Our Purpose as Human Beings

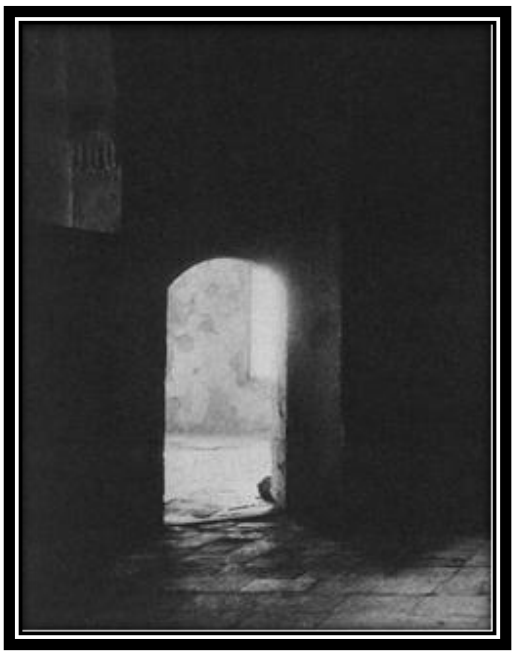
INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

One hundred and twenty-five years ago, none of us were here in this earthly existence. One hundred and twenty-five years from now, our footsteps too will have faded. We live this life in a blink of time between two vast eternities: the eternal past and the eternal future. This reality cannot help but prompt the ultimate questions: What are we doing here? What is our purpose in this life?

If we were to ask these questions of the eight billion people on earth, we would most likely receive as many different answers. For Bahá'ís, the sole source of information concerning these questions is found in true religion and revealed with assurance by the Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh. Science may tell us *how* things happen; however, the why, the purpose, and the meaning of life cannot be explained by science. Moreover, in this age of recognized diversity, neither tradition nor culture can offer sufficient agreement on these realities.

These questions, as difficult as they may be, find answers in the Bahá'í Writings that move the soul to rejoice, to practice righteousness, and to seek spirituality, while avoiding those damaging and meaningless pursuits that lead to sorrow, grief, confusion, and despair. To know one's self and to pursue the purpose for which we were created gives direction and meaning to life in all its aspects.

This study on our purpose as human beings helps to answer questions that have perplexed people for ages and sets one out on the true and intended path. The Sacred Scriptures tell us that we were created out of God's love: *"I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee..."*[1] To what end and purpose? Let's explore.



Entrance to Bahá'u'lláh's prison cell in 'Akká, Israel.

"My body hath endured imprisonment that ye may be released from the bondage of self."[2]
—Bahá'u'lláh

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 our purpose as human beings.

[1] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, (Evanston: Bahá'í Publishing, 2012), Arabic no. 3, p. 7.
[2] *Fountain of Wisdom*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 2016), par. 2.8, p. 12.

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 **our purpose as human beings**.

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

1. And when the sanctified souls rend asunder the veils of all earthly attachments and worldly conditions, and hasten to the stage of gazing on the beauty of the Divine Presence and are honoured by recognizing the Manifestation and are able to witness the splendour of God's Most Great Sign in their hearts, then will the purpose of creation, which is the knowledge of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, become manifest. **—`Abdu'l-Bahá**

Cited in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 23, p. 176.

beauty: brilliant, attractive, and pleasing spiritual attributes and qualities
Divine Presence: Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh; *"Whoso hath recognized the Day Spring of Divine guidance* [the Manifestation of God] *and entered His holy court hath drawn nigh unto God and attained His Presence . . ."* —Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1952, 1971 printing), XXIX, p. 70.
earthly attachments: affectionate attractions to, or dependencies upon, the things of this world
gazing: focused attention with deep, unclouded, spiritual perception
hasten: move swiftly
Him Who is the Eternal Truth: God
honoured: raised to an exalted state of worthy entitlement
knowledge: awareness, recognition, and progressive understanding
manifest: clearly known and evident
Manifestation: great Prophet or chosen ⇗ Messenger Who reveals the Words and exhibits the signs and qualities of God, Bahá'u'lláh
Most Great Sign: great Prophet or chosen Messenger Who reveals the Words and exhibits the signs and qualities of God, Bahá'u'lláh
purpose: main reason for the existence
recognizing: formally accepting and acknowledging the reality of
rend asunder: tear apart or break through
sanctified souls: those with devotion to God and detachment from worldly influences
splendour: brilliance, magnificence, and glory; figuratively—illuminating spiritual knowledge and goodness
stage: interval regarded as a developmental time or step
veils: figuratively—distorted perspectives and inaccurate understandings
witness: see or know by personal experience
worldly conditions: concerns with the affairs and things of the commonly perceived reality of material existence

