

What About Religion?

A Study of Bahá'í Writings

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

The condition of the world is such that the need or value of religion is being seriously questioned, and challenged to such a degree, that its influence and support continue to diminish. And yet, a high percentage of people believe in, and want, spirituality, but are unable to find fulfillment in religion. Why?

"We will, therefore," as `Abdu'l-Bahá has written, "investigate religion, seeking from an unprejudiced standpoint to discover whether it is the source of illumination, the cause of development and the animating impulse of all human advancement. We will investigate independently, free from the restrictions of dogmatic beliefs, blind imitations of ancestral forms and the influence of mere human opinion; for as we enter this question, we will find some who declare that religion is a cause of uplift and betterment in the world, while others assert just as positively that it is a detriment and a source of degradation to mankind. We must give these questions thorough and impartial consideration so that no doubt or uncertainty may linger in our minds regarding them."¹

"*Chaos and confusion,*" writes Bahá'u'lláh, "*are daily increasing in the world. They will attain such intensity as to render the frame of mankind unable to bear them. Then will men be awakened and become aware that religion is the impregnable stronghold and the manifest light of the world, and its laws, exhortations and teachings the source of life on earth.*"² Such is the clear warning from Bahá'u'lláh, accompanied by a prophetic promise of hope.

What we are about to learn is that true religion is the light of the world, and that serious social and personal problems arise when people turn away from religion once religion deviates from its true purpose. Let us investigate this premise with an open and loving heart and an attentive and prejudice-free mind, and delve into the Bahá'í teaching pertaining to the need for *true* religion.



Some Sacred Books of the World's Great Religions

"Religion is the light of the world."
`Abdu'l-Bahá

¹ `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 361 #112.2

² Bahá'u'lláh, cited in *The Compilation of Compilations II*, p. 165 #1587

Dear Participants...

You are about to engage in a study of the sacred Writings of the Bahá'í Faith. We will be exploring the teachings that help us understand the true purpose and reality of religion. We will study the Word of God from the latest Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh, and those of His predecessor, The Báb. We will also learn from the writings and talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the writings of Shoghi Effendi, the only two designated interpreters of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings. Our study will search for truths that support both our personal spiritual journey and those that contribute to the advancement of society as a whole.

It's Language...

It's important to understand that the material we will be studying comes from old-world languages. The talks and writings quoted herein were originally written in either Arabic or Persian. The English translators were either Persian, British, or American from the last century so the phrasing has an elevated spiritual or religious overtone common to that era, which may seem unusual when compared with modern English. Furthermore, it has been the decision of the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi, to translate the sacred Scriptures into the finest Oxford Style English, and to retain the King James English style common to sacred Scriptures of the past that express a lofty separation of Scripture from that of common English.

Reading Bahá'í quotations and thoroughly understanding the English vocabulary can be difficult for even the most literate among us. A believer was advised by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to "...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."³ And Bahá'u'lláh tells us: "*Let no one be content with mere hearing; rather doth it behoove everyone to ponder that which this Wronged One hath revealed.*"⁴ However, before one can ponder or derive the hidden meaning in the heart of the words, understanding the definition of the words is undeniably important. Bahá'u'lláh reminds us that "*...the reading of the scriptures and holy books is for no other purpose except to enable the reader to apprehend their meaning and unravel their innermost mysteries. Otherwise reading, without understanding, is of no abiding profit unto man.*"⁵ Therefore, to help understand the English text, definitions, synonyms, or simple replacement phrases of various words or word-couples in the text are provided in the boxes below each quotation to help clarify the meaning of words in context and enhance our understanding of what is written. The primary dictionary used was the 1934 printing of Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, Second Edition, as this was the dictionary habitually referred to by the Guardian in his translations of the sacred Text.

The "him" and "her" of it all...

The primary use of singular nouns and pronouns in masculine form (e.g., he, him) throughout Bahá'í Text is purely to accommodate the requirements of proper English. *Proper* English demands the use of masculine forms (he, him), under most circumstances, for pronouns that are intended to represent a man or to represent *both* men and women. The phrase "a new race of men," for example, is clearly intended to refer to all of humanity, not just to males. Similarly, other masculine forms should be understood to be universal in intent. Only when referring *specifically* to a woman is "her" or "she" considered proper.

The Bahá'í writings were originally written in either Persian or Arabic. Singular pronouns in the Persian language are gender-neutral, whereas, gender in Arabic is more complicated, but presents similar problems for translation. Plural pronouns (they, them) are, fortunately, gender-neutral in both languages.

Currently, it is more common than not for American English writers to use gender-neutral alternatives for the pronouns "man" and "men" whenever possible. Therefore, in this study, where practical, gender-neutral pronoun alternatives for these two words are provided in the boxes below each quotation.

³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 459 #137.1

⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Fountain of Wisdom*, p. 120 #8.62

⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, p. 172

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“Another asked why the teachings of all religions are expressed largely by parables and metaphors and not in the plain language of the people.

“‘Abdu’l-Bahá replied: ‘Divine things are too deep to be expressed by common words. The heavenly teachings are expressed in parable in order to be understood and preserved for ages to come. When the spiritually minded dive deeply into the ocean of their meaning they bring to the surface the pearls of their inner significance. There is no greater pleasure than to study God’s Word with a spiritual mind.’”⁶

⁶ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London*, pp. 79-80

Facilitator Guidelines

This section is a brief review of guidelines for facilitating this deepening. Facilitators may want to also consider reading through the more extensive “*Facilitator Guidelines for Group Study*” found [HERE](#).

This study experience is designed to allow the participants an opportunity to explore specifically selected Bahá’í verses that pertain to the common foundations of religion with minimal commentary on their meaning or purpose. It also provides for a sharing of those heartfelt discoveries of truth one encounters from the experience, as well as, an opportunity to collectively explore how these teachings might be applied in our lives, and an opportunity to personally design one’s own plans to implement these blessed spiritual truths. A fuller understanding and appreciation of this study process and its decades of history and development can be found at www.bahaessentials.com in the document titled “Developmental History of Bahá’í Essentials”, or accessed directly at this [link](#):

Unlike an instructor, the role of the facilitator is to guide, aid, and assist the participants through a study of the quotations and accompanying exercises by gently but frequently referring them to the study process as described. The study process is designed such that it will easily and thoroughly guide the participants through the entire study on its own. The facilitator simply reminds the participants to follow the process.

Let’s review the following Study Process:

Please study all the quotations in this deepening in the following manner:

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...***

PARTICIPANTS: 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...(this will be different in each section)

Facilitator

Note: The replacement phrases, definitions, or synonyms won’t always read easily into the sentences and some are merely symbolic renditions and not literal.

Facilitator!

The following **Sharing Exercise** is designed to provide an opportunity *at the end of each study time together* for the participants to share their heartfelt inspirations derived from the quotations. This intimate sharing profoundly facilitates learning and the enhancement of group unity among the participants.

Each time you gather to study, please allow time at the close of each study time to accommodate this sharing exercise before the closing reading or prayer.

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

Near the *end of each section* there will be some questions presented to help the participants confirm their understanding of the material. Answers to the questions can be found on the last page of each section.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY: *A look to the horizon...*

1. To understand the Bahá'í Teachings on the true meaning of religion.
2. To understand the purpose and value of religion and why we need it.
3. To be clear on what happens to societies and individuals living without religion.
4. To understand why and how religion can lose its way and purpose.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

How Definitions/Replacement Phrases Are Prepared

To write a definition or replacement phrase for the quotations found in this study I begin with a review of the definition found in the 1934 printing of Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, Second Edition, as this was the dictionary used by the Guardian in his translations of the sacred Text from Persian and Arabic to English. [\[source\]](#) Then, I review the definitions rendered in several elementary dictionaries, because they give a simplified definition that is often helpful. I often refer to the First Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary as well as this was the predominant dictionary used at Oxford where the Guardian attended college. I also use several online sources in an effort to produce a definition that is consistent with current renditions of the word if possible. Serious consideration is always given to the context of the word and how it is used in the statement. Thus, the definition of a specific word may appear slightly different from quotation to quotation. I also do a thorough search of the Writings on the Bahá'í search engine "Ocean" to see if or how 'Abdu'l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi might have defined the word and how they used it in context. Plus, prayer and meditation, until a suitable rendition is forthcoming.

