

# Deepening and Compilation for Bahá'í Youth Teaching Projects

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Universal House of Justice

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The glory rest upon you,  
and God's mercy,  
and God's blessings.  
-Bahá'u'lláh

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Session 1 — Introduction

Blessed is he who in the **prime of his youth** and the heyday of his life will **arise to serve** the Cause of the Lord of the beginning and of the end, and adorn his heart with His love. The manifestation of such a grace is **greater** than the creation of the heavens and of the earth. Blessed are the steadfast and well is it with those who are firm.<sup>1</sup>

-Bahá'u'lláh

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<sup>1</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, From a Tablet

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For their citizenship, it must be remembered, is in the Kingdom of Bahá'u'lláh. Though **willing to share** to the utmost the temporal benefits and the fleeting joys which this earthly life can confer, though eager to **participate in whatever activity** that conduces to the richness, the happiness and peace of that life, they can, at no time, forget that it constitutes no more than a transient, a very brief stage of their existence, that they who live it are but pilgrims and wayfarers whose **goal is the Celestial City**, and whose home the Country of never-failing joy and brightness.<sup>2</sup>

-Shoghi Effendi

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<sup>2</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 198

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A vibrant band of Bahá'í youth on the European continent, **committed to the promotion** of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and the **upholding of His laws** and principles, **determined to work** in harmony and unity with their fellow believers of all ages and classes, **can revolutionize** the progress of the Cause.<sup>3</sup>

This generation of Bahá'í youth enjoys a **unique distinction**. You will live your lives in a period when the forces of history are moving to a climax, when mankind will see the **establishment of the Lesser Peace**, and during which the Cause of God will play an increasingly prominent role in the reconstruction of human society.

The **key to success** in this endeavor is,

**firstly**, to **deepen your understanding** of the Teachings of the Cause so that you will be able to apply them to the problems of individuals and society, and explain them to your peers in ways that they will understand and welcome;

**secondly**, to strive to **model** your behavior in every way after the high standards of honesty, trustworthiness, courage, loyalty, forbearance, purity and spirituality set forth in the Teachings;

and, **above all**, to live in continual awareness of the presence and **all-conquering power of Bahá'u'lláh**, which will enable you to overcome every temptation and surmount every obstacle.

With love and utmost longing we call upon you to **immerse yourselves** in the Divine Teachings, champion the Cause of God and His Law, and arise for the quickening of mankind.

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3 Universal House of Justice, Message to the Youth Conference in Innsbruck, 1984

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## Session 2 — Consultation

*Let us begin our reflections on some of the implications of the principle of consultation by studying a few quotations from the Bahá'í Writings. After having read a quote, discuss its main message.*

If any differences arise amongst you, behold Me standing before your face, and **overlook the faults of one another** for My name's sake and as a token of your love for My manifest and resplendent Cause.<sup>4</sup>

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The **prime requisites** for them that take counsel together are **purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrances, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold**. Should they be graciously aided

to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Bahá shall be vouchsafed to them.<sup>5</sup>

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*Discuss the following phrases:*

- *Purity of motive*
  - *Radiance of Spirit*
  - *Detachment from all else save God*
  - *Attraction to His Divine Fragrances*
  - *Humility and Lowliness amongst His loved ones*
  - *Patience and long-suffering in difficulties*
  - *Servitude to His exalted Threshold*
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The members thereof must take counsel together in such wise that no occasion for ill-feeling or discord may arise. This can be attained when every member **expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion** and setteth forth his argument. Should any one oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed.<sup>6</sup> The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions. If after discussion a decision be carried unanimously, well and good; but if, the Lord forbid, differences of opinion should arise, a majority of voices must prevail.<sup>7</sup>

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The principle of consultation, which constitutes **one of the basic laws** of the Administration, should be **applied to all Bahá'í activities** which affect the collective interests of the Faith, for it is through co-operation and continual exchange of thoughts and views that the Cause can best safeguard and foster its interests. **Individual initiative**, personal ability and resourcefulness, though indispensable,

are, unless supported and enriched by the collective experiences and wisdom of the group, utterly incapable of achieving such a tremendous task.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 315

<sup>5</sup> *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 87

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> From a Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, August 30, 1933

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### Session 3 — Role of Youth

The Pen of the Most High hath decreed and imposed upon every one the obligation to teach this Cause.... God will, no doubt, inspire whosoever detacheth himself from all else but Him, and will cause the pure waters of wisdom and utterance to gush out and flow copiously from his heart.

