

Bahá'í History

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 the importance of being familiar with the history of the Heroic and Formative Ages of the Faith and the extent of its spread and stature today.



Bahá'í International Archives, Haifa, Israel

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

Facilitator

The following is a short account of the history of the Bahá'í Faith that highlights some events of special significance. This should be read out loud by the facilitator and/or the participants before continuing with the quotations exercise. In this lesson there is a long introduction and fewer quotations to study.

This Faith began on that fate-laden day of May 23rd, 1844, when the Báb revealed His Prophetic mission as the “*Promised One*” to the stunned and elated youth, Mullá Husayn, an event celebrated today on a yearly basis by Bahá'ís around the world as the beginning of the Bahá'í Era. Of that day Shoghi Effendi wrote: “May 23, 1844, signalizes the commencement of the most turbulent period of the Heroic Age of the Bahá'í Era, an age which marks the opening of the most glorious epoch in the greatest cycle which the spiritual history of mankind has yet witnessed. No more than a span of nine short years marks the duration of this most spectacular, this most tragic, this most eventful period of the first Bahá'í century.”¹ Subsequent to the Báb's declaration to Mullá Husayn, seventeen more stainless souls independently recognized the Báb as the promised Messenger of God. The striking fact that the Manifestation of God was, after such a long time, and as promised, finally present upon the planet led thousands of Persians to declare themselves Bábís, or followers of the Báb. The spiritual potency of the Báb originated such fervor among the Bábís and such commotion among the people of Persia as to spark a series of dramatic events that historians are impotent to describe. The events following the declaration of the Báb provoked such a reaction among the fanatical Moslem population that they, in turn, inflicted untold horrors upon the Bábís. This population of Shí'ah Moslems had long been indoctrinated

¹ GPB, p. 3

by a fanatical clergy that belief in Muhammad as the Seal of the Prophets meant there would be no more Messengers of God. Thus, anyone making a claim, such as that put forth by the Báb to be the promised Messenger of God, was considered a heretic and the act an apostasy. Closely joined government and religious authorities ordered the death of numerous believers in an attempt to suppress the fervor of the movement. The general population was so stirred by the commotion that they perpetrated untold criminal acts of ridicule, torture, and murder upon the Bábís. Individual believers were shot from cannons, skinned alive, and parents were tortured and executed in front of their children, all in attempt to force the believers to recant their faith in the Báb. Yet, these early believers were so intoxicated with the love of the Báb, and their joy so great in being able to make a contribution to the furtherance of God's new Faith, that even the death of thousands of fellow believers was ineffective in dampening the zeal of those who remained. Their homes were destroyed, they were dismissed from their jobs and imprisoned, their material goods confiscated, and they were subjected to endless other atrocities, too numerous and heinous to list. Bahá'u'lláh wrote of this period: "*The events that have happened in Persia during the early years have truly saddened the well-favored and sincere ones. Each year witnessed a fresh massacre, pillage, plunder, and shedding of blood.*"¹

Within this most perilous environment the early believers demonstrated a faith and heroism that staggers the imagination. These spiritual giants gave their lives that the Faith of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh might become known throughout the world, and peace, liberty and tranquility be attained by all. Some twenty thousand believers were martyred for their Faith in this new Revelation. The Báb Himself was imprisoned. After a short nine year ministry, filled with spellbinding events and drama, He was shot to death by a firing squad of seven hundred and fifty soldiers in a vain attempt to destroy His Cause. In spite of this dreadful act, the believers arose to even greater heights of heroism to further the unifying Faith of God. Of the nine-year period comprising the Dispensation of the Báb, Shoghi Effendi wrote: "In sheer dramatic power, in the rapidity with which events of momentous importance succeeded each other, in the holocaust which baptized its birth, in the miraculous circumstances attending the martyrdom of the One Who had ushered it in, in the potentialities with which it had been from the outset so thoroughly impregnated, in the forces to which it eventually gave birth, this nine-year period may well rank as unique in the whole range of man's religious experience."² And further he writes: "The tributes paid the noble army of the heroes, saints and martyrs of that Primitive Age, by friend and foe alike, from Bahá'u'lláh Himself down to the most disinterested observers in distant lands, and from the moment of its birth until the present day, bear imperishable witness to the glory of the deeds that immortalize that Age.