Provisional Translations

As you proceed through this study you may note the designation "Provisional Translation" in the reference notes following a few of the quotations. I selected these quotations over other optional authorized translations because I felt they best conveyed the basic truths of the Revelation on the given subject.

For Bahá'í purposes, "provisional translations" refer to renderings of the Writings that have been produced by one or more translators (Bahá'í or not) in a personal capacity. These stand in contrast to "authorized translations," which have undergone a rigorous vetting and editing process facilitated by the Universal House of Justice—the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith—who then approves these translations for publication in Bahá'í texts.

In a memorandum from the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Center, entitled "Policies Governing Authorized and Provisional Translations of the Bahá'í Holy Writings into English and their Publication", dated 4 July 1999, we read:

"Individual believers are free to translate into English any of the Holy Writings for their own use. Such translations may also be issued electronically, and may be published in circulars or journals without review by anyone other than the editors of the publications, but they must, in all cases, be clearly labeled as 'provisional translations.'" [\[source\]](#).

The True Meaning of Religion

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

What do we mean by “religion”?

First of all, let us consider the concept of religion itself. We will be exploring the meaning of religion as it is described by the central figures of the Bahá’í Faith. What is being presented here are the fundamental verities or basic facts and truths, as gleaned from the Bahá’í Writings on the Bahá’í perspective pertaining to the reality of religion. Please consider the value of laying aside all preconceived understandings of religion, that one may be enabled thereby to explore the possibility of a new perspective of what true religion was intended to be, and what it still can be. It is helpful to keep this present in mind as we study the following verses together in exploration of a greater understanding.

Please study the quotations in this section in the following manner, which is the same as the process presented on page 4, except 3B, which is specific to the material in this section.

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...*

PARTICIPANTS: 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 **what the Bahá’í teachings mean by “religion”**.

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

- 1.1 “The Great Being saith: O ye children of men! The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and enmity. This is the straight Path, the fixed and immovable foundation.”
(*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 215)

animating: giving life, spirit, or energy to
discord: absence of unity, producing active disagreement or conflict
dissension: difference in opinion, causing separating or opposing groups
enmity: bitter attitudes or feelings of hatred or ill will, often concealed
fellowship: companionship, friendly association, and mutual sharing
foster: carefully promote the growth and development of
foundation: basic and essential principle or truth
fundamental: basic and essential
immovable: incapable of being altered
interests: welfare, benefits, and advantages
love: an unconditional, vulnerable compulsion to be spiritually intimate, dominated by warm-hearted affection, compassion, and concern for the good of all
men: the people
promote: advance, further, and elevate in rank, grade, or position

purpose: goal to be attained; intention
Religion: includes, but is not limited to, Bahá'í, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion; “. . . by religion is meant that which is ascertained by investigation and not that which is based on mere imitation, the foundations of Divine Religions and not human imitations.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, First Tablet to The Hague, 17 December 1919, cited in *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 302)
safeguard: make safe against loss or injury; protect
suffer: allow; permit
The Great Being: God, through the Manifestation Bahá'u'lláh
unity: heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and the struggle for dominance

- 1.2 “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 and which are the cause of the decline and effacement of a nation.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 363 #112.8)

blind imitations: thoughtless and repetitious mimicking of pointless and entrenched behaviors, traditions, and customs
decline: gradual downward change to an inferior, weaker, or failed condition
dogmas: developed opinions, principles, and beliefs laid down, without adequate grounds, by some authority as being unquestionably true
effacement: wearing away and destruction
encrusted it: created an outward covering of thoughts, beliefs, opinions, and habits
essential: most important and necessary

foundation: underlying truths, teachings, and purpose; “Those foundations of the religion of God, however, which are spiritual and consist in human virtues, . . .” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 2014 ed., p. 55 #9)
reality: the true and real existence
religion: “. . . by religion is meant that which is ascertained by investigation and not that which is based on mere imitation, the foundations of Divine Religions and not human imitations.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, First Tablet to The Hague, 17 December 1919, cited in *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 302)

- 1.3 “Religion, moreover, is not a series of beliefs, a set of customs; religion is the teachings of the Lord God, teachings which constitute the very life of humankind, which urge high thoughts upon the mind, refine the character, and lay the groundwork for man’s everlasting honour.”
 (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 52-53 #23)

character: distinguishing traits and qualities
constitute: establish or form
customs: a body of habitual, usual, familiar, or customary behaviors and practices which regulate social life
groundwork: foundation and support
high: supreme, superior, or noble; marked by elevated moral and intellectual principles
honour: being held in high regard for moral worth, nobility, and excellence of character
life: eternal life: “...the rewards of this life are the real luminous perfections (the spiritual qualities, attribute, and virtues radiating from the celestial worlds) which are realized in this world, and are the very progress of existence.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’i World Faith*, pp. 324-25)

man’s: a person’s
refine: improve and perfect; raise to a higher spiritual state
religion: includes, but is not limited to, Bahá’í, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion
series: a number of things or events standing or succeeding in order and connected by a like relationship
teachings: values, morals, beliefs, concepts, perceptions, principles, standards, ideals and truths
urge: inspire; encourage

- 1.4 “True religion is the foundation of spiritual union, the union of thought, the union of susceptibilities, the unity of customs and the ideal chain binding together all the children of men. Through its practical realization, the minds and souls will receive development by divine instruction; they will become assisted to investigate reality, attain to a lofty station of wisdom and establish the basis of a divine civilization....

“In short, by religion we mean those necessary bonds which have power to unify. This has ever been the essence of the religion of God. This is the eternal bestowal of God! This is the object of divine teachings and laws! This is the light of the everlasting life!”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a letter written to the Honorable Secretary of the Sixth International Congress of Free and Progressive Christians and other Religious Liberals, held in Paris, France, July 16-22, 1913, cited in *Divine Philosophy*, pp. 160-61 ¶6.4, 6.7, a provisional translation of the original text by Ahmad Sohrab, 1918.)

bestowal: gift conferred
binding: uniting and bonding
chain: figuratively: connective element
children of men: people
customs: habitual, usual, familiar, or customary behaviors and practices which regulate social life
development: gradual improvement, advancement, and growth
divine: God inspired; holy; sacred
essence: core reality and purpose
establish: originate and made permanent
everlasting life: the eternal life of the soul
foundation: underlying base for establishment and support
light: clear and understandable knowledge
lofty: impressively high
object: intention or purpose
practical realization: practice and application to bring it forth

reality: what is real and true about life
religion: includes, but is not limited to, Bahá’í, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion
spiritual: higher, divine, or heavenly oriented
susceptibilities: impressionable feelings that affect moral judgements and decisions
teachings: values, morals, beliefs, concepts, perceptions, principles, standards, ideals and truths taught by the founding Prophets and Manifestations of the religions of God
true religion: religion that is truthfully real and genuine
unify: bring together in peace, love, and harmony
union: joining together in peace, love, and harmony
unity: joining together in peace, love, and harmony

- 1.5 “True religion is the source of love and agreement amongst men, the cause of the development of praiseworthy qualities, but the people are holding to the counterfeit and imitation, negligent of the reality which unifies, so they are bereft and deprived of the radiance of religion.”
(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 179 #63.8)

bereft: lacking or withheld from
counterfeit: false and misleading representation
development: gradual improvement, advancement, and growth
imitation: deceptive representation that pretends something genuine
love: an unconditional, vulnerable compulsion to be spiritually intimate, dominated by warm-hearted affection, compassion, and concern for the good of all
men: the people
negligent of: carelessly failing to properly attend to
qualities: virtues, powers, and traits of character
radiance: emanating energy, light, and love

reality: existence that is true and real
religion: includes, but is not limited to, Bahá'í, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion; “. . . by religion is meant that which is ascertained by investigation and not that which is based on mere imitation, the foundations of Divine Religions and not human imitations.” (`Abdu'l-Bahá, First Tablet to The Hague, 17 December 1919, cited in *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 302)
true religion: religion that is truthfully real and genuine
unifies: brings people together in peace, love, and harmony