2. *The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence. To this most excellent aim, this supreme objective, all the heavenly Books and the divinely-revealed and weighty Scriptures unequivocally bear witness. Whoso hath recognized the Day Spring of Divine guidance and entered His holy court hath drawn nigh unto God and attained His Presence, a Presence which is the real Paradise, and of which the loftiest mansions of heaven are but a symbol.* **—Bahá'u'lláh**

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1952, 1971 printing), XXIX, p. 70.

aim: intended achievement or purpose
attain/ed His Presence: succeed/ed in recognizing the Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh; *"Whoso hath recognized the Day Spring of Divine guidance* [the Manifestation of God] *and entered His holy court hath drawn nigh unto God and attained His Presence . . ."*—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1952, 1971 printing), XXIX, p. 70.
bear witness: serve as evidence and proof
court: place of His presence
Day Spring of Divine guidance: Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh
divinely-revealed: made known through God's Manifestations
enable: provide the means and opportunity for
heaven: the spiritual sphere and dwelling place of God, his angels, and the blessed souls who have passed on
heavenly Books: recorded Revelations of God by His Manifestations
know: recognize, become informed and familiar with
loftiest: greatest and highest
man: the human beings
mansions: dwelling places
nigh: near
objective: goal or purpose
Paradise: heaven; state of bliss, happiness, and delight
purpose: main reason or intention
recognized: formally accepted and acknowledged the reality of
Scriptures: Writings considered holy and/or authoritative
supreme: highest and most excellent
symbol: sign or emblem
unequivocally: clearly, sincerely, and without question
weighty: serious and greatly important

3. *Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation.... Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty.* **—Bahá'u'lláh**

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1952, 1971 printing), XXVII, p. 65.

attributes: inherent spiritual qualities
bounty: generously bestowed gift or favor
capacity: receptive power and potential
confer: grant graciously
distinction: special characteristics
enduring: lasting and unyielding
favor: privilege or right granted out of kindness
focused: caused to be concentrated
generating: stimulating into existence; originating; initiating
glory: radiant honor and beauty
impulse: motive or incentive
inmost: deepest within
know: recognize, become informed and familiar with
light: emanating illumination
love: have spiritual intimacy with feelings of warm attraction, strong affection, and adoration for
man: humankind
mirror: true representation or reflection
must needs: of necessity or requirement
names: glorious spiritual perfections
operation: exertion of power and influence
primary: most important
purpose: reason for existing
radiance: emanating energy, light, and love
reality: true existence
recipient: receiver
regarded: considered or thought of
shed: divided and poured forth
singled out: selected or chosen
sovereign: supreme and independent
unconstrained: unrestricted or unlimited
underlying: upon which everything is based [in]
unique: unequaled; matchless

4. *For every one of you his paramount duty is to choose for himself that on which no other may infringe and none usurp from him. Such a thing—and to this the Almighty is My witness—is the love of God, could ye but perceive it.* **—Bahá'u'lláh**

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1952, 1971 printing), CXXIII, p. 261.

duty: sacred responsibility
infringe: interfere or violate one's choice or right
love: spiritual intimacy with feelings of warm ⇗ attraction, strong affection, and adoration
paramount: supreme; most important
usurp: take and keep by force

5. *All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Say: O friends! Drink your fill from this crystal stream that floweth through the heavenly grace of Him Who is the Lord of Names. Let others partake of its waters in My name, that the leaders of men in every land may fully recognize the purpose for which the Eternal Truth hath been revealed, and the reason for which they themselves have been created.* **—Bahá'u'lláh**

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1952, 1971 printing), CIX, p. 215.

beareth Me witness: serves as My evidence and proof
beasts of the field: animals living in the wild
befit: are suited or appropriate to
carry forward: actively cause or enable to proceed
compassion: sympathetic consciousness of the distress of others and the desire to alleviate it
dignity: worthy state of honor, nobility, and esteem
Eternal Truth: reality of God
ever-advancing: continually progressing and improving
forbearance: patience indulgence and long-suffering towards offenders or in hardship
friends: fellow Bahá'ís
grace: gifted divine influence that makes people ⇗ morally pure and strong
Him: the Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh
kindreds: those connected by something in common
Lord of Names: One with independent and supreme spiritual power to reflect the glorious perfections of God, Bahá'u'lláh
loving-kindness: tender regard and affection
man: the people
men: people
mercy: kindness and compassion toward the condemned, the distressed, and the unfortunate
purpose: main reason or intention
recognize: formally accept and acknowledge
revealed: made known through His Manifestation, Bahá'u'lláh
unworthy: inappropriate to the station
virtues: spiritual qualities and traits