- Bahá'u'lláh

*Study these extracts of the message sent by the Universal House of Justice on June 16th 1966 "to the Bahá'í Youth In Every Land" concerning the role of youth. Summarize the paragraphs and discuss its main message.*

#### To Bahá'í Youth in Every Land

In country after country the achievements of Bahá'í youth are increasingly advancing the work of the Nine Year Plan and arousing the admiration of their fellow believers. From the very beginning of the Bahá'í Era, youth have played a vital part in the promulgation of God's Revelation. The Báb Himself was but twenty-five years old when He declared His Mission, while many of the Letters of the Living were even younger. The Master, as a very young man, was called upon to shoulder heavy responsibilities in the service of His Father in 'Iráq and Turkey; and His brother, the Purest Branch, yielded up his life to God in the Most Great Prison at the age of twenty-two that the servants of God might "be quickened, and all that dwell on earth be united." Shoghi Effendi was a student at Oxford when called to the throne of his Guardianship, and many of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, who won imperishable fame during the Ten Year Crusade, were young people. Let it, therefore, never be imagined that youth must await their years of maturity before they can render invaluable

services to the Cause of God. For any person, whether Bahá'í or not, his youthful years are those in which he will make many decisions which will set the course of his life's work, complete his education, begin to earn his own living, marry, and start to raise his own family. Most important of all, it is during this period that the mind is most questing and that the spiritual values that will guide the person's future behaviour are adopted. These factors present Bahá'í youth with their greatest opportunities, their greatest challenges, and their greatest tests—opportunities to truly apprehend the teachings of their Faith and to give them to their contemporaries, challenges to overcome the pressures of the world and to provide leadership for their and succeeding generations, and tests enabling them to exemplify in their lives the high moral standards set forth in the Bahá'í writings. Indeed, the Guardian wrote of the Bahá'í youth that it is they “who can contribute so decisively to the virility, the purity, and the driving force of the life of the Bahá'í community, and upon whom must depend the future orientation of its destiny, and the complete unfoldment of the potentialities with which God has endowed it.”

...

Three great fields of service lie open before young Bahá'ís, in which they will simultaneously be remaking the character of human society and preparing themselves for the work they can undertake later in their lives.

First, the foundation of all their accomplishments, is their study of the teachings, the spiritualization of their lives, and the forming of their characters in accordance with the standards of Bahá'u'lláh. As the moral standards of the people around us collapse and decay, whether of the centuries-old civilizations of the East, the more recent cultures of Christendom and Islám, or of the rapidly changing tribal societies of the world, the Bahá'ís must increasingly stand out as pillars of righteousness and forbearance. The life of a Bahá'í will be characterized by truthfulness and decency; he will walk uprightly among his fellowmen, dependent upon none save God, yet linked by bonds of love and brotherhood with mankind; he will be entirely detached from the loose standards, the decadent theories, the frenetic experimentation, the desperation of present-day society, will look upon his neighbours with a bright and friendly face, and be a beacon light and haven for all those who would emulate his strength of character and assurance of soul.

The second field of service, which is linked intimately with the first, is teaching the Faith, particularly to their fellow youth, among whom are some of the most open and seeking minds in the world. Not yet having acquired all the responsibilities of a family or a long-established home and job, youth can the more easily choose where they will live and study or work. In the world at large young people travel hither and thither

seeking amusement, education, and experiences. Bahá'í youth, bearing the incomparable treasure of the Word of God for this Day, can harness this mobility into service for mankind and can choose their places of residence, their areas of travel, and their types of work with the goal in mind of how they can best serve the Faith.

