

Service to Humanity

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

Dear friends and lovers of the light. In this study we will explore the Bahá'í Teachings regarding service to humanity. We will learn about a service that is accompanied by a heartfelt love for the people and motivated solely by one's love for God, and not by any personal benefit, recognition, or gain. `Abdu'l-Bahá reminds us: "Love and serve mankind just for the sake of God and not for anything else."¹

Even though service to humanity is clarified and expanded by the Bahá'í Revelation, this is not a new teaching in religious history. The station and value of service as it relates to our spiritual reality can be found in religious scriptures written thousands of years ago. One example can be found in these recorded words of Jesus: "*And he among you who wants to be the first will be a servant to all.*"²

Some aspects of service to humanity are also covered in two separate *Bahá'í Essentials*' studies titled: "Service to the Cause" and "The Spiritual Nature of Work". This study, under the greater umbrella of service to humanity, will address the basic teachings of the Faith from serving the ones you're with, to social action in multi-national organizations that tend to the greater humanitarian needs.

An old adage says so much: "When everyone serves, everyone gets served." Let's explore.



From the Bahá'í Terrace Gardens, Haifa, Israel.

"...striving to serve. He who serves most is nearest to God."
— `Abdu'l-Bahá

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 service to humanity.

¹ From notes taken of talks given by `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. IX, p. 99

² *Aramaic Bible in Plain English*, Mark 10:44

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 service to humanity.

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

1. May you love all and serve all, because serving mankind is serving God. Everyone should be kind. Everyone should strive for unity and endeavour to serve mankind. All nations should become as one nation and each should serve all.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, from a talk cited in *Star of the West*, Vol. II, No. 12, p.3)

endeavour: try to achieve with earnest effort
kind: of the disposition to do good and bring happiness to others
serve: actively exert oneself to answer the needs of, be of use to, help, comfort, guard, protect, ↗

benefit, wait upon, watch over, and assist
strive: devote serious energy or effort
unity: a heartfelt condition of peace, love and harmony in human relations, free of contention, dissension and the struggle for dominance

2. Briefly, all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity. This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 176)

exertion: active exercise of any power or faculty
man: woman or man
minister: give aid or service
motives: emotions or desires that move one to act
prompted: moved to action
serve: actively exert oneself to answer the needs of, be of use to, help, comfort, guard, protect, ↗

benefit, wait upon, watch over, and assist
service: active exertion to answer the needs of, be of use to, help, comfort, guard, protect, benefit, wait upon, watch over, and assist
worship: an expression of respect, honor, adoration, and reverence to God

3. *All men have been called into being for the betterment of the world. It behooveth every soul to arise and serve his brethren for the sake of God.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tabernacle of Unity*, p. 43 #2.42)

arise: actively come forth
behooveth: is advantageous and necessary for
betterment: making better or improving
brethren: fellow human beings
called into being: brought into existence; created

sake: good pleasure and honor
serve: actively exert oneself to answer the needs of, be of use to, help, comfort, guard, protect, benefit, wait upon, watch over, and assist
men: women and men

4. *Cling ye to the hem of virtue, and hold fast to the cord of trustworthiness and piety. Concern yourselves with the things that benefit mankind, and not with your corrupt and selfish desires.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 29)

benefit: promote the well-being, prosperity, and happiness [of]
cling ye: hold on tight; adhere
concern: give importance, have interest, and be involved
cord: figuratively — moral or emotional tie
corrupt: morally dishonest, distorted, or perverted
desires: strong wants or perceived needs

fast: firmly without yielding
hem: sewn border or edge of a garment; figuratively — sacred closeness or nearness
piety: devoted reverence towards God
selfish: excessive or exclusive concern for one's own welfare and advantage [type of]
trustworthiness: being worthy of trust and reliance
virtue: commendable spiritual qualities and traits

5. The real fruit of the human tree is everlasting, and that is the love for God, that is the knowledge of God, that is service to the world of humanity, that is kindness to all mankind, and that is endeavouring and striving for the material and spiritual-or ideal-development of the world of man. This is the everlasting fruit. This is the divine effulgence. This is the divine bestowal. This is the everlasting life.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, from a talk cited in *Star of the West*, Vol. IV, No. 11, pp. 193-94)

bestowal: given gift
divine: God inspired; holy; sacred
effulgence: radiant light
endeavouring: trying to achieve with earnest effort
everlasting: eternally enduring; continuing without end
fruit: joyous effects or outcomes
ideal: highest standard of excellence [in the]

kindness: being of the disposition to do good and bring happiness
man: women and men
service: active exertion to answer the needs of, be of use to, help, comfort, guard, protect, benefit, wait upon, watch over, and assist
striving: devoting serious energy or effort