"*'The whole world,' is Bahá'u'lláh's matchless testimony in the Kitáb-i-Íqán, 'marveled at the manner of their sacrifice.... The mind is bewildered at their deeds, and the soul marveleth at their fortitude and bodily endurance.... Hath any age witnessed such momentous happenings?' And again asserted: 'Hath the world, since the days of Adam, witnessed such tumult, such violent commotion?... Methinks, patience was revealed only by virtue of their fortitude, and faithfulness itself was begotten only by their deeds.' 'Through the blood which they shed,' He, in a prayer, referring more specifically to the martyrs of the Faith, has significantly affirmed, 'the earth hath been impregnated with the wondrous revelations of Thy might and the gem-like signs of Thy glorious sovereignty. Ere-long shall she tell out her tidings, when the set time is come.'*"³ Of this unparalleled period the Guardian further wrote: "...these happenings proclaim the birth, and signalize the establishment, of an epoch which future historians will acclaim as the most heroic, the most tragic and the most momentous period in the Apostolic Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation."⁴ And again he details it as "...one of the most turbulent, afflictive and glorious stages of Bahá'í history — a stage immortalized by an effusion of blood, a self-abnegation, a heroism unsurpassed not only in the annals of the Faith

¹ *ESW*, p. 88

² *GPB*, p. 3

³ *GPB*, pp. 79-80

⁴ *GPB*, p. 237

but in the world's spiritual history."¹ Of the staggering heroism displayed by these early believers Bahá'u'lláh Himself wrote: *"How many were those pure and kindly hearts which faithfully reflected the light of that eternal Sun, and how manifold the emanations of knowledge from that Ocean of divine wisdom which encompassed all beings! In every city, all the divines and dignitaries rose to hinder and repress them, and girded up the loins of malice, of envy, and tyranny for their suppression. How great the number of those holy souls, those essences of justice, who, accused of tyranny, were put to death! And how many embodiments of purity, who showed forth naught but true knowledge and stainless deeds, suffered an agonizing death! Notwithstanding all this, each of these holy beings, up to his last moment, breathed the Name of God, and soared in the realm of submission and resignation. Such was the potency and transmuting influence which He exercised over them, that they ceased to cherish any desire but His will, and wedded their soul to His remembrance.*

"Reflect:" Bahá'u'lláh continues: "Who in this world is able to manifest such transcendent power, such pervading influence? All these stainless hearts and sanctified souls have, with absolute resignation, responded to the summons of His decree. Instead of complaining, they rendered thanks unto God, and amidst the darkness of their anguish they revealed naught but radiant acquiescence to His will. It is evident how relentless was the hate, and how bitter the malice and enmity entertained by all the peoples of the earth towards these companions. The persecution and pain they inflicted on these holy and spiritual beings were regarded by them as means unto salvation, prosperity, and everlasting success. Hath the world, since the days of Adam, witnessed such tumult, such violent commotion? Notwithstanding all the torture they suffered, and manifold the afflictions they endured, they became the object of universal opprobrium and execration. Methinks, patience was revealed only by virtue of their fortitude, and faithfulness itself was begotten only by their deeds."²

