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A Brief Course

on the Bahá'í Faith

Introduction	7
1. Proofs of the Existence of God	9
2. The Need for Religion	13
3. The Immortality of the Human Soul	19
4. Progressive Revelation	27
5. Maturity of the World	33
6. Oneness of Mankind	43
7. History of the Bahá'í Faith	49
8. Bahá'í Administration	65
9. The Covenant	73
10. Quotations from the Writings	77

SOURCES

Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, Bahá'u'lláh	= ESW
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INTRODUCTION

- A Brief Course on the Bahá'í Faith is a guide for those believers,

especially youth, who wish to deepen others enough to become teachers of the Bahá'í Faith.

- Few teachers have sufficient time to explain the Bahá'í Faith in great detail, so this book was compiled to explain some of the basic Teachings to enable students to grasp a general understanding of the Faith, thus preparing them to become teachers.
- To be a competent teacher you must know the material in advance, well enough to answer basic questions, or at least enough to help the student find the answer through independent investigation of the truth.
- The preferred way to use this book is as follows: One topic should be covered in one session, and since there are ten topics there should be ten sessions. It has been suggested that the teacher ask interested people to sacrifice ten mornings in a row, then all interested students meet at dawn to study. The sessions could range in time from one to two hours. Each day a new topic should be covered and in less than two weeks a whole new set of students could be taught.
- Discussion is to be encouraged as this helps everyone gain a deeper understanding of the concepts.
- Each student should understand the topics presented in each section before proceeding to the next topics for discussion.
- Try to memorize as many “words of God” as possible, since these words have the greatest impact on the human soul, and they can be recalled at any time, any place.
- As you gain more experience you will develop your own teaching style, and through your growing knowledge of the Bahá'í Faith you will have greater means to teach others.
- Teaching the Faith of God is an obligation for every Bahá'í.
- Although the ideas and concepts dealt with in this book cover fundamental aspects of the Bahá'í Faith, it is by no means a complete teachers guide. There are many excellent books which explain the Faith in much greater detail, and further study is encouraged.

1. PROOFS OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

[From: Some Answered Questions, pp. 5-6]

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. . . .

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. . . .

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 selfevidently 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 in-dwelling 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.

Word Meanings:

indisputable: cannot be shown to be wrong.

masterpiece: a work done with special skill.

contingent: subject to chance or unseen effects.

dependency: relying on something else for support.

self-evidently: shows itself clearly.

supposition: something that one thinks is true.

1. Questions: Proofs of the Existence of God

1. a. Does God exist?

1. b. What are the proofs of the existence of God?

1. c. Did man create himself?
1. d. What do we know about the contingent world?
1. e. Can the creature be as perfect as its Creator?
1. f. Give the names of the different worlds of God.

2. THE NEED FOR RELIGION

[From: Some Answered Questions, pp. 7-11]

When we consider existence, we see that the mineral, vegetable, animal and human worlds are all in need of an educator.

If the earth is not cultivated, it becomes a jungle where useless weeds grow; but if a cultivator comes and tills the ground, it produces crops which nourish living creatures. It is evident, therefore, that the soil needs the cultivation of the farmer. Consider the trees: if they remain without a cultivator, they will be fruitless, and without fruit they are useless; but if they receive the care of a gardener, these same barren trees become fruitful, and through cultivation, fertilization and engrafting the trees which had bitter fruits yield sweet fruits. These are rational proofs; in this age the peoples of the world need the arguments of reason. . . .

But education is of three kinds: material, human and spiritual. Material education is concerned with the progress and development of the body, through gaining its sustenance, its material comfort and ease. This education is common to animals and man. Human education signifies civilization and progress—that is to say, government, administration, charitable works, trades, arts and handicrafts, sciences, great inventions and discoveries and elaborate institutions, which are the activities essential to man as distinguished from the animal.

Divine education is that of the Kingdom of God: it consists in acquiring divine perfections, and this is true education; for in this state man becomes the focus of divine blessings, the manifestation of the words, “Let Us make man in Our image, and after Our likeness.” [Gen. 1:26] This is the goal of the world of humanity.

Now we need an educator who will be at the same time a material, human and spiritual educator, and whose authority will be effective in all conditions. So if anyone should say, “I possess perfect comprehension and intelligence, and I have no need of such an educator,” he would be denying that which is clear and evident, as though a child should say, “I have no need of education; I will act according to my reason and intelligence, and so I shall attain the perfections of existence”; or as though the blind should say, “I am in no need of sight, because many other blind people exist without difficulty.”

Then it is plain and evident that man needs an educator, and

this educator must be unquestionably and indubitably perfect in all respects and distinguished above all men. Otherwise, if he should be like the rest of humanity, he could not be their educator, more particularly because he must be at the same time their material and human as well as their spiritual educator—that is to say, he must teach men to organize and carry out physical matters, and to form a social order in order to establish cooperation and mutual aid in living so that material affairs may be organized and regulated for any circumstances that may occur.

In the same way he must establish human education—that is to say, he must educate intelligence and thought in such a way that they may attain complete development, so that knowledge and science may increase, and the reality of things, the mysteries of beings and the properties of existence may be discovered; that, day by day, instructions, inventions and institutions may be improved; and from things perceptible to the senses conclusions as to intellectual things may be deduced.

He must also impart spiritual education, so that intelligence and comprehension may penetrate the metaphysical world, and may receive benefit from the sanctifying breeze of the Holy Spirit, and may enter into relationship with the Supreme Concourse. He must so educate the human reality that it may become the center of the divine appearance, to such a degree that

the attributes and the names of God shall be resplendent in the mirror of the reality of man, and the holy verse “We will make man in Our image and likeness” [Gen. 1:26] shall be realized.

It is clear that human power is not able to fill such a great office, and that reason alone could not undertake the responsibility of so great a mission. How can one solitary person without help and without support lay the foundations of such a

noble construction? He must depend on the help of the spiritual and divine power to be able to undertake this mission. One Holy Soul gives life to the world of humanity, changes the aspect of the terrestrial globe, causes intelligence to progress, vivifies souls, lays the basis of a new life, establishes new foundations, organizes the world, brings nations and religions under the shadow of one standard, delivers man from the world of imperfections and vices, and inspires him with the desire and need of natural and acquired perfections. Certainly nothing short of a divine power could accomplish so great a work. We ought to consider this with justice, for this is the office of justice. . . .

Therefore, the Universal Educator must be at the same time a physical, human and spiritual educator; and He must possess a supernatural power, so that He may hold the position of a divine teacher. If He does not show forth such a holy power, He will not be able to educate, for if He be imperfect, how can He give a perfect education? If He be ignorant, how can He make

others wise? If He be unjust, how can He make others just? If

He be earthly, how can He make others heavenly?

Now we must consider justly: did these Divine Manifestations Who have appeared possess all these qualifications or not?

If They had not these qualifications and these perfections, They were not real Educators. . .

It has now been proved by rational arguments that the world of existence is in the utmost need of an educator, and that its education must be achieved by divine power. There is no doubt that this holy power is revelation, and that the world must be educated through this power which is above human power.

Word Meanings:

cultivate: to loosen and break up the soil for the growing of crops.

nourish: to feed.

fertilization: adding goodness to the soil to make crops better.

engrafting: joining the shoot of a special plant to the roots of another.

sustenance: food.

signifies: a sign of.

distinguished: being different from something when compared to it.

comprehension: understanding.

indubitably: without doubt.

mutual: to have the same feelings for one another.

perceptible: can be understood or grasped.

metaphysical: being beyond what one's senses can understand.

sanctifying: to free from sin; to make pure and holy.

Supreme Concourse: the gathering of holy souls in the next world.

solitary: single and alone.

noble: having good or excellent qualities.

2. Questions: The Need for Religion

2. a. What are the qualities of a perfect educator?

2. b. Can material education be enough for man? Is there a need for religion?

2. c. Is God a material, human and spiritual educator?

2.d. What should be man's reality?

2. e. Is man the best educator for himself?

3. THE IMMORTALITY OF THE HUMAN SOUL

[From: The New Garden, pp. 73-78]

Our lives are very short. Twenty or thirty years may seem a long time when we are still very young, but when we have left those years behind us, we wonder how they could have gone by so swiftly. The years that lie ahead of us will also pass like fleeting moments, and death will soon overtake us all.

Is death the end of everything for us? No! The Bahá'í Faith teaches that death is not the end. It is only a beginning.

Bahá'u'lláh says:

“O Son of the Supreme! I have made death a messenger of joy to thee. Wherefore dost thou grieve? I made the light to shed on thee its splendour. Why dost thou veil thyself therefrom?”—The Hidden Words (Arabic) No. 32

Death is the beginning of our spiritual journey towards God.

It is a rebirth — a spiritual rebirth.

When our soul departs from our body, it continues to live and progress in the Kingdom of God. But it never comes back to the earth in a material form.

A nightingale which has always lived in a cage does not know any other place but the cage. It may get glimpses of a garden through the bars of its cage but the poor bird has no conception of freedom and has never known the joy of flying in the green woods or the open fields. If you open the door of the cage to set the bird free, it may hop to a corner of the cage and not want to come out, and when you put your hand in to take the bird out, it gets frightened and tries to escape from your hand. But once the bird is free, it soars high in the open sky and sings among the green trees. It makes its home in the flowered meadows and the perfumed woods, and never comes back to a cage even if you offer it thousands of golden cages.

In the same way when the soul is being set free from the cage of this body, those who are not aware of the Kingdom of God, and the happiness which awaits them after they depart from this life, find it very difficult to die. It is because they know of only the cage, and are unaware of the heaven of God's love and eternal mercy.

