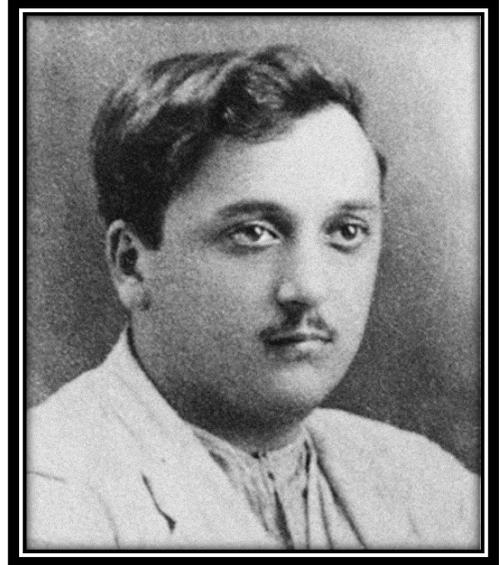


# Bahá'í Standards of Behavior

## INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

Living a Bahá'í life calls for an ongoing effort to develop one's character and refine one's behavior, as is best exemplified by the life of `Abdu'l-Bahá. All of us come into this Faith with specialized God-given capacities that are not fully developed. Furthermore, most of us have inherited or developed certain behavioral burdens that require serious curtailment. It is certain all have room to grow, as the steps on the path of spiritual improvement are endless.

Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, identified three initial requirements of spiritual success that should be given serious attention by the believers; namely, a high sense of moral rectitude, absolute chastity, and complete freedom from prejudice. The focus of this study will be Bahá'í standards of private and public behavior as they relate to these three subjects.



The Guardian, Shoghi Effendi

## OBJECTIVE: *A look to the horizon...*

### Facilitator

Review the following objective with the participants:

The objective of this study is to understand the fundamental verities or basic truths regarding standards of private and public behavior in living the Bahá'í life.

## THE STUDY PROCESS: *Attaining the water of life...*

### Facilitator

Review the following study process with the participants. Then study the numbered quotations on the following pages, one at a time as described below.

1. **READING:** *A drink from the cup of guidance...*  
Have two participants take turns reading the quotation out loud so that it is read twice.
2. **CONFIRMING MEANING:** *A spray from the fountain of light...*
  - A. If anyone would like to have better understanding of a word used in the quotation, now is the time to refer to its substitute phrase, definition or synonym, which can be found in the boxes below each quotation. Read the substitute phrase, definition or synonym out loud so everyone can hear.

- B. Read the sentence again that contains the word you selected, while **substituting for that word**, its given phrase, definition or synonym from the box below the quotation.
- C. If anyone would like a better understanding of another word, repeat the process above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words in the quotation.

3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Mining the gems of truth...*

Take turns stating each basic fact or truth you can find in the quotation about standards of private and public behavior in living the Bahá'í life.

**QUOTATIONS:** *Within the meadows of Thy nearness...*

1. These requirements [the spiritual requisites of success] are none other than a high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities, absolute chastity in their individual lives, and complete freedom from prejudice in their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or color.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 22)

**absolute:** complete and perfect  
**administrative:** management or directing of [Bahá'í]  
**chastity:** cleanliness and purity in thought and action from sexual misconduct  
**class:** social ranking as a group  
**creed:** system of beliefs  
**dealings:** actions taken  
**freedom:** liberation and exemption  
**moral:** excellence in what pertains to right and wrong conduct or behavior  
**prejudice:** ignorant and preconceived judgment ☞

of different others, marked by a sense of self-superiority, suspicion, intolerance, or irrational hatred  
**race:** common ancestry  
**rectitude:** with no deviation from what is the right or correct way  
**requirements:** essentials needed  
**requisites:** necessary or required qualities  
**sense:** ability for sound reasoning and correct judgment  
**social:** gathering and associating with people

2. This rectitude of conduct, with its implications of justice, equity, truthfulness, honesty, fair-mindedness, reliability, and trustworthiness, must distinguish every phase of the life of the Bahá'í community.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 23)

**conduct:** acting and behaving  
**distinguish:** set apart from others by prominent qualities  
**equity:** dealing fairly, equally, and impartially with all concerned  
**fair-mindedness:** inclined to make impartial judgments free of undue influence  
**honesty:** freedom from deception or fraud; straightforwardness  
**implications:** shown connections or close involvements

