

Spiritual Teachings Common to All Religions

A Study of Bahá'í Writings

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

The purpose of this study is to help us understand how the divine religions have, in essence and reality, “*proceeded from one Source, and are the rays of one light.*”¹ It is easy to say the religions are one or to say that the Bahá'í Faith teaches that they are one. But, when we investigate the various religions and their numerous sects, we observe that they don't readily appear as being in agreement or unified. They seem instead to be in disagreement and distinctly separate from one another in belief and practice. Let's explore together those aspects of the divine religions that, according to the Bahá'í teachings, are common to them all and thereby establishes them as one “*indivisible religion of God,*”² and characterizes them as being “*one Light but many lamps.*”³

You may read in Bahá'í literature or you may hear it said at Bahá'í meetings that all religions have both “*spiritual teachings*” and “*social teachings*”. It is usually explained that the “*social teachings*” change with each religion according to the needs and conditions of the time. They may also explain that the “*spiritual teachings*” are the same in all religions and that's what bonds them together as one. So, we have to wonder: What are those “*spiritual teachings*” that unite these many religions? How come other religions don't teach this? And why then, are there so many religions? Hopefully, this study will help answer these important questions.

In this study we will consider divine religions as those major world religions known to identify with a Prophet or Manifestation of God and include a holy Book or sacred Scripture, and those that directed people to the one true God but whose origin and history may now be vague or forgotten.



**“Pillars of Creation”
NASA James Webb Space Telescope**

*“O Thou in Whose hand is the kingdom of creation!”
– Bahá'u'lláh*

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 13
² The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 56
³ `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, Vol III, p. 505

Dear Participants...

You are about to engage in a study of the sacred writings of the Bahá'í Faith. We will be exploring the teachings that pertain to the belief in a common foundation of all the world's major religions, a Bahá'í teaching that is *new* to understanding the purpose and history of religion. We will study the Word of God from the latest Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh, and those of His predecessor, The Báb. We will also learn from the writings and talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the writings of Shoghi Effendi, the only two designated interpreters of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings. Our study will search for truths that support both our personal spiritual journey and those that contribute to the advancement of society as a whole.

It's Language...

It's important to understand that the material we will be studying comes from old-world languages. The talks and writings quoted herein were originally written in either Arabic or Persian. The English translators were either Persian, British, or American from the last century so the phrasing has an elevated spiritual or religious overtone common to that era, which may seem unusual when compared with modern English. Furthermore, it has been the decision of the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi, to translate the sacred Scriptures into the finest Oxford Style English, and to retain the King James English style common to sacred Scriptures of the past that express a lofty separation of Scripture from that of common English.

Reading Bahá'í quotations and thoroughly understanding the English vocabulary can be difficult for even the most literate among us. A believer was advised by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to “study the Holy Scriptures word by word so that you may attain knowledge of the mysteries hidden therein. Be not satisfied with words, but seek to understand the spiritual meanings hidden in the heart of the words.”⁴ And Bahá'u'lláh tells us: “*Let no one be content with mere hearing; rather doth it behoove everyone to ponder that which this Wronged One hath revealed.*”⁵ However, before one can ponder or derive the hidden meaning in the heart of the words, understanding the definition of the words is undeniably important. Bahá'u'lláh reminds us that “*the reading of the scriptures and holy books is for no other purpose except to enable the reader to apprehend their meaning and unravel their innermost mysteries. Otherwise reading, without understanding, is of no abiding profit unto man.*”⁶ Therefore, to help understand the English text, definitions, synonyms, or simple replacement phrases of various words or word-couples in the text are provided in the boxes below each quotation to help clarify the meaning of words in context and enhance our understanding of what is written.

The “him” and “her” of it all...

The primary use of singular nouns and pronouns in masculine form (e.g., he, him) throughout Bahá'í Text is purely to accommodate the requirements of proper English. *Proper* English demands the use of masculine forms (he, him), under most circumstances, for pronouns that are intended to represent a man or to represent *both* men and women. The phrase “a new race of men,” for example, is clearly intended to refer to all of humanity, not just to males. Similarly, other masculine forms should be understood to be universal in intent. Only when referring *specifically* to a woman is “her” or “she” considered proper.

The Bahá'í writings were originally written in either Persian or Arabic. Singular pronouns in the Persian language are gender-neutral, whereas, gender in Arabic is more complicated, but presents similar problems for translation. Plural pronouns (they, them) are, fortunately, gender-neutral in both languages.

Currently, it is more common than not for American English writers to use gender-neutral alternatives for the pronouns “man” and “men” whenever possible. Therefore, in this study, where practical, gender-neutral pronoun alternatives for these two words are provided in the boxes below each quotation.

⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 459 #137.1

⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *Fountain of Wisdom*, p. 120 #8.62

⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, p. 172

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FACILITATOR GUIDELINES

This study experience is designed to allow the participants an opportunity to explore specifically selected Bahá'í verses that pertain to the common foundations of religion with minimal commentary on their meaning or purpose. It also provides for a sharing of those heartfelt discoveries of truth one encounters from the experience, as well as, an opportunity to collectively explore how these teachings might be applied in our lives, and an opportunity to personally design one's own plans to implement these blessed spiritual truths. A fuller understanding and appreciation of this study process and its decades of history and development can be found at www.bahaessentials.com in the document titled "Developmental History of Bahá'í Essentials", or accessed directly at this link: [040_developmental_history_of_bahai_essentials1.pdf \(bahaessentials.com\)](#)

Unlike an instructor, the role of the facilitator is to guide, aid, and assist the participants through a study of the quotations and accompanying exercises by gently but frequently referring them to the study process as described. The study process is designed such that it will easily and thoroughly guide the participants through the entire study on its own. The facilitator simply reminds the participants to follow the process. *For those planning to facilitate this study, please thoughtfully review "Some Considerations for Facilitating", pages 50-56.*

Let's review the following Study Process:

Please study all the quotations in this deepening in the following manner:

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...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud in its entirety.
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. Each participant **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.
 - C. Repeat A and B above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words.
3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Mining the gems of truth...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.
 - B. Take turns **stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about... (this will be different in each section)

Facilitator

Note: The replacement phrases, definitions, or synonyms won't always read easily into the sentences and some are merely symbolic renditions and not literal.

Facilitator!

The following **Sharing Exercise** is designed to provide an opportunity *at the end of each study time together* for the participants to share their heartfelt inspirations derived from the quotations. This intimate sharing profoundly facilitates learning and the enhancement of group unity among the participants.

Each time you gather to study, please allow time at the close of each study time to accommodate this sharing exercise before the closing prayer.

SHARING EXERCISE: *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, one thing that was outstanding or inspiring and how it made them feel. Please remind everyone not to remark on the comments of others.

One thing from the quotations that was outstanding or inspiring to me was _____

What feeling or emotion did that bring up for you? _____

Explain _____

SOME QUESTIONS: *A cup from the showers of confirmation...*

Facilitator

At the *end of each section* there will be some questions presented to help the participants confirm their understanding of the material. Answers to the questions can be found on page 58.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY: *A look to the horizon...*

1. To better understand the common foundations that bond the religions of God.
2. To help us understand the true nature and history of the religions of God.
3. To help us become better at conveying these glorious teachings and understandings to others.
4. To help us understand how to better maintain and support the purity of the Faith.

The Common Origin and Foundation of Divine Religion...

SECTION 1

Please study the quotations in this section in the following manner, which is the same as the process presented on page 4, except 3B, which is specific to the material in this section.

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...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud in its entirety.
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. Each participant **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.
 - C. Repeat A and B above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words.
3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Mining the gems of truth...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.
 - B. Take turns **stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about the **spiritual teachings common to all religions**.

- 1.1 “Bahá’u’lláh has announced that the foundation of all the religions of God is one, that oneness is truth and truth is oneness which does not admit of plurality. This teaching is new and specialized to this Manifestation.”

(`Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 454 #135.5)

admit: allow or permit
Bahá’u’lláh: Prophet Founder of the Bahá’í Faith
foundation: basic underlying truths, principles, and teachings
Manifestation: great Prophet or chosen Messenger Who reveals the Words, and exhibits the signs and qualities of God; Bahá’u’lláh
one: “. . . as that of lamps kindled: for these in respect to their glasses and oil-holders, are different, but in respect to their light, One, and in respect to their illumination, One; nay, each one is identical with the other, without imputation of plurality, or diversity or multiplicity or separateness.” (`Abdu’l-Bahá, ↗

Baha'i World Faith, p. 371)
oneness: the quality, state, or fact of being single and indivisible
plurality: the state of being more than one or divided
religions of God: including, but not limited to; Bahá’í, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion
specialized to: has characteristics unique to the specific purpose [of]
this teaching is new: it has always been true but it was not fully revealed until now
truth: actual fact of what is real

- 1.2 “It is clear and evident to thee that all the Prophets are the Temples of the Cause of God, Who have appeared clothed in divers attire. If thou wilt observe with discriminating eyes, thou wilt behold them all abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, seated upon the same throne, uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith.”

(Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, pp. 153-54)

abiding: firmly residing
appeared: in outward aspect, seemed to have been
attire: spiritual adornments i.e., righteousness, justice, knowledge etc.
behold: with attention, look upon and observe
Cause: eternal religious Faith
clothed: invested or endowed
discriminating eyes: a careful perception for accuracy
divers: distinctly different
evident: easy to understand; obvious
Faith: true spiritual beliefs

heaven: sublime or exalted condition
proclaiming: formally and publicly declaring
Prophets: Ones who reveal divinely inspired revelations of God
seated: of an official position of status
soaring: raised to a higher majestic existence
tabernacle: holy dwelling place
Temples: that which reflects God or the Divine Presence
throne: supreme position of heavenly power and dignity
uttering: expressing orally or in writing

- 1.3 “. . . these firmly-established and mighty systems [divine religions], have proceeded from one Source, and are rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated.”

(Bahá’u’lláh, *The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 13)

ages: periods of time in history identified by distinct features
attributed to: explained to be caused by
differ: are different
firmly-established: well-founded and permanently secured
Light: God
proceeded: come forth in their origin

promulgated: made known and put into effect
rays: representative radiant beams
requirements: necessary and appropriate conditions
Source: God
systems: organizations of religious belief; religions of God
varying: partially changing

- 1.4 “Know thou assuredly that the essence of all the Prophets of God is one and the same. Their unity is absolute. God, the Creator, saith: There is no distinction whatsoever among the Bearers of My Message. They all have but one purpose; their secret is the same secret. To prefer one in honor to another, to exalt certain ones above the rest, is in no wise to be permitted. Every true Prophet hath regarded His Message as fundamentally the same as the Revelation of every other Prophet gone before Him.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 78-79)

absolute: in itself, complete and perfect
assuredly: with confidence and certainty
Bearers: Prophets of God who possess and deliver...
distinction: special quality that sets [one] apart with recognition and honor
essence: core reality and purpose
exalt: highly praise, elevate, or glorify
fundamentally: at its basis and foundation
honor: high regard for moral worth, nobility, or excellence of character
in no wise: in no way or manner
one: single and indivisible; “. . . as that of lamps kindled: for these in respect to their glasses ↗

and oil-holders, are different, but in respect to their light, One, and in respect to their illumination, One; nay, each one is identical with the other, without imputation of plurality, or diversity or multiplicity or separateness.”
 (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Baha’i World Faith*, p. 371)
prefer: favor; choose
Prophet(s): One(s) who reveal divinely inspired revelations [of God]
regarded: considered or viewed
Revelation: Communication of God and His Will to humanity
secret: knowledge known to them alone
unity: quality or state of being one

Study the following quotation as you did the others while giving special attention to the first sentence. Here, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asks something which he rarely does, saying: “Let me ask your closest attention in considering this subject.” Obviously, his statement is to give emphasis to what he is about to say. What follows helps form the basis for this entire study.

- 1.5 “Let me ask your closest attention in considering this subject. The divine religions embody two kinds of ordinances. First, those which constitute essential or spiritual teachings of the Word of God. These are faith in God, the acquirement of the virtues which characterize perfect manhood, praiseworthy moralities, the acquisition of the bestowals and bounties emanating from the divine effulgences; in brief, the ordinances which concern the realm of morals and ethics. This is the fundamental aspect of the religion of God and this is of the highest importance because knowledge of God is the fundamental requirement of man. Man must comprehend the oneness of divinity. He must come to know and acknowledge the precepts of God and realize for a certainty that the ethical development of humanity is dependent upon religion. He must get rid of all defects and seek the attainment of heavenly virtues in order that he may prove to be the image and likeness of God. . . . In a word, the ‘image and likeness of God’ constitute the virtues of God, and man is intended to become the recipient of the effulgences of divine attributes. This is the essential foundation of all the divine religions, the reality itself, common to all. . . . all the prophets upheld this standard and aspect of divine religion.