Those who have recognized the Manifestations of God, however, are sure of the immortality of the soul and everlasting life.

Somebody asked Bahá'u'lláh about life after death, and this was His reply:

“And now concerning thy question regarding the soul of man and its survival after death. Know thou of a truth that the soul, after its separation from the body, will continue to progress until it attaineth the presence of God, in a state and condition which neither the revolution of ages and centuries, nor the changes and chances of this world, can alter. It will endure as

long as the Kingdom of God, His sovereignty, His dominion and power will endure. It will manifest the signs of God and His attributes, and will reveal His loving kindness and bounty. The movement of My pen is stilled when it attempteth to befittingly describe the loftiness and glory of so exalted a station.”—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, LXXXI, pp. 155-56

Death is spiritual rebirth for each one of us. Let us therefore be prepared to welcome “the messenger of joy” [The Hidden Words (Arabic), No. 32] whenever it may knock at our door.

If you plant a field in the proper season, water it regularly and protect it from pests and birds, you will be rewarded with a rich harvest. But if you do not sow your seeds at the right time, and neglect to water the field, you cannot hope for a good crop. You will be punishable for your negligence when the time comes to reap the harvest and who can be blamed for the loss except yourself?

Reward and punishment are necessary for the order of the world. Reward and punishment are the natural consequences of our own deeds. All the Messengers of the past have tried to make us realize that what we do in this world does not only affect our lives here, but continues to bear results after our death. If our deeds are good, they will produce good results and become the cause of everlasting happiness; if they are bad, they will bear evil results and bring eternal suffering to us. It is not because God wishes to take revenge on those who have done wrong, but because it is impossible to get good results from bad actions just as it is impossible to have beautiful flowers in the garden when we have planted weeds. This is what is meant by reward and punishment. But this essential belief which has been taught in all religions, has been greatly misunderstood. The Manifestations of God have explained the existence of reward and punishment through symbols and parables. We have mentioned that the Manifestations of God are perfect Educators. A perfect educator must necessarily teach in a way that his students may understand or else there would be no purpose in His teaching. To make people understand that they will have to account for their deeds even after their life in this world is over, God’s Messengers have pictured a life full of joy and pleasure for the good, and spoken of torture and misery for the wicked. The pleasures and tortures they have mentioned are those that people know of in this world because it was the only way to make people understand the importance of Their teachings on life after death.

To a small child who asks about knowledge, the parent may say that it is sweeter than anything he has ever enjoyed. He does not mean, of course, that knowledge is a kind of food which can be tasted, and when the child is older, he will come to know what his parent meant by the description he gave. Most of the

people in the world are taking the symbols and parables which the Manifestations of God have used about life after death quite literally, and do not realize that they were meant to illustrate spiritual experiences. They have, therefore, set up an imaginary hell and heaven. Some believe hell to be a horrible place with fire, disease and horrid devils in which sinners are tortured forever. And heaven, according to them, is a beautiful garden full of delicious fruits and earthly pleasures. Others believe that our souls will return to this world after death as if there were no other place in the whole of the universe except our little planet. They say that we will come back in different forms, and that we may even come as animals depending on the kind of deeds we have done our lifetime.

Whereas the Manifestations of the past have had to speak of our experiences after death in symbolic terms, Bahá'u'lláh says we are now ready to know the true meaning of heaven and hell. The two important facts which we must remember are these:

1. Our souls are immortal and continue to live after our bodies are dead.
2. Our deeds in this world will produce their results even after the soul departs from the body.

This world into which the soul enters after departing from the body is very different from the world we are used to here. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says it is as different from this world as our world is different from the womb of the mother where a child lives before it is born. And, in the same way as a child prepares for his life in this world by developing his eyes, ears, and limbs, which he does not need in his mother's womb, but without which he cannot live a normal, healthy life here, we too must prepare for a happy life in the next world which our souls will be born into after leaving this world. In the next world we are not going to need physical eyes and ears any more, but we will need spiritual qualities which we can acquire in this world by following the teachings of God sent to us through His Messengers.

There is, however, a great difference between the condition of a child in his mother's womb and that of a person who is living in this world. The unborn child is not responsible for his own development because he has no choice and cannot help himself in any way. But in this world we are given the power to choose between right and wrong, good and bad. We are, therefore, responsible for our spiritual development, and if we fail to grow strong and healthy in spirit, we are going to be very unhappy in the next world. This state of unhappiness is called hell. If, on the other hand, we strive to understand and obey the laws of God, we will be preparing for a life of happiness in the next world and we will enjoy the state which is spoken of as heaven.

Bahá'u'lláh says that heaven is nearness to God and hell is being deprived of this bounty. He calls upon each one of us to strive to become worthy of the eternal blessings which are prepared for us in the worlds to come:

“O Son of Bounty! Out of the wastes of nothingness, with the clay of My command I made thee to appear, and have ordained for thy training every atom in existence and the essence of all created things. Thus, ere thou didst issue from thy mother’s womb, I destined for thee two founts of gleaming milk, eyes to watch over thee, and hearts to love thee. Out of My loving kindness, ’neath the shade of My mercy I nurtured thee, and guarded thee by the essence of My grace and favour. And My purpose in all this was that thou mightest attain My everlasting dominion and become worthy of My invisible bestowals. . . .”—
The Hidden Words (Persian), No. 29

Word Meanings:

immortality: continuing to live forever; never-ending existence.

grieve: to feel sad; to suffer

nightingale: a bird with an especially beautiful song.

glimpse: a quick look at something.

conception: understanding an idea.

Manifestation: the Being through which God shows His attributes and qualities.

revolution: the passing of a period of time.

manifest: to show.

loftiness: high position and station.

consequences: results.

eternal: continuing forever.

revenge: to hurt someone who has wronged us in order to get even.

parable: a story that shows a religious principle.

torture: to cause someone great pain.

misery: suffering and unhappiness.

wicked: very bad; evil.

literally: understanding something in word only, not in spirit.

illustrate: to show.

3. Questions: The Immortality of the Human Soul

3. a. Is death the end of existence?

3. b. The soul is immortal. True or False?

3. c. After death, our soul progresses in the earthly kingdom.

True or False?

3.d. What should be our attitude towards death?

3. e. Who is responsible for our spiritual development? What is our task?

3. f. What are the effects of our good and bad deeds on our spiritual development?

4. PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

[From: *The Renewal of Civilization*, pp. 54-60]

Bahá'u'lláh teaches that revelation is progressive, and that each Manifestation of God answers the need of His time. This need has two voices: one, crying for spiritual food, satisfaction of the inner life, 'knowledge of God', faith, is always answered in the same way, through spiritual teachings, an outpouring of love, and a renewal of the soul's vigour. The other voice cries for laws to regulate excesses, abrogation of outworn customs, and organization of daily affairs.

Both cries are answered. Moses revived the faith of the captive Israelites and gave them laws. Jesus gave to drink 'of that

water which is life indeed'; but the rigid law of the Sabbath was abrogated, and to correct the excesses of the time, divorce was forbidden. Muhammad gave his people faith in Alláh, and also laws and regulations which proved of the greatest benefit. Bahá'u'lláh again pours out the 'water of life', in answer to our cry, and also gives us laws and regulations for modern affairs. "Know of a certainty that in every Dispensation the light of Divine Revelation hath been vouchsafed unto men in direct proportion to their spiritual capacity. Consider the sun. How feeble its rays the moment it appeareth above the horizon. How gradually its warmth and potency increase as it approacheth its zenith, enabling meanwhile all created things to adapt themselves to the growing intensity of its light. How steadily it declineth until it reacheth its setting point. Were it, all of a sudden, to manifest the energies latent within it, it would, no doubt, cause injury to all created things. . . . In like manner, if the Sun of Truth were suddenly to reveal, at the earliest stages of its manifestation, the full measure of the potencies which the providence of the Almighty hath bestowed upon it, the earth of human understanding would waste away and be consumed; for men's hearts would neither sustain the intensity of its revelation, nor be able to mirror forth the radiance of its light. Dismayed and overpowered, they would cease to exist."—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXXVIII, pp. 87-88

There is only one religion.

There is but one God, by whatever name He is called. There is but one human race. There can be but one religion. But this one religion has many Speakers, and many expressions.

The life and progress of man are dependent upon the Word of God. In past times the human race was divided by oceans, mountain ranges, forests, deserts, all the physical barriers which

modern invention has just succeeded in surmounting. This is one reason why there have been many revealers of the Word of God; so that all mankind should receive it.

There is another reason. Religion becomes corrupt; it loses its early vigour and degenerates into institutions with no spiritual force to energize the inner life of man. Therefore it must be renewed and purified. This is accomplished through the influence of a Messiah . . . another Speaker.

There is yet another reason. Man, through successive seasons of civilization and decline, grows in understanding and social capacity. He, therefore, needs, from time to time, a further measure of that essential, real truth which is both the food of his spirit and the energy of his new civilization. This truth is revealed by a divine messenger.

Bahá'u'lláh teaches:

1. that religious revelation is progressive.
2. that old forms and institutions must give way to new ones.
3. that revelation is according to the need and capacity of the time.

The first teaching is upheld by the Bible, the Gospel and the Qur'án, by the Bhagavad Gita and the Gospel of Buddha. The Old Testament contains the story of successive revelation up to the beginning of the Christian era. The Gospel confirms the teachings of the Old Testament, fulfils many of its prophecies and emphatically renews the promise of another Messiah (or the 'return' of the Messiah). The Qur'án confirms both the Old Testament and the New, and again renews this promise.