The third field of service is the preparation by youth for their later years. It is the obligation of a Bahá'í to educate his children; likewise it is the duty of the children to acquire knowledge of the arts and sciences and to learn a trade or a profession whereby they, in turn, can earn their living and support their families. This, for a Bahá'í youth, is in itself a service to God, a service, moreover, which can be combined with teaching the Faith and often with pioneering. The Bahá'í community will need men and women of many skills and qualifications; for, as it grows in size the sphere of its activities in the life of society will increase and diversify. Let Bahá'í youth, therefore, consider the best ways in which they can use and develop their native abilities for the service of mankind and the Cause of God, whether this be as farmers, teachers, doctors, artisans, musicians, or any one of the multitude of livelihoods that are open to them.

...

Paralleling the growth of his inner life through prayer, meditation, service, and study of the teachings, Bahá'í youth have the opportunity to learn in practice the very functioning of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Through taking part in conferences and summer schools as well as Nineteen Day Feasts, and in service on committees, they can develop the wonderful skill of Bahá'í consultation, thus tracing new paths of human corporate action. Consultation is no easy skill to learn, requiring as it does the subjugation of all egotism and unruly passions, the cultivation of frankness and freedom of thought as well as courtesy, openness of mind, and wholehearted acquiescence in a majority decision. In this field Bahá'í youth may demonstrate the efficiency, the vigour, the access of unity which arise from true consultation and, by contrast, demonstrate the futility of partisanship, lobbying, debate, secret diplomacy, and unilateral action which characterize modern affairs. Youth also take part in the life of the Bahá'í community as a whole and promote a society in which all generations—elderly, middle-aged, youth, children—are fully integrated and make up an organic whole. By refusing to carry over the antagonisms and mistrust between the generations which perplex and bedevil modern society, they will again demonstrate the healing and life-giving nature of their religion.<sup>9</sup>

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THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

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<sup>9</sup> Message from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'í Youth, 1966

## Session 4 — The Bahá'í Faith

By the righteousness of God! Whoso openeth his lips in this Day and maketh mention of the name of his Lord, the hosts of Divine inspiration shall descend upon him from the heaven of My name, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. On him shall also descend the Concourse on high, each bearing aloft a chalice of pure light. Thus hath it been foreordained in the realm of God's Revelation, by the behest of Him Who is the All-Glorious, the Most Powerful.

- Bahá'u'lláh

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I wish to urge the necessity of concentrating... on the systematic **study of the early history and principles of the Faith**, on public speaking, and on a thorough discussion, both formally and informally, of various aspects of the Cause. These I regard as essential preliminaries to a future intensive campaign of teaching in which the rising generation must engage, if the spread of the Cause is to be assured in that land.

— Shoghi Effendi

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## The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh - A World Religion

- Shoghi Effendi

The Faith established by Bahá'u'lláh was born in Persia about the middle of the nineteenth century and has, as a result of the successive banishments of its Founder, culminating in His exile to the Turkish penal colony of 'Akká, and His subsequent death and burial in its vicinity, fixed its permanent spiritual center in the Holy Land, and is now in the process of laying the foundations of its world administrative center in the city of Haifa.

Alike in the claims unequivocally asserted by its author and the general character of the growth of the Bahá'í community in every continent of the globe, it can be regarded in no other light than a world religion, destined to evolve in the course of



time into a world-embracing commonwealth, whose advent must signalize the Golden Age of mankind, the age in which the unity of the human race will have been unassailably established, its maturity attained, and its glorious destiny unfolded through the birth and efflorescence of a world-encompassing civilization.

## The Herald

The Bahá'í Faith revolves around three central Figures, the first of whom was a youth, a native of Shíráz, named Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad, known as the Báb (Gate), who in May, 1844, at the age of twenty-five, advanced the claim of being the Herald Who, according to the sacred Scriptures of previous Dispensations, must needs announce and prepare the way for the advent of One greater than Himself, Whose mission would be according to those same Scriptures, to inaugurate an era of righteousness and peace, an era that would be hailed as the consummation of all previous Dispensations, and initiate a new cycle in the religious history of mankind. Swift and severe persecution, launched by the organized forces of Church and State in His native land, precipitated successively His arrest, His exile to the mountains of Ádharbayján, His imprisonment in the fortresses of Máh-Kú and Chihríq and His execution, in July, 1850, by a firing squad in the public square of Tabríz. No less than twenty thousand of his followers were put to death with such barbarous cruelty as to evoke the warm sympathy and the unqualified admiration of a number of Western writers, diplomats, travellers and scholars, some of whom were witnesses of these abominable outrages, and were moved to record them in their books and diaries.

