INTRODUCTION: Approaching the threshold...

Dear friends and lovers of the light. In this study we will explore the Bahá’í Teachings regarding service to humanity. We will learn about a service that is accompanied by a heartfelt love for the people and motivated solely by one’s love for God, and not by any personal benefit, recognition, or gain. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reminds us: “Love and serve mankind just for the sake of God and not for anything else."1

Even though service to humanity is clarified and expanded by the Bahá’í Revelation, this is not a new teaching in religious history. The station and value of service as it relates to our spiritual reality can be found in religious scriptures written thousands of years ago. One example can be found in these recorded words of Jesus: “And he among you who wants to be the first will be a servant to all."2

Some aspects of service to humanity are also covered in two separate Bahá’í Essentials studies titled: “Service to the Cause” and “The Spiritual Nature of Work”. This study, under the greater umbrella of service to humanity, will address the basic teachings of the Faith from serving the ones you’re with, to social action in multi-national organizations that tend to the greater humanitarian needs.

An old adage says so much: “When everyone serves, everyone gets served.” Let’s explore.

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 service to humanity.

---

1 From notes taken of talks given by ’Abdu’l-Bahá, Star of the West, Vol. IX, p. 99
2 Aramaic Bible in Plain English, Mark 10:44
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 service to humanity.

QUOTATIONS: Within the meadows of Thy nearness...

1. May you love all and serve all, because serving mankind is serving God. Everyone should be kind. Everyone should strive for unity and endeavour to serve mankind. All nations should become as one nation and each should serve all.
   (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a talk cited in Star of the West, Vol. II, No. 12, p.3)

   | **endeavour** | try to achieve with earnest effort |
   | **kind** | of the disposition to do good and bring happiness to others |
   | **serve** | actively exert oneself to answer the needs of, be of use to, help, comfort, guard, protect, benefit, wait upon, watch over, and assist |

   | **strive** | devote serious energy or effort |
   | **unity** | a heartfelt condition of peace, love and harmony in human relations, free of contention, dissension and the struggle for dominance |

2. Briefly, all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity. This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer.
   (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 176)

   | **exertion** | active exercise of any power or faculty |
   | **man** | woman or man |
   | **minister** | give aid or service |
   | **motives** | emotions or desires that move one to act |
   | **prompted** | moved to action |
   | **serve** | actively exert oneself to answer the needs of, be of use to, help, comfort, guard, protect, benefit, wait upon, watch over, and assist |

   | **service** | active exertion to answer the needs of, be of use to, help, comfort, guard, protect, benefit, wait upon, watch over, and assist |
   | **worship** | an expression of respect, honor, adoration, and reverence to God |
3. All men have been called into being for the betterment of the world. It behooveth every soul to arise and serve his brethren for the sake of God.

Bahá’u’lláh, The Tabernacle of Unity, p. 43 #2.42

| **arise** | actively come forth |
| **behooveth** | is advantageous and necessary for |
| **betterment** | making better or improving |
| **brethren** | fellow human beings |
| **called into being** | brought into existence; created |

| **sake** | good pleasure and honor |
| **serve** | exert oneself to answer the needs of, be of use to, help, comfort, guard, protect, benefit, wait upon, watch over, and assist |
| **men** | women and men |

4. Cling ye to the hem of virtue, and hold fast to the cord of trustworthiness and piety. Concern yourselves with the things that benefit mankind, and not with your corrupt and selfish desires.

(Bahá’u’lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 29)

| **benefit** | promote the well-being, prosperity, and happiness [of] |
| **cling ye** | hold on tight; adhere |
| **concern** | give importance, have interest, and be involved |
| **cord** | figuratively — moral influence |
| **corrupt** | morally dishonest, distorted, or perverted |
| **desires** | strong wants or perceived needs |

| **fast** | firmly without yielding |
| **hem** | figuratively — sacred closeness or nearness |
| **mankind** | the human beings in general |
| **piety** | devoted reverence towards God |
| **selfish** | excessive or exclusive concern for one’s own welfare and advantage [type of] |
| **trustworthiness** | being worthy of trust and reliance |
| **virtue** | commendable spiritual qualities and traits |