- 1.6 “People think religion is confined in an edifice, to be worshipped at an altar. In reality it is an attitude toward divinity which is reflected through life.”
(Attributed to `Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in *Divine Philosophy*, p. 15 ¶134, a provisional translation by Ahmad Sohrab, 1918.)

altar: designated site or structure of worship, ritual, and ceremony
attitude: mental, emotional, and behavioral state of being
confined: limited to and kept
divinity: the sacred and holy; Godlike characteristics; spirituality
edifice: elaborately constructed building [for worship]

reality: the true and real existence
reflected: mirrored forth or expressed
religion: includes, but is not limited to, Bahá'í, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion
worshipped: giving expressions of respect, honor, and reverence

- 1.7 “It is evident, therefore, that the divine teachings are intended to create a bond of unity in the human world and establish the foundations of love and fellowship among mankind. Divine religion is not a cause for discord and disagreement. If religion becomes the source of antagonism and strife, the absence of religion is to be preferred.”
(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 117 #47.3)

antagonism: mutual opposition between groups
discord: disunity, causing active disagreement or conflict
divine teachings/religion: includes, but is not limited to, Bahá'í, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion
establish: confirm and permanently secure
fellowship: companionship, friendly association, and mutual sharing
foundations: underlying base for establishment ↗

and support
love: an unconditional, vulnerable compulsion to be spiritually intimate, dominated by warm-hearted affection, compassion, and concern for the good of all
strife: striving or competing for superiority where there is conflict or disagreement
unity: a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and the struggle for dominance

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, one thing from the quotations 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. The answers are found in the quotations studied or in the definition boxes in this section. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers.

“True religion...” (check what is true)

- ☐ 1. is truthfully real and genuine
- ☐ 2. is the source of love and agreement amongst men
- ☐ 3. is confined to an edifice or an altar
- ☐ 4. establishes the foundations of love and fellowship among mankind
- ☐ 5. is intended to create a bond of unity in the human world
- ☐ 6. promotes dogmas: developed opinions, principles, and beliefs laid down, without adequate grounds, by some authority as being unquestionably true
- ☐ 7. is the cause of the development of praiseworthy qualities
- ☐ 8. establishes the basis of a divine civilization
- ☐ 9. is negligent of the reality which unifies
- ☐ 10. is an attitude toward divinity which is reflected through life
- ☐ 11. urges counterfeit practices: false and misleading representations
- ☐ 12. is mostly a set of customs: a body of habitual, usual, familiar, or customary behaviors and practices which regulate social life
- ☐ 13. is those necessary bonds which have power to unify
- ☐ 14. is the teachings of the Lord God
- ☐ 15. permits dissension and discord, hate, and enmity
- ☐ 16. lays the groundwork for man's everlasting honour
- ☐ 17. safeguards the interests and promotes the unity of the human race
- ☐ 18. supports imitation: deceptive representation that pretends something genuine
- ☐ 19. fosters the spirit of love and fellowship
- ☐ 20. constitutes the very life of humankind
- ☐ 21. is the cause of the decline and effacement of a nation
- ☐ 22. urges high thoughts upon the mind
- ☐ 23. refines the character
- ☐ 24. urges blind imitation: thoughtless and repetitious mimicking of pointless and entrenched behaviors, traditions, etc.
- ☐ 25. is the straight path
- ☐ 26. is the foundation of spiritual union
- ☐ 27. is the union of thought
- ☐ 28. is merely a series of beliefs
- ☐ 29. is the union of susceptibilities
- ☐ 30. is the unity of customs
- ☐ 31. is the ideal chain binding together all the children of men
- ☐ 32. fosters discord and disagreement

CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song...*

Facilitator

Kindly read the following talk from `Abdu'l-Bahá.

“God has sent forth the Prophets for the purpose of quickening the soul of man into higher and divine recognitions. He has revealed the heavenly Books for this great purpose. For this the breaths of the Holy Spirit have been wafted through the gardens of human hearts, the doors of the divine Kingdom opened to mankind and the invisible inspirations sent forth from on high. This divine and ideal power has been bestowed upon man in order that he may purify himself from the imperfections of nature and uplift his soul to the realm of might and power. God has purposed that the darkness of the world of nature shall be dispelled and the imperfect attributes of the natal self be effaced in the effulgent reflection of the Sun of Truth. The mission of the Prophets of God has been to train the souls of humanity and free them from the thralldom of natural instincts and physical tendencies. They are like unto Gardeners, and the world of humanity is the field of Their cultivation, the wilderness and untrained jungle growth wherein They proceed to labor. They cause the crooked branches to become straightened, the fruitless trees to become fruitful, and gradually transform this great wild, uncultivated field into a beautiful orchard producing wonderful abundance and outcome.”⁷

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...*

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| 1. T | 14. T |
| 2. T | 15. F |
| 3. F | 16. T |
| 4. T | 17. T |
| 5. T | 18. F |
| 6. F | 19. T |
| 7. T | 20. T |
| 8. T | 21. F |
| 9. F | 22. T |
| 10. T | 23. T |
| 11. F | 24. F |
| 12. F | 25. T |
| 13. T | 26. T |
| | 27. T |
| | 28. F |
| | 29. T |
| | 30. T |
| | 31. T |
| | 32. F |

⁷ `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 310 #101.4-101.5

The Purpose and Value of Religion

SECTION 2

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

“If we investigate the religions to discover the principles underlying their foundations, we will find they agree; for the fundamental reality of them is one and not multiple. By this means the religionists of the world will reach their point of unity and reconciliation. They will ascertain the truth that the purpose of religion is the acquisition of praiseworthy virtues, the betterment of morals, the spiritual development of mankind, the real life and divine bestowals. All the Prophets have been the promoters of these principles; none of Them has been the promoter of corruption, vice or evil. They have summoned mankind to all good. They have united people in the love of God, invited them to the religions of the unity of mankind and exhorted them to amity and agreement.”⁸

Please study the quotations in this section in the following manner, which is the same as the process presented on page 4, except 3B, which is specific to the material in this section.

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...*

PARTICIPANTS: 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 purpose and value of religion**.

⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 152 #56.3

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

- 2.1 “*The purpose of religion as revealed from the heaven of God’s holy Will is to establish unity and concord amongst the peoples of the world; make it not the cause of dissension and strife. The religion of God and His divine law are the most potent instruments and the surest of all means for the dawning of the light of unity amongst men. The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquillity of peoples, and the peace of all who dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances of God. Religion bestoweth upon man the most precious of all gifts, offereth the cup of prosperity, imparteth eternal life, and showereth imperishable benefits upon mankind.*”
(Bahá’u’lláh, *Fountain of Wisdom*, p. 119 #8.60)

benefits: favors, gifts, blessings, and advantages
bestoweth: confers as a gift
concord: friendly and peaceful relations
development: gradual improvement or advancement
dissension: difference in opinion, causing separating or opposing groups
divine law: rule of conduct established and enforced by God through His Manifestations
eternal life: “. . . the rewards of this life are the real luminous perfections which are realized in this world, and which are the cause of eternal life, for they are the very progress of existence.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í World Faith*, pp. 324-25)
heaven: sublime or exalted condition; “*By ‘heaven’ is meant the heaven of divine Revelation, . . .*” (Bahá’u’lláh, *KI*, p. 44)
imparteth: causes to be given
imperishable: ever living and enduring
instruments: means for the achievement of
man: people
mankind: the human beings
means: useful, helpful, and available methods
men: the people
ordinances: prescribed practices and regulations
peace: serenity and harmony in human relations ↗

free of disturbance and disorder
principles: basic guiding truths, teachings, and standards
precious: great moral or spiritual worth and value
progress: advancement and improvement
prosperity: advancement or success in well-being or anything good
purpose: goal to be attained; intention
religion: includes, but is not limited to, Bahá’í, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion; “. . . by religion is meant that which is ascertained by investigation and not that which is based on mere imitation, the foundations of Divine Religions and not human imitations.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, First Tablet to The Hague, 17 December 1919, cited in *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 302)
strife: striving or competing for dominance or superiority where there is conflict or disagreement
tranquillity: state of calmness, serenity, and peacefulness, free of turmoil or agitation
unity: a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and the struggle for dominance