## Bahá'u'lláh

Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí, surnamed Bahá'u'lláh (the Glory of God), a native of Mázindarán, Whose advent the Báb had foretold, was assailed by those same forces of ignorance and fanaticism, was imprisoned in Ṭihrán, was banished, in 1852, from His native land to Baghdád, and thence to Constantinople and Adrianople, and finally to the prison city of 'Akká, where He remained incarcerated for no less than twenty-four years, and in whose neighborhood He passed away in 1892. In the course of His banishment, and particularly in Adrianople and 'Akká, He formulated the laws and ordinances of His Dispensation, expounded, in over a hundred volumes, the principles of His Faith, proclaimed His Message to the kings and rulers of both the East and the West, both Christian and Muslim, addressed the Pope, the Caliph of Islám, the Chief Magistrates of the Republics of the American continent, the entire Christian sacerdotal order, the leaders of Shí'ih and Sunní Islám, and the high priests of the Zoroastrian religion. In these writings He proclaimed His Revelation, summoned

those whom He addressed to heed His call and espouse His Faith, warned them of the consequences of their refusal, and denounced, in some cases, their arrogance and tyranny.

### *'Abdu'l-Bahá*

His eldest son, Abbas Effendi, known as 'Abdu'l-Bahá (the Servant of Bahá), appointed by Him as the successor and the authorized interpreter of His teachings, who since early childhood had been closely associated with His Father, and shared His exile and tribulations, remained a prisoner until 1908, when as a result of the Young Turk Revolution, He was released from His confinement. Establishing His residence in Haifa, He embarked soon after on His three-year journey to Egypt, Europe and North America, in the course of which He expounded before vast audiences, the teachings of His Father and predicted the approach of that catastrophe that was soon to befall mankind. He returned to His home on the eve of the first World War, in the course of which He was exposed to constant danger, until liberation of Palestine by the forces under the command of General Allenby, who extended the utmost consideration to Him and the small band of His fellow-exiles in 'Akká and Haifa. In 1921 He passed away, and was buried in a vault in the mausoleum erected on Mount Carmel, at the express instruction of Bahá'u'lláh for the remains of the Báb which had previously been transferred from Tabríz to the Holy Land after having been preserved and concealed for no less than sixty years.

### *Administrative Order*

This Administrative Order, unlike the systems evolved after the death of the Founders of the various religions, is divine in origin, rests securely on the laws, the precepts, the ordinances and institutions which the Founder of the Faith has Himself specifically laid down and unequivocally established, and functions in strict accordance with the interpretations of the authorized Interpreters of its holy scriptures. Though fiercely assailed, ever since its inception, it has by virtue of its character, unique in the annals of the world's religious history, succeeded in maintaining unity of the diversified and far-flung body of its supporters, and enabled them to launch, unitedly and systematically, enterprises in both Hemispheres, designed to extend its limits and consolidate its administrative institutions.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Shoghi Effendi's Statement to the Special UN Committee on Palestine, 1947

## Session 5 — “O My Beloved Friends”

By God besides Whom is none other God! Should any one arise for the triumph of our Cause, him will God render victorious though tens of thousands of enemies be leagued against him. And if his love for Me wax stronger, God will establish his ascendancy over all the powers of earth and heaven. Thus have We breathed the spirit of power into all regions.