**justice:** conforming to what is morally right and good  
**phase:** stage of development; part or aspect  
**rectitude:** strict observance of the right or correct way  
**reliability:** known and capable to do what is expected or required; dependable  
**trustworthiness:** worthy of being trusted and relied upon with confidence  
**truthfulness:** having the disposition to tell what is true and factual

3. Such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations. It demands daily vigilance in the control of one's carnal desires and corrupt inclinations. It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous

conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures. It requires total abstinence from all alcoholic drinks, from opium, and from similar habit-forming drugs. It condemns the prostitution of art and of literature, the practices of nudism and of companionate marriage, infidelity in marital relationships, and all manner of promiscuity, of easy familiarity, and of sexual vices. It can tolerate no compromise with the theories, the standards, the habits, and the excesses of a decadent age. Nay rather it seeks to demonstrate, through the dynamic force of its example, the pernicious character of such theories, the falsity of such standards, the hollowness of such claims, the perversity of such habits, and the sacrilegious character of such excesses.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 30)

**abandonment:** giving up with the intent of never again claiming a right or interest  
**abstinence:** voluntarily depriving oneself or refraining  
**age:** period of time in history identified by distinct features  
**amusements:** pleasurable pastimes or diversions; entertainment  
**artistic:** of art or artists  
**attachment:** heart-felt attraction and attention  
**avocations:** secondary occupations or enjoyable hobbies  
**carnal:** pleasures of the body or lower nature [type of]  
**character:** distinguishing trait, quality, or nature  
**chaste:** clean and pure in thought and action of sexual misconduct  
**claims:** asserted beliefs  
**clean-mindedness:** having morally pure thoughts and mental images  
**companionate marriage:** living together like husband and wife, and indulging in sexual relations “where there is no legal or religious marriage” (UHJ, cited in *DDBC*, p. 15.18)  
**compromise:** shameful or disreputable concessions or yielding  
**condemns:** pronounces as wrong and strongly disapproves of  
**conduct:** way of acting or behaving  
**corrupt:** morally degenerate or perverted  
**decadent:** decaying or declining in social conditions [kind of]  
**decency:** conformity to standards of what is suitable or proper in words, behavior, dress, and ceremony  
**demands:** calls for or requires as a necessity  
**demonstrate:** clearly show  
**desires:** strong feelings for enjoyment or satisfaction  
**dynamic:** change and growth producing  
**easy familiarity:** carefree and unrestrained sexually intimate acts or remarks  
**excesses:** surpassed limits in what is usual, proper, or necessary; indulgences  
**excessive:** limits surpassed in what is usual, proper, or necessary; indulgent  
**exercise:** carrying out and performing  
**falsity:** incorrectness, untruthfulness, deceitfulness, and disloyalty

**frivolous:** of little proper value or importance  
**habit-forming:** causing repeated, irresistible, and frequent use [kind of]  
**habits:** repeated, irresistible, and frequent behaviors acquired from repetition  
**hollowness:** lacking in real value, sincerity, or substance  
**implications:** shown connections or close involvements  
**inclinations:** tendencies or mental dispositions  
**infidelity:** unfaithfulness or disloyalty in one’s moral obligation to the other  
**involves:** includes as a closely related part  
**literary:** of literature, books, learning, or writing  
**manner:** kinds and sorts  
**misdirected:** incorrect or wrongly guided  
**moderation:** restraint from excesses  
**modesty:** humility, decency, and moderation in dress, speech, and conduct  
**nudism:** living in a nude state  
**pernicious:** destructive, harmful, or fatal  
**pertains:** is associated with or appropriate  
**perversity:** deviation from the right, proper, or true intended purpose  
**pleasures:** satisfaction or gratification of sensual desires or inclinations  
**promiscuity:** unrestricted or casual sexual relations  
**prostitution:** deliberate lowering of the moral integrity, usually of one’s talents for money  
**purity:** freedom and cleanliness from fault, blame, or sin  
**requires:** demands as necessary or appropriate  
**sacrilegious:** offensive and shameful violation of what is sacred or holy [kind of]  
**standards:** definite rules and principles established by authority, custom, or tradition  
**temperance:** self-control and moderation in the indulgence of appetites or passions  
**theories:** rationales and beliefs that propose a basis for action; philosophy  
**tolerate:** put up with; allow; permit  
**trivial:** those things of little worth or importance  
**vices:** habits or behaviors that are immoral or degrading  
**vigilance:** attention and watchfulness to avoid danger or pitfalls

4. Bahá'u'lláh tells us that prejudice in its various forms destroys the edifice of humanity. We are adjured by the Divine Messenger to eliminate all forms of prejudice from our lives. Our outer lives must show forth our beliefs. The world must see that, regardless of each passing whim or current fashion of the generality of mankind, the Bahá'í lives his life according to the tenets of his Faith. We must not allow the fear of rejection by our friends and neighbours to deter us from our goal: to live the Bahá'í life. Let us strive to blot out from our lives every last trace of prejudice—racial, religious, political, economic, national, tribal, class, cultural, and that which is based on differences of education or age.