- 2.2 “*O ye that dwell on earth! The religion of God is for love and unity...*”
(Bahá’u’lláh, *Fountain of Wisdom*, p. 202 #15.4)

love: an unconditional, vulnerable compulsion to be spiritually intimate, dominated by warm-hearted affection, compassion, and concern for the good of all
religion of God: includes, but is not limited to, Bahá’í, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and the ancient ↗

Sabaeen religion; what is truthful, real, and genuinely intended of religion
unity: a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and the struggle for dominance

- 2.3 “Religion is verily the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world and of tranquillity amongst its peoples.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Fountain of Wisdom*, p. 54 #6.18)

chief: main; most important
establishment: bringing into recognized and permanent existence
instrument: method or means
order: a united and harmonious people

religion: what is truthful, real, and genuinely intended of religion
tranquillity: a state of calmness, serenity, and peacefulness, free of turmoil or agitation
verily: in very truth

- 2.4 “In truth, religion is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world, for the fear of God impelleth man to hold fast to that which is good, and shun all evil.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Fountain of Wisdom*, p. 115 #8.50)

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)
fast: firmly without yielding
fear: reverential awe and respect for the power and majesty
impelleth: strongly stirs to action and inspires
impregnable: invincibly secure

light: emanation of spiritual knowledge and goodness of God
man: people
religion: what is truthful, real, and genuinely intended of religion
shun: turn away from; avoid
stronghold: means for safety and survival
welfare: well-being in respect to health, happiness, and good fortune

- 2.5 “The real bond of integrity is religious in character, for religion indicates the oneness of the world of humanity. Religion serves the world of morality. Religion purifies the hearts. Religion impels men to achieve praiseworthy deeds. Religion becomes the cause of love in human hearts, for religion is a divine foundation, the foundation ever conducive to life. The teachings of God are the source of illumination to the people of the world. Religion is ever constructive, not destructive.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 344 #109.4)

bond: connecting or unifying force
character: its distinguishing traits or qualities
conductive: tending to promote and lead
constructive: helpful toward improvement or development
divine: God inspired; holy; sacred
foundation: institution with an established social and administrative order; “Those foundations of the religion of God, however, which are spiritual and consist in human virtues, . . .” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 2014 ed., p. 55 #9)
hearts: that aspect of one’s human nature which becomes attracted, loves, and grows attached; “. . . the human heart, which is the recipient of the light of God and the seat of the revelation of the All-Merciful, . . .” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 186)
illumination: intellectual and spiritual enlightenment, insight, and knowledge
impels: strongly stirs to action and inspires
integrity: moral incorruptibility

life: “. . . the rewards of this life are the real luminous perfections which are realized in this world, and which are the cause of eternal life, for they are the very progress of existence.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, pp. 324-25)
love: an unconditional, vulnerable compulsion to be spiritually intimate, dominated by warm-hearted affection, compassion, and concern for the good of all
men: people
morality: right and proper conduct or behavior
oneness: unity, harmony, and agreement of mind, feeling, and purpose
praiseworthy: deserving of honor or praise
purifies: nurtures release from the sinful promptings of selfishness [in]
religion: belief and faith in God and His Manifestations; what is truthful, real, and genuinely intended of religion
religious: deeply concerned with God and religion

- 2.6 “Religion is the light of the world, and the progress, achievement, and happiness of man result from obedience to the laws set down in the holy Books. Briefly, it is demonstrable that in this life, both outwardly and inwardly the mightiest of structures, the most solidly established, the most enduring, standing guard over the world, assuring both the spiritual and the material perfections of mankind, and protecting the happiness and the civilization of society – is religion.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, pp. 71-72)

civilization: development and refinement of manners, morals, ethics, laws, rules, arts, culture, education, governance, and science
demonstrable: capable of being logically proven; apparent and evident
enduring: lasting and unyielding in hardship
established: confirmed and permanently secured
holy Books: recorded Revelation of God; today, the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh
light: figuratively: source of true knowledge and goodness
man: people

mightiest: the most earnest, vigorous, and powerful
obedience: willing submission and compliance
perfections: attainments with the highest possible degree of excellence
progress: advancement and improvement
religion: belief and faith in God and His Manifestations in a way that is true, real, and genuine to its original intent
standing guard: an attentive protection, shield, and defense
structures: human organizations

- 2.7 “There are two kinds of civilization, - material civilization which serves the physical world and divine civilization which renders service to the world of morality. The founders of the material, practical civilization are the scientists and investigators and the establishers of divine civilization are the celestial universal teachers.

“True religion is the basis of divine civilization. Material civilization is like unto the body; divine civilization is like unto the spirit. A body without the spirit is dead, although it may be clothed in the utmost beauty and comeliness.

“In short, by religion we mean those necessary bonds which have power to unify. This has ever been the essence of the religion of God. This is the eternal bestowal of God! This is the object of divine teachings and laws! This is the light of the everlasting life!”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a letter written to the Honorable Secretary of the Sixth International Congress of Free and Progressive Christians and other Religious Liberals, held in Paris, France, July 16-22, 1913, cited in *Divine Philosophy*, pp. 161 ¶6.5-6.7, a provisional translation of the original text by Ahmad Sohrab, 1918.)

basis: underlying foundation
bestowal: boundless spiritual gift
bonds: connecting or unifying forces
celestial universal teachers: great Prophets or chosen Messengers including but not limited to Krishna, Abraham, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, The Báb, and Bahá’u’lláh
civilization: societal development and refinement
clothed: figuratively: invested or endowed
comeliness: the quality of being good looking or attractive
divine: God inspired; holy; sacred
essence: core reality and purpose
establishers: ones who bring into recognized and permanent existence
everlasting life: “. . . the real luminous perfections which are realized in this world, and which are the cause of eternal life, for they are the very progress of existence.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’i World Faith*, p. 325)

founders: ones who brought into being and are the establishers
investigators: those who examine and study things to discover the truth
light: reflection of spiritual knowledge and goodness
morality: the development of right and proper conduct or behavior
object: intention or purpose
renders: furnishes; provides
service: beneficial deeds and works
spirit: activating or vital force held to give life to the soul
true religion: belief and faith in God and His Manifestations in a way that is true, real, and genuine to its original intent
unify: cause a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and the struggle for dominance

- 2.8 “Bahá’u’lláh taught, that Religion is the chief foundation of Love and Unity and the cause of Oneness. If a religion becomes the cause of hatred and disharmony, it would be better that it should not exist. To be without such a religion is better than to be with it.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London*, p. 28)

chief: main; most important
disharmony: conflict, contention, dissension, or strife
foundation: underlying base for establishment and support
love: an unconditional, vulnerable compulsion to be spiritually intimate, dominated by warm-hearted affection, compassion, and concern for the good of all

oneness: the quality, state, or fact of being single and indivisible; unity, harmony, and agreement of mind, feeling, and purpose
religion: belief and faith in God and His Manifestations in a way that is truthful, real, and genuine to its original intention
unity: a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and the struggle for dominance

