

# To Study and Deepen

## INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

To deepen our love and understanding of this glorious Faith, to study its life-giving principles, and to partake regularly of its illuminating guidance does nothing less than to lovingly and comprehensively nurture our very soul in the purpose for which it was created—to know and love God.

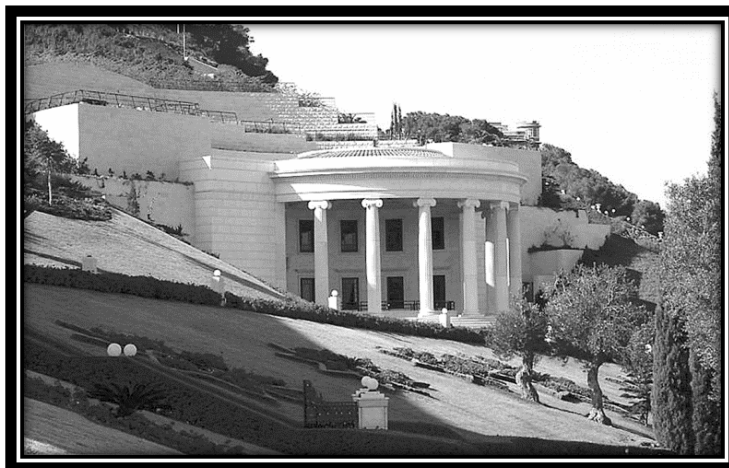
To study and deepen in the Faith, among other things, primarily requires one to read, meditate on, and study the Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice on a regular basis. Furthermore, attendance at Bahá'í summer and winter schools, institute courses, study classes, deepenings, study circles, lectures, and talks, or the reading of Bahá'í books, or listening to Bahá'í recordings, or watching Bahá'í videos, can all constitute study and deepening in the Faith.

We are encouraged by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to "...investigate and 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."<sup>1</sup>

From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian we read: "The more deep our studies the more we can understand the significance of the teachings.

"In the Cause we cannot divorce the letter from the spirit of the words. As Bahá'u'lláh says we should take the outward significance and superimpose upon it the inner. Either without the other is wrong and defective."<sup>2</sup>

Let us explore this subject of study and deepening with eagerness and joy.



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

### Facilitator

Review the following objective with the participants:

The objective of this study is to understand the fundamental verities or basic truths regarding the importance of studying and deepening in the Faith.

<sup>1</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 459 #137.1

<sup>2</sup> From a letter dated 16 February 1932 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, cited in *Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, p. 215 #461

## 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 **studying or deepening in the Faith**.

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

1. His advice to you is to continue deepening your knowledge and understanding of this Revelation, both by means of patient and thorough study of Bahá'í writings, and through active association with your fellow-believers and close participation in the activities of your local Bahá'í community.

(From a letter dated 12 February 1940 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, cited in *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, p. 225, #491)

**association:** joint action in common interests or activities  
**deepening:** making deeper, more comprehensive, and more developed  
**means:** the use

**participation:** partaking in common  
**patient:** calm endurance under suffering or provocation  
**thorough:** carried through to completion with full detail and exactness

2. Deepening is far more a matter of developing a spiritual attitude, devotion and selflessness than it is of acquiring information, although this, of course, is also important.

(*Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986: The Third Epoch of the Formative Age*, p. 499, #289.4)

**attitude:** mind set, disposition, or emotional state  
**devotion:** acts of ardent dedication and affection

**selflessness:** devotion to the welfare and concerns of others above one's own

3. *Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths.*

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

**depths:** profound, immeasurable, and vast extent  
**immerse:** engross the attention of; absorb  
**My words:** the revelation and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh  
**ocean:** great source; immensity; "...the oceans of inner meaning and explanation..." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 147)

**pearls:** highly valued insights of knowledge and wisdom; "...the pearls of Divine knowledge and wisdom that lie concealed within the ocean of its words." (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, p. 85 #180)  
**wisdom:** deep, thorough, and mature knowledge and understanding of truth and reality

4. Indeed if an avowed follower of Bahá'u'lláh were to immerse himself in, and fathom the depths of, the ocean of these heavenly teachings, and with utmost care and attention deduce from each of them the subtle mysteries and consummate wisdom that lie enshrined therein, such a person's life, materially, intellectually and spiritually, will be safe from toil and trouble, and unaffected by setbacks and perils, or any sadness or despondency.

