Alcohol and Drugs

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

Continental Bahá'í House of Worship for North America, near Chicago, in Wilmette, Illinois

The desire to rise above the burdens, pains, and emotional hardships of life in this world is common to every soul. The need to celebrate on occasion and let go of the inherent inhibitions that restrain our expressions of joy is also strong in human nature. However, the inability to feel good and express ourselves freely without the use of recreational drugs or alcohol is an outward sign of a spiritual illness in society, whose healing is merely delayed by use of these intoxicants.

Even though alcohol and some drugs appear to give us a sense of detachment, a feeling of escape or temporary vacation from a sometimes- harsh reality, the detriment to the soul and body is far greater than the deceptive benefits initially perceived. Some believe that it is possible to use these intoxicants without experiencing or causing harm. However, the unnecessary use of alcohol or other mind-altering substances interfere with spiritual development and obstruct the peace and tranquility of both the individual and society. In consideration of our true purpose in life, they have no value, except in rare cases when they are prescribed to cure or treat disease.

Understandably then, the Bahá'í teachings clearly prohibit the use of alcohol and drugs unless prescribed by a competent physician as part of a medical treatment.

Bahá'ís believe that spiritual disciplines and the eventual healing of social illnesses through the implementation of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh will create a society conducive to the happiness and tranquility of human beings, wherein the desire for intoxicants is negligible.

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

Facilitator Review the following objective with the participants:

The objective of this study is to understand the fundamental verities or basic truths regarding the importance and necessity of abstinence from alcohol and drugs.

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 **alcohol or drugs use for Bahá'ís**.

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

1. *Beware lest ye exchange the Wine of God for your own wine, for it will stupefy your minds, and turn your faces away from the Countenance of God, the All-Glorious, the Peerless, the Inaccessible. Approach it not, for it hath been forbidden unto you by the behest of God, the Exalted, the Almighty.*

—Bahá'u'lláh

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 144, p. 227.

All-Glorious: sole One, completely splendid and magnificent
approach: go near; encounter
behest: will and order
beware: be on guard and cautious
Countenance: divine favor, grace, and approval
exchange: part with and substitute
forbidden: not permitted or allowed; prohibited
Inaccessible: One that cannot be seen, talked with, influenced, understood, or approached
lest: for fear that
Peerless: One unequaled, matchless, and incomparable
stupefy: make foolish by dulling the perception and understanding of
Wine of God: "...an allegorical sense – such as being the cause of spiritual ecstasy."—written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, Cited in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 2, p. 165.

2. *Fear ye God, O people of the earth, and think not that the wine We have mentioned in Our Tablets is the wine which men drink, and which causeth their intelligence to pass away, their human nature to be perverted, their light to be changed, and their purity to be soiled. ... We meant by this Wine, the River of God, and His favour, the fountain of His living waters, and the Mystic Wine and its divine grace...* **—Bahá'u'lláh**

"Prohibition of Intoxicating Drinks", In *The Compilation of Compilations: Prepared by the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1990*, (Maryborough: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), vol. II, no. 1785, p. 245.

changed: altered or made different
divine: God-inspired; holy; sacred
favour: help, assistance, and support
fear ye: have reverential awe and respect for the majesty of
fountain: source from which there is a continuous supply
grace: influence that makes people morally pure and strong
human nature: inborn character or disposition that is exclusively human
intelligence: capacity for understanding, good judgment, and wisdom
light: power to reflect spiritual knowledge and goodness
living waters: outpourings that give or sustain the life of the spirit

mystic: baffling or incomprehensible to the understanding
Our: used by one in authority to denote himself
pass away: go away or disappear
perverted: turned away from the right, proper, or true intended purpose
purity: cleanliness and freedom from sinfulness, immorality, or selfishness
River of God: abundant outflow of God's spiritual gifts
soiled: made morally unclean and corrupt
Tablets: divinely revealed Scripture
We: used by one in authority to denote himself
Wine: "...an allegorical sense – such as being the cause of spiritual ecstasy."—written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, Cited in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 2, p. 165.