The second teaching is a recognized requirement of all phases of life, but a strange and quite unfounded exception is given to religious institutions. Why? They too are mortal, and must give way to new ones. Jesus Christ taught this: Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.' (Heaven is the place where the sun resides—the synagogue, church, mosque or temple from which the light of religion shines; earth is the recipient of the light—the social order. Both shall pass away; but the light shall not pass away.)

Jesus Christ also supports the third teaching, that religious revelation is according to the capacity and the need. 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. . . ' You cannot bear it now.' Surely if men are wise enough to educate their children according to this principle, God will do no less!

The true educator of man is the Founder of religion, who trains him in morals and the higher virtues and reveals to him his spiritual reality. All the Prophets have served this purpose. They have trained men in honesty, truthfulness, trustworthiness, reverence,

modesty, civil obedience and self sacrifice for others. The essential teaching of all Religion is the same. But the names of the speakers are different: they apply spiritual truth differently to different conditions, and that is a great source of annoyance to conventional minds (not only in religion). Justice at one time was achieved by an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', but that application today would be barbarous. At one time divorce was permitted, at another forbidden. When women were regarded as chattel and had no protection unless belonging to a man, polygamy was sanctioned. In hot countries the eating of pork was forbidden. One day of the week must be kept free from work, so Muslims, Jews and Christians remain exclusive about this and keep Friday, Saturday and Sunday respectively. The differences in religion are due to the different requirements of the times in which each revelation was made, and the enmity between religions is due to prejudice and ignorance. ". . . Know thou assuredly that the essence of all the Prophets of God is one and the same. Their unity is absolute. God, the Creator, saith: There is no distinction whatsoever among the Bearers of My Message. They all have but one purpose; their secret is the same secret. . . .

"It is clear and evident, therefore, that any apparent variation in the intensity of their light is not inherent in the light itself, but should rather be attributed to the varying receptivity of an ever-changing world. Every Prophet Whom the Almighty and Peerless Creator hath purposed to send to the peoples of the earth hath been entrusted with a Message, and charged to act in a manner that would best meet the requirements of the age in which He appeared. . . ."—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXXIV, pp. 78-79

Here is a teaching, acceptable to reason, in accord with historical evidence, and, moreover, capable of removing religious enmity and of providing a basis for true spiritual brotherhood among all people.

Word Meanings:

progressive: moving forward and onward.
vigour: activity; energy.
excesses: things taken beyond moderation.
abrogation: getting rid of something.
Dispensation: the period during which a Manifestation of God holds sovereignty.
vouchsafed: given.
potency: strength; power.
zenith: highest point in the sky.
intensity: brilliance; strength.
latent: hidden; potential.

sustain: to carry; to bear.
dismayed: having no courage.
surmounting: overcoming.
corrupt: changing from good to bad.
degenerate: sinking into a bad condition.
recipient: the one who receives.
conventional minds: those accepting only what they consider to be standard.
chattel: belongings of a man.
polygamy: law allowing a man to have many wives.
sanction: to allow.
enmity: bad feelings; hatred.
inherent: within; a part of.
receptivity: capacity to receive.

4. Questions: Progressive Revelation

4. a. The Manifestations of God are renewing the divine message at each revelation.
4. b. Religious truth is relative and absolute. True or False?
4. c. Are there several Gods?
- 4.d. The Revelation is given to man according to the needs and capacity of an age. True or False?

5. MATURITY OF THE WORLD

[From: The Promise of World Peace, pp. 2-4]

It is out of a deep sense of spiritual and moral duty that we are impelled at this opportune moment to invite your attention to the penetrating insights first communicated to the rulers of mankind more than a century ago by Bahá'u'lláh, Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, of which we are the Trustees. "The winds of despair", Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "are, alas, blowing from every direction, and the strife that divides and afflicts the human race is daily increasing. The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appears to be lamentably defective." This prophetic judgement has been amply confirmed by the common experience of humanity. Flaws in the prevailing order are conspicuous in the inability of sovereign states organized as United Nations to exorcize the spectre of war, the threatened collapse of the international economic order, the spread of anarchy and terrorism, and the intense suffering which these and other afflictions are causing to increasing millions. Indeed, so much have aggression and conflict come to characterize our social, economic and religious systems, that many have succumbed to the view that such behaviour is intrinsic to human nature and therefore ineradicable. With the entrenchment of this view, a paralyzing contradiction has developed in

human affairs. On the one hand, people of all nations proclaim not only their readiness but their longing for peace and harmony, for an end to the harrowing apprehensions tormenting their daily lives. On the other, uncritical assent is given to the proposition that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive and thus incapable of erecting a social system at once progressive and peaceful, dynamic and harmonious, a system giving free play to individual creativity and initiative but based on co-operation and reciprocity.

As the need for peace becomes more urgent, this fundamental contradiction, which hinders its realization, demands a reassessment of the assumptions upon which the commonly held view of mankind's historical predicament is based. Dispassionately examined, the evidence reveals that such conduct, far from expressing man's true self, represents a distortion of the human spirit. Satisfaction on this point will enable all people to set in motion constructive social forces which, because they are consistent with human nature, will encourage harmony and co-operation instead of war and conflict. To choose such a course is not to deny humanity's past but to understand it. The Bahá'í Faith regards the current world confusion and calamitous condition in human affairs as a natural phase in an organic process leading ultimately and irresistibly to the unification of the human race in a single social order whose boundaries are those of the planet. The human race, as a distinct, organic unit, has passed through evolutionary stages analogous to the stages of infancy and childhood in the lives of its individual members, and is now in the culminating period of its turbulent adolescence approaching its long-awaited coming of age.

A candid acknowledgement that prejudice, war and exploitation have been the expression of immature stages in a vast historical process and that the human race is today experiencing the unavoidable tumult which marks its collective coming of age is not a reason for despair but a prerequisite to undertaking the stupendous enterprise of building a peaceful world. That such an enterprise is possible, that the necessary constructive forces do exist, that unifying social structures can be erected, is the theme we urge you to examine.

Whatever suffering and turmoil the years immediately ahead may hold, however dark the immediate circumstances, the Bahá'í community believes that humanity can confront this supreme trial with confidence in its ultimate outcome. Far from signaling the end of civilization, the convulsive changes towards which humanity is being ever more rapidly impelled will serve to release the "potentialities inherent in the station of man" and reveal "the full measure of his destiny on earth, the innate excellence of his reality".

[From: The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion, pp. 78-81]

Unity, in the Bahá'í conception, is a unity in diversity rather than uniformity. It is not by the suppression of differences that we will arrive at unity, but rather by an increased awareness of and respect for the intrinsic value of each separate culture, and indeed, of each individual. It is not diversity itself which is deemed the cause of conflict, but rather our immature attitude towards it, our intolerance and prejudice. 'Abdu'l-Bahá expressed this viewpoint in the following passage:

“A critic may object, saying that peoples, races, tribes and communities of the world are of different and varied customs, habits, tastes, character, inclinations and ideas, that opinions and thoughts are contrary to one another, and how, therefore, is it possible for real unity to be revealed and perfect accord among human souls to exist? In answer we say that differences are of two kinds. One is the cause of annihilation and is like the antipathy existing among warring nations and conflicting tribes who seek each other's destruction. . . The other kind which is a token of diversity is the essence of perfection and the cause of the appearance of the bestowals of the Most Glorious Lord. Consider the flowers of a garden; though differing in kind, colour, form and shape, yet, inasmuch as they are refreshed by the waters of one spring, revived by the breath of one wind, invigorated by the rays of one sun, this diversity increaseth their charm, and addeth unto their beauty. . . .

“How unpleasing to the eye if all the flowers and plants, the leaves and blossoms, the fruits, the branches and the trees of that garden were all of the same shape and colour! Diversity of hues, form and shape, enricheth and adorneth the garden, and heighteneth the effect thereof. In like manner, when divers shades of thought, temperament and character, are brought together under the power and influence of one central agency, the beauty and glory of human perfection will be revealed and made manifest. Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men.”—Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 290-291

Because the establishment of world unity and a planetary civilization represents the consummation of mankind's development on this planet, it represents the “coming of age” of humanity, the maturity of the human race. Shoghi Effendi expressed this idea as follows:

“The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the coming of age of the entire human race. It should be viewed . . . as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous

evolution of man's collective life on this planet. The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture . . . should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop."—The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, BPT (U.S.), 1982 ed., p. 163

The different stages in mankind's development are regarded as quite similar to the stages in the life of an individual. The current stage is described as that of adolescence, the stage immediately preceding full maturity:

"The long ages of infancy and childhood, through which the human race had to pass, have receded into the background. Humanity is now experiencing the commotions invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax, and must gradually be superseded by the calmness, the wisdom, and the maturity that characterize the stage of manhood. Then will the human race reach that stature of ripeness which will enable it to acquire all the powers and capacities upon which its ultimate development must depend."—The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 202

Speaking of the age of mankind's full maturity, Shoghi Effendi said: "That mystic, all-pervasive, yet indefinable change, which we associate with the stage of maturity inevitable in the life of the individual . . . must . . . have its counterpart in the evolution of the organization of human society. A similar stage must sooner or later be attained in the collective life of mankind, producing an even more striking phenomenon in world relations, and endowing the whole human race with such potentialities of wellbeing as shall provide, throughout the succeeding ages, the chief incentive required for the eventual fulfillment of its high destiny."—The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 163-164

Of course, the history of mankind that we can observe is the history of man's infancy, childhood, and adolescence. Therefore, affirmed Bahá'u'lláh, we tend to underestimate the true capacities of the entire human race. But these latent capacities will become evident as humankind achieves its maturity:

"Verily I say, in this most mighty Revelation, all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest . . . consummation. . . .

