



Teaching the Cause

Ruhi Institute



Book 6

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Ruhi Institute

Books in the Series:

Below are the current titles in the series designed by the Ruhi Institute. The books are intended to be used as the main sequence of courses in a systematic effort to enhance the capacity of youth and adults to serve their communities. The Ruhi Institute is also developing a set of courses that branch out from the third book in the series for training Bahá'í children's class teachers, as well as another set from Book 5 for raising up animators of junior youth groups. These, too, are indicated in the list below. It should be noted that the list may undergo change as experience in the field advances, and additional titles will be added as a number of curricular elements under development reach the stage where they can be made widely available.

- Book 1 *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*
- Book 2 *Arising to Serve*
- Book 3 *Teaching Children's Classes, Grade 1*
 Teaching Children's Classes, Grade 2 (branch course)
 Teaching Children's Classes, Grade 3 (branch course)
 Teaching Children's Classes, Grade 4 (branch course)
- Book 4 *The Twin Manifestations*
- Book 5 *Releasing the Powers of Junior Youth*
 Initial Impulse: The first branch course of Book 5
 Widening Circle: The second branch course of Book 5
- Book 6 *Teaching the Cause*
- Book 7 *Walking Together on a Path of Service*
- Book 8 *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*
- Book 9 *Gaining an Historical Perspective*
- Book 10 *Building Vibrant Communities*
- Book 11 *Material Means*
- Book 12 *The Family and the Community*
- Book 13 *Engaging in Social Action*
- Book 14 *Participating in Public Discourse*

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A Few Thoughts for the Tutor

It is important for all those who serve as tutors of the courses of the Ruhi Institute to understand that *Teaching the Cause*, the sixth in its main sequence, occupies a pivotal position in the educational process in which participants are engaged. On the one hand, with their accumulating experience in the field of service, they will be ready to reflect more extensively on a subject first introduced to them in Book 2. On the other, the themes they examine here will place in context so much of what they do going forward, for a life given to service to the Cause will necessarily be infused with a fervent desire to attain the privilege of sharing Bahá'u'lláh's teachings with others.

Since embarking on the path of service opened up by the courses, participants have gained a great deal of experience in carrying out, in the company of their friends, a set of interrelated acts of service in their villages and neighborhoods—hosting devotional gatherings, undertaking systematic visits to homes, teaching classes for the spiritual education of children, and engaging groups of junior youth in a program for their spiritual empowerment. Interwoven with all these acts have been conversations that have helped growing numbers to become familiar with the principles of the Faith and deepen their knowledge of its teachings. Each of the earlier courses, particularly Book 2, has contributed to the development of those capabilities needed for participants to enter into such conversations. No doubt, many of them have by this time also had the bounty of assisting other souls in recognizing Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for today and in bearing allegiance to His Faith. They are now well prepared to think more deeply about the act of teaching, which is the purpose of the third unit of this book. The second will provide them with an opportunity to reflect on spiritual qualities and attitudes that those who teach the Faith should acquire, while the first will enhance their understanding of the spiritual significance of this sacred act.

In exploring the nature of the duty enjoined on us by Bahá'u'lláh to teach His Cause, the first unit takes up several fundamental concepts. Among those introduced early in the unit is the concept of “enkindlement”. Participants are encouraged to recognize that our duty to teach is concerned as much with our inner condition as it is with the actions we carry out. That “being” and “doing” are two complementary aspects of a life lived according to the Bahá'í teachings is a theme underlying the entire sequence of courses. Here it is made explicit and, indeed, gives shape to the overall structure of the book. The initial sections of the unit will assist participants in gaining spiritual insight into this idea as it relates to teaching the Faith. Several metaphors found in the Writings are employed to help them see the interconnectedness between “being” and “doing”—most notably, the image of a flame, which, no matter how small, gives forth warmth and light. The act of teaching, it is suggested, is a natural expression of a state of being, one that can best be described as a state of enkindlement, in which the love of God burns so brightly in our hearts that we strive ceaselessly to diffuse His Word.

The understanding participants reach through their study of the passages in these sections, then, should enable them to appreciate how the complementarity of “being” and

“doing” is manifested in practical terms in the field of service. In this, the implications of certain commonly held notions that separate the two, particularly those religious in character, will need to become clear to participants, if they are to keep such dichotomous thinking from influencing the way they view a life dedicated to the promotion of the Cause. The exercises in Sections 9 and 10 will assist in this respect, and tutors should ensure they receive adequate attention. Of course, participants will be readily able to see that the twofold moral purpose they have been pursuing ties together every aspect of their lives—their search for knowledge, their obedience to Divine law, their efforts to serve God and draw closer to Him and to acquire spiritual qualities and refine their character.

The sacred nature of the duty to teach is the focus of the next several sections of the unit. In a world from which the very notion of sacredness is disappearing, participants should emerge from their study of the course with an acute awareness of “the sacred”—that which belongs to God—and with a profound grasp of the idea that, in teaching the Faith, they are interacting with two sacred things: the human heart and His Revelation. Reflection on selected passages from the Writings will shed light on what is an intensely spiritual act—that is, the opening of the city of the human heart to His Revelation with the key of utterance. The question of “utterance” will be explored in detail in the third unit, where participants will consider the content of the message they convey to another soul when teaching. In the sections here, they are asked to think about how a heightened consciousness of the sacredness of this act does not merely increase the effectiveness of endeavors in the field. Rather, and more importantly, it releases the spiritual forces needed to raise such endeavors above worldly affairs, setting in motion, thereby, processes that can bring about fundamental change, both individual and collective. In Section 17 participants will spend some time examining the implications of this heightened consciousness. Among the points the tutor will want to make sure come across to them, two stand out: First, they will have to take care, lest they adopt certain mindsets which, however widespread in society, would introduce into their teaching efforts attitudes and practices that would compromise their sacred nature. The act of teaching should not be approached as though one were recruiting members for a progressive social cause, much less be conceived in terms of selling a product, no matter how beneficial to the user. Second, they should recognize that, since all their undertakings on the path of service involve bringing hearts into contact with the Word of God, these, too, are sacred in nature and should be approached with this awareness.

The unit then turns to a subject well familiar to participants: the transformative effect of the Word of God. In the act of teaching, a connection is formed between the human heart and the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh—His greatest bestowal to humankind—a connection through which an enduring process of transformation can begin. The Word of God, alone, is endowed with the power capable of such a transformation. To whatever extent participants have reflected on this subject in previous courses, it is here that they will immerse themselves in Bahá’u’lláh’s own Utterances regarding the significance of the Word of God and the importance of drawing on its power when teaching His Cause. The emphasis the Ruhi Institute places on memorizing passages from the writings will become even more compelling in the minds of participants. To explain the teachings accurately, giving them to others in their pure form, is among the capabilities we all seek to develop as we walk the path of service, and this requires that we exert effort at all times to align our thoughts and words as closely as possible with the writings.

The unit concludes, then, by making it clear that, when conversing with others about the Faith, we are to draw not only on the knowledge we have acquired to provide clear and coherent explanations but also on the force of love. In the context of teaching, conversation

should, in addition to being characterized by joy, create and strengthen bonds of love between the hearts through which noble feelings and lofty ideas can flow.

The second unit, “Qualities and Attitudes Essential for Teaching”, opens by reminding participants of what they studied in the first unit related to the complementarity of “being” and “doing”. It underscores from the outset that the refinement of an individual’s inner state naturally finds expression in service to others, while it is in serving others that one’s inner state is further enhanced. Participants are invited to reflect on such spiritual qualities as purity of heart, selflessness, faith, kindness, courage, wisdom, detachment, and humility as they pertain to our efforts to diffuse the Divine fragrances. The development of spiritual qualities, together with corresponding attitudes, is a theme addressed repeatedly in the courses of the Ruhi Institute, but always in the context of building a particular capacity—the capacity needed, for example, to contribute to the devotional character of a community, to share with others pearls of wisdom from Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation, to conduct classes for the spiritual education of children. In this way, participants’ understanding of these essential attributes of the human soul expands and assumes greater depth over time, as they examine the dynamics of each one in a new light and witness its operation in some new area of action.

In guiding a group through the unit, a tutor will want to bear in mind a concept central to the exploration of spiritual qualities, which, present in all the courses of the main sequence, moves to the forefront in this one—namely, that such qualities depend on one another for their proper expression. Of particular significance to the act of teaching is an understanding of how courage demands wisdom; how wisdom remains unexpressed in the absence of courage; how purity requires detachment from worldly ambition, as well as selflessness; how kindness, if not modified by faith in people’s capacity, can be overshadowed by paternalism or how, without sincerity, it is, in reality, nothing more than hypocrisy.

Tutors are by now familiar with the idea, put forward in Book 3, that spiritual qualities are those permanent structures that constitute who we are as human beings. The acquisition of these qualities enables us to display proper attitudes in our interactions with others and to eschew the undesirable ones which we might have acquired through our upbringing and culture. Our openness towards people and the sympathy we have for their struggle to understand the truth are examples of attitudes that affect teaching. What all tutors need to appreciate is that the discussion of attitudes is built into the exploration of spiritual qualities that are the focus of the greater part of the unit. For instance, in thinking about the qualities of kindness and patience in Section 7, participants analyze situations in which the attitudes of paternalism and negligence can assert themselves in their name. Likewise, after reflecting on the quality of detachment in Section 8, they will be asked to consider how it relates to our passion for teaching, a lofty desire towards which we all aspire. Participants should be able to identify ardor and enthusiasm as attitudes they should strive to show forth and acknowledge apathy and indifference as those they will resist. This is the purpose of the exercise in Section 9, which should be the subject of careful thought.

Those who serve as tutors are, of course, also aware that the development of any spiritual quality involves an understanding of a number of associated concepts. Attaining higher and higher degrees of purity, to take an example, requires some understanding of what the human heart has been created to mirror forth, of what constitutes the dust and dross that can obscure its radiance, and of what is needed to keep it cleansed of such impurities. But, beyond a deepening understanding of such concepts, one must possess the will and the sincere desire to advance spiritually. Will and desire are not created by mere intellectual discussion; there is need for deep and profound reflection by each individual on his or her inner state. It is the task of the

tutor, then, to foster an environment conducive to such reflection—an environment that does not give rise to feelings of guilt, that does not call for confessions, that does not encourage accusations, one in which a group of friends can dispassionately discuss both abstract and practical matters, leaving each to reflect privately on what is required of him or her.

One spiritual quality that receives particular attention is humility. On the one hand, true humility is intimately connected to the state of enkindlement we are all striving to attain. Reaching its heights demands that we become increasingly oblivious of self. It is the quality that endows our words and deeds with spiritual power and protects us from the onslaught of pride and vainglory. On the other hand, it engenders an attitude of learning so essential to effective teaching. A posture of learning formed on the foundation of true humility guards against rigidity in the methods and approaches we employ when teaching the Faith, both in our own individual efforts and in our contributions to collective undertakings; it assists us in becoming more and more adept at responding appropriately to the circumstances in which we find ourselves—whether to proceed boldly or cautiously, whether to act swiftly or mark time, whether to speak directly and unequivocally about the person of Bahá'u'lláh or more generally about His teachings and the principles He has enunciated. The discussion of these ideas begins in Section 10 and culminates in the exercises in Section 14. As always, the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, with which the unit ends, will guide participants in their reflections on the qualities and attitudes that should characterize the way they interact with receptive souls and approach their conversations about the Faith.

The third unit, which takes up the act of teaching itself, addresses the subject in two contexts: in our own personal efforts as individuals and in collective endeavors at the grassroots. A significant portion is dedicated to the former, but tutors should remember that much of what they will discuss with participants applies equally to both. Indeed, while the unit considers each in turn, in reality they are not isolated from one another but overlap in many respects.

Among the capacities the unit suggests participants will need to develop to be effective in either context is that of recognizing and nurturing receptivity to the message of Bahá'u'lláh. In this, the spiritual qualities that were the focus of the second unit will be key, as will, as noted by the Guardian in the passage in Section 3, the ability to take advantage of the opportunities created by the turmoil in society today. In their discussions, participants should give sufficient thought to the conditions that rise in the human heart under the stresses and strains of a declining world order.

Of course, however ample such opportunities may be, they will go unrealized if the capacity to present the Bahá'í teachings in a cogent manner, appropriate to the circumstances, does not receive adequate attention. The core of the unit, then, is given over to an exploration of this capacity, and participants are helped to think about its nature with the aid of an example—a conversation in which a young person, Anna, presents the Faith to her friend Emilia. Tutors will want to make sure participants come away from this core discussion with at least two ideas clear in their minds.

First, it is imperative that participants appreciate not only the difference between concepts and information, raised in Sections 4 through 6, but also why the distinction is so important. It is, after all, the understanding of concepts and profound truths that enables souls to draw closer to Bahá'u'lláh, not the mere assimilation of information. To the extent that the act of teaching is concerned with raising consciousness and fostering understanding it can be seen as a means of helping to empower individuals, intellectually and spiritually. Here, the capacity participants have been developing since entering the institute process to

interact with the Word of God and achieve understanding will come into play, as they now consider how to guide others towards the shores of true knowledge.

Second, participants should realize that the conversation between Anna and her friend, outlined in Sections 7 through 21, is intended to give them an idea of what a cogent presentation of the Faith entails; it should not be taken as a formula to be used indiscriminately. Indeed, the exercises that follow each segment of the presentation are designed to highlight its overall logic and elicit some initial thoughts on how it might be adapted in response to different backgrounds and interests. If participants are to develop the ability to do this, however, they will need, in the first instance, to learn the presentation well as it stands and be able to express the sequence of ideas in their own words.

The discussion of individual teaching efforts draws to a close in Section 26, in which participants are asked to look at their life circumstances and identify the elements of a personal teaching plan. They are encouraged in Section 27 to devise, on that basis, an initial plan of action for a certain period of time, either several weeks or a few months. It is hoped that this exercise will raise their awareness of the importance of engaging regularly in teaching as a personal initiative throughout their lives.

Section 28, then, turns to the question of collective action, which is the focus of the remainder of the unit. It is expected that, by this time, participants will have already taken part in various kinds of intensive campaigns. Further, they will each belong to a growing nucleus of active supporters of the Faith working steadily to advance the process of community building in the cluster in which they reside. These final sections will help them reflect on their experience as participants in such collective action. While the exercises are not extensive, this does not mean the sections should be moved through in haste, and it is important for the tutor to ensure that enough time is allotted for participants to relate what they are studying to their own experience. In doing so, they should come to see how, in collective action, every individual is to contribute to an environment characterized by increasing degrees of unity, in its various dimensions. They should gain a vision of how unified action at the grassroots, together with individual exertions, serves to advance the global enterprise in which the Bahá'í community is engaged.

To this end, the sections raise a number of questions that participants will consider: What is the nature of collective action? What does it mean for collective action to be unified? What are the features of the approach to the growth of the Faith worldwide, and what is the role of intensive campaigns? What are some of the characteristics of the people among whom they are working, whether the inhabitants of a village or a receptive population living in a neighborhood or dispersed throughout the cluster? How strong are the forces being generated by their collective action to propel the movement of the population towards the vision of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order? How intimately connected to the growth of the Faith is the capacity built through the educational process being promoted by the institute for children, junior youth, and youth and adults? Are the requisite conditions for effective collective action being created? Are bonds of fellowship continually being strengthened? Is unity of purpose being achieved among participants in collective action? Is it being made manifest in joyful and intense activity? To what extent is their approach to learning about growth being defined by action, reflection on action, and consultation? The importance of this last question cannot be overstated, for it is the extent to which such an approach becomes the mode of operation among an expanding nucleus of friends that they will be able to build higher and higher degrees of unity of thought, so necessary if they are to discover what is needed to advance from one stage of growth to the next.



The Spiritual Nature of Teaching

Purpose

To gain an understanding of teaching as an act
of particular spiritual significance and
to appreciate that effective teaching
involves both “being” and “doing”—
attention to one’s inner condition
as well as constant activity

SECTION 1

You have by now been advancing on the path of service for some time—a path on which the spiritual and intellectual development of the individual is inseparable from his or her contribution to the transformation of society. At every point along this path a combination of study and action has enhanced your capacity to serve in various ways—in reinforcing the devotional character of your community, in initiating and sustaining spiritually uplifting conversations with friends and families in your neighborhood or village, in participating in a program of systematic visits to homes, in acting as a children’s class teacher or as an animator of a junior youth group, or both. In all of these undertakings, you have felt the joy of sharing with those of diverse backgrounds and varied ages pearls of wisdom from the ocean of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation.

Undoubtedly, as you have worked to strengthen the spiritual foundations of your community, you have seized opportunities to speak directly and in depth about the person of Bahá’u’lláh and His Revelation with those who are interested—for example, when visiting parents with children in the educational programs of the institute, perhaps as part of an intensive campaign, or when conversing with young people who entered the institute process out of a desire to serve. Even in your daily interactions with relatives, friends, classmates, coworkers, and acquaintances you must have found similar opportunities. Further, on these and other such occasions, you have not shied away from inviting receptive souls to embrace the truth of His message and to join the community of His followers. The three units of this book will help you reflect on the act of teaching, the act of guiding souls to the shores of the ocean of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation. There are, of course, so many avenues through which people arrive at these shores. We should recognize, then, that much of what we will study about the spiritual dynamics of teaching applies broadly to all of our efforts, in every setting and circumstance, to discuss Bahá’í ideals, to share our beliefs and convictions, to explore spiritual matters with others, and even to nurture the young—for these efforts, too, involve bringing souls into contact with the Word of God.

SECTION 2

“Teach ye the Cause of God, O people of Bahá,” is Bahá’u’lláh’s exhortation, “for God hath prescribed unto every one the duty of proclaiming His Message, and regardeth it as the most meritorious of all deeds.” What does it mean for teaching to be the duty of all those who have recognized Bahá’u’lláh?

The word “duty” is used in human speech in a number of ways. At times, it carries the notion of a set of rules imposed on us for no apparent reason. We think of certain duties as tasks we must perform even though it would be far more pleasant if we could avoid doing them. Other duties, related to our own well-being and to the well-being of those for whom we care, we undertake gladly. In consultation with your group, make a list of a few enjoyable duties.

In general, we tend to carry out with diligence those duties that seem important to us. A farmer, for example, cares dutifully for his farm because he knows that each task is essential to the final goal of reaping an abundant harvest, upon which the sustenance of his family depends. Now, what are some of the fruits we hope our efforts to teach the Faith will yield?

The duties enjoined upon us by the Manifestation of God are conducive to the greatest good. Yet their value does not lie solely in the good they produce. The ordinances of God are not mere rules telling us what to do or not to do; they are, in essence, statements about the reality of human existence. A simple example will clarify this point.

We know that in order to live a healthy life we need to eat a moderate amount of food on a regular basis. Eating regularly, however, is not an arbitrary rule of behavior someone has imposed on us; it is a statement about the reality of our physical existence. Our bodies are made up in such a way that they require nourishment every so many hours, and we must respond to this requirement; neglecting it will ultimately lead to death.

In the same way, when the Manifestation of God gives us an exhortation or command, for example, one requiring us to pray every day, He is not imposing on us some arbitrary rule of behavior. Rather, we are being told something about the reality of our existence—in this case, that the human soul was created in such a way that, for it to be nourished, we must turn our hearts and minds regularly towards God and “converse” with the Source of our being. Likewise, our duty to teach His Cause, beyond the obvious benefit it brings to us and to humanity, reveals certain truths about the nature of the human soul and its requirements. In the next several sections we will explore some of these truths. Before doing this, however, you may find it helpful to write a sentence about the nature of each of the following. An example is given to assist you.

1. A candle: The nature of a candle is to give light.

2. A moth: _____

3. A flame: _____

4. A fountain: _____

5. Rain clouds: _____

6. Perfume: _____

Would you agree that the nature of a human being is to give ceaselessly—to give of one’s possessions, time, energy, and knowledge?

SECTION 3

Let us begin our reflections on some of the implications of our duty to teach by studying a few quotations from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in this and the next two sections. On one occasion, He writes:

“O living flame of heavenly love! Thine heart hath been so fired with the love of God that from ten thousand leagues afar its warmth and radiance may be felt and seen. The fire lit by mortal hand imparteth light and warmth to but a little space, whereas that sacred flame which the Hand of God hath kindled, though burning in the east, will set aflame the west and give warmth to both the north and the south; nay, it shall rise from this world to glow with the hottest flame in the realms on high, flooding with light the Kingdom of eternal glory.”¹

According to the above passage, our hearts should be so _____ with the love of God that from _____ afar its _____ and _____ may be _____ and _____. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that the _____ lit by _____ imparts _____ and _____ to but a little _____, while that _____ which the _____ has kindled, though burning in the _____, will set _____ the _____ and give _____ to both the _____ and the _____. It will rise from this world to _____ with the _____ in the realms on high, _____ with light the Kingdom of _____.

SECTION 4

To one of the friends who, having long desired to attain His presence, finally had a brief meeting with Him, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addresses the following words:

“. . . I hope that this meeting was like unto the lamp’s wick that met the fire and was ignited upon contact. I am expectantly awaiting the results of this meeting, that I may find thee ablaze like a candle and consumed like a moth by the fire of the love of God. May thou, moved by the intensity of love and rapture, weep like the cloud, laugh like the fresh meadow, and tremble with joy like the incomparable sapling stirred by the breezes of the Abhá Paradise.”²

According to this passage, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá hopes to find us ablaze like a _____ and consumed like a _____ by the _____ of the _____ of God. Moved by the _____ of _____ and _____, we should weep like the _____, laugh like the _____, and tremble with joy like the _____ stirred by the _____ of the Abhá Paradise.

SECTION 5

And in a Tablet written in reply to questions from one of the early followers of the Faith, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

“The handmaids of God must rise to such a station that they will, by themselves and unaided, comprehend these inner meanings, and be able to expound at full length every single word; a station where, out of the truth of their inmost hearts, a spring of wisdom will well up, and jet forth even as a fountain that leapeth from its own original source.”³

‘Abdu’l-Bahá desires that we rise to such a station that we will, by ourselves and unaided, _____ the inner meanings of the teachings and be able to _____ at full length _____. This is the station where, out of the _____ of our inmost hearts, a _____ will well up, and _____ even as a _____ that _____ from its own _____.

SECTION 6

The three quotations we have just studied suggest that our duty to teach the Cause is concerned as much with a state of being we must attain as it is with the actions we must carry out. There is a great deal we can learn about this state of being from the images contained in the quotations. They speak of things whose very existence requires them to give of themselves. Can a flame choose not to give forth light and yet be called a flame? Can a fountain choose not to flow and still be a fountain? So, too, are we created to be giving and generous. To give, to share with others what we possess is a requirement of our spiritual existence. Of all that we possess the most precious is the gift of faith—recognition of Bahá’u’lláh as the Manifestation of God for today. It is only natural that we would share with others the knowledge we receive from His Revelation and the love and joy with which this Revelation fills our souls.

We may encounter many obstacles in our way, of course, as we strive to teach the Cause. We may be shy, we may be fearful to act or to speak forth, we may find it difficult at times to express ideas with clarity, but all this we can gradually overcome if we understand that by teaching the Cause of God, we are learning to give freely of that which is most dear to us. The following words from a letter written on behalf of the Guardian can serve as a constant reminder of our duty to share with others the divine wisdom contained in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation:

“The world is in great turmoil, and its problems seem to become daily more acute. We should, therefore, not sit idle, otherwise we would be failing in carrying out our sacred duty. Bahá'u'lláh has not given us His teachings to treasure them and hide them for our personal delight and pleasure. He gave them to us that we may pass them from mouth to mouth, until all the world becomes familiar with them, and enjoys their blessings and uplifting influence.”⁴

SECTION 7

One way to characterize the state of being towards which we are striving is to say that it is a state of enkindlement. As we focus our thoughts and energy on teaching, then, we should remember that the fire of love for Bahá'u'lláh in our hearts should burn brighter and brighter each day. You may wish to commit to memory the following passage from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and let it remind you always of the need to feed the flame of the love of God in your heart:

“O thou who art as a lamp set aflame with the fire of the love of God! I read thy recent letter, which told of thy fervent love and of thine enkindlement with the fire of the love of thy Lord, the Mighty, the Praised, and indicated the pervading influence of the Spirit of Truth within thy limbs and nerves, thy veins and arteries, thy bones and blood and flesh, in such wise that it hath taken the reins of power from thy hands, moving thee as it willeth, causing thee to speak as it willeth, and attracting thee as it willeth. This indeed well becometh every heart that is filled with the spirit of the love of God. Soon shalt thou behold wondrous results and discover the signs of thy Mighty Lord.”⁵

SECTION 8

The above passage describes a state in which we cannot help but to serve and to teach the Cause. So infused is the Spirit of Truth into our very being that it takes the reins of power from us and moves us as it wills. Try to think of the consequences of resisting such a natural impulse, by reflecting on each the following:

- a. A fountain that receives water but refuses to flow: _____

- b. A person who constantly receives the bounties of God yet refuses to share them with others: _____

- c. One who receives knowledge but does not share it with others: _____

- d. Someone who receives the gift of faith but does not serve and teach the Cause:

SECTION 9

As you reflect on the nature of enkindlement, you should bear in mind that “being” and “doing” are two complementary aspects of a life lived according to the Bahá’í teachings. So tightly interwoven are they that it is futile to attempt to separate them. We cannot wait all our lives until we attain a state of total enkindlement before we act. Even the smallest of flames gives warmth and light. There are many things to which we must devote ourselves simultaneously. We must pray and meditate on the profound meaning of the Writings we study each day. We must strive to purify our hearts and reflect His attributes. We must open our inner eyes, behold His beauty and become enamored with it. And we must be active in the field of service and share with others the knowledge we gain from Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation. Aware of the interconnectedness between “being” and “doing”, which of the following statements would you make without hesitation? Mark them.

