

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 that follow, one at a time as described below.

1. READING: *A drink from the cup of guidance...*

Two volunteers take turns reading the quotation out loud so it is read twice.

2. CONFIRMING MEANING: *A spray from the fountain of light...*

PARTICIPANTS: To better understand certain words used in the quotation, take turns with the following:

A. Choose a word from the quotation and state it for the whole group to hear. (Like a fun game – pick a word!) Then...

- B. Read out loud the sentence that contains the **word** you selected, **while substituting for that word**, its given phrase, definition, or synonym from the boxes below the quotation.

Repeat A and B above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words.

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

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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."¹ 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."²
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...* _____

¹ ADJ, p. 37

² 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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