

2. Care for the aged.

by valuing their life experience.

by providing physical care when necessary.

by providing cross-generational communication and relationships.

3. Support for the individual and facilitating growth and change.

acceptance. Change is a daunting process. I believe that we need to feel accepted before we are able to make lasting and effective change. At its best a

family is a safe haven where you can be your 'true' self and know that you will be accepted.

a sense of belonging to and identifying with a group

support - physical and financial.

4. Providing the stimulus for change.

a range of people with whom to interact. M. Scott Peck writes that there are two valid reasons to get married. One is for the care and raising of children.

The other is for the friction.[2] Living in close proximity with others inevitably causes friction. In an extended family one encounters a variety of sources of friction. One can use this friction to polish the different facets of our nature and reveal the hidden gems.

Should the community step in and fill these vacant roles?

In the Ridvan Message of B.E. 151 the Universal House of Justice affirmed that "We live in the midst of populations which are in desperate need of the

Message of Bahá'u'lláh". When we think of the state of the world we are often drawn to think of the graphically displayed need in places like Bosnia and Rwanda.

Less dramatic but no less real, is the need in our own local arena.

In The Promise of World Peace the Universal House of Justice offered the Bahá'í community as a model for study. To be worthy of such study we

need to offer something different to what is currently available to the generality of

society. The House has admonished us to "...produce a truly Bahá'í community, a light and haven for the bewildered." The Guardian linked this with entry by troops.[3]

The generality of society lives in isolated nuclear families. As Edward Shorter says:

The nuclear family is a state of mind rather than a particular kind of structure or set of household arrangements. It has little to do with whether the generations live together or whether Aunt Mary stays in the spare bedroom. Nor can it be understood with kinship diagrams and figures on family size. What really distinguishes the nuclear family - mother, father, and children - from other patterns of family life in Western society is a special sense of solidarity that separates the domestic unit from the surrounding community. Its members feel that they have much more in common with one another than they do with anyone else on the outside - that they enjoy a privileged emotional climate they must protect from outside intrusion, through privacy and isolation.[4]

By developing supportive communities which are filling the roles of the extended family, we will be providing an attractive alternative to the divisive mind set of "them and us". As stated in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi: "The world is not only starving for lofty principles and ideals, it is, above all, starving for a shining example which the Bahá'ís can and must provide."[5]

What sort of community do we need to become to be effective in this?

Bahá'u'lláh tells us we are created to bring forth an ever advancing civilisation. In systems theory a change in one part of a system necessitates a change in the whole system. So a community of individuals who are changing and growing in their quest to know and love God will be constantly evolving. As communities we need to resist inertia and be open to change and innovation. A period of rapid change will soon be upon us as entry by troops becomes a reality.

To be effective, our communities need to go beyond the superficial to develop bonds between all the believers, in fact with all humanity. As John Davidson says

"The art of loving in the Bahá'í community is to some extent the art of knowing people well enough that we can sincerely show them that we appreciate what they are doing."[6] And in the Bahá'í writings: "Concern yourselves with one another. Help along one another's projects and plans. Befriend one another until ye become as a single body, one and all..."[7]

Above all I feel we need to be non-judgemental and accepting. The first step to change is to be accepted as what you are. It is from this strong base that we gain the courage and strength to begin to grow. If as Bahá'ís we sincerely believe that the Word of God has the power to spiritually transform the individual then we can in no way judge someone on their past performance. They may literally overnight have become a new creation. There is a Confucian saying: "if you have not seen a person for three days you must become acquainted with his character all over again when next you meet."

In such an evolving, supportive community many of the roles we have discussed will be filled quite naturally as a result of the change in human relationships.

If there is not a striving to change relationships then attempts to fill the roles may be successful in the short term but, I feel, will ultimately fail due to lack of commitment.

How can a Community fill these roles?

Let us look at the roles of the family I highlighted earlier and discuss some of the practical ways a community can play a part. These ideas are but a starting point. What is practical and necessary will differ from community to community and will change over time.

1. Raising children

We live in an age-stratified society. My children primarily play with children very close to their own age. I associate with women at a similar stage of life as

I am. It is really only in the Bahá'í community that my children interact with

adolescents or I with middle aged women. It plays a vital role in providing role models of

how we can choose to behave at another stage of our lives. This is one of the reasons I

feel it is very important that our community functions involve a range of age groups and are attractive to all.