- Bahá'u'lláh

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Before leaving to pilgrimage to the holy sites of Mekka and Medina, the Báb summoned to His presence the remaining Letters of the Living, and to each severally He gave a special command and appointed a special task. He addressed to them these parting words:

O My beloved friends! You are the bearers of the name of God in this Day. You have been chosen as the repositories of His mystery. 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 very members of your body must bear witness to the loftiness of your purpose, the integrity of your life, the reality of your faith, and the exalted character of your devotion. For verily I say, this is the Day spoken of by God in His Book: “On that day will We set a seal upon their mouths yet shall their hands speak unto Us, and their feet shall bear witness to that which they shall have done.” Ponder the words of Jesus addressed to His disciples, as He sent them forth to propagate the Cause of God. In words such as these, He bade them arise and fulfil their mission: “Ye are even as the fire which in the darkness of the night has been kindled upon the mountain-top. Let your light shine before the eyes of men. Such must be the purity of your character and the degree of your renunciation, that the people of the earth may through you recognise and be drawn closer to the heavenly Father who is the Source of purity and grace. For none has seen the Father who is in heaven. You who are His spiritual children must by your deeds exemplify His virtues, and witness to His glory.

You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?

“Such must be the degree of your detachment, that into whatever city you enter to proclaim and teach the Cause of God, you should in no wise expect either meat or reward from its people. Nay, when you depart out of that city, you should shake the dust from off your feet. As you have entered it pure and undefiled, so must you depart from that city. For verily I say, the heavenly Father is ever with you and keeps watch over you. If you be faithful to Him, He will assuredly deliver into your hands all the treasures of the earth, and will exalt you above all the rulers and kings of the world.” O My Letters! Verily I say, immensely exalted is this Day above the days of the Apostles of old. Nay, immeasurable is the difference! You are the witnesses of the Dawn of the promised Day of God. You are the partakers of the mystic chalice of His Revelation. Gird up the loins of endeavour, and be mindful of the words of God as revealed in His Book: “Lo, the Lord thy God is come, and with Him is the company of His angels arrayed before Him!”. ... You have been called to this station; you will attain to it, only if you arise to trample beneath your feet every earthly desire, and endeavour to become those “honoured servants of His who speak not till He hath spoken, and who do His bidding.” ...

Scatter throughout the length and breadth of this land, and, with steadfast feet and sanctified hearts, prepare the way for His coming. Heed not your weaknesses and frailty; fix your gaze upon the invincible power of the Lord, your God, the Almighty. ...

Arise in His name, put your trust wholly in Him, and be assured of ultimate victory.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Dawn-Breakers, Nabil's Narrative*, p. 92

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## Session 6 — Proofs and Evidences of the Existence of God

Be unrestrained as the wind, while carrying the Message of Him Who hath caused the Dawn of Divine Guidance to break. Consider, how

the wind, faithful to that which God hath ordained, bloweth upon all the regions of the earth, be they inhabited or desolate. Neither the sight of desolation, nor the evidences of prosperity, can either pain or please it. It bloweth in every direction, as bidden by its Creator. So should be every one that claimeth to be a lover of the one true God. It behoveth him to fix his gaze upon the fundamentals of His Faith, and to labor diligently for its propagation. Wholly for the sake of God he should proclaim His Message, and with that same spirit accept whatever response his words may evoke in his hearer. He who shall accept and believe, shall receive his reward; and he who shall turn away, shall receive none other than his own punishment.

- Bahá'u'lláh

*One person from the group prepares a short talk on this topic based on the following text. Read this Chapter from Some Answered Questions before the deepening that you may gain a deeper insight of what the speaker is saying.*

One of the proofs and demonstrations of the existence of God is the fact that man did not create himself: nay, his creator and designer is another than himself.

It is certain and indisputable that the creator of man is not like man because a powerless creature cannot create another being. The maker, the creator, has to possess all perfections in order that he may create.

Can the creation be perfect and the creator imperfect? Can a picture be a masterpiece and the painter imperfect in his art? For it is his art and his creation. Moreover, the picture cannot be like the painter; otherwise, the painting would have created itself. However perfect the picture may be, in comparison with the painter it is in the utmost degree of imperfection.

The contingent world is the source of imperfections: God is the origin of perfections. The imperfections of the contingent world are in themselves a proof of the perfections of God.

For example, when you look at man, you see that he is weak. This very weakness of the creature is a proof of the power of the Eternal Almighty One, because, if there were no power, weakness could not be imagined. Then the weakness of the creature is a proof of the power of God; for if there were no power, there could be no weakness; so from this weakness it becomes evident that there is power in the world. Again, in the contingent world there is poverty; then necessarily wealth exists, since poverty is apparent in the world. In the contingent world there is ignorance; necessarily

knowledge exists, because ignorance is found; for if there were no knowledge, neither would there be ignorance. Ignorance is the nonexistence of knowledge, and if there were no existence, nonexistence could not be realized.

