Unity Above All Things

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the sacred valley...*

Facilitator

The following is an introduction. Please read it out loud without comment, and then proceed with the study of the quotations.

When we take a look back at the various religions of the past, we observe that each one emphasized a major theme or distinct spiritual quality. In the Jewish religion it was the law, in Christianity it was love, in Buddhism it was detachment, in Hinduism it was the presence of God in all things, and in Islam it was submission to the Will of God. In this day and age the spiritual theme that carries the most importance is unity. Unity is a spiritual condition of harmony, agreement, peace and accord in human relations, free of conflict, dissension, contention and strife. This is the spirit that is defined as the "alpha and omega of all Bahá'í objectives". It is the goal and purpose of all our activities, *and* the intended *means* by which we attempt to achieve them.

"...let it be in unity."

– Bahá'u'lláh

The Bahá'í Writings state that "in cycles gone by, though harmony was established, yet, owing to the absence of means, the unity of all mankind could not have been achieved." But now, the time has come for its application as the overarching theme of our time and age.

Unity suggests that we strive to create a condition of love and peace in all our relations with one another. It suggests a move away from all things that create conflict, and instead suggests a non-violent approach to solving every problem. It suggests an attitude of oneness with others, no matter how different they may be. It suggests a move away from skepticism, suspicion, cynicism, separation, anger, self-superiority and prejudice towards others, and instead promotes a move towards love, acceptance, tolerance, interest, concern, hope, and care towards our fellow human beings. It suggests a move away from hatred and war, and suggests love and peace as the means for happiness. It suggests an abandonment of manipulating one another with emotional or physical force and instead promotes honesty, consultation and understanding. Unity is the theme of the age, and all things in the Bahá'í Teachings promote its presence.

A brief overview of the problems that face human kind across the globe can readily conclude that disunity is the poison that hampers all progress and interferes with every attempt to solve the problems that plague us, whether these problems are in the family, our local communities, our towns, our cities or nations. Perhaps unity is our most potent charm and greatest and highest hope. Perhaps unity first and foremost in all things, could be the means to both personal happiness and peace and tranquility in the world. Let us explore with eager hope the following Bahá'í quotations as they pertain to the spiritual condition of unity.

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

Facilitator Review the following objective with the participants:

The purpose of this group experience is to *explore* the concept of "unity above all things", through a study of selected Bahá'í Writings.

THE STUDY PROCESS: *Attaining the pure water...*

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 sacred stream...*
   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 look up its suggested substitute phrase, definition or synonym, which can be found in the boxes below each quotation. Read the phrase, definition or synonym out loud so everyone can hear.
   B. Read the sentence again that contains the word you looked up, while **substituting for that word,** its suggested 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.
   D. Have the quotation read one more time by one of the participants.

3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Gem-like discoveries...*
   In the tradition of the "talking circle" ask the participants to take turns sharing, one at a time, in a round, WHAT WAS PERSONALLY MOST MEANINFUL FROM THE QUOTATION AND WHY. (Remember show and tell?) Remind the participants that *whatever* is shared should be considered as a valid perspective, and that in this *exploratory study* there are no right or wrong perceptions and no lesser or greater understandings. All are therefore asked to avoid comments, corrections, or judgments on the perceived insights of others. This is not a time for questions and answers, it is an exercise for the purpose of bonding hearts by sharing and receiving personal heartfelt perspectives without discussion.

1. *"The Great Being saith: O ye children of men! 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. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and enmity. This is the straight Path, the fixed and immovable foundation. Whatsoever is raised on this foundation, the changes and chances of the world can never impair its strength, nor will the revolution of countless centuries undermine its structure."*