The community is also vital in reinforcing what parents have been teaching their children. I don't mean just in the children's class syllabus.

Children need to see consultation being used effectively at the Feast; unity in diversity

must become a reality; all the virtues of humanity need to be embodied in the Bahá'ís around them. So much of what we strive to achieve in a Bahá'í home is negated by the society around us. Children need to see that others live as they do. We

need to ensure that they mix with their Bahá'í peers as much as possible.

This is

especially important for those of us who live in small communities. To be "different" is not the goal of most children.

According to Bahiyyih Nakhjavani, "It is very hard to be the kind of parent or teacher envisaged in the Writings unless we have support and encouragement." [8] I feel we need to be providing parenting education before marriage and certainly before a couple has children. Our communities need to address the needs of parents and assess how to be of support. The LSA which asks what the parents in their community need will probably be flooded with ideas. They may take the form of arranging child minding so that parents can spend time together working on their relationship. It may be deepenings/workshops on parenting. It might be buying a copy of The Virtues Guide [9] for the community library.

I believe the most important support a community can provide is to foster an awareness of the importance of the education of children. We know that parents are primarily responsible for this, but not solely so according to Bahá'u'lláh.

"We prescribe unto all men that which will lead to the exultation of the Word of God amongst His servants, and likewise, to the advancement of the world of being and the uplift of souls. To this end, the greatest means is education of the child.

To this must each and all hold fast....

We ask of God that He will assist each and every one to obey this inescapable command." [10]

2. Care for the aged.

The dependencies around the House of Worship have always fascinated me. It is worth noting here that two of them are an orphanage and a home for the aged. So the young and the old are brought together at the spiritual centre of the community. The building of strong relationships between the young and the elderly will have great benefits for all. Shoghi Effendi encouraged such interaction. "Our Faith is

just as
much for the children as for older people, and it rejoices his heart when he
sees both
working together to bring this great Message of good to all mankind." [11]

There is often a natural affinity between the young and the old.

Very few Bahá'í communities in Australia would be ready to run a
Nursing Home, but there is much we can do anyway. First is the realisation that
effective,
fulfilling life does not end at 65 years of age. We have Mother and Father Dunn
as
wonderful examples of what can be achieved.

For those less mobile a community can arrange for regular visitors;
help with the heavy jobs in the garden and spring cleaning; help with doing
shopping.

3. Support for the individual

I have spoken about the strengthening in bonds between the individuals
in the community. One of the most important factors that I see in this process
is the
Feast. The Feast can provide a great sense of belonging to a community, a sense
of
identity as a Bahá'í. The consultation section provides an avenue for
everyone's views to be heard. This may mean that a large community needs to
hold a
number of small Feasts so the participants feel they have a chance to speak.
The social
part of the Feast is an opportunity to encourage each other and catch up on
each others
plans and projects. When LSA's meet with each individual or family in the
community
it reinforces the feeling of belonging and of being heard.

4. Stimulus for change

One of the ways we learn about ourselves is through our interactions
with others. In a diverse Bahá'í community we will be in contact with many
different people. We have a range of people originally from different
religious, ethnic,
national, and family backgrounds. What a wonderful pot-pourri with which to
interact.

Another avenue for growth is by taking on new challenges. Many of us
will have found ourselves called upon to do any number of things we had never
envisaged -
serving on LSAs, committees, public speaking, writing papers for Bahá'í
Studies. In
a close community such work will not be done only by a small minority who seem

to do

everything and are stressed to the limit as a result. The human resources of the whole community will be used and developed. As this happens, the potential of each of us to serve the Faith and humanity will grow what before seemed impossible will be achieved individually and collectively.

How do we foster the development of such a community?

I have given you a vision of a supportive, evolving community but how do we go about making this vision a reality? We begin by working on our own spiritual development. After all, the only people we can change are ourselves. "Let each morn be better than its eve and each morrow richer than its yesterday." [12]

Bahá'u'lláh exhorts us. A letter written on behalf of the Guardian reassures us, "What every believer, new or old, should realise is that the Cause has the spiritual power to re-create us if we make the effort to let that power influence us." [13] How do we do this? We follow the basic precepts of prayer and reading the Writings.