The time of the Báb was closely overlapped by the transforming Presence of Bahá'u'lláh, Whose appearance was foretold by the Báb when He declared the future coming of *"He Whom God shall make manifest"*. The events transpiring during the life of Bahá'u'lláh are replete with tragedy, heroism, betrayal, sacrifice, and miracles, not unlike that nine-year ministry of the Báb. These events include His initial experience as the Recipient of the Word of God while in the deplorable dungeon prison in Tihrán; the torture of the bastinado [a beating with a wooden rod on the soles of the feet], which He was forced to endure; His two year departure from the Bábí community into the mountains of Kurdistán after being exiled to Baghdád; the glorious circumstances of His Declaration that he was the One foretold by the Báb as *"Him Whom God will make manifest"*; and His subsequent exile from city to city and from country to country by the government, eventually placing Him in the Holy Land. These events were filled with drama and mystery, both in the failed attempts by the Ottoman Government and Islamic Ecclesiastics to repress the movement stirred by His Revelation, and in the turbulent activities within the community of the newborn Faith. Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in the Holy Land, His forty year imprisonment, His ministry to `Abdu'l-Bahá, His letters to Kings and Ecclesiastics calling them to the Most Great Peace, His Revelation of *The Most Holy Book* that is destined to guide the affairs of humankind until the next Manifestation appears, all these and more constitute only some of the features of the Heroic Age of which He was so prominent a Figure. Consider, for example, what Shoghi Effendi wrote pertaining just to the effects of Bahá'u'lláh's Messages to the governmental and religious leaders: *"The historian of the future, viewing more widely and in fuller perspective the momentous happenings of the Apostolic and Formative Ages of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, will no doubt be able to evaluate accurately and to describe in a circumstantial manner the causes, the implications and the effects of these Divine Messages which, in their scope and effectiveness, have certainly no parallel in the religious annals of mankind."³*

The Apostolic Age was further privileged to embrace the wondrous figure `Abdu'l-Bahá. The events associated with his ministry are profoundly moving to the spirit. He was affectionately referred

¹ *CF*, p. 68

² *KI*, pp. 234-36

³ *PDC*, pp. 28-29

to by Bahá'u'lláh as the “*Mystery of God*”.¹ The transforming effect He had on those who were privileged to meet Him, the loving and moving nature of His letters and talks, the unifying manner in which He dealt with difficulties among the believers, and the farsighted and proactive nature of the Tablets of the Divine Plan that were to implant the foundation of the Faith world-wide, are just a few remarkable aspects that distinguish the life of `Abdu'l-Bahá. His visits to Egypt, Europe, and North America, and His writing of the historic Tablets of the Divine Plan were such as to propel the Bahá'í community into a worldwide crusade that eventually took the healing Message of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the world.

Of the prominent events spanning the Heroic Age and linking it to the following Formative Age, Shoghi Effendi concluded: “With the passing of `Abdu'l-Bahá the first century of the Bahá'í era, whose inception had synchronized with His birth, had run more than three quarters of its course. Seventy-seven years previously the light of the Faith proclaimed by the Báb had risen above the horizon of Shíráz and flashed across the firmament of Persia, dispelling the age-long gloom which had enveloped its people. A blood bath of unusual ferocity, in which government, clergy and people, heedless of the significance of that light and blind to its splendor, had jointly participated, had all but extinguished the radiance of its glory in the land of its birth. Bahá'u'lláh had at the darkest hour in the fortunes of that Faith been summoned, while Himself a prisoner in Tihrán, to reinvigorate its life, and been commissioned to fulfil its ultimate purpose. In Baghdád, upon the termination of the ten-year delay interposed between the first intimation of that Mission and its Declaration, He had revealed the Mystery enshrined in the Báb's embryonic Faith, and disclosed the fruit which it had yielded. In Adrianople Bahá'u'lláh's Message, the promise of the Bábí as well as of all previous Dispensations, had been proclaimed to mankind, and its challenge voiced to the rulers of the earth in both the East and the West. Behind the walls of the prison-fortress of `Akká the Bearer of God's newborn Revelation had ordained the laws and formulated the principles that were to constitute the warp and woof of His World Order. He had, moreover, prior to His ascension, instituted the Covenant that was to guide and assist in the laying of its foundations and to safeguard the unity of its builders. Armed with that peerless and potent Instrument, `Abdu'l-Bahá, His eldest Son and Center of His Covenant, had erected the standard of His Father's Faith in the North American continent, and established an impregnable basis for its institutions in Western Europe, in the Far East and in Australia. He had, in His works, Tablets and addresses, elucidated its principles, interpreted its laws, amplified its doctrine, and erected the rudimentary institutions of its future Administrative Order. In Russia He had raised its first House of Worship, whilst on the slopes of Mt. Carmel He had reared a befitting mausoleum for its Herald, and deposited His remains therein with His Own hands. Through His visits to several cities in Europe and the North American continent He had broadcast Bahá'u'lláh's Message to the peoples of the West, and heightened the prestige of the Cause of God to a degree it had never previously experienced. And lastly, in the evening of His life, He had through the revelation of the Tablets of the Divine Plan issued His mandate to the community which He Himself had raised up, trained and nurtured, a Plan that must in the years to come enable its members to diffuse the light, and erect the administrative fabric, of the Faith throughout the five continents of the globe.