3. `Abdu'l-Bahá explains that the Aqdas prohibits "both light and strong drinks", and He states that the reason for prohibiting the use of alcoholic drinks is because "alcohol leadeth the mind astray and causeth the weakening of the body".

Shoghi Effendi, in letters written on his behalf, states that this prohibition includes not only the consumption of wine but of "everything that deranges the mind", and he clarifies that the use of alcohol is permitted only when it constitutes part of a medical treatment which is implemented "under the advice of a competent and conscientious physician, who may have to prescribe it for the cure of some special ailment". **—written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice**

Cited in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 144, p. 227.

ailment: bodily or mental disorder, illness, or disease
Aqdas: A Book from Bahá'u'lláh titled: *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The Most Holy Book,* which contains the laws or rules of conduct for Bahá'ís.
astray: to the path of error
competent: one who is properly qualified and responds suitably to all requirements
conscientious: one whose behavior is governed by what is known to be right, honorable, and true
constitutes: composes or forms
consumption: use or drinking
cure: restoration of health

deranges: causes disorder or confusion and disturbs the normal action or function of
implemented: carried out or put into effect
leadeth: directs by influence
light: those containing small portions of alcohol
permitted: allowed or authorized
physician: person skilled and authorized to practice the art of healing
prescribe: order or advise the use of
prohibition: act of forbidding by the command of authority
prohibits: forbids by the command of authority
strong: those containing large portions of alcohol

4. Alcohol consumeth the mind and causeth man to commit acts of absurdity, but this opium, this foul fruit of the infernal tree, and this wicked hashish extinguish the mind, freeze the spirit, petrify the soul, waste the body and leave man frustrated and lost. **—`Abdu'l-Bahá**

Cited in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 170, p. 239.

absurdity: that which is ridiculously unreasonable, inappropriate, and inconsistent with common sense
commit: do or perpetrate
consumeth: destroys or wastes away the substance of
extinguish: causes to die out or destroys
foul: detestable, shameful, and exceedingly offensive
freeze: causes to become motionless, fixed, discouraged, and terrified
frustrated: unable to satisfy or attain a purpose
hashish: concentrated drug resin from the flower of the hemp [marijuana] plant
infernal tree: a thorny, pungent tree called ⇗ Zaqqum that bears exceedingly bitter fruit. In the Qur'án the tree is said to grow at the bottom of hell. It symbolizes a very severe punishment and bitter remorse.
lost: ruined or destroyed physically and/or morally
opium: narcotic drug made from the poppy plant
petrify: causes to become lifeless, inactive, deadened, and confound with fear [in]
soul: immortal essence of one's rational, spiritual, and emotional self
spirit: activating or vital force held to give life, courage, and enthusiasm
waste: wears away the strength, vigor, and life [of]
wicked: morally very harmful and evil causing

5. ...Shoghi Effendi stated that one of the requirements for "a chaste and holy life" is "total abstinence ... from opium, and from similar habit-forming drugs". Heroin, hashish and other derivatives of cannabis such as marijuana, as well as hallucinogenic agents such as LSD, peyote and similar substances, are regarded as falling under this prohibition. . . .

It should be noted that the above prohibition against taking certain classes of drugs does not forbid their use when prescribed by qualified physicians as part of a medical treatment.