- 2.9 “Universal benefits derive from the grace of the Divine religions, for they lead their true followers to sincerity of intent, to high purpose, to purity and spotless honor, to surpassing kindness and compassion, to the keeping of their covenants when they have covenanted, to concern for the rights of others, to liberality, to justice in every aspect of life, to humanity and philanthropy, to valor and to unflagging efforts in the service of mankind. It is religion, to sum up, which produces all human virtues, and it is these virtues which are the bright candles of civilization.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 98)

benefits: gains and advantages
civilization: a highly developed and advanced society
compassion: kind-hearted concern for another’s suffering or distress and a desire to alleviate it
covenant: agreements, promises, or pledges made
derive: come from, emanate, or are received
Divine: God inspired; holy; sacred
grace: divine influence that makes people pure and morally strong
honor: moral worth, nobility, and excellence of character
humanity: kind feelings, compassion, and sympathies towards people and the creatures
intent: one’s motivating purpose
justice: to render or conform to what is right, good, true, and fair as defined by the Word of God
lead: inspire; influence
liberality: the trait of being open-minded and open-handed (generous)

philanthropy: expend one’s resources, time, and/or energy to help the poor and needy
purity: release from the sinful promptings of selfishness
religions: includes, but is not limited to, Bahá’í, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion
sincerity: the quality of being open and truthful, not deceitful or hypocritical
surpassing: transcend or go beyond
unflagging: tireless; inexhaustible
universal: present everywhere and including all without exception
valor: strength of mind and courage in braving danger
virtues: reflections of divine spiritual qualities and attributes; commendable traits of moral excellence

- 2.10 “The greatest bestowal of God in the world of humanity is religion, for assuredly the divine teachings of religion are above all other sources of instruction and development to man. Religion confers upon man eternal life and guides his footsteps in the world of morality. It opens the doors of unending happiness and bestows everlasting honor upon the human kingdom. It has been the basis of all civilization and progress in the history of mankind.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 361 #112.1)

basis: underlying foundation
bestowal: boundless spiritual gift
bestows: gives the gift of
civilization: highly developed and advanced societies
divine: God inspired; holy; sacred
eternal life: “. . . the rewards of this life are the real luminous perfections which are realized in this world, and which are the cause of eternal ☞

life, for they are the very progress of existence.”
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í World Faith*, pp. 324-25)
honor: esteem, dignity, and admiration
kingdom: realm or sphere
man: people
morality: right and proper conduct or behavior
religion: belief and faith in God and His Manifestations in a way that is truthful, real, and genuine to its original intention

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, 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 in their own words or from the verses studied. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers.

1. What do these verses say to you about what true religion has to offer to the individual’s desire for spirituality? _____

2. What do these verses say to you about what true religion has to offer to the development and quality of society? _____

CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song...*

Facilitator

Kindly read the following talk from `Abdu'l-Bahá.

“God has desired for mankind the effulgence of love, but through blindness and misapprehension man has enveloped himself in veils of discord, strife and hatred. The supreme need of humanity is cooperation and reciprocity. The stronger the ties of fellowship and solidarity amongst men, the greater will be the power of constructiveness and accomplishment in all the planes of human activity. Without cooperation and reciprocal attitude the individual member of human society remains self-centered, uninspired by altruistic purposes, limited and solitary in development like the animal and plant organisms of the lower kingdoms. The lower creatures are not in need of cooperation and reciprocity. A tree can live solitary and alone, but this is impossible for man without retrogression. Therefore, every cooperative attitude and activity of human life is praiseworthy and foreintended by the will of God. The first expression of cooperation is family relationship, which is unreliable and uncertain in its potency, for it is subject to separation and does not permanently cement together the individual members of humanity. There is also a cooperation and oneness in nativity or race which is likewise not efficient, for although its members may agree in general, they differ radically in personal and particular points of view. Racial association, therefore, will not ensure the requirements of divine relationship. There are other means in the human world by which physical association is established, but these fail to weld together the hearts and spirits of men and are correspondingly inefficient. Therefore, it is evident that God has destined and intended religion to be the cause and means of cooperative effort and accomplishment among mankind. To this end He has sent the Prophets of God, the holy Manifestations of the Word, in order that the fundamental reality and religion of God may prove to be the bond of human unity, for the divine religions revealed by these holy Messengers have one and the same foundation. All will admit, therefore, that the divine religions are intended to be the means of true human cooperation, that they are united in the purpose of making humanity one family, for they rest upon the universal foundation of love, and love is the first effulgence of Divinity.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 338 #108.2)

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...*

1. all answers are valuable
2. all answers are valuable

What Happens Without Religion

SECTION 3

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

“We live in an age when the role of religion in shaping human thought and in guiding individual and collective conduct is increasingly discounted. In societies that have bowed to the dictates of materialism, organized religion is seeing the sphere of its influence contract, becoming confined mostly to the realm of personal experience. Not infrequently the laws of religion are regarded as arbitrary rules blindly obeyed by those incapable of independent thought or as a prudish and outdated code of conduct hypocritically imposed upon others by advocates who, themselves, fail to live up to its demands. Morality is being redefined in such societies, and materialistic assumptions, values, and practices pertaining to the nature of humankind and its economic and social life are taking on the status of unassailable truth.

“Indeed, the expenditure of enormous energy and vast amounts of resources in an attempt to bend truth to conform to personal desire is now a feature of many contemporary societies. The result is a culture that distorts human nature and purpose, trapping human beings in pursuit of idle fancies and vain imaginings and turning them into pliable objects in the hands of the powerful. Yet, the happiness and well-being of humanity depend upon the opposite: cultivating human character and social order in conformity with reality. Divine teachings shed light on reality, enabling every soul to investigate it properly and to acquire, through the exercise of personal discipline, those attributes that are to distinguish the human being.”⁹

Please study the quotations in this section in the following manner, which is the same as the process presented on page 4, except 3B, which is specific to the material in this section.

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...***

PARTICIPANTS: 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 **what happens without religion**.

⁹ The Universal House of Justice, *Framework For Action*, UHJ 2006-2016, #51.3-51.4

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

- 3.1 “*The weakening of the pillars of religion hath strengthened the foolish and emboldened them and made them more arrogant. Verily I say: The greater the decline of religion, the more grievous the waywardness of the ungodly. This cannot but lead in the end to chaos and confusion. Hear Me, O men of insight, and be warned, ye who are endued with discernment!*”
(Bahá'u'lláh, *Fountain of Wisdom*, p. 54 #6.18)

arrogant: disposed to an aggressive exaggeration of undeserved self-importance
chaos: hopeless confusion and complete disorder
discernment: having perception and understanding
emboldened: made daring and encouraged
endued; endowed or gifted
foolish: those having no good sense or judgement
grievous: seriously harmful and dangerous
men: people

pillars: essential supports that provide strength and reliability
religion: the organized systems of faith for worship of God in a way that is truthful, real, and genuine to its original intention
verily: in very truth
waywardness: impulsive, undisciplined, and unruly inclinations
weakening: reduction of quality, strength, and spirit

- 3.2 “*Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness and justice, of tranquillity and peace cease to shine. Unto this will bear witness every man of true understanding.*”
(Bahá'u'lláh, *Fountain of Wisdom*, p. 115 #8.50)

bear witness: serve as evidence and proof
chaos: hopeless confusion and complete disorder
fairness: impartiality and equitability without undue advantage to anyone
justice: rendering or conforming to what is right, good, true, and fair as defined by the Word of God
lamp: emanation of knowledge and goodness
lights: clear and understandable knowledge and goodness

man: person
obscured: concealed, hidden, or disguised
peace: serenity and harmony in human relations, free of disturbance and disorder
religion: the organized systems of faith for worship of God in a way that is truthful, real, and genuine to its original intention
tranquillity: a state of calmness, serenity, and peacefulness, free of turmoil or agitation

- 3.3 “And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is that religion is a mighty bulwark. If the edifice of religion shakes and totters, commotion and chaos will ensue and the order of things will be utterly upset...”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, First Tablet to The Hague, 17 December 1919, cited in *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 302)

bulwark: strong support and protection
chaos: hopeless confusion and complete disorder
commotion: mental and emotional agitation; public disturbance and unrest
edifice: elaborately constructed institution or organization

religion: the organized systems of faith for worship of God in a way that is truthful, real, and genuine to its original intention
totters: threatens to collapse
utterly: to the fullest extent; completely

- 3.4 “...when, as a result of human perversity, the light of religion is quenched in men’s hearts, and the divinely appointed Robe, designed to adorn the human temple, is deliberately discarded, a deplorable decline in the fortunes of humanity immediately sets in, bringing in its wake all the evils which a wayward soul is capable of revealing. The perversion of human nature, the degradation of human conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions, reveal themselves, under such circumstances, in their worst and most revolting aspects. Human character is debased, confidence is shaken, the nerves of discipline are relaxed, the voice of human conscience is stilled, the sense of decency and shame is obscured, conceptions of duty, of solidarity, of reciprocity and loyalty are distorted, and the very feeling of peacefulness, of joy and of hope is gradually extinguished.”