(*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas"*, pp. 167-68)

animating: giving life, spirit, or energy to
contention: to compete by quarreling or arguing
discord: absence of unity, producing active disagreement or conflict
dissension: difference in opinion, causing separating or opposing groups
enmity: bitter attitudes or feelings of hatred or ill will, often concealed
fellowship: companionship, friendly association, and mutual sharing
foster: carefully promote the growth and development of
foundation: basic and essential principle
fundamental: basic and essential
immovable: incapable of being altered
impair: make worse or damage
interests: welfare, benefits, and advantages

love: warm attraction, strong affection, and concern for the good of another
promote: advance, further, and elevate in rank, grade, or position
purpose: goal to be attained; intention
raised: created and caused to stand
revolution: regular succession
safeguard: make safe against loss or injury; protect
strife: striving or competing for superiority where there is conflict or disagreement
structure: organized makeup
suffer: allow; permit
undermine: gradually weaken or ruin
unity: spiritual condition of harmony, agreement, peace and accord in human relations, free of conflict, dissension, contention and strife

2. *"The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established."*

(*Gleanings From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 286)

contention: to compete by quarreling or arguing
dissension: difference in opinion, causing separating or opposing groups
established: confirmed and made permanent
firmly: with unchangeable purpose
peace: serenity and harmony in human relations, free of disturbance and disorder
security: assured safety and protection

strife: striving or competing for superiority where there is conflict or disagreement
unattainable: not capable being achieved or accomplished
unity: spiritual condition of harmony, agreement, peace and accord in human relations, free of conflict, dissension, contention and strife
well-being: condition of wellness, happiness, and prosperity

3. Of such cardinal importance is this principle of unity that it is expressly referred to in the Book of His [Bahá'u'lláh's] Covenant, and He unreservedly proclaims it as the central purpose of His Faith. *"We, verily,"* He declares, *"have come to unite and weld together all that dwell on earth." "So potent is the light of unity,"* He further states, *"that it can illuminate the whole earth." "At one time,"* He has written with reference to this central theme of His Revelation, *"We spoke in the language of the lawgiver; at another in that of the truth seeker and the mystic, and yet Our supreme purpose and highest wish hath always been to disclose the glory and sublimity of this station."* Unity, He states, is the goal that *"excelleth every goal"* and an aspiration which is *"the monarch of all aspirations."*

(Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 217)

aspiration(s): ardent desire(s) to achieve something great
cardinal: superior, main, or chief
central: dominant and basic
disclose: make known or expose
dwell: live as residents for a period of time; reside
excelleth: is above or superior to; surpasses
expressly: directly, explicitly, and in unmistakable terms
glory: distinguishing honor and admiration; splendor; radiant beauty
illuminate: give intellectual and spiritual enlightenment, insight, and knowledge to
lawgiver: one who gives codes of law to people
monarch: one surpassing all others
mystic: one who intuitively comprehends esoteric truths beyond human understanding

Our: used by one in authority to denote himself
potent: powerful and effective
principle: basic governing truth or standard
purpose: goal to be attained; intention
referred to: given direct attention by clear and specific mention
station: standing, position, or rank of unity
sublimity: the awe inspiring spiritual, intellectual, and moral worth
theme: topic or subject
unity: a spiritual condition of harmony, agreement, peace and accord in human relations, free of conflict, dissension, contention and strife
unreservedly: without limits or holding back; frankly; openly
We: used by one in authority to denote himself
weld: bring into close or intimate union; bond

4. "Cleanse ye your eyes, so that ye behold no man as different from yourselves. See ye no strangers; rather see all men as friends, for love and unity come hard when ye fix your gaze on otherness. And in this new and wondrous age, the Holy Writings say that we must be at one with every people; that we must see neither harshness nor injustice, neither malevolence, nor hostility, nor hate, but rather turn our eyes toward the heaven of ancient glory. For each of the creatures is a sign of God, and it was by the grace of the Lord and His power that each did step into the world; therefore they are not strangers, but in the family; not aliens, but friends, and to be treated as such."