(Shoghi Effendi, cited in *The Compilation of Compilations*, Prepared by the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1990, Vol. I, p. 204, #427)

**attention:** mental concentration; careful thinking  
**avowed:** openly declared or frankly acknowledged  
**consummate:** complete, perfect, and of the highest quality  
**deduce:** determine by logical reasoning; infer  
**depths:** abundant inmost parts; profoundness  
**despondency:** temporary or partial loss of courage or hope; dejection  
**enshrined:** held as sacred; cherished  
**fathom:** penetrate and come to thorough understanding of; comprehend  
**immerse:** engross the attention of; absorb  
**mysteries:** things unexplained or unknown that remains so secret or obscure as to excite ☞

curiosity and wonder  
**perils:** exposure to risk, danger, harm or loss  
**safe:** free of harm, danger, or loss; protected  
**setbacks:** that which reverses or hinders progress; impediments  
**subtle:** marked by or requiring mental keenness  
**teachings:** specific beliefs, concepts, perceptions, principles, standards, morals, ideals and truths taught [in the Bahá'í Faith]  
**toil:** long, strenuous, and fatiguing labor; drudgery  
**unaffected:** not changed, affected, or influenced  
**utmost:** the greatest or highest degree of  
**wisdom:** deep, thorough, and mature knowledge and understanding of truth and reality

5. *The understanding of His words and the comprehension of the utterances of the Birds of Heaven are in no wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán, The Book of Certitude*, p. 211)

**Birds of Heaven:** Holy Prophets or Manifestations of God  
**chastity of soul:** faithfulness in thought and intention to the love of God  
**comprehension:** understanding; grasping of the knowledge of  
**dependent:** conditioned or reliant  
**freedom of spirit:** liberated from influence, restraints, or restrictions in perception or course of action  
**purity of heart:** *"A pure heart is as a mirror; cleanse it with the burnish of love and severance from all save God, that the true sun may shine" ☞*

*therein and the eternal morning dawn."*  
 (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Call of the Divine Beloved*, p. 31 ¶43); "The pure heart is one that is entirely cut away from self. To be selfless is to be pure."  
 ('Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 107)  
**His words:** the inspired Word of God through the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh  
**human learning:** learning directly from other human beings  
**in no wise:** in no way or manner  
**solely:** to the exclusion of all else  
**utterances:** oral or written expressions

6. The principles of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh should be carefully studied, one by one, until they are realized and understood by mind and heart—so will you become strong followers of the light, truly spiritual, heavenly soldiers of God, acquiring and spreading the true civilization in Persia, in Europe, and in the whole world.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, Twelfth Ed., p. 9 #8)

**civilization:** society characterized in all its aspects by spiritual enlightenment, progressive development, and human refinement  
**heavenly soldiers:** holy ones who puts forth effort and sacrifice for the Cause  
**light:** illuminating spiritual knowledge and ☞

goodness of God  
**principles:** basic truths and beliefs  
**realized:** brought into being and made real  
**studied:** read and examined with diligence and attention  
**true:** intended; ideal

7. His brotherly advice to you, and to all loyal and ardent young believers like you, is that you should deepen your knowledge of the history and of the tenets of the Faith, not merely by means of careful and thorough study, but also through active, whole-hearted and continued participation in all the activities, whether administrative or otherwise, of your community. The Bahá'í community life provides you with an indispensable laboratory, where you can translate into living and constructive action the principles which you imbibe from the Teachings. By becoming a real part of that living organism you can catch the real spirit which runs throughout the Bahá'í Teachings. To study the principles, and to try to live according to them, are, therefore, the two essential mediums through which you can ensure the development and progress of your inner spiritual life and of your outer existence as well. May Bahá'u'lláh enable you to attain this high station, and may He keep the torch of faith forever burning in your heart!

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 2 November 1933, cited in *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, p. 219 #475)

**administrative:** connected or relating to the management or directing [of Bahá'í affairs]  
**ardent:** eager and zealous  
**community:** Bahá'í community  
**deepen:** make deeper, more comprehensive, and more developed  
**imbibe:** take into the mind and retain  
**indispensable:** absolutely necessary and not subject to being set aside or neglected

**laboratory:** place for observation, study, and practice  
**mediums:** means for learning  
**principles:** basic truths and beliefs  
**station:** standing or position  
**study:** to read and examine with diligence and attention  
**tenets:** principles, beliefs, and doctrines held to be true

## 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 and why. 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 \_\_\_\_\_