(From a letter written 11 March 1936 by Shoghi Effendi to the beloved of God and the handmaids of the Merciful throughout the West, cited in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 187)

conceptions: ideas and understandings
conscience: sense of moral rightness or fairness
corruption: destruction of integrity, virtue, and moral principle
debased: caused to degrade to a lower state or deteriorate
decency: what is suitable or proper in language, behavior, dress, and ceremony
degradation: decline to a morally decadent state
deplorable: regrettable and shameful
dissolution: disruption and breakdown
discipline: training that molds, corrects, or perfects mental faculties or moral character
distorted: misleading and intentionally altered from the true meaning
duty: required or morally obligated action
extinguished: caused to die out because of the absence or withdrawal of reinforcement
evils: morally wrong, reprehensible, sinful, and wicked acts; “Evil is nonexistent; it is the absence of good.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *PUP*, p. 295)
fortunes: progress, success, and prosperity
human nature: what it truly means to be human
institutions: established practices, relationships, and administrative structures, authorized and maintained through prescribed rules and agencies

light: spiritual knowledge and goodness
loyalty: feelings of faithfulness and allegiance
men’s: the people’s
nerves: courage to carry on
obscured: made unclear and distorted
perversion: turning away from the right, proper, or true intended purpose
perversity: turning away from the right, proper, or true intended purpose
quenched: dimmed or extinguished
reciprocity: a relationship of mutual dependence and support
religion: what is truthful, real, and genuine to the original intent of the organized systems of faith for worship of God
revolting: offensive and disgusting
Robe: “*Its robe is the Revelation vouchsafed unto it by God.*” (Bahá’u’lláh, cited in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 187)
shame: what is disgraceful, humiliating, or dishonorable behavior
solidarity: union in opinion, purpose, interests, and standards
temple: reflection of the divine presence
wake: consequential events
wayward: impulsive, undisciplined, and unruly

- 3.5 “When the lights of religion become darkened, the materialists appear. They are the bats of night. The decline of religion is their time of activity; they seek the shadows when the world is darkened and clouds have spread over it.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 179-180 #63.8)

clouds: that which blocks the light of true religion
darkened: “This darkness is conducive to differences and dissensions; rites and dogmas are many and various; therefore, discord has arisen among the religious systems, whereas religion is for the unification of mankind.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 179 #63.8)
lights: spiritual knowledge and goodness

materialist: those with an extreme desire for the selfish pursuit of wealth, possessions, power, sensual pleasures, or social status, and the willingness to withstand and take part in conflict, contention, dissension, strife, separation, violence, chaos, hopelessness, and despair for their acquisition
religion: what is truthful, real, and genuine to the original intent of the organized systems of faith for worship of God

- 3.6 “Religious teachings are essential for the proper development of the mind and the spirit. If religious instruction is not given to the children they will grow heedless and lose their moral susceptibilities.”
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from the Diary of Mírzá Ahmad Sohráb, 16 October 1914, published in *Star of the West*, Vol. IX, No. 8, p. 96)

essential: most important and necessary
heedless: careless, thoughtless, and inattentive
moral: excellence in what pertains to right and wrong conduct or behavior
proper: complete and appropriate

religious: that which is truthful, real, and genuine to the original intent of the organized systems of faith for worship of God
susceptibilities: impressionable feelings that affect moral judgements and decisions

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, 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. The first question is personal in nature, whereas the answer to the second question is from the quotations studied in this section. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers.

1. This section has clearly laid out some of the personal and social outcomes and consequences of living in the absence of true religion. Do you observe any of these outcomes or consequences evident in the people or the current societies? If so, what are they? (please avoid personal backbiting and gossip here) _____

2. What is the single remedy for the ills that afflict society and its people? _____

CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song...*

Facilitator

Kindly read the following talk from `Abdu'l-Bahá.

“The world of humanity cannot advance through mere physical powers and intellectual attainments; nay, rather, the Holy Spirit is essential. The divine Father must assist the human world to attain maturity. The body of man is in need of physical and mental energy, but his spirit requires the life and fortification of the Holy Spirit. Without its protection and quickening the human world would be extinguished. Jesus Christ declared, *‘Let the dead bury their dead.’* He also said, *‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.’* It is evident, therefore, according to Christ that the human spirit which is not fortified by the presence of the Holy Spirit is dead and in need of resurrection by that divine power; otherwise, though materially advanced to high degrees, man cannot attain full and complete progress.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 182 #63.21)

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...*

1. all answers are valuable
2. true religion

How Religion Loses Its Way and Purpose

SECTION 4

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

If true religion is as we have learned so far, why then does religion in general, appear undesirable to so many people? What causes religions to deviate from the purpose for which they were created and lose their way over time? Let us study together the following references from the Bahá'í Writings and see if we can answer these all-important questions and come to a reasonable understanding.

This understanding is profoundly important in helping ourselves and others better understand the process of religious renewal and decline and the process and purpose of continuous and progressive revelations from God. This awareness also helps protect us from deviation on the sacred path.

In the past most people could not read and were dependent upon the clergy for understanding the intent and meaning of the words of the prophets. They trustingly followed their guidance with loyalty. Once the clergy were gone astray there was no way for them to return to the truth except by the appearance of the next Manifestation of God. In this day, most people can read and thereby have the responsibility and privilege of reading and studying the Word of God themselves for understanding and clarity of the true meaning and purpose of religion. Let's explore.

Please study the quotations in this section in the following manner, which is the same as the process presented on page 4, except 3B, which is specific to the material in this section.

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...*

PARTICIPANTS: 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 **how religion loses its way and purpose**.

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

From what we have studied it is clear that the problems in the world today are upon us because so many religions have deviated from their true purpose causing the people to turn away from religion. Let us consider what `Abdu'l-Bahá has said:

“The third teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is that religion must be the source of fellowship, the cause of unity and the nearness of God to man. If it rouses hatred and strife it is evident that absence of religion is preferable and an irreligious man better than one who professes it. According to the divine will and intention religion should be the cause of love and agreement, a bond to unify all mankind for it is a message of peace and goodwill to man from God.”¹⁰

And from the Universal House of Justice:

“This turning away from religion has been powerfully reinforced by the growth of materialism, and has produced a combination of physical well-being and spiritual aridity that is having catastrophic results, socially and psychologically, on the population.”¹¹

4.1 “The Prophets and Manifestations of God bring always the same teaching; at first men cling to the Truth but after a time they disfigure it. The Truth is distorted by man-made outward forms and material laws. The veil of substance and worldliness is drawn across the reality of Truth. . . .

“Each time God sends a Great One to us we are given new life, but the Truth each Manifestation brings is the same. The Truth never changes but man’s vision changes. It is dulled and confused by the complication of outward forms.

“The Truth is easy to understand although the outward forms in which it is expressed bewilder the intelligence. As men grow they see the futility of man-made forms and despise them. Therefore many leave the churches, because the latter often emphasize the external only.”

