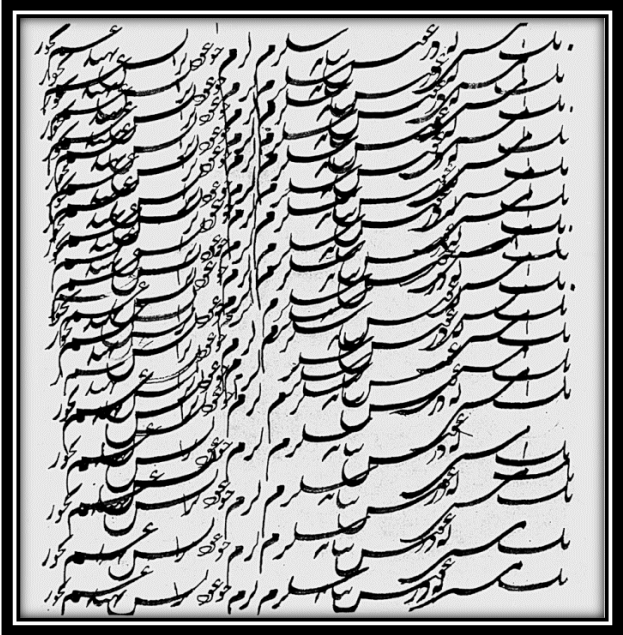


# Children and Youth

## 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.



Calligraphic exercise of the Báb, written before He was ten

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.

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

2. **CONFIRMING MEANING:** *A spray from the fountain of light...*  
 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 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, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 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, *Bahá'í World Faith*, 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  
**rear:** foster and raise  
**staunch:** steadfast in loyalty or principle  
**supreme:** highest in degree or quality

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, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 3-4)

**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 what spiritual feelings it enkindled. Please remind everyone not to remark on the comments of others.

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

It made me feel \_\_\_\_\_

Explain \_\_\_\_\_

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

### 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."<sup>1</sup> List at least two reasons why it is so important for us to educate the children in the Teachings of the Faith.

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2. Bahá'í children should be educated...

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

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

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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                       c. the local Spiritual Assembly  
 b. fathers                       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."<sup>3</sup> During what period of life do you think this occurs?

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

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."<sup>4</sup> What can we do to help keep the Bahá'í youth active in the Cause of God?

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<sup>1</sup> *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, p. 145, ¶483

<sup>2</sup> *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, p. 300, ¶664

<sup>3</sup> *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, p. 215, ¶721

<sup>4</sup> *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 22

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

### Facilitator

Read through #1 together and proceed as stated. Then take time for the participants to write out their individual plans for action in #2. (these are not shared) When everyone has finished, move on to the closing reading.

#### 1. IMAGINING THE 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.

#### 2. DECIDING ACTION: *Mirroring forth a beam of light...*

From your experience in this study class on Children and Youth, describe what **you** are inspired to put into reality and action. ***I will make conscious efforts to...*** \_\_\_\_\_

***My next step will be...*** \_\_\_\_\_

## CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song...*

### ‘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: A Bahá'í Reference file*, p. 215, ¶721)
6. a, b, c, d, and e
7. all answers are valuable

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