*(Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986: The Third Epoch of the Formative Age, p. 222, #117.2)*

**adjured:** earnestly advised or commanded  
**blot out:** wipe out or destroy  
**class:** of people grouped by social ranking  
**cultural:** of people based on shared customs, skills, beliefs, arts, values, or social structure  
**destroys:** causes to be completely ruined beyond use  
**deter:** discourage, prevent, or turn  
**economic:** of people based on income or style of household management  
**edifice:** elaborately constructed institution or organization  
**eliminate:** expel or get rid of  
**Faith:** Bahá'í Faith  
**fashion:** socially favored way of dressing, behaving, writing, or performing  
**forms:** kinds or types  
**generality:** greatest part  
**humanity:** the human race  
**live:** conduct one's self in accordance with

**national:** of people based on country of origin or citizenship  
**political:** of people affiliated with specific systems of government  
**prejudice:** ignorant and preconceived judgment of different others, marked by a sense of self-superiority, suspicion, intolerance, or irrational hatred  
**racial:** of people based on race  
**rejection:** being unaccepted or unwanted by not fulfilling expected requirements  
**religious:** of people based on religion  
**strive:** devote serious energy or effort  
**tenets:** principles, beliefs, and doctrines held to be true  
**trace:** minute sign or evidence  
**tribal:** of people based on tribe of origin or affiliation  
**various:** indefinite number of  
**whim:** sudden turn or new interest of the mind

5. *Be pure, O people of God, be pure; be righteous, be righteous.... Say: O people of God! That which can ensure 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, and are as clear and manifest as the sun. 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 flowing from such an action will, most certainly, be diffused throughout the whole world.*

*(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 287)*

**acceptable:** worthy of being received with favor or approval  
**aid:** give help and assistance to  
**ariseth:** becomes very active  
**assistance:** supportive help  
**Cause:** eternal religious Faith, in this day the purpose and plans of the Bahá'í Faith  
**character:** distinguishing traits, qualities, or nature  
**conduct:** ways of acting and behaving  
**deeds:** actions or activities performed  
**diffused:** dispersed or distributed widely or in every direction; scattered  
**ensure:** cause to be made sure, certain, or safe  
**flowing:** caused to issue forth  
**hosts:** multiple supporters and attendants; ↗

*"In this Most Great Revelation goodly deeds and a praiseworthy character are regarded as the hosts of God, likewise is His blessed and holy Word." (Bahá'u'lláh, TOB, p. 256)*  
**influence:** outpouring of spiritual or moral power without direct force  
**manifest:** evident or obvious  
**Our:** used by one in authority to denote himself  
**praiseworthy:** deserving of honor or commendation [in]  
**pure:** free and clean of fault, blame, or sin  
**righteous:** morally right, fair, and just behaving  
**summoneth:** actively brings  
**upright:** marked by strong moral rectitude [in]  
**victory:** triumph; conquest

**SHARING:** *A breath from the spirit of inspiration...*

**Facilitator**

Ask the participants to complete the statements below. When everyone has finished, have each person share, in a round, the one thing that was most outstanding or inspiring and how it made him or her feel. Please remind everyone not to remark on the comments of others.

The one thing from the quotations that was the most outstanding or inspiring to me was \_\_\_\_\_

It made me feel \_\_\_\_\_

Explain \_\_\_\_\_

**SOME QUESTIONS:** *A gentle breeze from the testing winds...*

**Facilitator**

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. They can usually find answers in the quotations just studied or in the introduction. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers.

1. Shoghi Effendi identified three major areas of concern regarding acceptable public and private behavior essential to one’s spiritual growth. What are they? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. A high sense of moral rectitude requires the acquisition of numerous virtues. Match these virtues with their appropriate descriptions.