- _____ Visiting people in their homes and engaging with them in meaningful conversation requires a lot of courage. First, I must overcome my profound shyness, then I will be ready to offer this service.
- _____ Although I am nervous about initiating conversations with people I do not know well, I have placed my trust in God, conscious that it is only through taking action that I will overcome my timidity.
- _____ I do not have sufficient knowledge to discuss the Faith with others. I should become more knowledgeable before I seek out receptive souls and try to share the teachings with them.
- _____ The wisdom we can draw from Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation is inexhaustible, yet even the smallest insights we are able to gain from it are so invaluable that we should liberally share them with others.

- _____ I know I'm not perfect by any means and have a long way to go before I reflect the many spiritual qualities described in the Writings. Still, Bahá'u'lláh promises that He will assist all those who arise to serve Him, so I should try my best to do so.
- _____ Although I am inadequate, I will arise and serve the Cause. Sharing the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh with others helps increase my love for Him and assists me in developing the necessary abilities and spiritual qualities.
- _____ I would love to teach a children's class, but first I should develop all the necessary qualities of a good teacher. How will the students learn if I do not set the proper example?
- _____ In the act of teaching a class, my love for the children grows, and I find many opportunities to practice generosity, patience, and loving-kindness.
- _____ Junior youth in the group I am guiding as an animator should be able to talk to me. If they think I am too saintly, they won't feel comfortable expressing their ideas freely. The most important thing is that I am there for them, week in and week out.
- _____ In serving as an animator of a group of junior youth, I must tend to the refinement of my character, just as I try to help them in their spiritual and intellectual development.
- _____ In general, in any field of service, if I say the right things, it doesn't make any difference whether my soul is enkindled or not.
- _____ All I have to do is concentrate on loving Bahá'u'lláh. Then I won't have to say a word. So enkindled will be my heart that people will wonder why I am the way I am. When they find out it is because I'm a Bahá'í, they will investigate and accept the Faith on their own.
- _____ Teaching is a state of being. It will come naturally. Why make an effort!
- _____ Teaching is a natural state of being. There is no need to make systematic plans to seek out receptive souls and engage them in conversation about the person of Bahá'u'lláh and His teachings. You should just let it happen!

SECTION 10

We have agreed that we can and should share the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh from the very moment we recognize Him. The image we have used is of a flame which, no matter how small, still gives light and warmth. At the same time we understand that, without allowing our efforts in the field of service to ever slacken, we must constantly strive to enrich our spiritual life, feeding the fire of the love of God in our hearts and increasing its intensity. Let us pause and reflect, then, on that which increases enkindlement.

Below are two sets of statements. The set on the left includes statements which, while containing some truth, cause confusion on this matter. Match each to the statement in the set on the right that you find more suitable.

_____ Knowledge is a veil. Too much knowledge leads to pride. One should take care not to give too much emphasis to studying the Writings. It is sufficient to concentrate on loving God and humanity.

_____ So essential is enkindlement that one should withdraw from all activity for some time and work solely on improving one's inner condition.

_____ When one is enkindled with the fire of the love of God, one lives effortlessly in a state of perpetual joy.

_____ We fail to obey the commandments of God because we do not love Bahá'u'lláh enough.

_____ Enkindlement only comes through the grace of God. Therefore, we need not make any effort to increase its intensity.

_____ Once the fire of the love of God has been lit in one's heart, it can never be put out. It will, by itself, remain kindled, purifying the heart of self and passion.

- a. Teaching and service to the Cause are necessary to spiritual growth and increase one's enkindlement.
- b. Ultimately, enkindlement depends on the grace of God. However, this does not imply that effort is not needed. Praying daily, supplicating at His Threshold, reading the Writings, and actively serving Him—these increase the susceptibilities of the soul to receive God's grace and bounties.
- c. Knowledge feeds the flame of love for Bahá'u'lláh in one's heart. The more one comes to know Him through the study of His Revelation and through service to His Cause, the more deeply one loves Him. When one is freed from ego, which leads to pride and turns knowledge into a veil, the acquisition of knowledge contributes greatly to increasing one's enkindlement.
- d. Just as prayer and service to the Cause help to intensify the flame of the love of God in one's heart, the winds of ego and selfish desires quench it. Therefore, one must be vigilant and protect the fire of the love of God in one's heart.
- e. As one labors assiduously in the path of God, the veils of self are burned away by the fire of His love, and one feels the joy of drawing closer to Him.
- f. Even when we love Bahá'u'lláh we can make many mistakes, for we are weak and are in constant need of His mercy and forgiveness. Making an effort to obey His commandments increases enkindlement.

“God hath prescribed unto every one the duty of teaching His Cause. Whoever ariseth to discharge this duty, must needs, ere he proclaimeth His Message, adorn himself with the ornament of an upright and praiseworthy character, so that his words may attract the hearts of such as are receptive to his call.”⁹

“O ye beloved of God! Repose not yourselves on your couches, nay bestir yourselves as soon as ye recognize your Lord, the Creator, and hear of the things which have befallen Him, and hasten to His assistance. Unloose your tongues, and proclaim unceasingly His Cause. This shall be better for you than all the treasures of the past and of the future, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth.”¹⁰

You may wish to memorize as many of the above passages as you can.

SECTION 12

When considering the various aspects of our duty to teach, we must not forget that the commandments of God are a sign of His bounty to us. Not for a moment should we think that we are doing God a favor by following His exhortations and commands. He could, with a single word, secure the complete victory of His Cause. That He has given us the opportunity to champion His Faith is an inestimable blessing which has been conferred upon each one of us. Bahá'u'lláh says:

“If it be Our pleasure We shall render the Cause victorious through the power of a single word from Our presence. He is in truth the Omnipotent, the All-Compelling. Should it be God’s intention, there would appear out of the forests of celestial might the lion of indomitable strength whose roaring is like unto the peals of thunder reverberating in the mountains. However, since Our loving providence surpasseth all things, We have ordained that complete victory should be achieved through speech and utterance, that Our servants throughout the earth may thereby become the recipients of divine good. This is but a token of God’s bounty vouchsafed unto them.”¹¹

In spoken and written language, metaphors are often employed to convey an idea—that is, a word or phrase which brings to mind a certain image is used to describe something intangible. In this passage, Bahá'u'lláh uses the metaphor of a lion. The lion emerges from the forests of celestial might, and his roar is like thunder echoing in the mountains. This image gives us a glimpse of the power of God, the Creator. Through a single act, He could make His might known, and all the peoples of the earth would bow down in submission before Him. It is only out of His loving-kindness that He allows us, His servants, to be the instruments for the propagation of His Faith. Complete the following sentences using words and phrases from the quotation:

1. If it be God’s pleasure, He could _____
_____ .
2. If it be God’s intention, there would _____
_____ .

3. The roaring of this lion would be like _____
_____ .
4. However, since His loving providence surpasses all things, God has ordained that

_____ .
5. This He has done so that _____
_____ .
6. This is but _____ .

SECTION 13

It is not uncommon for people to hold certain beliefs and, at the same time, say things that basically contradict them. In general, it is not easy to be consistent. We all have habits of the mind, formed throughout our lives, that cause us to say things without thinking about them. With a little more thought, it would become clear to us that we do not really believe some of the statements we make. As our understanding advances, then, both in light of the teachings and through experience, it is worthwhile to pause from time to time and examine the validity of certain statements. Decide which of the following are consistent with your understanding of the concept of teaching as a duty. Mark them.

- _____ I actively participate in the consultations of my community on the teaching work and offer suggestions about how it should be done. That's how I fulfill my duty to teach.
- _____ Whenever there is a focused teaching effort in my community, I say special prayers for it. That's how I fulfill my duty to teach.
- _____ Whenever an opportunity presents itself, I offer some insights drawn from Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. That's enough for me to fulfill my duty to teach.
- _____ I have taught the Faith to one person this year. I've done my duty for the year.
- _____ Everyone I know is aware that I am a Bahá'í, and I have told those who are interested about Bahá'u'lláh and His Revelation. I have exhausted all the avenues open to me for teaching the Faith.
- _____ I fulfill my duty to teach by telling everyone I meet that I am a Bahá'í.
- _____ The best way I can fulfill my duty to teach is to live an exemplary life. There's no need for words.
- _____ I try to obey all of Bahá'u'lláh's commands and exhortations, including the one to teach His Cause, for only in this way will I be able to live an exemplary life.

_____ I know Bahá'u'lláh has enjoined the duty of teaching His Cause on every one of His followers. But He didn't really mean "everyone". He was referring to those who are very knowledgeable in the Faith and have a great deal of experience.

_____ Whenever I think about the beauty of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, I become so filled with joy that I don't see how I would not share His message with others.

_____ It is in fulfilling my duty to teach the Cause that I will receive Divine confirmation.

_____ I fulfill my duty to teach the Cause because of my love for Bahá'u'lláh and the love He has instilled in me for all of humanity.

_____ We have so many community-building activities under way in our neighborhood, and it is only a matter of time before more and more individuals and families enter the Faith. There is no need for us to look for opportunities to speak about Bahá'u'lláh and His Revelation and help confirm souls in His Cause.

Memorize the following passage from a Tablet revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

“O thou seeker after the Kingdom of God! If thou wishest thy speech and utterance to penetrate hearts that are hardened, rid thyself of all attachment to the world and turn thy face unto the Kingdom of God. Kindle the fire of His love within thy heart in such wise that thou mayest become a burning flame and a luminous candle of guidance. Then will thy speech, through the confirmation of the Holy Spirit, stir every heart.”¹²

SECTION 14

Now that we have thought about the significance of teaching as a duty, let us reflect on the sacredness of this act, to which the Guardian draws our attention in the quotation we studied in Section 6. In what sense is teaching sacred? Of course, the mere fact that it is an exhortation which comes from God makes this duty sacred. But are there other dimensions of sacredness that we should explore in relation to teaching? In one of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh says:

“That which He hath reserved for Himself are the cities of men's hearts; and of these the loved ones of Him Who is the Sovereign Truth are, in this Day, as the keys. Please God they may, one and all, be enabled to unlock, through the power of the Most Great Name, the gates of these cities.”¹³

In another passage He states:

“The things He hath reserved for Himself are the cities of men's hearts, that He may cleanse them from all earthly defilements, and enable them to draw nigh unto the hallowed Spot which the hands of the infidel can never profane. Open, O people, the city of the human heart with the key of your utterance. Thus have We, according to a preordained measure, prescribed unto you your duty.”¹⁴

Answering the following questions will help you to see how these passages relate to sacredness and the act of teaching:

1. What has God reserved for Himself? _____
2. To Whom does the human heart belong? _____
3. What word do we use to describe “that which belongs to God”? _____
4. Who are as keys to the cities of men’s hearts? _____
5. From what does God wish to cleanse these cities? _____

6. To what does He wish these hearts to draw closer? _____

7. With what key are we to open the city of the human heart? _____
8. What duty has been prescribed unto us in these passages? _____

SECTION 15

There is yet another dimension to sacredness we need to consider in our effort to explore its relation to teaching. In one of His Tablets Bahá’u’lláh refers to His Revelation in these words:

“Say: This is the sealed and mystic Scroll, the repository of God’s irrevocable Decree, bearing the words which the Finger of Holiness hath traced, that lay wrapt within the veil of impenetrable mystery, and hath now been sent down as a token of the grace of Him Who is the Almighty, the Ancient of Days. In it have We decreed the destinies of all the dwellers of the earth and the denizens of heaven, and written down the knowledge of all things from first to last.”¹⁵

In the above passage, Bahá’u’lláh describes His Revelation as a sealed and mystic Scroll. A scroll is a roll of paper on which an important message is written. This sealed and mystic Scroll is the repository of God’s Decree—that is, it carries that which God has commanded and is unchangeable. The following exercise should help you gain insights into the meaning of this passage. Fill in the blanks using words from the quotation and then read the sentences together.

1. Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation has been sent down to us as a token of God’s _____ .
2. That which has been sent down is the _____ and _____ Scroll that before lay wrapt within the _____ of _____ .

3. It is the repository of God's _____ .
4. In it God has decreed the destinies of all the _____ of the earth and heaven.
5. Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation contains in it the _____ of all things from _____ to _____ .

SECTION 16

Consider now what we have studied in the previous two sections. Teaching is the sacred duty of every Bahá'í, for it is enjoined upon us by God. Moreover, when we teach we are dealing with two very sacred things. One is the human heart which essentially belongs to God. Teaching, in fact, can be described as that spiritual act which results in the opening of the city of the human heart to Him. The other sacred thing with which teaching is concerned is the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. We teach in order to connect the heart to His Revelation, His greatest bestowal to humankind.

Try to remember occasions in your life when you felt the presence of the sacred. If you have ever been in the Holy Shrines of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb, you retain strong memories of how it felt to draw close to, and bow down at, Their Sacred Thresholds. But even if you have not yet had that bounty, there must be many occasions in your life when you were enraptured in prayer, with your mind and heart turned towards God, and you vividly felt to be standing in His presence. What are some of the sentiments that fill your heart in such moments? Mark them in the following list:

- | | | |
|--------------------|----------------|------------------|
| ___ intense love | ___ humility | ___ joy |
| ___ awe | ___ uneasiness | ___ unworthiness |
| ___ indifference | ___ rapture | ___ reverence |
| ___ submissiveness | ___ gratitude | ___ tranquility |

SECTION 17

This last exercise has reminded us of the reverent attitude that one assumes when approaching that which is sacred and of the noble feelings that stir in one's heart when standing in the presence of the sacred. In this context, an important question must be asked: How does your own awareness of the sacred nature of teaching imbue your acts with potency? To help you answer this question, it is suggested that you carry out an exercise in which three different ways to view the act of teaching are described and you are encouraged to think about the results of each. Do not worry if the exercise seems somewhat artificial; it will, nonetheless, provide you with certain needed insights.

As part of a growing nucleus of active supporters of the Faith in your neighborhood or village, you are a member of a team engaged in a collective teaching endeavor.

Together you and the other members visit households and discuss with individuals and families—some of whom are already, in one way or another, connected to the community-building activities under way—the fundamental verities enshrined in the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, helping them to recognize Him as the Manifestation of God for today. Let us imagine a scenario in which your team has assisted over a period of time some thirty people in embracing the Cause and in joining the Bahá’í community. We can assume that each member of the team has carried out his or her duty to teach with the utmost sincerity and solely out of love for Bahá’u’lláh. Yet, what if the team’s perception of what it was doing was not constant in all cases?

Let us say that, at first, you saw yourselves, more or less, as salespeople. “Teaching is like selling,” you told yourselves. “The Faith has the best ideas around. We are good teachers if we can effectively package the Faith and sell these wonderful ideas to people.” Ten souls came into the Faith in this way.

Now suppose that, a little later, you and the other members of the team saw what you were doing largely in terms of recruiting individuals into a progressive social cause. “With the dire state of the world,” you said to yourselves, “what is needed is to recruit as many people as we can, as quickly as possible—people who will find in the teachings the solutions to humanity’s ills and who will work for the establishment of unity, for the elimination of prejudices, and for the cause of justice.” And so you enthusiastically began to invite others to join you in promoting such important ideals as peace, unity, the equality of the sexes, and the abolition of prejudice. Ten people came into the Faith through these efforts.

Sometime later, you were, of course, still concerned about the condition of the world and the need to increase the number of people who could apply Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings to transform it. But your team had developed a much more profound understanding of the sacred nature of teaching. Now each time you explained the verities of the Faith to someone, you were keenly aware that you were addressing a human heart, which belongs to God. What you were doing, you would remind yourselves, was using the key of your utterance to open the gates to the city of this heart and connect it to Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation. Under these conditions another ten people declared their faith.

Having helped these thirty friends embrace the Cause, your team now embarks on a systematic effort to deepen their knowledge of the teachings, encouraging as many of them as possible to enter the institute process and become protagonists of the community-building endeavor in your village or neighborhood. Do you think there will be any difference among the three groups in the intensity of their engagement in Bahá’í activity? Will your efforts be more effective with any one group? Of course, from any one of the three groups could emerge individuals so prepared by Bahá’u’lláh, so eager to delve into His Revelation, that they rapidly become deepened and involved in the affairs of the community. What you are being asked, however, is to think about each group as a whole. On average, do you think there will be any significant difference between the three? Discuss this question in your group and write your conclusions below.

Bahá'u'lláh is to this process of transformation. Recognizing the Sun of Truth and allowing its rays to enter and illumine the heart is the single most significant step that a person can take in his or her life. By reflecting on the transformation that follows the recognition of Bahá'u'lláh, we are better able to understand how we can help others take this crucial step. Can you write one or two sentences about some of the changes that occur in each of the following when we accept Bahá'u'lláh and begin to act according to His teachings?

1. Our hearts: _____

2. Our minds: _____

3. Our thoughts: _____

4. Our character: _____

5. Our relations with our fellow human beings: _____

6. Our goals in life: _____

7. Our view of the world: _____

SECTION 19

We addressed briefly in Book 5 the notion of power when we reflected on the dynamics of spiritual empowerment. This theme merits further reflection in the context of our discussion here. In the physical world, change occurs through the application of power. For us to move from one point to another, for a plant to grow, for a lamp to turn darkness into light, for

the rivers to flow, and for the tides to rise and ebb, power is needed—the power supplied by the muscles of the human body, the power generated by the sun, by electricity, or by the gravitational force. It is important to ask, then, What are the powers that bring about the kind of transformation you have described in the previous section? So central is this question to our understanding of the spiritual nature of teaching that we will dedicate the rest of this unit to seeking answers to it. To begin, decide which of the following powers can contribute to spiritual transformation in the individual and in society:

- The power of prayer
- The power of pure and goodly deeds
- The power of the Word of God
- The power of justice
- The power of the sword
- The power of unity
- The power of truth
- The power of example
- The power of kindly words
- The power of convincing arguments
- The power of money
- The power of a righteous character
- The power of the Covenant
- The power of political domination
- The power of protest
- The power of love
- The power of persuasion
- The power of faith
- The power of constructive and selfless thoughts
- The power of the gun
- The power of true knowledge
- The power of reason
- The power of intimidation
- The power of humble service to the Cause

SECTION 20

From among all the powers that contribute to spiritual transformation one stands out as unique, as the fundamental force behind other powers. Which is it?

Throughout the centuries, there has been a belief in the existence of a substance called an “elixir” which once applied to copper, or in fact to any other element, would turn it into gold. This process, which has been sought by many but never found, is referred to as the “transmutation of elements”. In one of His Tablets, Bahá’u’lláh uses this image to reveal a most profound spiritual truth:

“The vitality of men’s belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it? Is it within human power, O Ḥakím, to effect in the constituent elements of any of the minute and indivisible particles of matter so complete a transformation as to transmute it into purest gold? Perplexing and difficult as this may appear, the still greater task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish. The Force capable of such a transformation transcendeth the potency of the Elixir itself. The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change.”¹⁶

Now that you have read this passage, which power would you say stands out as unique, as the fundamental force behind other powers? _____

What is this force capable of accomplishing? _____

SECTION 21

In the above passage, we are told that, difficult as the transmutation of an element into pure gold may be, changing satanic strength into heavenly power is surely more formidable. Yet the Word of God, and the Word of God alone, can bring about such a fundamental transformation. But what is the “Word of God”, we must ask, which is capable of so stupendous an accomplishment? Bahá’u’lláh says:

“Know thou, moreover, that the Word of God—exalted be His glory—is higher and far superior to that which the senses can perceive, for it is sanctified from any property or substance. It transcendeth the limitations of known elements and is exalted above all the essential and recognized substances. It became manifest without any syllable or sound and is none but the Command of God which pervadeth all created things. It hath never been withheld from the world of being. It is God’s all-pervasive grace, from which all grace doth emanate. It is an entity far removed above all that hath been and shall be.”¹⁷

1. The Word of God is _____ and far _____ to that which the senses can perceive.
2. The Word of God is _____ from any _____ or _____ .

3. The Word of God _____ the limitations of _____
_____ .
4. The Word of God is _____ above all the _____ and
_____ substances.
5. The Word of God became manifest without any _____ or _____ .
6. The Word of God is the _____ of God.
7. The Word of God, His Command, pervades _____ .
8. The Word of God, His Command, has never been _____ from the
_____ .
9. The Word of God is His all-pervasive _____ , from which _____
_____ emanates.
10. The Word of God is an entity _____ above all that _____
_____ and all that _____ .

SECTION 22

Another image that gives us a glimpse of the power of the Word of God is that of the joining of the letters B and E. In the Writings we are told that God joined the letters B and E together and issued the command “BE”. Thus the whole of creation came into being. In a prayer revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, He refers to God, our Creator, as

“the One through a motion of Whose finger all the names and their kingdom were called into being, and all the attributes and their dominion were created, and Who, through yet another motion of that same finger, hath united the letters B and E (Be) and knit them together, manifesting thereby what the highest thoughts of Thy chosen ones who enjoy near access to Thee are unable to grasp, and what the profoundest wisdom of those of Thy loved ones that are wholly devoted to Thee are powerless to fathom.”¹⁸

In another Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh declares:

“Every thing must needs have an origin and every building a builder. Verily, the Word of God is the Cause which hath preceded the contingent world—a world which is adorned with the splendors of the Ancient of Days, yet is being renewed and regenerated at all times. Immeasurably exalted is the God of Wisdom Who hath raised this sublime structure.”¹⁹

SECTION 23

We have now learned that the Word of God is His all-pervasive command and grace and is not made of syllables and sounds. Yet there do exist words that we can read and hear which carry with them the power of the Word of God, namely, those uttered by the Manifestation. These have the power to create, to regenerate and to transform, and for this reason, they are referred to as the “Creative Word”. Bahá’u’lláh tells us:

“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.”²⁰

“O friend of mine! The Word of God is the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable. It hath ever dominated and will continue to dominate the realm of being. The Great Being saith: The Word is the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked.”²¹

“The Word of God hath set the heart of the world afire; how regrettable if ye fail to be enkindled with its flame!”²²

Below are several questions that refer to the quotations in this and the preceding sections. Although some of the questions only require you to respond “yes” or “no”, completing the entire exercise should help clarify your understanding of the power of the Word of God.

1. Is the Word of God made of syllables and sounds? _____
2. Is the Word of God made of any known substance? _____
3. Can the Word of God be perceived by our senses? _____
4. What is the Word of God?
 - a. It is none other than _____
 - b. It is God’s _____
5. What does it mean that the Command of God pervades all created things? _____

6. Would anything in the universe exist if it were not called into being by the Command of God? _____
7. What does it mean that the grace of God is all-pervasive? _____

8. What would happen if God’s grace were withheld from the world of being? _____

9. Since the Word of God cannot be perceived by our physical senses and faculties, how do we become aware of it? _____
10. Who is “the mouth of God” through Whom God speaks? _____
11. With what is every word uttered by the Manifestation of God endowed? _____

12. What are some of the characteristics of the “new life” instilled into every human being by the Word of God? _____

13. How great is the influence of the Word of God? _____
14. What is the master key to the whole world? _____
15. What does the Word of God do to the hearts of people? _____
16. What has set the heart of the world afire? _____
17. With what flame should we be enkindled? _____

Now memorize the following quotation:

“This is the day in which to speak. It is incumbent upon the people of Bahá to strive, with the utmost patience and forbearance, to guide the peoples of the world to the Most Great Horizon. Every body calleth aloud for a soul. Heavenly souls must needs quicken, with the breath of the Word of God, the dead bodies with a fresh spirit.”²³

SECTION 24

Let us examine the relationship between some of the ideas we have discussed in the previous sections. Bahá’u’lláh calls upon us to open the city of the human heart with the key of our utterance. Once the gates to this city are opened and the heart connected to His

Revelation, a wondrous transformation begins to occur. Among the powers that drive this transformation, the power of the Word of God, conveyed through the words of the Manifestation, is most indispensable. Does this mean, then, that it is best for us not to use our own words in teaching and only recite to others passages from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh?

In answering this question remind yourself of the behavior of certain religious zealots who carry around with them a copy of a Holy Book, from which they constantly preach at people. Certainly, this is not an approach we would want to take. In your study of Book 2, you were encouraged to seek a balance between quoting directly from the Writings and using your own words to explain the teachings and principles of the Faith. Undoubtedly, since then, you have enhanced this capacity through the acts of service you have carried out in your neighborhood or village. Read the following exhortation of Bahá'u'lláh and reflect once again on how, in our teaching efforts, we should learn to draw upon the power of the Word of God:

“The sanctified souls should ponder and meditate in their hearts regarding the methods of teaching. From the texts of the wondrous, heavenly Scriptures they should memorize phrases and passages bearing on various instances, so that in the course of their speech they may recite divine verses whenever the occasion demandeth it, inasmuch as these holy verses are the most potent elixir, the greatest and mightiest talisman. So potent is their influence that the hearer will have no cause for vacillation.”²⁴

1. Bahá'u'lláh tells us to _____ and _____ in our hearts regarding the _____ of _____ .
2. We should _____ phrases and _____ related to various subjects from the _____ of the Holy Scriptures.
3. We should memorize passages from the Holy Scriptures so that in the _____ of our _____ we may _____ divine verses whenever the _____ .
4. We should recite divine verses in our speech inasmuch as these _____ are the most potent _____ .
5. So _____ is the _____ of the holy verses that the _____ will have no cause for _____ .

SECTION 25

Bahá'u'lláh tells us to memorize phrases and passages from the Holy Scriptures in order that we may use them in our speech whenever the opportunity arises. Clearly this refers first and foremost to His own Writings, for He is the Manifestation of God for today and, like those of all the previous Manifestations, such as the Báb, His utterances constitute the Creative Word.

But what about the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá? With the other members of your group, reflect on the power that His words exert on the listener. Think of the effect of His words on your own heart, for example, when studying them in the earlier books of this sequence. You may remember, too, the insights you gained from the statements in the second unit of Book 2 that, based on His talks and Tablets, helped you develop the capabilities needed to engage in meaningful and uplifting conversation. Although His Writings may not be considered divinely revealed verses, they possess a station of their own. From where do His words draw their power? Is it not desirable for us to incorporate passages from His Writings into our speech, as we do from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh?

Now consider the same questions in relation to the writings of the Guardian, bringing to mind, for instance, how passages quoted in earlier books have illumined your thoughts on various themes. After having done so, carry out a similar discussion regarding the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.