“Secondly: Laws and ordinances which are temporary and non-essential. These concern human transactions and relations. They are accidental and subject to change according to the exigencies of time and place. These ordinances are neither permanent nor fundamental.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, pp. 92-93) ⁷

⁷ From the notes of Joesph H. Hannen of a talk given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at the Eighth Street Temple, Synagogue in Washington, D.C. on November 8th, 1912. Also published in *Promulgations of Universal Peace*, pp. 403-04, #121.4-5.

accidental: conditional, dependent, and non-essential

acquisition: personal cultivation and attainment

acquirement: efforts of gaining or acquiring

aspect: feature or characteristic

attributes: distinct characteristics and qualities that belong to and describe the one true God; *“It behoves each one of you to manifest the attributes of God, and to exemplify by your deeds and words the signs of His righteousness, His power and glory.”* (The Báb, cited in *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 92)

bestowals: the boundless spiritual gifts from God; *“...bestowals which are the wisdom and guidance of God and the favor of God, which constitute spiritual progress.”* (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Divine Philosophy*, p. 34)

bounties: divine gifts; *“The bounties of God are: to love each other, to speak the truth, to sever our hearts from the world, to be reverent, to be humble, to be hospitable.”* (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Scriptures*, p. 501 #964)

characterize: make up the qualities and traits of

common: shared and belonging

constitute: make up or form

defects: absence of something essential for perfection or completeness

dependent: able to exist and be sustained only through reliance

divine: God’s

divine religions: including, but not limited to; Bahá’í, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion

effulgences: literally-radiant floods of light having extreme splendor, luster, and brilliance; [figuratively] spiritual knowledge, understanding, inspiration, grace, and enlightenment that come from God through His Manifestations, bringing forth in humankind divine attributes and spiritual qualities; *“By this is meant the effulgence of His names and attributes, . . .”* (Bahá’u’lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 109 #211)

emanating: radiating or coming forth

embody: have; contain

essential: the highest importance; indispensable

ethical: the standards and principles of right and proper conduct

ethics: the standards and principles of right and proper conduct; moral standards of a given social group

exigencies: (ek’-si-juhn-seez) urgent requirement or pressing needs

faith: assured belief; *“By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds.”* (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *BWF*, p. 383)

foundation: underlying principle for establishment and support; *“Those foundations of the Religion of God, however, which are spiritual and consist in human virtues, . . .”* (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some* ↗

Answered Questions, 2014 ed., p. 55 #9)

fundamental: basic and essential

heavenly: holy and sacred

image: This comes from the book of Genesis 1:27, wherein *“God created man in his own image...”* The understanding is that this scriptural passage does not mean that God is in human form, but rather, that humans are in the image of God in their moral, spiritual, and intellectual nature.

man: humanity

manhood: state of being a spiritually mature person

moralties: qualities of right and proper conduct

morals: the practice of right and proper conduct

non-essential: not absolutely necessary

oneness of divinity: *“Oneness, in its true significance, means that God alone should be realized as the one power which animates and dominates all things, which are the manifestations of His energy.”* (Bahá’u’lláh, quoted in *Bahá’í World*, Vol. no. 9, p. 776)

ordinances: established or prescribed practices and regulations

precepts: commandments or principles intended as rules of action or conduct

prophets: including but not limited to Krishna, Abraham, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, The Báb, and Bahá’u’lláh

reality: true and real existence

realm: place or sphere of reality

recipient: receiver

relations: communications and interactions between people and groups of people

religion: *“But when we speak of religion, we mean the essential foundation or reality of religion, not the dogmas and blind imitations. . .”* (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 363 #112.8)

religion of God: including, but not limited to; Bahá’í, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion

spiritual: that which vitally affects the eternal soul [type of]

standard: uniformly accepted and well-established principle

temporary: purposeful for a limited amount of time

transactions: physical operations, actions, or processes

upheld: confirmed and maintained

virtues: human reflections of divine spiritual qualities and attributes

Word of God: The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh and authentic Revelation of the other Prophets or Manifestations of God; *“The intention is all that hath been sent down from the Heaven of Divine Utterance . . . the Word of God.”* (Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, Questions and Answers #68, p. 127)

1.6 “The religion of God consists of two parts: One is the very foundation and belongs to the spiritual realm; that is, it pertains to spiritual virtues and divine qualities. This part suffers neither change nor alteration: It is the Holy of Holies, which constitutes the essence of the religion of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá’u’lláh, and which will endure throughout all the prophetic Dispensations. It will never be abrogated, for it consists in spiritual rather than material truth. It is faith, knowledge, certitude, justice, piety, high-mindedness, trustworthiness, love of God, and charity. It is mercy to the poor, assistance to the oppressed, generosity to the needy, and upliftment of the fallen. It is purity, detachment, humility, forbearance, patience, and constancy. These are divine qualities. These commandments will never be abrogated, but will remain in force and effect for all eternity. These human virtues are renewed in every Dispensation; for at the close of each Dispensation the spirit of the law of God, which consists in the human virtues, vanishes in substance and persists only in form. . . .

“The second part of the religion of God, which pertains to the material world . . .”
 (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 2014 ed., pp. 54-55 #7-10)⁸

<p>abrogated: repealed, abolished, or ended by authority</p> <p>alteration: adjustment or revision</p> <p>certitude: a condition of unfailing certainty and sureness; “<i>With a certitude that none can question, all men would cleave to His commandments, and would scrupulously observe them.</i>” (Bahá’u’lláh, <i>Gleaning from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh</i>, p. 117)</p> <p>charity: feelings and actions of love, kindness, affection, and good will toward others for the sake of God</p> <p>constancy: firm and steadfast in faith under duress or pressure</p> <p>consists: exists or resides</p> <p>constitutes: makes up or forms</p> <p>detachment: neither affected nor deterred by worldly events or concerns in one’s devotion or service to God</p> <p>Dispensations: religious Systems that administer human affairs under divine authority</p> <p>divine: God-inspired</p> <p>essence: that which makes it what it is; most important, true, and indispensable quality</p> <p>faith: unquestioned belief in God and His Revealed Word; “By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, <i>Bahá’í World Faith</i>, p. 383)</p> <p>fallen: those who have lost the will or capacity to perform, maintain, or endure</p> <p>forbearance: patience, tolerance, and long-suffering</p> <p>form: outward appearance or show</p> <p>foundation: underlying principle for establishment and support; “Those foundations of the Religion of God, however, which are spiritual and consist in human virtues, . . .” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, <i>Some Answered Questions</i>, 2014 ed., p. 55 #9)</p>	<p>high-mindedness: marked by elevated moral and intellectual principles</p> <p>Holy of Holies: “Briefly, what is meant by the term ‘Holy of Holies’ is that spiritual law which can never be changed or abrogated, . . .” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, <i>Some Answered Questions</i>, 2014 ed., pp. 55-56)</p> <p>humility: consciousness of one’s defects and shortcomings; free of an arrogant, prideful, or assertive manner</p> <p>justice: to render or conform to what is right, good, true, and fair as defined by the Word of God</p> <p>knowledge: to acquire, know, and understand truth</p> <p>mercy: kindness, compassion, and leniency</p> <p>oppressed: those caused to experience excessive spiritual, physical, or mental burdens or injustices</p> <p>patience: calm endurance under suffering or provocation</p> <p>piety: loving obedience and reverent devotion to God</p> <p>purity: freedom from fault, blame, or sin</p> <p>qualities: distinctive virtues, powers, or traits of character</p> <p>realm: place or sphere of reality</p> <p>religion of God: including, but not limited to; Bahá’í, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion</p> <p>spiritual: that which vitally affects the eternal soul [type of]</p> <p>substance: real and essential content</p> <p>suffers: allows; permits</p> <p>trustworthiness: worthy of being trusted and relied upon with confidence</p> <p>virtues: human reflections of divine spiritual qualities and attributes</p>
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⁸ From talks between ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Laura Clifford Barney while in ‘Akká, Israel from 1904 through 1906. First published in Great Britain in 1908.

There are numerous references in the talks and writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá where he spoke about the common foundation of all religions. We have studied two of them. Here are some additional comments he made about this subject.

What *spiritual teachings common to all religions* can you find in the following verses that were *not covered* in quotations 1.1 through 1.6?

- 1.7 **They all:** “. . . instill and awaken the knowledge and love of God, love for humanity, the virtues of the world of mankind, the attributes of the divine Kingdom, rebirth and resurrection from the kingdom of nature.”
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 393 #118.6)
- 1.8 **They were all concerned with:** “. . . spiritual susceptibilities, the development of moral principles and the quickening of the conscience of man.”
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 106 #44.3)
- 1.9 **This fundamental basis was:** “. . . reiterated and renewed in the cycle of every prophet.”
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. VII:17, 19 January 1917, p. 173)
- 1.10 **They all have come to:** “. . . promote divine bestowals, to found the spiritual civilization and teach the principles of morality.”
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 12 #5.6)
- 1.11 **They all have one purpose:** “. . . to educate man and to inform him of the spiritual, the luminous, the divine, so that he may partake of heavenly spirit and find eternal life, show forth the virtues of mankind, and from a world of darkness enter a world of light.”
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. III:17, 19 January 1913, p. 3)
- 1.12 **They have all:** “. . . served the world of humanity. All have summoned souls to peace and accord. All have proclaimed the virtues of humanity. All have guided souls to the attainment of perfections. . . .”
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 344 #109.5)

SOME QUESTIONS: *A cup from the showers of confirmation...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. The answers can be found in the quotations just studied. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers. The answers can be found on page 58.

1. The foundation of all the religions of God is one and the same.
 true
 false

2. What is the spiritual teaching that is new to religious understanding and specialized to the Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh? _____

3. What is the “essential foundation of all the divine religions, the reality itself, common to all”? _____

4. The Bahá'í Faith teaches that all divine religion comes from...
 a. one Source
 b. God
 c. Texas
 d. one spiritual Light

5. What is it that is never changed, altered, or abrogated from one religious dispensation to the next?

6. Name two spiritual virtues or divine qualities _____

7. We learned that the ethical development of humanity is dependent upon _____

8. We learned that there are two kinds of ordinances in religion. One is essential, unchanging, and common to all; the other is non-essential and changes from one religious dispensation to the next, depending upon _____

9. How could I apply what I learned in this section? _____

CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song...*

Facilitator

Kindly read the following talk from `Abdu'l-Bahá where he likens the cycle of the seasons to the renewing cycles of the religious dispensations.

THE SUN OF REALITY

“. . . just as the solar cycle has its four seasons, the cycle of the Sun of Reality (the Prophet or Manifestation of God) has its distinct and successive periods. Each brings its vernal season or springtime. When the Sun of Reality returns to quicken the world of mankind, a divine bounty descends from the heaven of generosity. The realm of thoughts and ideals is set in motion and blessed with new life. Minds are developed, hopes brighten, aspirations become spiritual, the virtues of the human world appear with freshened power of growth, and the image and likeness of God become visible in man. It is the springtime of the inner world. After the spring, summer comes with its fullness and spiritual fruitage; autumn follows with its withering winds which chill the soul; the Sun seems to be going away, until at last the mantle of winter overspreads, and only faint traces of the effulgence of that divine Sun remain. Just as the surface of the material world becomes dark and dreary, the soil dormant, the trees naked and bare and no beauty or freshness remains to cheer the darkness and desolation, so the winter of the spiritual cycle witnesses the death and disappearance of divine growth and extinction of the light and love of God. But again the cycle begins and a new springtime appears. In it the former springtime has returned; the world is resuscitated, illumined and attains spirituality; religion is renewed and reorganized, hearts are turned to God, the summons of God is heard, and life is again bestowed upon man. For a long time the religious world had been weakened and materialism had advanced; the spiritual forces of life were waning, moralities were becoming degraded, composure and peace had vanished from souls, and satanic qualities were dominating hearts; strife and hatred overshadowed humanity, bloodshed and violence prevailed. God was neglected; the Sun of Reality seemed to have gone completely; deprivation of the bounties of heaven was a fact; and so the season of winter fell upon mankind. But in the generosity of God a new springtime dawned, the lights of God shone forth, the effulgent Sun of Reality returned and became manifest, the realm of thoughts and kingdom of hearts became exhilarated, a new spirit of life breathed into the body of the world, and continuous advancement became apparent.

“I hope that the lights of the Sun of Reality will illumine the whole world so that no strife and warfare, no battles and bloodshed remain. May fanaticism and religious bigotry be unknown, all humanity enter the bond of brotherhood, souls consort in perfect agreement, the nations of earth at last hoist the banner of truth, and the religions of the world enter the divine temple of oneness, for the foundations of the heavenly religions are one reality.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 95-96 #40.5-6)

The Station and Reality of the Virtues of God...

SECTION 2

We have learned the Bahá'í Faith teaches that all the religions of God are the same in their foundations, which is to develop divine virtues in the souls of humanity. These virtues are often referred to as the “attributes of God” or the “names of God”, and become manifest in society as spiritual qualities, morals, and ethics. There is a near-endless list of virtues that would be impractical to consider here. However, Bahá'u'lláh extols the wonder and value of the station and reality of the virtues of God with such exquisite beauty that at least a few citations are called for that our spirits may be elevated.

Please study the quotations in the following manner, which is the same as before except for 3B, which is specific to this section.

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...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud in its entirety.
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. Each participant **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.
 - C. Repeat A and B above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words.
3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Mining the gems of truth...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.
 - * B. Take turns **stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about **divine virtues, spiritual qualities, or attributes**.

2.1 “...whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that most great Light. . . . To a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, hath been invested with the robe of such gifts, and hath been singled out for the glory of such distinction. For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed. All these names and attributes are applicable to him.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 100-101)

applicable: rightfully and capably apply
atom: smallest know particle [at the time]
attributes: distinct characteristics and qualities that belong to and describe the one true God; “It behoves each one of you to manifest the attributes of God, and to exemplify by your deeds and words the signs of His righteousness, His power and glory.” (The Báb, cited in *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 92)
bear: give and support
being: living entity
degree: measure or extent
distinction: a special honor
eloquent: strong, clear, and persuasive
enshrined: held as sacred; cherished
evidence: proof; conclusive sign
excelled: gone beyond
glory: distinguishing honor and admiration
heavens: the spiritual spheres or worlds of God
inasmuch as: in view of the fact that
invested: by right, furnished or endowed
Light: emanation of spiritual knowledge and goodness of God

man: the human beings
names of God: a word or phrase designating an exalted title for each of the attributes of God; “. . . every created thing, proclaims but one of the names of God, but the reality of man is an all-encompassing and universal reality which is the seat of the revelation of all the divine perfections.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 2014 edition, p. 227 #4)
robe: [figuratively] a spiritual adornment that represents being gifted with or the taking on of a quality, condition, or characteristic
potentially revealed: the possibility and power to manifest and exhibit
supreme: most excellent and greatest possible
surpassed: exceeded; outshone
revelation: revealed truth
signs: indications of the presence or existence
singled out: treated in a way different from other (created things)
testimony: evidence or proof

`Abdu'l-Bahá has told us: “. . . the essential basis of all the Divine Religions which pertains to the virtues of the world of mankind and is the foundation of the welfare of the world of man, is found in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh in the most perfect presentation.”⁹ Consider the following from Bahá'u'lláh as one example:

2.2 “*The virtues and attributes pertaining unto God are all evident and manifest, and have been mentioned and described in all the heavenly Books. Among them are trustworthiness, truthfulness, purity of heart while communing with God, forbearance, resignation to whatever the Almighty hath decreed, contentment with the things His Will hath provided, patience, nay, thankfulness in the midst of tribulation, and complete reliance, in all circumstances, upon Him. These rank, according to the estimate of God, among the highest and most laudable of all acts. All other acts are, and will ever remain, secondary and subordinate unto them.*”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 290)

attributes: distinct characteristics and qualities that belong to and describe the one true God; “*It behoves each one of you to manifest the attributes of God, and to exemplify by your deeds and words the signs of His righteousness, His power and glory.*” (The Báb, cited in *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 92)

communing: praying; communicating; conversing

contentment: being happy and satisfied

decreed: divinely determined or ordered, e.g., that which happens or comes about

estimate: assessment or judgment

forbearance: indulgence toward offenders; to endure hardship patiently

heart: spiritual consciousness

heavenly: holy; sacred

His Will: directives revealed in the Word of God

laudable: praiseworthy; commendable

manifest: plainly and clearly made known and exhibited

midst: condition of being surrounded

nay: not only this but also

patience: calm endurance under suffering or provocation

pertaining: associated with or belonging

provided: supplied for sustenance or support

purity: “. . . the mirror of the heart is cleansed from the rust of worldly thoughts.” (`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, Vol. III, p. 728)

rank: hold the position among others

reliance: demonstration of confidence, trust, and dependence

resignation: surrender or be submissive

subordinate: considered of less value or importance

thankfulness: expressions of thanks and gratitude

tribulation: trying afflictions

trustworthiness: worthy of being trusted and relied upon with confidence

truthfulness: having the disposition to tell what is true and factual; “*Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues. Without truthfulness progress and success, in all the worlds of God, are impossible for any soul. When this holy attribute is established in man, all the divine qualities will also be acquired.*” (`Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 26)

virtues: human reflections of divine spiritual qualities and attributes

⁹ `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, (First Tablet to The Hague 17 December 1919) p. 305

An example of the reality and value of just one of the virtues of God is conveyed in this magnificent depiction of trustworthiness by Bahá'u'lláh.