“The moment had now arrived for that undying, that world-vitalizing Spirit that was born in Shíráz, that had been rekindled in Tihrán, that had been fanned into flame in Baghdád and Adrianople, that had been carried to the West, and was now illuminating the fringes of five continents, to incarnate itself in institutions designed to canalize its outspreading energies and stimulate its growth. The Age that had witnessed the birth and rise of the Faith had now closed. The Heroic, the Apostolic Age of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, that primitive period in which its Founders had lived, in which its life had been generated, in which its greatest heroes had struggled and quaffed the cup of martyrdom, and its pristine foundations been established — a period whose splendors no victories in this or any future age, however brilliant, can rival — had now terminated with the passing of One Whose mission may be regarded as the link binding the Age in which the seed

¹ *WOB*, p. 134

of the newborn Message had been incubating and those which are destined to witness its efflorescence and ultimate fruition.

“The Formative Period, the Iron Age, of that Dispensation was now beginning, the Age in which the institutions, local, national and international, of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh were to take shape, develop and become fully consolidated, in anticipation of the third, the last, the Golden Age destined to witness the emergence of a world-embracing Order enshrining the ultimate fruit of God’s latest Revelation to mankind, a fruit whose maturity must signalize the establishment of a world civilization and the formal inauguration of the Kingdom of the Father upon earth as promised by Jesus Christ Himself.”¹

The death of `Abdu’l-Bahá in 1921 closed the Heroic Age of the Faith. This was followed immediately by the Formative Age, the initial stages of which were directed and guided by the appointed Guardian, Interpreter, and Head of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi. “The Heroic Age of the Faith,” wrote Shoghi Effendi, “born in anguish, nursed in adversity, and terminating in trials as woeful as those that greeted its birth, has been succeeded by that Formative Period which is to witness the gradual crystallization of those creative energies which the Faith has released, and the consequent emergence of that World Order for which those forces were made to operate.”²

The activities and events associated with the Faith in the following years of the Twentieth Century, the century referred to by `Abdu’l-Bahá as the “century of light,” and as “the most radiant century,” are of a nature and scale that only future generations will be able to adequately detail or describe. This is the age in which the Faith grew world-wide, from representatives of only a few nations, to followers in more than 188 countries and 45 dependent territories of the earth, becoming the second most widespread religion in the world. From a Faith initially viewed as a mere sect of Islám, to recognition worldwide as an independent world religion. This was a period that witnessed the struggle to take this new Revelation to the peoples of the world. It was confronted with the most materialistic and turbulent conditions the world had yet known. Of this period the Guardian wrote: “For great as have been the attainments and unforgettable the services of the pioneers of the heroic age of the Cause in Persia, the contribution which their spiritual descendants, the American believers, the champion-builders of the organic structure of the Cause, are now making towards the fulfillment of the Plan which must usher in the golden age of the Cause is no less meritorious in this strenuous period of its history.”³ Again Shoghi Effendi speaks of his hopes and expectations that this period in Bahá’í history “may yet come to be regarded as a period of collective administrative and teaching accomplishments distinguishing the Formative Age of our Faith and endowed with a fertility comparable to that which marked the spiritual feats of the dawn-breakers of the Heroic Age which preceded it.”⁴

