in this book; the corresponding page number from *The Word of God* is included in parenthesis.

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Index Abbreviation:

FWU

PT

PUP

SDC

SAB

SAQ

TAB

TDP

SB

ES

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