

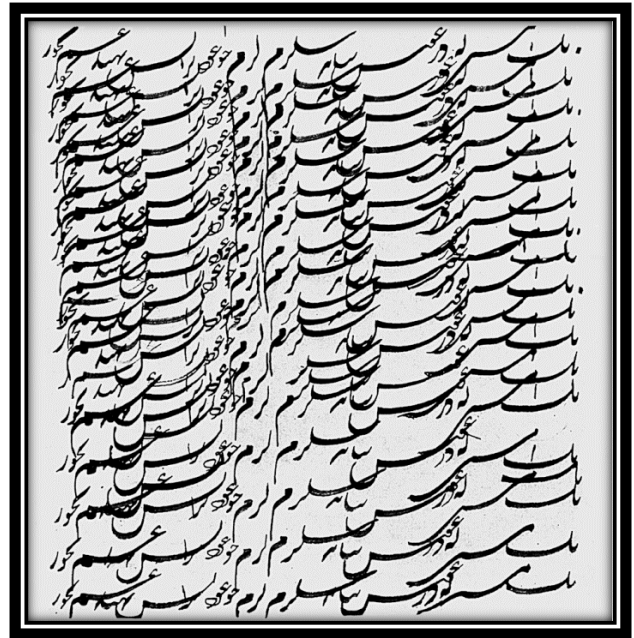
Children and Youth

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

To give proper attention and effort to the moral education and training 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 nurture spiritual qualities in 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 tutors, 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 Bahá'í community life.

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...*
 - 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: divine gifts; "...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)

bounden: binding or required

deed: action or activity performed

draw nigh: move steadily or gradually closer

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 ¶97.14)

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*, p. 383)

good pleasure: honor or respect, deserved by satisfying the will or preference

light: illuminating spiritual knowledge and goodness

praiseworthy: deserving of honor, praise, or respect

rear: foster and raise

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..." (`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 363 ¶112.8)

staunch: firm, loyal, and steadfast

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 #97)

admonitions: loving and firm warnings and cautions against wrongful behavior
Blessed Beauty: Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh [one of His titles]
conduct: ways of acting and behaving
counsels: wise guidance, advice, and directions
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 successfully
trained: taught skills and proficiencies
ways of: behaviors harmonious with

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, just, and virtuous in accordance with the divine spirit
train: guide and direct the development
training: guidance and direction
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 #123)

All-Glorious: God; sole One completely splendid and magnificent
Cause of God: today, the 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: taught skills and proficiencies through instruction and guidance
truth: actual fact of what is true and real
virtues: divine spiritual qualities and attributes
yield: give in return as a natural outcome

5. Of particular importance is the training of the youth to enable them to stand firm against the perils of the society in which they live. They should be encouraged to participate in Bahá'í activities, while pursuing their education in fields that will benefit humanity.

(The Universal House of Justice to the Iranian Believers Throughout the World, from a letter dated March 1997, ¶13, translated from Persian)

benefit: promote the well-being, prosperity, and happiness [of]
enable: provide the means and opportunity for
encouraged: lovingly supported and assisted to feel hopeful and be inspired
fields: subjects of study and learning

perils: risk of danger, harm, or loss
pursuing: proceeding to accomplish
stand firm: remain steadfast in belief and conviction, especially in the face of pressure, opposition, or difficulty
training: teaching of skills and proficiencies

6. 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 and 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)

7. “O thou who art young in age! May the confirmations of the Merciful enable thee to attain to His bountiful bestowals. Since thou wert adorned with the recognition of the Day-star of Revelation when thou wert in the prime of youth, beseech thou God to enable thee to achieve that which will be immortalized in the book of existence. Mortality overtaketh everything except what is uttered and carried out for God's sake; such (words and deeds) are deathless. Strive that thou mayest drink of the wine of immortality and attain unto the Kawthar of steadfastness.”

(Letter from The Universal House of Justice to the Iranian Believers Throughout the World, March 1997, ¶15, translated from Persian)

adorned: spiritually advantaged or enhanced
beseech: make a sincere and urgent request
bestowals: 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)
bountiful: plentiful; abundant
confirmations: validations and assurances that cause spiritual strength
Day-star of Revelation: the Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh
enable: provide the means and opportunity for
immortality: everlasting life

immortalized: given eternal glory
Kawthar: abundant blessings of the thirst-quenching waters
Merciful: kind and compassionate God
mortality: that which is subject to death
recognition: formal acceptance and acknowledgment
sake: pleasure and honor
steadfastness: firmness and constancy in belief and devotion
strive: devote serious energy and effort
uttered: spoken or expressed in writing
wine: “...an allegorical sense – such as being the cause of spiritual ecstasy.” (*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The Most Holy Book*, Notes, p. 165 #2)

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."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. | ☐ 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."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 | ☐ 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."³ During what period of life do you think this occurs?

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

Continued on the next page...

¹ *Lights of Guidance*: A Bahá'í Reference File, p. 145, #483

² *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, p. 300, #664

³ *Lights of Guidance*: A Bahá'í Reference File, p. 215, #721

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.
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."¹ What can we do to help keep the Bahá'í youth active in the Cause of God? _____
8. Shoghi Effendi wrote: "I would strongly urge you to utilize, to the utmost possible extent, the wealth of authentic material gathered in Nabíl's stirring Narrative [*The Dawn-Breakers*] and to encourage the youth to master and digest the facts recorded therein as a basis for their future work in the teaching field, and as a sustenance to their spiritual life and activities in the service of the Cause."² How might we help make this happen as parents, community members, or administrators? _____

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... _____

¹ Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 22

² Shoghi Effendi, cited in *The Compilation of Compilations*, Prepared by the Universal House of Justice, 1963 - 1990, Vol. I, p. 207, #436

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 #111)

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...*

1. all answers are valuable
2. b, c, d, and e
3. anything similar to: 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, and d
7. all answers are valuable
8. all answers are valuable

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