2.3 “We will now mention unto thee Trustworthiness and the station thereof in the estimation of God, thy Lord, the Lord of the Mighty Throne. One day of days We repaired unto Our Green Island. Upon Our arrival, We beheld its streams flowing, and its trees luxuriant, and the sunlight playing in their midst. Turning Our face to the right, We beheld what the pen is powerless to describe; nor can it set forth that which the eye of the Lord of Mankind witnessed in that most sanctified, that most sublime, that blest, and most exalted Spot. Turning, then, to the left We gazed on one of the Beauties of the Most Sublime Paradise, standing on a pillar of light, and calling aloud saying: ‘O inmates of earth and heaven! Behold ye My beauty, and My radiance, and My revelation, and My effulgence. By God, the True One! I am Trustworthiness and the revelation thereof, and the beauty thereof. I will recompense whosoever will cleave unto Me, and recognize My rank and station, and hold fast unto My hem. I am the most great ornament of the people of Bahá, and the vesture of glory unto all who are in the kingdom of creation. I am the supreme instrument for the prosperity of the world, and the horizon of assurance unto all beings.’ Thus have We sent down for thee that which will draw men nigh unto the Lord of creation.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Fountain of Wisdom*, pp. 111-12 #8.41)

assurance: confidence, trust, and certainty pledged or guaranteed
behold: with attention, look upon and observe
blest: highly favored with spiritual happiness and bliss
cleave: strongly, loyally, and unwaveringly cling
effulgence: radiant flood of light having extreme splendor, luster, and brilliance; [figuratively] spiritual knowledge, grace, and enlightenment
estimation: assessment or judgment
exalted: elevate, glorify, and highly praised
glory: distinguishing honor and admiration
heaven: the spiritual worlds of God
hem: moral influence
horizon: greatest perceptual amount
instrument: means for the achievement of
inmates: souls occupying a place
Lord of Mankind: refers to Himself, Bahá'u'lláh
men: people
nigh: near
ornament: addition of spiritual luster, grace, and beauty
Our: used by one in authority to denote himself
Our Green Island: Refers to the Garden of Ridván (Paradise) near 'Akká, Israel, which is the garden Bahá'u'lláh had made and which He frequented during the latter years of His life after being freed from the strict imprisonment of 'Akká and when He occupied the house in the country known as Bahjí.
Paradise: heaven or spiritual world

people of Bahá: Bahá'ís
pillar: something providing strength and support
prosperity: advancement or success in well-being or anything good
radiance: emanating energy, light, and love
rank: degree and position of dignity, eminence, and excellence
recognize: formally acknowledge and accept
recompense: give graciously in return
repaired: to take oneself
revelation: revealed truth
set forth: give an account of
sanctified: sacred; holy
station: standing or position
sublime: awe-inspiring because of supreme spiritual, intellectual, or moral worth
supreme: highest and most excellent
the most great: of the highest importance or valued (this does not mean at the exclusion of others)
trustworthiness: worthy of being trusted and relied upon with confidence; “Say: *trustworthiness is the sun of the heaven of My commandments, truthfulness is its moon, and praiseworthy attributes are its stars.*” (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, p. 332 #2033)
vesture: spiritual adornment of divine gift or favor
We: used by one in authority to denote himself
witnessed: observed by personal presence

SOME QUESTIONS: *A cup from the showers of confirmation...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. The answers can be found in the quotations just studied. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers. The answers can be found on page 58.

1. In whom alone, among all created things, “are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God”? _____

2. The virtues and attributes of God are all mentioned and described...
 - a. in one quotation
 - b. in all the heavenly books
 - c. in our heart
 - d. in a hidden book

3. Can you name three of the nine highest and most laudable virtues or acts according to Bahá’u’lláh?

4. What can you say about trustworthiness? _____

5. What is the foundation of all human virtues? _____

6. How could I apply what I learned in this section? _____

A CLOSING PRAYER:

“O God my God! Thou hearest the sighing of Him Who is Thy Light (Bahá), hearkenest unto His lamentations in the daytime and in the night season and knowest that He desireth naught for Himself but rather seeketh to sanctify the souls of Thy servants and to deliver them from the fire with which they are beset at all times. O Lord! The hands of Thy well-favoured servants are raised towards the heaven of Thy bounty and those of Thy sincere lovers are lifted up to the sublime heights of Thy generosity. Disappoint them not, I entreat Thee, in that which they seek from the ocean of Thy favour and from the heaven of Thy grace and the day-star of Thy bounty. Aid them, O Lord, to acquire such virtues as will exalt their stations among the peoples of the world. Verily Thou art the Powerful, the Mighty, the Most Generous.”

(Bahá’u’lláh, *Fountain of Wisdom*, pp. 82-83 #7.27)

Basic Truths About Spiritual Virtues...

SECTION 3

From our study so far, we have discovered that the development of spiritual virtues is the primary foundation common to all the religions of God. We have read that “they are eternal” and “will never be changed.” `Abdu’l-Bahá was asked: “What is true greatness in man?” His answer: “His spiritual attributes. No one can destroy his spiritual qualities; they are from God.”¹⁰ Next, we are going to seek out the true and real value of the spiritual virtues.

Please study the quotations in the following manner, which is the same as before except for 3B, which is specific to this section.

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...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud in its entirety.
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. Each participant **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.
 - C. Repeat A and B above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words.
3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Mining the gems of truth...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.
 - * B. Take turns **stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about **divine virtues, spiritual qualities, and attributes** as they relate to all religions.

- 3.1 “The essence of all religions is the Love of God, and it is the foundation of all the sacred teachings.”
(`Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 82 #27.6)

essence: ultimate and essential spiritual quality
foundation: underlying truth, purpose, and reality
love of God: “As to what causes the growth of the love of God, know that it is to turn one’s self toward God.” (`Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Scriptures*, p. 494 #953) “. . . the love of God ↗

is realized in the universal love of all humanity.” (`Abdu’l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. VIII:10, 8 September 1917, p. 135)
sacred teachings: holy teachings of the founding Prophets and Manifestations of the religions of God

¹⁰ `Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in *Ten Days in the Light of `Akká*, p. 14

- 3.2 “All religions teach that we must do good, that we must be generous, sincere, truthful, law-abiding, and faithful; all this is reasonable, and logically the only way in which humanity can progress.”
(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 142 #445)

faithful: steadfast in belief, firm in allegiance, and true in affection to God

progress: improve, advance, and evolve

- 3.3 “Those foundations of the religion of God, however, which are spiritual and consist in human virtues, are never subject to abrogation but are eternal and everlasting, and are renewed in every prophetic Dispensation.”
(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 2014 edition, p. 55 #9)

abrogated: being repealed, abolished, or ended
Dispensation: religious System that administers human affairs under divine authority for a particular period of time
foundations: underlying truths and principles
religion of God: including, but not limited ↗

to; Bahá'í, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion
renewed: restored into existence again
virtues: reflections of divine spiritual qualities and attributes

- 3.4 “All the divine prophets and Manifestations appeared in the world that this heavenly manna, might be given to man. This is the food which fosters spiritual growth and strength and causes pure illumination in the souls of men. They become filled with the breaths of the Holy Spirit. They increase in the knowledge of God and in those virtues which belong to the world of humanity. They attain to the very image and likeness of God.”
(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. VII:16, 31 December 1916, p. 160)

breaths: life-giving inspirations
food: [figuratively] spiritual nourishment
fosters: carefully nurtures, supports, and sustains
Holy Spirit: “The Holy Spirit is the Light from the Sun of Truth bringing, by its infinite power, life and illumination to all mankind, . . . the Holy Spirit quickens the souls of men.” (`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 58-59 #17.9-.12)
illumination: intellectual and spiritual enlightenment, insight, and knowledge
image and likeness of God: This passage does not mean that the human physical form is like that of God, but rather that humans are in the image of God in their moral, spiritual, and intellectual nature. “Inasmuch as all were created in the image of God, we must bring ourselves to realize that all embody divine possibilities.” (`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The* ↗

Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 113)
Manifestations: great Prophets or chosen Messengers
man: the people
manna: historically-a food miraculously supplied to the Israelites during their desert journey; [figuratively] divine spiritual nourishment; “. . . the heavenly manna of the knowledge of God.” (`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. VII:16, 31 December 1916, p. 160)
men: humanity
prophets: including but not limited to Krishna, Abraham, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, The Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh
pure: immaculate; unblemished
spiritual: higher, divine, or heavenly oriented
virtues: human reflections of divine spiritual qualities and attributes

- 3.5 “When they [the human souls] invoke God’s favour at the divine threshold their minds become open, they enter into spiritual pleasures and make discoveries. By this they enjoy ecstasies of the Spirit and see the world illumined. They are filled with insight. They become fully attuned to the bounties of God and see them face to face, acquiring in themselves the virtues of the Manifestations.”
(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. VII:16, 31 December 1916, p. 160)

attuned: made aware and responsive
bounties: generous gifts and favors
divine threshold: [figuratively] entrance to the presence of God
ecstasies: entrancing emotions of joy
favour: help, assistance, and support
illumined: lit up with understanding

insight: understanding of the inner nature of things
invoke: earnestly invite or call upon
Manifestations: great Prophets or chosen Messengers
virtues: human reflections of divine spiritual qualities and attributes

- 3.6 “For if the spiritual qualities of the soul, open to the breath of the Divine Spirit, are never used, they become atrophied, enfeebled, and at last incapable; whilst the soul’s material qualities alone being exercised, they become terribly powerful—and the unhappy, misguided man, becomes more savage, more unjust, more vile, more cruel, more malevolent than the lower animals themselves.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 97 #31.6)

atrophied: wasted away and weakened
breath: life-giving inspiration
cruel: disposed to inflicting pain and suffering
enfeebled: faint, and deprived of strength
incapable: unable to perform their purpose
malevolent: productive of harm and evil
man: person
material qualities: “In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone. ↗

Signs of both these natures are to be found in men. In his material aspect he expresses untruth, cruelty and injustice; all these are the outcome of his lower nature.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 60 #18.2)
savage: rude, unmannerly, and brutal
spiritual qualities: those qualities which pertain to the divine qualities, attributes, and virtues
vile: physically repulsive, intellectually dishonest, and morally despicable

- 3.7 “All the different religions of God that have risen on the face of the earth have one purpose: to educate man and to inform him of the spiritual, the luminous, the divine, so that he may partake of heavenly spirit and find eternal life, show forth the virtues of mankind, and from a world of darkness enter a world of light.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. III:17, 19 January 1913, p. 3)

divine: “By the divine we mean the discovery of the mysteries of God, the comprehension of spiritual realities, the wisdom of God, inner significances of the heavenly religions and foundation of the law.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 138 #52.1)
eternal life: “. . . the rewards of this life are the real luminous perfections which are realized in this world, and which are the cause of eternal life, for they are the very progress of existence.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í World Faith*, pp. 324-25)
light: [figuratively] spiritual knowledge and goodness

luminous: the spiritual radiations of the celestial world including love, grace, knowledge, bounty, etc.
man: humanity
partake: take or receive a portion
purpose: main reason for existing
religions of God: including, but not limited to, Bahá’í, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion
risen: come about and appeared
virtues: human reflections of divine spiritual qualities and attributes

- 3.8 “. . . unity is the essential truth of religion and, when so understood, embraces all the virtues of the human world. Praise be to God! This knowledge has been spread, eyes have been opened, and ears have become attentive. Therefore, we must endeavor to promulgate and practice the religion of God which has been founded by all the Prophets. And the religion of God is absolute love and unity.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 32)

embraces: includes and incorporates
endeavor: try to achieve with earnest effort
essential: real essence of
promulgate: openly make known
unity: a heartfelt condition of peace, love, ↗

and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and the struggle for dominance
virtues: human reflections of divine spiritual qualities and attributes

3.9 “The rewards of this life are the virtues and perfections which adorn the reality of man.
(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 323)

adorn: add splendor and attractiveness to
man: the human beings
perfections: virtues with the highest possible degree of excellence

reality: what is true and real
virtues: human reflections of divine spiritual qualities and attributes

3.10 “The religion of God reforms the moral side of the life of mankind. It is the spreader of the virtues of the world of humanity.”
(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. VIII:2, 9 April 1917, p. 28)

moral: excellence in what pertains to right and wrong conduct or behavior
reforms: corrects and improves

spreader: propagator; disseminator
virtues: human reflections of divine spiritual qualities and attributes

3.11 “Bahá'u'lláh has even said that occupation and labor are devotion. All humanity must obtain a livelihood by sweat of the brow and bodily exertion, at the same time seeking to lift the burden of others, striving to be the source of comfort to souls and facilitating the means of living. This in itself is devotion to God. Bahá'u'lláh has thereby encouraged action and stimulated service. But the energies of the heart must not be attached to these things; the soul must not be completely occupied with them. Though the mind is busy, the heart must be attracted toward the Kingdom of God in order that the virtues of humanity may be attained from every direction and source.”
(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 187 #66.4)

attached: bound with heartfelt attraction and attention
attained: successfully acquired
devotion(al): as prayer and worship
facilitating: making easier, aiding, or helping
heart: aspect of human nature which becomes attracted, loves, and grows attached; “. . . the human heart, which is the recipient of the light of God and the seat of the revelation of the All-Merciful, . . .” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 186)
Kingdom of God: the eternal realm and dominion of God; “This world is even as the body or ↗

man, and the Kingdom of God is as the spirit of life.” (`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 192 #161)
livelihood: means of support or subsistence
occupation: what is actively pursued as one's livelihood; art, business, career, craft, job, employment, profession, trade, vocation, or work
occupied: with full attention and energy engaged
soul(s): immortal essence of one's rational, spiritual, and emotional self
virtues: human reflections of divine spiritual qualities and attributes

3.12 “The meditative faculty is akin to the mirror; if you put it before earthly objects it will reflect them. Therefore if the spirit of man is contemplating earthly subjects he will be informed of these.
“But if you turn the mirror of your spirits heavenwards, the heavenly constellations and the rays of the Sun of Reality will be reflected in your hearts, and the virtues of the Kingdom will be obtained.”
(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 176 #54.17-.18)

akin: like or similar
contemplating: to consider with continued attention
constellations: assemblages of splendor and excellence; arrangements of light (spiritual knowledge, wisdom, and goodness)
faculty: function or ability
heavenwards: towards the holiness of the spiritual world
Kingdom: spiritual realm of God
man: a person

meditative: deeply and continually contemplative or reflective
mirror: that which reflects a true representation; [figuratively] reflective power of attention
obtained: achieved through effort
rays: beams of moral or intellectual light (spiritual knowledge, wisdom, and goodness)
Sun of Reality: God
virtues: human reflections of divine spiritual qualities and attributes