It is certain that the whole contingent world is subjected to a law and rule which it can never disobey; even man is forced to submit to death, to sleep and to other conditions—that is to say, man in certain particulars is governed, and necessarily this state of being governed implies the existence of a governor. Because a characteristic of contingent beings is dependency, and this dependency is an essential necessity, therefore, there must be an independent being whose independence is essential.

In the same way it is understood from the man who is sick that there must be one who is in health; for if there were no health, his sickness could not be proved.

Therefore, it becomes evident that there is an Eternal Almighty One, Who is the possessor of all perfections, because unless He possessed all perfections He would be like His creation. Throughout the world of existence it is the same; the smallest created thing proves that there is a creator. For instance, this piece of bread proves that it has a maker.

Praise be to God! the least change produced in the form of the smallest thing proves the existence of a creator: then can this great universe, which is endless, be self-created and come into existence from the action of matter and the elements? How self-evidently wrong is such a supposition!

These obvious arguments are adduced for weak souls; but if the inner perception be open, a hundred thousand clear proofs become visible. Thus, when man feels the indwelling spirit, he is in no need of arguments for its existence; but for those who are deprived of the bounty of the spirit, it is necessary to establish external arguments.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, Chapter 2

## Session 7 — Suffering in the World

They that have forsaken their country for the purpose of teaching Our Cause—these shall the Faithful Spirit strengthen through its power. A company of Our chosen angels shall go forth with them, as bidden by Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Wise. How great the blessedness that awaiteth him that hath attained the honor of serving the Almighty! By My life! No act, however great, can compare with

it, except such deeds as have been ordained by God, the All-Powerful, the Most Mighty. Such a service is, indeed, the prince of all goodly deeds, and the ornament of every goodly act. Thus hath it been ordained by Him Who is the Sovereign Revealer, the Ancient of Days.

- Bahá'u'lláh

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*“If God is just and kind, why is there so much suffering in the world?” A question which many people, believers and non-believers ask themselves or others during a conversation. Summarize each of the next paragraphs which are extracts from an essay on this same topic.<sup>13</sup>*

- 1) *Bahá'u'lláh says: “Regard the world as the human body.” Let us assume that the body is sick, i.e. suffering from gastritis. The symptoms of this illness include the pain in the stomach, inner bleeding, vomiting, nausea etc. It is clear that gastritis cannot be cured by treating the symptoms only, for example by getting rid of the stomach ache with a painkiller. The underlying sickness needs to be found and treated at the root, to remove in the long-term. The same can be applied to the world's problems. Among the symptoms of the world's sickness are racism, poverty, wars and starvation, but again it would not help investing time in curing these, because they would continuously relapse. The money sent to a third world country to feed the people would not suffice to feed them forever, and food shortage would soon reoccur. If we however, look for the basic illness, the underlying problem, we see that the cause of all this trouble in the world is disunity. Bahá'u'lláh says: “The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.”*
- 2) *Bahá'u'lláh says: “Man is the supreme talisman. Lack of proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess.” We have all been created noble by God and in His image! Every child is born pure, and should be regarded as a “mine rich in gems of inestimable value.” Sadly, what many children are deprived of today is moral and spiritual education. Ignorance and lack of these spiritual truths prevent the child from being able to contribute to an ever-advancing civilization, and have its part in solving the world's problems.*
- 3) *Bahá'u'lláh says: “The world is in travail, and its agitation waxeth day by day...” The travail, or the birth pangs a mother has to endure when she gives birth to her child, is comparable to the sufferings of mankind. She suffers lots of pain, however knowing that the Baby will soon be born bringing lots of happiness and light. The same thing*

*can be applied to the world. Though now it endures suffering and difficulties such as war, corruption, crime etc. this is just a transient stage in the process and will ultimately lead to unity and peace. Another example is that of a farmer ploughing his field. The more he ploughs it, and turns and churns the earth, the more fruitful will the harvest be.*