5. The real fruit of the human tree is everlasting, and that is the love for God, that is the knowledge of God, that is service to the world of humanity, that is kindness to all mankind, and that is endeavouring and striving for the material and spiritual-or ideal-development of the world of man. This is the everlasting fruit. This is the divine effulgence. This is the divine bestowal. This is the everlasting life.


| **bestowal** | given gift |
| **divine** | God inspired; holy; sacred |
| **effulgence** | radiant light |
| **endeavouring** | trying to achieve with earnest effort |
| **everlasting** | eternally enduring; continuing without end |
| **fruit** | joyous effects or outcomes |
| **ideal** | highest standard of excellence [in the] |

| **kindness** | being of the disposition to do good and bring happiness |
| **man** | women and men |
| **service** | active exertion to answer the needs of, be of use to, help, comfort, guard, protect, benefit, wait upon, watch over, and assist |
| **striving** | devoting serious energy or effort |

6. We must now highly resolve to arise and lay hold of all those instrumentalities that promote the peace and well-being and happiness, the knowledge, culture and industry, the dignity, value and station, of the entire human race. Thus, through the restoring waters of pure intention and unselfish effort, the earth of human potentialities will blossom with its own latent excellence and flower into praiseworthy qualities, and bear and flourish….

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Diving Civilization, p. 4)

| **arise** | actively come forth |
| **bear** | come to satisfying fruition and production |
| **dignity** | state of being worthy of honor, nobility, and esteem |
| **excellence** | superior qualities and features |
| **flourish** | reach the climax of development |
| **instrumentalities** | ways, means, and methods |
| **intention** | determined aims and goals |
| **latent** | present capabilities, not yet obvious or active |

| **lay hold of** | come to understand and possess |
| **potentialities** | abilities that can be brought into existence and developed |
| **promote** | furthers the progress, supports, and actively encourages |
| **pure** | free and clear of morally defiled or corrupt |
| **resolve** | with determination, decide |
| **well-being** | state or condition of wellness, happiness, and prosperity |
7. The friends must, with wisdom and moderation, after careful consultation, and according to their capacity and means, assist any association that sincerely aims to contribute to the common weal and to the best interests of the world of humanity. They should participate to the extent possible, but must refrain from the least involvement in politics, whether in their deeds, hearts, or words, and must shun and avoid any association with malevolent and contending parties.

(Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated September 1926 written to the Bahá'ís of the East – translated from the Persian, Social Action, #89)

---

**association**: group, society, or organization  
**common weal**: general well-being, prosperity, and happiness  
**consultation**: “Therefore, true consultation is spiritual conference in the attitude and atmosphere of love.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, PUP, pp. 72-73)  
**contending**: striving in opposition [type of]  
**extent**: amount or degree  
**friends**: Bahá’ís  
**interests**: welfare, benefits, and advantages  
**involvement**: inclusion; participation  
**least**: even the slightest or smallest amount [of]

---

8. Most appropriately conceived in terms of a spectrum, social action can range from fairly informal efforts of limited duration undertaken by individuals or small groups of friends to programs of social and economic development with a high level of complexity and sophistication implemented by Bahá’í inspired organizations. Irrespective of its scope and scale, all social action seeks to apply the teachings and principles of the Faith to improve some aspect of the social or economic life of a population, however modestly. Such endeavors are distinguished, then, by their stated purpose to promote the material well-being of the population, in addition to its spiritual welfare. That the world civilization now on humanity’s horizon must achieve a dynamic coherence between the material and spiritual requirements of life is central to the Bahá’í teachings.

(The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2010 message to the Bahá’ís of the World, Social Action, #119)

---

**Bahá’í inspired organizations**: …groups of believers who share a common vision of service. Such an agency can be established as a non-governmental, non-profit organization for social and economic development. (Office of Social and Economic Development, 1994 Aug 28, Evolution of Institutional Capacity)  
**central**: of primary importance  
**coherence**: unified whole  
**complexity**: complicated, interrelated parts  
**conceived**: thought of or understood  
**distinguished**: by their prominent qualities, set apart from others  
**dynamic**: changing and growth producing  
**endeavors**: goal directed efforts  
**horizon**: purview, range, or reach  
**implemented**: carried out or put into effect