6. *We have counselled all people, in the most clear and eloquent language, to adorn their characters with trustworthiness and godliness, and with such qualities as are conducive to the elevation of man's station in the world of being. This Wronged One testifieth that the purpose for which mortal men have, from utter nothingness, stepped into the realm of being, is that they may work for the betterment of the world and live together in concord and harmony.* **—Bahá'u'lláh**

"Trustworthiness." In *The Compilation of Compilations: Prepared by the Universal House of Justice 1963-1990*, (Maryborough: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), vol. II, no. 2032, p. 332.

adorn: add the advantages of splendor and attractiveness to
concord: friendly and peaceful relations
conducive: tending to promote and contribute
eloquent: moving and persuasive
godliness: the virtues and characteristics of righteousness
harmony: complementary and pleasant agreement
man's: peoples'
mortal men: the people of the earth
purpose: main reason or intent
qualities: distinctive virtues, powers, or traits of ⇗ character
realm of being: place or sphere of human reality
station: standing or position
stepped: advanced and entered
testifieth: witnesses and solemnly declares
This Wronged One: Bahá'u'lláh referring to Himself
trustworthiness: being dependable and worthy of trust
utter: absolute and total
We: Bahá'u'lláh referring to Himself
world of being: place or sphere of human reality

7. The real fruit of the human tree is everlasting, and that is the love for God, that is the knowledge of God, that is service to the world of humanity, that is kindness to all mankind, and that is endeavouring and striving for the material and spiritual—or ideal—development of the world of man. This is the everlasting fruit. This is the divine effulgence. This is the divine bestowal. This is the everlasting life.

The teachings are lengthy, but I state them briefly, and from these brief statements, which are fundamental, you must learn the full teachings. **—`Abdu'l-Bahá**

"`Abdu'l-Bahá's 'Welcome' to California", cited in *Star of the West*, vol. 4, no. 11 (September 27, 1913), pp. 191 and 194.

bestowal: boundless spiritual gifts from God; "…bestowals which are the wisdom and guidance of God and the favor of God, which constitute spiritual progress." —`Abdu'l-Bahá, *`Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy*, (Boston: The Tudor Press, 1918) par. 1.8, p. 34.
development: gradual improvement, advancement, or growth
divine: God inspired; holy; sacred
effulgence: figuratively—spiritual knowledge, understanding, inspiration, grace, and enlightenment that come from God through His Manifestations, bringing forth in humankind divine attributes and spiritual qualities
endeavouring: trying to achieve with earnest effort
fruit: productive purpose for our existence
fundamental: basic and essential
ideal: highest standard of excellence [in the]
kindness: being of the disposition to do good and bring happiness
knowledge: awareness, recognition, and progressive understanding
love: spiritual intimacy with feelings of warm attraction, strong affection, and adoration
man: humanity
mankind: humankind
service: active exertion to answer the needs of, be of use to, help, comfort, guard, protect, benefit, wait upon, watch over, and lend assistance
striving: devoting serious energy or effort

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 Bahá'í Writings tell us our purpose in this life is to…

- ☐ a. acquire spiritual attributes.
- ☐ b. satisfy the lower or material nature.
- ☐ c. know God.
- ☐ d. compete for social status.
- ☐ e. love God.
- ☐ f. make lots and lots of money.
- ☐ g. own lots and lots of things.
- ☐ h. recognize His Manifestation for the day in which we live.
- ☐ i. carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.

Continue on next page…

2. Recognizing Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this day and following His teachings is the same as attaining the Presence of _____ , which accomplishes one of the purposes for which we were created.

3. `Abdu'l-Bahá was asked, "What is the purpose of our lives?" He responded, "To acquire virtues."[1] Acquiring virtues is the way we reflect the greatness of God's glory. Name some virtues that we should strive to acquire as spiritual beings. _____

_____

_____

4. Bahá'u'lláh wrote: *"All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization."*[2] How does this relate to your day-to-day life? _____

_____

5. Why each one of us was created is revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in "The Hidden Words": *"O SON OF MAN! Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty."*[3] Why did God create you? _____

_____

6. `Abdu'l-Bahá reminds us that our true "fruits" of life, or the successes of this life are…

- ☐ a. those "fruits" that are everlasting.
- ☐ b. the knowledge of God.
- ☐ c. the love God.
- ☐ d. service to the world of humanity.
- ☐ e. showing kindness to all mankind.
- ☐ f. striving for the spiritual *and* material development of the world.
- ☐ g. doing the things listed above that constitute everlasting life.