In 1934, just 90 years after the Declaration of the Báb, Shoghi Effendi wrote of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh: “Born in an environment of appalling degradation, springing from a soil steeped in age-long corruptions, hatreds and prejudice, inculcating principles irreconcilable with the accepted standards of the times, and faced from the beginning with the relentless enmity of government, church and people, this nascent Faith of God has, by virtue of the celestial potency with which it has been endowed, succeeded, in less than four score years and ten, in emancipating itself from the galling chains of Islamic domination, in proclaiming the self-sufficiency of its ideals and the independent integrity of its laws, in planting its banner in no less than forty of the most advanced countries of the world, in establishing its outposts in lands beyond the farthest seas, in consecrating its religious edifices in the midmost heart of the Asiatic and American continents, in inducing two of the most powerful governments of the West to ratify the instruments essential to its administrative activities, in obtaining from royalty befitting tributes to the excellence of its teachings, and, finally, in forcing its grievances upon the attention of the representatives of the highest Tribunal in the civilized

¹ *GPB*, pp. 323-24

² *MA*, p. 52

³ *WOB*, pp. 52-53

⁴ *MBW*, p. 35

world, and in securing from its members written affirmations that are tantamount to a tacit recognition of its religious status and to an express declaration of the justice of its cause.”¹

In the Formative Age of the Faith, the believers find themselves struggling against social conditions characteristic of an age rampant with ambition and avarice (the love of power and the love of money), which currently dominate the attention of the people of the civilized world. A social condition where the orientation towards materialism prevails among the people, causing a frenzy of social pressure to achieve, acquire, and experience all that an ungodly society has to offer. These are the circumstances with which the followers of Bahá’u’lláh are struggling during the Formative period of His Cause. This is, as foretold by `Abdu’l-Bahá, a time when “severe mental tests”² and “moral persecution”³ were, and are, the constant oppressive forces. “*Sharp must be thy sight,*” wrote Bahá’u’lláh to an early believer, “...and adamant thy soul, and brass-like thy feet, if thou wishest to be unshaken by the assaults of the selfish desires that whisper in men’s breasts.”⁴ With detachment and firm resolve, selfless and heroic believers persevere in spreading this Cause throughout the world, and simultaneously engage themselves in developing its unprecedented Administrative Order, an objective of this Age clearly envisioned by Shoghi Effendi when he wrote: “The inception of this fourth, this last period of the first Bahá’í century synchronizes with the birth of the Formative Age of the Bahá’í Era, with the founding of the Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh—a system which is at once the harbinger, the nucleus and pattern of His World Order.”⁵

Of the earth-shaking tasks before the believers living in this age, Shoghi Effendi further wrote: “...humanity is struck by the scourge of His chastisement which will inevitably bring together the scattered and vanquished tribes of the earth; and on the other, the weak few whom He has nurtured under the protection of His loving guidance are, in this formative age and period of transition, continuing to build amidst these tumultuous waves an impregnable stronghold which will be the sole remaining refuge for those lost multitudes.”⁶ Of the victories to be attained within this period Shoghi Effendi continues: “During this Formative Age of the Faith, and in the course of present and succeeding epochs, the last and crowning stage in the erection of the framework of the Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh—the election of the Universal House of Justice—will have been completed, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Mother-Book of His Revelation, will have been codified and its laws promulgated, the Lesser Peace will have been established, the unity of mankind will have been achieved and its maturity attained, the Plan conceived by `Abdu’l-Bahá will have been executed, the emancipation of the Faith from the fetters of religious orthodoxy will have been effected, and its independent religious status will have been universally recognized.”⁷ And, “It is the structural basis of that self-same Order which, in the Formative Age of that same Faith, the stewards of that same Covenant, the elected representatives of the world-wide Bahá’í community, are now laboriously and unitedly establishing. It is the superstructure of that self-same Order, attaining its full stature through the emergence of the Bahá’í World Commonwealth—the Kingdom of God on earth—which the Golden Age of that same Dispensation must, in the fullness of time, ultimately witness.”⁸

Founded a century and a half ago, the Bahá’í Faith is today, while still in its Formative Age, among the fastest growing of the world’s religions. With more than five million followers in at least 235 countries and dependent territories, it has already become the second-most widespread faith, surpassing every religion but Christianity in its geographic reach. By July 2005, Bahá’ís were found to reside in more than 129,000 localities around the world, an expansion that reflects their dedication to the ideal of a true world community. More than 2,100 different ethnic and tribal groups are currently represented by its membership, over 12,000 Local Spiritual Assemblies are elected in the

¹ *WOB*, pp. 54-55

² *BA*, p. 50

³ *UD*, p. 425

⁴ *GWB*, pp. 245-46

⁵ *GPB*, p. rm 15

⁶ *LOG*, p. 127 #424

⁷ *CF*, p. 6

⁸ *GPB*, p. 26

world each year at this time, and the Bahá'í Writings have now been translated into 802 languages.