- 4) *God endowed man with free-will; freedom to take responsibility for his own actions. In a Hidden Word revealed by Bahá'u'lláh He says: "O Son of the Wondrous Vision! I have breathed within thee a breath of My own Spirit, that thou mayest be My lover. Why hast thou forsaken Me and sought a beloved other than me." God has given us the free-will to recognize him and abide by his laws or to turn away from them. "O Son of Spirit! Noble have I created thee, yet hast thou abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created." Sadly, man has chosen to abase himself and turn away from the teachings, which causes suffering in the world, because the key to peace and security only lies in the Divine teachings.*
- 5) *Throughout his life, a human being passes through different stages of life, including infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The same is true for the world of humanity, which is now going through the stage of adolescence. Shoghi Effendi said: "The tumult of this age of transition is characteristic of the impetuosity and irrational instincts of youth, its follies, its prodigality, its pride, its self-assurance, its rebelliousness, and contempt of discipline." As the quote implies this is the stage of rebellion, in which mankind ignores, rejects and opposes in various ways the Divinely ordained teachings that God has destined for the proper development of mankind, and to ensure its peace and felicity.*

*You may use one or more of these insightful reasons to answer questions like this.*

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13 Essay written by Maryam Zölzer

## Session 8 — The Three Stations of the Manifestations of God

If he be kindled with the fire of His love, if he forgoeth all created things, the words he uttereth shall set on fire them that hear him. Verily, thy Lord is the Omniscient, the All-Informed. Happy is the man that hath heard Our voice, and answered Our call. He, in truth, is of them that shall be brought nigh unto Us.

- Bahá'u'lláh



Know that the Holy Manifestations, though They have the degrees of endless perfections, yet, speaking generally, have only three stations. The first station is the physical; the second station is the human, which is that of the rational soul; the third is that of the divine appearance and the heavenly splendor.

The physical station is phenomenal; it is composed of elements, and necessarily everything that is composed is subject to decomposition. It is not possible that a composition should not be disintegrated.

The second is the station of the rational soul, which is the human reality. This also is phenomenal, and the Holy Manifestations share it with all mankind.

Know that, although the human soul has existed on the earth for prolonged times and ages, yet it is phenomenal. As it is a divine sign, when once it has come into existence, it is eternal. The spirit of man has a beginning, but it has no end; it continues eternally. In the same way the species existing on this earth are phenomenal, for it is established that there was a time when these species did not exist on the surface of the earth. Moreover, the earth has not always existed, but the world of existence has always been, for the universe is not limited to this terrestrial globe. The meaning of this is that, although human souls are phenomenal, they are nevertheless immortal, everlasting and perpetual; for the world of things is the world of imperfection in comparison with that of man, and the world of man is the world of perfection in comparison with that of things. When imperfections reach the station of perfection, they become eternal. This is an example of which you must comprehend the meaning.

The third station is that of the divine appearance and heavenly splendor: it is the Word of God, the Eternal Bounty, the Holy Spirit. It has neither beginning nor end, for these things are related to the world of contingencies and not to the divine world. For God the end is the same thing as the beginning. So the reckoning of days, weeks, months and years, of yesterday and today, is connected with the terrestrial globe; but in the sun there is no such thing—there is neither yesterday, today nor tomorrow, neither months nor years: all are equal. In the same way the Word of God is purified from all these conditions and is exempt from the boundaries, the laws and the limits of the world of contingency. Therefore, the reality of prophethood, which is the Word of God and the perfect state of manifestation, did not have any beginning and will not have any end; its rising is different from all others and is like that of the sun. For example, its dawning in the sign of Christ was with the utmost splendor and radiance, and this is eternal and everlasting. See how many conquering kings there have been,

how many statesmen and princes, powerful organizers, all of whom have disappeared, whereas the breezes of Christ are still blowing; His light is still shining; His melody is still resounding; His standard is still waving; His armies are still fighting; His heavenly voice is still sweetly melodious; His clouds are still showering gems; His lightning is still flashing; His reflection is still clear and brilliant; His splendor is still radiating and luminous; and it is the same with those souls who are under His protection and are shining with His light.