I felt this way because \_\_\_\_\_

## 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. One of the reasons we study and deepen is to acquire wisdom. What is wisdom? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How is it, do you think, that study and deepening in the Bahá'í writings can help keep us unaffected by setbacks and perils, or any sadness or despondency, or toil or trouble? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Bahá'ís can continue to deepen their knowledge of the spirit and truths of the Bahá'í Faith...
  - ☐ a. by means of patient and thorough study of the Bahá'í Writings.
  - ☐ b. by wearing sacred things.
  - ☐ c. from genetic memory passed on from being born to Bahá'í parents.
  - ☐ d. by close participation in the activities of the local Bahá'í community.
  - ☐ e. through active association with fellow believers.
4. Understanding of the Word of God is dependent upon what three things? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Understanding the Word of God is *not* dependent upon human learning. What is human learning? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Shoghi Effendi wrote: "If you read the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá with selflessness and care and concentrate upon them, you will discover truths unknown to you before and will obtain an insight into the problems that have baffled the great thinkers of the world."<sup>1</sup> How could this be? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. One of the outcomes of study and deepening is the acquisition of knowledge and understanding that allows us to better contribute to the development of true civilization. What is true civilization? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Is participation in this study considered deepening?  
☐ Yes      ☐ No
9. Bahá'í community life provides a living environment wherein one can apply the following guidance from Bahá'u'lláh: "*Treasure the companionship of the righteous....*"<sup>2</sup> How might this constitute deepening? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. To best acquire a clear understanding of the Bahá'í teachings requires one to primarily study...
  - ☐ a. the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh.
  - ☐ b. the Writings of the Báb.
  - ☐ c. the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.
  - ☐ d. the writings of the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi.
  - ☐ e. the writings of the Universal House of Justice.

<sup>1</sup> *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, p. 205, ¶430

<sup>2</sup> *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, from the Persian, #3

## 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 “To Study and Deepen,” 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...*

### A talk by `Abdu'l-Bahá to a Bible class in 1912.

I have been informed that the purpose of your class meeting is to study the significances and mysteries of the Holy Scriptures and understand the meaning of the divine Testaments. It is a cause of great happiness to me that you are turning unto the Kingdom of God, that you desire to approach the presence of God and to become informed of the realities and precepts of God. It is my hope that you may put forth your most earnest endeavor to accomplish this end, that you may investigate and 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. ... It is difficult to comprehend even the words of a philosopher; how much more difficult it is to understand the Words of God. The divine Words are not to be taken according to their outer sense. They are symbolical and contain realities of spiritual meaning. For instance, in the book of Solomon's songs you will read about the bride and bridegroom. It is evident that the physical bride and bridegroom are not intended. Obviously, these are symbols conveying a hidden and inner significance. In the same way the Revelations of St. John are not to be taken literally, but spiritually. These are the mysteries of God. It is not the reading of the words that profits you; it is the understanding of their meanings. Therefore, pray God that you may be enabled to comprehend the mysteries of the divine Testaments.

Consider the symbolical meanings of the Words and teachings of Christ. He said, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever.” When the Jews heard this, they took it literally and failed to understand the significance of His meaning and teaching. The spiritual truth which Christ wished to convey to them was that the reality of Divinity within Him was like a blessing which had come down from heaven and that he who partook of this blessing should never die. That is to say, bread was the symbol of the perfections which had descended upon Him from God, and he who ate of this bread, or endowed himself with the perfections of Christ, would undoubtedly attain to everlasting life. The Jews did not understand Him, and taking the words

literally, said, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Had they understood the real meaning of the Holy Book, they would have become believers in Christ.

All the texts and teachings of the holy Testaments have intrinsic spiritual meanings. They are not to be taken literally. I, therefore, pray in your behalf that you may be given the power of understanding these inner real meanings of the Holy Scriptures and may become informed of the mysteries deposited in the words of the Bible so that you may attain eternal life and that your hearts may be attracted to the Kingdom of God. May your souls be illumined by the light of the Words of God, and may you become repositories of the mysteries of God, for no comfort is greater and no happiness is sweeter than spiritual comprehension of the divine teachings. If a man understands the real meaning of a poet’s verses such as those of Shakespeare, he is pleased and rejoiced. How much greater his joy and pleasure when he perceives the reality of the Holy Scriptures and becomes informed of the mysteries of the Kingdom!

I pray that the divine blessings may descend upon you day by day, that your hearts may be opened to perceive the inner significances of the Word of God. There is no fruit in knowing the mere letters of the Book. ... I pray that you may be quickened by the breaths of the Holy Spirit and illumined by the rays of the Sun of Truth. May you be favored with heavenly blessings in the threshold of God and attain to eternal life. This is my prayer. May God bless and enlighten you.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 458-60 #137.1-137.4)

### **ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...***

1. anything similar to: deep, thorough, and mature knowledge and understanding of truth and reality
2. all answers are valuable
3. a, d, and e
4. anything similar to: “...*purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit.*”
5. anything similar to: learning directly from other human beings
6. all answers are valuable
7. anything similar to: the intended or ideal society characterized in all its aspects by spiritual enlightenment, progressive development, and human refinement
8. yes
9. all answers are valuable
10. a, b, c, d, and e

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