The unprecedented events of the Heroic age of the Faith and their associated effects are recorded in a historical account of the Bábí Dispensation in a book by Nabíl entitled *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*. The history of the first one hundred years of the Faith was meticulously recorded in the outstanding record of events by Shoghi Effendi: *God Passes By*. Other distinguished records of Bahá'í History include the four volume series, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, by Adib Taherzadeh, *Bahá'u'lláh, The King of Glory*, and *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh* both by H. M. Balyuzi. Another delightful reading is *Release the Sun*, by William Sears, who tells stories of the lives of early believers of this Faith. In addition, there are numerous other books and records of Bahá'í history available.

Records of the more recent history of the Faith can be found in volumes of *The Bahá'í World*, published from 1925 to present. Recent happenings and the extent of the spread and stature of the Faith today can be accessed by reviewing the Ridván letters from the Universal House of Justice, especially those closing and opening each Plan. These letters often review the more recent victories accomplished in the Bahá'í world. Numerous international, national, regional and local newsletters, circulars, and web-sites are available as well, reporting Bahá'í current events and activities as they occur.

Of the glory and greatness of this Faith's history Shoghi Effendi concluded: "We may vainly search in the records of the earliest beginnings of any of the recognized religions of the past for episodes as thrilling in their details, or as far-reaching in their consequences, as those that illumine the pages of the history of this Faith. The almost incredible circumstances attending the martyrdom of that youthful Prince of Glory; the forces of barbaric repression which this tragedy subsequently released; the manifestations of unsurpassed heroism to which it gave rise; the exhortations and warnings which have streamed from the pen of the Divine Prisoner in His Epistles to the potentates of the Church and the monarchs and rulers of the world; the undaunted loyalty with which our brethren are battling in Muslim countries with the forces of religious orthodoxy — these may be reckoned as the most outstanding features of what the world will come to recognize as the greatest drama in the world's spiritual history."¹

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 look up 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 looked up, 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.

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

Take turns stating each basic fact or truth you can find in the quotation about the importance of knowing the history of the Bahá'í Faith or its current status.

¹ WOB, p. 56

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

1. *Do thou ponder these momentous happenings [those related to the early faithful believers of the Báb] in thy heart, so that thou mayest apprehend the greatness of this Revelation, and perceive its stupendous glory. Then shall the spirit of faith, through the grace of the Merciful, be breathed into thy being, and thou shalt be established and abide upon the seat of certitude.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, p. 236)

abide: continue to reside
apprehend: come to know and appreciate
being: living soul
breathed: whispered like
certitude: unflinching certainty
established: confirmed and permanently secured
glory: distinguishing honor and admiration; brilliance; radiant beauty
grace: divine influence that makes you morally pure and strong, gifted out of the loving-kindness
happenings: events and occurrences
Merciful: One full of kindness and compassion towards the suffering or condemned; God
momentous: very important
perceive: become aware and understand; comprehend

ponder: think over deeply and carefully
Revelation: Communication of God and His Will to man
seat: place where the prevailing condition is
spirit of faith: "The fourth degree of spirit is the heavenly spirit; it is the spirit of faith and the bounty of God; it comes from the breath of the Holy Spirit, and by the divine power it becomes the cause of eternal life. It is the power which makes the earthly man heavenly, and the imperfect man perfect. It makes the impure to be pure, the silent eloquent; it purifies and sanctifies those made captive by carnal desires; it makes the ignorant wise." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *SAQ*, pp. 144-45)
stupendous: astonishing magnitude [of its]

2. He ... sincerely trusts that the recollection of these early days of the heroic age of the Faith will have served to fill with fresh enthusiasm and renewed vigour your souls, and that as a result you all now feel the urge to play a more active part....

