

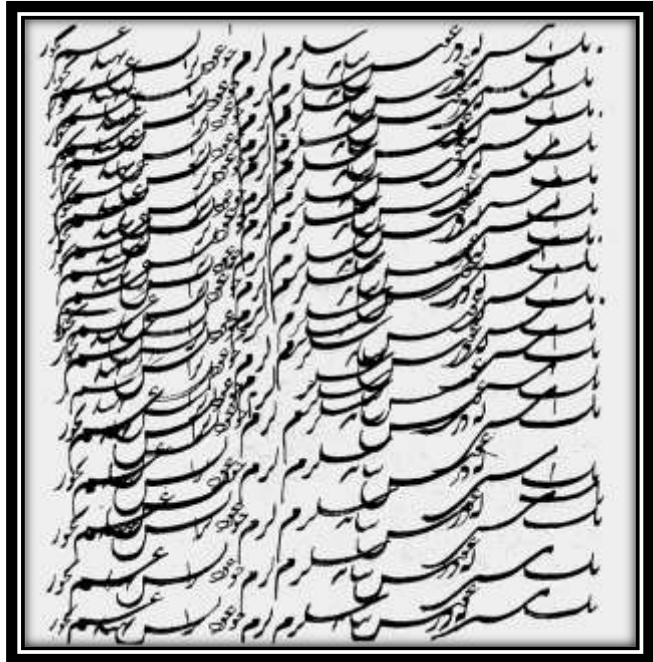
Children and Youth

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

To give proper attention and effort to the moral training and education of children and youth is a legacy to which each generation of humanity is spiritually bound. To behave as parents in an exemplary Bahá'í fashion, to consciously endeavor to teach morals to our children, to ensure our children's attendance in local Bahá'í classes and activities, and to volunteer as children and youth class teachers or aides, are some examples of how we can act responsibly as Bahá'í parents. To leave the children to their own devices, in a world fraught with spiritual dangers, is to act irresponsibly towards a sacred trust.

Bahá'í institutions of the Faith also share in the right and obligation to promote and provide moral education for children and spiritual training and activities for youth. Likewise, community members, individually and collectively, bear an obligation to interact with children and youth in ways that spiritually nurture them and integrate them into the life of the Cause.

In a world where all that is good depends upon proper education, moral training, and exemplary models, the Bahá'í community proceeds with assurance in the all-important task of rearing future generations with promise.



Calligraphic exercise of the Báb, written before He was ten

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

Facilitator

Review the following objective with the participants:

The objective of this study is to understand the fundamental verities or basic truths regarding the importance and responsibility of educating children in the Teachings of the Faith and the stimulation of youth participation in Bahá'í community life.

THE STUDY PROCESS: *Attaining the water of life...*

Facilitator

Review the following study process with the participants. Then study the numbered quotations that follow, one at a time as described below.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Take turns stating each basic fact or truth you can find in the quotation about the importance and responsibility of educating children in the Teachings of the Faith or the stimulation of youth participation in Bahá'í community life.

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

1. *It is the bounden duty of parents to rear their children to be staunch in faith, the reason being that a child who removeth himself from the religion of God will not act in such a way as to win the good pleasure of his parents and his Lord. For every praiseworthy deed is born out of the light of religion, and lacking this supreme bestowal the child will not turn away from any evil, nor will he draw nigh unto any good.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, cited in *The Compilation of Compilations*, Prepared by the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1990, Vol. I, p. 248, #563)

bestowal: gift given
bounden: binding or required
deed: action or activity performed
draw nigh: move steadily or gradually near
duty: morally due obligation
evil: that which is morally wrong, reprehensible, sinful, or wicked; "Evil is nonexistent; it is the absence of good." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *PUP*, p. 295)
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, *BWF*, p. 383)
good pleasure: honor or respect, deserved by satisfying the will or preference
light: illuminating spiritual knowledge and goodness
praiseworthy: deserving of honor or commendation [kind of]
rear: foster and raise
staunch: steadfast in loyalty or principle
supreme: highest in degree or quality [kind of]

2. *It is incumbent upon that Spiritual Assembly, that assemblage of God, to exert every effort to educate the children, so that from infancy they will be trained in Bahá'í conduct and the ways of God, and will, even as young plants, thrive and flourish in the soft-flowing waters that are the counsels and admonitions of the Blessed Beauty.*

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 126)

admonitions: counsels, warnings, and cautions against fault or oversight
Blessed Beauty: Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh [one of His titles]
conduct: ways of acting and behaving
counsels: given wisdom and guidance; advise
exert: put forth energetically

flourish: reach the climax of development
incumbent: imposed as a duty
Spiritual Assembly: local Administrative Body of each Bahá'í community
thrive: grow vigorously and prosper
trained: directed in development by education
ways: characteristic methods or manners

3. A child is as a young plant: it will grow in whatever way you train it. If you rear it to be truthful, and kind, and righteous, it will grow straight, it will be fresh and tender, and will flourish. But if not, then from faulty training it will grow bent, and stand awry, and there will be no hope of changing it.