---

**informal**: requiring no authorization; unofficial  
**material**: concerned with the physical aspects of life  
**modestly**: limited in scope  
**principles**: basic truths or standards  
**requirements**: condition demanded as necessary and appropriate  
**social action**: …to apply the [Bahá’í] Revelation to the manifold dimensions of social existence. (The Universal House of Justice, Framework For Action, p. 222, #35.30)  
**sophistication**: well refined development  
**spectrum**: position on a scale between two extremes  
**spiritual**: divine or higher nature  
**welfare**: health and happiness  
**well-being**: state or condition of wellness, happiness, and prosperity
9. The highest righteousness of all is for blessed souls to take hold of the hands of the helpless and deliver them out of their ignorance and abasement and poverty, and with pure motives, and only for the sake of God, to arise and energetically devote themselves to the service of the masses, forgetting their own worldly advantage and working only to serve the general good.


---

**SHAREING: 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. Since God is unknowable and unattainable, we can best express our love for Him by being of service to __________

2. Social action for Bahá’ís might include service in such broad fields as:

   - a. agriculture
   - b. healthcare
   - c. education
   - d. the environment
   - e. economic development
   - f. politics
   - g. the advancement of women
   - h. race relations
   - i. industry and trade
   - j. arts and sciences
   - k. the development of culture
   - l. all the above

Continued on next page...
3. That the world civilization now on humanity’s horizon must achieve a dynamic coherence between the ________________ and spiritual requirements of life is central to the Bahá’í teachings.

4. Bahá’u’lláh tells us that we have been brought into being “for the betterment of the world” and created “to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization”. This means...
   - a. we were created to be of service to humanity
   - b. us being on the planet makes for a better world
   - c. none of the above
   - d. a and b

5. Two conditions recommended for service to mankind include a motive that is pure and for the sake of God.
   ☐ true ☐ false

6. Is helping people in a way that supports their harmful, wrongful, or destructive behavior to themselves or others considered a service to humanity?
   - yes ☐ no ☐

7. Bahá’u’lláh wrote: “Beware lest ye commit that which would sadden the hearts of your fathers and mothers. Follow ye the path of Truth which indeed is a straight path. Should anyone give you a choice between the opportunity to render a service to Me and a service to them, choose ye to serve them, and let such service be a path leading you to Me. This is My exhortation and command unto thee. Observe therefore that which thy Lord, the Mighty, the Gracious, hath prescribed unto thee.”
   What does this say to you about prioritizing one’s service to humankind? ________________

8. According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the highest righteousness of all is
   - a. serving the masses
   - b. serving dinner
   - c. service in a political party
   - d. working at a service station

9. For a person to engage in service to humanity, they must strive to give up two things. What are they?
   - a. prosperity
   - b. their own worldly advantages
   - c. corrupt and selfish desires
   - d. happiness
   - e. chocolate

10. Service to humanity might include serving the better interests of:
   - a. your fellow employees
   - b. your neighbors
   - c. your children
   - d. your friends
   - e. whomever you are with
   - f. those you feel incompatible with

---

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 serving humanity, describe what you are inspired to put into reality and action. I will make conscious efforts to...

____________________________________

From a talk given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá...

This meeting is, verily, the noblest and most worthy of all meetings in the world because of these underlying spiritual and universal purposes. Such a banquet and assemblage command the sincere devotion of all present and invite the downpouring of the blessings of God. Therefore, be ye assured and confident that the confirmations of God are descending upon you, the assistance of God will be given unto you, the breaths of the Holy Spirit will quicken you with a new life, the Sun of Reality will shine gloriously upon you, and the fragrant breezes of the rose gardens of divine mercy will waft through the windows of your souls. Be ye confident and steadfast; your services are confirmed by the powers of heaven, for your intentions are lofty, your purposes pure and worthy. God is the helper of those souls whose aim is to serve humanity and whose efforts and endeavors are devoted to the good and betterment of all mankind.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 448)

ANSWERS: Affirming treasures...

1. humankind
2. all except f and l
3. material
4. a
5. true
6. no
7. all answers are valuable
8. a
9. b and c
10. a, b, c, d, e, and f

This study guide and many others are available as free downloads at www.bahaiessentials.com