SECTION 26

We have seen how important memorizing passages from the writings is to our efforts to teach the Cause. Yet we also know that, in sharing Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings, we need to use our own words as well, for we cannot simply quote passage after passage from the writings of the Faith to people. Quotations should be woven into our conversations and discussions in a natural way. The question is then: How can we make sure that our words touch the hearts of those with whom we converse and help them to draw closer to Bahá’u’lláh and reach the shores of the ocean of His Revelation?

Clearly the answer is that, although we use our own words, what we say should be entirely in keeping with the teachings. It is not our own theories that we should be giving, but Bahá’u’lláh’s message in the purest form possible. This, of course, requires us to immerse ourselves in the writings and to constantly deepen our knowledge and understanding of the Faith. In this connection, the Guardian advises:

“Surely the ideal way of teaching is to prove our points by constant reference to the actual words of Bahá’u’lláh and the Master. This will save the Cause from being misinterpreted by individuals. It is what these divine Lights say that is truth and therefore they should be the authorities of our statements.

“This, however, does not mean that our freedom of expression is limited. We can always find new ways of approach to that truth or explain how they influence our life and condition. The more deep our studies the more we can understand the significance of the Teachings.”²⁵

“To deepen in the Cause means to read the writings of Bahá’u’lláh and the Master so thoroughly as to be able to give it to others in its pure form. There are many who have some superficial idea of what the Cause stands for. They, therefore, present it together with all sorts of ideas that are their own. As the Cause is still in its early days we must be most careful lest we fall under this error and injure the Movement we so much adore.

“There is no limit to the study of the Cause. The more we read the writings the more truths we can find in them and the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous.”²⁶

Now read the following statements and decide which are true. Do not be content with simply marking the answers. The sequence of ideas should help you think about the importance of studying the writings systematically.

___ The study of the writings is only for the highly educated. Others merely need to have some basic ideas explained to them in simple terms.

___ All of us should study the writings. Even people not accustomed to reading can study, with the help of others, one passage at a time.

___ As we study the writings and gain a deeper and deeper understanding of the Faith, we are able to express more faithfully the truths enshrined in the Revelation, and therefore our words will have greater effect on the listener.

___ By trying to be faithful to the writings when teaching the Cause, we put limits on our own freedom of thought and expression.

___ If we are faithful to the writings when teaching the Cause, our thoughts will be raised to a higher level; we will not be enslaved by the opinions of others and restricted by narrow thinking.

___ If we are faithful to the writings when teaching the Cause, we will be inspired, and insights and answers will come to our mind that we could never have thought of before.

___ Once you have read a book or Tablet revealed by one of the Central Figures of the Faith, there is no point in rereading it.

___ No matter how many times one reads any passage from the writings, one finds new meaning and fresh insights in it.

___ One does not study the writings simply to accumulate volumes of information about the Faith. What matters is how much one reflects on the writings and strives to understand the meaning enshrined therein.

___ When we teach the Cause, we should not obscure the truths we glean from the writings by mixing them with all sorts of superficial ideas that gain popularity for a time.

___ When we incorporate insights from the teachings into an informal conversation or study a theme of spiritual significance during a visit to the home of a friend or neighbor, it is not only those with whom we converse that benefit from the pearls of wisdom found in the ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. We, too, deepen our understanding of the profound truths enshrined in His Writings.

_____ As we advance through the courses of the institute and carry out the acts of service they encourage, we continuously deepen our knowledge of the Faith while developing our capacity to serve the community.

SECTION 27

Bringing our words into conformity with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh as interpreted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian, and with the guidance we receive from the Universal House of Justice, endows them with great power. This power is multiplied if we actually learn passages from the writings and weave them into our speech naturally and with wisdom. But our words must satisfy other conditions if they are to touch the hearts of those with whom we converse. Particularly, they must carry with them the force of love, love that is genuinely felt, not a mere appearance of love. In one of His talks, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

“If I love you, I need not continually speak of my love—you will know without any words. On the other hand if I love you not, that also will you know—and you would not believe me, were I to tell you in a thousand words, that I loved you.”²⁷

Love is not simply some abstract principle that one talks about. It is real, and when one truly loves another, a bond is created between hearts through which noble feelings and lofty ideas can flow. One soul can uplift the other, and joy fills them both.

Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, a dedicated Bahá'í in whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá placed the greatest trust, once analyzed the concept of love for humanity in a talk given to a group of friends. He explained how easy it is for any one of us to sit comfortably in a house with a nice garden and say, “I love humanity.” But, as Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl pointed out, love only becomes real when it is tested. Only when we have fought the battles of love and have time and again been wounded for the sake of love, can we utter the sentence “I love” with authority and assurance. So, he went on, a person who claims that he has love in his heart must test himself and see if he meets all the conditions of true love.

What are some of these conditions? Clearly they include sincerity and truthfulness, generosity and liberality, forgiveness and trustworthiness. You can readily see that all of these are necessary for love to exist. For what is insincere love but hypocrisy? What is the outcome of love when it is ruled by jealousy and control, and not by openheartedness and generosity? What kind of love is associated with vengeance rather than forgiveness? How can anyone trust in our love, if we are not trustworthy?

With this understanding of love, let us now turn our attention to the dynamics of teaching. When you teach the Cause, you are communicating with a fellow human being. You do not just teach in abstract. Think about the feelings you have towards someone you love—a dear friend, your mother and father, brothers and sisters, husband or wife, your children. These feelings are very real. It would, of course, be unreasonable to believe that we could love a stranger with the same intensity as we love those who are near to us. What is essential to understand, however, is that by teaching we are expressing our love for humanity, a love that should be translated into concrete love for individual members of the human race. It is not enough for us to simply have some abstract love for an abstract idealization of humanity.

An important question to ask in this respect is: For what reason would we not love a person, even a stranger, who is, after all, sufficiently attracted to listen to the message of Bahá'u'lláh? In contemplating this question, think of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His love for humanity. Did He not shower love and kindness upon each and every human being with whom He came into contact?

To increase your understanding of the power of love in teaching the Cause, decide whether the following statements are true:

- Words are words. They have the same effect whether you say them with love in your heart or not.
- When words are clothed with love, they have greater effect on the listener's heart.
- We can only love someone we know, like our mother or father, or a dear friend.
- It is possible to love a person we hardly know.
- To show love to every human being is impossible unless you are some kind of a saint.
- Loving humanity means loving every human being with the same intensity.
- That a person you do not know takes the time to engage in a conversation with you about the Faith, in itself, engenders love in your heart for him or her.
- It is contradictory to say, "I love humanity but do not care to teach anyone and offer them the great bounties that result from accepting Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for today."
- If we do not teach the Cause, it is because we do not have enough love for humanity.
- It is not that those who hesitate in teaching the Cause do not love humanity. There may be other factors, such as fear, lack of confidence, or shyness, that prevent a person who is full of love from teaching.
- We should only teach our friends and not those we do not know.
- We should love all those we teach.
- If we feel that we do not love humanity enough, we should not teach.
- The act of teaching increases our love for our fellow human beings. Therefore we should not make insufficient love an excuse for not teaching.
- It is our love for God that compels us to take up the sacred duty to teach the Faith, and our love for Him creates in our hearts love for humanity.

SECTION 28

We have said that when we teach, we are translating our love for humanity into love for one or more of its individual members. The power of love finds expression when it is directed towards something or someone. We should remember, however, that love itself is not limited. Love is unlimited, boundless, infinite. This infinite love cannot be adequately expressed when confined by narrow and restrictive motives. When we love someone, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us, “let it be with a ray of the Infinite Love! Let it be in God, and for God!” Love for God is “sanctified beyond the notions and imaginings of men”. We should “shed the light of a boundless love on every human being” we meet, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says. Let us memorize the following quotation:

“O flame of the love of God! The ray must shed light and the sun must rise; the full moon must shine and the star must gleam. Since thou art a ray, beseech thou the Lord to enable thee to give illumination and enlightenment, to brighten the horizons and to consume the world with the fire of the love of God. I hope that thou mayest attain such a station, nay, surpass it.”²⁸

SECTION 29

To end this unit, we should remind ourselves of an important fact that we all have learned in our lives: that, without divine assistance, nothing can be achieved. When teaching the Cause, then, we have to be ever conscious of divine assistance and seek strength from the hosts of the Supreme Concourse. Below are only a few of the many passages from the Writings on this subject. You may wish to memorize them, if you have not done so on earlier occasions.

“By the righteousness of God! Whoso openeth his lips in this Day and maketh mention of the name of his Lord, the hosts of Divine inspiration shall descend upon him from the heaven of My name, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. On him shall also descend the Concourse on high, each bearing aloft a chalice of pure light. Thus hath it been foreordained in the realm of God’s Revelation, by the behest of Him Who is the All-Glorious, the Most Powerful.”²⁹

“He, verily, will aid everyone that aideth Him, and will remember everyone that remembereth Him. To this beareth witness this Tablet that hath shed the splendor of the loving-kindness of your Lord, the All-Glorious, the All-Compelling.”³⁰

“Say: Beware, O people of Bahá, lest the strong ones of the earth rob you of your strength, or they who rule the world fill you with fear. Put your trust in God, and commit your affairs to His keeping. He, verily, will, through the power of truth, render you victorious, and He, verily, is powerful to do what He willeth, and in His grasp are the reins of omnipotent might.”³¹

“By God besides Whom is none other God! Should any one arise for the triumph of our Cause, him will God render victorious though tens of thousands of enemies be leagued against him. And if his love for Me wax stronger, God will establish his ascendancy over all the powers of earth and heaven. Thus have We breathed the spirit of power into all regions.”³²

“He will come to your aid with invisible hosts, and support you with armies of inspiration from the Concourse above; He will send unto you sweet perfumes from the highest Paradise, and waft over you the pure breathings that blow from the rose gardens of the Company on high. He will breathe into your hearts the spirit of life, cause you to enter the Ark of salvation, and reveal unto you His clear tokens and signs. Verily is this abounding grace. Verily is this the victory that none can deny.”³³

“O ye servants of the Sacred Threshold! The triumphant hosts of the Celestial Concourse, arrayed and marshaled in the Realms above, stand ready and expectant to assist and assure victory to that valiant horseman who with confidence spurs on his charger into the arena of service. Well is it with that fearless warrior, who armed with the power of true Knowledge, hastens unto the field, disperses the armies of ignorance, and scatters the hosts of error, who holds aloft the Standard of Divine Guidance, and sounds the Clarion of Victory. By the righteousness of the Lord! He hath achieved a glorious triumph and obtained the true victory.”³⁴

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Qualities and Attitudes Essential for Teaching

Purpose

To reflect on qualities and attitudes
needed to teach the Faith effectively

SECTION 1

In walking the path of service set out by this sequence of courses, you have not only acquired the knowledge, skills and abilities that it demands but also gained insight into some of the spiritual qualities and attitudes required in order to make steady progress. We have reflected on a few such qualities and attitudes in earlier courses, but here we will think about several specific ones, as they relate to the sacred act of teaching. In this, what we should never forget, as emphasized in the previous unit, is that “being” and “doing” are complementary and inseparable aspects of a spiritual life. Our efforts to perfect our inner condition and develop spiritual qualities, central to our state of being, must find expression in the field of service. We must arise to teach, then, confident that, in doing so, the spiritual qualities which are to distinguish this sacred act will be further strengthened within us. In this light, list some of the qualities that you think we should strive to manifest in greater and greater measure if we are to become increasingly effective instruments for the diffusion of the Faith.

In the sections that follow you will be presented with short quotations related to several spiritual qualities, some of which you no doubt mentioned above. The questions and exercises included in each section will help you examine how the development of a given quality increases your effectiveness in teaching the Cause. It is important to make explicit at this point that our discussions here will not be concerned with attaining perfection but with striving towards perfection. For example, in the next section we will give thought to how increasing the purity of one’s heart enhances efforts in the field of teaching, which is not to suggest that unless one is the essence of purity, one cannot teach. Naturally, the writings point us towards perfection, for if we are not aware of the goal how can we strive to achieve it?

SECTION 2

In one of His Tablets, calling upon us to diffuse the teachings, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

“The aim is this: The intention of the teacher must be pure, his heart independent, his spirit attracted, his thought at peace, his resolution firm, his magnanimity exalted and in the love of God a shining torch.”¹

In another Tablet, He exhorts us:

“ . . . become ye sanctified above and purified from this world and the inhabitants thereof; suffer your intentions to work for the good of all; cut your attachment to the earth and like unto the essence of the spirit become ye light and delicate. Then with a firm resolution, a pure heart, a rejoiced spirit, and an eloquent tongue, engage your time in the promulgation of the divine principles . . . ”²

Why do you think purity of heart and purity of intention are so essential in teaching? What if our intentions are not pure but we are extremely good at pretending and convincing others that they are? Some of the impurities that come easily to mind in relation to teaching are a sense of superiority, a desire for recognition, and ambition. Can you explain how each of these affect the act of teaching?

1. Sense of superiority: _____

2. Desire for recognition: _____

3. Ambition: _____

SECTION 3

A letter written on behalf of the Guardian states:

“The Master assured us that when we forget ourselves, and strive with all our powers to serve and teach the Faith, we receive divine assistance. It is not we who do the work, but we are the instruments used at that time for the purpose of teaching His Cause.”³

In another letter, he explains:

“Just one mature soul, with spiritual understanding and a profound knowledge of the Faith, can set a whole country ablaze—so great is the power of the Cause to work through a pure and selfless channel.”⁴

In an effort to align our lives with the spirit of the teachings, we all try to rid ourselves of ego and strive to be selfless. In this journey towards selflessness, we must realize that it is possible to fall into the trap of self-centeredness even if one’s motivation is pure. One can be sincerely interested in the progress and well-being of others, yet be driven by the desire to be at the center of every situation. In thinking the thought “I help others”, a person caught in this trap will place emphasis on “I” and not on “others” or on the act of helping. Imagine yourself conversing with a friend about the Faith. Which of the following statements would represent your thoughts and feelings if you were consciously trying to avoid self-centeredness—to avoid placing yourself at the center of everything?

- _____ May God open his heart and endow him with true understanding.
- _____ I hope that my own shortcomings will not prevent him from recognizing the truth of the Faith.
- _____ It feels good to teach. I feel great when I convince someone of the truth.
- _____ After everything I've done for him, explaining things so carefully, he had better become a Bahá'í.
- _____ I hope that my friend will recognize Bahá'u'lláh and feel the same joy that I have felt in serving His Cause.
- _____ O God, please put the right thoughts in my mind and give me the right words so I can share the teachings in a way that touches his heart.

SECTION 4

‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us:

“Lift up your hearts above the present and look with eyes of faith into the future! Today the seed is sown, the grain falls upon the earth, but behold the day will come when it shall rise a glorious tree and the branches thereof shall be laden with fruit. Rejoice and be glad that this day has dawned, try to realize its power, for it is indeed wonderful! God has crowned you with honor and in your hearts has He set a radiant star; verily the light thereof shall brighten the whole world!”⁵

The Guardian’s advice to us is:

“You should, therefore, try all your best to carry aflame within you the torch of faith, for through it you will surely find guidance, strength and eventual success.”⁶

Surely you would agree that, the moment someone recognizes Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for today, the spark of faith has been ignited in his or her heart. You would also agree, then, that those who teach must be instruments through which this spark is ignited. But what if the flame of faith does not burn in our own hearts? With what are we to kindle the spark in the listener’s heart? We can enter into the most engaging conversations and make the most eloquent statements, but, without faith, these will have little effect, for the listener can feel whether or not we truly believe in what we say. And the more brightly the torch of faith burns in our hearts, the greater the possibility of helping others to recognize Bahá'u'lláh. In what, however, must we have faith when we step into the teaching field? Can you mention a few things? Some examples are given to assist you.

1. Faith in the power of divine assistance
2. Faith that the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are what humanity really needs
3. Faith in the capacity of every soul to recognize Bahá'u'lláh
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

What we should realize is that, while we need courage to teach, the act of teaching itself increases our courage. To help you remember this, you may wish to memorize the following quotation, if you have not already:

“The source of courage and power is the promotion of the Word of God, and steadfastness in His Love.”⁹

SECTION 6

‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us:

“The teaching work should under all conditions be actively pursued by the believers because divine confirmations are dependent upon it. Should a Bahá’í refrain from being fully, vigorously and wholeheartedly involved in the teaching work he will undoubtedly be deprived of the blessings of the Abhá Kingdom. Even so, this activity should be tempered with wisdom—not that wisdom which requireth one to be silent and forgetful of such an obligation, but rather that which requireth one to display divine tolerance, love, kindness, patience, a goodly character, and holy deeds.”¹⁰

And in another passage He explains:

““Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it.’ Such is the consummate wisdom to be observed in thy pursuits. Be not oblivious thereof, if thou wishest to be a man of action under all conditions. First diagnose the disease and identify the malady, then prescribe the remedy, for such is the perfect method of the skillful physician.”¹¹

Courage must be modified by wisdom. This does not mean that wisdom is supposed to hold back courage. The two should go hand in hand. When we have courage and wisdom, we boldly enter the field of action and, with sound judgment and clear thinking, advance. What to say and what not to say, how best to deal with delicate situations and how to answer questions—all these decisions have to be made with wisdom. Wisdom, however, should not become an excuse for inaction. We should not fall into the habit of constantly saying: “It would be unwise to do this. It would be unwise to do that.” Below are a few situations in which you may find yourself. What do you think would be the wisest way to deal with each one?

1. You are discussing the Faith with two people. As the conversation goes on, it becomes clear that one is interested in the Faith but the other is not. What do you do?

2. You meet someone at a gathering and enter into a conversation about the Faith. While he listens to you attentively, he does not say much or ask any questions. What do you do?

3. Someone who seems very interested in the Faith invites you to her home so that she can learn more about it. You present various aspects of the teachings to her, and the visit seems to be going well. She tells you that she likes what she has heard very much and that she thinks the Faith is the answer to humanity's problems. Then she asks you to give her a stack of pamphlets about the Faith so that she can hand them out at the political rally she is attending the next day. What do you do?

4. You are participating in a two-week campaign in your village. The purpose is to increase the number of those involved in the community-building endeavors and to invite receptive souls to embrace the Cause. Of course, many families are already aware of the Bahá'í activities in the village, or even connected to them in some way, and you spend the days of the campaign visiting households and conversing with family members on themes appropriate to their receptivity. In the evenings, gatherings open to everyone in the village are held, during which various aspects of the teachings of the Faith and their implications for community life are discussed.

One evening, someone attending the meeting asks you a question about a specific Bahá'í law. You answer him, but he does not accept your explanation. A few other participants in the campaign then attempt to address his question, but, after a while, it becomes clear that he is trying to discredit the Faith in the eyes of those present. What do you do?

5. You are a member of a team visiting homes in a neighborhood with the hope of increasing the number of children participating in classes for their spiritual education. Most families are aware of the classes already established, and they look favorably on this development in the neighborhood and are happy to learn more about it. During your visits, you focus largely on certain educational concepts found in the Bahá'í writings, which stimulates lively discussions with parents. At one home, however, a visiting relative voices concern, suggesting that you are trying to convert the children in the classes to the Faith. What do you do?

6. A young person who has been studying the courses of the institute for some time and serving as an animator of a junior youth group has decided to enroll in the Faith. Yet his parents are uneasy about their son's decision. What do you do?

SECTION 7

Bahá'u'lláh tells us:

“Should anyone among you be incapable of grasping a certain truth, or be striving to comprehend it, show forth, when conversing with him, a spirit of extreme kindness and goodwill. Help him to see and recognize the truth, without esteeming yourself to be, in the least, superior to him, or to be possessed of greater endowments.”¹²

In another passage, He exhorts us:

“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 goodwill. If it be accepted, if it fulfill its purpose, your object is attained. If anyone should refuse it, leave him unto himself, and beseech God to guide him. Beware lest ye deal unkindly with him. A kindly tongue is the lodestone of the hearts of men. It is the bread of the spirit, it clotheth the words with meaning, it is the fountain of the light of wisdom and understanding.”¹³

We all strive to show forth loving-kindness and patience in our dealings with people. But we should not confuse kindness with other things. For example, sometimes what appears to be kindness can, in fact, be paternalism. A person who has difficulty recognizing people’s capacity and often treats them kindly, but as if they were children, is being paternalistic. Hypocrisy can also present itself as kindness; one can show forth the utmost loving-kindness yet really have one’s own interests in mind. Like kindness, patience can sometimes be misused. For instance, it can be an excuse for negligence. To think about these ideas further, carry out the exercise below.

1. You explain the teachings of the Faith to someone with great kindness. But when at the end she expresses certain disagreements with you, you become upset. Was your kindness sincere? _____
2. When introducing the Faith to those with less formal education than you, you stop every so often and say: “Do you understand, dear?” Is this kindness or paternalism? _____
3. You are introducing the Faith to someone with little formal education. You decide that many of the profound concepts found in the Writings are too difficult for him to grasp, so you reduce Bahá’u’lláh’s message down to a few simple ideas. Is this kindness or paternalism? _____
4. You are introducing the Faith to someone with little formal education. Although it takes time, you give her a thorough presentation of its essential verities, reading with her relevant passages from the Writings and discussing their significance. Is this patience or paternalism? _____
5. One of your neighbors seems receptive to the Faith, so you decide to engage her in a series of discussions. Over the course of your conversations and with great kindness, you help her gain an appreciation of the significance of the Bahá’í teachings and nurture her understanding until she recognizes Bahá’u’lláh. After she has enrolled in the community, you continue to nurture and assist her as she learns more about the teachings and begins to share them with others. Is this paternalism? _____
6. During a campaign to visit homes in a nearby neighborhood, you meet a father who seems eager to learn about the Faith. After a brief conversation, he tells you that he likes what he has heard and asks you for some literature to read. You give him a small introductory book and decide that, since he seems busy, you will wait a few months before visiting him again. Is this patience or negligence? _____

Can you think of other situations in which there may be some paternalism or hypocrisy present in the form of kindness, or negligence in the form of patience?

SECTION 8

Bahá'u'lláh declares:

“If they arise to teach My Cause, they must let the breath of Him Who is the Unconstrained stir them, and must spread it abroad on the earth with high resolve, with minds that are wholly centered in Him, and with hearts that are completely detached from and independent of all things, and with souls that are sanctified from the world and its vanities. It behooveth them to choose as the best provision for their journey reliance upon God, and to clothe themselves with the love of their Lord, the Most Exalted, the All-Glorious. If they do so, their words shall influence their hearers.”¹⁴

‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

“These shall labor ceaselessly, by day and by night, shall heed neither trials nor woe, shall suffer no respite in their efforts, shall seek no repose, shall disregard all ease and comfort, and, detached and unsullied, shall consecrate every fleeting moment of their lives to the diffusion of the divine fragrance and the exaltation of God’s holy Word.”¹⁵

We know from our study of Book 2 that detachment is a requirement of joyful teaching. While we hope the service we render yields worthy results, we recognize that if we are too attached to the results, if we are overly affected by praise or criticism, we will lose the joy that quickens our steps. Completing the sentences below will help you think further about what it means to be detached when we enter the teaching field.

1. When we arise to teach the Cause, we should let the _____
_____ stir us.
2. When we arise to teach the Cause, our minds should be _____
_____ .
3. When we arise to teach the Cause, our hearts should be _____
_____ and independent of _____ .
4. When we arise to teach the Cause, our souls should be _____
_____ .
5. We should choose as the best provision for our journey _____
_____ .

6. We should clothe ourselves with the _____ .
7. And having entered the field of service, we should labor _____ ,
by day and by night.
8. We should heed neither _____ nor _____ , should seek no
_____, and should disregard all _____ .
9. Detached and unsullied, we should consecrate _____
_____ of our lives to the _____
_____ and the _____
_____ .

SECTION 9

Bahá'u'lláh tells us:

“Cry out and summon the people to Him Who is the Sovereign Lord of all worlds, with such zeal and fervor that all men may be set on fire by thee.”¹⁶

Shoghi Effendi urges us:

“... let us arise to teach His Cause with righteousness, conviction, understanding and vigor. Let this be the paramount and most urgent duty of every Bahá'í. Let us make it the dominating passion of our life.”¹⁷

If we are to succeed in our efforts to guide large numbers to the ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, we must be driven by a passion to teach the Faith. Our hearts must be fired by enthusiasm, for how are we to convey the joy of being a Bahá'í if we are not ourselves joyful and enthusiastic? But in our eagerness to share Bahá'u'lláh's message with others, we should take care not to overstep proper bounds and turn away those whom we seek to teach. A word one often hears in this connection is “proselytization”, which means to put undue pressure on someone to change his or her Faith. Bahá'ís are strictly forbidden to proselytize. Yet, in avoiding proselytization, we should not be so passive and so unconvincing that our teaching efforts have no effect.

To help you think about the difference between passion in teaching and proselytization, read the following statements and decide in which cases you would be overstepping proper bounds. Mark them with an “O”. In which would you be so unenthusiastic that you would be ineffective? Mark them with a “U”. In which cases would your approach be enthusiastic and within proper limits? Mark them with an “E”.