6. We must now highly resolve to arise and lay hold of all those instrumentalities that promote the peace and well-being and happiness, the knowledge, culture and industry, the dignity, value and station, of the entire human race. Thus, through the restoring waters of pure intention and unselfish effort, the earth of human potentialities will blossom with its own latent excellence and flower into praiseworthy qualities, and bear and flourish....

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 4)

arise: actively come forth
bear: come to satisfying fruition and production
dignity: state of being worthy of honor, nobility, and esteem
excellence: superior qualities and features
flourish: reach the climax of development
instrumentalities: ways, means, and methods
intention: determined aims and goals
latent: present capabilities, not yet obvious or active
lay hold of: come to understand and possess

potentialities: abilities that can be brought into existence and developed
promote: furthers the progress, supports, and actively encourages
pure: free and clear of morally defiled or corrupt
restoring: bringing back into existence, use or function
resolve: with determination, decide
well-being: state or condition of wellness, happiness, and prosperity

7. The friends must, with wisdom and moderation, after careful consultation, and according to their capacity and means, assist any association that sincerely aims to contribute to the common weal and to the best interests of the world of humanity. They should participate to the extent possible, but must refrain from the least involvement in politics, whether in their deeds, hearts, or words, and must shun and avoid any association with malevolent and contending parties.

(Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated September 1926 written to the Bahá'ís of the East – translated from the Persian, *Social Action*, #89)

association: group, society, or organization
common weal: general well-being, prosperity, and happiness
consultation: “Therefore, true consultation is spiritual conference in the attitude and atmosphere of love.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *PUP*, pp. 72-73)
contending: striving in opposition [type of]
extent: amount or degree
friends: Bahá'ís
interests: welfare, benefits, and advantages
involvement: inclusion; participation
least: even the slightest or smallest amount [of]

malevolent: [those] disposed to ill will, injury, or harm to others
moderation: with restraint from excesses
means: resources and funds
parties: groups organized for the purpose of promoting shared theories and principles
politics: anything pertaining to those interest groups or individuals who compete for partisan power or leadership in government
refrain: hold oneself back
shun: persistently turn away from
wisdom: sound and good judgement

8. Most appropriately conceived in terms of a spectrum, social action can range from fairly informal efforts of limited duration undertaken by individuals or small groups of friends to programs of social and economic development with a high level of complexity and sophistication implemented by Bahá'í inspired organizations. Irrespective of its scope and scale, all social action seeks to apply the teachings and principles of the Faith to improve some aspect of the social or economic life of a population, however modestly. Such endeavors are distinguished, then, by their stated purpose to promote the material well-being of the population, in addition to its spiritual welfare. That the world civilization now on humanity's horizon must achieve a dynamic coherence between the material and spiritual requirements of life is central to the Bahá'í teachings.

(The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2010 message to the Bahá'ís of the World, *Social Action*, #119)

Bahá'í inspired organizations: ...groups of believers who share a common vision of service. Such an agency can be established as a non-governmental, non-profit organization for social and economic development. (Office of Social and Economic Development, 1994 Aug 28, Evolution of Institutional Capacity)
central: of primary importance
coherence: unified whole
complexity: complicated, interrelated parts
conceived: thought of or understood
distinguished: by their prominent qualities, set apart from others
dynamic: changing and growth producing
endeavors: goal directed efforts
horizon: purview, range, or reach
implemented: carried out or put into effect

informal: requiring no authorization; unofficial
material: concerned with the physical aspects of life
modestly: limited in scope
principles: basic truths or standards
requirements: condition demanded as necessary and appropriate
social action: ...to apply the [Bahá'í] Revelation to the manifold dimensions of social existence. (The Universal House of Justice, *Framework For Action*, p. 222, #35.30)
sophistication: well refined development
spectrum: graduated scale with a wide range of characteristics
spiritual: divine or higher nature
welfare: health and happiness
well-being: state or condition of wellness, happiness, and prosperity