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in *The Compilation of Compilations*, Prepared by the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1990, Vol. I, p. 287, #636)

awry: off the correct or expected course
bent: dishonest or corrupt
faulty: defective or erroneous
flourish: reach the climax of development
kind: to be of the disposition to do good and bring happiness to others

rear: foster and raise
righteous: morally right, fair, and just behaving
train: direct the development by educating
truthful: of the disposition to tell what is true and factual

4. The instruction of these children is even as the work of a loving gardener who tendeth his young plants in the flowering fields of the All-Glorious. There is no doubt that it will yield the desired results; especially is this true of instruction as to Bahá'í obligations and Bahá'í conduct, for the little children must needs be made aware in their very heart and soul that "Bahá'í" is not just a name but a truth. Every child must be trained in the things of the spirit, so that he may embody all the virtues and become a source of glory to the Cause of God.

(*Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 143)

All-Glorious: sole One completely splendid and magnificent
Cause of God: Bahá'í Faith
conduct: ways of acting and behaving
embody: represent in human form
glory: distinguishing honor and admiration
instruction: action of educating or teaching
must needs: of moral necessity or requirement

obligations: moral duties and responsibilities
spirit: heavenly, divine, or higher orientation
tendeth: fosters and cares for
trained: directed in development by education
truth: actual fact or reality
virtues: morally excellent qualities or traits
yield: give in return as a natural outcome

5. Indeed it is very important for the Faith, to extend the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh amongst the youth, as it is through their activities, that the Cause of our Beloved Master will in future spread all over.... They have upon their shoulders all the responsibilities for the progress of the Movement; it is our duty to rear their spiritual feelings, enlighten their hearts with the light of guidance which has been shed before us by the Master.

(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *The Compilation of Compilations*, Prepared by the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1990, Vol. II, p. 429, #2267)

duty: required or morally obligated action
enlighten: give knowledge, insight, and spiritual illumination to
Faith: Bahá'í Faith
feelings: sensitivities or sensibilities
light: illuminating spiritual knowledge and goodness
Master: a title given by Bahá'u'lláh specially to ↗

`Abdu'l-Bahá
Movement: series of organized activities working toward the objectives [of the Bahá'í Faith]
progress: advancement or development
rear: foster and raise
shed: poured fourth or cast
upon their shoulders: the burden and duty to assume

6. If the younger Bahá'í generation, in whom Shoghi Effendi has great hopes, take the pain of studying the Cause deeply and thoroughly, read its history, find its underlying principles and become both well informed and energetic, they surely can achieve a great deal. It is upon their shoulders that the Master has laid the tremendous work of teaching. They are the ones to raise the call of the Kingdom and arouse the people from slumber.

(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Dawn of a New Day: Messages to India 1923-1957*, p. 3)

arouse: stimulate to action or readiness; awaken
deeply: far beyond the superficial or surface; profoundly
Kingdom: eternal kingship of God
Master: a title given by Bahá'u'lláh specially to 'Abdu'l-Bahá
principles: basic governing truths or standards
slumber: an unaware or negligent state

teaching: imparting knowledge that causes others to learn [the Bahá'í Faith]
thoroughly: with detail and completely in all respects
tremendous: extremely great
underlying: foundation upon which everything is based [in its]
upon their shoulders: their burden and duty

7. In the field of teaching, in pioneer service and settlement, in the administration of the Cause, they must increasingly take an active part, as upon these same youth will devolve the many and heavy responsibilities of the future when the Bahá'ís will be called upon to demonstrate to their fellow-men the perfection of Bahá'u'lláh's laws and World Order in such a manner that bewildered humanity will turn to them as their only refuge.

(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Dawn of a New Day: Messages to India 1923-1957*, p. 181)

administration: managing, directing, and executing decisions
bewildered: [a] perplexed or confused
demonstrate: clearly show
devolve: fall or be passed on
fellow-men: associate human beings
pioneer service: when a Bahá'í who arises and leaves his home to journey to another country for the purpose of teaching the Bahá'í Faith
refuge: shelter or protection from danger or distress

responsibilities: acts for which there is moral accountability
settlement: when a Bahá'í arises and leaves his home to inhabit a place or region where no Bahá'ís reside
teaching: imparting knowledge that causes others to learn [the Bahá'í Faith]
World Order: future "Divine Civilization, the establishment of which is the primary mission of the Bahá'í Faith." (Shoghi Effendi, *WOB*, pp. 3-4)

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

Facilitator

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

The one thing from the quotations that was the most outstanding or inspiring to me was _____

It made me feel _____

Explain _____

SOME QUESTIONS: *A gentle breeze from the testing winds...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. They can usually find answers in the quotations just studied or in the introduction. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers.

1. `Abdu'l-Bahá said: "The education of children is one of the most great services."¹ List at least two reasons why it is so important for us to educate the children in the Teachings of the Faith.