The potentialities inherent in the station of man, the full measure of his destiny on earth, the innate excellence of his reality, must all be manifested in this promised Day of God."—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLXI & CLXII p. 340

In summary, the Bahá'í principle of the oneness of humankind means that the

human race represents an organic unit whose collective social life has gradually developed by being reorganized on ever-higher levels of unity (the family, the tribe, the city-state, the nation). The specific mission of Bahá'u'lláh was to provide the impetus for the next stage of this social evolution, namely the organization of human society as a planetary civilization. This is to be achieved through the development of new social structures which reduce and eliminate conflict of interest; and by the creation of a new level of human consciousness, that of the basic oneness of humanity. Moreover, the unification of humankind represents the attainment of the stage of maturity or adulthood in the collective life of humankind.

The Bahá'í community is seen as both the embryo and the prototype of the future world civilization. It also provides the individual with an opportunity to begin to live the experience of unity and to develop this new consciousness. . . .

Word Meanings:

penetrating: deep.
impelled: forced by reason.
strife: fighting; struggling.
impending convulsions: disturbances which are about to happen.
lamentably defective: sadly at fault.
flaws: faults; defects.
prevailing order: the way society is presently arranged.
conspicuous: easy to see.
exorcize: to drive out; banish; put an end to.
spectre: something ghostly.
anarchy: utter confusion.
succumb: to give up and accept.
intrinsic: an essential part of.
ineradicable: can't be overcome or gotten rid of.
entrenchment: strengthening position of.
harrowing apprehensions: continuous and worrisome doubts.
incorrigibly selfish: selfishness which can't be overcome or controlled.
reciprocity: an exchange of privileges between people.
reassessment: to judge again.
predicament: being in a situation where you must make a choice.
dispassionately: justly; without a selfish interest.
distortion: to twist out of shape.
consistent: in line with.

calamitous: distressful; harmful.
 ultimately: in the end.
 organic: living; having the capacity to grow.
 analogous: having many things in common, although appearing to be different.
 turbulent adolescence: period of trials and changes experienced by a teenager.
 candid: frank; openly expressed.
 exploitation: unfair use of people to gain an advantage for someone else.
 despair: total loss of hope.
 prerequisite: a necessary condition or step.
 stupendous: tremendous; monumental.
 impelled: pushed.
 suppression: holding control by force.
 annihilation: to kill off completely.
 antipathy: deeply rooted dislike or hatred for another.
 invigorated: to give life and energy to.
 divergent: things which are heading in different directions.
 implications: deeper meanings.
 advent: arrival.
 stupendous: tremendous.
 collective life: the life of mankind as a whole.
 consummation: completion.
 receded: gone back.
 commotions: disturbances.
 turbulent: violent and disturbing.
 impetuosity: wanting to do things as soon as one thinks of them.
 vehemence: being strong in feelings and expressions.
 superseded: overtaken.
 all-pervasive: being within the essence of everything.
 incentive: motivation; something that prompts some one to seek a goal.
 underestimate: to not see the full measure.
 innate: existing from birth.
 impetus: push; energy.
 consciousness: understanding; thought.
 prototype: an original model.

5. Questions: Maturity of the World

5. a. The Bahá'í Faith believes in unity in diversity. True or

False?

5. b. The establishment of world peace represents the climax of the development of humanity. True or False?

5. c. Humanity has reached its full maturity. True or False?

6. ONENESS OF MANKIND

[From: The New Garden, pp. 51-54]

Bahá'u'lláh has taught us the Oneness of Mankind. All human beings are children of one God. If we believe in one Heavenly Father, then we must accept each other as brothers and sisters, as members of one family—the family of man.

Before Bahá'u'lláh brought us the light of unity, there were many causes which made men think they were different from others. Some people thought that because the colour of their skin was white, they were better than those who were black or yellow or brown. Bahá'u'lláh said this is not true. Man is not different because of his colour. If they are different, it is because they have received different degrees of education and not because they have different colours of skin. The different coloured peoples of the world are like the different kinds of flowers you find in a garden. If all the flowers of a garden were of the same colour, it would not be so beautiful. Bahá'u'lláh said God is like a kind Shepherd for whom the white sheep are no better than the brown or the black. God loves us all, no matter what the colour of our skin may be or which part of the world we may come from. Why should we, then, look upon each other as strangers? Bahá'u'lláh has kindled such love in the hearts of His followers that they feel like members of the same family even though they come from all the countries of the world.

In His Writings, Bahá'u'lláh says:

“. . . O well-beloved ones! The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. . . .”—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXII p. 218

“. . . Be ye as the fingers of one hand, the members of one body. Thus counselleth you the Pen of Revelation. . . .”—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXXII, p. 140

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written:

“And among the teachings of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh is the oneness of the world of humanity; that all human beings are the sheep of God and He is the kind Shepherd. The Shepherd is kind to all the sheep, because He created them all, trained them, provided for them and protected them. There is no doubt that the Shepherd is kind to all the sheep; and should there be among these sheep ignorant ones, they must be educated; if there be children, they must be trained until they reach maturity; if there be sick ones, they must be healed. There must be no

hatred and enmity, for as by a kind physician these ignorant, sick ones should be treated.”—Foundations of World Unity, p. Let us pray for the unity of mankind:

“O my God! O my God! Unite the hearts of Thy servants, and reveal to them Thy great purpose. May they follow Thy commandments and abide in Thy law. Help them, O God, in their endeavor, and grant them strength to serve Thee. O God! Leave them not to themselves, but guide their steps by the light of Thy knowledge, and cheer their hearts by Thy love. Verily, Thou art their Helper and their Lord.”—Bahá’u’lláh, Bahá’í Prayers (U.S. edition), p. 204

Bahá’u’lláh teaches that all forms of prejudice must be forgotten, whether it is national prejudice or racial prejudice or religious prejudice. As long as people cling to prejudice, we will not have any peace on earth.

All the wars that we have had in the past, all the murders and the bloodshed have been due to prejudice of some kind. People have fought over their country or their religion, bringing destruction to the world and death to millions of their fellow humans.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

“If this prejudice and enmity are on account of religion consider that religion should be the cause of fellowship, otherwise it is fruitless. And if this prejudice be the prejudice of nationality consider that all mankind are of one nation; all have sprung from the tree of Adam, and Adam is the root of the tree. That tree is one and all these nations are like branches, while the individuals of humanity are like leaves, blossoms and fruits thereof. Then the establishment of various nations and the consequent shedding of blood and destruction of the edifice of humanity result from human ignorance and selfish motives.

“As to the patriotic prejudice, this is also due to absolute ignorance, for the surface of the earth is one native land. Everyone can live in any spot on the terrestrial globe. Therefore all the world is man’s birthplace. These boundaries and outlets have been devised by man. In the creation, such boundaries and outlets were not assigned. Europe is one continent, Asia is one continent, Africa is one continent, Australia is one continent, but some of the souls, from personal motives and selfish interests, have divided each one of these continents and considered a certain part as their own country. God has set up no frontier between France and Germany; they are continuous. Yea, in the first centuries, selfish souls, for the promotion of their own interests, have assigned boundaries and outlets and have, day by day, attached more importance to these, until this led to intense enmity, bloodshed and rapacity in subsequent centuries. In the same way this will continue indefinitely, and if this conception of patriotism remains limited within a certain circle, it will be

the primary cause of the world's destruction. No wise and just person will acknowledge these imaginary distinctions. Every limited area which we call our native country we regard as our motherland, whereas the terrestrial globe is the motherland of all, and not any restricted area. In short, for a few days we live on this earth and eventually we are buried in it, it is our eternal tomb. Is it worth while that we should engage in bloodshed and tear one another to pieces for this eternal tomb? Nay, far from it, neither is God pleased with such conduct nor would any sane man approve of it.

“Consider! The blessed animals engage in no patriotic quarrels. They are in the utmost fellowship with one another and live together in harmony. For example, if a dove from the east and a dove from the west, a dove from the north and a dove from the south chance to arrive, at the same time, in one spot, they immediately associate in harmony. So is it with all the blessed animals and birds. But the ferocious animals, as soon as they meet, attack and fight with each other, tear each other into pieces and it is impossible for them to live peacefully together in one spot. They are all unsociable and fierce, savage and combative fighters.”—Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, pp. 299-301

Word Meanings:

tabernacle: a tent for the purpose of worship.
counseleth: to give advice.
prejudice: a bad opinion of someone formed without knowing them properly.
enmity: hatred.
patriotic prejudice: extreme and selfish love for one's home country.
terrestrial: the earth.

6. Questions: Oneness of Mankind

6. a. The world forms one large family. True or False?
6. b. Bahá'u'lláh explains the diversity of humanity through images in His Writings. Give two examples.
6. c. Bahá'u'lláh has revealed a prayer for the unity of His servants. What is this prayer?
6. d. What are the effects of prejudices?
6. e. What should be the effects of religion?

7. HISTORY OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

[From: The New Garden, pp. 27-31]

The Báb:

“Báb” means “Gate”! The Báb was the Gate to a new Kingdom—the

Kingdom of God on earth.

The Báb was very young when He told people about the Message which God had given Him. He was only 25 years old. A beautiful city in the south of Iran, called Shíráz, was the birthplace of the Báb. The people of Iran were Muhammadans, so He was given a name that was much used in that country. He was called 'Alí-Muhammad, and was a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad Himself. The Báb's father died soon after His birth, so He was placed under the care of His maternal uncle. As a child He was sent to a teacher who taught the Qur'án and elementary subjects. But from His early childhood, the Báb was different from other children. He was always asking difficult questions and then giving the answers Himself in a way that astonished His elders. Often when other children were busy at play, He would be found rapt in prayer under the shade of a tree or in some other quiet spot.