Then it is evident that the Manifestations possess three conditions: the physical condition, the condition of the rational soul, and the condition of the divine appearance and heavenly splendor. The physical condition will certainly become decomposed, but the condition of the rational soul, though it has a beginning, has no end: nay, it is endowed with everlasting life. But the Holy Reality, of which Christ says, "The Father is in the Son," has neither beginning nor end. When beginning is spoken of, it signifies the state of manifesting; and, symbolically, the condition of silence is compared to sleep. For example, a man is sleeping—when he begins to speak, he is awake—but it is always the same individual, whether he be asleep or awake; no difference has occurred in his station, his elevation, his glory, his reality or his nature. The state of silence is compared to sleep and that of manifestation to wakefulness. A man sleeping or waking is the same man; sleep is one state, and wakefulness is another. The time of silence is compared to sleep, and manifestation and guidance are compared to wakefulness.

In the Gospel it is said, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." Then it is evident and clear that Christ did not reach to the station of Messiahship and its perfections at the time of baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the likeness of a dove. Nay, the Word of God from all eternity has always been, and will be, in the exaltation of sanctification.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, Chapter 38

## Session 9 — Christian Themes

O ye beloved of God! Repose not yourselves on your couches, nay bestir yourselves as soon as ye recognize your Lord, the Creator, and hear of the things which have befallen Him, and hasten to His assistance. Unloose your tongues, and proclaim unceasingly His Cause. This shall be better for you than all the treasures of the past and of the future, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth.

- Bahá'u'lláh

*Read the following chapters from Some Answered Questions. Each person will prepare a short presentation on one of the topics and present it to the others.*

*Chapter 6 — Christ*

*Chapter 17 — The Birth of Christ*

*Chapter 21 — The Symbolism of Bread and Wine*

*Chapter 22 — Miracles*

*Chapter 23 — The Resurrection of Christ*

*Chapter 26 — The Second Coming of Christ and the Day of Judgement<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> All Chapters are from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*

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## Session 10 — The Holy Spirit

He will come to your aid with invisible hosts, and support you with armies of inspiration from the Concourse above; He will send unto you sweet perfumes from the highest Paradise, and waft over you the pure breathings that blow from the rose gardens of the Company on high. He will breathe into your hearts the spirit of life, cause you to enter the Ark of salvation, and reveal unto you His clear tokens and signs. Verily is this abounding grace. Verily is this the victory that none can deny.

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá

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Question. — What is the Holy Spirit?

Answer. — The Holy Spirit is the Bounty of God and the luminous rays which emanate from the Manifestations; for the focus of the rays of the Sun of Reality was Christ, and from this glorious focus, which is the Reality of Christ, the Bounty of God reflected upon the other mirrors which were the reality of the Apostles. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles signifies that the glorious divine bounties reflected and appeared in their reality. Moreover, entrance and exit, descent and ascent, are characteristics of bodies and not of spirits—that is to say, sensible realities enter and

come forth, but intellectual subtleties and mental realities, such as intelligence, love, knowledge, imagination and thought, do not enter, nor come forth, nor descend, but rather they have direct connection.

For example, knowledge, which is a state attained to by the intelligence, is an intellectual condition; and entering and coming out of the mind are imaginary conditions; but the mind is connected with the acquisition of knowledge, like images reflected in a mirror.

Therefore, as it is evident and clear that the intellectual realities do not enter and descend, and it is absolutely impossible that the Holy Spirit should ascend and descend, enter, come out or penetrate, it can only be that the Holy Spirit appears in splendor, as the sun appears in the mirror. In some passages in the Holy Books the Spirit is spoken of, signifying a certain person, as it is currently said in speech and conversation that such a person is an embodied spirit, or he is a personification of mercy and generosity. In this case, it is the light we look at, and not the glass. In the Gospel of John, in speaking of the Promised One Who was to come after Christ, it is said in chapter 16, verses 12, 13: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak."

Now consider carefully that from these words, "for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak," it is clear that the Spirit of truth is embodied in a Man Who has individuality, Who has ears to hear and a tongue to speak. In the same way the name "Spirit of God" is used in relation to Christ, as you speak of a light, meaning both the light and the lamp.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, Chapter 25