_____ You are so enamored with the Faith that, at every opportunity, you introduce into your conversations, in a natural way and with wisdom, Bahá'í principles and teachings. When appropriate, you mention the source of your ideas as the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

- _____ You are so enthusiastic that, even if people do not want to listen to your presentation about the Faith, you practically force them to.
- _____ You do not want people to think you are fanatical about your religion, so even if they ask you about the Faith, you only give a short answer. If they persist and ask again, then you finally give them a book and tell them to read it for themselves.
- _____ A campaign has been organized to teach the Faith in a number of villages where the people are very open and receptive. Your team decides that the best approach is to go from house to house and introduce the Faith as, in fact, most people would be upset if you visited a neighbor and did not visit them.
- _____ An intensive campaign has recently begun in a neighboring village to explore with those newly enrolled in the Faith themes to deepen their knowledge of the teachings. You go to a few homes but, each time, are told by other family members that those you were looking for are not there. You leave, disappointed.
- _____ An intensive campaign has recently begun in a neighboring village to explore with those newly enrolled in the Faith themes to deepen their knowledge of the teachings. Though you do not find most of those you are looking for at home, you greet the other family members you meet and, knowing people in the village are open and receptive, ask if they would like to engage in a conversation about the Faith.
- _____ You are a member of a team teaching in a neighboring village where the people have little access to formal education and health services, so the team decides the best approach is to emphasize all the good things the Faith can do for them. You promise them that if they become Bahá'ís you will help them establish an academic school for their children and a small health clinic.
- _____ You are a member of a team teaching in a neighboring village where the people have little access to formal education. Yet you have faith in their spiritual capacity and do not avoid engaging them in profound conversations on the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. You explain to members of the village council how the institute courses, which are based on these teachings, can help build capacity to work for the betterment of the community. You offer to return and assist a small group of young people in studying the first course.
- _____ You begin every meeting with those interested in the Faith by handing out declaration cards and inviting them to become members of the Bahá'í community whenever they are so moved.
- _____ You often begin meetings with those interested in the Faith by telling them that Bahá'u'lláh's message is for all of humanity and that it is a pleasure to share some of His teachings with them. You also mention that they should not hesitate to ask any questions that come to their minds, which you will try to answer to the best of your ability. Towards the end of the meeting, if it seems appropriate, you explain what it means to enter the Faith, noting, of course, that this is a personal matter to be contemplated by each individual, free from pressure.

- _____ You begin every meeting with those interested in the Faith by explaining that the purpose of the gathering is not to convert them. You simply wish to share with them a few ideas. It is important that they take plenty of time to investigate the truth before considering the possibility of enrolling in the Bahá'í community.
- _____ You have been teaching a friend for some time now and can see that the spark of faith exists in her heart, so one day you invite her to join the Bahá'í community.
- _____ You have been teaching a friend for some time now and can see that the spark of faith exists in her heart, so you keep inviting her to Bahá'í activities thinking that someday she will become a Bahá'í.
- _____ You are a member of a team participating in a campaign to teach the Faith in your neighborhood. You do not really contribute to discussions and planning but spend most of your time staring at your mobile phone. When the campaign gets under way, you look up from your phone every once in a while to see what is happening and to nod in agreement with other members of the team who are engaged in conversations with people in the neighborhood.
- _____ You are a member of a team participating in a campaign to teach the Faith in your neighborhood. Your team goes to a public place, and you stop everyone that passes you and ask: “Have you heard of Bahá'u'lláh?”
- _____ You are participating in a campaign to intensify the community-building efforts in a neighborhood. As part of the initial phase of the campaign, your group—made up primarily of a few friends who have recently moved there—studies the neighborhood and becomes familiar with spaces such as schools, parks and community centers where you might encounter young people with a desire to serve humanity. On the basis of what it learns, the group devises a plan to undertake a range of activities: to spend time in these spaces, to make presentations at the local secondary school, to hold gatherings in the evening, and to visit the homes of individuals who show interest in the educational process promoted by the institute. As you meet young people, you discuss with them the special characteristics of the period of youth and the significance of walking a path of service in which they can learn to assist others, particularly those younger than themselves, in acquiring knowledge, skills, and spiritual qualities. You invite anyone who would like to learn more to continue the conversation at the gatherings you have planned for the evenings. You prepare yourselves to assist whoever wishes in beginning their study of the main sequence of courses and to accompany them in the acts of service they will undertake. You are also aware that some may very soon accept the Faith, and you will not shy away from inviting them to join the Bahá'í community.
- _____ You are participating in a campaign to intensify the community-building efforts in a neighborhood. As part of the initial phase of the campaign, your group—made up primarily of a few friends who have recently moved there—spends a considerable amount of time in parks, schools and community centers speaking with young people and inviting them to gatherings held in the evenings. You make sure to emphasize that there will be plenty of time for singing and for socializing, downplaying the purpose of the gathering, which is to discuss with them how they can channel their energies towards serving their community. You

are convinced that if you can capture their interest in this way and form bonds of friendship with them, it will be easy to enter into a conversation about the special characteristics of the period of youth and the significance of walking a path of service. When only a small proportion of those who attend the evening gatherings remain once they understand what they have been invited to, you decide you will need to attract larger numbers if you are to achieve the goals envisioned.

— You are participating in a week-long campaign to visit the many families in your village with youngsters in children’s classes or in junior youth groups. Your team plans to go to a good number of homes and invite the families that seem receptive to join the Bahá’í community. You decide the best approach is to mention only a couple of ideas that you know appeal to the local population, staying away from topics which, although important, might raise questions; then you will invite all the members of each household to enroll.

— You are participating in a week-long campaign to visit the many families in your village with youngsters in children’s classes or in junior youth groups and invite those who are receptive to join the Bahá’í community. Your team notices that most of the families it visits are eager to discuss the Bahá’í teachings, some accepting the Cause quickly and others raising questions they would like to explore further. You are conscious that this campaign is part of an ongoing, long-term process of expansion and consolidation, and so you spend the necessary time with each family, answering questions that arise and furthering their understanding of the tenets of the Faith. In this way, beyond contributing to growth in terms of numbers and to the multiplication of activities, each visit deepens the roots of the Faith in the community.

SECTION 10

As mentioned earlier, the emphasis we have placed on spiritual qualities in our discussion of teaching does not imply that we have to be perfect in order to teach the Cause. We are called upon, rather, to arise and serve the Faith, while constantly reflecting on our inner condition and striving to manifest in higher and higher degrees such qualities as purity of heart, selflessness, faith, courage, wisdom, loving-kindness, and detachment. There are, of course, many other qualities that require our attention—generosity, magnanimity, and steadfastness, to name a few. But our explorations here would be remiss if we did not discuss the quality of humility.

The ways of humility are, of course, subtle. It is as we become enamored of God and oblivious of “self”, submitting to His Will, that our words and actions become imbued with power. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

“The teacher, when teaching, must be himself fully enkindled, so that his utterance, like unto a flame of fire, may exert influence and consume the veil of self and passion. He must also be utterly humble and lowly so that others may be edified, and be totally self-effaced and evanescent so that he may teach with the melody of the Concourse on high—otherwise his teaching will have no effect.”¹⁸

And, regarding our efforts to help others recognize the truth of the Cause, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us:

“In accordance with the divine teachings in this glorious dispensation we should not belittle anyone and call him ignorant, saying: ‘You know not, but I know.’ Rather, we should look upon others with respect, and when attempting to explain and demonstrate, we should speak as if we are investigating the truth, saying: ‘Here these things are before us. Let us investigate to determine where and in what form the truth can be found.’ The teacher should not consider himself as learned and others ignorant. Such a thought breedeth pride, and pride is not conducive to influence. The teacher should not see in himself any superiority; he should speak with the utmost kindness, lowliness and humility, for such speech exerteth influence and educateth the souls.”¹⁹

What is the difference between the passion referred to in the first quotation above and the passion discussed in the preceding section?

With the other members of your group, discuss how humility increases the influence exerted by our words. Write down a few of your thoughts.

SECTION 11

Our discussion in the last section raises another point related to humility that deserves our attention. It is true that we must constantly strive to perfect our characters and improve our inner condition, conscious that the effectiveness of our efforts to teach depends on the spiritual qualities we manifest. Yet we should never assume, not even for a moment, that what we accomplish in the field of teaching is a result of our own merits. Humility protects us from gaining a feeling of self-importance.

We must always separate our accomplishments in teaching the Cause from ourselves. Any part we play in helping a soul to recognize Bahá’u’lláh is a gift bestowed upon us by God. He chooses those through whom He will work. We can only hope to become a channel through which He operates and strive to acquire those qualities that will enable us to become His instruments. In the Hidden Words we read:

“Humble thyself before Me, that I may graciously visit thee. Arise for the triumph of My cause, that while yet on earth thou mayest obtain the victory.”²⁰

The following passage from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi provides us with a warning:

“Perhaps the reason why you have not accomplished so much in the field of teaching is the extent you looked upon your own weaknesses and inabilities to spread the message. Bahá’u’lláh and the Master have both urged us repeatedly to disregard our own handicaps and lay our whole reliance upon God. He will come to our help if we only arise and become an active channel for God’s grace. Do you think it is the teachers who make converts and change human hearts? No, surely not. They are only pure souls who take the first step, and then let the spirit of Bahá’u’lláh move them and make use of them. If any one of them should even for a second consider his achievements as due to his own capacities, his work is ended and his fall starts. This is in fact the reason why so many competent souls have after wonderful services suddenly found themselves absolutely impotent and perhaps thrown aside by the Spirit of the Cause as useless souls. The criterion is the extent to which we are ready to have the will of God operate through us.

“Stop being conscious of your frailties, therefore; have a perfect reliance upon God; let your heart burn with the desire to serve His mission and proclaim His call; and you will observe how eloquence and the power to change human hearts will come as a matter of course.

“Shoghi Effendi will surely pray for your success if you should arise and start to teach. In fact the mere act of arising will win for you God’s help and blessings.”²¹

Can you give a few examples of how pride and arrogance make us ineffective in teaching the Cause?

Now, to think further about the different forms pride can take in relation to teaching, carry out the following exercise:

1. A collective effort is under way to teach the Faith to individuals and families connected to the community-building activities in a neighborhood. Participants are

divided into teams and are asked to utilize an approach that has proven effective on earlier occasions. One participant, however, does not feel the approach enables him to use what he considers to be his most outstanding talents. Which of the following reactions shows a lack of pride on his part?

___ Refusing to participate in the effort because it does not allow him to use his talents as he wishes.

___ Taking part in the effort joyfully, working alongside his fellow participants in whatever way is necessary and drawing upon his other capacities.

___ Trying to find fault with the collective effort, saying that it does not employ a good approach because it does not draw upon all the talents and capacities of the participants.

2. A group of friends serving in a neighborhood hears about an approach to teaching that is bringing excellent results in another neighborhood in the region. Which of the following would be the most appropriate response on the part of the group, reflecting neither pride nor lack of wisdom?

___ Concluding, without examining the approach, that it could not possibly work in their neighborhood since the conditions are different.

___ Concluding that, since the approach worked in one place, it should work in another and should be adopted immediately and without change.

___ Examining the approach carefully to see if all or part of it could work in a new setting and, on that basis, utilizing the approach and modifying it in whatever way experience shows is necessary.

3. Someone from a neighborhood where the community-building process has advanced considerably is visiting a neighborhood nearby at the request of the institutions of the Faith. Work there is progressing but is not very far along, and she has been asked to assist the friends in their efforts. Which of the following shows a lack of pride on her part?

___ Making it clear to the friends in the neighborhood that she has been sent by the institutions and presenting a long list of instructions for them to follow.

___ Talking continuously and in glowing terms about the advances made where she resides and not providing any opportunity for those in the neighborhood she is visiting to share experiences from their own reality.

___ Listening to what the friends in the neighborhood have to say about their experience, participating with them in planning and action, and sharing, as appropriate, what has been learned in the neighborhood where she lives that may be helpful to them in determining their next steps.

4. A campaign is soon to get under way in a neighborhood to bring more and more young people into a conversation about how they can develop their talents and abilities and

contribute to the betterment of their communities. Those who show interest will be invited to study the courses of the institute in order to build their capacity for service. All the participants in the campaign are divided into teams of two. In one team, a very experienced person is paired with someone less experienced who has yet to gain courage and confidence in the field. Which of the following shows a lack of pride on the part of the more experienced member of the team?

- _____ Interrupting frequently whenever the less experienced member of the team talks with young people and eventually taking over the conversation.
- _____ Letting the less experienced member do most of the talking during the conversations with the young people, while taking mental note of the mistakes she thinks he makes, so that she can speak with him later about his shortcomings and teach him how such conversations are meant to be carried out.
- _____ Initiating most of the conversations but quickly drawing the other member in, assisting him as he becomes more comfortable in conversing with young people.

SECTION 12

In the previous sections we have examined humility as a quality that both endows our speech with influence and protects us against the pitfalls we can encounter in our efforts to grow spiritually. There is yet another significant contribution humility makes to our lives that is especially relevant to teaching. Humility allows us to approach all we do, particularly our endeavors in service to the Cause, with an attitude of learning. In the absence of such an attitude we tend to become blind to our own ignorance and believe we know that which we do not know. A most praiseworthy characteristic of those who walk humbly in the path of God is their willingness to learn.

Why, we may ask, is having an open attitude towards learning so important for those of us who wish to teach the Cause effectively? To answer this question, reflect on what you know about teaching. Do you always know the most appropriate approach to take? Do you know what to say and how to say it in every situation that presents itself to you? Do you think it is possible to learn in a course or two all that you need to know about an act so sacred? Can teaching be reduced to a formula? Surely you agree that the answer to these questions is “no” and that the only reasonable way to go about increasing one’s effectiveness in teaching is to adopt a posture of learning.

As we strive to become more and more effective at teaching the Cause, we should be careful not to fall into the trap of arguing with others in the community over teaching methods and approaches. If not careful, we can easily become engaged in this kind of argument, each of us believing that we have found the right “formula” and that, unless teaching is done our way, “success” is impossible.

We can avoid such behavior when we realize that teaching the Cause is something that has to be learned. We free ourselves of self-imposed limitations when we see in every teaching effort an opportunity to acquire insights and increase our understanding of the

spiritual dynamics involved. Our discussions with our fellow Bahá'ís are most fruitful when we exchange ideas, share experiences, and analyze what contributes to effective teaching. Every one of us is encouraged to

“reflect periodically on effective ways of teaching the Faith in their surroundings . . . Souls who have been given the blessing of faith have a natural wish to share this gift through conversations with relatives, friends, classmates, coworkers, and those previously unmet, seeking in every place and at every moment a hearing ear. Different settings and circumstances lend themselves to different approaches, and the friends should be occupied in an ongoing process of learning about what is most effective in the place where they are.”²²

Read the situations presented below. How would you respond to each one if you were determined to see in every teaching effort an opportunity to learn?

1. You decide to hold a weekly meeting at your home to discuss the Faith. You invite about ten people who have, on different occasions, expressed interest. For each meeting, you choose some subject and prepare and deliver a short talk on it, following which you open the meeting up for questions. You then have a period of hospitality in which you socialize and sing songs. After a few weeks, only two people are still coming. You decide:

___ You need to make the meetings more entertaining and social.

___ You should drop the weekly meeting from your teaching plans; it wasn't such a good idea after all.

___ You should try a different format in the next few meetings, perhaps studying with your guests a few quotations on a particular subject, allowing them to become familiar with the Holy Word, and then build on that experience.

___ You should seek out all the people who are not coming any longer and ask them why they stopped attending the meetings.

2. When you were learning about the Faith, there were a few principles that struck you most, so now you feel the best way to teach people is to present these same principles to them. However, in general, you find that the people you speak to are not particularly enthused by the ideas you express. You decide:

___ You need more practice in presenting the principles.

___ You should seek out people like yourself and only teach them.

___ You are not a natural-born teacher and should serve the Faith in some other way.

___ You should try, in future, to understand the concerns that occupy the minds of those you meet and to incorporate relevant teachings from the Faith into your conversations with them.

3. You are part of a team that has decided to focus its efforts on a particular population and share Bahá'u'lláh's message with them. After a while, you notice from the questions they ask that they all seem to have difficulty with the prevailing notion of God. The team decides:

_____ It is better not to talk about this subject. If people bring it up in your discussions, you will quickly move on to another topic.

_____ People who have difficulty with the concept of God are not receptive to the Faith, so you should not spend time trying to teach them.

_____ You will ask someone with more experience to accompany you and speak with those you visit about the existence of God. If that does not work, then you will leave them and insist no longer.

_____ After studying some of the relevant passages from the writings, your team will prepare together a short statement to help those you visit understand what Bahá'u'lláh teaches about God. You will listen to their reactions, reflect on the results, go back to the writings to find answers to the questions raised, and modify the statement in light of the insights the team gains from experience and the passages you study together. You will continue doing this until your efforts begin to bring satisfactory results.

4. You are part of a team that has participated in several highly effective teaching campaigns in a neighborhood. A good number of families have embraced the Cause. Aware of how important it is for them to deepen their knowledge of the Faith, your team has visited most of their homes regularly and discussed the themes addressed in the third unit of Book 2 with members of the households. The team is now wondering how to proceed in a way that both increases their commitment to the Faith and enables them to share Bahá'u'lláh's teachings with others. The team decides:

_____ You will prepare together a list of thirty talks on a wide range of subjects and will present a new subject on each visit, following your list faithfully to ensure you cover all the topics you have chosen.

_____ You will give each family a small booklet about the Faith and ask them to read a certain number of pages in between your visits. During your visits, then, you will discuss with them any questions they have.

_____ You worry about utilizing an approach that will take too long. So, instead of continuing to visit the families one by one, you will invite them to a weekly meeting at someone's home to discuss the Faith. "Those that are really interested in learning will come," you say to each other.

_____ You will think of one basic theme related to the Faith that they would like to learn more about and will find relevant passages on the subject in the writings. You will then visit one of the families to share the passages you have selected and to discuss the ideas with them. Afterwards, you will reflect on the results of the meeting, go back to the writings, modify the selection of passages as needed, and use the revised selection in a visit to another family. Meanwhile,

in light of comments made during the visit to the first family, you will choose another set of ideas and passages to study with them during your second visit. You will continue in this way until you have established a pattern of regular visits centered around a series of themes. At the same time, you will explore with the families how the same themes could be discussed with their neighbors, relatives, and friends.

SECTION 13

The exercises in the preceding section helped us to see how, whether engaged in a personal teaching effort or in a collective endeavor, important questions arise as we act and reflect on the results of our action. One set of questions that will emerge time and again as we adopt such a posture of learning has to do with the way we approach teaching and the attitudes we maintain in carrying out this sacred act. Should we be very bold? Should we be cautious and conservative? Should we offer Bahá'u'lláh's message immediately to every person we meet, or should we be selective? Should we talk directly about the Faith as the religion for humanity today, or should we limit our conversations to a general discussion of principles that are easily acceptable to people? Should we mention those aspects of the teachings that we know will be challenging to the listener, or should we leave all such subjects for later, after the person has accepted the Faith? In order to be convincing, should we make our presentations strong and overwhelming, or should we speak with as little passion as possible?

In the passage below, the Guardian gives us invaluable advice in this respect. Some of the words may be unfamiliar to you so, before studying the quotation, you may wish to review the following list of definitions:

Provocative:	Causing anger or strong disagreement
Supine:	Laid back
Fanatical:	Filled with excessive or mistaken enthusiasm
Excessive:	Beyond what is normal or proper
Liberal:	Broad-minded; not bound by tradition or rules
Exposition:	An explanation of meaning or purpose; presentation of a theme
Wary:	Cautious
Conciliatory:	Willing to give in
Layman:	A person who is not of the clergy
Contemptuous:	Showing disrespect or disdain; scornful
Whittle down:	Reduce bit by bit
Proffer:	To present for acceptance; to offer
Uncompromising:	Not making or allowing a compromise; unyielding; immovable

Now read the quotation from the writings of the Guardian:

“They must be neither provocative nor supine, neither fanatical nor excessively liberal, in their exposition of the fundamental and distinguishing features of their

Faith. They must be either wary or bold, they must act swiftly or mark time, they must use the direct or indirect method, they must be challenging or conciliatory, in strict accordance with the spiritual receptivity of the soul with whom they come in contact, whether he be a nobleman or a commoner, a northerner or a southerner, a layman or a priest, a capitalist or a socialist, a statesman or a prince, an artisan or a beggar. In their presentation of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh they must neither hesitate nor falter. They must be neither contemptuous of the poor nor timid before the great. In their exposition of its verities they must neither overstress nor whittle down the truth which they champion, whether their hearer belong to royalty, or be a prince of the church, or a politician, or a tradesman, or a man of the street. To all alike, high or low, rich or poor, they must proffer, with open hands, with a radiant heart, with an eloquent tongue, with infinite patience, with uncompromising loyalty, with great wisdom, with unshakable courage, the Cup of Salvation at so critical an hour . . .”²³

1. Shoghi Effendi tells us that, when teaching the Cause, we must be neither _____ nor _____ in our _____ of the _____ and _____ features of the Faith.
2. Nor must we be _____ or _____ in our exposition.
3. We must be either _____ or _____, we must act _____ or _____, we must use the _____ or _____ method, we must be _____ or _____, in strict accordance with the _____ of the soul with whom we come in contact.
4. When teaching the Cause, we must act in strict _____ with the _____ of the soul with whom we come in contact, whether he be a nobleman or a _____, a northerner or a _____, a layman or a _____, a capitalist or a _____, a statesman or a _____, an artisan or a _____.
5. In presenting the Faith, we must neither _____ nor _____.
6. We must be neither _____ of the poor nor _____ before the great.
7. In our exposition of the verities of the Faith, we must neither _____ nor _____ the truth which we champion, whether our hearer _____.

belong to _____, or be a _____, or
a _____, or a _____, or a _____
_____.

8. To all alike, we must proffer, with _____ hands, with a _____ heart,
with an _____ tongue, with _____ patience, with
_____ loyalty, with _____ wisdom, with
_____ courage, the Cup of Salvation at this critical hour.

SECTION 14

Now let us examine the above quotation more closely and try to discover some of its practical implications.

1. The quotation tells us that, when we teach the Cause, we should not be provocative in our presentation. Below are a few situations. Put a “P” next to those in which your presentation is provocative.

_____ To demonstrate to a devout believer in another Faith that humanity is in need of a new Manifestation, you begin your presentation by drawing his attention to all the things that have gone wrong with his religion.

_____ You explain to a devout believer in another Faith that the Manifestations of God are like mirrors reflecting the light of the sun. They reflect the qualities of God and reveal His divine attributes. Though the Mirrors may differ, They all reflect the Light of the same Sun. In this way, you help him gradually come to understand that accepting Bahá’u’lláh does not mean rejecting the Manifestations that came before Him.

_____ You are teaching someone who is not sure whether she believes in God. You begin by telling her that Bahá’u’lláh is the Supreme Manifestation of God.

_____ A small group has gathered at your home. Most of those present have not as yet shown any significant interest in the Faith, and you are hoping to introduce the teachings to them in a way that captures their attention. During the course of your discussions, you state emphatically that, in the future, everyone is going to become Bahá’í.

_____ You begin your presentation to someone who has all the comforts of life by saying that wealth is a veil between a person and God.

_____ You meet a clergyman who is genuinely interested in learning about the Faith and asks you to explain some of the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh to him. The first thing you tell him is that, in this age, God has abolished the priesthood.

2. When we teach the Cause, we should not be supine. In which of the following situations are you too laid back? Mark them with an “S”.

- _____ Someone asks you what is special about the Bahá'í Faith. You answer: "The Faith is like all other religions. Its essence is to be kind and to love each other."
- _____ Your method of teaching others is to try to show them that the Faith is a collection of noble principles which anyone can accept. "The establishment of peace," you say, for example, "who doesn't believe in that?" Once they become attracted to the Faith in this way, you leave them to themselves, sometimes telling them that they can have a book to read if they wish. That is as far as you ever go.
- _____ Someone close to accepting the Faith asks you about finances and contributions. Your entire answer is: "Sure, like everything else in life, some money is needed to do things. But you will contribute only if you want to."
- _____ Someone close to accepting the Faith asks you about finances and contributions. You tell him that contributing to the funds of the Faith is the sacred obligation of every believer and explain to him the spiritual significance of sacrifice, which implies giving up that which is lower to receive that which is higher. "Contributing to the funds," you say, "is an integral part of our work to build a better world."
- _____ A friend who has been studying the Faith for some time asks you to explain the concept of the eternal Covenant to him. You say that it is really very simple: "There is an agreement between God and humanity. From time to time, He sends His Manifestation, and we recognize Him and try our best to do what He says."
- _____ A friend who has been studying the Faith for some time asks you to clarify for him the concept of the eternal Covenant. You explain briefly that, having created humanity out of His love for us, God has promised never to leave us alone but to make His Will and Purpose known to us from time to time through His Manifestations; we, in turn, promise to recognize the Manifestation for our Day and to follow His teachings.
3. When we teach the Cause, we should not be fanatical in our presentation. Below are several situations. Put an "F" next to those in which your presentation is fanatical.
- _____ Someone who is investigating the Faith asks you what it is like to be a Bahá'í. You tell him that becoming a Bahá'í is no small thing. "You have to give up everything to the Faith," you explain. "It's all or nothing."
- _____ You begin a meeting at your home with a few people who have come to hear about the Faith for the first time by asking them to hold hands and sing "Alláh-u-Abhá".
- _____ You begin teaching a devout believer in another Faith by telling her that the time of her religion is over and done with. She should abandon her religion. "Bahá'u'lláh, the Messenger of God for today, has come," you tell her. "You should throw away the past."
- _____ You are explaining the Faith to someone. He disagrees with one of the points you have raised. You start to argue with him saying that you will show him proof from the Scriptures of his own religion that he is wrong.

_____ You are explaining the Faith to someone. He disagrees with one of the points you have raised. You can see that he feels very passionately about the subject. You acknowledge his concerns and say: “We can discuss this particular point some other day if you wish. But there are so many things on which we agree. For today let us explore those things together.”

_____ You are explaining the laws of the Faith to a friend. “Obedience to the laws of God is the essence of religion,” you say. “The world is in such a terrible state today because humanity is not following the laws of Bahá’u’lláh. Everyone who does not obey His laws will be judged in the next world.”

_____ You are explaining the laws of the Faith to a friend. “Bahá’u’lláh tells us that His laws are the lamps of His loving providence,” you say. “His laws illumine our path and lead us to true happiness. Still, we are not perfect and sometimes we make mistakes. But when we accept Bahá’u’lláh, and as we pray to Him, He Himself helps us to overcome our weaknesses and gives us strength to obey His laws.”

4. When we teach the Faith, we should not be excessively liberal. Decide in which of the following situations you are being too liberal. Mark them with an “L”.