Along with this work on ourselves we can be changing the way we interact with others. Stephen Covey writes about the importance of achieving a Private Victory before we turn this into a Public Victory. We need to become independent beings, with a sense of personal congruence and integrity, before we can move on to interdependence and develop rich relationships with others. [14]

Kurt Lewin developed a "Force Field Analysis" model which involved an equilibrium between driving forces and restraining forces in any situation. [15]

Increasing the driving forces may bring short term change. To achieve lasting change we need to remove the restraining forces. The difficult part about this is that often we aren't even aware that they exist. I believe that consultation is the key to exposing these restraining forces and thus allowing us to work on them to change the whole tone of a situation.

By saying what we really think and feel in consultation we are making ourselves vulnerable and exposing the restraining forces that exist within us all. We are also creating an atmosphere in which it is possible to develop deeper relationships with

others in our community. "The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation." [16] We come again to the importance of the institution of the Feast and the consultation that takes place there. "Every meeting which is organised for the purpose of unity and concord will be conducive to changing strangers into friends, enemies into associates, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá will be present in His heart and soul with that meeting." [17]

So it is possible to develop bonds between people and establish the "great human family" envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh. [18] With this in mind I would like to finish with a quote from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. "Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted: what progress the members of that family make, how they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but addeth to its stature and its lasting honour, as day succeedeth day..." [19]

References

Biddulph, Steve. *The Secret Of Happy Children*. Bay Books Sydney. 1988 p. 81

Peck, M Scott. *A World Waiting To Be Born*. Bantam Books. 1993 p. 105

Universal House Of Justice. *Ridvan Message B.E.* 151.

Shorter, Edward. in - *The Making and Breaking of the Australian Family*. Allen and Unwin. Sydney 1977 p. 204.

The Compilation of Compilations. Bahá'í Publications Australia. # 812

Davidson, John. *A Bahá'í Approach to Community*. Association for Bahá'í Studies - Australia. 1993 p. 33

The Compilation of Compilations. # 185.

Nakhjavani, Bahiyyih. *When We Grow Up*. George Ronald. Oxford. 1980 p. 77

Popov, L. & D., & Kavelin J., *The Virtues Guide: A Handbook For Parents Teaching Virtues*, The Virtues Project Inc., Ganges, Canada, 1993.

The Compilation of Compilations. # 557

ibid # 882

ibid # 767

ibid # 811

Covey, Stephen R. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. The Business Library Melbourne. 1993 p. 185

ibid p. 279

The Compilation of Compilations # 168

ibid # 185/1

ibid # 858

ibid # 836

METADATA

Views8361 views since posted 2011-10-22; last edit 2024-07-09 05:06 UTC;

previous at archive.org.../gabriel_community_family

Language

English

Permission

fair use

History

Formatted 2011-10-22 by Jonah Winters; Proofread 2011-10-19 by Jonah Winters.

Share

Shortlink: bahai-library.com/2827

Citation: [ris/2827](https://bahai-library.com/2827)

select Collection:

Archives

Articles

Articles-unpublished

Audio

Bibliographies

BIC

Biographies

Books

Chronologies

Compilations

Compilations-NSA

Compilations-personal

Documents

East-asia

Encyclopedia

Essays

Etc

Excerpts

Fiction

Glossaries

Guardian

Histories

Introductory

Letters

[Maps](#)
[Music](#)
[Newspapers](#)
[NSA-documents](#)
[NSA-letters](#)
[Personal](#)
[Pilgrims](#)
[Poetry](#)
[Presentations](#)
[Resources](#)
[Reviews](#)
[Scripts](#)
[Software](#)
[Statistics](#)
[Study](#)
[Talks](#)
[Theses](#)
[Transcripts](#)
[Translations](#)
[UHJ-documents](#)
[UHJ-letters](#)
[Video](#)
[Visual](#)
[Writings](#)

[home](#)

[sitemap](#)

[series](#)

[chronology](#)

[search:](#)

[author](#)

[title](#)

[date](#)

[tags](#)

[adv. search](#)

[languages](#)

[inventory](#)

[bibliography](#)

[abbreviations](#)

[links](#)

[about](#)

[contact](#)

[RSS](#)

[new](#)

— The Community as Family: Opportunities of Growth (Used by permission of the curator)