

Bahá'í Standards of Behavior

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

Living a Bahá'í life calls for an ongoing effort to develop one's character and refine one's behavior, as is best exemplified by the life of `Abdu'l-Bahá. All of us come into this Faith with specialized God-given capacities that are not fully developed. Furthermore, most of us have inherited or developed certain behavioral burdens that require serious curtailment. All certainly have room to grow, as the steps on the path of spiritual improvement are endless.

Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, identified three initial requirements for spiritual success that should be given serious attention by believers: a high sense of moral rectitude, absolute chastity, and complete freedom from prejudice. The focus of this study will be on the Bahá'í standards of private and public behavior as they relate to these three subjects.



The Guardian, Shoghi Effendi

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

Facilitator

Review the following objective with the participants:

The objective of this study is to understand the fundamental verities or basic truths regarding standards of private and public behavior in living the Bahá'í life.

THE STUDY PROCESS: *Attaining the water of life...*

Facilitator

Review the following study process with the participants. Then study the numbered quotations that follow, one at a time as described below.

1. **READING:** *A drink from the cup of guidance...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud in its entirety.
2. **CONFIRMING MEANING:** *A spray from the fountain of light...*

To better understand certain words used in the quotation, take turns with the following:

 - A. Each participant **choose a word** from the quotation and **state it** for the whole group to hear. (Like a fun game – pick a word!) Then...
 - B. Read out loud the sentence that contains the **word** you selected, **while substituting for that word**, its given phrase, definition, or synonym from the boxes below the quotation.
 - C. Repeat A and B above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words.
3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Mining the gems of truth...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.
 - B. Take turns **stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about **standards of private and public behavior in living the Bahá'í life**.

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

1. These requirements [the spiritual requisites of success] are none other than a high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities, absolute chastity in their individual lives, and complete freedom from prejudice in their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or color. —Shoghi Effendi

The Advent of Divine Justice, (Evanston: Bahá'í Publishing, 2006), par. 36, p.32.

absolute: complete and perfect
administrative: management or directing of [Bahá'í]
chastity: cleanliness and purity in thought and action from sexual misconduct
class: social ranking as a group
creed: system of beliefs
dealings: actions taken
freedom: liberation and exemption
moral: excellence in what pertains to right and wrong conduct or behavior
prejudice: preconceived opinion or judgment of those different from oneself, not based on ↗

reason or actual experience, and often marked by a sense of self-superiority, suspicion, intolerance, or irrational hatred
race: common ancestry
rectitude: with no deviation from what is the right or correct way
requirements: needed essentials
requisites: necessary or required qualities
sense: ability for sound reasoning and correct judgment
social: gathering and associating with people
success: attainment to the desired outcome

2. This rectitude of conduct, with its implications of justice, equity, truthfulness, honesty, fair-mindedness, reliability, and trustworthiness, must distinguish every phase of the life of the Bahá'í community. —Shoghi Effendi

The Advent of Divine Justice, (Evanston: Bahá'í Publishing, 2006), par. 39, p. 34.

conduct: acting and behaving
distinguish: set apart from others by prominent qualities
equity: dealing fairly, equally, and impartially with all concerned
fair-mindedness: inclined to make impartial judgments free of undue influence
honesty: freedom from deception or fraud; straightforwardness
implications: shown connections or close involvements

justice: conforming to what is morally right, good, true, and fair
phase: stage of development; part or aspect
rectitude: strict observance of the right or correct way
reliability: known and capable of doing what is expected or required; dependable
trustworthiness: worthy of being trusted and relied upon with confidence
truthfulness: having the disposition to tell what is true and factual

3. *Be pure, O people of God, be pure; be righteous, be righteous....* —Bahá'u'lláh
Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1952, 1971 printing), CXXXI, p. 287.

pure: clean and free of any sinful, immoral, or selfish motives, imaginings, or behaviors; “To be selfless is to be pure.” —`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 107.
righteous: morally right, fair, just, and virtuous ↗

in accordance with the divine spirit; “...*the whole object of such righteousness is but recognition of God, thy Lord, and undoubted faith in the Words revealed by Him.*” —The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1976), p. 34.