- 3.13 “We must strive with energies of heart, soul and mind to develop and manifest the perfections and virtues latent within the realities of the phenomenal world, for the human reality may be compared to a seed. If we sow the seed, a mighty tree appears from it. The virtues of the seed are revealed in the tree; it puts forth branches, leaves, blossoms, and produces fruits. All these virtues were hidden and potential in the seed. Through the blessing and bounty of cultivation these virtues became apparent. Similarly, the merciful God, our Creator, has deposited within human realities certain latent and potential virtues. Through education and culture these virtues deposited by the loving God will become apparent in the human reality, even as the unfoldment of the tree from within the germinating seed.”
 (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgations of Universal Peace*, pp. 90-91 #38.9)

apparent: evident and actual
blessings: beneficial gifts
bounty: abundant yield
cultivation: preparation and fostering of the growing conditions
culture: the act of developing the intellectual and moral faculties through education
deposited: placed in trust
education: the attainment of knowledge and training
latent: present, but not yet active
perfections: virtues with the highest possible degree of excellence; ↗

“... the rewards of this life are the real luminous perfections which are realized in this world, and which are the cause of eternal life, for they are the very progress of existence.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’i World Faith*, pp. 324-25)
phenomenal: material or physical
potential: existing as a possibility; capable of development
realities: true and real existence
strive: devote serious effort
unfoldment: gradual development
virtues: human reflections of divine spiritual qualities and attributes

- 3.14 “The virtues of humanity are many, but science is the most noble of them all. The distinction which man enjoys above and beyond the station of the animal is due to this paramount virtue. It is a bestowal of God; it is not material; it is divine. Science is an effulgence of the Sun of Reality, the power of investigating and discovering the verities of the universe, the means by which man finds a pathway to God. All the powers and attributes of man are human and hereditary in origin—outcomes of nature’s processes—except the intellect, which is supernatural.”
 (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 49 #20.2)

attributes: distinct characteristics and qualities that belong to and describe the one true God
bestowal: spiritual gift
divine: spiritual; a supernatural power
distinction: special quality that sets [humans] apart with recognition and honor
effulgence: radiant flood of light having extreme splendor, luster, and brilliance; [figuratively] spiritual knowledge, grace, and enlightenment
hereditary: genetically transmitted
intellect: the powers of reasoning to acquire, understand, and apply knowledge
man: humanity
nature’s: the controlling forces of the universe’s
paramount: supreme; highly important
science: Science is essentially the use of the human intellect to study the phenomena ↗

of the natural world and determine through proven methods its truths. “If we say religion is opposed to science, we lack knowledge of either true science or true religion, for both are founded upon the premises and conclusions of reason, and both must bear its test.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 107 #44.8)
Sun of Reality: God
supernatural: transcends or exceeds the laws of nature
the most noble: superior in excellence or value (this does not mean at the exclusion of others)
verities: truths, facts, and reality
virtue(s): human reflection(s) of divine spiritual qualities and attributes

SOME QUESTIONS: *A cup from the showers of confirmation...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. The answers can be found in the quotations just studied. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers. The answers can be found on page 58.

1. The spiritual virtues taught by the Divine Religions are eternal, “are renewed in every prophetic Dispensation”, and cannot be _____ or _____
2. To acquire the spiritual virtues, one must turn one’s _____ towards God.
3. The intellect enjoyed by humans is supernatural.
 true
 false
4. What spiritual reality embraces all of the virtues of the human world?
 a. unity
 b. science
 c. love
 d. hugs
5. According to `Abdu’l-Bahá, the acquisition of spiritual virtues is the only way humanity can _____
6. The superhuman power of the intellect is manifest in the world as the virtue of _____
7. The rewards of this life which do not die and are taken with us to the spiritual afterlife are _____
8. The purpose of the Manifestations of God and all the Divine religions is _____
9. The foundations common to all Divine Religions are _____
10. How could I apply what I learned in this section? _____

CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song...*

Facilitator

Kindly read through the following out loud.

“The holy Manifestations of God come into the world to dispel the darkness of the animal or physical nature of man, to purify him from his imperfections in order that his heavenly and spiritual nature may become quickened, his divine qualities awakened, his perfections visible, his potential powers revealed and all the virtues of the world of humanity latent within him may come to life. These holy Manifestations of God are the educators and trainers of the world of existence, the teachers of the world of humanity. They liberate man from the darkness of the world of nature, deliver him from despair, error, ignorance, imperfections and all evil qualities. They clothe him in the garment of perfections and exalted virtues. Men are ignorant; the Manifestations of God make them wise. They are animalistic; the Manifestations make them human. They are savage and cruel; the Manifestations lead them into kingdoms of light and love. They are unjust; the Manifestations cause them to become just. Man is selfish; they sever him from self and desire. Man is haughty; they make him meek, humble and friendly. He is earthly; they make him heavenly. Men are material; the Manifestations transform them into semblance divine. They are immature children; the Manifestations develop them into maturity. Man is poor; they endow him with wealth. Man is base, treacherous and mean; the Manifestations of God uplift him into dignity, nobility and loftiness.”

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 110)

A CLOSING PRAYER:

O Thou kind Lord! These are Thy servants who have gathered in this meeting, have turned unto Thy Kingdom and are in need of Thy bestowal and blessing. O thou God! Manifest and make evident the signs of Thy oneness which have been deposited in all the realities of life. Reveal and unfold the virtues which Thou hast made latent and concealed in these human realities.

O God! We are as plants, and Thy bounty is as the rain; refresh and cause these plants to grow through Thy bestowal. We are Thy servants; free us from the fetters of material existence. We are ignorant; make us wise. We are dead; make us alive. We are material; endow us with spirit. We are deprived; make us the intimates of Thy mysteries. We are needy; enrich and bless us from Thy boundless treasury. O God! Resuscitate us; give us sight; give us hearing; familiarize us with the mysteries of life, so that the secrets of Thy kingdom may become revealed to us in this world of existence and we may confess Thy oneness. Every bestowal emanates from Thee; every benediction is Thine.

Thou art mighty. Thou art powerful. Thou art the Giver, and Thou art the Ever-Bounteous.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 91 #38.10-12)

The Changing Requirements of Divine Religion...

SECTION 4

In the first section, we learned that there are two aspects of religion, one being those that are essential and go unchanged from one religious dispensation to the next. Now we are going to examine those aspects of religion that are intentionally different in each religious dispensation.

“The fundamental principle enunciated by Bahá’u’lláh . . . is that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ only in the nonessential aspects of their doctrines, and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society.”¹¹

Another common aspect of all Divine Religion, as pointed out above, is that each time a Manifestations of God appears He changes some of the “nonessential” teachings from the previous dispensation to meet the needs of a maturing humanity. These required changes are often what lead to misunderstandings about the oneness of religion. A clear comprehension of the purpose and reality of these changes helps us accept these differences as valuable and necessary to our ever-evolving spiritual and social natures. Let’s take a look at this shared feature.

Please study the quotations in the following manner, which is the same as before except for 3B, which is specific to this section.

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...*
 - A. Read the quotation** out loud in its entirety.
- 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:

 - Each participant **choose a word** from the quotation and **state it** for the whole group to hear. (Like a fun game – pick a word!) Then...
 - 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...*
 - A. Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.
 - * **B. Take turns stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about **the changing requirements** of divine religion

¹¹ Shoghi Effendi, Introduction to the pamphlet “*The Faith of Bahá’u’lláh: A World Religion*,” written in response to the request of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, 14 July 1947, cited in the preface of *The Promised Day is Come*.

- 4.1 “The second division (of religious ordinances) comprises laws and institutions which provide for human needs and conditions according to exigencies of time and place.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 393 #118.7)

comprises: is made up of or includes
conditions: circumstances and/or characteristics
division: part or aspect
exigencies: (ek'·si·juhn·seez) urgent requirement or pressing needs
institutions: established practices, relationships, ↗

and administrative structures, authorized and maintained through prescribed rules and agencies
laws: binding practices or rules of conduct or action
ordinances: established or prescribed practices and regulations

- 4.2 “The second part of the religion of God, which pertains to the material world and which concerns such things as fasting; prayer; worship; marriage; divorce; manumission; legal rulings; transactions; and penalties and punishments for murder, assault, theft, and injury, is changed and altered in every prophetic Dispensation and may be abrogated—for policies, transactions, punishments, and other laws are bound to change according to the exigencies of the time.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 2014 edition, p. 55 #10)

abrogated: repealed or ended by authority
bound: required; obligated
Dispensation: religious System that administers human affairs under divine authority for a particular period of time
exigencies: urgent requirements or pressing needs
fasting: the religious practice of abstaining ↗

from food and drink for a period of time
manumission: formal release from bondage or slavery
pertains: is associated with or appropriate
policies: courses of action embracing general goals and acceptable procedures
religion of God: all the divine religions

- 4.3 “The second class of divine teachings is material and deals with behaviour, such as divorce, the commandments, the way of worshipping. All these conditions have changed in the cycle of every prophet. The character of divine sovereignty has no change or transformation, but the organization and administration change continually.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. VII:17, 19 January 1917, p. 173)

administration: management and directing of affairs
character: distinguishing trait, quality, or nature
class: category or group
cycle: recurring periods of time and authority
commandments: authoritative commands, mandates, or orders of behavior

divine sovereignty: all-encompassing, all-pervading, supreme spiritual influence and power of the Prophet
organization: systematic design and coordination of methods, plans, and objectives
transformation: alteration in form, character, or function

- 4.4 “*The difference between the ordinances under which they [the religions] abide should be attributed to the varying requirements and exigencies of the age in which they were revealed. All of them, except a few which are the outcome of human perversity, were ordained of God, and are a reflection of His Will and Purpose.*”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 217)

abide: conform to and accept as valid
attributed to: considered as being due to
exigencies: urgent necessities or pressing needs
ordained: destined by divine power; “*These differences are not worthy of mention. The eye of divine mercy casteth its glance upon all that is past. It behoveth us to mention them only in favourable terms, for they do not contradict that which is essential.*” (Bahá'u'lláh, ↗

The Tabernacle of Unity, p. 27 #2.18)
ordinances: established or prescribed practices, regulations, and laws
perversity: deviation from the right, proper, or true intended purpose
reflection: effect brought about by the influence
requirements: conditions considered necessary and appropriate
varying: different or partially changing

4.5 “... every time the Prophets of God have illumined the world with the resplendent radiance of the Day Star of Divine knowledge, they have invariably summoned its peoples to embrace the light of God through such means as best befitted the exigencies of the age in which they appeared. They were thus able to scatter the darkness of ignorance, and to shed upon the world the glory of their own knowledge. It is towards the inmost essence of these Prophets, therefore, that the eye of every man of discernment must be directed, inasmuch as their one and only purpose hath always been to guide the erring, and give peace to the afflicted.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 80-81)

afflicted: ones with pain, suffering, and distress
befitted: was suited and appropriate to
Day Star of: Manifestation of God's
discernment: having perception and understanding
embrace: take to heart and accept readily and gladly
erring: error-prone
essence: core reality and purpose

exigencies: (ek'-si-juhn-seez) urgent requirement or pressing needs
illumined: with the light of understanding, lit up
invariably: without change
man: person
means: useful, helpful, and available methods
summoned: notified and commanded the attention of

4.6 “The second kind of ordinances in the divine religions is those which relate to the material affairs of humankind. These are the material or accidental laws which are subject to change in each day of manifestation, according to exigencies of the time, conditions and differing capacities of humanity. For instance, in the day of Moses ten commandments in regard to murder were revealed by Him. These commandments were in accordance with the requirements of that day and time. Other laws embodying drastic punishments were enacted by Moses—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. The penalty for theft was amputation of the hand. These laws and penalties were applicable to the degree of the Israelitish people of that period, who dwelt in the wilderness and desert under conditions where severity was necessary and justifiable. But in the time of Jesus Christ this kind of law was not expedient; therefore, Christ abrogated and superseded the commands of Moses.

“In brief, every one of the divine religions contains essential ordinances, which are not subject to change, and material ordinances, which are abrogated according to the exigencies of time.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 106 #44.4-.5)

abrogated: repealed, abolished, or ended by authority
accidental: conditional, dependent, and non-essential
according: agreeable with and conforming
amputation: the cutting off
capacities: receptivities and abilities to understand and learn
commandments: authoritative commands, mandates, or orders of behavior
conditions: particular circumstances and/or characteristics
day of manifestation: dispensation
embodying: including; involving
essential: the most important and necessary
exigencies: (ek'-si-juhn-seez) urgent requirement or pressing needs
expedient: suited to achieving a particular end in a given circumstance

eye for an eye: principle of justice that requires punishment equal to the offense
Israelitish: of or pertaining to the people of ancient Israel; Hebrews
Jesus Christ: Prophet of the Christian religion
justifiable: considered to be legally and morally reasonable, correct, and just
material: social; behavioral
Moses: Prophet of the Israelites and the religion of Judaism
necessary: essential or needed
ordinances: prescribed practices and regulations
requirements: appropriate necessities and conditions
severity: strictness; harshness
superseded: set aside or replaced
time: particular time period noted for its distinctive characteristics; day, age, epoch, or era

SOME QUESTIONS: *A cup from the showers of confirmation...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following question. The answers can be found in the quotations just studied. When everyone has finished, review the question, then share and discuss the answers. The answers can be found on page 58.

1. Give examples of how a Manifestation of God initiated something new that was different from the former religion? _____

2. Each Manifestation of God initiates changes to some of the laws and ordinances of the former religion or creates new ones that best serve the _____ of the people of that time and age.
 - a. exigencies
 - b. urgent requirements
 - c. demands
 - d. wishes
 - e. pressing needs

3. How could I apply what I learned in this section? _____

The Twofold Station of the Manifestations of God...

SECTION 5

We know from an abundance of historical information that whenever a Manifestation of God appears, it creates quite a stir among the leaders and followers of the dominant contemporary religion. We have learned that each new Manifestation of God conveys some concepts and ideas specific to the needs and requirements of the time, that are different from the former religion, and challenging for those leaders to accept.

There is another challenging issue. Bahá'u'lláh was asked why each of the Manifestations of God appear so different if they were given the same purpose or mission. He has pointed out that the Manifestations of God hold a twofold station: one wherein they are all considered the same, and one wherein they are all quite different. Let's explore this reality so that we might understand why their religions initially appear different while in fact, they are all considered part of the same "*changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future.*"¹²

Please study the quotations in the following manner, which is the same as before except for 3B, which is specific to this section.

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...*
 - A. Read the quotation out loud in its entirety.
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. Each participant **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.
 - C. Repeat A and B above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words.
3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Mining the gems of truth...*
 - A. Read the quotation out loud again in its entirety.
 - * B. Take turns **stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about **the twofold station of the Manifestation of God**.

¹² Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 136

The following paragraph reveals to us the nature of the first station.