(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *The Light of Divine Guidance*, p. 75)

active: engaged or involved by action or works [kind of]
enthusiasm: eager and impassioned interest
heroic age: period of time from the declaration of the Báb, May 23, 1844, to the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on November 28, 1921
part: role

recollection: recalling to mind; remembrance
renewed: make like new [the]
souls: immortal essence of the rational, spiritual, and emotional self
urge: pressure upon you
vigour: active energy and strength

3. I urge you ... to study and digest the chapters of Nabil's narrative ... that you may obtain a fuller grasp of the purpose, the influence and the moving episodes of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

(Shoghi Effendi, cited in *The Light of Divine Guidance*, p. 75)

digest: take in to the mind and memory
episodes: outstanding stories and events
Faith: Religion
grasp: understanding or comprehension
influence: outpouring of spiritual or moral ↗

power without direct force
Nabil's narrative: *The Dawn-Breakers*
obtain: gain with effort
purpose: aim, reason, or intention
urge: advocate or put pressure on

4. I strongly urge you to devote, while you are pursuing your studies, as much time as you possibly can to a thorough study of the history and Teachings of our Beloved Cause. This is the prerequisite of a future successful career of service to the Bahá'í Faith in which I hope and pray you will distinguish yourself in the days to come.

(Shoghi Effendi, cited in *The Compilation of Compilations*, Prepared by the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1990, Vol. I, p. 206, #432)

Cause: Bahá'í Faith
career: occupation or lifework
devote: set aside and dedicate
distinguish: be set apart from others by prominent qualities [within]
prerequisite: necessary or required conditions in advance

pursuing: proceeding to accomplish
service: performance of beneficial deeds or works
strongly: in a persuasive manner
thorough: carried through to completion with full detail and exactness [kind of]
urge: advocate or put pressure on

5. I would strongly urge you to utilize, to the utmost possible extent, the wealth of authentic material gathered in Nabil's stirring Narrative and to encourage the youth to master and digest the facts recorded therein as a basis for their future work in the teaching field, and as a sustenance to their spiritual life and activities in the service of the Cause.

(Shoghi Effendi, cited in *The Compilation of Compilations*, Prepared by the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1990, Vol. I, p. 207, #436)

authentic: credible in fact and authoritative
basis: underlying foundation
Cause: Bahá'í Faith
digest: take in to the mind and memory
encourage: support and foster
extent: amount or degree
master: understand and apply
Nabil's stirring Narrative: *The Dawn-Breakers*
service: performance of beneficial deeds and ☞

works
strongly: in a persuasive manner
sustenance: means of maintenance and support
teaching: imparting of knowledge that causes others to learn [the Bahá'í Faith] [kind of]
urge: advocate or put pressure on
utilize: make use of
utmost: greatest or highest
wealth: great and valuable amount

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. The history of the Faith is divided into three distinct Ages. What are they called?

2. What Age are we living in now? _____

3. It is important to study and ponder the historic events and happenings of this Faith, so the believer may

- a. apprehend the greatness of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.
- b. pass a test on it someday.
- c. perceive the stupendous glory of this Faith.
- d. be filled with renewed enthusiasm and vigor.
- e. have a more successful career of service to the Bahá'í Faith.
- f. be more successful in the teaching field.
- g. receive spiritual sustenance.

4. Shoghi Effendi wrote: "Indeed the chief motive actuating me to undertake the task of editing and translating Nabil's immortal Narrative has been to enable every follower of the Faith in the West to better understand and more readily grasp the tremendous implications of His [the Báb's] exalted station and to more ardently admire and love Him."¹ *Nabil's Narrative* is now titled:

5. The Formative Age of the Faith will be distinguished as

- a. a period of collective administrative and teaching accomplishments.
- b. a stage immortalized by an effusion of blood, a self-abnegation, a heroism unsurpassed not only in the annals of the Faith but in the world's spiritual history.
- c. the Age in which the institutions, local, national and international, of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh were to take shape, develop and become fully consolidated.
- d. a time when the Lesser Peace will have been established.
- e. a time when the unity of mankind will have been achieved and its maturity attained.
- f. a time when the emancipation of the Faith from the fetters of religious orthodoxy will have been effected.
- g. a time when its independent religious status will have been universally recognized.
- h. a time when the Plan conceived by `Abdu'l-Bahá will have been executed.