—written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Cited in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 170, pp. 238-39.

abstinence: voluntarily depriving oneself or refraining
chaste: clean and pure in thought and action of sexual misconduct
drugs: those drugs noted as prohibited include, but are not limited to, opium, heroin, hashish, cannabis, LSD, and peyote.
forbid: command against or prohibit
habit-forming: causing a strong need or addiction for repeated, irresistible, and frequent use
holy: set apart to the service and worship of God; sacred; spiritual
hallucinogenic: substances inducing altered, unreal, or imaginary distortions to one's perceptions of reality
opium: narcotic drug made from the poppy plant
prescribed: ordered or advised the use of
prohibition: act of forbidding by the command of authority
qualified: those having the required qualities, accomplishments, and training to be recognized officially [as]
requirements: essentials needed

6. *Beware of using any substance that induceth sluggishness and torpor in the human temple and inflicteth harm upon the body. We, verily, desire for you naught save what shall profit you, and to this bear witness all created things, had ye but ears to hear.* **—Bahá'u'lláh**

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), par. 155, p. 75.

bear witness: stand as evidence and proof
beware: be on guard and cautious
harm: physical, mental, or emotional damage
human temple: human body and mind
induceth: causes or brings about
sluggishness: a state of physical, mental, or emotional idleness, characterized by depleted energy, slowed thinking, limited motivation, ⇗ or reduced physical activity
substance: chemical composition, natural or manufactured, that can be consumed, inhaled, injected, or otherwise absorbed into the body
torpor: a profound state of mental, physical, and emotional irresponsiveness, often described as deadening of the mind and senses
We: used by one in authority to denote himself

7. O ye lovers of God! In this, the cycle of Almighty God, violence and force, constraint and oppression, are one and all condemned. It is, however, mandatory that the use of opium be prevented by any means whatsoever, that perchance the human race may be delivered from this most powerful of plagues. **—`Abdu'l-Bahá**

Cited in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 170, p. 239.

condemned: pronounced as wrong and strongly disapproved of
constraint: the restriction or confinement of another by force
cycle: era; age
delivered: set free of the burden, peril, and captivity
force: the exertion of physical, intellectual, or moral power to cause a person to act against his will
mandatory: authoritatively commanded or required
means: useful and helpful available resource
misery: a condition of great suffering, pain, or sorrow
opium: narcotic drug made from the poppy plant
oppression: control of people through systematic and pervasive use of power and authority
perchance: perhaps or possibly
plagues: disastrous evils or afflictions
prevented: kept from occurring
violence: the exhibition or exercise of force to cause intimidation, compliance, injury, or damage
whatsoever: including anything and everything

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. The use of alcohol by Bahá'ís is acceptable only when two requirements are met. What are they?

_____

_____

2. The Universal House of Justice wrote that the problem of alcoholism "must never become a source of disunity among believers."[1] In what way could you apply this guidance? _____

_____

_____

Continued on next page…

[1] The Universal House of Justice, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 1180, p. 353.

3. Which of the following are true?

- ☐ a. It's alright for a Bahá'í to drink socially if one's behavior can be controlled.
- ☐ b. It doesn't hurt for Bahá'ís to drink or use drugs at home or where no one will see them.
- ☐ c. Use of alcohol causes one to turn away from the Countenance of God.
- ☐ d. All of God's laws benefit our souls, even if obedience to them results in loss of financial or social gain.
- ☐ e. Alcohol and drugs have serious, harmful effects on one's body, mind, soul, and spirit.

4. In quotation number seven, `Abdu'l-Bahá states that "...the use of opium be prevented by any means whatsoever." Elsewhere, he condemns both opium and hashish.[1] These were two prominent mind-altering recreational drugs of His time. What do these words of `Abdu'l-Bahá suggest about how we might approach drug *prevention* today? _____

_____

_____

5. The Universal House of Justice wrote: "...spiritual stimulation comes from turning one's heart to Bahá'u'lláh and not through any physical means."[2] Alcohol or drug use provides _____ spiritual stimulation.