- 5.1 “... as these Birds of the Celestial Throne are all sent down from the heaven of the Will of God, and as they all arise to proclaim His irresistible Faith, they therefore are regarded as one soul and the same person. For they all drink from the one Cup of the love of God, and all partake of the fruit of the same Tree of Oneness. These Manifestations of God have each a twofold station. One is the station of pure abstraction and essential unity. In this respect, if thou callest them all by one name, and dost ascribe to them the same attribute, thou hast not erred from the truth.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude*, p. 152)

arise: actively come forth
ascribe: accredit or assign
attribute: quality, feature, or characteristic
Birds: [figuratively] Manifestations of God
Celestial Throne: heavenly position of supreme power and dignity
erred: failed or deviated
essential unity: the real essence of the quality or state of being one
Faith: Religion or Spiritual Cause
His: God's
Manifestations: great Prophets or chosen Messengers
proclaim: formally and publicly declare
pure abstraction: totally based upon spiritual concepts and understanding, withdrawn from concrete or tangible reality, and devoid of differences, separation, or limitations; “*After traversing the Valley of Knowledge, which is* ↻

the last plane of limitation, the wayfarer attains the first stage of the Valley of Unity, whereupon he quaffs the chalice of abstraction and witnesses the Manifestations of Oneness. . . . He hears with the ears of God and sees the mysteries of divine creation with the eyes of God. . . . He will gaze upon all things with the eye of oneness and will find the Divine Sun, from the Heavenly Day-Spring, shedding the same light and splendour upon all beings and will see the lights of singleness reflected and visible upon all creation. . . .” (Bahá'u'lláh, cited by H.M. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh, The King of Glory*, p. 162)

regarded: considered or thought of
respect: regard; consideration
station: condition of reality
twofold: two-part
Will: Desire or Choice

And then He tells us that there is another way to look at the Manifestations, a different station:

- 5.2 “The other is the station of distinction, and pertaineth to the world of creation and to the limitations thereof. In this respect, each Manifestation of God hath a distinct individuality, a definitely prescribed mission, a predestined Revelation, and specially designated limitations. Each one of them is known by a different name, is characterized by a special attribute, fulfills a definite Mission, and is entrusted with a particular Revelation.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude*, p. 176)

attribute: quality, feature, or characteristic
definitely: specifically; precisely
designated: pointed out and specified
distinct: clear and unmistakably different
distinction: special qualities, characteristics, and circumstances that set [them] apart from one another
entrusted: assigned in trust
limitations: prescribed bounds or limits
Manifestation of God: great Prophets or chosen Messenger

mission: task assigned by God
particular: separate and specific
pertaineth: is associated with or belongs
predestined: determined by divine decree
prescribed: appointed, ordered, or commanded
respect: regard; consideration
Revelation: Communication of God and His Will to humanity
specially: for a particular purpose
station: condition of reality
world of creation: the human world

Here He explains to us why the Manifestations and their religions appear separate and different:

5.3 “It is because of this difference in their station [of distinction] and mission that the words and utterances flowing from these Well-springs of divine knowledge appear to diverge and differ. Otherwise, in the eyes of them that are initiated into the mysteries of divine wisdom, all their utterances are in reality but the expressions of one Truth. As most of the people have failed to appreciate those stations to which We have referred, they therefore feel perplexed and dismayed at the varying utterances pronounced by Manifestations that are essentially one and the same.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude*, p. 177)

differ: be different
dismayed: dispirited with alarm and apprehension
diverge: lead away from one another
essentially: of its inner character or essence
initiated: instructed in primary principles
Manifestations: great Prophets or chosen Messenger
mission: task assigned by God

one: in agreement and harmony
perplexed: full of doubt and uncertainty
pronounced: articulated or spoken
reality: what is true and real
station(s): condition(s) of reality
Truth: transcendental spiritual reality
utterances: oral or written expressions
varying: different or partially changing
Well-springs: refers to the Manifestations of God

The question that comes to mind at this point is: Why do the Messengers of God reveal wisdom differently at different times and different from each other?

5.4 “In every instance they have voiced an utterance that would conform to the requirements of the occasion, . . .”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude*, p. 181)

conform: be harmonious or agreeable
declared: made known with emphasis
instance: occasion; occurrence
occasion: particular circumstance

requirements: urgent necessities or pressing needs and conditions
they: the Manifestations of God
utterance: oral or written expression

5.5 “From these incontrovertible and fully demonstrated statements strive thou to apprehend the meaning of the questions thou hast asked, that thou mayest become steadfast in the Faith of God, and not be dismayed by the divergences in the utterances of His Prophets and Chosen Ones.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude*, p. 178)

apprehend: come to know and appreciate
Chosen Ones: Manifestations of God
dismayed: dispirited with alarm and apprehension
divergences: the conditions of being different, unlike, or dissimilar
incontrovertible: too clear or certain to admit dispute

questions: *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* or *The Book of Certitude* was written by Bahá'u'lláh in response to questions presented by The Báb's maternal uncle. See *Bahá'u'lláh, The King of Glory*, by H.M. Balyuzi, pp. 164-65
steadfast: steady and unwavering
strive: devote serious energy and effort
utterances: oral or written expressions

SOME QUESTIONS: *A cup from the showers of confirmation...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. The answers can be found in the quotations just studied. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers. The answers can be found on page 58.

1. In what ways are the Manifestations of God the same? _____

2. In what ways are the Manifestations of God different? _____

3. How do these differences affect the way the Manifestations of God were and are perceived? _____

4. In what ways could we describe the twofold station of the Manifestations that allows them to be understood as “*proclaiming the same Faith?*”¹³ _____

5. How could I apply what I learned in this section? _____

¹³ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, p. 154

The Deviation and Decline of Religion Over Time...

SECTION 6

From what we read in the last section we understand that each of the Manifestations of God have a twofold station. One is the spiritual station of unity, where we rightfully recognize them as the “expressions of one Truth,” “For they all drink from the one Cup of the love of God, and all partake of the fruit of the same Tree of Oneness”. The second station is “the station of distinction” which “pertaineth to the world of creation.” Whenever a new Manifestation of God is identified solely through this second station, it can result in people *erroneously perceiving* their teachings as a serious divergence from the previous religion, making it difficult for people to accept and believe in the renewed Faith of God.

We also read earlier from “Abdu’l-Bahá that religions go through cycles of rise and fall that parallel in concept the earthly seasons. And, from what we know historically, certain factors *do* come into play later in the course of each religious dispensation that eventually causes them to deviate from their sacred foundation and decline in their spiritual potency. It is, therefore, important for us to understand the *causes* of this deviation of religion that we might be empowered to help others understand it and be vigilant in averting it ourselves.

Let’s explore then what it is that has caused each religion to change over time, to deviate from the original teachings of its spiritual foundation, and eventually become divided into contending sects and divisions.

Please study the quotations in the following manner, which is the same as before except for 3B, which is specific to this section.

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...*
 - A. Read the quotation** out loud in its entirety.
- 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:

 - Each participant **choose a word** from the quotation and **state it** for the whole group to hear. (Like a fun game – pick a word!) Then...
 - 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...*
 - A. Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.
 - * **B. Take turns stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about **the deviation or decline of religion.**

6.1 “He [Bahá’u’lláh] announced that the fundamental basis of all religion is one, that the essence of religion is human fellowship and that the differences in belief which exist are due to dogmatic interpretation and blind imitations which are at variance with the foundations established by the Prophets of God.”

(`Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 354 #110.15)

announced: revealed
basis: underlying foundational truths
blind imitation: thoughtless and repetitious mimicking of pointless and entrenched behaviors, traditions, and customs
dogmatic interpretation: strongly asserting a matter of opinion on the meaning of sacred Scripture that neither experience nor reason can support
established: originated and made permanent
fellowship: companionship, friendly association, and mutual concern

foundations: underlying truths and principles
fundamental: basic and essential
one: single and indivisible; “. . . as that of lamps kindled: for these in respect to their glasses and oil-holders, are different, but in respect to their light, One, and in respect to their illumination, One; nay, each one is identical with the other, without imputation of plurality, or diversity or multiplicity or separateness.” (`Abdu’l-Bahá, *Baha’i World Faith*, p. 371)
variance: different enough to cause dispute or controversy

6.2 “. . . certain forms and imitations have been persistently adhered to which have nothing to do with the foundation of the teachings of the Prophets of God. As these imitations are various and different, contention and strife prevail among the people of religious beliefs, and the foundation of the religion of God has become obscured.”

(`Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 297 #98.1)

adhered to: followed and obeyed
contention: assertive argument over differences
forms: prescribed patterns of religious practices: rituals, ceremonies, rites, and services
foundation: underlying truths and principles
imitations: mimicking of entrenched behaviors, traditions, and customs
obscured: unclear and not easily understood

persistently: in a continuing manner without change
prevail: gain dominance and control through strength and triumph
strife: bitter struggle for dominance and sometimes violent conflict where there is disagreement
various: indefinite in number

6.3 “Behold . . . how the sayings and doings of the followers of . . . have dulled the joy and fervor of its early days, and tarnished the pristine brilliancy of its light. In its primitive days, whilst they still adhered to the precepts associated with the name of their Prophet, the Lord of mankind, their career was marked by an unbroken chain of victories and triumphs. As they gradually strayed from the path of their Ideal Leader and Master, as they turned away from the Light of God and corrupted the principle of His Divine unity, and as they increasingly centered their attention upon them who were only the revealers of the potency of His Word, their power was turned into weakness, their glory into shame, their courage into fear. Thou dost witness to what a pass they have come.”

(Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 69)

adhered: faithfully conformed
a pass: “come to pass” means “to happen”
brilliancy: exceptional brightness and clarity
corrupted: altered and morally perverted
Divine unity: “*The essence of belief in Divine unity consisteth in regarding Him Who is the Manifestation of God and Him Who is the invisible, the inaccessible, the unknowable Essence [God] as one and the same.*” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 167)
dulled: limited the luster and life of
fervor: deep-seated passion of the soul

Ideal Leader and Master: the Manifestation of God
light: [figuratively] spiritual knowledge and goodness
precepts: commandments or principles intended as rules of action or conduct
primitive: original or early
principle: basic governing truth or standard
pristine: pure and unspoiled
revealers: clergy
strayed: [figuratively] wandered or deviated in conduct, belief, and purpose
tarnished: sullied, stained, or dimmed

6.4 “Should we study the divine religions with the perception of truth, we would then conclude that their underlying principle is the One Reality. All the religions of God are the reality. Reality does not accept multiplicity and division. But alas! that the fundamental reality is laid aside and forgotten and a catalogue of creeds, dogmas and rites have taken its place which are the basis of difference, the cause of hatred and prejudice and the establishment of the religion of God is totally forgotten and quite neglected.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. VII:4, 17 May 1916, p. 25)

basis: underlying foundations
catalogue: descriptive and systematic list
creeds: systems of beliefs
divine religions: including, but not limited to; Bahá'í, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion
dogmas: sets of principles laid down by authority as unquestionably true
establishment: specific founding purpose
fundamental: basic and essential
multiplicity: the state of being more than one

neglected: unattended; without due care and attention
One: single and undivided
perception: awareness and understanding
prejudice: ignorant and preconceived judgment of different others, marked by a sense of self-superiority, suspicion, intolerance, or irrational hatred
principle: governing truth or fact
Reality: truth of existence
rites: prescribed ceremonies
truth: what is factual and real
underlying: evident only on close inspection

6.5 “The Prophets and Manifestations of God bring always the same teaching; at first men cling to the Truth but after a time they disfigure it. The Truth is distorted by man-made outward forms and material laws. The veil of substance and worldliness is drawn across the reality of Truth. . . .

“Each time God sends a Great One to us we are given new life, but the Truth each Manifestation brings is the same. The Truth never changes but man’s vision changes. It is dulled and confused by the complication of outward forms.

“The Truth is easy to understand although the outward forms in which it is expressed bewilder the intelligence. As men grow they see the futility of man-made forms and despise them. Therefore many leave the churches, because the latter often emphasize the external only.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, p. 57)

bewilder: perplex and confuse
churches: organized body of religious worshipers
complication: complex and difficult make-up
despise: look upon with strong dislike and aversion
disfigure: cause damage through serious alterations
distorted: altered from its true meaning
dulled: made to be less active and clouded
external: refers to “outward forms”
forms: prescribed patterns of religious practices: rituals, ceremonies, rites, and services
futility: pointlessness; uselessness
Great One: Manifestation of God
grow: spiritually mature
Manifestations: great Prophets; chosen Messengers

man-made: created by humans, as distinguished from the divine Word
man’s: peoples’
material: not spiritual but worldly
men: people
new life: rebirth to truth and spirituality from worldliness and error
outward: emphasis on appearance rather than inner significance
reality: real existence
substance: means, wealth, and possessions
Truth: actual facts of what is real
veil: that which covers, disguises, or hides
worldliness: predominant concerns with material existence

6.6 “The religious differences and divisions which exist in the world are due to blind imitations of forms without knowledge or investigation of the fundamental divine reality which underlies all the religions. Inasmuch as these imitations of ancestral forms are various, dissensions have arisen among the people of religion. Therefore, it is necessary to free mankind from this subjection to blind belief by pointing the way of guidance to reality itself, which is the only basis of unity.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 287 #96.8)

ancestral: derived or copied from our ancestors
blind imitations: thoughtless and repetitious modeling of pointless and entrenched behaviors, traditions, and customs
dissensions: differences in opinion, causing separating or opposing groups
divine reality: that which is real and true about existence as conveyed by God through His Manifestations
forms: prescribed patterns of religious practices: rituals, ceremonies, rites, and services

fundamental: basic and essential
imitations: mimicking of entrenched behaviors, traditions, and customs
reality: what is real and true about existence
subjection: imposed obligation
underlies: is the foundation of
unity: a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and the struggle for dominance
various: indefinite in number

6.7 “Though our Cause unreservedly recognizes the Divine origin of all the religions that preceded it and upholds the spiritual truths which lie at their very core and are common to them all, its institutions, whether administrative, religious or humanitarian, must if their distinctive character is to be maintained and recognized, be increasingly divorced from the outworn creeds, the meaningless ceremonials and man-made institutions with which these religions are at present identified.”

(Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, p. 5)

administrative: connected or relating to the management or directing of affairs
Cause: advocated and supported truths [of the Bahá'í Faith]
ceremonials: sets of rules, customs, or rituals
common: shared and belonging to
core: essence or most important part
creeds: systems of belief
distinctive: special and unique qualities [of]
Divine: God-inspired
divorced: separated and disunited
humanitarian: the promotion of human ↗

welfare and social reform
identified: intimately connected
institutions: established practices, relationships, and administrative structures, authorized and maintained through prescribed rules and agencies
man-made: human-made
origin: source and beginning
outworn: no longer useful or acceptable
recognizes: formally accepts and acknowledges
unreservedly: without limits or holding back
upholds: agrees with and supports

6.8 “He [Bahá'u'lláh] reestablished the prophetic foundations, reformed and renewed the principles laid down by the Messengers of God who had preceded Him. And now it is hoped that through His life and teachings the East and West shall become so united that no trace of enmity, strife and discord shall remain.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 129 #49.10)

Bahá'u'lláh: Prophet founder of the Bahá'í Faith
discord: disunity, causing active disagreement or conflict
East and West: people of the far reaches of the earth
enmity: bitter attitudes or feelings of hatred or ill-will, often concealed
foundations: underlying truths and principles
principles: basic guiding truths, teachings, and standards

prophetic: of or relating to the prophets
reestablished: restored and brought back into existence
reformed: caused to be improved
renewed: restored into existence again
strife: a bitter struggle for dominance and sometimes violent conflict where there is disagreement
united: joined in a heartfelt condition of peace, love, agreement, and harmony

SOME QUESTIONS: *A cup from the showers of confirmation...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. The answers can be found in the quotations just studied. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers. The answers can be found on page 58.

1. One way religions have declined or deviated from the sacred path over time is by the believers turning their attention away from the Manifestation of God and “*increasingly centered their attention upon . . .*” _____

2. Those repeatable and predictable behaviors that cause the followers of religion to deviate from the sacred Path and contribute to the decline in their religion are:
 a. blind imitations c. dogmatic interpretations
 b. science d. adherence to outward forms

3. What is blind imitation? _____

4. What is dogmatic interpretation of sacred Scripture? _____

5. What are the “forms” `Abdu’l-Bahá has warned us about? _____

6. What did Shoghi Effendi ask the believers to increasingly divorce themselves from? _____

7. Bahá’u’lláh has reestablished the prophetic foundations and reformed and renewed the principles laid down by the Messengers of God who preceded Him.
 true false

8. On one occasion Bahá’u’lláh made the following comment regarding the spiritual concepts of the clergy in times past: “*The eye of divine mercy casteth its glance upon all that is past. It behoveth us to mention them only in favourable terms, for they do not contradict that which is essential.*”¹⁴
How do you think this can help us in our attitude towards the process of deviation and decline of religions past? _____

9. How could I apply what I learned in this section? _____

¹⁴ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Tabernacle of Unity*, p. 27 #2.18

Some Additional Teachings Common to Divine Religions...

SECTION 7

In this section we are going to study some additional spiritual truths found common to the divine religions as portrayed in the Bahá'í sacred writings. There are, most likely, others as well. However, the criterion for selecting verses for this study was confined to only those that clearly state the spiritual teaching is common to “all” or “every” religion, from “all” or “every” prophet, or something similar.

Please study the quotations in the following manner, which is the same as before except for 3B, which is specific to this section.

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...*

A. **Read the quotation** out loud in its entirety.

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. Each participant **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.

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

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

A. **Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.

* B. Take turns **stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about the **teachings common to all religions**.

1. Every major religion comes from God:

7.1 “Since thou hast faithfully obeyed the true religion of God in the past, it behooveth thee to follow His true religion hereafter, inasmuch as every religion proceedeth from God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.”

(The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 139)

behooveth: is advantageous and necessary for
His: God's
inasmuch as: given the fact that
peril: danger of injury, loss, or harm
proceedeth: comes forth

religion: including, but not limited to; Bahá'í, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion
Self-Subsisting: One able to be and exist without the aid of another

2. In their beginning the divine religions all taught there is only one God:

Historians, researchers, and theologians often categorize religions into monotheism (belief in one God) or polytheism (belief in many gods). This is because they categorize the religions based on how they are presented today and on their limited verifiable history. There is, however, an abundance of evidence from historical data that throughout known history there were great spiritual teachers all over the earth who taught the oneness of God. We have already considered many of them. Two examples not so well known include Native American spiritual teachers and the ancient Chinese teacher, Shang Ti, who lived before the development of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Here are some of the Bahá'í teachings on the oneness of God.

7.2 “His creation hath ever existed, and the Manifestations of His Divine glory and the Day Springs of eternal holiness have been sent down from time immemorial, and been commissioned to summon mankind to the one true God.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 174)

commissioned: authorized and empowered [by God]
Day Springs: Ones Who are the origin of renewed spiritual light
Manifestations: great Prophets or Messengers

one: single; only; matchless
summon: notify and command the attention of
time immemorial: time so long past as to be indefinitely ancient
true: real and actual

7.3 “All the divine Manifestations have proclaimed the oneness of God and the unity of mankind.”
 (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 32 #12.7)

divine: God-inspired; holy; sacred
Manifestations: great Prophets or chosen Messengers including but not limited to Krishna, Abraham, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, The Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh

proclaimed: formally and publicly declared
oneness of God: belief in only one God (monotheism); the singleness and indivisibility of God
unity: quality or state of being one

7.4 “The divine Manifestations have been iconoclastic in Their teachings, uprooting error, destroying false religious beliefs and summoning mankind anew to the fundamental oneness of God.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 154 #57.1)

anew: again, but differently
destroying: putting an end to and abolishing
divine: God-inspired; holy; sacred
fundamental: basic and essential
false: mistaken or incorrect
iconoclastic: opposed and destructive to established beliefs and institutions based on error or superstition; opposed and destructive to the use of images, pictures, or other representative objects (imagined or real) ↗

for worship or devotion
Manifestations: great Prophets or chosen Messengers including but not limited to Krishna, Abraham, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, The Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh
oneness of God: belief in only one God (monotheism); the singleness and indivisibility of God
summoning: stirring, arousing, and calling
uprooting: removing and bringing to an end

- 7.5 “The founder of Buddhism was a precious Being Who established the oneness of God, but later the original precepts were gradually forgotten and displaced. . . .”
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 2014 ed., p. 188 #8)

Being: person; soul
Buddhism: the religion growing out of the teachings of Gautama Buddha
established: confirmed beyond doubt
displaced: changed or removed
founder: one who brought into being and is the establisher

oneness of God: belief in only one God (monotheism); the singleness and indivisibility of God
precepts: divine commandments and instructions
precious: much loved and valued
original: initial or beginning

3. The divine religions all taught that truth and the knowledge of God is attained through recognition of His Manifestation for the age:

- 7.6 “The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence. To this most excellent aim, this supreme objective, all the heavenly Books and the divinely-revealed and weighty Scriptures unequivocally bear witness. Whoso hath recognized the Day Spring of Divine guidance and entered His holy court hath drawn nigh unto God and attained His Presence, a Presence which is the real Paradise, and of which the loftiest mansions of heaven are but a symbol.”
(Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 70)

attain(ed): succeed(ed) in acquiring
bear witness: serve as evidence and proof
court: inclusion of those who have exhibited favorable conduct
Day Springs: Manifestation of God
Divine: holy; sacred
enable: provide the means and opportunity for
heaven: the spiritual sphere and dwelling place of God, his angels, and the blessed souls who have passed on
know: recognize, become informed, and familiar with
loftiest: greatest and highest
man: human beings
mansions: dwelling places
nigh: near

objective: goal and purpose
Paradise: ultimate state of bliss, happiness, and delight
Presence: spiritual closeness or nearness, which is the knowledge and recognition of God, faith in Him, and reflection of His virtues
purpose: reason or intention
recognize(d): formally accept(ed) and acknowledge(d)
Scriptures: Writings considered holy and/or authoritative
supreme: highest and most excellent
symbol: sign or emblem to represent it
unequivocally: clearly, sincerely, and unquestionably
weighty: serious and greatly important

- 7.7 “True knowledge, therefore, is the knowledge of God, and this is none other than the recognition of His Manifestation in each Dispensation.”
(The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 89)

Dispensation: religious System that administers human affairs under divine authority for a particular period of time
knowledge: awareness and understanding of reality
Manifestation: great Prophet or chosen ↻

Messenger, including but not limited to Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster, The Báb, and Bahá’u’lláh
recognition: formal acceptance and acknowledgment
true: real and actual

7.8 “It is an established fact that the followers of all the religions believe in a reality, the benefits of which are universal; which reality is a medium between God and man. The Jews call that reality Moses, the Christians Christ, the Mussulmans Mohammed, the Buddhists Buddha and the Zoroastrians Zoroaster. Now mark well that none of these religionists have ever seen the founders; they have only heard his name. Could they overlook these names they would at once realize that all believe in a perfect reality which is an intermediary between the Almighty and the creatures.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Divine Philosophy*, pp. 155-156)

founders: great Prophets or chosen Messengers of their religions

intermediary: one who serves as a means to accomplish or achieve something; “. . . one who receives the full light of the divine splendor and radiates it over the human world as the earth’s atmosphere receives and diffuses the warmth of the sun’s rays.” (`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Divine Philosophy*, p. 32)

man: the people

mark well: take notice and give attention

medium: individual held to be a channel of communication

Mussulmans: a former translation for the word “Muslims”

overlook: skip over without notice or ignore

reality: existence that is true and real

realize: become fully aware

religionist: followers of religion

universal: present everywhere and includes all without exception

4. The divine religions all announced that God’s guidance would continue through future Prophets:

7.9 “. . . all the Prophets of God, whenever made manifest unto the peoples of the world, have invariably foretold the coming of yet another Prophet after them, and have established such signs as would herald the advent of the future Dispensation. To this the records of all sacred books bear witness.”

(Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude*, pp. 12-13)

advent: coming into being or arrival

bear witness: serve as evidence and proof

Dispensation: religious System that administers human affairs under divine authority for a particular period of time

foretold: prophesied or told ahead of time

herald: officially conveys the news and proclaim

invariably: without change

manifest: known or evident

Prophet(s): One(s) who reveal divinely inspired revelations of God

signs: indications of [Their] presence or existence

7.10 “The Lord of the universe hath never raised up a prophet nor hath He sent down a Book unless He hath established His covenant with all men, calling for their acceptance of the next Revelation and of the next Book; inasmuch as the outpourings of His bounty are ceaseless and without limit.”

(The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 87)

acceptance: willingness to favorably receive

Book: recorded Revelation by a Prophet

bounty: generously bestowed gifts and favors

covenant: binding agreement

established: originated and made permanent

inasmuch as: given the fact that

men: people

outpourings: full and continuous flowing

prophet: One who reveals divinely inspired revelations of God

raised up: placed higher in rank or dignity

Revelation: Communication of God’s will to humanity by a Prophet

- 7.11 “The holy Manifestations Who have been the Sources or Founders of the various religious systems were united and agreed in purpose and teaching. Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh are one in spirit and reality. Moreover, each Prophet fulfilled the promise of the One Who came before Him and, likewise, Each announced the One Who would follow.”
 (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 197 #71.2)

one: single and undivided; “. . . as that of lamps kindled: for these in respect to their glasses and oil-holders, are different, but in respect to their light, One, and in respect to their illumination, One; nay, each one is identical with the other, without imputation of plurality, or diversity or multiplicity or separateness.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, ↗

Baha'i World Faith, p. 371)
One: holy Manifestation or Prophet of God
promise: pledge of assurance or guarantee
Prophet: One who reveals divinely inspired revelations of God
reality: the true and real existence

5. The common purpose of all divine religion is love and unity:

- 7.12 “All the divine Manifestations have proclaimed the oneness of God and the unity of mankind. They have taught that men should love and mutually help each other in order that they might progress. Now if this conception of religion be true, its essential principle is the oneness of humanity. The fundamental truth of the Manifestations is peace. This underlies all religion, all justice. The divine purpose is that men should live in unity, concord and agreement and should love one another. Consider the virtues of the human world and realize that the oneness of humanity is the primary foundation of them all. Read the Gospel and the other Holy Books. You will find their fundamentals are one and the same. Therefore, unity is the essential truth of religion and, when so understood, embraces all the virtues of the human world. Praise be to God! This knowledge has been spread, eyes have been opened, and ears have become attentive. Therefore, we must endeavor to promulgate and practice the religion of God which has been founded by all the Prophets. And the religion of God is absolute love and unity.”
 (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 31 #12.7)

absolute: without exception
concord: friendly and peaceful relations
divine: God-inspired; holy; sacred
embraces: includes and incorporates
endeavor: try with earnest effort
essential: most important and necessary
foundation: underlying principle for establishment and support; “Those foundations of the Religion of God, however, which are spiritual and consist in human virtues, . . .” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 2014 ed., p. 55 #9)
fundamental: basic and essential
fundamentals: basic and essential truths
Gospel: teachings or revelation of Jesus, usually considered as the first four books of the New Testament contained in the Bible
humanity: includes all the human beings, regardless of their differences
justice: to render or conform to what is right, good, true, and fair as defined by the Word of God
love: an unconditional, vulnerable compulsion to be spiritually intimate, dominated by warm-hearted affection, compassion, and concern for the good of all
men: the people (of)

Manifestations: great Prophets or chosen Messengers including but not limited to Krishna, Abraham, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, The Báb, and Bahá’u’lláh
mutually: with shared concern for one another
oneness: heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony; quality, state, or fact of the singleness and indivisibility
oneness of God: belief in only one God (monotheism); the singleness and indivisibility of God
peace: serenity and harmony in human relations, free of disturbance and disorder
principle: governing moral truth
proclaimed: formally and publicly declared
progress: improve and advance
promulgate: make known openly and put into effect
underlies: is the foundation of
unity: a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and strife; quality or state of being one
virtues: human reflections of divine spiritual qualities and attributes

7.13 “Bahá’u’lláh said that God has sent religion for fellowship among humankind and not for strife and discord, for all religion is founded upon the love of humanity. . . . This is the reality of religion. If you investigate the reality and inner significance of their teachings you will find it so. You must not listen to hearsay but investigate the reality. The purpose is that religion is the cause of amity, love and fellowship, not of discord, enmity and estrangement.”

(`Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Scriptures*, p. 349 #675)

amity: friendly relations
discord: disunity, causing active disagreement or conflict
enmity: bitter attitudes or feelings of hatred or ill-will, often concealed
estrangement: indifference, hostility, alienation, or separation
fellowship: companionship, friendly association, and mutual concern
hearsay: what others say or have heard
love: an unconditional, vulnerable compulsion to be spiritually intimate, dominated by warm-hearted affection, compassion, and concern ↗

for the good of all
reality: true and real facts
religion: “But when we speak of religion, we mean the essential foundation or reality of religion, not the dogmas and blind imitations which have gradually encrusted it and which are the cause of the decline and effacement of a nation.” (`Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 363 #112.8)
significance: meaningful qualities
strife: striving or competing for superiority where there is conflict or disagreement

7.14 “All the divine messengers have come to this earth as specialists of the law of love. They came to teach a divine love to the children of men; they came to minister a divine healing between the nations; they came to cement in one the hearts of men and to bring humanity into a state of unity and concord. In this pathway, each one of these divine Manifestations of God’s love has accepted innumerable calamities and hardships. For the sake of a realization of love and concord amongst men, they have sacrificed their lives. How many persecutions have they suffered; so that they might bring into a state of harmony those contending nations and religions; so that they might create peace and consolation between these various peoples of the earth!”