4. Such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations. It demands daily vigilance in the control of one's carnal desires and corrupt inclinations. It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures. It requires total abstinence from all alcoholic drinks, from opium, and from similar habit-forming drugs. It condemns the

prostitution of art and of literature, the practices of nudism and of companionate marriage, infidelity in marital relationships, and all manner of promiscuity, of easy familiarity, and of sexual vices. It can tolerate no compromise with the theories, the standards, the habits, and the excesses of a decadent age. Nay rather it seeks to demonstrate, through the dynamic force of its example, the pernicious character of such theories, the falsity of such standards, the hollowness of such claims, the perversity of such habits, and the sacrilegious character of such excesses.

—Shoghi Effendi

The Advent of Divine Justice, (Evanston: Bahá'í Publishing, 2006), par. 47, pp. 45-46.

abandonment: giving up with the intent of never again claiming a right or interest
abstinence: voluntarily depriving oneself or refraining
age: period of time in history identified by distinct features
amusements: pleasurable pastimes or diversions; entertainment
artistic: of art or artists
attachment: heart-felt attraction and attention
avocations: secondary occupations or enjoyable hobbies
carnal: pleasures of the body or lower nature
character: distinguishing trait, quality, or nature
chaste: clean and pure in thought and action of sexual misconduct
claims: asserted beliefs
clean-mindedness: having morally pure thoughts and mental images
companionate marriage: living together like husband and wife and indulging in sexual relations; “where there is no legal or religious marriage,” —written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 1275, p. 382.
compromise: shameful or disreputable concessions or yielding
condemns: pronounces as wrong and strongly disapproves of
conduct: way of acting or behaving
corrupt: morally degenerate or perverted
decadent: decaying or declining in social conditions
decency: conformity to standards of what is suitable or proper in words, behavior, dress, and ceremony
demands: calls for or requires as a necessity
demonstrate: clearly show
desires: strong feelings for enjoyment or satisfaction
dynamic: change and growth producing
easy familiarity: carefree and unrestrained sexually intimate acts or remarks
excesses: surpassed limits in what is usual, proper, or necessary; indulgences
excessive: limits surpassed in what is usual, proper, or necessary; indulgent
exercise: carrying out and performing
falsity: incorrectness, untruthfulness, deceitfulness, and disloyalty

frivolous: of little true value or importance
habit-forming: causing repeated, irresistible, and frequent use [of]
habits: repeated, irresistible, and frequent behaviors acquired from repetition
hollowness: lacking in real value, sincerity, or substance
implications: shown connections or close involvements
inclinations: tendencies of the mind, will, or desire
infidelity: unfaithfulness or disloyalty in one's moral obligation to [one's spouse]
involves: includes as a closely related part
literary: of literature, books, learning, or writing
manner: kinds and sorts
misdirected: incorrect or wrongly guided
moderation: avoidance of excesses or extremes
modesty: humility, decency, and moderation in dress, speech, and conduct
nudism: socially going nude among others
pernicious: destructive, harmful, or fatal
pertains: is associated with or appropriate
perversity: deviation from what is right, good, or true
pleasures: satisfaction or gratification of desires and inclinations
promiscuity: having or involving many sexual partners
prostitution: deliberate lowering of the moral integrity, usually of one's talents for money
purity: clean and free of any sinful, immoral, or selfish motives, imaginings, or behaviors; “To be selfless is to be pure.” —**Abdu'l-Bahá**, *Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 107.
requires: demands as necessary or appropriate
sacrilegious: offensive and shameful violation of what is sacred or holy
standards: rules, expectations, and norms established by authority, custom, or tradition that govern behavior within a society or group
temperance: self-control and moderation in the indulgence of appetites or passions
theories: rationales and beliefs that propose a basis for action; philosophy
tolerate: put up with; allow; permit
trivial: those things of little worth or importance
vices: habits or behaviors that are immoral or degrading
vigilance: attention and watchfulness to avoid danger or pitfalls

5. Bahá'u'lláh tells us that prejudice in its various forms destroys the edifice of humanity. We are adjured by the Divine Messenger to eliminate all forms of prejudice from our lives. Our outer lives must show forth our beliefs. The world must see that, regardless of each passing whim or current fashion of the generality of mankind, the Bahá'í lives his life according to the tenets of his Faith. We must not allow the fear of rejection by our friends and neighbours to deter us from our goal: to live the Bahá'í life. Let us strive to blot out from our lives every last trace of prejudice—racial, religious, political, economic, national, tribal, class, cultural, and that which is based on differences of education or age.