Later, when the Báb revealed His reality as a Manifestation of God, both His uncle and His teacher believed in Him because they had known Him since His childhood, and seen the difference between Him and other children. His uncle even died as a martyr for the Cause of God revealed through his Nephew, the Báb.

Mullá Husayn was the Báb's first disciple. The Báb gave him the title of Bábu'l-Báb, which means "Gate of the Gate". That night [May 23rd 1844] was the beginning of a new era. The Bahá'í calendar starts from that year.

It was not long before many people came to believe in the Báb. Some met Him, some read His Holy Writings, while others recognized Him through dreams and visions.

The Message of the Báb was first given to the people of Iran. But the Muslims of other countries did not yet know that their Promised One had come. Therefore, when thousands of Muslims from all countries gathered in Mecca for pilgrimage, the Báb journeyed to this holiest spot of Islám to tell them that the object of their adoration had come and that He was their Promised One.

Nobody listened to Him; but the Báb had completed His announcement.

When the Báb returned to His native land, He was met by a group of soldiers who had come to arrest Him because the fanatical Mullás did not want the new Faith to spread. These Mullás made every effort to put out the Light of God which was burning in the breast of the Blessed Báb. From that day the Báb had

to undergo many hardships. His short but brilliant life was mostly spent in prison after He had made His Declaration. Twice He was sent to prisons built on very cold and forbidding mountains.

But no chains or prisons could ever prevent the Call of God from spreading. When the Báb was in prison, His faithful followers spread His

Message throughout the country, and during that brief time thousands of people gave their lives for His Cause.

The Báb was still young, about 31 years of age, when they [His enemies] decided to kill Him. The Báb knew that He would be martyred in the path of God. He was glad to give His life so that the people of the world might come to understand the purpose of their lives and turn to God and His eternal Kingdom. The day of His martyrdom was the 9th of July, 1850.

...

The Báb was a great Manifestation of God. In all His Writings He said that the main purpose of His coming was to give the glad-tidings that very soon the Promised One of all ages would appear. He warned His followers to beware lest they failed to recognize “Him Whom God will make manifest”. He said that they should lay aside everything else and follow Him as soon as they heard His Message. The Báb wrote many prayers beseeching God that His own life might be accepted as a sacrifice to the Beloved of His heart, the One “Whom God will make manifest”. He even referred in His Writings to the Order of Bahá’u’lláh, and said: “. . . Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá’u’lláh, and rendereth thanks unto his Lord. For He will assuredly be made manifest. God hath indeed irrevocably ordained it in the Bayán. . . .”—God Passes By, p.25
[From: The New Garden, pp. 32-37]

Bahá’u’lláh:

On April 21st 1863, Bahá’u’lláh proclaimed to the world that “The Revelation which, from time immemorial, hath been acclaimed as the Purpose and Promise of all the Prophets of God, and the most cherished Desire of His Messengers, hath now. . . been revealed unto men. . . .”—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, III p. 5

When Bahá’u’lláh made this wonderful announcement, He was a prisoner at the hands of two powerful monarchs, and He was being exiled to ‘Akká (Acre), “. . . the most desolate of the cities of the world . . .”—God Passes By, p. 186

About 46 years before this announcement, Bahá’u’lláh was born in the house of a distinguished Minister of the royal court of Iran. From the days of His childhood everybody could notice that Bahá’u’lláh was different from other children, but no one actually knew that this wonderful Boy was soon to change the whole destiny of mankind. When He was 14 years old, Bahá’u’lláh was already famous in the court for His learning and wisdom. He was 22 years of age when His father died. The government wished Him to take over the position His father had occupied. They thought this gifted young man would make

a very good minister, but Bahá'u'lláh had no intention of wasting His time in the management of worldly affairs. Being a man of God, He took no interest in the royal life which was offered to Him. He left the court and its ministers to follow the path set for Him by the Almighty.

When the Báb declared His Mission, Bahá'u'lláh was 27 years old. He immediately accepted the Báb as the Manifestation of God and soon became one of His most powerful and famous followers.

At the time when the Government and fanatical Mullás persecuted the followers of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh was not spared in any way. He was twice imprisoned, and once He was beaten so severely with whips and canes that the soles of His feet started bleeding. Nine years after the Báb's Declaration, Bahá'u'lláh was thrown into a dark dungeon. This was a terrible underground room which had no window or other opening except the door through which they entered. In this dungeon Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned with about 150 murderers, highway robbers and other such criminals. The chains that were put around His neck were so heavy that He could not lift up His head. Here Bahá'u'lláh spent four terrible months of suffering, yet it was in this same dungeon that the Glory of God filled His soul. He writes that one night in a dream He heard the following words vibrating from all sides:

“Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy Pen. . . .”—Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 21

Bahá'u'lláh endured all these hardships for our sake and for the sake of generations to come. He bore chains around His blessed neck in order to free us from the chains and fetters of prejudice, bigotry and enmity.

At last Bahá'u'lláh and His family were deprived of all their ancestral riches and ordered to leave the country. They were exiled to Baghdád in the bitter cold of winter. The road lay along mountainous parts of Iran where thick snow and ice covered the ground.

Bahá'u'lláh, His wife and young children had to walk hundreds of miles to their destination and the fact that they did not have proper clothing made the journey even more difficult to endure. At last they reached Baghdád but Bahá'u'lláh's sufferings did not come to an end in that city. However, had Bahá'u'lláh been afraid of hardships and difficulties,

He could have enjoyed a luxurious life in the court of the king of Iran. He was prepared to endure any amount of suffering in the path of God.

The fame of Bahá'u'lláh soon spread throughout Baghdád and other cities of Iraq, and many people came to the door of this exiled Prisoner to receive His blessings. The followers of the Báb gathered around Him from different parts of Iran and Iraq seeking

guidance and inspiration. But there were some who became jealous of His fame. Among them was His own brother Yahyá, who was living under Bahá'u'lláh's loving care and guidance. Yahyá thought that, because he was respected by the followers of the Báb, he might be accepted as their leader if he should denounce Bahá'u'lláh. He did not realize that by turning against the Manifestation of God, he was bringing about his own doom. For when a Manifestation appears, only those who accept His servitude can hope for true greatness. Even His closest relatives are no exception, because a Manifestation of God stands apart from all other human beings and has a station which no one else can share. All the past Manifestations have had brothers and sisters or other relatives, but even their names have now been forgotten.

Yahyá's plotting caused disunity among the followers of the Báb and this made Bahá'u'lláh very sad. One night without telling anybody, He left His home and went into the mountains of Kurdistán. He spent two years of secluded life in these mountains giving all His time to prayer and meditation. He stayed in a small cave and lived on very simple food. Nobody knew His name. Nobody knew where He had come from. But soon, like a moon in a dark night, His light shed over all Kurdistán and everybody heard of the "Nameless One". All this time His family and friends in Baghdád who were heart-broken by His departure did not know where He was. Then they too heard about the "Nameless One", the great Saint who was known to have inherent knowledge bestowed upon Him by God. Bahá'u'lláh's son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, immediately knew that this could be no one but His beloved Father. He sent letters and a special messenger entreating Him to return because not only His own family but all the followers of the Báb were suffering from His absence.

Thus, after spending two years in prayer and meditation, Bahá'u'lláh returned to Baghdád and with Him returned the joy of all the Báb's followers. The only people who were angry about His return were the fanatical Mullás and His treacherous and jealous brother Yahyá. The Mullás did not want Bahá'u'lláh to stay in Baghdád because He was too close to certain sacred places belonging to the Muslims, and pilgrims who came to visit these places were often attracted by Bahá'u'lláh's charm and personality. These Mullás kept on complaining until the Government of Iran joined hands with the authorities of the Turkish Empire to remove Bahá'u'lláh to a more distant place—Istanbul. The same thing happened in Istanbul, which was the seat of the Muslim Caliphs. Bahá'u'lláh's great wisdom and personal charm attracted many people. "He must not stay in Istanbul any longer," said the fanatical Mullás, so once more He was sent to a smaller town, Adrianople. From there He was

again exiled, but this time to 'Akká in the Holy Land, which was then a special penal colony reserved for murderers, thieves and highway robbers undergoing life imprisonment. It was a terrible place and for the first few days after their arrival even water was denied to Bahá'u'lláh, His family and friends. The hardships and sufferings of Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká are too many to describe. In the beginning He was imprisoned in a lonely cell where even His children were not permitted to see Him. He lacked every means of comfort, and was surrounded by enemies day and night. Yet it was from 'Akká that He sent His famous letters to the most powerful kings and rulers of His day, calling upon them to listen to the Message of God and obey the Commandments of the King of kings. No one but a Manifestation of God could dare to address those who had imprisoned Him, as a king addresses his vassals.

Bahá'u'lláh raised the banner of universal peace and brotherhood from His prison walls and though the powers of the world combined their forces against Him, He was victorious over them all as God had promised Him in His dream. The Message of Bahá'u'lláh influenced the hearts of thousands of people and many of them gave their lives for His Cause. Through the power of the Word of God and the sacrifices of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, now hundreds of thousands of people who were once divided under various names have become like members of one family.

Although Bahá'u'lláh was sent to 'Akká as a prisoner for life, He chose to leave that fortress city nine years after His arrival. But this time, His great personal charm had made such friends of all those around Him—even His hard-hearted jailor—that no one objected to His leaving His prison. Bahá'u'lláh spent the remaining years of His life in a place outside the city of 'Akká where He passed away to His heavenly Kingdom on May 29th, 1892.