6. Why is it important to be familiar with the history of the Faith and the extent of its spread and stature today? _____

7. The purpose or objective of the Formative Period, the Iron Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation, is to see that the _____, local, national and international, of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh take shape, develop and become fully consolidated.

¹ *WOB*, p. 123

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 history of the Bahá'í Faith, describe what **you** are inspired to put into reality and action. ***I will make conscious efforts to...*** _____

One, of many thousand, “momentous happening...”

When Zarrin [Muqimi] was taken to the religious magistrate to recant her Faith, and was told as usual either to recant or to be prepared for execution, she said in reply, “I have found the way to reality, and I am not prepared to give it away for any price. Therefore, I submit to the Court’s verdict.” On another occasion the judge asked Zarrin, “To what extent are you prepared to adhere to your belief?” Zarrin answered, “I hope to remain firm in my belief to the last moment.” “But you must give up your belief!” retorted the judge. Zarrin, annoyed by the repetition of the same proposal, exclaimed, “Your honor, you have been conducting my trial for many days, and have asked the same question, and I have given you a definite and satisfactory answer. I don’t think repeating the same thing is necessary!” But the judge rudely repeated the same proposal. Dear Zarrin started crying and with a loud voice said, “In what language do you want me to tell you? Why don’t you leave me alone? My whole being is Bahá'u'lláh! My love is Bahá'u'lláh! My heart is dedicated to Bahá'u'lláh!” The infuriated judge shouted, “I will pull out your heart from your chest!” Zarrin replied, “Then my heart will cry out, ‘Bahá'u'lláh! Bahá'u'lláh!’” The judge, moved by this display of sentiment, left the room.

After Zarrin’s martyrdom, dear Mother described the event for me over the phone: “Saturday, June 18, 1983, I went to visit Zarrin as usual, taking fresh fruits with me. It was raining, and the weather was quite warm. At the visiting time Zarrin was brought behind the glass partition, and we started to talk. Her countenance seemed to have changed; she said to me, ‘Mother, please pray for me and implore God to give me perseverance!’ She did not say good-bye to me when leaving, because she did not want to see me saddened. Zarrin had always told me not to hope for her freedom, but it did not occur to me that this was our last meeting. The friends (Bahá'ís) had been urged to recant for the last time, and most probably they would be executed. Visiting time was over, and I returned home. The following day, Sunday, June 19, early in the morning I found out that ten women prisoners had been hanged during the night. I ran out of the house to inquire from the friends; in the street I met three friends. With tearful eyes they showed me a list; then I realized Zarrin was also martyred. I ran toward Adelabad prison, moaning and crying. This was the place most of our time had been spent the last eight months. I was allowed to go into the cold room. What I went through that day, and what I saw in that historic moment, I cannot describe. I entered the cold

room. O, my God! I saw ten angels lying motionless next to each other. I knew all of them; I had been in the same prison with them. Mother and daughter were together. All had a pair of pants and a summer blouse on. Some of them had their chadur (long robe) tied around their waist; others had it thrown on the floor. What force kept me on my feet and breathing I don't know! I looked at all the ten angels, and found Zarrin among them reposed; I embraced her cold body, put my cheek on her delicate and cold cheek, and kissed the mark of rope on her lovely neck on behalf of all of you (Father, who was in prison: myself; and my brother, out of the country). Her face looked natural and composed."

(Extracts from an Account of the Life and Activities of Zarrin Muqimi, One of the Bahá'í Women Hanged in Shíráz on June 18th, 1983. Cited in *Unrestrained as the Wind*, pp. 53-54)

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...*

1. the Heroic and also Apostolic or Primitive Age; the Formative and also the Iron Age; and the Golden Age
2. the Formative Age
3. a, c, d, e, f, and g
4. The Dawn-Breakers
5. a, c, d, e, f, g, and h
6. all answers are valuable
7. institutions

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