—the Universal House of Justice

Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), par. 117.2, p. 222.

adjured: earnestly advised in the most solemn and impressive manner
blot out: wipe out or destroy
class: of people grouped by social ranking
cultural: of people based on shared customs, skills, beliefs, arts, values, or social structure
destroys: causes to be completely ruined beyond use
deter: discourage, prevent, or turn
Divine Messenger: Bahá'u'lláh
economic: of people based on income or style of household management
edifice: elaborately constructed institution or organization
eliminate: expel or get rid of
Faith: Bahá'í Faith
fashion: socially favored way of dressing, behaving, writing, or performing
forms: kinds or types
generality: greatest part
live: conduct one's self in accordance with
mankind: humankind

national: of people based on country of origin or citizenship
political: of people affiliated with specific systems of government
prejudice: preconceived opinion or judgment of those different from oneself, not based on reason or actual experience, and often marked by a sense of self-superiority, suspicion, intolerance, or irrational hatred
racial: of people based on race
rejection: being unaccepted or unwanted by not fulfilling the expected requirements
religious: of people based on religion
strive: devote serious energy or effort
tenets: principles, beliefs, and doctrines held to be true
trace: minute sign or evidence
tribal: of people based on tribe of origin or affiliation
various: indefinite number of
whim: sudden turn or new interest of the mind

6. For you I desire spiritual distinction—that is, you must become eminent and distinguished in morals. In the love of God you must become distinguished from all else. You must become distinguished for loving humanity, for unity and accord, for love and justice. In brief, you must become distinguished in all the virtues of the human world—for faithfulness and sincerity, for justice and fidelity, for firmness and steadfastness, for philanthropic deeds and service to the human world, for love toward every human being, for unity and accord with all people, for removing prejudices and promoting international peace. Finally, you must become distinguished for heavenly illumination and for acquiring the bestowals of God.

—`Abdu'l-Bahá

The Promulgation of Universal Peace, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), par. 68.4, p. 190.

accord: agreeable and harmonious relationships
acquiring: striving to obtain
bestowals of God: divine gifts; "...bestowals which are the wisdom and guidance of God and the favor of God, which constitute spiritual progress."
 —`Abdu'l-Bahá, *Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy*, (Boston: The Tudor Press, 1918) par. 1.8, p. 34.
distinguished: set apart from others by outstanding, notable qualities
eminent: well-known, outstanding, and prominent
faithfulness: being steadfast in belief, firm in allegiance, and true in affection to God
fidelity: strict and continued faithfulness and loyalty
firmness: being constant in affection and principles
heavenly illumination: spiritual insight, enlightenment, knowledge, and understanding
justice: rendering and conforming to what is right, good, true, and fair as defined by the Word of God

love of God: "...the love of God is realized in the universal love of all humanity."—`Abdu'l-Bahá, "The Divine Art of Living-Chapter VII", cited in *Star of the West*, vol. 8, no. 10 (September 8, 1917), p. 135.
morals: the practice of right and proper conduct
philanthropic: loving, charitable, and helpful
prejudices: preconceived opinions or judgments of those different from oneself, not based on reason or actual experience
service: performance of beneficial deeds or works
sincerity: honesty of feelings, beliefs, and intention
spiritual distinction: divine virtues and qualities that set one apart with recognition and honor
steadfastness: firm in belief and devotion
unity: a heartfelt condition of peace, love, and harmony in human relations
virtues: human reflections of divine spiritual qualities and attributes

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 _____

I felt this way because _____

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

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. They can usually find answers in the quotations just studied or in the introduction. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers.

1. Shoghi Effendi identified three major areas of concern regarding acceptable public and private behavior essential to one's spiritual growth. What are they? _____

2. A high sense of moral rectitude requires the acquisition of numerous virtues. Match these virtues with their appropriate descriptions.
___ justice a. known to do, and capable of doing, what is expected or required; dependable
___ equity b. freedom from deception or fraud; straightforwardness
___ truthfulness c. having the disposition to tell what is true and factual
___ honesty d. worthy of being trusted and relied upon with confidence
___ fair-mindedness e. conforming to what is morally right, good, true, and fair
___ reliability f. dealing fairly, equally, and impartially with all concerned
___ trustworthiness g. inclined to make impartial judgments free of undue influence
3. Match the virtues of a chaste and holy life with their appropriate meanings.
___ modesty a. conformity to standards of what is suitable or proper in words, behavior, dress, and ceremony
___ purity b. humility, decency, and moderation in dress, speech, and conduct
___ temperance c. self-control and moderation in the indulgence of appetites or passions
___ decency d. having morally pure thoughts and mental images
___ clean-mindedness e. clean and free of any sinful, immoral, or selfish motives, imaginings, or behaviors
4. How are the "bestowals of God" acquired? _____
5. Bahá'u'lláh tells us that prejudice destroys what? _____
6. Describe your understanding of the "edifice of humanity." _____