_____ Someone who is investigating the Faith asks you if there are any leaders in the Bahá’í community. You respond: “We don’t have priests or clergy that come between us and God. We all live according to our own conscience. Nobody tells us what to do.”

_____ Someone who is investigating the Faith asks you if there are any leaders in the Bahá’í community. You explain: “The community conducts its affairs through a worldwide administrative system, which includes councils at the national and local levels called National and Local Spiritual Assemblies. These councils are elected without nominations or campaigning and in a sanctified atmosphere of prayer. There is also a group of outstanding individuals who are appointed to act as advisors to the Assemblies and to inspire and encourage their fellow Bahá’ís. All of these institutions are under the international governing body of the Bahá’í Faith called the Universal House of Justice.”

_____ Someone to whom you are teaching the Faith asks you how the individual is expected to relate to Bahá’í administration. You respond: “Well, you know, the Bahá’í Faith has to have some scheme of administration, so we have what are referred to as Spiritual Assemblies consisting of nine members each. These elected bodies administer the affairs of the Faith at the local and national level, but you only have to obey them as your conscience dictates.”

_____ You are teaching someone the Faith, and he says that he likes everything which he has heard except that Bahá’ís do not believe in reincarnation. You say: “That is perfectly all right since Bahá’ís believe in unity in diversity. That means a diversity of opinions too.”

_____ Someone asks you how the Bahá’ís spread their Faith. You simply say that Bahá’ís do not proselytize. “We just ‘live the life’ and when people ask us questions, we tell them about the Faith.”

_____ Someone who has read about the Faith and has expressed interest in it asks you to explain what is required of those who enroll in the Bahá'í community. "Religion is a personal thing," you say. "It is a way of life. It is something you can just feel in your heart. In the Bahá'í Faith, there are of course a few laws, but you need only obey them as your conscience dictates."

_____ Someone who has read about the Faith and has expressed interest in it asks you to explain what is required of those who enroll in the Bahá'í community. You respond: "The essence of religion is to know God through His Manifestation, to remain steadfast in His love, and to follow His teachings. Our love of God extends to His creation; we love humanity and we fulfill our responsibility to the Faith by working for the betterment of society."

_____ You are talking to some friends on the topic of the education of children. Then you say: "The Bahá'í Faith teaches that children are born good and, if you love them and help them to develop what God has put inside them, they will turn out fine."

_____ You are talking to some friends on the topic of the education of children. Then you say: "The Bahá'í Faith tells us that children have the capacity to be good, but they also have inclinations that must be checked. They need education so that they take the right path and develop the great potential with which they are each endowed."

5. Decide which of the following responses would be appropriate in each of the situations below, as you try to determine how to go about teaching the Faith. One or more of the choices may apply to each.

- | | |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| a. Be wary | e. Use the direct method |
| b. Be bold | f. Use the indirect method |
| c. Act swiftly | g. Be challenging |
| d. Mark time | h. Be conciliatory |

_____ Someone comes to the local Bahá'í center very excited. She says that she has read something about the Faith on the internet and wants to know more about Bahá'u'lláh. She explains that she has always felt deep in her heart that God would never abandon humanity and that He would send us another Manifestation.

_____ You and your family have moved to a village where you do not know anyone. One day, shortly after your arrival, your neighbor comes to your home to welcome you and to introduce himself. In doing so, he makes it clear that all the villagers are very united in their religion and that they do not like the way these "other" religions come and try to divide people.

_____ You and your family have moved to a village where you do not know anyone. One day, shortly after your arrival, your neighbor comes to your home to welcome you and to introduce himself. He notices some Bahá'í books on a table and asks you, "What is the Bahá'í Faith?"

_____ You have joined an organization of people interested in promoting peace. One of the individuals particularly attracted to the ideas you express in the meetings firmly believes that the only way to achieve meaningful change in society is through partisan political action. He makes it a point to talk with you each time the organization meets.

_____ One of the people with whom you work has told you on several occasions that he does not believe in God. Yet he is attracted to many of the ideas you express related to social issues, for example, the equality of men and women and the need for universal education.

_____ At a village meeting attended by several chiefs in the region, you put forward some ideas about the education of children. Afterwards, one of the village chiefs comes over to talk to you. He says that he knows you are a Bahá'í and likes many of the suggestions you made. He is interested in learning more about the Faith.

_____ A friend who has just enrolled in the community takes you to her home to meet her family. They are opposed to her being a Bahá'í and are trying to get her to leave the Faith.

_____ A friend who has just enrolled in the community takes you to her home to meet her family. She tells you that they are all very excited about the Faith and cannot wait to hear more.

6. Try to think of what attitudes might be present, and what spiritual qualities lacking, if one is

– contemptuous of the poor: _____

– timid before the great: _____

7. Give an example of how, in the exposition of the verities of the Faith, one might

– overstress the truth: _____

- whittle down the truth: _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

SECTION 15

The following guidance from the Guardian reminds us that, as in all things, we should look to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when we try to determine the most appropriate approach to teaching in any situation:

“Let us too bear in mind the example which our beloved Master has clearly set before us. Wise and tactful in His approach, wakeful and attentive in His early intercourse, broad and liberal in all His public utterances, cautious and gradual in the unfolding of the essential verities of the Cause, passionate in His appeal yet sober in argument, confident in tone, unswerving in conviction, dignified in His manners—such were the distinguishing features of our Beloved’s noble presentation of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh.”²⁴

1. As you endeavor to follow the example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, what will you strive to be like in your approach to teaching? _____
2. What will you try to be like when you first come into contact with a person? _____
3. What will characterize the words you use to speak about the Faith in public? _____
4. How will you bring to the attention of people the truths of the Cause? _____
5. What will you strive to be like
 - in your appeal? _____
 - in your argument? _____
 - in your tone? _____
 - in your conviction? _____
 - in your manners? _____

Now memorize the above quotation.

SECTION 16

We began this unit by reminding ourselves that “being” and “doing” are complementary and inseparable aspects of a spiritual life. Then we devoted several sections to exploring some of the spiritual qualities that we must all strive to develop as we engage in regular and systematic teaching activity. Our discussion of humility led us to consider our attitude towards learning, so important when teaching the Faith. We also gained some insight into how other attitudes can affect the way we go about teaching. Now let us go one step further and explore the nature of our relationship with those we teach. What should this relationship be like? What do the writings tell us about this?

The first concept that probably comes to mind is fellowship. Clearly, in the context of personal teaching efforts, the ability to establish bonds of friendship with people is essential. This same ability is also crucial to our participation in collective campaigns—for example, when we are inviting youth to study the institute courses as a means of enhancing their capacity for service, when we are forming new classes for the spiritual education of children and groups for the spiritual empowerment of junior youth, when we are visiting the homes of those newly enrolled in the Faith in our neighborhoods and villages to explore various themes with them, and when we are engaging in direct teaching efforts among populations receptive to Bahá’u’lláh’s message. In all such cases, our ability to establish warm relationships determines how we approach those we meet, how we communicate with them, and whether we are able to touch their hearts.

A question we need to ask ourselves is how we are to develop this essential ability. Our temperaments, of course, are different. Some of us, whether as a result of our upbringing or a natural inclination, find it easy to make friends. Some can strike up a conversation with perfect strangers. Others are shy and find this more of a challenge. Yet, no matter what our character, we should realize that, through conscious effort, we can learn to consort with people in a spirit of fellowship. The writings offer numerous and valuable counsels on this subject, only a few examples of which are given below. The phrases set off by quotation marks are taken directly from the writings themselves. It is suggested that you read through the ideas several times and discuss them with the other members of your group.

We are told to dispel the “darkness of estrangement” and to “see all men as friends”. We are expected to “be at one with every people”. We must turn our eyes towards “the heaven of ancient glory” and consider each and every creature as “a sign of God”, for it is by His grace and power “that each did step into the world”.

We are called upon to “associate in affectionate fellowship with stranger and friend alike”, showing forth to all “the utmost loving-kindness” and disregarding “the degree of their capacity”, never asking whether they “deserve to be loved”.

Should anyone “taunt and mock” us, we should “meet him with love”. Should he heap “blame” upon us, we should “praise” him. Should he offer us “a deadly poison”, we should give him “the choicest honey in exchange”. Should he “threaten” our life, we should grant him a “remedy that will heal him evermore”. Should he become “pain itself”, we should become his “medicine”. And should he become as “thorns”, we should become as “roses and sweet herbs”.

We are urged to make a mighty effort, that “all the peoples and kindreds of the world, even the enemies”, put “their trust, confidence and hope” in us. If a soul commits “a

hundred thousand misdeeds”, he should yet be able to “hope for forgiveness”, that he may not become “despondent or grieved”.

We must “powerfully sustain one another and seek for everlasting life” and become “the mercies and the blessings sent forth” by God.

We are told to show “kindliness and friendship, sympathy and courtesy” to all, that we may be as “refreshing water to every thirsty one” and as “the bread of heaven to every hungry one”. We should “show forth a tenderness which is not of this world”. We should think of “love and good fellowship as the delights of heaven”, and regard “hostility and hatred as the torments of hell”.

We must take care not to “harm any soul, or make any heart to sorrow”. We should not “offend the feelings of another”, even though he be an “evildoer” and wish us “ill”. We are urged not to look “upon the creatures”, but to turn ourselves to “their Creator”.

We are called upon to “sacrifice” ourselves for the “common good” and “strive night and day” to “rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind”. We should weep “over the tears” shed by God’s creatures and mourn “the grief” of His children. We should “give up” our “rest and comfort”, that we may become “the cause of the tranquility of the world”.

We are told to be “loving fathers to the orphan, and a refuge to the helpless, and a treasury for the poor, and a cure for the ailing”. We are to be “the helpers of every victim of oppression, the patrons of the disadvantaged”. We should think “at all times of rendering some service to every member of the human race”.

We should “do all” we can to “purify the hearts and minds of men” and strive “to gladden every soul”. We should “do some good to every person whose path” we cross and “be of some benefit to him”. We must endeavor to “improve the character of each and all, and reorient the minds of men”. Ours is the task to “summon” the people to God and “invite” humanity to “follow the example of the Company on high”.

We are called upon to bring “those who have been excluded into the circle of intimate friends”. We should “waken them that slumber” and “make the heedless mindful”. “In the darkness of the world” we are to be “radiant flames”. “In the sands of perdition” we are to be “wellsprings of the water of life” and “guidance from the Lord God”.

You may now wish to memorize the following quotation from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

“As for you, O ye lovers of God, make firm your steps in His Cause, with such resolve that ye shall not be shaken though the direst of calamities assail the world. By nothing, under no conditions, be ye perturbed. Be ye anchored fast as the high mountains, be stars that dawn over the horizon of life, be bright lamps in the gatherings of unity, be souls humble and lowly in the presence of the friends, be innocent in heart. Be ye symbols of guidance and lights of godliness, severed from the world, clinging to the handhold that is sure and strong, spreading abroad the spirit of life, riding the Ark of salvation. Be ye daysprings of generosity, dawning-points of the mysteries of existence, sites where inspiration alighteth, rising-places of splendors, souls that are sustained by the Holy Spirit, enamored of the Lord,

detached from all save Him, holy above the characteristics of humankind, clothed in the attributes of the angels of heaven, that ye may win for yourselves the highest bestowal of all, in this new time, this wondrous age.”²⁵

SECTION 17

As we consort with all people in a spirit of fellowship, and through our efforts to live a life in keeping with the teachings, we attract others to the Cause. We are not, of course, expected to be perfect, nor do we claim to be free of shortcomings. Yet to the extent that we reflect the qualities set forth in the teachings do we become effective channels for the diffusion of divine fragrances. It is in this sense that we often talk about teaching by example. But we should be careful that the phrase “teaching by example” does not become an excuse for not teaching. It is true that we need to pay a great deal of attention to our inner condition, to our character, to our deeds, and to the rectitude of our conduct. This, however, should not make us lose sight of the fact that it is with the key of our utterance that we are to open the gates to the city of the human heart. To clarify this point, let us look at two sets of quotations from the writings and try to understand them together. First read the following quotations:

“Whoso ariseth among you to teach the Cause of his Lord, let him, before all else, teach his own self, that his speech may attract the hearts of them that hear him. Unless he teacheth his own self, the words of his mouth will not influence the heart of the seeker.”²⁶

“One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely, the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh.”²⁷

“Whoso ariseth, in this Day, to aid Our Cause, and summoneth to his assistance the hosts of a praiseworthy character and upright conduct, the influence flowing from such an action will, most certainly, be diffused throughout the whole world.”²⁸

“Let your actions cry aloud to the world that you are indeed Bahá’ís, for it is *actions* that speak to the world and are the cause of the progress of humanity.

“If we are true Bahá’ís speech is not needed. Our actions will help on the world, will spread civilization, will help the progress of science, and cause the arts to develop. Without action nothing in the material world can be accomplished, neither can words unaided advance a man in the spiritual Kingdom. It is not through lip-service only that the elect of God have attained to holiness, but by patient lives of active service they have brought light into the world.”²⁹

Now study the following set of quotations:

“It is at such times that the friends of God avail themselves of the occasion, seize the opportunity, rush forth and win the prize. If their task is to be confined to good conduct and advice, nothing will be accomplished. They must speak out, expound the proofs, set forth clear arguments, draw irrefutable conclusions establishing the truth of the manifestation of the Sun of Reality.”³⁰

“Then look thou not at the degree of thy capacity, look thou at the boundless favor of Bahá’u’lláh; all-encompassing is His bounty, and consummate His grace.”³¹

“Turn thy face toward the Kingdom of God, ask for the bestowals of the Holy Spirit, speak, and the confirmations of the Spirit will come.”³²

“O ye beloved of God! Repose not yourselves on your couches, nay bestir yourselves as soon as ye recognize your Lord, the Creator, and hear of the things which have befallen Him, and hasten to His assistance. Unloose your tongues, and proclaim unceasingly His Cause. This shall be better for you than all the treasures of the past and of the future, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth.”³³

“If the friends always waited until they were fully qualified to do any particular task, the work of the Cause would be almost at a standstill! But the very act of striving to serve, however unworthy one may feel, attracts the blessings of God and enables one to become more fitted for the task.

“Today the need is so great on the part of humanity to hear of the Divine Message, that the believers must plunge into the work, wherever and however they can, heedless of their own shortcomings, but ever heedful of the crying need of their fellow-men to hear of the teachings in their darkest hour of travail.”³⁴

If we separate the first set of quotations from all the other passages on the subject of teaching—only a few examples of which are given in the second set—and focus solely on them, we may end up using them as an excuse for not teaching. We fall into this trap when we mistakenly arrive at the conclusion that our primary task is to improve our own inner condition and become better and better people until we reach the point where we are so perfect that we do not need words to teach, because others will be attracted to us and will go out of their way to investigate the Faith by themselves. Yet we know that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who led a life of deeds more exemplary than any of ours, used the power of His utterance and, at every appropriate opportunity, spoke about the Faith.

What is important to realize is that the main theme of the first set of quotations is not how to teach the Faith. These passages reveal to us profound spiritual truths about the significance of our inner condition. They remind us that a praiseworthy character and upright conduct infuse our actions with power and warn us that our actions cannot contradict our words. If one is going to teach honesty, for example, one should sincerely strive to be honest.

In general, it is not wise to take a vast, profound subject, such as teaching, and draw conclusions about it on the basis of one or two quotations.

With these thoughts in mind, let us go back to the above passages and reflect on them as we fill in the blanks in the sentences below with the appropriate words.

1. Whoever arises to teach the Cause of his Lord, let him, before all else, _____

_____.

2. Unless one teaches one's own self, _____
_____ .
3. One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of the Cause, namely, _____

_____ .
4. Whoever arises, in this Day, to aid the Cause of God, and summons to his assistance _____ , the influence flowing from such an action will, most certainly, _____
_____ .
5. It is actions that _____ and are the cause of _____ .
6. If we are true Bahá'ís, _____ . Our actions should cry aloud to the world that _____ .
7. Our actions should _____ , should _____ , should _____ , and _____ .
8. Without action, _____ , neither can words _____ .
9. It is not through lip-service that those near to God have attained to holiness, but by _____ .
10. If our task is to be confined to good conduct and advice, _____ . We must _____ out, _____ the proofs, _____ clear arguments, _____ establishing the truth of the manifestation of the Sun of Reality.
11. We should not look at the degree of our capacity, but at the _____ .

12. We should turn our faces towards the Kingdom of God, _____
_____, speak, and _____
_____ .
13. We should not repose on our couches, but should _____
as soon as we recognize our Lord, the Creator, and hear of the things which have
befallen Him, _____ .
14. We are to unloose our tongues and _____
_____. This is better for us than _____
_____ .
15. If we always waited until we were fully qualified to do any particular task, _____

_____ .
16. The very act of striving to serve, however unworthy we may feel, _____

_____ .
17. Today the need is so great on the part of humanity to hear of the Divine Message, that
we must _____, wherever and however we can,
_____, but ever heedful
of _____
_____ in their darkest hour of travail.

SECTION 18

Let us end this unit on the spiritual qualities and attitudes that are to distinguish our efforts to teach by remembering the example set by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His travels to the West. The passage below written by the Guardian, describing how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá offered His Father’s message to those He encountered, will prepare us for the next unit in which we will explore the act of teaching itself.

“During these travels ‘Abdu’l-Bahá displayed a vitality, a courage, a single-mindedness, a consecration to the task He had set Himself to achieve that excited the wonder and admiration of those who had the privilege of observing at close hand His daily acts. Indifferent to the sights and curiosities which habitually invite the attention of travelers and which the members of His entourage often wished Him to visit; careless alike of His comfort and His health; expending every ounce of His energy day after day from dawn till late at night; consistently refusing any gifts or contributions towards the expenses of His travels; unflinching in His

solicitude for the sick, the sorrowful and the down-trodden; uncompromising in His championship of the underprivileged races and classes; bountiful as the rain in His generosity to the poor; contemptuous of the attacks launched against Him by vigilant and fanatical exponents of orthodoxy and sectarianism; marvelous in His frankness while demonstrating, from platform and pulpit, the prophetic Mission of Jesus Christ to the Jews, of the Divine origin of Islám in churches and synagogues, or the truth of Divine Revelation and the necessity of religion to materialists, atheists or agnostics; unequivocal in His glorification of Bahá'u'lláh at all times and within the sanctuaries of divers sects and denominations; adamant in His refusal, on several occasions, to curry the favor of people of title and wealth both in England and in the United States; and last but not least incomparable in the spontaneity, the genuineness and warmth of His sympathy and loving-kindness shown to friend and stranger alike, believer and unbeliever, rich and poor, high and low, whom He met, either intimately or casually, whether on board ship, or whilst pacing the streets, in parks or public squares, at receptions or banquets, in slums or mansions, in the gatherings of His followers or the assemblage of the learned, He, the incarnation of every Bahá'í virtue and the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal, continued for three crowded years to trumpet to a world sunk in materialism and already in the shadow of war, the healing, the God-given truths enshrined in His Father's Revelation."³⁵

After reading through the above passage one more time, write a number of sentences describing the qualities and attitudes that characterized the way 'Abdu'l-Bahá interacted with people and approached His conversations about the Faith—for example, "He displayed vitality, courage, and single-mindedness."

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

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31. *Ibid.*, no. 153.3, p. 249.
32. *Ibid.*, no. 153.4, p. 250.
33. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLIV, par. 2, p. 374.
34. From a letter dated 4 May 1942 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, published in *Teaching the Bahá'í Faith*, no. 104, p. 72.
35. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 1974, 2022 printing), pp. 446–48.



The Act of Teaching

Purpose

To strengthen the capacity
to recognize and nurture receptivity and
to develop the capacity to make a cogent presentation of the Faith,
suitable to the circumstances, whether as part of a personal teaching effort
or in the context of a collective campaign

SECTION 1

Having explored the spiritual nature of teaching in the first unit, and the qualities and attitudes essential to those who teach in the second, let us now turn our attention to the act of teaching itself. We generally carry out this sacred act in one of two contexts: in our own personal efforts as individuals and in collective endeavors at the grassroots. Of course, as part of a growing nucleus of friends in our neighborhoods and villages engaged in activities to build vibrant communities, we have come into contact with numerous individuals from a range of backgrounds—high school and college students, parents and relatives of children and junior youth participating in the educational programs of the institute, teachers, farmers, village chiefs and other local leaders, to mention a few—and have seen the interest some of them have shown in learning more about the Faith. Our participation in the institute process has, likewise, served to strengthen in us capacities needed to guide souls to the ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, most notably those that enable us to express our understanding of profound concepts and to explore spiritual reality in conversations of significance. Alongside these capacities, there is one other that is essential for us to develop, both as we pursue our own personal teaching efforts and as we participate in collective endeavors—namely, the capacity to recognize and nurture receptivity to Bahá'u'lláh's message. We will consider the importance of building this capacity in the coming sections. First, however, let us reflect on the following words of Bahá'u'lláh, which you may wish to memorize:

“Whensoever ye encounter a thirsty soul, give him to drink from the cup of everlasting life; and whensoever ye find a hearing ear, recite unto him the verses of God, the Powerful, the Mighty, the Compassionate. Unloose your tongues with kindly words and, should ye find the people inclined towards the Sanctuary of God, summon them to the truth . . .”¹

SECTION 2

An important concept those who wish to develop the capacity to recognize and nurture receptivity should understand is that teaching goes beyond the mere proclamation of the Faith.

Proclamation is a highly meritorious and necessary activity, undertaken with varying degrees of formality by individuals, communities, and their institutions. Such activity serves to familiarize people with the noble aims and ideals of the Cause and helps reinforce positive attitudes towards the Faith. Teaching includes an element of proclamation, but its main purpose is to assist souls in recognizing Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for today, in deepening their knowledge of His Revelation, and in becoming confirmed in their newly acquired faith. It is possible, of course, that through an act of proclamation, a particularly receptive soul may become enamored with the Faith and, after some investigation, decide to enroll. However, we should not expect, at least at this stage in human history, that proclamation alone will open the hearts of a great many people to Bahá'u'lláh—this, no matter how elaborately a project may be designed or how professionally an event may be executed. Teaching goes beyond giving out information and leaving people to themselves. It involves dialogue. It requires a conversation between confirmed souls and those who are willing to listen and investigate the truth of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. To explore this point further, let us consider an example.

One effective way to teach the Faith is through firesides. Firesides are warm and intimate meetings held in one's home to which those interested in the Faith are invited. They

provide excellent opportunities for the exchange of ideas and fruitful conversation which can lead people to the acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh. However, if care is not taken, a fireside can easily turn into a proclamation event.

Now, for the purpose of our example, suppose you are holding a weekly fireside in your home. You begin each meeting by welcoming your guests and asking one of the Bahá'ís present to recite a prayer. Then the invited speaker gives a talk for about thirty to forty-five minutes on a particular subject related to the Faith. At the end, you ask for questions, and usually there are one or two, which the speaker tries to answer. Refreshments are then served, and your guests depart. Would you agree that a meeting of this kind, which has its merits, would best be characterized as a proclamation event?

Suppose that, after a while, you decide to change the character of the meetings. So, for each fireside, you invite one or two talented friends to give a short musical performance following the talk, rightfully hoping that the introduction of music will heighten the spiritual atmosphere of the event. Do you think that by doing this you have changed the fireside from a proclamation to a teaching event?

What are some of the ways through which you could make the fireside more of a teaching activity?

SECTION 3

Now, with the distinction between teaching and proclamation in mind, let us think about how we are to identify receptive souls, those whose hearts are seeking after the truth. Of course, we need to pray continually, that God may lead us to those He has prepared to receive His message. But then, we must be able to recognize them when we meet them. This is not always easy. Even in the case of a collective effort to teach among a highly receptive population, not everyone will want to hear the message and embrace its truth; it is left to us to find those souls ready to respond to Bahá'u'lláh's call.

A receptive person may not necessarily appear to be searching for the Faith, or even be particularly interested in religion. In fact, it is important to realize that receptivity and religiosity are not the same. What is required is a condition in which a person is willing to learn about the teachings and explore their truth with a degree of openness. As we gain experience in teaching, and as our spiritual faculties become sharper and sharper, our ability to sense this condition increases.

Although it is impossible to lay down hard and fast rules about what makes a person receptive, we can identify some of the contributing factors. These often make people more receptive at certain points in their lives for a particular length of time. This is true of both individuals and whole populations. Discuss this subject with the other members of your group and write down some of the factors that you think can affect a person's receptivity, such as the following example:

Becoming aware of widespread injustice in the world

It is suggested that, before moving on to the next section, you reflect on this passage written by Shoghi Effendi. It speaks to the relationship between the turmoil of the present age and receptivity to the Cause.

“The opportunities which the turmoil of the present age presents, with all the sorrows which it evokes, the fears which it excites, the disillusionment which it produces, the perplexities which it creates, the indignation which it arouses, the revolt which it provokes, the grievances it engenders, the spirit of restless search which it awakens, must, in like manner, be exploited for the purpose of spreading far and wide the knowledge of the redemptive power of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and for enlisting fresh recruits in the ever-swelling army of His followers.”²

We can see all too clearly that the worldwide turmoil the Guardian described so many decades ago has only intensified with the passage of time as the old order has continued to crumble. Below are some of the conditions to which this turmoil gives rise. Discuss with your group the implications of each for our teaching efforts.

- The sorrows which it evokes
- The fears which it excites
- The disillusionment which it produces
- The perplexities which it creates
- The indignation which it arouses
- The revolt which it provokes
- The grievances it engenders
- The spirit of restless search which it awakens

SECTION 4

When we find people who are receptive, we enter into a conversation with them, sometimes relatively brief and sometimes ongoing, the purpose of which is to help them recognize Bahá'u'lláh's Station. But what should the substance of these conversations be? What should we say to those we teach?

The answer to this question is by no means simple. You already know, from the experience you have gained so far in sharing the teachings and principles of the Faith with your friends and with families in your community, that there is no formula that we can learn and repeat to everyone in every situation. The individuals with whom we have such intimate conversations are each in a particular spiritual state with varied needs and questions. As we strive to teach the Cause, we must reflect constantly on how its verities are to be explained to every seeker—what is to be said, and in what sequence thoughts should be expressed.