2. Bahá'í children should be educated

- a. about how to grow a plant straight.
- b. in Bahá'í obligations and Bahá'í conduct.
- c. in the things of the spirit.
- d. in the ways of God.
- e. to be staunch in faith.

3. Shoghi Effendi wrote: "...it is, therefore, the sacred obligation of the parents to provide their children with a thorough Bahá'í training."² What do you think "sacred obligation" means?

4. Who has the responsibility of educating children in the Teachings of the Faith and stimulating youth participation in Bahá'í community life?

- a. mothers
- b. fathers
- c. the local Spiritual Assembly
- d. Bahá'í community members

5. The Universal House of Justice wrote: "...it is during this period that the mind is most questing and that the spiritual values that will guide the person's future behaviour are adopted."³ During what period of life do you think this occurs?

- a. childhood
- b. youth
- c. adulthood
- d. elderhood

6. It is vitally important to stimulate youth participation in Bahá'í community life because they have the tremendous responsibility and privilege to

- a. teach the Faith to others.
- b. pioneer to other countries to teach the Faith.
- c. settle areas where no Bahá'ís reside.
- d. eventually take on the administration of the Cause.
- e. awaken the people from their spiritual slumber.

7. Shoghi Effendi wrote that the Bahá'í youth "...can contribute so decisively to the virility, the purity, and the driving force of the life of the Bahá'í community, and upon whom must depend the future orientation of its destiny, and the complete unfoldment of the potentialities with which God has endowed it."⁴ What can we do to help keep the Bahá'í youth active in the Cause of God?

¹ LOG, p. 145, #483
² COC, Vol. I, p. 300, #664
³ LOG, p. 215, #721
⁴ ADJ, p. 22

APPLICATION: *Showing forth divine light...*

Facilitator

Read through the following paragraph together and proceed as stated. Then take time for the participants to write out their individual plans for action. When everyone has finished, move on to the closing reading.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote: *“It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action....”* Imagine how the Bahá'í Teachings in this study class could be translated into reality and action. Take turns sharing the possibilities. Begin your statements with: *“One could....”*

From your experience in this study class on the importance and responsibility of educating children in the Teachings of the Faith and the stimulation of youth participation in Bahá'í community life, describe what *you* are inspired to put into reality and action. *I will make conscious efforts to...* _____

'Abdu'l-Bahá on the importance of early spiritual education...

The root cause of wrongdoing is ignorance, and we must therefore hold fast to the tools of perception and knowledge. Good character must be taught. Light must be spread afar, so that, in the school of humanity, all may acquire the heavenly characteristics of the spirit, and see for themselves beyond any doubt that there is no fiercer hell, no more fiery abyss, than to possess a character that is evil and unsound; no more darksome pit nor loathsome torment than to show forth qualities which deserve to be condemned.

The individual must be educated to such a high degree that he would rather have his throat cut than tell a lie, and would think it easier to be slashed with a sword or pierced with a spear than to utter calumny or be carried away by wrath.

Thus will be kindled the sense of human dignity and pride, to burn away the reapings of lustful appetites. Then will each one of God's beloved shine out as a bright moon with qualities of the spirit, and the relationship of each to the Sacred Threshold of his Lord will be not illusory but sound and real, will be as the very foundation of the building, not some embellishment on its façade.

It followeth that the children's school must be a place of utmost discipline and order, that instruction must be thorough, and provision must be made for the rectification and refinement of character; so that, in his earliest years, within the very essence of the child, the divine foundation will be laid and the structure of holiness raised up.

Know that this matter of instruction, of character rectification and refinement, of heartening and encouraging the child, is of the utmost importance, for such are basic principles of God.

Thus, if God will, out of these spiritual schools illumined children will arise, adorned with all the fairest virtues of humankind, and will shed their light not only across Persia, but around the world.

It is extremely difficult to teach the individual and refine his character once puberty is passed. By then, as experience hath shown, even if every effort be exerted to modify some tendency of his, it all availeth nothing. He may, perhaps, improve somewhat today; but let a few days pass and he forgetteth, and turneth backward to his habitual condition and accustomed ways. Therefore it is in

early childhood that a firm foundation must be laid. While the branch is green and tender it can easily be made straight.

Our meaning is that qualities of the spirit are the basic and divine foundation, and adorn the true essence of man; and knowledge is the cause of human progress. The beloved of God must attach great importance to this matter, and carry it forward with enthusiasm and zeal.

(Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 136-37)

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...*

1. all answers are valuable
2. b, c, d, and e
3. something like: a Holy, hallowed or consecrated promise, duty, or responsibility
4. a, b, c, and d
5. b; "For any person, whether Bahá'í or not, his youthful years are those in which he will make many decisions which will set the course of his life. In these years he is most likely to choose his life's work, complete his education, begin to earn his own living, marry and start to raise his own family. Most important of all, it is during this period that the mind is most questing and that the spiritual values that will guide the person's future behaviour are adopted." (Cited in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 215, #721)
6. a, b, c, d, and e
7. all answers are valuable

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