7. Bahá'u'lláh wrote: "*Close your eyes to racial differences, and welcome all with the light of oneness.*"¹ How can this be applied in our efforts to eliminate prejudice? _____

8. Why do you think the Bahá'í Faith advocates such high standards of public and private behavior?

Continued on next page...

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, Quoted by Shoghi Effendi, published in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, (Evanston: Bahá'í Publishing, 2006), par. 55, p. 55.

9. Proper private and public behavior remains the responsibility of the individual. Improper behavior warrants sanctions from Bahá'í institutions only in extreme cases. At this time, the Universal House of Justice has written that a person can lose sacred Bahá'í rights and privileges for immoral behavior only after three criteria have been met: "...whether the party is guilty of blatant and flagrant immorality, whether such conduct is harming the Faith, and whether the believer has refused or neglected to improve ... conduct despite repeated warnings."¹

What do you think **flagrant** means? _____

What do you think **blatant** means? _____

APPLICATION: Showing forth divine light...

Facilitator

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

1. IMAGINING THE POSSIBILITIES: *Visions of radiant lights...*

Bahá'u'lláh wrote: "It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action...." Imagine how the Bahá'í Teachings in this study class could be translated into reality and action. Take turns sharing the possibilities. Begin your statements with: "**One could....**" Suggest as many ideas as you want.

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

From your experience in this study class on "Bahá'í Standards of Behavior," describe what **you** are inspired to put into reality and action. **I will make conscious efforts to...** _____

My next step will be... _____

¹ Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 206, p. 58.

CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song...*

From `Abdu'l-Bahá to some believers in the West.

O army of God! Today, in this world, every people is wandering astray in its own desert, moving here and there according to the dictates of its fancies and whims, pursuing its own particular caprice. Amongst all the teeming masses of the earth, only this community of the Most Great Name is free and clear of human schemes and hath no selfish purpose to promote. Alone amongst them all, this people hath arisen with aims purified of self, following the Teachings of God, most eagerly toiling and striving toward a single goal: to turn this nether dust into high heaven, to make of this world a mirror for the Kingdom, to change this world into a different world, and cause all humankind to adopt the ways of righteousness and a new manner of life.

O army of God! Through the protection and help vouchsafed by the Blessed Beauty—may my life be a sacrifice to His loved ones—ye must conduct yourselves in such a manner that ye may stand out distinguished and brilliant as the sun among other souls. Should any one of you enter a city, he should become a centre of attraction by reason of his sincerity, his faithfulness and love, his honesty and fidelity, his truthfulness and loving-kindness towards all the peoples of the world, so that the people of that city may cry out and say: “This man is unquestionably a Bahá’í, for his manners, his behaviour, his conduct, his morals, his nature, and disposition reflect the attributes of the Bahá’ís.” Not until ye attain this station can ye be said to have been faithful to the Covenant and Testament of God. For He hath, through irrefutable Texts, entered into a binding Covenant with us all, requiring us to act in accordance with His sacred instructions and counsels.

O army of God! The time hath come for the effects and perfections of the Most Great Name to be made manifest in this excellent age, so as to establish, beyond any doubt, that this era is the era of Bahá’u’lláh, and this age is distinguished above all other ages.

—`Abdu'l-Bahá

Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), no. 35, p. 70-71.

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...*

1. **a high sense of moral rectitude** in their social and administrative activities, **absolute chastity** in their individual lives, and **complete freedom from prejudice** in their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or color
2. e, f, c, b, g, a, d
3. b, e, c, a, d
4. by striving to obtain them
5. the edifice of humanity
6. anything close to - elaborately constructed institution or organization of the human race
7. all answers are valuable
8. all answers are valuable
9. anything close to - **flagrant**: so outrageously wrong and improper that it cannot escape notice, and **blatant**: offensively or completely obvious

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