The Message of Bahá'u'lláh spread to different parts of the world from the Holy Land as had been foretold in the sacred Books of the past. In Buddhist scriptures the Holy Land is referred to as a Paradise in the West, the Seat of the Promised One—Amitabha. To the Jews it is “The Promised Land” from where the Law of God will once more go out into the world. The Christians and Muslims too have wonderful prophecies about this sacred country which has been their Holy Land for many centuries. Since the time when Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to 'Akká, the Holy Land of the religions of the past has become the World Centre of the Bahá'í Faith.

Bahá'u'lláh is that Great Manifestation of God Whose coming all the Manifestations of the past have foretold. The divine religions of all ages lead to the same direction and teach the same goal—the Bahá'í Faith. They are like many rivers that flow

into the ocean. Each river irrigates thousands of acres of land, but no single river is, by itself, as vast and powerful as the mighty ocean because the ocean is the meeting place of all these rivers. In the Bahá'í community followers of all religions have come together and become united. Even though they are from the four corners of the earth, they have now joined hands in one great Brotherhood, one common Faith.

The waters of different Rivers merge into one indeed, when they pour into the Mighty Ocean!

[From: The Renewal of Civilization, pp. 30-34]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

May 23rd, 1844, was a significant day in the history of the world.

On that day in the eastern city of Shíráz, the Báb, the morning star of the new day, made his declaration.

On that day in the western world, the first telegraphic message to be flashed along the wires was sent from Baltimore to Washington. It read, “What hath God wrought.”

On that day was born ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He whom many people, seeing only the perfect life and the simple majesty, acclaimed as the Christ. They were wrong; but not so wrong as those who saw only an elderly man from the east.

How to write of Him? It conveys little to say that He was the eldest son of Bahá’u’lláh, the centre of His Covenant, the exemplar of His teachings. Gentle and wise, humorous and just, the “father of the poor”, a healer to every sick one, a comforter to every oppressed one, He was known to one and all as the Master.

From the age of eight, until sixty-four, He suffered persecution and oppression, the last forty years being spent as a prisoner. His hardships began when, in 1852, Bahá’u’lláh was

thrown into the dungeon in Tíhrán. He accompanied the small band of exiles on all their journeys, and entered the Great Prison of ‘Akká, a young man of twenty-four. He was to be released forty years later by the overthrow of those very forces which had been responsible for the persecutions and calumnies heaped upon Him and His Beloved Father.

Thereupon, in 1910, He set out to take the message of the new day to the western world. Egypt, countries of Europe, and finally America were visited. He came to England twice, in 1911 and 1913, and the newspapers of the time prove that His visits were not unnoticed.

He chose for Himself the title of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá—the servant of Bahá—and by His life of service to humanity, showed what true religion meant.

All through the exiles and imprisonments, He was His Father’s constant companion and devoted son. His love for His

Father was boundless, but this did not deter Him from showing constant care and attention to others; rather was it the source of His love for all people. When, shortly after the band of exiles had arrived in the prison of 'Akká, dysentery broke out, it was 'Abdu'l-Bahá who washed and fed and nursed them, until he too was stricken. He lived the life of Christ among the people, never caring for Himself but always for them.

During the war of 1914-1918 He was able, by the wise provisions which he had made, to feed the helpless people of Palestine, to keep corn from the destruction of the Turks and to provide General Allenby with food for his army when it eventually conquered the Holy Land.

The Turkish commander had threatened to crucify 'Abdu'l-Bahá on Mount Carmel, but the prompt action of the British Government averted the tragedy. Through the energy of Lady Blomfield, a prominent member of the Bahá'í community in England, a telegram was despatched from the War Office instructing General Allenby to "extend every protection . . . to

'Abdu'l-Bahá, His family and friends when the British march on Haifa." Allenby's reply a few days later was to the effect, "have today taken Palestine notify the world 'Abdu'l-Bahá is safe. . . ."

'Abdu'l-Bahá loved people to be happy, and He, more than any other, was the cause of their happiness. He saw immediately the need and condition of every soul and knew how to answer it. In His presence prejudices and differences evaporated, and only unity remained. Jews, Christians, Muhammadans, Hindus, East and West, old and young, rich and poor, white and coloured, all were gathered together in the radiance of His universal spirit.

He penetrated beneath the forms and creeds and names; membership of a church or society meant little to Him. His only standard was the degree of striving to efface the self and come nearer to the divine perfection. "Light is good in whatsoever lamp it shines," He would say, and in the visitors' book at Wandsworth Prison He wrote, "The greatest prison is the prison of self."

Throughout His journeys in the West he addressed all kinds of societies, clubs, churches, giving to each encouragement in whatever they were doing for the betterment of mankind, but always stressing the oneness of humanity. He admitted no distinction of religion, colour, nation or class. The human heart was, to Him, the home of God, and the exterior circumstances mattered little.

In spite of His sixty years of exile and imprisonment, educated only by His Father's company and the Holy Books, such as the Bible and the Qur'án, He mixed naturally with scientists, economists, businessmen, educators, answering their questions and displaying a knowledge which no schooling could have

given.

People tried to shower Him with gifts. Flowers or fruit He would accept and distribute among His friends—those assembled at the time. Money, or valuable gifts, He did not accept. “I came for the hearts,” He would say.

By the provisions of Bahá’u’lláh’s Will, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was appointed sole interpreter of the Writings, and His word has the same validity as Bahá’u’lláh’s own. He explained and amplified the teachings and His recorded talks and written letters form a large part of Bahá’í scripture.

He left His earthly frame in 1921, making provision in His Will and Testament for the future administration of the Faith in a manner (already outlined by Bahá’u’lláh) which is recognized to be unique, and which has preserved its unity in the face of tests and opposition. Today there is no Bahá’í sect, neither is there any priesthood, ritual or adopted creed.

Rather has the Faith forged ahead under the leadership of its appointed Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, winning to its ranks people of all races, classes, religious backgrounds, in all parts of the world, weathering persecution and establishing its Administrative Order on a universal foundation.

[From: The New Garden, pp. 45-48]

The Guardian:

Shoghi Effendi was a young boy when the beloved Master wrote His Will and Testament. He was only 24 years of age when he became the Guardian of the Cause of God, but because he was always assisted by Bahá’u’lláh, it did not matter that he was not old in years. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called Shoghi Effendi the Sign of God on earth and said that all who obeyed him had obeyed God. It was through the great wisdom and spiritual guidance of Shoghi Effendi that the Message of Bahá’u’lláh was carried to every country of the globe.

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá passed away, Shoghi Effendi was studying in England at Oxford University. His cherished desire was to serve the beloved Master throughout his life and to be able to translate the sacred Writings of the Bahá’í Faith into English for thousands of believers who could not read them in Persian or Arabic. The news of the passing away of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was such a great blow to Shoghi Effendi that he became ill. Before he had fully recovered from the shock of being so suddenly separated from the Master he arrived in the Holy Land to find out that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had given him the crushing responsibility of being the Guardian of the Cause of God. But when God gives anyone a task to accomplish in the world, He also gives him the strength to carry it out. After many weeks spent in meditation and prayer, Shoghi Effendi was ready to start his great work in life.

And God blessed him with divine wisdom and inspiration in every step he took for the promotion of His Cause.

During the 36 years of his guardianship, Shoghi Effendi had no other thought but the progress of the Cause. He worked day and night, did not spare himself in any way. His personal life was very simple, he seldom had more than one meal in 24 hours, or slept more than a few hours every night. The rest of his time was given to his ever-growing work for the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.

Those who saw the amount of work he accomplished every day realized that it was only through the power of God that a simple man could do so much day after day and year after year. . . .

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá passed away the Bahá'í Faith had spread to 35 countries, but during the lifetime of the beloved Guardian, the Message of Bahá'u'lláh was carried to over 251 countries of the world including all the places mentioned by

'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Tablets of the Divine Plan. . . .

Shoghi Effendi completed his work by appointing 27 Hands of the Cause whom he called the "Chief Stewards" of the Faith and to whom he gave the responsibility of protecting the Cause and spreading the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. When the Guardian passed away, the Hands of the Cause elected a body of nine from among themselves to remain in the Holy Land and see to the work at the World Centre. These were called the Custodians. The rest of the Hands scattered throughout the world to help in completing the Guardian's Ten-Year Plan.

The end of the Ten-Year Plan in 1963 marked a new milestone in the history of the Bahá'í Faith. A full century had passed since the day when Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed His Mission, and the Bahá'ís of the world elected the first International House of Justice—that Supreme Body which 'Abdu'l-Bahá has assured us will be under the direct guidance of God and infallible in all its decisions.

[From: The Bahá'í Faith An Introduction, pp. 108-109]

The Universal House of Justice:

Just as the National Assembly directs and unifies the Local Assemblies within its jurisdiction, the House of Justice guides and coordinates the activities of all the various National Assemblies of the world. The House of Justice gives plans and sets goals for the whole of the Bahá'í world, and the National Assemblies unitedly put those plans into action.

A main difference, however, between the House of Justice and the Assemblies is that Bahá'u'lláh has given this Supreme International Body the right to enact such laws as are not explicitly given by Himself. For example, Bahá'u'lláh teaches that capital should give a percentage of its profits to labour. He does not, however, say what that percentage should be because the amount may have to vary from time to time. The House of

Justice, therefore, can decide on what that percentage should be; and if at some later date the rate of percentage has to be changed, the House of Justice can make that change. In other words, the House of Justice cannot alter any of the laws given by Bahá'u'lláh; but it can legislate on matters He has left for it to decide on. The House of Justice can also change its own laws when the necessity arises.