(`Abdu’l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. III:17, 19 January 1913, p. 6)

calamities: misfortunes, loss, and misery
cement: unite or make firm
concord: friendly and peaceful relations
consolation: bring relief, comfort, and tranquility
contending: striving in opposition; competing
divine: God-inspired; holy; sacred
harmony: a pleasing and agreeable arrangement and functioning [of]
hearts: that aspect of one’s human nature that becomes attracted, loves, and grows attached; “. . . the human heart, which is the recipient of the light of God and the seat of the revelation of the All-Merciful, . . .” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 186)
love: spiritual intimacy, dominated by warm-hearted attraction, strong affection, and concern for the good of all

men: humanity
minister: give aid or service to
peace: serenity and harmony in human relations, free of disturbance and disorder
persecutions: injuries, grief, or suffering from being constantly harassed and afflicted for being different
realization: accomplishment or attainment
sacrificed: given up something of value for something of greater value; offered up
sake: special beneficial purpose
specialists: ones of expert capabilities, knowledge, and authority
unity: a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and strife

7.15 “His Highness the Merciful One hath caused the appearance of the splendors of love and affinity in the world of humanity, so that the individuals of mankind might be perfectly united and the rays of unity be revealed amongst the children of men. Hence He sent forth the holy Manifestations, inspired their hearts with the contexts of the heavenly books and instituted divine religions, in order that these sanctified personages, these revealed books, these religions of God might become the means of unity and accord, love and good fellowship in the human world.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Scriptures*, p. 303 #616)

accord: agreement and harmony
affinity: a spiritual relationship of attraction to one another
contexts: the light of meaning and perspective
fellowship: companionship, friendly association, and mutual concern
Highness: used as a title of high rank
instituted: established the practices, relationships, and administrative structures [for]
love: spiritual intimacy, dominated by warm-hearted attraction, strong affection, and concern for the good of all

Manifestations: great Prophets or chosen Messengers
men: humanity
Merciful One: Merciful God
personages: the Manifestations of God
rays: beams of radiant [spiritual] light
sanctified: holy; sacred
splendors: brilliance, magnificence, and glory
unity: a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and strife

6. The divine religions all teach the importance of prayer:

7.16 “. . . in all Dispensations the law of prayer hath constituted a fundamental element of the Revelation of all the Prophets of God—a law the form and the manner of which hath been adapted to the varying requirements of every age.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude*, p. 39)

adapted: made suitable and adjusted
constituted: made up or formed
Dispensations: religious Systems that administer human affairs under divine authority
element: feature or part
form: structure and arrangement
fundamental: basic and essential
law: rule of action or binding practice
manner: way or method of performing

prayer: “Prayer is conversation with God.”
 (`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, VII:4, 17 May 1917, p. 41)
requirements: appropriate necessities and conditions
Revelation: Communication of God's Will to humanity
varying: partially changing or different

7. All the Prophets of God manifest the qualities and attributes of God:

7.17 “These attributes of God are not, and have never been, vouchsafed specially unto certain Prophets, and withheld from others. Nay, all the Prophets of God, His well-favored, His holy and chosen Messengers are, without exception, the bearers of His names, and the embodiment of His attributes.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 48)

attributes: true spiritual qualities
bearers: ones who bring forth and are the expression
embodiment: representative in human form
exception: exclusion or question
names: glorious spiritual qualities and perfections
nay: not only this, but also

Prophets: Ones who reveal divinely inspired revelations of God
specially: with special favor
vouchsafed: graciously given or bestowed
well-favored: ones abundantly graced with admirable qualities

8. The divine religions all taught the eternal nature of the soul:

7.18 “In all religions the belief exists that the soul survives the death of the body. Intercessions are sent up for the beloved dead, prayers are said for their progress and for the forgiveness of their sins.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 89 #29.6)

forgiveness: withholding of punishment and pardoning
intercessions: acts of pleading or entreaty in favor of another or others
soul: “. . . the soul is the medium of the spiritual life.” (`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 370) “The soul is not a combination of elements, it is not composed of many atoms, it is of one indivisible substance and therefore eternal. It is entirely out of the order of the ↗

physical creation; it is immortal!”
 (`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 91 #29.13)
 “Know, verily, that the soul is a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel.” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 158-59)
survives: remains alive or in existence [after]

7.19 “In the heavenly Books, mention is made of the immortality of the spirit, which is the very foundation of the divine religions. . . .

“The ultimate rewards, which consist in life everlasting, have been explicitly recorded in all the heavenly Scriptures. They are divine perfections, eternal bounty, and everlasting joy. The ultimate rewards are the gifts and perfections that man attains in the spiritual realms after his ascension from this world, while the existential rewards are those true and luminous perfections which are attained while still abiding in this world, and which are the cause of everlasting life.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 2014 ed., pp. 257-259 #2-4)

abiding: firmly residing
ascension: arising [of the soul]
eternal bounty: endless and everlasting [spiritual] gifts and favors
divine perfections: God inspired attainment of virtues with the highest possible degree of excellence; “. . . the rewards of this life are the real luminous perfections which are realized in this world, and which are the cause of eternal life, for they are the very progress of existence.”
 (`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 324)
divine religions: religions inspired by God
everlasting life: unending existence; eternal life
existential: of this world of existence
explicitly: clearly; openly
foundation: underlying truth or principle

heavenly Books/Scriptures: writings containing the teachings of the Manifestations of God
immortality: unending existence; eternal life
life everlasting: unending existence; eternal life
luminous perfections: virtues with the highest possible degree of excellence radiating from the celestial worlds
man: a person
perfections: the highest possible degree of excellence
realms: places or spheres of reality
spirit: “The spirit, or human soul, is the rider; and the body is only the steed.” (`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 416 #123.5)
ultimate: eventual, conclusive, or final

9. The divine religions all taught the true reality of man:

7.20 “Every good thing is of God, and every evil thing is from yourselves. Will ye not comprehend? This same truth hath been revealed in all the Scriptures, if ye be of them that understand.”

(Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 149-50)

10. The purpose of all divine religions has been to nurture the true development of humanity:

- 7.21 “All the religions, all the prophets, all the great teachers had no other purpose than to raise mankind from the animal to the divine nature. Their purpose was to free man and to make him an inhabiter of the realm of Reality. For although the body of man is material, his reality is spiritual; although his body is darkness, his soul is light; although his body may seem to imprison him, his soul is essentially free.”
 (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. III:17, 19 January 1913, p. 3)

animal: “. . . the ego, the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature that can develop into a monster of selfishness, brutality, lust and so on.” (. . . on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, December 10, 1947, Lights of Guidance, p. 113 #386)
divine nature: “The attributes of his Divine nature are shown forth in love, mercy, kindness, truth, and justice, one and all being expressions of his higher nature. Every good habit, every noble quality belongs to man’s spiritual nature, . . .” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 60 #18.2)

free: liberate from personal and external influences
imprison: limit and restrain
inhabiter: one who lives or dwells
man: the human beings
purpose: aim and intention
realm: place or sphere
reality: true and real existence
raise: cause to be elevated and develop
soul: immortal essence
teachers: those who taught spiritual truths

- 7.22 “All the Prophets have come to promote divine bestowals, to found the spiritual civilization and teach the principles of morality. Therefore, we must strive with all our powers so that spiritual influences may gain the victory. For material forces have attacked mankind. The world of humanity is submerged in a sea of materialism. The rays of the Sun of Reality are seen but dimly and darkly through opaque glasses.”
 (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 12 #5.6)

civilization: highly developed society
divine bestowals: the boundless spiritual gifts from God; “. . . bestowals which are the wisdom and guidance of God and the favor of God, which constitute spiritual progress.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Divine Philosophy*, p. 34)
found: take steps in building
material forces: “The animal energies predominate in their activities; all their thoughts are directed to material things; day and night they are devoted to the attractions of this world, . . .” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 261 #90.2)
materialism: the desire and selfish pursuit of wealth, possessions, power, sensual pleasures, or social status, and the willingness to withstand and take part in conflict, contention, ☞

dissension, strife, separation, violence, chaos, hopelessness, and despair for their acquisition
morality: right and proper conduct or behavior
opaque: unclear
Prophets: chosen Messengers or Manifestations of God
promote: elevate and advance
rays: beams of moral or intellectual light (spiritual knowledge, wisdom, and goodness)
spiritual: pertaining to the development of divine virtues, attributes, and qualities [type of]
strive: devote serious energy or effort
Sun of Reality: God
victory: “It is certain that spirituality will overcome materiality and that the divine will have the victory over the human; . . .” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, Vol. 2, p. 323)

11. The divine religions all await a Promised One:

All religions foretell of and await a promised universal Messenger who will fulfill their expectations and renew and unite all religions. Bahá’ís believe that the Promised One foretold for the age we are now living in is fulfilled by Bahá’u’lláh. Here are some of the verses that affirm this belief.

7.23 “The Revelation which, from time immemorial, hath been acclaimed as the Purpose and Promise of all the Prophets of God, and the most cherished Desire of His Messengers, hath now, by virtue of the pervasive Will of the Almighty and at His irresistible bidding, been revealed unto men. The advent of such a Revelation hath been heralded in all the sacred Scriptures.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 5)

advent: important arrival
acclaimed: expressed with enthusiasm and praise
Almighty: God
bidding: expressed command or order
by virtue of: by the authority of
cherished: dearly held and fostered
Desire: sacred and earnest longing
heralded: officially proclaimed and foretold
men: humanity
Messengers: great Prophets or chosen Manifestations
pervasive: all-encompassing power [of the]

Promise: divine or sacred pledge
Prophets: Ones who reveal divinely inspired revelations
Purpose: main reason for the existence of
Revelation: specific Communication of God's Will to humanity by a Manifestation
revealed: made known
Scriptures: Writings considered holy and/or authoritative
time immemorial: time so long past as to be indefinitely ancient
Will: choice and desire

7.24 “For each and every people, and every religion, await a Promised One, and Bahá'u'lláh is that One Who is awaited by all; and therefore the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh will bring about the oneness of mankind, and the tabernacle of unity will be upraised on the heights of the world, and the banners of the universality of all humankind will be unfurled on the peaks of the earth.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 101 #65)

await: waits for
banner: flag-like sign of victory
Cause: advocated and supported Faith
oneness: heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony
Promised One: prophesied Manifestation of God or great universal spiritual Teacher, Prophet, Messenger, or Messiah
tabernacle: holy dwelling place

unfurled: unfolded
unity: a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and the struggle for dominance
universality: all-inclusive quality or state of oneness
upraised: raised or lifted up

7.25 “Briefly, there were many universal cycles preceding this one in which we are living. They were consummated, completed and their traces obliterated. The divine and creative purpose in them was the evolution of spiritual man, just as it is in this cycle. The circle of existence is the same circle; it returns. The tree of life has ever borne the same heavenly fruit.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 220 #79.9)

consummated: fulfilled in the highest possible degree of perfection
divine: God given
evolution of spiritual man: progressive development of the divine attributes, holy qualities, and heavenly virtues within humans
heavenly fruit: “Yea, this fruit [the fruit of the Tree of Life] is the knowing God and love for God, and reliance upon God and is the virtue with which the reality of man is adorned...” (`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, Vol. 3, p. 516)
obliterated: destroyed or rendered imperceptible
traces: signs and evidences of existence
tree of life: “By ‘the tree of life’ is meant the highest degree of the world of existence, that is, the station of the Word of God and His universal Manifestation.” (`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 2014 edition, p. 139 #7)

universal cycles: “...our claim is that a universal cycle in the world of existence comprises a vast span of time and countless ages and epochs. In such a cycle, the Manifestations of God shine forth in the visible realm until a universal and supreme Manifestation makes the world the focal centre of divine splendours and, through His revelation, brings it to the stage of maturity. The duration of the cycle He ushers in is very long indeed. Other Manifestations will arise in the course of that cycle under His shadow and will renew, according to the needs of the time, certain laws pertaining to material affairs and transactions, but They will remain under His shadow. We are in the cycle which began with Adam and whose universal Manifestation is Bahá'u'lláh.” (`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 183 #5)

SOME QUESTIONS: *A cup from the showers of confirmation...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following question. The answer can be found in the quotations just studied. When everyone has finished, review the question, then share and discuss the answers. All answers are valuable.

1. Name any three things from this section that is common to all religions: _____

SHARING EXERCISE: *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, one thing that was outstanding or inspiring and how it made them feel. Please remind everyone not to remark on the comments of others.

One thing from the quotations that was outstanding or inspiring to me was _____

What feeling or emotion did that bring up for you? _____

Explain _____

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

Facilitator

Read the following paragraph out loud and proceed as stated.

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

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** . . .” Suggest as many ideas as you want.

Facilitator

Read the following paragraph out loud, then take time for the participants to write out their individual plans for action (these are not shared).

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

From your experience in this study on *Spiritual Teachings Common to all Religions*, describe what **you** are inspired to put into reality and action. **I will** make conscious efforts to _____

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

SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR FACILITATING...

The following considerations for facilitators were created for use with the studies *Bahá'í Essentials*. This *study process* was developed over a forty-year period with the input and cooperation of numerous people. The intent has been to create a process for studying Holy Scripture consistent with Bahá'í principles and current scientific data as it pertains to adult learning.

PREPARING THE ENVIRONMENT

Take the time while organizing your study class to prepare an environment that will “create a spiritual atmosphere conducive to learning.” First, give some attention to the location of the study class. It is preferable to choose a place centrally located, easy to find, with plenty of parking, warm or cool enough for the participants, and with comfortable arrangements. You do not want to lose participants for reasons that could be avoided.

Many people have allergies and cannot tolerate being in environments housing dogs, cats, or creatures other than humans. Furthermore, animals can be a significant distraction. Cleanliness of the air and the physical surroundings helps create a more desirable learning environment.

Make an effort to minimize distractions as much as possible. It may be appropriate to turn off phones, televisions, radios, or other electronic devices that could interfere with the experience. You may want to hold the class where visual distractions are minimal or where curtains on the windows can help avoid distractions. Another consideration is the human environment. The activity of children or other household members may be evaluated and modified accordingly.

Some facilitators like to “set the mood” by preparing adequate and soothing lighting, adding pleasant fragrances (some people have allergies so be mindful), or even providing low background music before beginning the study. Be creative; be sensitive; be moderate. The International Teaching Center wrote: “They [facilitators] need to combine the qualities of love, humility, and patience with the dedication, perseverance, and commitment required to create a spiritual atmosphere conducive to learning.”¹⁵

GENERAL FACILITATING SKILLS

Facilitators have the primary role of **facilitating** the participant’s learning by guiding them through the study process. This can best be accomplished when you are sensitive to the dynamics of the participants.

Your task is not to disseminate information like a teacher. Rather, it is to guide, encourage, aid, and support the participants and ease their journey through the process of learning inherent in the lesson. Part of this is to help everyone feel comfortable in the learning environment. Participants have the best experience when appreciated, heard, acknowledged, validated, and encouraged. Consider all questions valid, all answers valuable, and all shared feelings genuine. Refrain from remarking on every comment

¹⁵ *Training Institutes and Systematic Growth*, February 2000

or from correcting trivial statements that may not be absolutely true or accurate. When participants have questions you cannot answer, simply tell them it's a good question, but you just don't know the answer, or that you will look it up with them later. This helps validate their question but does not make them feel as though they have asked something foolish.