9. The highest righteousness of all is for blessed souls to take hold of the hands of the helpless and deliver them out of their ignorance and abasement and poverty, and with pure motives, and only for the sake of God, to arise and energetically devote themselves to the service of the masses, forgetting their own worldly advantage and working only to serve the general good.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 102)

abasement: degraded or humiliating state or condition
advantage: benefit, interest, prosperity, and well-being
blessed: spiritually happy
deliver: bring forth and liberate or rescue
devote: wholly give up
energetically: with great vigor and effectiveness
helpless: [people] unable to defend themselves or act without help
ignorance: absence of awareness and knowledge
masses: common people of society

pure: free and clear of morally defiled or corrupt
righteousness: quality of doing what is morally right, fair, and just
sake: good pleasure and honor
serve: actively exert oneself to answer the needs of, be of use to, help, comfort, guard, protect, benefit, wait upon, watch over, and assist
service: active exertion to answer the needs of, be of use to, help, comfort, guard, protect, benefit, wait upon, watch over, and assist
worldly: material and social

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. Since God is unknowable and unattainable, one of the best ways we can express our love for Him is by being of service to _____.
2. Social action for Bahá'ís might include service in such broad fields as

<input type="checkbox"/> a. agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> g. the advancement of women
<input type="checkbox"/> b. healthcare	<input type="checkbox"/> h. race relations
<input type="checkbox"/> c. education	<input type="checkbox"/> i. industry and trade
<input type="checkbox"/> d. the environment	<input type="checkbox"/> j. arts and sciences
<input type="checkbox"/> e. economic development	<input type="checkbox"/> k. the development of culture
<input type="checkbox"/> f. politics	<input type="checkbox"/> l. all the above

Continued on next page...

3. That the world civilization now on humanity's horizon must achieve a dynamic coherence between the _____ and spiritual requirements of life is central to the Bahá'í teachings.
4. Bahá'u'lláh tells us that we have been brought into being “*for the betterment of the world*” and created “*to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization*”. This means
- a. we were created to be of service to humanity
 - b. us being on the planet makes for a better world
 - c. none of the above
 - d. a and b
5. Two conditions recommended for service to mankind include a motive that is pure and for the sake of God.
- true
 - false
6. Is helping people in a way that supports their harmful, wrongful, or destructive behavior to themselves or others considered a service to humanity?
- yes
 - no
7. Bahá'u'lláh wrote: “*Beware lest ye commit that which would sadden the hearts of your fathers and mothers. Follow ye the path of Truth which indeed is a straight path. Should anyone give you a choice between the opportunity to render a service to Me and a service to them, choose ye to serve them, and let such service be a path leading you to Me. This is My exhortation and command unto thee. Observe therefore that which thy Lord, the Mighty, the Gracious, hath prescribed unto thee.*”¹
 What does this say to you about prioritizing one's service to humankind? _____

8. In service to mankind, our motive is to be concerned with the things that benefit others, and not our own
- a. potential for prosperity
 - b. worldly advantages
 - c. corrupt and selfish desires
 - d. welfare and benefits
 - e. material or social rewards
 - f. all the above
9. Service to humanity might include serving the better interests of
- a. your fellow employees
 - b. your neighbors
 - c. your children
 - d. your friends
 - e. whomever you are with
 - f. those you feel incompatible with
 - g. all the above

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, cited in *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, p. 387, #824

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 serving humanity, describe what **you** are inspired to put into reality and action. *I will make conscious efforts to...* _____

From a talk given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá...

This meeting is, verily, the noblest and most worthy of all meetings in the world because of these underlying spiritual and universal purposes. Such a banquet and assemblage command the sincere devotion of all present and invite the downpouring of the blessings of God. Therefore, be ye assured and confident that the confirmations of God are descending upon you, the assistance of God will be given unto you, the breaths of the Holy Spirit will quicken you with a new life, the Sun of Reality will shine gloriously upon you, and the fragrant breezes of the rose gardens of divine mercy will waft through the windows of your souls. Be ye confident and steadfast; your services are confirmed by the powers of heaven, for your intentions are lofty, your purposes pure and worthy. God is the helper of those souls whose aim is to serve humanity and whose efforts and endeavors are devoted to the good and betterment of all mankind.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 448)

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...*

1. humankind
2. all except f and l
3. material
4. a
5. true
6. no
7. all answers are valuable
8. f
9. g

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