There is another major difference between the House of Justice and all other Assemblies. Bahá'ís have been promised that the House of Justice will always be guided by God to make the right decisions.

Word Meanings:

time immemorial: since time began.
dungeon: an underground prison.
render: to make.
victorious: to emerge as the winner; to overcome all obstacles.
endured: to live through with difficulty.
bore: carried.
bigotry: intolerance of other's ideas, thoughts or religion.
luxurious: being surrounded by wealth and riches and having all needs met.
denounce: to make someone appear bad in the eyes of others.
secluded: hidden away; isolated.
inherent: an essential part of something, existing within it since creation.
fanatical: taking something beyond moderation, usually religious enthusiasm.
wrought: done; shaped; caused.
exemplar: an example.
calumnies: false accusations.
crucify: to put to death by nailing to a cross.
evaporated: disappeared, like water which dries up.
penetrated: to go deeper.
efface: to wipe away.
sole interpreter: the only one allowed to say what a passage or verse means.
validity: truth
amplified: to make more clear.
Will and Testament: one's wishes, in writing, to be carried out after death.

7. Questions: History of the Bahá'í Faith

7. a. What does the Báb mean?

- 7. b. What happened on 21 April 1863?
- 7. c. Who was Bahá'u'lláh's father?
- 7.d. What are the two first cities where Bahá'u'lláh was first exiled?
- 7. e. Where did Bahá'u'lláh retreat to of His own will for 2 years?
- 7. f. Who was Yahya?
- 7. g. What does the date 23 May 1844 remind you of?
- 7.h. When did the trials of 'Abdu'l-Bahá start?
- 7. i. What does 'Abdu'l-Bahá mean?
- 7. j. Give some examples of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's good deeds.
- 7. k. Who was the authorized interpreter of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh?
- 7. l. Who was the Guardian?
- 7.m. What was his duty?
- 7.n. Who took care of the Faith at the World Centre when the Guardian passed away?

8. BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATION

[From: The New Garden, pp. 87-91]

There was a time when it was necessary to have a group of people in society to be in charge of religious affairs. Ordinary people were either illiterate or did not have time to make a proper study of their religion. They therefore engaged a number of people who had no other task or profession in life except to study religion and to see that people observed its laws. That is why we find Brahmins among the Hindus; Bhikkhus among the Buddhists, Priests among the Christians and Mullás among the Muslims.

In the Bahá'í Faith professional priesthood is abolished and this is one of the distinctions of our religion. Bahá'u'lláh says that although it was necessary to have priests in the past, they are no more needed in our age. He has called upon every one of us to search after Truth for himself so that we may see with our own eyes and not with the eyes of others, and hear with our own ears and understand with our own power of understanding. In searching after Truth, Bahá'ís acquire sufficient knowledge about their Faith which is not the case with people of other religions who expect to receive instructions from clergymen. Every Bahá'í has to pray for himself and cannot pay another man to pray for him as is done by many people in other religions. A Bahá'í asks for God's grace and forgiveness himself and does not need a priest to do it for him through man-made rituals and ceremonies. Every Bahá'í can establish contact with God through His Manifestation, and no medium is required between us and Bahá'u'lláh.

Although there have been many good priests in every religion, a lot of harm which has been done in the name of religion has been due to the priests in every age. Two priests living in one neighbourhood did not always agree on religious problems, and their disagreement brought about a great deal of trouble in the world. Some people thought this priest was right, while others believed that one's view was correct, and so, disunity and divisions arose in every religion. Gradually many sects were formed and men quarrelled with each other over different interpretations of their sacred writings, and this became the cause of wars and bloodshed.

Such things cannot happen in the Bahá'í Faith. First of all there are no priests or other personalities in the Faith who can form a following from among the believers. All are equal in the Faith. Secondly, nobody has the right to interpret the teachings and Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. This authority was given only to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, and after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the right of interpretation was given to Shoghi Effendi alone.

It is dangerous to be able to earn a living through religion because many insincere people may be attracted to this profession for no other reason than that they want to live an easy life or have a good income. Such people have always misled others in the garb of priesthood, and have committed many crimes in the name of religion so as to serve their own selfish interests. Bahá'u'lláh has abolished the institution of priesthood so that no one can ever hope to misuse religion in order to serve his own selfish and worldly desires.

The history of the past shows that whenever a Manifestation of God appeared in the world, priests of the previous religions were the first to oppose Him. Why? Because those priests knew that by believing in the new Manifestation, they would have to sacrifice their position, their wealth and material comforts.

They therefore tried their best to uproot the new religion as soon as it appeared among them. Buddhism was pushed out of India by the priests of the time. Christ was crucified because the Jewish priests opposed Him. The Báb was martyred because Muslim priests did not want people to believe in Him.

Bahá'u'lláh suffered all His life chiefly because the Mullás instigated the government and the people of their time to rise against the new Cause of God.

There were exceptions of course. Many learned priests who lived at the time of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh believed in Them, and some even shed their blood in the path of God. But when they believed in the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, they no longer remained priests. They became Bahá'ís—humble servants of the Cause of God. They took up other professions with which to earn their livelihood. They did not mingle money with religion

or a worldly profession with the Faith of God.

Instead of having priests to see to religious affairs in the community, Bahá'u'lláh laid down the foundation of a wonderful system of administration through which all of us can work together for the progress of the Faith and the spiritual welfare of the community. Bahá'í administration, like all other teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, is divine in origin. . . .

If there is a river on one side and a stretch of farmland on the other, how would we bring water to the various fields we wish to grow? We would first dig a canal which is large enough to bring sufficient water from the river to irrigate the whole area. Then we would dig smaller canals which would take water from the large canal to different sections of the land. And lastly, we would require a multitude of small streams to take water from these canals to every single field. When our system of canals and streams is completed, the river will be able to irrigate all the farmland.

Bahá'í administration, Shoghi Effendi has told us, is like a system of canals and streams “through which. . . the Holy Spirit of the Cause pours forth to the Bahá'í communities scattered throughout the entire world.”

In previous ages the priests were expected to bring the water of life from its Fountainhead to the people of the time. But their power was limited. They could carry a handful of this water, and that too, only as long as they had the strength and the zeal to do so.

But Bahá'u'lláh has not entrusted this task to individuals. He has planned a wonderful network of channels through which the water of life is brought to the field of existence. This plan is called the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, and Bahá'í administration is a part of it.

The good news of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh was first proclaimed by the Báb when He said:

“Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá'u'lláh, and rendereth thanks unto his Lord. For He will assuredly be made manifest. . . .”—*God Passes By*, p. 25

Bahá'u'lláh has laid the foundation for this World Order, and drafted its plan. Later, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá explained this divine plan, gave us its details and started its construction. But it was through the lifelong efforts of Shoghi Effendi that the Bahá'í administration was gradually built up, joining far-flung communities together and making them parts of a unified whole.

Bahá'í administration is different from every other form of religious order because it is not man-made. It is the Plan of God for this age, given to us through His Manifestation, Bahá'u'lláh, and destined to establish order and peace among all the various peoples of the earth.

Bahá'í administration is composed of many parts, all connected together. It consists of Local Spiritual Assemblies which are elected by Bahá'ís of villages or towns, National Spiritual Assemblies elected by the Bahá'ís of countries, and the Universal House of Justice, elected by all the Bahá'ís of the world through their National Spiritual Assemblies.

If we think of the Local Spiritual Assemblies as streams which bring water from canals to different fields, the National Spiritual Assemblies will be the canals that connect these streams to the one large canal into which water flows from the river itself; and the Supreme House of Justice is that main canal. It is through the Universal House of Justice that God's guidance flows out into all parts of the world.

Word Meanings:

stewards: managers, those who look after something.

infallible: never wrong.

illiterate: cannot read or write.

abolished: gotten rid of.

sect: a group which believes the same as others, in general, but whose beliefs differ in essential matters.

garb: appearance of; clothed like.

martyred: killed by others who do not share one's own principles.

8. Questions: Bahá'í Administration

8. a. Why isn't there any professional clergy in the Bahá'í Faith?

8. b. Bahá'u'lláh says that priests are not necessary for this age.

What should we do to know our Faith?

8. c. What does personal search for truth mean for Bahá'ís?

8.d. What was the cause of many religious wars?

8. e. What was the image that Shoghi Effendi gave about the Bahá'í Administration?

8. f. What are the particulars of Bahá'í Administration compared with other religious systems?

9. THE COVENANT

[From: The Covenant for Young People, pp. 23-27]

. . . the nature of the Covenant is to give spiritual life to the Bahá'ís. One purpose of the Covenant, then, is to keep the Bahá'ís spiritually alive. That is, the Covenant keeps the Bahá'ís close to God and helps them to do what God wants.

Another purpose of the Covenant is to keep the Bahá'ís united. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written, "The purpose of the Covenant was simply to ward off disunion and differences so that no one might say, 'My opinion is the true and valid one.' "—The Promulgation

of Universal Peace, p. 386

The unity of the Bahá'í Faith is kept because when people do not agree, they find out what is right by turning to the Centre of the Covenant. No one can say, "My way is right and yours is wrong" because only the Centre of the Covenant can say for certain which way is the right way.

. . . the purpose of the Covenant is to make sure that the Bahá'í Faith remains united and one. This purpose is fulfilled through the nature of the Covenant. It is also fulfilled through the power of the Covenant.