Establishing and preserving unity in the group will be one of your principal functions. That is, strive to maintain a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony, free of conflict, dissension, contention, and strife among the participants. One way to help accomplish this is to ask the participants to be extremely kind to one another, and remind them of `Abdu'l-Bahá's directive: "Beware lest ye offend the feelings of anyone, or sadden the heart of any person, or move the tongue in reproach of and finding fault with anybody..."¹⁶ And, if by chance one of the participants should have the occasion to feel offended by another, remind them of `Abdu'l-Bahá's gentle guidance: "Let not your heart be offended with anyone. If some one commits an error and wrong toward you, you must instantly forgive him."¹⁷

The hope here is to create an optimal environment for learning and fellowship. For this to occur, a great deal of trust must be established among the participants. Your role will be to facilitate this as much as possible. The Bahá'í principle of independent investigation of truth is operative here and you will want to establish a setting for its fullest expression. One way to accomplish this is by discouraging these four vices: analyzing, generalizing, advising, and sermonizing to one another. To prevent these "vices" from occurring you may want to share the following suggestions with the participants:

When offering an opinion, speak about yourself only: your feelings, your thoughts, your opinions, and your goals. Try to avoid generalizations like we feel, they think, those people always, or Bahá'ís believe.

1. Refrain from giving direct or indirect advice to others through imperatives like: you **ought to**, Bahá'ís **need to**, they **should**, we've **got to**, we **must**, you **better**, people **have to**, etc.
2. Avoid imposing statements like: I want you to..., you won't..., you have to..., you can't..., you're not..., or you're going to....
3. Avoid all negative personal judgments about or towards others.
4. Keep all expressed attitudes, thoughts, feelings, or goals confidential. What you hear stays here!
5. Consider all questions as valid, even if they are not necessarily relevant.
6. Consider all answers as having some value, even though they may not appear to be correct.

Another role of the facilitator is to help create an emotionally safe environment by **equalizing** the distribution of power among the participants. You can best accomplish this by preventing controlling behaviors. It is normal in any group for controlling behaviors to surface, but undesirable in Bahá'í activities. These behaviors are demonstrated when individuals attempt to direct, guide, correct, advise, judge, reward, or punish others. You can best prevent these behaviors by reminding the participants of the guidelines above and directing them to return to the process of the study. You may also need to gently encourage those who are hesitant to join in, and if necessary, curtail those who speak excessively.

¹⁶ `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, Vol I, p. 45

¹⁷ `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 453 #134.2

GETTING STARTED

It is a courtesy to the host and the participants to start on time if possible. Once everyone is settled and ready to start, please begin with prayer. When outlining the conditions necessary for confirmations from the Holy Spirit upon the meeting of the Local Spiritual Assembly, `Abdu'l-Bahá wrote: "They must, when coming together, turn their faces to the Kingdom on high and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. ... Should they endeavour to fulfil these conditions the Grace of the Holy Spirit shall be vouchsafed unto them..."¹⁸ Even though this is not a Local Spiritual Assembly meeting, the conditions that attract divine assistance are principally the same. The Guardian reminded us: "...it is highly unlikely, nay impossible, for any enterprise to prosper and develop when deprived of divine bestowals and confirmation."¹⁹

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

The easiest way to introduce the study is for **the facilitator to read straight through the introduction** from beginning to end, or you may ask one of the participants to read the introduction. Keep in mind, however, that some people are hesitant to read out loud in public. You don't want to make anyone feel required to read or make anyone read through something so difficult it causes embarrassment. You will want to get to know the participants and then make wise choices as to whom you ask to read and when. The Bahá'í Writings contain words that for many are difficult to pronounce, and many will find themselves introduced for the first time to words that are common to Bahá'ís but not common to most people. So, proceed cautiously with the intent of making everyone feel comfortable enough in the learning environment to freely participate.

Generally, what is written in the introduction will suffice. Depending on the previous Bahá'í experience of the participants you can supplement the introduction to make sure everyone understands the topic, but rarely is this necessary. The introduction should take no more than a couple of minutes to complete. Avoid giving a fireside or deepening at this point. The study material to follow will take care of the details related to the topic.

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.

Facilitating this study is quite easy. All you have to do is follow the instructions given in the facilitator's notes provided on pages 4-5. Bahá'ís are accustomed to studying by reading through a quotation and then discussing its meaning. Often, only a few in the group will offer **opinions** while the rest take on the role of listening. This results in the majority learning what a few others **think** the Word of God means. This study course is different. Participants will read the quotations and **mine gems of truth** from the quotation by finding numerous answers to a specific question provided in the study material. This "mining of the gems of truth" helps the participants learn the obvious truths without undue interpretation. Furthermore, the participants may use the provided replacement phrases, definitions, or

¹⁸ `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 88

¹⁹ Shoghi Effendi, cited in *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol II, p. 301

synonyms to better understand the meaning of words used in the quotations. This way, there is less misinterpretation of words, less learning of meaning according to another's definition or understanding, and less misinformation from using alternative dictionary definitions or synonyms that can confuse the true intent. Following this process helps to ensure that the participants learn the intended meaning of the sacred verses.

If you are facilitating this study with some veteran believers, you may find they have a tendency to talk about each quotation and the various meanings and possible applications of wisdom it contains. If this happens **excessively**, encourage the participant to stay on track and follow the instructions as they are given. Getting caught up in time-consuming analysis of the verses can distract from the focus of the study and cause more confusion than it does clarity.

Study of the quotations begins by simply following the instructions provided for the facilitator on page 4, with occasional changes to #3b provided at the beginning of each section. The instructions are also listed below, *with additional comments noted in italics*.

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...*

Read the quotation out loud in its entirety.

Gently ask each participant to take part when it's their turn to read a quotation out loud, however, be very careful not to put any pressure on anyone to read and let them pass if they want. Some quotations are quite lengthy and may need to be read twice. Ask the group for feedback and they will tell you what they need.

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. Each participant **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.

Since part A and B are new procedures for most people, they may appear a little awkward at first. The first time you may need to demonstrate for the participants by choosing a word yourself, reading out loud its substitution phrase, definition, or synonym, and then reading it again into the sentence.

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

You may want to ask others to choose just any word to help them become familiar with this process. Participants have fun with this once they realize that choosing a word and reading its substitution into the sentence is not an admission of one's ignorance, but is a proactive effort to better understand the verse.

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

A. **Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.

B. Take turns **stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about... (*the topic of the section is inserted here*).

After a volunteer reads the quotation again, you simply read statement 3B until the participants have exhausted the possibilities. Many are familiar with the study process in which the participants were asked to respond with their answers word for word from the quotation. It isn't necessary for this process as some may discover implied truths or even some truths that don't seem relevant at all. It doesn't matter. All discovered gems of truth are legitimate and should be validated by the facilitator unless, of course, the perceived truth is completely at variance with Bahá'í teachings. The following guidance from the Notes of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas gives some general principles that can be helpful in facilitating this exercise.

“The interpretations of `Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi are considered divinely guided and are binding on the Bahá'ís. The existence of authoritative interpretations does not preclude the individual from engaging in the study of the Teachings and thereby arriving at a personal interpretation or understanding. A clear distinction is, however, drawn in the Bahá'í Writings between authoritative interpretation and the understanding that each individual arrives at from a study of its Teachings. Individual interpretations based on a person's understanding of the Teachings constitute the fruit of man's rational power and may well contribute to a greater comprehension of the Faith. Such views, nevertheless, lack authority. In presenting their personal ideas, individuals are cautioned not to discard the authority of the revealed words, not to deny or contend with the authoritative interpretation, and not to engage in controversy; rather they should offer their thoughts as a contribution to knowledge, making it clear that their views are merely their own.”²⁰

Proceed with this same process through all the numbered quotations.

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

The following **Sharing Exercise** is designed to provide an opportunity *at the end of each study time together* for the participants to share their heartfelt inspirations derived from the quotations. This exercise profoundly enhances learning and significantly facilitates bonds of love and affection among the participants. *Please don't skip this very important exercise.* The facilitator will want to keep this in mind as the study proceeds to make sure there is sufficient time at the end of each study time to accommodate this experience before the closing prayer.

Facilitator

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

²⁰ *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, Notes, pp. 221-22 #130

One thing from the quotations that was outstanding or inspiring to me was _____

What feeling or emotion did that bring up for you? _____

Explain _____

Please follow the instructions for this exercise very closely. The participants should read the statements and write down their comments. You may then choose someone who normally offers their opinion eagerly, or someone who was emotionally touched by one of the verses to be the first to share their outstanding or inspiring verse. After a person speaks, you may need to remind them: "What feeling or emotion did that bring up for you?" or: "please explain." Participants readily reveal their most inspiring verse, but frequently forget to tell how it made them feel and why. Sharing feelings this way helps the participant speak from the heart, which makes the experience personal and often very moving for them and others.

You may feel it necessary to assure the participants that no one is required to share. However, it is important they do so if possible. The design of this exercise has a bonding and unifying effect on the group that would be significantly reduced if many were to refrain from sharing. Of course, if an individual insists, it would be more appropriate to let that person pass and move on to the next person.

Remind the participants not to comment on the answers of others but to share only what they have identified as personally inspiring.

SOME QUESTIONS: *A cup from the showers of confirmation...*

Facilitator

At the *end of each section* there will be some questions presented to help the participants confirm their understanding of the material. Answers to the questions can be found on page 58.

*To facilitate the writing exercise, simply follow the facilitator's notes provided. The questions are usually simple and generally intended to check the accuracy of the participants' understanding. Sometimes, if time is running short, you may just read the questions one at a time and openly ask the participants for the correct answers. **Answers to the questions are located on page 58.***

APPLICATION EXERCISE: *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 (these are not shared).

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

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** . . .” Suggest as many ideas as you want.

At this point in the study, the participants engage their creative nature by exploring the endless possibilities for applying the gems of truth mined from the Sacred Writings. Again, you simply read through the first paragraph and encourage the participants to engage. They are asked to begin their answers with: “One could,” because this keeps them in the creative mode and out of an advisory mode, sometimes stated as: “you should”, “Bahá'is must”, “we had better”, “we've got to”, etc. This method allows the participants an opportunity to freely explore possibilities of application, and then follow with an immediate commitment to action.

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

From your experience in this study on *Spiritual Teachings Common to All Religions*, describe what **you** are inspired to put into reality and action. **I will make conscious efforts to** _____

Proceed with the application exercise by following the facilitator's notes provided. Give the participants enough time to write out their plans for action. Sometimes people are getting fidgety at this point so you may have to ask them to remain quiet so everyone can concentrate enough to finish. If there is limited time, have them simply make a mental note of their intentions.

CLOSING READING:

Sometimes at the end of a section there will be a closing reading, meditation, prayer, or commentary. Try to read straight through the closing without spending much time in discussion or explanation. Some participants may ask questions for clarity but try not to get drawn into a detailed explanation of everything in the reading. The reading is just for closure and reinforcement of the verities under study.

CLOSE WITH PRAYER:

SUGGESTIONS FOR INDEPENDENT STUDY...

Simple read through the introduction to this study and then proceed by studying the selected quotations one at a time as suggested below.

1. **READING:** Read the quotation out loud. Reading the material out loud will help you understand it better and retain the information longer.

2. **CONFIRMING MEANING:** If you would like to have a better understanding of a word used in the quotation, you can look up its substitute phrase, definition, or synonym in the boxes below the quotation. Read the substitute phrase, definition, or synonym out loud. Substitute phrases, definitions, or synonyms help to clarify and confirm the true meaning and intent of the author. Now read out loud from the quotation, the *sentence* containing the *word* you looked up *while substituting for that word*, its given phrase, definition, or synonym. This step is very important, so take your time and enjoy it. If you would like a better understanding of another word, repeat this process.

3. **FINDING VALUE:** The instructions say: “Take turns stating each basic fact or truth you can find in the quotation about....” You will replace this statement with the question: “What basic facts or truths can “I” find in the quotation about....” While browsing through the quotation, try to identify facts, truths, or important points about the subjects identified in the statement under “FINDING VALUE”. You can state these facts and truths out loud, or maybe even write them down.

4. Proceed in the same way with each of the numbered quotations.

SHARING EXERCISE: This exercise is very valuable as it allows you to identify and speak about those very special spiritual feelings generated by reading and studying the Bahá’í Writings. You will have no one to share with if you do this alone, however, just going through the exercise, writing it out, and stating it verbally is still important and can be especially moving. Consider doing this at the end every time you study.

SOME QUESTIONS are provided at the end of each section. Simple try to answer the questions provided. When you have finished, you will find the answers on page 58.

APPLICATION EXERCISE: First ask yourself the following question: How *could* the Bahá’í Teachings in this study class be translated into reality and action? Begin your answers with: “*One could....*” Exhaust the possibilities by thinking of as many ways you could apply what you learned.

Complete the exercise by writing out how **you** will make conscious efforts to translate what you have learned from this study class into reality and action.

Finish each section by reading through the closing reading or prayer if provided.

ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS: *Affirming treasures...*

SECTION 1: The Common Origin and Foundation of Divine Religion: p. 12

1. true
2. the foundation of all the religions of God is one
3. the virtues of God
4. a, b, and d
5. anything consistent with the spiritual virtues or divine qualities
6. all answers are valuable
7. religion
8. anything consistent with the exigencies of time and place
9. all answers all valuable

SECTION 2: The Station and Reality of The Virtues of God: p. 18

1. human beings (man)
2. b
3. any of the virtues from quotation 2b
4. all answers are valuable
5. truthfulness, from the definition of truthfulness in quotation 2b
6. all answers all valuable

SECTION 3: Basic Truths About Spiritual Virtues: p. 24

1. abrogated or removed
2. any or all of the following: heart, mind, soul, spirit, and meditative faculty
3. true
4. a and c
5. progress
6. science
7. the virtues and perfections
8. to educate the human beings to acquire the divine virtues and attain eternal life: all answers are valuable
9. the virtues of humanity

SECTION 4: The Changing Requirements of Divine Religion: p. 29

1. all answers are valuable
2. a, b, and e
3. all answers are valuable

SECTION 5: The Twofold Station of The Manifestations of God: p. 33

1. all answers are valuable
2. all answers are valuable
3. all answers are valuable
4. all answers are valuable

SECTION 6: The Deviation and Decline of Religion Over Time: p. 38

1. the clergy
2. a, c, and d
3. anything consistent with the definition in the boxes
4. anything consistent with the definition in the boxes
5. anything consistent with the definition in the boxes
6. the outworn creeds, the meaningless ceremonials, and man-made institutions
7. true
8. all answers are valuable
9. all answers are valuable

SECTION 7: Additional Teachings Common to the Divine Religions: p. 49

1. anything consistent with the quotations in section 7