- ☐ a. little
- ☐ b. some
- ☐ c. considerable
- ☐ d. no

6. Use of alcohol or prohibited drugs can cause numerous harmful effects to the soul, mind, body, and spirit. What are some positive outcomes to the soul, mind, body, and spirit that are to be expected by abstaining from these intoxicants? _____

_____

_____

7. "The Guardian does feel, however, that with new Bahá'ís coming into the Faith, leniency should be exercised; but he feels that when a person is a Bahá'í for some time, his Bahá'í association and the spirit of the Teachings which he studies and endeavours to exemplify will bring about a change in the character, and the individual will stop drinking."[3] What two things will assist a new believer to stop drinking? _____

_____

_____

8. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi: "Any work that helps people to get over the terrible habit of drinking is excellent, and should be looked upon with sympathy and approval by the Bahá'ís."[4] Give some examples of "any work." _____

_____

_____

_____

9. Drugs or substances that can harm the mind or body should only be used under what conditions?

_____

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[1] `Abdu'l-Bahá, see *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 170, p. 239.

[2] The Universal House of Justice, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 1185, p. 354.

[3] Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, "Prohibition of Intoxicating Drinks", In *The Compilation of Compilations: Prepared by the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1990*, (Maryborough: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), vol. II, no. 1804, p. 250.

[4] Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, "Prohibition of Intoxicating Drinks", In *The Compilation of Compilations: Prepared by the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1990*, (Maryborough: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), vol. II, no. 1799, p. 249.

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

_____

My *next step will be...* _____

_____

_____

Some prayers...

Lauded and glorified art Thou, O my God! I entreat Thee by the sighing of Thy lovers and by the tears shed by them that long to behold Thee, not to withhold from me Thy tender mercies in Thy Day, nor to deprive me of the melodies of the Dove that extolleth Thy oneness before the light that shineth from Thy face. I am the one who is in misery, O God! Behold me cleaving fast to Thy Name, the All-Possessing. I am the one who is sure to perish; behold me clinging to Thy Name, the Imperishable. I implore Thee, therefore, by Thy Self, the Exalted, the Most High, not to abandon me unto mine own self and unto the desires of a corrupt inclination. Hold Thou my hand with the hand of Thy power, and deliver me from the depths of my fancies and idle imaginings, and cleanse me of all that is abhorrent unto Thee.

Cause me, then, to turn wholly unto Thee, to put my whole trust in Thee, to seek Thee as my Refuge, and to flee unto Thy face. Thou art, verily, He Who, through the power of His might, doeth whatsoever He desireth, and commandeth, through the potency of His will, whatsoever He chooseth. None can withstand the operation of Thy decree; none can divert the course of Thine appointment. Thou art, in truth, the Almighty, the All-Glorious, the Most Bountiful.

—Bahá'u'lláh

Prayers and Meditations, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1938, 1971 printing), CLXII, p. 255.

O Divine Providence! Bestow Thou in all things purity and cleanliness upon the people of Bahá. Grant that they be freed from all defilement, and released from all addictions. Save them from committing any repugnant act, unbind them from the chains of every evil habit, that they may live pure and free, wholesome and cleanly, worthy to serve at Thy Sacred Threshold and fit to be related to their Lord. Deliver them from intoxicating drinks and tobacco, save them, rescue them, from this opium that bringeth on madness, suffer them to enjoy the sweet savours of holiness, that they may drink deep of the mystic cup of heavenly love and know the rapture of being drawn ever closer unto the Realm of the All-Glorious. For it is even as Thou hast said: *"All that thou hast in thy cellar will not appease the thirst of my love—bring me, O cup-bearer, of the wine of the spirit a cup full as the sea!"*

—`Abdu'l-Bahá

Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), no. 129, pp. 149-50.

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...*

1. 1) when prescribed by a competent physician or under the advice of a competent and conscientious physician
   2) for the cure of some special ailment or as part of a medical treatment
2. all answers are valuable
3. c, d, and e
4. perhaps any means should be used to prevent drug use, including "violence and force, constraint and oppression"
5. d
6. anything similar to: the soul can remain full of life and fearless; the mind potentially bright and intelligent; the body can be strong and healthy; the spirit free and courageous
7. his Bahá'í association and the spirit of the Teachings which he studies and endeavours to exemplify
8. Alcoholics Anonymous, professional counseling, ...all answers are valuable
9. when prescribed by qualified physicians as part of a medical treatment

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