Yet, while we should be aware of individual differences, we should not make the mistake of overemphasizing them to the point that we lose sight of the underlying unity of human existence. The way people respond to the message of Bahá'u'lláh follows certain patterns, and these patterns become especially noticeable among those of the same culture and background. If you are a student, for example, and you set out to teach among your peers, you will gradually find one introductory presentation of the Faith that proves to be effective with most of your friends. The details of what you say will change as, on each occasion, different questions are asked and different interests are expressed. But the basic pattern will remain the same.

As you begin to think systematically about the way you will explain the Faith to others, you may find it useful to consider two aspects of the message you will convey. The first is information. The listener will, naturally, want to know a number of facts about the Faith. When did it begin? How large is the Bahá'í community? How widespread is it? Do Bahá'ís believe in an afterlife? What are the basic principles of the Bahá'í Faith? As you can imagine, the number of facts related to the Faith is overwhelmingly large. What information you will offer to a person on a given occasion will depend on the nature of your conversation. But there are some facts a seeker usually needs to learn during his or her initial stages of investigation, and it is quite instructive to think about these. In the space below, write down some of the information that you might want to convey. You should not be too exacting in making your list. You will be asked to review and modify it after we have discussed a few other points in the subsequent sections.

Now compare your list with those of your fellow participants in this course.

SECTION 6

Having considered the distinction between concepts and information, let us now focus our discussion on what you will say in the initial conversation you will have with someone who is interested in learning about the Faith but knows little about it. Remember that your aim is to help open the gates of the city of the seeker's heart to Bahá'u'lláh. You will, of course, have to provide the listener with certain information and assist him or her in understanding several fundamental concepts. Clearly, the central concept you want to get across is that Bahá'u'lláh is the Manifestation of God for today, for it is on the basis of this understanding that he or she will decide to join the Bahá'í community. Keeping this central concept in mind, then, you will have to say a number of things, all of which will help to make the concept clear and lead the seeker to the recognition of Bahá'u'lláh's Station.

In choosing the concepts and the information you will present, and the order in which you will do so, you will need to pay close attention to the following passage written by the Universal House of Justice:

“Those who declare themselves as Bahá'ís should become enchanted with the beauty of the Teachings, and touched by the love of Bahá'u'lláh. The declarants need not know all the proofs, history, laws, and principles of the Faith, but in the process of declaring themselves they must, in addition to catching the spark of faith, become basically informed about the Central Figures of the Faith, as well as the existence of laws they must follow and an administration they must obey.”³

Now, go back to the lists of concepts and information you prepared in the previous sections. On the basis of the above words of the Universal House of Justice, decide what you would add to your list of information and what you would discard. Make a new list, placing the items in the order you would present them in an introduction to the Faith. Do the same with your list of concepts.

Information: _____

you may wish to write down below the background of some of the people you are most likely to teach.

SECTION 8

Here is how Anna begins her presentation of the Faith to Emilia:

You already know that the Bahá'í Faith is a world religion, whose teachings center on the unity of humanity. Bahá'ís are the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, Who they believe is the Promised One of all ages. The traditions of almost every people include the promise of a future when peace and harmony will be established on earth and humankind will live in prosperity. We believe that the promised hour has come and that Bahá'u'lláh is the great Personage Whose teachings will enable humanity to build a new world. In one of His Writings, Bahá'u'lláh says:

“That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith.”⁴

If it is all right with you, I will first say a few words about how the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith describe God and our relationship with Him. Bahá'u'lláh teaches us that God is unknowable in His Essence. This means that whatever image we have of God in our mind—for example, thinking of Him as a man—is the fruit of our own imagination. In general, that which has been created cannot understand its creator. For instance, a table cannot understand the nature of the carpenter who made it. The carpenter's existence is totally incomprehensible to the objects he makes.

God is the Creator of all things. Humanity was created, we are told by Bahá'u'lláh, out of God's love. He says:

“O Son of Man! I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life.”⁵

So although God's existence is far beyond our understanding, His love touches our lives and our beings ceaselessly. The way this love flows to us is through His eternal Covenant. According to this eternal Covenant, God never leaves us alone and without

guidance. In every age, as humanity moves away from Him and forgets His teachings, a Manifestation of God appears and makes His Will and Purpose known to us.

The word “manifest” means to reveal, to bring forth something that was not known before. The Manifestations of God are those special Beings Who reveal to humanity the Word and the Will of God; thus when we listen to Them, we are responding to the Call of God.

There is an example from the physical world that helps us to understand the concept of “Manifestation” as taught by Bahá’u’lláh. In this world, the sun is the source of all warmth and light, without which life would not exist on the planet. Yet the sun itself does not descend to earth, and if we tried to approach it, we would be totally consumed.

But suppose we take a well-polished mirror and point it towards the sun. In it we will see the image of the sun, and the more perfectly polished the mirror, the more perfect the image will be. The Manifestations of God are like perfect Mirrors that reflect the Light of God in all its splendor. And all these Mirrors reflect the same Light. While God is beyond our reach, these perfect Beings come to us from time to time, live among us, give us guidance, and fill us with the energy we need to progress, materially and spiritually.

You are fortunate to have been raised according to the teachings sent by God to humanity some two thousand years ago through His Manifestation, Christ, Whose Station is that of the Son of God. Now you can receive the teachings of a new Manifestation, Bahá’u’lláh, Whose title means the “Glory of God”. Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings, then, are in perfect harmony with the teachings of Christ, but they address the condition of humanity today. If you think for a moment about the plight of humanity, I am sure you will agree that the time is right for another Manifestation of God to have appeared. Let me recite for you a passage from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh that speaks about the Day in which we live:

“This is the Day in which God’s most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things. It is incumbent upon all the peoples of the world to reconcile their differences, and, with perfect unity and peace, abide beneath the shadow of the Tree of His care and loving-kindness.”⁶

Before going on, perhaps I should stop here so that we can discuss any questions you have. What do you think about what I have shared with you?

SECTION 9

Now let us examine what Anna has said thus far. Five aspects of her presentation are analyzed in the exercises below. Mark the statements with which you agree. These exercises do not need lengthy discussion. You should read each statement, examine it, and decide whether or not you agree with it. What is important to remember is that teaching the Faith should be approached with an attitude of learning.

1. Anna begins by stating that the Bahá'í Faith is a world religion, whose teachings center on the unity of humanity. She then immediately introduces Bahá'u'lláh as the Promised One of all ages.

_____ Immediately introducing Bahá'u'lláh as the Promised One is an excellent way of presenting the Faith to people of all religions—Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and others—since the concept of a Promised One exists in every religious tradition in some form or another.

_____ Most people today are not really interested in religion, even if they belong to one, so it is best not to introduce the Figure of Bahá'u'lláh immediately. It is more effective to talk first about Bahá'í beliefs, explaining in some detail various principles such as the equality of men and women, the elimination of all forms of prejudice, and universal peace.

_____ If you are teaching someone who has difficulty believing in God, you could still introduce the Figure of Bahá'u'lláh immediately. In that case, however, you would initially refer to Him as one of those universal Educators Who come to humanity from time to time. Later, you would introduce the concept of “Manifestation of God”.

_____ The presentation Anna gives would be more effective if, having introduced Bahá'u'lláh as the Promised One of all ages, she went on to cite a number of prophecies to prove to Emilia that He is the fulfillment of each one.

_____ In the vast majority of cases, using prophecies to convince people of the validity of Bahá'u'lláh's Station leads to difficulty. It tends to make people argumentative, rather than putting them in a mood of thoughtful reflection. Anna conveys the important idea that Bahá'u'lláh is the Promised One of all ages but is justified in not going into details.

2. After speaking with Emilia about the person of Bahá'u'lláh, Anna briefly describes the concept of God and humanity's relationship with Him. Particularly noteworthy is the way she introduces these ideas. She does not start by saying “Bahá'is believe . . .”, or much less “I believe . . .” She makes it clear that she is drawing from the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh so that the focus remains on Him.

_____ In today's world, to talk about God and humanity's relationship with Him too early in a conversation about the Faith will turn people off. Most people are more interested in social issues than in spiritual ones. It would be better for Anna not to bring up the subject.

_____ To introduce the idea that God, as explained in the Bahá'í teachings, is an unknowable Essence is highly beneficial for seekers from every religious background and even for those who have difficulty believing in God. It immediately sets the Faith apart from all kinds of superstitious and irrational beliefs. At the same time, it addresses the longing of the seeker's soul to recognize the Source of its being.

3. Anna is careful to use the word “manifestation” each time she refers to Bahá’u’lláh and Christ. The image of the mirror helps her to explain this concept to Emilia.

_____ The word “manifestation” is too difficult. Anna should use the word “prophet” since it is both simpler and easier to understand.

_____ A person from a Catholic background would consider it disrespectful to refer to Christ as a Prophet. By the same token, if Anna were to refer to Bahá’u’lláh as a “Prophet”, she would give Emilia the impression that His Station is beneath that of Christ.

_____ If one is teaching a Muslim, the word “messenger” could be used effectively, since Muslims refer to Muḥammad as the Messenger of God, but the concept of the “Manifestation of God” should also be explained.

_____ It is correct for Anna to avoid stating explicitly that Bahá’u’lláh is the Return of Christ since the idea of “return” is so confused in the minds of people that there is no way to know what it would mean for Emilia. By using the analogy of the mirror, Anna conveys the concept without confusing the issue.

_____ It is wise for Anna not to dwell on the concept of “Christ as the Son of God”. She simply mentions it in passing and then states that Bahá’u’lláh is the Glory of God. By doing so, Anna accepts a certain truth without taking the conversation off course.

_____ If you were teaching a person from a Hindu background, you would still use the image of the mirror to describe the concept of “Manifestation”. But instead of referring to Christ, you would make mention of Lord Krishna’s statement: “Whenever there is a decline in righteousness, O Bharat, and the rise of irreligion, it is then that I send forth My spirit. For the salvation of the good, the destruction of the wicked, and for firmly establishing true religion, I manifest myself from age to age.”

_____ By introducing God as an unknowable Essence, Anna acknowledges that the door to the knowledge of God is closed to us. Yet God, out of His mercy, sends us His Manifestations Who, as perfect Mirrors, reflect all of His attributes and reveal to us His Purpose. This explanation of the concept of “Manifestations of God” is suitable for everyone, including those who have difficulty believing in God, a difficulty that often stems from the way God is commonly portrayed.

4. While she is talking to Emilia, Anna quotes directly from Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings a few times.

_____ The words in the quotations are too difficult. It would be better for Anna to avoid quoting directly from the Writings, especially so early in her presentation, and to give the ideas in her own words. Besides, she runs the risk of sounding like a preacher.

_____ Anna weaves the quotations into her presentation in a natural way, very much in keeping with Bahá'u'lláh's own counsel. Even if her friend Emilia does not understand the quotations fully, the words will have an effect on her heart.

5. Anna also uses two analogies in discussing difficult concepts with Emilia. As mentioned above, the analogy of the sun and the mirror helps Anna to explain the phrase "Manifestation of God". The other analogy she uses is of the carpenter and the table to illustrate the concept that God is beyond human understanding.

_____ If you use analogies when explaining the Faith to people, they will think that you are talking down to them. People do not want to be treated like children.

_____ Using analogies is an effective way to teach all people—young or old, unschooled or formally educated. In fact, without analogies, it would be very difficult to understand some of the very profound truths contained in the teachings of the Faith.

SECTION 10

Although Anna pauses to give her friend a chance to express her feelings and ask questions, at this early stage of the conversation, Emilia says little. She merely tells Anna that she likes what she has heard so far. She is especially impressed by the clear reasoning with which the Bahá'í Faith explains things; it resolves so much of what confuses people about religion today. Anna then decides to continue:

Now let me share with you some ideas related to the central teaching of the Bahá'í Faith, that humanity is one. Bahá'u'lláh tells us that we are the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch. Although we differ from one another physically, although we have different talents and capacities, we all spring from the same root; we all belong to the same human family.

Humanity can be likened to a vast garden in which grow side by side flowers of every form, color, and perfume. The charm and beauty of the garden lie in this diversity. We should not allow the differences that exist among us—in our physical characteristics, our temperaments, our backgrounds, our thoughts and views—to give rise to conflict and strife. We should see the members of the human race as beautiful flowers growing in the garden of humanity and rejoice in belonging to this garden.

Although the oneness of humankind is an undeniable truth, the peoples of the earth are so far from it that unifying them is no easy task. If you choose to join the Bahá'í Faith—and it would bring me so much happiness if you were to do so—you will have accepted Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for today and will strive to apply His teachings not only in your own life but in efforts to work alongside the rest of us in building vibrant and unified communities. We are all trying to align our thoughts and actions with our belief in the oneness of humankind. We are told that, when a thought of war enters our minds, we should immediately replace it with a thought of peace. When a feeling of hate begins to take shape in our hearts, we should immediately replace it with a feeling of love. We should do everything possible to

- _____ It is foolish to invite someone to join the Bahá'í community when he or she still knows little about the Faith. Emilia probably resents the fact that her friend is trying to convert her.

- _____ By expressing the hope that Emilia will become a Bahá'í, Anna oversteps the bounds of moderation and is proselytizing.

- _____ By expressing the hope that her friend will become a Bahá'í, Anna makes it clear, early on, that Emilia is welcome to join the Bahá'í community at any time. But she does this in such a way that Emilia does not feel unduly pressured.

- _____ There is no reason for Anna to express the hope that Emilia will enter the Faith. It is sufficient for Anna to help her friend become more and more involved in undertaking activities in service to the community, since that is what really matters.

- _____ If we want people to join the Bahá'í community, we should not say anything about what they will have to do until after they have drawn close to the Faith. Better yet, we should wait until after they have declared.

- _____ Sadly, most people are only interested in what will benefit them. They are not concerned about what they can do to help the world around them. Rather than talking to Emilia about how she will participate in efforts to build vibrant and unified communities, Anna should talk to her about the love and fellowship one feels when one enters the Faith.

- _____ Anna strikes the right balance in conveying to her friend a sense of what it will mean, in practical terms, for her to become a Bahá'í. She makes it sound challenging, but not overwhelming. The quotation Anna chooses is especially effective, for Emilia understands that she will be strengthened in her efforts to work for the unity and progress of her village. When Emilia becomes a member of the Bahá'í community, she will, in all probability, not be a passive observer, but an active worker for the Cause.

SECTION 12

Like most people today, Emilia is quite attracted to the Bahá'í teachings on unity. Enthused by what she has heard about the efforts of Bahá'ís in so many places to build unified communities, she enters into a brief but lively conversation with Anna about the harm caused by prejudices of every kind. Anna then resumes her presentation:

Bahá'u'lláh was born in 1817 in Tīhrán, the capital of Iran. From His early childhood, He showed signs of greatness. Though He received some instruction at home, He was not in need of schooling, for He was endowed by God with innate knowledge. Bahá'u'lláh came from a noble family and, when He was a young man, was offered a high position in the court of the king, but He refused it. He wished to dedicate His time to helping the oppressed, the sick and the poor and to championing the cause of justice.

There are two aspects of Bahá'u'lláh's life which I would like to mention in particular. One is the suffering He endured. The other is the tremendous influence He had on the hearts and minds of people. These actually characterize the lives of all the Manifestations of God.

Bahá'u'lláh's sufferings began the moment He arose to proclaim the Cause of God. His life was one of exile, imprisonment, and persecution. He was put in chains in a dark and dismal dungeon in Tīhrán. He was exiled four times from land to land. In one of His Tablets revealed during this long banishment, He wrote:

“Remember My days during thy days, and My distress and banishment in this remote prison. And be thou so steadfast in My love that thy heart shall not waver, even if the swords of the enemies rain blows upon thee and all the heavens and the earth arise against thee.”⁸

Bahá'u'lláh was eventually sent to the prison-city of 'Akká in the Ottoman Empire. So intense were His sufferings there that He has referred to 'Akká as the “Most Great Prison”. I always carry in my bag a small notebook in which I write passages from the Bahá'í writings that have particularly touched my heart. Let me read for you what Bahá'u'lláh has said about His sufferings:

“The Ancient Beauty hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner within this most mighty Stronghold that the whole world may attain unto true liberty. He hath drained to its dregs the cup of sorrow, that all the peoples of the earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness. This is of the mercy of your Lord, the Compassionate, the Most Merciful. We have accepted to be abased, O believers in the Unity of God, that ye may be exalted, and have suffered manifold afflictions, that ye might prosper and flourish. He Who hath come to build anew the whole world, behold, how they that have joined partners with God have forced Him to dwell within the most desolate of cities!”⁹

Every effort was made by two powerful courts—those of the king of Iran and the Ottoman Emperor—to oppose Bahá'u'lláh and to halt the spread of His teachings. But the Light of Truth cannot be so easily extinguished. The very water that is poured on this fire to put out its flame turns into oil, and the fire burns with more intensity. Nothing could be done to stop Bahá'u'lláh's growing influence. The farther the authorities banished Him, the greater the number of people who were attracted to His teachings and recognized His power and majesty. In spite of constant persecution, Bahá'u'lláh continued to reveal the Word of God for more than forty years and released such tremendous spiritual energy that it will ultimately regenerate the whole world.

Bahá'u'lláh passed away in 1892. His Shrine, which we consider the Holiest Spot on earth, is located near the city of 'Akká. Here are some pictures of the entrance to the Shrine and the gardens surrounding it. You don't know how much I would like to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I hope, someday, you will be able to do so as well.

SECTION 13

The following exercises explore various aspects of Anna's account of the life of Bahá'u'lláh:

1. In telling the story of the life of Bahá'u'lláh, Anna chooses two main concepts that she wants to get across. In the process, she presents several facts about His life, but clearly it is not her intention to convey a great deal of information. She knows that if, as she hopes, Emilia becomes a Bahá'í, she will study the story of Bahá'u'lláh's life in more detail. What are the two concepts that she is trying to get across?

a. _____

b. _____

2. Why do you think she chooses these two concepts? _____

3. Do you agree with her that these concepts are the two most essential for Emilia to understand at this stage? If not, do you have other suggestions?

4. Make a list of the items of information that Anna gives in her account of Bahá'u'lláh's life.

5. Is there any other information that you think might be necessary to present at this stage?

6. Besides trying to convey two main concepts and some necessary information, Anna is clearly hoping to communicate certain feelings to Emilia. What are these? Does she succeed?

7. Now that you have thought about Anna's presentation of Bahá'u'lláh's life, do you think it would have to be modified if you were speaking to someone with a different religious background or none at all? If so, can you give some examples of the changes you would make?

Station even as a child, and had shared in the sufferings of His Father. He was a most precious gift given to humanity, the perfect Exemplar of all Bahá'í teachings.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá lived on this earth for 77 years. He was born on the same night the Báb declared His Mission in 1844 and passed away in November 1921. His life was filled with affliction, but to everyone who entered His presence He brought the greatest joy and happiness. After the passing of His Father, the responsibility for the Bahá'í community fell on His shoulders, and He labored day and night to spread the Faith throughout the East and the West. He wrote thousands of Tablets to individuals and groups everywhere and clarified the teachings of His Father. His interpretations are now an essential part of the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith.

By focusing on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, the Bahá'ís of the world remain united in their efforts to live a Bahá'í life and to contribute to the transformation of society. We remember that, as part of our promise to Bahá'u'lláh, we are to love one another and, in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, we see the perfect manifestation of love. We remember that we must uphold justice, that we must be generous, that we must overlook the faults of others, and from the example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá we learn justice, generosity and forgiveness. More than anything else, by keeping our focus on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, we are always aware of our covenant with Bahá'u'lláh that we will not allow the unity of His followers to be broken and that, united as a worldwide community, we will labor until the oneness of humankind has been firmly established.

In His Will and Testament, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá named His grandson Shoghi Effendi the Guardian of the Faith, who, after His passing, became the authorized interpreter of the words of Bahá'u'lláh. For thirty-six years, he continued the work of his Grandfather, clarifying the teachings of the Manifestation and firmly establishing His Faith in all parts of the planet. Five and a half years after his passing, the Bahá'ís of the world elected the Universal House of Justice, as envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh and clearly described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian. The Universal House of Justice is the supreme institution of the Faith to which all the Bahá'ís of the world now turn.

SECTION 17

You probably noted that this part of Anna's presentation is weighty because she explains to Emilia in a few words some extremely profound concepts. The exercise below will help you examine her remarks in more detail.

1. Up to this point, Anna has, in keeping with the statement of the Universal House of Justice quoted in Section 6, spoken to Emilia about the Station of the Forerunner of the Faith, the Báb, and its Author, Bahá'u'lláh. She now wants to help Emilia recognize the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. To do this, Anna also introduces the concept of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. She presents a number of facts in order to assist Emilia in gaining some understanding of these two interrelated concepts.

Below is a list of some of these facts. Each statement is intended to contribute to Emilia's understanding of one or the other of these two concepts, or both. Put a “1” in front of those that you feel largely reinforce the concept of the station of

‘Abdu’l-Bahá and a “2” in front of those that are more directed towards the concept of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh. If you feel the statement contributes equally to the understanding of both concepts, put a “1” and a “2” next to it.

- ___ All other religions have been divided into numerous sects because of the lack of an explicitly authorized interpreter.
- ___ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the Center of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant.
- ___ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the Interpreter of Bahá’u’lláh’s words.
- ___ The establishment of the Universal House of Justice was envisioned by Bahá’u’lláh.
- ___ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá named His grandson the Guardian of the Faith in His Will and Testament.
- ___ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote thousands of Tablets clarifying the teachings of the Faith.
- ___ Bahá’u’lláh protected His Faith from division by endowing it with the power of the Covenant.
- ___ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the perfect Exemplar of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings.
- ___ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá brought joy and happiness to everyone who entered His presence.
- ___ Bahá’u’lláh stated in the clearest terms, in writing, that, after His passing, all Bahá’ís should turn to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.
- ___ The desire for leadership can be the cause of disunity in a religion.
- ___ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá labored day and night to spread the Faith throughout the East and the West.
- ___ The Bahá’ís of the world elected the Universal House of Justice soon after the passing of the Guardian.
- ___ The lack of an authorized interpreter in a religion opens the door to conflict and dissension.

SECTION 18

During her explanation of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh and the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Anna notices that Emilia is somewhat overwhelmed. She quickly weighs in her mind the two choices before her: she can take time and discuss the subject in much more depth or continue with her presentation and make sure that, in another conversation soon, they study the theme of the Covenant again. She decides on the second course of action and continues thus:

Many of the ideas I have explained on this last subject require a great deal of thought. If you agree, some other time we can discuss this theme in more depth. For that discussion, I will bring a few passages from Bahá'u'lláh's Book of the Covenant as well as the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá so we can read them together. But let me go on and present to you a few other ideas that are important to know about the Bahá'í Faith right from the beginning.

Emilia agrees and graciously states that she actually liked the explanation, that she has gotten a glimpse of the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, and that she looks forward to learning more about the subject soon. Anna, happy and relaxed, goes on:

Important to every religion are the laws that the Manifestation brings to humanity in order to guide it on the right path. Some of these laws and commandments are eternal, others change as humanity progresses and evolves. In the Faith we are taught that we should not think of Bahá'í laws as a set of rules, a series of dos and don'ts. Bahá'u'lláh tells us that His laws are "the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures." Nor should we obey these laws out of fear of punishment, for He clearly has stated in His Most Holy Book: "Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty."

These ideas will become clearer if I give you a few examples of Bahá'í laws. In the physical world, human beings have to eat every day. This is a requirement of the human body; if we don't, we will get sick and quickly die. We can say, then, that eating daily is a law of physical existence which has to be obeyed. In the same way, one of the commandments of Bahá'u'lláh is that we should pray every day. Like our body, our soul needs constant nourishment, and prayer provides the nourishment for our spiritual growth. There are many beautiful prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, by the Báb, and by 'Abdu'l-Bahá which we can say when we are alone or recite in meetings. Some prayers are obligatory and, together with a few other specific ones, have special potency. One of the daily obligatory prayers says:

"I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth.

"There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting."¹²

It is a short and beautiful prayer and, having seen how easy it is for you to memorize verses, I am sure you will know it by heart after repeating it a few times.

In another commandment, Bahá'u'lláh prohibits backbiting and calumny. This is important because, if you think about it, one of the greatest enemies of unity is backbiting. And unfortunately, it has become an established practice among most of humanity to talk about other people's faults in their absence. Everybody seems to be concerned with everybody else's shortcomings, which are made bigger and bigger as they are constantly mentioned. 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us to do the opposite. We should overlook the shortcomings of others and see with the eye of forgiveness. We should love people for the sake of God. There are imperfections in every human being, 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us, and we will always become unhappy if we look towards the people themselves. But if we look towards God, we will love them and be kind to them.

Emilia, who is listening with special interest to Anna's last comments, remembers some recent incidents at school in which backbiting resulted in many people being hurt. The two friends talk for some time about how gossip can destroy a friendship, and then Anna searches in her notebook and reads the following:

“O Companion of My Throne! Hear no evil, and see no evil, abase not thyself, neither sigh and weep. Speak no evil, that thou mayest not hear it spoken unto thee, and magnify not the faults of others that thine own faults may not appear great; and wish not the abasement of anyone, that thine own abasement be not exposed. Live then the days of thy life, that are less than a fleeting moment, with thy mind stainless, thy heart unsullied, thy thoughts pure, and thy nature sanctified, so that, free and content, thou mayest put away this mortal frame, and repair unto the mystic paradise and abide in the eternal kingdom forevermore.”¹³

She then continues:

Bahá'u'lláh also prohibits the drinking of alcohol and, of course, substance abuse. Drinking alcohol is really one of the greatest social ills that exists today in the world. It is one of the most common causes of violence and the ruin of healthy family life. To tell you the truth, I have never understood why people would take something that interferes with their minds and makes them lose their ability to think clearly. Drinking makes people capable of acting in shameful ways, when we have actually been created noble. I know a beautiful quote from Bahá'u'lláh's Writings about nobility:

“O Son of Spirit! I created thee rich, why dost thou bring thyself down to poverty? Noble I made thee, wherewith dost thou abase thyself? Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being, why seekest thou enlightenment from anyone beside Me? Out of the clay of love I molded thee, how dost thou busy thyself with another? Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.”¹⁴

Another commandment of Bahá'u'lláh, one which particularly speaks to my heart, is about the obligation of parents and society to educate children. I have in my notebook here a short passage from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Writings that explains this well:

“Therefore, the beloved of the Lord and the handmaidens of the Merciful should, with all their heart and soul, educate children and instruct them in the school of virtue and perfection. Nor should they tolerate in this regard the least neglect or shortcoming. . . .