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *`Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, p. 57)

bewilder: perplex and confuse
churches: organized body of religious worshipers
complication: complex and difficult make-up
despise: look upon with strong dislike and aversion
disfigure: cause damage through serious alterations
distorted: altered from its true meaning
dulled: made to be less active and clouded
external: refers to “outward forms”
forms: prescribed patterns of religious practices: rituals, ceremonies, rites, and services
futility: pointlessness; uselessness
Great One: Manifestation of God
grow: spiritually mature
Manifestations: great Prophets; chosen Messengers

man-made: created by humans, as distinguished from the divine Word
man’s: people’s
material: not spiritual but worldly
men: people
new life: rebirth to truth and spirituality from worldliness and error
outward: emphasis on appearance rather than inner significance
reality: real existence
substance: means, wealth, and possessions
Truth: teachings of the Prophets and Manifestations of God
veil: that which covers, disguises, or hides
worldliness: predominant concerns with material existence

¹⁰ `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, pp. 239-40

¹¹ The Universal House of Justice, 1983 Sept 01, Requisites to Spiritual Growth, cited in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963 to 1986*, p. 588 #375.3

- 4.2 “What, then, is the source of enmity and alienation among humankind? Whence this conflict and strife? The real underlying cause is lack of religious unity and association, for in each of the great religions we find superstition, blind imitation of creeds, and theological formulas adhered to instead of the divine fundamentals, causing difference and divergence among mankind instead of agreement and fellowship. Consequently, strife, hatred and warfare have arisen, based upon this divergence and separation. If we investigate the foundations of the divine religions, we find them to be one, absolutely changeless and never subject to transformation. For example, ... the world of morality and ethical institutions. These are the essential ordinances. They instill and awaken the knowledge and love of God, love for humanity, the virtues of the world of mankind, the attributes of the divine Kingdom, rebirth and resurrection from the kingdom of nature. ... This is the foundation of divine religion.”
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 393 #118.6)

adhered to: followed and obeyed
alienation: withdrawn or separated affections
association: common interests and purpose
attributes: distinct characteristics and qualities that belong to and describe the one true God; “*It behoves each one of you to manifest the attributes of God, and to exemplify by your deeds and words the signs of His righteousness, His power and glory.*” (The Báb, cited in *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 92)
blind imitation: thoughtless and repetitious mimicking of pointless and entrenched behaviors, traditions, and customs
creeds: systems of beliefs
divergence: unlike or dissimilar separating branches
divine: God given
enmity: bitter attitudes or feelings of hatred or ill-will, often concealed
essential: most important and necessary
ethical: the standards and principles of right and proper conduct of a given social group
foundations: underlying reality and purpose
fundamentals: basic and essential truths
institution/s: established practices, relationships, and administrative structures, authorized and maintained through prescribed rules and agencies
love: an unconditional, vulnerable compulsion to be spiritually intimate, dominated by warm-hearted affection, compassion, and concern for the good of all
morality: right and proper conduct or behavior
one: single and indivisible; “. . . as that of lamps kindled: for these in respect to their glasses and oil-holders, are different, but in respect to their light, One, and in respect to their illumination, ☞

One; nay, each one is identical with the other, without imputation of plurality, or diversity or multiplicity or separateness.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Baha'i World Faith*, p. 371)
ordinances: permanent orders ordained by God
rebirth: change from a life of the lower nature to one of the spirit
religions: including, but not limited to; Bahá’í, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion
resurrection: “...by ‘resurrection’ is meant His own rise to proclaim the Cause of God. He bade the erring and wayward arise and speed out of the sepulchres of their bodies, arrayed them with the beauteous robe of faith, and quickened them with the breath of a new and wondrous life.” (Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Iqán: The Book of Certitude*, pp, 116-17)
strife: bitter or violent competition for dominance where there is disagreement or conflict
superstition: belief in things that are not true or real
theological formulas: a set form of words and/or physical expressions devised by religious clergy meant to express a basic religious truth or principle of belief
transformation: alteration in form, character, or function
unity: the heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and the struggle for dominance
virtues: human reflections of divine spiritual qualities and attributes; commendable qualities, traits, or moral excellence

4.3 “Alas that humanity is completely submerged in imitations and unrealities, notwithstanding the truth of divine religion has ever remained the same. Superstitions have obscured the fundamental reality, the world is darkened, and the light of religion is not apparent. This darkness is conducive to differences and dissensions; rites and dogmas are many and various; therefore, discord has arisen among the religious systems, whereas religion is for the unification of mankind. True religion is the source of love and agreement amongst men, the cause of the development of praiseworthy qualities, but the people are holding to the counterfeit and imitation, negligent of the reality which unifies, so they are bereft and deprived of the radiance of religion. They follow superstitions inherited from their fathers and ancestors. To such an extent has this prevailed that they have taken away the heavenly light of divine truth and sit in the darkness of imitations and imaginations. That which was meant to be conducive to life has become the cause of death; that which should have been an evidence of knowledge is now a proof of ignorance; that which was a factor in the sublimity of human nature has proved to be its degradation. Therefore, the realm of the religionist has gradually narrowed and darkened, and the sphere of the materialist has widened and advanced; for the religionist has held to imitation and counterfeit, neglecting and discarding holiness and the sacred reality of religion.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 179 #63.8)

alas: an expression of sorrow, regret, compassion, or grief
bereft: lacking or deprived
dogmas: sets of principles laid down by authority as unquestionably true
conducive to: promotes and leads to
counterfeit: false and misleading representation
darkened: dimmed the light of spiritual knowledge and goodness
darkness: absence of spiritual knowledge and goodness
degradation: decline and loss in moral and intellectual worth
discord: disunity, causing active disagreement or conflict
dissensions: differences in opinion, causing separating or opposing groups
divine: God inspired; holy; sacred
fundamental: what is basic and essential
holiness: virtue and spiritual distinction
imaginings: mental conceptions that are not true or real
imitation/s: mimicking of entrenched behaviors, traditions, and customs; “These imitations are accidental [conditional, dependent, and non-essential] and without sanction in the Holy Books. They are the outcomes of human interpretations and teachings which have arisen, gradually obscuring the real light of divine meaning and causing men to differ and dissent.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 314 #103.4)
inherited: received or passed down
light: emanating spiritual knowledge and goodness
love: an unconditional, vulnerable compulsion to be spiritually intimate, dominated by ☞

warm-hearted affection, compassion, and concern for the good of all
materialist: those with an extreme desire for the selfish pursuit of wealth, possessions, power, sensual pleasures, or social status, and the willingness to withstand and take part in conflict, contention, dissension, strife, separation, violence, chaos, hopelessness, and despair for their acquisition
men: people
negligent: inattentive and heedless
neglecting: failing to give due attention to
obscured: concealed, hidden, or disguised; made unclear and distorted
qualities: distinctive virtues, powers, or traits of character
radiance: emanating spiritual energy, light, and love
reality: of what is true and real
realm: scope of activity and influence
religion: what is truthful, real, and genuinely intended of religion
religionist: followers of religion
rites: prescribed ceremonies
sacred: holy and spiritually important
sphere: scope of activity and influence
sublimity: awe inspiring spiritual, intellectual, and moral worth
submerged: engulfed and involved
superstitions: beliefs in things that are not true or real
unification: bringing together in peace, love, harmony, and agreement
unifies: brings people together in a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and the struggle for dominance

The cause of this deviation from the foundational teachings of religion is primarily due to the leaders and clergy of religion who themselves either initiated or sanctioned the gradual changes that resulted in superstitions, ritualistic forms, and distorted and inflexible dogmas that lead to differences, divisiveness, conflict, and even violence.