___ justice	a. known to do, and capable of doing, what is expected or required; dependable
___ equity	b. freedom from deception or fraud; straightforwardness
___ truthfulness	c. having the disposition to tell what is true and factual
___ honesty	d. worthy of being trusted and relied upon with confidence
___ fair-mindedness	e. conforming to what is morally right and good
___ reliability	f. dealing fairly, equally, and impartially with all concerned
___ trustworthiness	g. inclined to make impartial judgments free of undue influence

3. Match the virtues of a chaste and holy life with their appropriate meanings.

___ modesty	a. conformity to standards of what is suitable or proper in words, behavior, dress, and ceremony
___ purity	b. humility, decency, and moderation in dress, speech, and conduct
___ temperance	c. self-control and moderation in the indulgence of appetites or passions
___ decency	d. possession of morally pure thoughts and mental images
___ clean-mindedness	e. freedom and cleanliness from fault, blame, or sin

Continued on next page...

4. What are God's "hosts and helpers on earth"? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Bahá'u'lláh tells us that prejudice destroys what? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Describe your understanding of the "edifice of humanity." \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Bahá'u'lláh wrote: "Close your eyes to racial differences, and welcome all with the light of oneness."<sup>1</sup> How can this be applied in our efforts to eliminate prejudice? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Why do you think the Bahá'í Faith advocates such high standards of public and private behavior?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Proper private and public behavior remains the responsibility of the individual. Improper behavior warrants sanctions from Bahá'í institutions only in extreme cases. At this time the Universal House of Justice has written that a person can lose sacred Bahá'í rights and privileges for immoral behavior only after three criteria have been met: "...whether the party is guilty of blatant and flagrant immorality, whether such conduct is harming the Faith, and whether the believer has refused or neglected to improve ... conduct despite repeated warnings."<sup>2</sup>  
What do you think **flagrant** means? \_\_\_\_\_  
What do you think **blatant** means? \_\_\_\_\_

**APPLICATION:** *Showing forth divine light...*

**Facilitator**

Read through the following paragraph together and proceed as stated. Then take time for the participants to write out their individual plans for action. When everyone has finished, move on to the closing reading.

**Bahá'u'lláh wrote:** "It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action...." Imagine how the Bahá'í Teachings in this study class could be translated into reality and action. Take turns sharing the possibilities. Begin your statements with: "**One could**...."

From your experience in this study class on the standards of private and public behavior in living the Bahá'í life, describe what **you** are inspired to put into reality and action. **I will make conscious efforts to...** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>1</sup> ADJ, p. 37  
<sup>2</sup> LOG, p. 58, #206

*From 'Abdu'l-Bahá to some believers in the West...*

O army of God! Today, in this world, every people is wandering astray in its own desert, moving here and there according to the dictates of its fancies and whims, pursuing its own particular caprice. Amongst all the teeming masses of the earth, only this community of the Most Great Name is free and clear of human schemes and hath no selfish purpose to promote. Alone amongst them all, this people hath arisen with aims purified of self, following the Teachings of God, most eagerly toiling and striving toward a single goal: to turn this nether dust into high heaven, to make of this world a mirror for the Kingdom, to change this world into a different world, and cause all humankind to adopt the ways of righteousness and a new manner of life.

O army of God! Through the protection and help vouchsafed by the Blessed Beauty — may my life be a sacrifice to His loved ones — ye must conduct yourselves in such a manner that ye may stand out distinguished and brilliant as the sun among other souls. Should any one of you enter a city, he should become a centre of attraction by reason of his sincerity, his faithfulness and love, his honesty and fidelity, his truthfulness and loving-kindness towards all the peoples of the world, so that the people of that city may cry out and say: “This man is unquestionably a Bahá’í, for his manners, his behaviour, his conduct, his morals, his nature, and disposition reflect the attributes of the Bahá’ís.” Not until ye attain this station can ye be said to have been faithful to the Covenant and Testament of God. For He hath, through irrefutable Texts, entered into a binding Covenant with us all, requiring us to act in accordance with His sacred instructions and counsels.

O army of God! The time hath come for the effects and perfections of the Most Great Name to be made manifest in this excellent age, so as to establish, beyond any doubt, that this era is the era of Bahá’u’lláh, and this age is distinguished above all other ages.

*(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 70-71)*

**ANSWERS:** *Affirming treasures...*

1. **a high sense of moral rectitude** in their social and administrative activities, **absolute chastity** in their individual lives, and **complete freedom from prejudice** in their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or color
2. e, f, c, b, g, a, d
3. b, e, c, a, d
4. such righteous deeds, such conduct and character, as are acceptable in His sight
5. the edifice of humanity
6. anything close to - elaborately constructed institution or organization of the human race
7. all answers are valuable
8. all answers are valuable
9. any thing close to - **flagrant**: so outrageously wrong and improper that it can not escape notice, and **blatant**: offensively or completely obvious

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