“The first duty of the loved ones of God and the handmaidens of the Merciful is to strive by every possible means to educate all children, girls and boys alike. For the latter are even as the former; there is no difference whatsoever between them. The ignorance of either is blameworthy; the unawareness of either is reprehensible. ‘Are they equal, those who know and those who do not know?’”¹⁵

This commandment is so important that the Bahá'í community is offering classes for the spiritual education of young children in villages throughout the area. I am taking a course given by the Bahá'í training institute to help me build my capacity to teach one of these classes, the one you have assisted me with a couple of times now. The

courses of the institute open up for everyone who takes them a path of service to our community, and if you are interested, I can tell you about them sometime.

SECTION 19

To help you think about the ideas Anna has presented, complete the exercises below.

1. In this part of her presentation, Anna is trying to follow the guidance of the Universal House of Justice to inform the seeker of the existence of laws in the Faith that must be followed. With which of the statements below do you agree?

_____ At this stage, it would be better for Anna not to bring up the question of laws at all. In today's society, people value their own personal freedom and the idea of "religious laws" turns them off.

_____ Anna should mention most, if not all, of the Bahá'í laws to Emilia, for example, the laws of inheritance, marriage, burial, and Ḥuqúqu'lláh. Otherwise Emilia will not be fully informed of what it means to be a Bahá'í.

_____ What is most important is for Emilia to understand the fact that laws exist in the Bahá'í Faith, to have some idea of the nature of these laws, and to be aware that, as a Bahá'í, she will have to obey them. At this stage, she does not need to know what all the laws are.

_____ For Anna's purposes, it would be sufficient to give an example of one law, that is, the law of prayer. She overdoes it by presenting four.

_____ Anna's explanation of the law of prayer is very effective. By first presenting a law governing our physical existence, Anna is able to explain the significance of such laws as prayer that govern our spiritual existence. With this approach, she does not reduce the laws of God, as is so commonly done, to a set of rules.

_____ Talking to a seeker about Bahá'u'lláh's prohibition of the use of alcohol is not a good idea, especially with a young person who is trying to establish her independence and show that she is becoming an adult. A young person will naturally want to try drinking alcohol, and any mention of a law against it will only push him or her away from the Faith.

_____ The way Anna presents Bahá'u'lláh's prohibition of the use of alcohol is appropriate. By talking about the effects of alcohol on one's clarity of mind, she shows the wisdom of the law. Moreover, by introducing the subject of nobility, she places the law in a higher, spiritual context.

_____ Anna makes a mistake by not talking much more firmly about obedience to Bahá'u'lláh's laws. In fact, she should bring up the question of administrative sanctions so that Emilia knows what the consequences of disobedience are.

SECTION 20

Anna's first conversation with Emilia about the Faith is coming to a close. Emilia has shown great interest in the Bahá'í teachings presented by Anna, and this has encouraged her to explain certain ideas in relative detail. Now she must conclude her remarks:

I am sure you are aware that I am inviting you to join a religion and not just accept a collection of nice ideals. In fact, the Bahá'í Faith is a very organized religion whose members are systematically working to apply the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to their own lives and to the life of society. It will be helpful for you to think of this work as the building of a world civilization. The Universal House of Justice tells us that there are three participants in this effort, each with a very important role.

The first participant is the individual. It is the duty of the individual to remain firm in the Covenant, to strive daily to bring his or her life in line with Bahá'í teachings, and to serve humanity, always conscious of the fact that life does not end with death and that one's relationship with God is eternal. After death, our souls continue to progress towards God for all eternity. Our lives here are very much like the life of a child in the womb of the mother. For some nine months the child develops faculties—eyes, ears, hands, and so on—to be used later in this world. In the same way, we are to develop here the spiritual faculties that we will need to progress in the other worlds of God. Of course, we do not achieve our purpose by just thinking about it. Rather, it is in the field of service, as we work for the betterment of society, that we grow spiritually and intellectually.

The second participant is the community. Human beings were not created to exist alone. We live in communities and must work together to raise up a new civilization. The community closest to us is the local one, which consists of the Bahá'ís of our village or town. But no matter where we reside, everyone is invited to join our efforts to build capacity for service and contribute to the progress of our neighborhoods and villages. It is in the local community that, with friends and neighbors working alongside us, we learn to cooperate with one another, advance together and become united. In addition to being members of the local community, we are also members of the national community and then the worldwide Bahá'í community, which is constantly expanding and attracting people from every religious background, nationality, ethnicity, race, and tribe.

The institutions of the Faith, the Universal House of Justice tells us, represent the third participant in the building of a new civilization. This is a subject about which we will have to talk some more when we discuss the Covenant. For now, let me just mention that included in the commandments of Bahá'u'lláh are many related to the way society should be organized. In the past, the Manifestations of God have not said much about how Their followers should organize themselves, and people have had to discover how to do this on their own. But, in the case of the Bahá'í Faith, we have the bounty of a divinely conceived Administrative Order, which means that Bahá'u'lláh Himself has told us what institutions we must create, how they should function, and how humanity should govern itself.

We have already spoken about the supreme institution, which is the Universal House of Justice. In each country, Bahá'ís elect once a year the National Spiritual Assembly,

and, in each locality, the Local Spiritual Assembly. This is the institution that you will get to know the soonest. There are no priests or clergy in the Bahá'í Faith, and it is the Local Spiritual Assembly that guides the affairs of the community and watches over the well-being of its individual members. A Local Spiritual Assembly consists of nine members elected in a prayerful atmosphere by secret ballot by all the adults in the community. Spiritual Assemblies are extremely important to Bahá'ís. Through them we learn how human affairs are to be administered and how a new order can be established in society, an order which is to be known as the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

We can imagine that the conversation between Anna and Emilia comes to a close here. Emilia is clearly eager to continue the discussion another day. Anna takes a small prayer book out of her bag and gives it to Emilia as a gift, suggesting they say a prayer together before they go their separate ways. Emilia opens the book and reads:

“Create in me a pure heart, O my God, and renew a tranquil conscience within me, O my Hope! Through the spirit of power confirm Thou me in Thy Cause, O my Best-Beloved, and by the light of Thy glory reveal unto me Thy path, O Thou the Goal of my desire! Through the power of Thy transcendent might lift me up unto the heaven of Thy holiness, O Source of my being, and by the breezes of Thine eternity gladden me, O Thou Who art my God! Let Thine everlasting melodies breathe tranquility on me, O my Companion, and let the riches of Thine ancient countenance deliver me from all except Thee, O my Master, and let the tidings of the revelation of Thine incorruptible Essence bring me joy, O Thou Who art the most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the hidden!”¹⁶

Although the account we have related of Anna and Emilia is not a real one, it is based on the experience of thousands of Bahá'ís around the world. As an end to the story, then, we can confidently say that, in a few days and after one or two more conversations, Emilia will join the Bahá'í community and embark, with Anna's help, on a path of service to the Cause.

SECTION 21

Let us examine Anna's overall presentation through the following two exercises:

1. The ideas Anna shares with her friend, especially those in her concluding remarks, will influence significantly how Emilia perceives her responsibilities as an individual member of the community, her participation in its affairs, and her future relationship with the institutions of the Faith.

What image of the individual is Anna trying to convey? What are some of the characteristics of this individual?

What image of the Bahá'í community is Anna trying to convey? What are some of its characteristics?

What image of the institutions of the Faith is Anna trying to convey? What are some of their characteristics?

2. All throughout, Anna is clearly trying to open the door for Emilia to join the Bahá'í community. Which of the following would you consider the main thrust of her appeal?

_____ That Bahá'ís are nice people and the Bahá'í community is united; therefore I hope you will join us.

_____ That the Bahá'í Faith contains the most progressive spiritual and social principles and, since you accept them, you are a Bahá'í.

_____ That with the short introduction I have given you, you now need to make a thorough study of the Bahá'í Faith and then decide whether or not to become a Bahá'í.

_____ That on the basis of what I have said, and some further explanation in response to any questions you may have, you will, I hope, come to recognize Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for today and feel the desire to become one of His devoted followers.

SECTION 22

The presentation we have examined in these pages, which follows in broad terms the statement of the Universal House of Justice in Section 6, lays out a cogent set of ideas to explain the essential features of the Bahá'í Faith to someone who knows little about it but who is interested in learning more. We have carried out this exploration in the context of a personal teaching effort, in a conversation between two friends. Naturally, the situations in which we find ourselves vary, and you will need to be prepared in all of your teaching endeavors to align your presentation to the particular circumstances—to the degree of receptivity of those with whom you come into contact, to the extent of their knowledge of the Faith and their association with the Bahá'í community, and to their specific background. So, while you are encouraged to learn well the presentation of ideas that Anna shares with Emilia, more important still is for you to appreciate the logic underlying it. Only in this way will you be able to draw on it with ease, resist the urge to convert it into a formula, and adjust it in keeping with circumstances.

It might be useful for you to pause here and reflect for a moment on what is at stake. Since entering the path of service opened up by these courses, you have steadily built the capacities needed to converse with others about the Bahá'í teachings and about their Author. You are now being called upon to go further and develop the capacity to make a cogent presentation of the Faith that responds to the receptivity and interest of those you know or meet under a diversity of circumstances. The exercises provided alongside the presentation in this book were intended to help you think about the nature of this capacity and what it will require of you. You may wish to write a few of your initial thoughts below.

SECTION 23

As you surely noted above, the capacity under consideration is developed in the field of action and enhanced over time as one teaches the Faith to more and more people. Like Anna in our story, we all have friends and relatives, coworkers and peers, who are, each in their own way, searching after the truth, and some will be open to investigating the message of Bahá'u'lláh in a conversation that presents His teachings in a cogent and direct manner. We may engage in a similar conversation with those we have just met as part of a collective campaign within a receptive population in our village or neighborhood. In the case of the latter, we should keep in mind the following guidance from the Universal House of Justice:

“Whether the first contact with such newly found friends elicits an invitation for them to enroll in the Bahá’í community or to participate in one of its activities is not an overwhelming concern. More important is that every soul feel welcome to join the community in contributing to the betterment of society, commencing a path of service to humanity on which, at the outset or further along, formal enrollment can occur.”¹⁷

What we should remember, then, is that among those working alongside us in our community-building efforts, or supporting them in various ways, are those who, at first motivated by a desire to serve humanity, are now ready to drink more deeply of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. In this connection, the House of Justice writes:

“Of course, the community welcomes any degree of association that a person would like to maintain, great or small. Yet to recognize Bahá’u’lláh as a Manifestation of God and accept the privileges and responsibilities that are uniquely associated with membership in the Bahá’í community is a singular moment in a person’s spiritual development, quite distinct from regular involvement in Bahá’í activities or voicing support for Bahá’í principles. Experience has shown that the environment created by community-building endeavors in a locality enables anyone who wishes to take this step to do so with relative ease. Wherever these endeavors are under way, it is important for the friends to remain mindful that the doors of the Faith are wide open and to give encouragement to those who stand at the threshold.”¹⁸

So, whether in our personal teaching efforts or in collective undertakings, we should be ready to have the kind of open conversation envisioned above, one that will serve to encourage those standing at its threshold to enter the stronghold of the Cause and draw strength from the unifying power of the Covenant.

SECTION 24

We have said that there are generally two contexts in which we engage in the act of teaching: in our own personal efforts and in collective campaigns. We will examine these two contexts, each in turn, over the next several sections. Let us begin by thinking about our personal teaching efforts. You are already familiar with the quotation below from your study of earlier courses but are now asked to reflect on its meaning more closely, for from it we can glean spiritual principles that form the basis of every personal teaching plan.

“O wayfarer in the path of God! Take thou thy portion of the ocean of His grace, and deprive not thyself of the things that lie hidden in its depths. Be thou of them that have partaken of its treasures. A dewdrop out of this ocean would, if shed upon all that are in the heavens and on the earth, suffice to enrich them with the bounty of God, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. With the hands of renunciation draw forth from its life-giving waters, and sprinkle therewith all created things, that they may be cleansed from all man-made limitations and may approach the mighty seat of God, this hallowed and resplendent Spot.

“Be not grieved if thou performest it thyself alone. Let God be all-sufficient for thee. Commune intimately with His Spirit, and be thou of the thankful. Proclaim the Cause of thy Lord unto all who are in the heavens and on the earth. Should any man respond to thy call, lay bare before him the pearls of the wisdom of the Lord, thy God, which His Spirit hath sent down unto thee, and be thou of them that truly believe. And should anyone reject thine offer, turn thou away from him, and put thy trust and confidence in the Lord, thy God, the Lord of all worlds.”¹⁹

1. Complete the following sentences:
 - a. We should take our _____ of the ocean of _____ .
 - b. With the hands of _____ , we should draw forth from its _____ .
 - c. We are to sprinkle _____ with the life-giving waters of God’s grace.
 - d. We should not be _____ if we must perform this task _____ .
 - e. We should _____ with His Spirit.
 - f. We are to be of the _____ .
 - g. We should _____ the Cause of our Lord unto all who are in the heavens and on the earth.
 - h. Should any person respond to our call, we should _____ before him or her the _____ of the Lord.
 - i. Should any person reject our offer, we should _____ from him or her and put our _____ in God.

2. What does it mean that we should take our portion of the ocean of God's grace?

3. What are some of the things that lie hidden in the depths of this ocean and which, if discovered, would enable us to teach the Cause with ever-increasing effectiveness?

4. What can a single drop of the ocean of God's grace do? _____

5. Why must we use "hands of renunciation" to draw forth from the life-giving waters of this ocean? _____

6. What should we do with the waters we draw forth from the ocean of God's grace?

7. What effect will this sprinkling have? _____

8. Do we always have to teach the Faith with the help of other Bahá'ís? _____

9. Do we need anyone except God when we proclaim and teach the Cause? _____

10. With Whom should we commune when we proclaim and teach the Cause? _____

11. For what should we be thankful when we proclaim and teach the Cause? _____

12. To whom should we proclaim the Cause? _____

13. Whom should we teach? _____
14. What should we do if the message we give is rejected? _____

15. Does the fact that we should turn away from those who reject the message mean that we should not be friends with them anymore? Or does it simply mean that we should not insist on trying to teach them the Faith?

16. Below are a few phrases about teaching. Decide which ones are most in keeping with the above passage from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Mark them.
- _____ I decided that the person I should teach is my best friend, Miguel. So for the past five years, I have been concentrating my efforts only on him. He is not responding well, but someday he will. Basically, that is my personal teaching plan.
- _____ I think that it is our responsibility to proclaim the Faith to people. Then it is their business whether they wish to investigate it further. If they really want, they can ask for a book to read so that they can decide for themselves.
- _____ Yesterday, I was explaining Bahá'u'lláh's message to one of my neighbors while we were having a cup of coffee together. After a while she said that, although she respected my enthusiasm, she was happy with her own religion. But she said it in such a way that it was clear she was not closing the door to future conversations about the Faith. So when we are next together, I will try to identify aspects of the teachings that might interest her and draw her closer to the Manifestation of God for this Day.

_____ Just because someone tells me that they are not interested in hearing about the Faith, it doesn't mean it is necessarily so. I just insist.

_____ If a person knows that I am a Bahá'í but doesn't ask me any questions about the Faith, it means he or she is not interested.

_____ If a person who works alongside me in the community-building activities has never asked about how someone can enroll in the Faith, it means he or she does not wish to make the spiritual commitment of accepting Bahá'u'lláh.

_____ I try to meet as many people as possible and, when occasions arise, I share with them some of the teachings of the Faith. If I find them receptive, I continue to teach them until I can finally invite them to join the Faith.

SECTION 25

In *The Advent of Divine Justice*, the Guardian provides us with a passage that eloquently describes the basic elements of a systematic personal teaching plan. The passage has been divided into short sections below. Read each one and then fill in the blanks in the sentences that follow.

“Having on his own initiative, and undaunted by any hindrances with which either friend or foe may, unwittingly or deliberately, obstruct his path, resolved to arise and respond to the call of teaching, let him carefully consider every avenue of approach which he might utilize in his personal attempts to capture the attention, maintain the interest, and deepen the faith, of those whom he seeks to bring into the fold of his Faith. Let him survey the possibilities which the particular circumstances in which he lives offer him, evaluate their advantages, and proceed intelligently and systematically to utilize them for the achievement of the object he has in mind.”²⁰

1. The Guardian tells us that we should, on our own _____, resolve to _____ and _____ to the call of _____.
2. In so doing, we are not to allow the obstacles that either _____ or _____ may, _____ or _____, put in our path to divert us from our intention.
3. Firm in our resolve, we should carefully consider _____ of _____ which we might use in our personal efforts to catch the _____, maintain the _____, and deepen the _____ of those whom we seek to teach the Faith.
4. Firm in our resolve, we should carefully _____ every avenue of approach which we might _____ in our personal efforts to _____ the

attention, _____ the interest, and _____ the faith of those whom we seek to teach the Faith.

5. We are told to _____ the possibilities which the particular _____ in which we live offer us.
6. We should _____ the advantages of the possibilities before us.
7. Having done so, we should proceed _____ and _____ to _____ them as a means for teaching the Faith.

“Let him also attempt to devise such methods as association with clubs, exhibitions, and societies, lectures on subjects akin to the teachings and ideals of his Cause such as temperance, morality, social welfare, religious and racial tolerance, economic cooperation, Islám, and comparative religion, or participation in social, cultural, humanitarian, charitable, and educational organizations and enterprises which, while safeguarding the integrity of his Faith, will open up to him a multitude of ways and means whereby he can enlist successively the sympathy, the support, and ultimately the allegiance of those with whom he comes in contact.”²¹

8. We should also try to think of such ways as association with _____ , _____ , and _____ , and _____ on subjects in harmony with the _____ and _____ of the Cause.
9. Moreover, we should try to find ways of participating in _____ , _____ , _____ , _____ , and _____ and _____ , while always _____ the integrity of the Faith.
10. This we should do so that a multitude of _____ and _____ will open up to us whereby we can enlist the _____ , the _____ , and ultimately the _____ of those with whom we come in contact.

“Let him, while such contacts are being made, bear in mind the claims which his Faith is constantly making upon him to preserve its dignity, and station, to safeguard the integrity of its laws and principles, to demonstrate its comprehensiveness and universality, and to defend fearlessly its manifold and vital interests. Let him consider the degree of his hearer’s receptivity, and decide for himself the suitability of either the direct or indirect method of teaching, whereby he can impress upon the seeker the vital importance of the Divine Message, and persuade him to throw in his lot with those who have already embraced it.”²²

11. While we are making such contacts, we should never forget our responsibility to _____ the dignity and _____ of the Faith, to _____ the integrity of its _____ and _____, to _____ its comprehensiveness and _____, and to _____ fearlessly its many vital _____.
12. The Guardian tells us that we should consider the degree of our listener's _____ and decide for ourselves the _____ of either the _____ or _____ method of teaching.
13. In choosing either method, we should remember that our aim is to _____ upon the seeker the _____ of the Divine Message and _____ him to _____ with those who have already embraced it.
- “Let him remember the example set by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and His constant admonition to shower such kindness upon the seeker, and exemplify to such a degree the spirit of the teachings he hopes to instill into him, that the recipient will be spontaneously impelled to identify himself with the Cause embodying such teachings. Let him refrain, at the outset, from insisting on such laws and observances as might impose too severe a strain on the seeker’s newly awakened faith, and endeavor to nurse him, patiently, tactfully, and yet determinedly, into full maturity, and aid him to proclaim his unqualified acceptance of whatever has been ordained by Bahá’u’lláh.”²³**
14. In our teaching efforts, we should call to mind the _____ set by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and His constant admonition to _____ the seeker with _____ and to strive to _____ the _____ of the teachings we hope to instill in him.
15. We should be so vigilant in following ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s example that the seeker will be _____ to identify himself with the Cause.
16. Having drawn the seeker to the Faith, we should be careful at the beginning not to _____ on such _____ and _____ as might _____ on his newly awakened faith.
17. We are to _____ him, patiently, tactfully and yet determinedly, into _____, and _____ him to proclaim his _____ of whatever has been _____ by Bahá’u’lláh.

18. We are to nurse him, _____, _____ and yet _____, into full maturity, and aid him to _____ his unqualified acceptance of whatever has been ordained by Bahá'u'lláh.

“Let him, as soon as that stage has been attained, introduce him to the body of his fellow-believers, and seek, through constant fellowship and active participation in the local activities of his community, to enable him to contribute his share to the enrichment of its life, the furtherance of its tasks, the consolidations of its interests, and the coordination of its activities with those of its sister communities.”²⁴

19. As soon as the seeker has reached this stage, we should _____ him to the other members of the community.

20. From that point forward we should seek, through _____ and _____ in the _____ of the community, to enable him to _____ his share to the _____ of its life, the _____ of its tasks, the _____ of its interests, and the _____ of its joint activities with other communities.

“Let him not be content until he has infused into his spiritual child so deep a longing as to impel him to arise independently, in his turn, and devote his energies to the quickening of other souls, and the upholding of the laws and principles laid down by his newly adopted Faith.”²⁵

21. The Guardian tells us that we should not be content until we have _____ in those we teach so deep a _____ as to _____ them to arise _____ and _____ their _____ to the teaching of other souls and the upholding of the laws and principles of the Faith.

SECTION 26

With the passages from the last two sections in mind, you are now asked to focus your attention on devising your own systematic personal teaching plan. As a first step, you will need to think about how the elements identified by Shoghi Effendi will take shape in your plan. Carrying out the exercises below will help you to do this.

1. Clearly, a crucial element of your personal teaching plan is your unshakable resolve to make concrete efforts to find receptive souls and to teach them. Whenever we make a firm commitment to do something, our resolve is tested. Obstacles inevitably arise. In the case of teaching, some of the obstacles put in our path come from opposition to the Faith or the condition of the world around us. For example, materialism in society can make our efforts to teach more difficult, as can the general apathy of people

3. Besides the possibilities that you have identified above, as one element of your personal teaching plan, you will need to devise various ways in which you can, while safeguarding the integrity of the Faith, constantly meet new people, some of whom will prove to be receptive to Bahá'u'lláh's message. For example, you could join an organization whose aims are in harmony with the teachings. If you live near an educational center, you could attend lectures on subjects akin to the teachings and ideals of the Cause. This element of your plan is extremely important because, if you do not continue to meet new people, you will end up focusing all your attention on the same few individuals year after year—most of whom may not even be receptive. Write down some of the ways you can come into contact with more and more people.

4. As, through all of the possibilities you noted in Exercises 2 and 3, you come into contact with an increasing number of people, you will need to think about how you will make the aims of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation known to them, in a wise and dignified manner. While they will surely catch glimpses of the beauty of His teachings through your deeds, you will want to find appropriate opportunities to discuss various aspects of the Faith with them. From your study of the second unit of Book 2, "Uplifting Conversations", and subsequent experience, you know how to go about engaging in such discussions. As you reflect on this element of your plan, it would be useful to bear in mind the different groups of people with whom you will come into contact. How can you most effectively bring the aims and ideals of the Cause to the attention of those in each group? Clearly, you will merely be able to put down your initial ideas here, since you will only know with certainty what to tell people when you are in the actual situation. Moreover, your ideas will evolve as you gain experience.

SECTION 28

As you probably noted when thinking about the elements of your personal teaching plan and drawing up an initial plan of action, often our individual efforts to teach are woven into the pattern of activity unfolding in our villages and neighborhoods. You saw, too, how such individual efforts contribute to and strengthen this pattern. But for the pattern of growth in a community to accelerate—nay, expand widely—collective campaigns are needed. To participate effectively in such campaigns requires that we develop a clear understanding of what collective action implies. Let us consider, for example, the following scenario.

Suppose you are participating in a gathering in which friends from several nearby villages or neighborhoods have come together to plan for a teaching campaign called for by the Area Teaching Committee. The meeting is carried out in a spiritual atmosphere, a few moving talks on the importance of teaching and the role of the individual are presented, and a great deal of excitement is generated. When the talks are over, those from each village or neighborhood consult as a group on their plans for the teaching campaign. After some time, all the groups come together to share their plans. A representative from one of the groups summarizes the fruits of its consultations in these words: “The plan we have devised to contribute to this campaign is straightforward. It asks that every individual pray daily to have at least one success in teaching, that every individual mention the Faith to at least one person every day, and that every family have a fireside at least once every nineteen days.”

Let us imagine that the friends from this group take the plan back to their village or neighborhood. Undoubtedly if everyone arises to follow the recommendations of the group with devotion and enthusiasm, we can assume that the community will witness growth both in numbers and capacity, preparing it to embark on even greater undertakings. However, in order to increase our understanding of the subject, it is useful to ask whether such a plan fits at all our notion of systematic collective action. Does the plan consist of more than encouraging individuals to pursue their own personal teaching efforts, admittedly with added enthusiasm stemming from the knowledge that others are also engaged in the same kind of activity? Should not collective action be designed in such a way that the talents and capacity of individuals reinforce one another, multiplying thereby their powers? Should not the united action of a group of people bring far more results than the sum of their separate individual efforts? Reflect on these questions with the other members of your group.

SECTION 29

Discussing the questions above will have surely confirmed what you have already begun to understand from your own experience. You have no doubt seen, as part of an expanding nucleus of individuals working together in a village or neighborhood, how, in the dynamics of unified action, our powers multiply. Our aim over the remainder of this unit will be to try to gain some insights into these dynamics in the context of the expansion and consolidation of the Faith.