- 4.4 “By religion we mean those necessary bonds which unify the world of humanity. This has ever been the essence of religion, for this object have all the Manifestations come to the world. Alas! that the leaders of religion afterwards have abandoned this solid foundation and have fabricated a set of blind dogmas and rituals which are at complete variance with the foundation of divine religion.”
(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Scriptures*, p. 439 #797)

abandoned: with careless disregard, given up trying to continue
alas: an expression of sorrow, regret, compassion, or grief
bonds: connecting or unifying forces
divine: God inspired; holy; sacred
blind dogmas: principles laid down as unquestionably true without due regard to rational discrimination, guidance, or wisdom
essence: core reality and purpose
fabricated: formed or conceived by imagination
foundation: underlying reality and purpose
leaders: clergy that inspires, rules, and guides;
“Leaders of religion, in every age, have hindered their people from attaining the shores of eternal salvation, inasmuch as they held ↗

the reins of authority in their mighty grasp. Some for the lust of leadership, others through want [lack] of knowledge and understanding, ... ” (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, p. 15)
Manifestations: great Prophets; chosen Messengers
object: intention or purpose
religion: what is truthful, real, and genuinely intended of religion
rituals: formalized services, ceremonies, rites, and procedures
unify: bring together in peace, love, harmony, and agreement
variance: disagreement and disharmony

In consideration of the next quotation we might ask: “How do we help overcome these deviations from truth?”

- 4.5 “The religious differences and divisions which exist in the world are due to blind imitations of forms without knowledge or investigation of the fundamental divine reality which underlies all the religions. Inasmuch as these imitations of ancestral forms are various, dissensions have arisen among the people of religion. Therefore, it is necessary to free mankind from this subjection to blind belief by pointing the way of guidance to reality itself, which is the only basis of unity.”
(`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 287 #96.8)

blind imitations: thoughtless and repetitious mimicking of pointless and entrenched behaviors, traditions, and customs
dissensions: differences in opinion, causing separating or opposing groups
divine: God inspired; holy; sacred
forms: prescribed patterns of religious practices: rituals, ceremonies, rites, and services
fundamental: what is basic and essential [to]
reality: what is true and real
religious: that which pertains to religion

religions: includes, but is not limited to, Bahá'í, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and the ancient Sabaeen religion
subjection: being under the power and control
underlies: is the foundation of
unity: a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and the struggle for dominance

- 4.6 “Though our Cause unreservedly recognizes the Divine origin of all the religions that preceded it and upholds the spiritual truths which lie at their very core and are common to them all, its institutions, whether administrative, religious or humanitarian, must if their distinctive character is to be maintained and recognized, be increasingly divorced from the outworn creeds, the meaningless ceremonials and man-made institutions with which these religions are at present identified.”

(Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, p. 5)

administrative: connected or relating to the management or directing of affairs
Cause: advocated and supported truths [of the Bahá'í Faith]
ceremonials: sets of rules, customs, or rituals
common: shared and belonging
core: essence or most important part
creeds: systems of belief
distinctive: special and unique quality [of]
Divine: God-inspired
divorced: separated and disunited
humanitarian: the promotion of human ↗

welfare and social reform
identified: intimately connected
institutions: established practices, relationships, and administrative structures, authorized and maintained through prescribed rules and agencies
man-made: human-made
origin: source and beginning
outworn: no longer useful or acceptable
recognized: formally accepted and acknowledged
unreservedly: without limits or holding back
upholds: agrees with and supports

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, 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. The answers are found in the quotations studied or in the definition boxes in this section. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers.

1. Below is a list of some of the aspects of religion that cause differences, separation, and the eventual darkening of the light of religion. Match the left column with its proper definition in the right column.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1) __ ancestral form | A. human designed established practices, relationships, and administrative structures, authorized and maintained through prescribed rules and agencies |
| 2) __ blind dogmas | B. sets of rules, customs, or rituals that have no true spiritual meaning |
| 3) __ blind imitation | C. systems of belief no longer useful or acceptable |
| 4) __ counterfeit | D. thoughtless and repetitious modeling of pointless and entrenched behaviors, traditions, and customs |
| 5) __ disfigured truth | E. that which covers, disguises, or hides means, wealth, or possessions |
| 6) __ imitation | F. ceremonies, rites, and services derived or copied from our ancestors |
| 7) __ man-made institutions | G. principles laid down as unquestionably true without due regard to rational discrimination, guidance, or wisdom |
| 8) __ meaningless ceremonials | H. formalized services, ceremonies, rites, and procedures |
| 9) __ outward forms | I. mimicking of entrenched behaviors, traditions, and customs |
| 10) __ outworn creeds | J. false and misleading representation |
| 11) __ rituals | K. that which covers, disguises, or hides predominant concerns with material existence |
| 12) __ superstitions | L. beliefs in things that are not true or real |
| 13) __ theological formulas | M. a set form of words and/or physical expressions devised by religious clergy meant to express a basic religious truth or principle of belief |
| 14) __ veil of substance | N. prescribed patterns of religious practices: rituals, ceremonies, rites, and services with emphasis on appearance rather than inner significance |
| 15) __ veil of worldliness | O. cause damage through serious alterations to the teachings of the Manifestations of God |

2. Adherence to the divine foundations protect us from deviating from the holy and pure path of God. The divine foundations might be summed up in two words: love and unity!

True ____
False ____

3. In what ways can we participate in protecting this blessed Faith of God from the deviations from the divine foundations that have repeatedly debilitated religion in the past? _____

CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song...*

Facilitator

Kindly read the following (some of this we have already studied) from a letter written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá from Port Said, Egypt, to the Honorable Secretary of the Sixth International Congress of Free and Progressive Christians and other Religious Liberals (Held in Paris, France, July 16-22, 1913).

“True religion is the basis of divine civilization. Material civilization is like unto the body; divine civilization is like unto the spirit. A body without the spirit is dead, although it may be clothed in the utmost beauty and comeliness.

“In short, by religion we mean those necessary bonds which have power to unify. This has ever been the essence of the religion of God. This is the eternal bestowal of God! This is the object of divine teachings and laws! This is the light of the everlasting life! Alas! A thousand times alas! that this solid foundation is abandoned and forgotten and the leaders of religions have fabricated a set of superstitions and rituals which are at complete variance with the underlying thought. As these man-made ideas differ from each other they cause dissension which breeds strife and ends in war and bloodshed; the blood of innocent people is spilled, their possessions are pillaged and their children become captives and orphans.

“Thus religion which was destined to become the cause of friendship has become the cause of enmity. Religion, which was meant to be sweet honey, is changed into bitter poison. Religion, the function of which was to illumine humanity, has become the factor of obscurity and gloom. Religion, which was to confer the consciousness of everlasting life, has become the fiendish instrument of death. As long as these superstitions are in the hands and these nets of dissimulation and hypocrisy in the fingers, religion will be the most harmful agency on this planet. These superannuated traditions, which are inherited unto the present day, must be abandoned, and thus free from past superstitions we must investigate the original intention. The basis on which they have fabricated the superstructures will be seen to be one, and that one, absolute reality; and as reality is indivisible, complete unity and amity will be instituted and the true religion of God will become unveiled in all its beauty and sublimity in the assemblage of the world.”¹²

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...*

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 1. 1. F | 10. C |
| 2. G | 11. H |
| 3. D | 12. L |
| 4. J | 13. M |
| 5. O | 14. E |
| 6. I | 15. K |
| 7. A | 2. True |
| 8. B | 3. Anything from quotations #4.5 or #4.6 |
| 9. N | |

¹² ('Abdu'l-Bahá, from a letter written to the Honorable Secretary of the Sixth International Congress of Free and Progressive Christians and other Religious Liberals, held in Paris, France, July 16-22, 1913, cited in *Divine Philosophy*, pp. 162-63 ¶6.6-6.8, a provisional translation by Ahmad Sohrab of the original text, 1918.)

The Application Exercise

APPLICATION: *Showing forth divine light...*

Facilitator

Read the following paragraph out loud and proceed as stated.

IMAGINING 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 on the truth and reality of religion 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.

Facilitator

Read the following paragraph out loud, then take time for the participants to write out their individual plans for action (these are not shared).

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

From your experience in this study class on *Why We Need Religion*, describe what **you** are inspired to put into reality and action. ***I will make conscious efforts to...*** _____

My next step will be... _____