The Covenant is very strong. It has the ability to keep people together, to keep them united. We cannot see this power and it is hard to understand. However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that "it moves the hearts" and "dashes into a thousand pieces all the forces of opposition." "It creates new spiritual worlds."—The Covenant, p. 70

Sometimes a person tries to stand against the Covenant, to resist it by insisting on his or her own point of view. Sometimes a person tries to do something which the Centre of the Covenant says is not right. These people sometimes try to divide the Bahá'í Faith. But the Covenant is so strong that this cannot happen. The power of the Covenant makes certain that those who try to divide the Bahá'í Faith and make sects in it will not succeed.

It is not enough simply to know what the Covenant is, to know what its purpose is and to understand its power. We must be firm in keeping to our part of the Covenant. That is, we must not be moved away from our acceptance of the Centre of the Covenant by people who try to harm the Bahá'í Faith. We must be very strong and do exactly what the Centre of the Covenant tells us to do.

'Abdu'l-Bahá said that "firmness in the Covenant means obedience so that no one may say, 'This is my opinion' . . ."—The Power of the Covenant, p. 33

In the beginning, we might not find it easy to be obedient.

We may simply accept that we have to be obedient to the Covenant without being joyful about it. We are obedient with "dull resignation". But as we become more perfect, we begin to find joy in being obedient to the Covenant. We have "radiant acquiescence".

9. The Covenant

9. a. What is the Covenant?

9. b. What is the role of the Covenant?

9. c. Why do we need a Covenant?

9.d. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, how does the power of the Covenant operate?

9. e. How do we avoid the making of sects in the Bahá'í Faith?

- 9. f. Who is the Centre of the Covenant?
- 9. g. State two things the Covenant does.
- 9.h. What helps us to be closer to God?

10. QUOTATIONS FROM THE WRITINGS

1. . . . Every true Prophet hath regarded His Message as fundamentally the same as the Revelation of every other Prophet gone before Him. If any man, therefore, should fail to comprehend this truth, and should consequently indulge in vain and unseemly language, no one whose sight is keen and whose understanding is enlightened would ever allow such idle talk to cause him to waver in his belief.

The measure of the revelation of the Prophets of God in this world, however, must differ. Each and every one of them hath been the Bearer of a distinct Message, and hath been commissioned to reveal Himself through specific acts. It is for this reason that they appear to vary in their greatness. . . .—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXXIV, pp. 78

2. . . . The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and enmity. . . .—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CX, p. 214

3. The time foreordained unto the peoples and kindreds of the earth is now come. The promises of God, as recorded in the holy Scriptures, have all been fulfilled. . . .—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, X, pp. 12-13

4. . . . This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. Let him that seeketh, attain it; and as to him that hath refused to seek it—verily, God is Self-Sufficient, above any need of His creatures.—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXX, p. 136

5. . . . How lofty is the station which man, if he but chooseth to fulfil his high destiny, can attain! To what depths of degradation he can sink, depths which the meanest of creatures have never reached! Seize, O friends, the chance which this Day offereth you, and deprive not yourselves of the liberal effusions of His grace. . . . —Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CI, p. 205

6. Consider the pettiness of men's minds. They ask for that which injureth them, and cast away the thing that profiteth them. . . . We find some men desiring liberty, and priding themselves therein. Such men are in the depths of ignorance. Liberty must, in the end, lead to sedition, whose flames none

can quench. . . . Know ye that the embodiment of liberty and its symbol is the animal. That which beseemeth man is submission unto such restraints as will protect him from his own ignorance, and guard him against the harm of the mischief-maker. . . .—
Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLIX, p. 334

7. Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbour, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgement, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts.
Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to the countenance of truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the tree of humility.—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXX, p. 284

8. Consort with all men, O people of Bahá, in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship. If ye be aware of a certain truth, if ye possess a jewel, of which others are deprived, share it with them in a language of utmost kindness and good-will. If it be accepted, if it fulfil its purpose, your object is attained. If any one should refuse it, leave him unto himself, and beseech God to guide him. Beware lest ye deal unkindly with him. . . .—
Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXXII, p. 287-288

9. . . . Blessed are the learned that pride not themselves on their attainments; and well is it with the righteous that mock not the sinful, but rather conceal their misdeeds, so that their own shortcomings may remain unveiled to men's eyes.—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLXV, p. 314

10. . . . The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXVII, p.

11. O contending peoples and kindreds of the earth! Set your faces towards unity, and let the radiance of its light shine upon you. Gather ye together, and for the sake of God resolve to root out whatever is the source of contention amongst you. . . .—

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXI, p. 216

12. All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. . . . 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. . . .—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CIX, p. 214

13. . . . It is incumbent upon them who are in authority to exercise moderation in all things. Whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence. Consider for instance such things as liberty, civilization and the like. However much men of understanding may favourably regard them, they will, if carried to excess, exercise a pernicious influence upon men. . . . How long will humanity persist in its waywardness? How long will injustice continue? How long is chaos and confusion to reign amongst men? How long will discord agitate the face of society? . . . The winds of despair are, alas, blowing from every direction . . . The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appeareth to be lamentably defective. . . .—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CX, p. 215

14. A new life is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth; and yet none hath discovered its cause or perceived its motive. . . .

O friends! Be not careless of the virtues with which ye have been endowed, neither be neglectful of your high destiny. Suffer not your labours to be wasted through the vain imaginations which certain hearts have devised. Ye are the stars of the heaven of understanding, the breeze that stirreth at the break of day, the soft-flowing waters upon which must depend the very life of all men. . . .

Be ye guided by wisdom in all your doings, and cleave tenaciously unto it. Please God ye may all be strengthened to carry out that which is the Will of God, and may be graciously assisted to appreciate the rank conferred upon such of His loved ones as have arisen to serve Him and magnify His name. . . .—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XCVI, p. 195-196

15. Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth. All the wondrous works ye behold in this world have been manifested through the operation of His supreme and most exalted Will, His wondrous and inflexible Purpose. . . . In the days to come, ye will, verily, behold things of which ye have never heard before. . . .—Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXXIV, p. 141

16. O Son of Spirit! My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting.—The Hidden Words (Arabic), No. 1

17. O Son of Spirit! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbour. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is my gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.—The Hidden Words (Arabic), No. 2

18. O Son of Man! Be thou content with Me and seek no other helper. For none but Me can ever suffice thee.—The Hidden Words (Arabic), No. 17

19. O Son of the Supreme! To the eternal I call thee, yet thou dost seek that which perisheth. What hath made thee turn away from Our desire and seek thine own?—The Hidden Words (Arabic), No. 23

20. O Son of Man! Breathe not the sins of others so long as thou art thyself a sinner. Shouldst thou transgress this command, accursed wouldst thou be, and to this I bear witness.—
The Hidden Words (Arabic), No. 27

21. O Son of Being! Ascribe not to any soul that which thou wouldst not have ascribed to thee, and say not that which thou doest not. This is My command unto thee, do thou observe it.—The Hidden Words (Arabic), No. 29

22. O Son of Being! Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds.—The Hidden Words (Arabic), No. 31

23. O Son of Spirit! With the joyful tidings of light I hail thee: rejoice! To the court of holiness I summon thee; abide therein that thou mayest live in peace for evermore.—The Hidden Words (Arabic), No. 33

24. O Son of Man! Wert thou to speed through the immensity of space and traverse the expanse of heaven, yet thou wouldst find no rest save in submission to Our command and humbleness before Our Face.—The Hidden Words (Arabic), No. 40

25. O Son of Being! Thy heart is My home; sanctify it for My descent. Thy spirit is My place of revelation; cleanse it for My manifestation.—The Hidden Words (Arabic), No. 59

26. O Son of Man! Many a day hath passed over thee whilst thou hast busied thyself with thy fancies and idle imaginings.

How long art thou to slumber on thy bed? Lift up thy head from slumber, for the Sun hath risen to the zenith, haply it may shine upon thee with the light of beauty.—The Hidden Words (Arabic), No. 62

A PRAYER

O my God! O my God! Unite the hearts of Thy servants, and reveal to them Thy great purpose. May they follow Thy commandments and abide in Thy law. Help them, O God, in their endeavors, and grant them strength to serve Thee. O God! Leave them not to themselves, but guide their steps by the light of Thy knowledge, and cheer their hearts by Thy love. Verily, Thou art their Helper and their Lord.—Bahá'í Prayers, BPT (U.S.), 1991 ed., p. 204

Word Meanings:

fundamentally: basically.
indulge: take pleasure in.
waver: to go between doubt and assurance.
commissioned: given the task of doing something.
dissension: disagreeing in opinion.
discord: lack of agreement or harmony.
enmity: hatred.
degradation: low rank and degree.
pettiness: narrow-mindedness; concentrating on things that matter little.
embodiment: physical form.
prosperity: good fortune.
adversity: bad times.
admonisher: one who warns gently.
sanctity: godliness; sacredness; good word.
pledge: promise.
meekness: patience and long-suffering.
fugitive: one who is running away or trying to escape something.
countenance: face.
fidelity: belief.
ensign: flag representing an army.
luminary: one who gives light.
diadem: crown.
firmament: the blackness in which the stars appear; the background.
ponder: think about.
accursed: being under a curse.
ascribe: to blame someone for something.
immensity: hugeness; the whole of.
traverse: to cross; to travel.
zenith: highest point in the sky; midday.

contention: argument; division.

cease: stop.

pernicious: very destructive.

chaos: disorder.

agitate: to shake; to stir up.

lamentably defective: not working properly and thereby causing sadness.

potency: strength; power.

— A Brief Course on the Baha'i Faith (Used by permission of the curator)