First, let us quickly review what you probably know by now about our approach to the growth of the Faith worldwide. At this time, endeavors to accelerate the process of growth are mostly carried out in specific neighborhoods or villages within a cluster. A “cluster” refers to a small geographic area of a size manageable for planning purposes. The Area Teaching Committee works at this level. Within the setting of a cluster, we are encouraged by the Universal House of Justice to operate in “three-month cycles of activity through which a community grows—the burst of expansion experienced as a result of intense action; the necessary period of consolidation during which increases in ranks are fortified as they, for example, participate in devotional gatherings and the Nineteen Day Feast and receive visits at their homes; and the opportunities designated for all to reflect and plan.”

Cycles, then, are characterized by the successive phases of expansion, consolidation, and reflection and planning. Each cycle builds on the achievements of the previous one. As more and more people enter the institute process after each wave of expansion, collective capacity rises as they begin to put into practice what they are learning. A set of interrelated activities, core to the process of growth—devotional gatherings, children’s classes, junior youth groups, and study circles—expands as a result, and the growing nucleus of active supporters of the Faith is able to increase the overall tempo of activity. The process of growth accelerates incrementally in this way.

The expansion phase demands the highest level of intensity, often achieved through the implementation of collective campaigns. Its objectives will vary depending on the conditions in a cluster, as mentioned above. At times, a campaign may seek to increase the number of participants in one or another of the core activities. On other occasions, the focus may be direct teaching. Often these latter efforts, carried out in a locality where activities are starting to give shape to community life, involve calling on people in their homes. Regarding campaigns of this kind, the Universal House of Justice provides the following guidance:

“At the heart of the matter, then, is how a campaign of teaching the Faith by visiting homes relates to the other activities being undertaken in a neighborhood—how it relates to the efforts to hold meetings that strengthen the devotional character

of the wider community, to offer classes that foster the spiritual development of children, to form groups that channel the energies of junior youth, to establish circles of study, open to all, that enable people of varied backgrounds to advance on equal footing and explore the application of teachings to their individual and collective lives.”²⁶

SECTION 30

As suggested by the quotation above, we should not think that teaching campaigns are carried out in a vacuum. They constitute just one element of our approach to growth. Further, endeavors in large-scale expansion and consolidation of the Faith are most fruitful when they are undertaken systematically over a long period of time among a specific population.

In this unit, we have mentioned the term “receptive population” a couple of times. Experience has shown that, just like individuals, some populations can be more ready than others to explore the implications of the Faith for their collective life. Such receptivity, the Universal House of Justice tells us, often “manifests itself in a willingness to participate in the process of community building set in motion by the core activities.” In every cluster, the task before the friends is

“to teach within one or more receptive populations, employing a direct method in their exposition of the fundamentals of their Faith, and find those souls longing to shed the lethargy imposed on them by society and work alongside one another in their neighborhoods and villages to begin a process of collective transformation.”²⁷

What is at stake, then, is the movement of a population towards Bahá’u’lláh’s vision of a new world order and a prosperous and harmonious civilization. To reflect further on the significance of this process, under way in clusters across the globe, read the following extract from a message written by the House of Justice:

“When the masses of mankind are awakened and enter the Faith of God, a new process is set in motion and the growth of a new civilization begins. Witness the emergence of Christianity and of Islam. These masses are the rank and file, steeped in traditions of their own, but receptive to the new Word of God, by which, when they truly respond to it, they become so influenced as to transform those who come in contact with them.

“God’s standards are different from those of men. According to men’s standards, the acceptance of any cause by people of distinction, of recognized fame and status, determines the value and greatness of that cause. But, in the words of Bahá’u’lláh: ‘The summons and Message which We gave were never intended to reach or to benefit one land or one people only. Mankind in its entirety must firmly adhere to whatsoever hath been revealed and vouchsafed unto it.’”²⁸

As to the nature of the process of transformation unfolding in clusters everywhere, we read the following in another message written by the House of Justice:

“Propelled by forces generated both within and outside the Bahá’í community, the peoples of the earth can be seen to be moving from divergent directions, closer and closer to one another, towards what will be a world civilization so stupendous in character that it would be futile for us to attempt to imagine it today. As this centripetal movement of populations accelerates across the globe, some elements in every culture, not in accord with the teachings of the Faith, will gradually fall away, while others will be reinforced. By the same token, new elements of culture will evolve over time as people hailing from every human group, inspired by the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, give expression to patterns of thought and action engendered by His teachings . . . ”²⁹

1. On the basis of the second quotation above, answer the questions below.
 - a. What happens when the masses of humankind are awakened and enter the Faith of God? _____

 - b. What change occurs in the masses when they truly respond to the new Word of God? _____

 - c. How does the passage explain one of the differences between God’s standards and the standards of men? _____

2. On the basis of the third quotation above, decide which of the following statements are true:

 To move closer to the world civilization envisioned in the writings, every population needs to adopt the elements of one dominant culture.

 Every culture in the world contains elements that are praiseworthy, and elements that would best be discarded.

 The standard of what is correct and what is undesirable in any culture is Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation.

 It is unacceptable for a group of people, in the name of culture, to regard women as inferior to men.

- _____ Aspects of any given culture that place emphasis on cooperation should be appreciated and cherished.
- _____ Those aspects of a culture that are praiseworthy contribute to enhancing the diversity and beauty of the entire human family.
- _____ The unacceptable aspects of a culture will have to change as it becomes illumined with the light of the teachings of the Faith.
- _____ There is nothing funny about jokes and remarks that in one way or another belittle any group of people; they are at best remnants from humanity's childhood that should be thrown away.
- _____ When a population enters the Faith, it will gradually leave behind those elements of its culture not in keeping with the teachings.
- _____ When a population enters the Faith, those elements of its culture in keeping with the teachings will be reinforced and strengthened.
- _____ Every population will, in time, adopt new elements of a culture inspired by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh—for instance, those that reflect the importance it places on educating the younger generations.
- _____ As populations draw closer and closer to the ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, they will inevitably draw closer to one another.
- _____ Diverse populations will ultimately draw closer to one another as they each pursue their path of development, whether or not they follow the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.
- _____ The participation of greater and greater numbers in core activities within a receptive population sets in motion a process of change that will move it closer and closer to the vision of Bahá'u'lláh's new world order.

In light of the above, reflect on your own experience in the cluster in which you reside. Since you began to walk the path of service, you have contributed to the strengthening and expansion of a set of interrelated activities—this, whether among the inhabitants of your village or among a specific population living in a certain area of your neighborhood or dispersed throughout the cluster. Think of these activities in their totality and the process of change they have set in motion. Describe how the movement of the population is being generated as the growing nucleus to which you belong is learning to do the following in a coherent way: to foster the devotional character of the community; to help empower more and more junior youth spiritually and intellectually; to invite more and more young people to walk the path of service, lending them assistance along the way; to provide spiritual education to more and more children; and to make it possible for more and more families of children and youth to learn about the teachings and apply them to their lives.

SECTION 31

Now that you have reflected on how the efforts of the expanding nucleus of friends in your village or neighborhood is generating the movement of a population towards Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a new world order, let us examine the conditions that render such collective action effective. You would agree that the first condition that must be met is unity. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

“If ye be truly united, if ye agree to promote that which is the essential purpose, and to show forth an all-unifying love, I swear by Him Who causeth the seed to split and the breeze to waft, so great a light will shine forth from your faces as to reach the highest heavens, the fame of your glory will be noised abroad, the evidences of your preeminence will spread throughout all regions, your power will penetrate the realities of all things, your aims and purposes will exert their influence upon the great and mighty nations, your spirits will encompass the whole world of being, and ye will discover yourselves to be kings in the dominions of the Kingdom, and attired with the glorious crowns of the invisible Realm, and become the marshals of the army of peace, and princes of the forces of light, and stars shining from the horizon of perfection, and brilliant lamps shedding their radiance upon men.”³⁰

To be so united that our powers are multiplied, as described above by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is not a state we attain once and for all. It requires daily effort. No matter how well we learn to plan and no matter how competent we become in implementing our plans, they will yield little fruit if we allow the least amount of tension or strife to creep in.

The causes of disagreement are usually trivial and hardly ever motivated by malice. Not infrequently, tension arises because someone is impatient with the missteps of another or insists on getting his or her own way. The remedy is magnanimity and the ability to rise above the petty things of life. 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us:

“Now is the time, O ye beloved of the Lord, for ardent endeavor. Struggle ye, and strive. And since the Ancient Beauty was exposed by day and night on the field of martyrdom, let us in our turn labor hard, and hear and ponder the counsels of God; let us fling away our lives, and renounce our brief and numbered days. Let us turn our eyes away from empty fantasies of this world's divergent forms, and serve instead this preeminent purpose, this grand design. Let us not, because of our own imaginings, cut down this tree that the hand of heavenly grace hath planted; let us not, with the dark clouds of our illusions, our selfish interests, blot out the glory that streameth from the Abhá Realm. Let us not be as barriers that wall out the rolling ocean of Almighty God. Let us not prevent the pure, sweet

scents from the garden of the All-Glorious Beauty from blowing far and wide. Let us not, on this day of reunion, shut out the vernal downpour of blessings from on high. Let us not consent that the splendors of the Sun of Truth should ever fade and disappear. These are the admonitions of God, as set forth in His Holy Books, His Scriptures, His Tablets that tell out His counselings to the sincere.

“The glory rest upon you, and God’s mercy, and God’s blessings.”³¹

The Guardian says:

“Fix your gaze on the mighty possibilities, the incalculable blessings, the indomitable spirit of this growing and struggling Faith of God, and do not allow the petty disputes and inevitable differences of the present to obscure your vision of the resplendent glories which the future of the Cause has in store for its steadfast and valiant supporters.”³²

Memorizing and internalizing passages such as the one below will assist us in contributing to unity in our collective efforts.

“If any differences arise amongst you, behold Me standing before your face, and overlook the faults of one another for My name’s sake and as a token of your love for My manifest and resplendent Cause. We love to see you at all times consorting in amity and concord within the paradise of My good-pleasure, and to inhale from your acts the fragrance of friendliness and unity, of loving-kindness and fellowship. Thus counseleth you the All-Knowing, the Faithful. We shall always be with you; if We inhale the perfume of your fellowship, Our heart will assuredly rejoice, for naught else can satisfy Us. To this beareth witness every man of true understanding.”³³

Unity is easier to maintain when everyone is aware of the significance of the work to be done and the sublimity of the goals to be achieved. When such an understanding exists, people have less difficulty putting aside their differences and selflessly give their all to the tasks at hand. Pause for a moment and think: Would you be willing to harm a process which is destined to draw scores of waiting souls closer to the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh for any one of the following:

- ___ Because you are not willing to forgive the actions of another?
- ___ Because you are preoccupied with your own shortcomings?
- ___ Because you do not want to follow the course of action everyone has agreed upon?
- ___ Because you believe yourself to be right and everyone else wrong?
- ___ Because you like to tell jokes whenever the opportunity presents itself, even if they are inappropriate and make others feel uncomfortable?
- ___ Because you insist on criticizing every shortcoming you notice, regardless of how it affects the enthusiasm of the group?
- ___ Because you do not appreciate the need for intensity in a collective effort?
- ___ Because someone spoke to you in a way that you did not like?

- ___ Because you are uncomfortable visiting people in their homes?
- ___ Because you are unhappy that your specific talents are not being drawn upon?

SECTION 32

The unity that exists among the members of a nucleus of dedicated friends laboring in a village or neighborhood is not confined to the loving fellowship that binds them. It manifests itself in the clarity they share about their common purpose. Unity of purpose is another condition essential to unified action; it gives direction to our efforts, not only when we are working together collectively but also when we are carrying out an individual act of service, like conducting a children’s class or serving as an animator of a junior youth group. It pervades what we do and endows our action with meaning. We see how our individual efforts are woven together with collective undertakings to create a vibrant pattern of activity that propels a population forward. The Universal House of Justice observes:

“The community is serving more and more as that environment in which individual effort and collective action, mediated by the institute, can complement each other in order to achieve progress. The vibrancy it manifests and the unity of purpose that animates its endeavors are drawing into its swelling ranks those from every walk of life eager to dedicate their time and energies to the welfare of humanity.”³⁴

This sense of common purpose, then, extends beyond the local level. We recognize how our efforts as part of an expanding nucleus in our village or neighborhood contribute to the greater purpose of advancing the work in the cluster where we reside. We see, in turn, how this furthers the progress of our national community and the unfoldment of the global Plans of the Faith, which will ultimately lead to the emergence of Bahá’u’lláh’s world order.

1. Why is an awareness that our work in a neighborhood or village contributes to a greater purpose important? _____

2. How do we make sure that individual aims and purposes are aligned with the aims of the Faith? _____

3. How do individual efforts and collective undertakings, mediated by the institute, complement one another? Why is an understanding of their complementarity essential to unified action?

4. How does unity of purpose further strengthen the bonds of love among friends serving together? _____

SECTION 33

We have seen that unity of purpose is essential to unified action; it inspires us to labor assiduously in the field of service. To realize a common purpose requires the investment of time and energy—hours of hard yet joyful work. There is a mistaken notion in the world of what constitutes fun. Over and over, we are given the message that the very purpose of life is to have fun, which is defined in terms of trivial pastimes. But how can such “fun” compare with the real joy of sharing the message of Bahá’u’lláh with others, of seeing them uplifted by the spirit of faith, of engaging in meaningful conversation with the families of participants in children’s classes and junior youth groups, of witnessing those studying the main sequence of institute courses advance in their understanding and capacity for service? If ever in a collective undertaking the desire for comfort and self-indulgence grows strong, it can be overcome by the remembrance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the perfect Exemplar, and His tireless efforts to propagate the Cause. Here are some of His words:

“Follow in the footsteps of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and in the pathway of the Abhá Beauty, long at every moment to give up your lives. Shine out like the daystar, be unresting as the sea; even as the clouds of heaven, shed ye life upon field and hill, and like unto April winds, blow freshness through those human trees, and bring them to their blossoming.”³⁵

“. . . man should so surrender his will to God, and become so oblivious of his own pursuits, that he may attain unto the station of living sacrifice: Thus, if he sleepeth, it should not be for the sake of bodily repose, but solely to recuperate his strength in order that his discourse may be clearer, his utterance more pleasing, and that he may serve God’s creatures and expound His proofs; and if he waketh, he should remain alert, engage in service to the Cause of God, and utterly submerge his own desires and inclinations in the will of God. When he attaineth unto this station, the confirmations of the Holy Spirit shall surround him, and, armed with such a power, he shall be capable of withstanding all the peoples of the earth.”³⁶

“I hope that, through the bounties of Him Who quickeneth the spirits, thou mayest not for a moment remain still, nor be deterred from pulsating like unto an artery

in the body of the world, that thou mayest ever breathe the spirit of life into the hearts and enable the souls to soar in the realms above.”³⁷

“These shall labor ceaselessly, by day and by night, shall heed neither trials nor woe, shall suffer no respite in their efforts, shall seek no repose, shall disregard all ease and comfort, and, detached and unsullied, shall consecrate every fleeting moment of their lives to the diffusion of the divine fragrance and the exaltation of God’s holy Word. Their faces will radiate heavenly gladness, and their hearts be filled with joy. Their souls will be inspired, and their foundation stand secure. They shall scatter in the world, and travel throughout all regions. They shall raise their voices in every assembly, and adorn and revive every gathering. They shall speak in every tongue, and interpret every hidden meaning. They shall reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom, and manifest unto everyone the signs of God. They shall burn brightly even as a candle in the heart of every assembly, and beam forth as a star upon every horizon. The gentle breezes wafted from the garden of their hearts shall perfume and revive the souls of men, and the revelations of their minds, even as showers, will reinvigorate the peoples and nations of the world.”³⁸

SECTION 34

One important instrument we have been given to help us create and consolidate our unity and to maintain a common sense of purpose is consultation. It is through action, reflection on action and consultation that we are able to achieve unity of thought. Unity of thought—about the nature of our activities and about the approaches we employ and the goals we adopt—is another requisite of effective unified action.

As an expanding nucleus of friends acts consistently and with unity of thought, it should continually strengthen its ability and discipline to reflect regularly on the effectiveness of its action. In reflecting, consulting, and studying, a nucleus draws on experience and on relevant passages from the writings, particularly guidance from the Universal House of Justice. When this pattern of action, reflection, consultation and study comes to define how a group of friends operates collectively, learning becomes their mode of operation. Sustained growth proves possible, as they build on strengths that have been gained cycle after cycle. To maintain the vitality of our activities, to engage people of all backgrounds, to administer the affairs of teeming numbers—in short, to grow continually—this is the object of learning in clusters everywhere:

“ . . . let the friends spare no effort to increase the level of participation. Let them strain every nerve to ensure that the system which they have so laboriously erected does not close in on itself but progressively expands to embrace more and more people. Let them not lose sight of the remarkable receptivity they found—nay, the sense of eager expectation that awaited them—as they gained confidence in their ability to interact with people of all walks of life and converse with them about the Person of Bahá’u’lláh and His Revelation.”³⁹

1. What should we spare no effort to increase? _____

2. What should we strain every nerve to ensure? _____

3. What should we not lose sight of? _____

4. The expanding nucleus of which you are a member has undoubtedly gained many an insight into the process of growth in your village or neighborhood as you have consistently acted, reflected on action, and consulted together. In this, you will have seen that there is a reciprocal relationship between two developments: the building of capacity in individuals on the path of service traced out by the institute courses and the increase in the scale of activities and the number of those participating in them. Discuss some of the insights you have acquired into this relationship and its centrality to the process of growth.

To reflect further on the implications of learning as a mode of operation and on the pattern of action, reflection, consultation and study that defines it, read the following passages from the Universal House of Justice. As you do so, think about the nucleus of friends to which you belong and with whom you are serving so diligently in your village or neighborhood.

“We rejoice to see that in a growing number of clusters, and in neighborhoods and villages within them, a nucleus of friends has emerged who through action and reflection are discovering what is required, at a particular point, for the process of growth to advance in their surroundings. They are drawing on the potent instrument of the institute, through which capacity to contribute to the spiritual and material prosperity of the community is enhanced, and as they act, the number of those joining them is increasing. Naturally, conditions vary greatly from place to place, as do the characteristics of growth. But through systematic striving, everyone can make a more and more effective contribution to the work at hand. In every setting, there is pure joy in engaging other souls in meaningful and uplifting conversations that lead, whether quickly or gradually, to the stirring of spiritual susceptibilities. The brighter the flame kindled within the heart of the believer, the greater will be the force of attraction felt by those exposed to its warmth. And to a heart consumed with love for Bahá’u’lláh, what more fitting occupation can be imagined than to seek out kindred spirits, to encourage them

as they enter the path of service, to accompany them as they gain experience and—perhaps the greatest joy of all—to see souls become confirmed in their faith, arise independently, and assist others on the same journey. These are among the most cherished of all the moments that this transitory life affords.”⁴⁰

“Learning as a mode of operation requires that all assume a posture of humility, a condition in which one becomes forgetful of self, placing complete trust in God, reliant on His all-sustaining power and confident in His unfailing assistance, knowing that He, and He alone, can change the gnat into an eagle, the drop into a boundless sea. And in such a state souls labor together ceaselessly, delighting not so much in their own accomplishments but in the progress and services of others. So it is that their thoughts are centered at all times on helping one another scale the heights of service to His Cause and soar in the heaven of His knowledge.”⁴¹

SECTION 35

Of course we know well that the success of our endeavors cycle after cycle is entirely dependent on divine assistance. Naturally, in our private communion with God, we beseech Him that our efforts, though small, may be accepted at His Holy Threshold. How precious is the remembrance of passages such as these:

“O Lord! I am a broken-winged bird and desire to soar in Thy limitless space. How is it possible for me to do this save through Thy providence and grace, Thy confirmation and assistance.”⁴²

“I beseech Thee, by Him Who is the Fountainhead of Thy Revelation and the Dayspring of Thy signs, to make my heart to be a receptacle of Thy love and of remembrance of Thee. Knit it, then, to Thy most great Ocean, that from it may flow out the living waters of Thy wisdom and the crystal streams of Thy glorification and praise.”⁴³

“I beg of Thee, O Thou King of existence and Protector of the seen and the unseen, to make whosoever arises to serve Thy Cause as a sea moving by Thy desire, as one ablaze with the fire of Thy Sacred Tree, shining from the horizon of the heaven of Thy will.”⁴⁴

“O my God, aid Thou Thy servant to raise up the Word, and to refute what is vain and false, to establish the truth, to spread the sacred verses abroad, reveal the splendors, and make the morning’s light to dawn in the hearts of the righteous.”⁴⁵

“O my God! O my God! Thou seest me in my lowliness and weakness, occupied with the greatest undertaking, determined to raise Thy word among the masses and to spread Thy teachings among Thy peoples. How can I succeed unless Thou assist me with the breath of the Holy Spirit, help me to triumph by the hosts of Thy glorious kingdom, and shower upon me Thy confirmations, which alone can change a gnat into an eagle, a drop of water into rivers and seas, and an atom into lights and suns?”⁴⁶

We also come together to supplicate the Almighty that He may bestow confirmations on our collective efforts, especially during an intensive campaign.

“O Lord! Make manifest in Thy lands humble and submissive souls, their faces illumined with the rays of guidance, severed from the world, extolling Thy Name, uttering Thy praise, and diffusing the fragrance of Thy holiness amongst mankind.”⁴⁷

“O God, my God! Aid Thou Thy trusted servants to have loving and tender hearts. Help them to spread, amongst all the nations of the earth, the light of guidance that cometh from the Company on high.”⁴⁸

“Verily, Thy lovers thirst, O my Lord; lead them to the wellspring of bounty and grace. Verily, they hunger; send down unto them Thy heavenly table. Verily, they are naked; robe them in the garments of learning and knowledge.”⁴⁹

“O Thou incomparable God! O Thou Lord of the Kingdom! These souls are Thy heavenly army. Assist them and, with the cohorts of the Supreme Concourse, make them victorious, so that each one of them may become like unto a regiment and conquer these countries through the love of God and the illumination of divine teachings.”⁵⁰

SECTION 36

We will conclude here our exploration of the act of teaching. No doubt, in thinking about teaching not only as a personal initiative but as a collective endeavor, you realize the same spiritual principles come into play in both. And yet, the process of introducing the Faith to a few friends and helping them reach the shores of the ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is certainly different from that of assisting thousands upon thousands of the inhabitants of a region in approaching those same shores. A simple analogy will clarify this point: The principles governing the growth of plants are the same in a small flower bed and in a farm spread over hundreds of hectares. Yet tending a few plants in one's personal garden is very different from farming large extensions.

When a few of your friends recognize Bahá'u'lláh and join the ranks of His followers, you will continue to nurture each one of them as part of your own personal teaching plan, spending time with them and supporting them in their efforts to grow in their knowledge of His teachings and to serve His Cause. Now turn your mind to an entire region. When endeavors among a receptive population indicate that large numbers, particularly youth, are willing—and in fact eager—to walk a path of service to their communities, when efforts make clear that a significant percentage are ready to enter the Faith through a conversation similar to the one that unfolded between Anna and Emilia, then an entirely different process is needed, one that enables scores upon scores to arise and serve the Cause according to their God-given capacities. A task of such magnitude cannot be met by individual efforts alone.

The latter sections of this unit have offered you a glimpse of how the expansion and consolidation of the Faith on a large scale can move forward, hand in hand. The elements of a system capable of supporting this dual process have been painstakingly discovered and

refined through decades of learning. Some of them have been mentioned here, and you will gain insights into others and, more importantly, into how they all work together to create a robust system through your continued experience and study. Among them are the construct of a “cluster”, the cycles of activity with its phases of expansion and consolidation, a scheme of coordination, and the methodology of action, reflection, consultation, and study. But key to them all is one central element: an appropriate means for building capacity for service.

To endow ever-growing contingents with “the spiritual insights, the knowledge, and the skills needed to carry out the many tasks of accelerated expansion and consolidation”, the training institute was created. With this instrument of “limitless potentialities”, the Universal House of Justice writes, it is possible, “under a wide diversity of conditions, in virtually any cluster,” for “an expanding nucleus of individuals to generate a movement towards the goal of a new World Order.” The following passage sums up for us how capacity building fostered by the institute drives the teaching work and propels this movement forward:

“Central to the pattern of action evolving in a cluster is the individual and collective transformation effected through the agency of the Word of God. From the beginning of the sequence of courses, a participant encounters Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation in considering such weighty themes as worship, service to humanity, the life of the soul, and the education of children and youth. As a person cultivates the habit of study and deep reflection upon the Creative Word, this process of transformation reveals itself in an ability to express one’s understanding of profound concepts and to explore spiritual reality in conversations of significance. These capacities are visible not only in the elevated discussions that increasingly characterize interactions within the community, but in the ongoing conversations that reach well beyond—not least between the Bahá’í youth and their peers—extending to include parents whose daughters and sons are benefiting from the community’s programs of education. Through exchanges of this kind, consciousness of spiritual forces is raised, apparent dichotomies yield to unexpected insights, a sense of unity and common calling is fortified, confidence that a better world can be created is strengthened, and a commitment to action becomes manifest. Such distinctive conversations gradually attract ever-larger numbers to take part in a range of community activities. Themes of faith and certitude surface naturally, prompted by the receptivity and experiences of those involved. What is clear, then, is that as the institute process in a cluster gains momentum, the act of teaching comes to assume greater prominence in the lives of the friends.”⁵¹

It must be a source of great joy to you to know that, by participating in the institute courses, you are fulfilling the vision of the Universal House of Justice described above. You will be equally glad to know that the next book you will study will help you to develop your capacity to serve as a tutor of the courses of the Ruhi Institute. This act of service is crucial not only to the progress of a steady, ever-widening stream of individuals through the institute courses but also to the overall process of growth in a cluster. Your immediate task, however, is to put into practice what you have learned in this book. Having deepened your understanding of the significance of teaching, what greater bliss can you imagine than to heed the Guardian’s appeal to all of us to “make it the dominating passion of our life”.

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