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 "Our Purpose as Human Beings," describe what ***you*** are inspired to put into reality and action. ***I will** make conscious efforts to...* _____

_____

***My** next step will be...* _____

_____

[1] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, (London, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), par. 55.2, p. 177.
[2] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1952, 1971 printing), CIX, p. 215.
[3] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, (Evanston: Bahá'í Publishing, 2012), Arabic no. 3, p. 7.

CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song…*

From a talk by `Abdu'l-Bahá while in New York.

In the beginning of his human life man was embryonic in the world of the matrix [womb]. There he received capacity and endowment for the reality of human existence. The forces and powers necessary for this world were bestowed upon him in that limited condition. In this world he needed eyes; he received them potentially in the other. He needed ears; he obtained them there in readiness and preparation for his new existence. The powers requisite in this world were conferred upon him in the world of the matrix, so that when he entered this realm of real existence he not only possessed all necessary functions and powers but found provision for his material sustenance awaiting him.

Therefore, in this world he must prepare himself for the life beyond. That which he needs in the world of the Kingdom must be obtained here. Just as he prepared himself in the world of the matrix by acquiring forces necessary in this sphere of existence, so, likewise, the indispensable forces of the divine existence must be potentially attained in this world.

What is he in need of in the Kingdom which transcends the life and limitation of this mortal sphere? That world beyond is a world of sanctity and radiance; therefore, it is necessary that in this world he should acquire these divine attributes. In that world there is need of spirituality, faith, assurance, the knowledge and love of God. These he must attain in this world so that after his ascension from the earthly to the heavenly Kingdom he shall find all that is needful in that eternal life ready for him.

That divine world is manifestly a world of lights; therefore, man has need of illumination here. That is a world of love; the love of God is essential. It is a world of perfections; virtues, or perfections, must be acquired. That world is vivified by the breaths of the Holy Spirit; in this world we must seek them. That is the Kingdom of everlasting life; it must be attained during this vanishing existence.

By what means can man acquire these things? How shall he obtain these merciful gifts and powers? First, through the knowledge of God. Second, through the love of God. Third, through faith. Fourth, through philanthropic deeds. Fifth, through self-sacrifice. Sixth, through severance from this world. Seventh, through sanctity and holiness. Unless he acquires these forces and attains to these requirements, he will surely be deprived of the life that is eternal. But if he possesses the knowledge of God, becomes ignited through the fire of the love of God, witnesses the great and mighty signs of the Kingdom, becomes the cause of love among mankind and lives in the utmost state of sanctity and holiness, he shall surely attain to second birth, be baptized by the Holy Spirit and enjoy everlasting existence….

Praise be to God! The door of divine knowledge has been opened by Bahá'u'lláh, for He has laid the foundation whereby man may become acquainted with the verities of heaven and earth and has bestowed the utmost confirmation in this day. He is our Teacher and Adviser; He is our Seer and the One clement toward us. He has prepared His gifts and vouchsafed His bounties, revealed every admonition and behest, prepared for us the means of eternal glory, breathed upon us the life-quickening breaths of the Holy Spirit, opened before our faces the doors of the paradise of `Abhá and caused the lights of the Sun of Truth to shine upon us. The clouds of mercy have poured down their precious rain. The sea of favor is swelling and surging toward us.

The spiritual springtime has come. Infinite bounties and graces have appeared. What bestowal is greater than this? We must appreciate the divine generosity and act in accordance with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh so that all good may be stored up for us and in both worlds we shall become precious and acceptable to God, attain to everlasting blessings, taste the delicacy of the love of God, find the sweetness of the knowledge of God, perceive the heavenly bestowal and witness the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is my advice, and this is my admonition. **—`Abdu'l-Bahá**

The Promulgation of Universal Peace, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), par. 81.2 and 81.8-81.12, pp. 225-28.

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...*

1. a, c, e, h, and i
2. God
3. all answers are valuable
4. all answers are valuable
5. anything similar to: *"I knew my love for thee, therefore I created thee…"*
6. a, b, c, d, e, f, and g

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