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 291)

aliens: possibly incompatible due to difference in natural character
behold: with attention, look upon and observe
cleanse: render free from impurities
creatures: human beings
eyes: figuratively — way of regarding or perceiving things
fix: firmly set
gaze: steady, intent, and eager attention
grace: undeserved gifts of loving kindness
harshness: unpleasantness; irritation; crudeness
heaven of ancient glory: the spiritual realm
Holy Writings: Writings of Bahá'u'lláh
hostility: dislike or ill will leading to aggression or attacks

injustice: wrongness; badness; unfairness
malevolence: intense or vicious ill will, spite, or hatred
man: human being
one: unity, harmony, and agreement of mind, feeling, and purpose
otherness: the qualities of others being unlike, diverse, or different
see: think of or perceive
signs: indications of the presence or existence
unity: a spiritual condition of harmony, agreement, peace and accord in human relations, free of conflict, dissension, contention and strife

5. "Be in perfect unity. Never become angry with one another. Let your eyes be directed toward the kingdom of truth and not toward the world of creation. Love the creatures for the sake of God and not for themselves. You will never become angry or impatient if you love them for the sake of God. Humanity is not perfect. There are imperfections in every human being, and you will always become unhappy if you look toward the people themselves. But if you look toward God, you will love them and be kind to them, for the world of God is the world of perfection and complete mercy. Therefore, do not look at the shortcomings of anybody; see with the sight of forgiveness. The imperfect eye beholds imperfections. The eye that covers faults looks toward the Creator of souls. He created them, trains and provides for them, endows them with capacity and life, sight and hearing; therefore, they are the signs of His grandeur. You must love and be kind to everybody, care for the poor, protect the weak, heal the sick, teach and educate the ignorant."

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 93)

creatures: human beings
endows: furnishes or provides
grandeur: greatness
kingdom: spiritual realm
mercy: kindness and compassion
sake of: purpose of pleasing, satisfying, or serving
shortcomings: deficiencies or defects

signs: indications of the presence or existence
unity: spiritual condition of harmony, agreement, peace and accord in human relations, free of conflict, dissension, contention and strife
world of creation: material world
world: spiritual realm

6. "Wherefore must the loved ones of God associate in affectionate fellowship with stranger and friend alike, showing forth to all the utmost loving-kindness, disregarding the degree of their capacity, never asking whether they deserve to be loved. In every instance let the friends be considerate and infinitely kind. Let them never be defeated by the malice of the people, by their aggression and their hate, no matter how intense. If others hurl their darts against you, offer them milk and honey in return; if they poison your lives, sweeten their souls; if they injure you, teach them how to be comforted; if they inflict a wound upon you, be a balm to their sores; if they sting you, hold to their lips a refreshing cup."

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 24)

affectionate: moderate feelings of warmth, tenderness, and fondness
associate: come together with others
balm: soothing, restorative agent
considerate: thoughtful of the rights and feelings of others
darts: something causing pain or distress

fellowship: companionship, friendly association, and mutual sharing
friends: believers
loved ones: believers or followers
loving-kindness: tender affection marked by good intention
malice: desire to cause pain, injury, or distress
utmost: greatest or highest degree

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APPLICATION: *Showing forth divine light...*

Facilitator

Read the first paragraph and ask the participants to state their ideas out loud. Then, read through the last paragraph and allow time for the participants to write out their plans for action. These plans are not shared.

IMAGINING POSSIBILITIES: *Visions of radiant lights...*

How **could** the concepts in this study on *Unity Above all Things* be applied a person's life in these modern times? Begin your answers with: *"**One could....**"* Suggest as many ideas as you want.

DECIDING ACTION: *Mirroring a beam of light...*

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...."* From your experience in this study on *Unity Above all Things*, describe what ***you*** are inspired to put into reality and action. ***I will*** *make conscious efforts to...* _____

_____

_____

CLOSING MEDITATIONS: *A heart song...*

Facilitator

Read the following out loud.

"O CHILDREN OF MEN! Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest. Such is My counsel to you, O concourse of light! Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory."

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic #68)

"O my God! O my God! Unite the hearts of Thy servants, and reveal to them Thy great purpose. May they follow Thy commandments and abide in Thy law. Help them, O God, in their endeavor, and grant them strength to serve Thee. O God! Leave them not to themselves, but guide their steps by the light of Thy knowledge, and cheer their hearts by Thy love. Verily, Thou art their Helper and their Lord."

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 202)