



NUMBER 2

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH
INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS



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THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH:

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INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

'The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men ... this is the straight Path, the fixed and immovable foundation.'

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, section CX

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1 INTRODUCTION

Bahá'í belief is centered upon the existence of one God, alone and transcendent, unknowable in essence, beyond physical description or limitation. God is the Creator and Lord of an infinite number of physical and spiritual worlds. God is active in history through the agencies of the Holy Spirit, the Angels, the Messengers and Prophets and the lives and deeds of pious men and women everywhere.

The pivotal principles of the Bahá'í Faith are unity, peace and advancement. Unity is expressed in three inter-related ways: the unity of God, the unity of religion and the unity of humanity. The Bahá'í Faith is an independent world religion with a single tradition, having a sole focus of authority in its sacred scriptures, as revealed by its founder Bahá'u'lláh (1817 - 1892). The Faith has a clearly demonstrated line of succession through Bahá'u'lláh eldest son 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844 - 1921), 'Abdu'l-Bahá's eldest grandson Shoghi Effendi (1897 - 1957), the Hands of the Cause of God (1957 - 1963) appointed by Shoghi Effendi, and the elected Universal House of Justice (1963 - present).

The sacred scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith contain a complete system of theology, devotional writings, laws for individual worship and moral behaviour, teachings for the foundation of a just and peaceful society, a calendar and an administrative system combining the best elements of elected and appointed institutions.

The chief goal of the Bahá'í Faith is world peace. This is embodied in a whole range of related teachings such as: the equality of men and women, the abolition of all forms of prejudice, the abolition of extremes of poverty and wealth, the establishment of a sovereign world government, the promotion of a universal auxiliary language, and the implementation of universal compulsory education founded on and engendering spirituality and morality.



Bahá'u'lláh teaches that God has revealed, and will continue to reveal, His message to humanity progressively over the ages, through a succession of great messengers. Their essential spiritual teachings are always the same having been given out according to the conditions of the age and the capacity of the human race to grasp them. This is partly what motivates Bahá'ís to work in a spirit of friendship and concord with the followers of other faiths, in their striving for a peaceful world.



2 BASIC INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

2.1 The early history

With more than five million followers in at least 236 countries and dependent territories, the Bahá'í Faith is today among the fastest growing of world faiths. Founded just over century and a half ago, it has already become the second-most widespread, surpassing every faith but Christianity in its geographic reach.

The Bahá'í Faith emerged in the mid-nineteenth century at a time when across the world many people were anticipating 'the millennium', the end of an era and beginning of a new age. In Persia a young man announced that he was Islam's "*He who will arise*" and taught that he was the Báb ('gate' or 'door'), through which the universal Messenger of God expected by all humanity would appear. The Báb attracted many followers, among them a young nobleman of a wealthy family, Mirza Husayn Ali.

This young man, born into a privileged family with connections at court and in government, by espousing the cause of the Báb put himself in opposition to his own class and spent time in prison because of it. It was whilst he was in prison that he had a mystical experience in which he was made aware that He Himself was '*the One whom God shall make manifest*', the long awaited Messenger of God.

This was the beginning of the Bahá'í revelation. The young man assumed the title 'Bahá'u'lláh' (Glory of God). Over the next 40 years despite exile and imprisonment first in Iraq, then Constantinople and Adrianople (both now in Turkey), and finally in the prison city of Acre in Palestine (now Israel), through the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, this latest revelation was made known to humankind.

Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be nothing less than a new and independent Messenger from God. His life, work and influence parallel that of Abraham,



Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Christ and Muhammad. Bahá'ís view Bahá'u'lláh as the most recent in this succession of Divine Messengers.

During the time of the Báb, His message was only known in Persia and Iraq, but during Bahá'u'lláh's ministry the Faith spread to thirteen more countries. Bahá'u'lláh appointed His eldest son, Abdu'l-Bahá, to be the Head of the Bahá'í Faith and sole interpreter of the Bahá'í teachings. After the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l-Bahá aided the further spread of the Faith so that by the time of His death in 1921, the Faith had reached thirty seven different countries.

In the past, scholars sometimes referred to the Bahá'í Faith as a 'sect' of Islam - owing to the fact that its Founder and early followers emerged from an Islamic society. Today, religious specialists recognise that such a reference would be equivalent to calling Christianity a 'sect' of Judaism or referring to Buddhism as a 'sect' of Hinduism. Although Christ was indeed Jewish and Buddha was born a Hindu, Their religious messages were not merely reinterpretations of the parent faiths, but went far beyond them. In the same way, Bahá'u'lláh laid entirely new spiritual foundations. His writings are independent scripture and His work transcends that of a religious reformer.

2.2 Beliefs

The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh deal with spiritual and material, mystical and practical topics. The Writings cover both ancient philosophical and theological questions and modern social and ethical questions. The essential message of Bahá'u'lláh is that of unity. He taught that there is only one God, that there is only one human race, and that all the world's faiths have been stages in one revelation of God's will and purpose for humanity.

One God

There is only one God, the Creator of the Universe, and its absolute ruler. He is infinite, limitless and all-powerful. Bahá'u'lláh teachings make clear that the human mind cannot directly comprehend God or understand the reality



of God. No gender can be attached to the Creator, though the masculine pronoun is used in references to God.

One religion

Throughout history God has revealed himself to humanity through a series of divine messengers (or manifestations, in Bahá'u'lláh words). Each of whom has founded a great faith that is part of one religion. The only way for a human being to know God is through these Messengers. The Messengers have included: Abraham, Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, The Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh. The Manifestations are perfect mirrors for God's attributes. Through these successive Messengers, God has revealed a plan of Divine Education for humanity, developing our spiritual, moral and intellectual capacities.

When Bahá'ís say that the various faiths are one, they do not mean that the various religious creeds and organizations are the same. Rather, they believe that there is only one religion and all of the Messengers of God have progressively revealed its nature. Together, the world's great faiths are expressions of a single unfolding Divine plan, the "*changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future*".

One people

We, as human beings, no matter what race, colour or ethnic background, are a higher form of life than other aspects of creation. We have been given gifts of reasoning and intellect, free will and a soul that is capable of knowing and loving God. We can turn to the teachings of God as expressed and exemplified in the Manifestations and attain a higher level of spiritual knowledge and contentment.

The soul does not die with the body, because it is spiritual rather than physical. Each soul is a unique creation and earthly life is a necessary stage of development for every soul. After physical death, the soul still exists and continues to progress and advance towards God. Heaven and Hell do not exist as places, but are rather states of nearness to God or remoteness from God.



One world

In this day, Bahá'u'lláh said, humanity has collectively come of age. As foretold in all of the world's scriptures, the time has arrived for the unification of all peoples into a peaceful and integrated global society. *"The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens"*, He wrote. Bahá'í beliefs therefore also include teachings about personal and social ethics and behaviour.

For a global society to flourish, Bahá'u'lláh said, it must be based on certain fundamental principles. They include: the elimination of all forms of prejudice; full equality between the sexes; recognition of the essential oneness of the world's great religions; the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth; universal education; the harmony of science and religion; a sustainable balance between nature and technology; and the establishment of a world federal system, based on collective security and the oneness of humanity.

2.3 Practices

Bahá'ís practice their faith in various ways: by participating in private and public worship; joining in with other Bahá'ís for various religious and social activities; reading the Bahá'í scriptures; taking part in celebrations of festivals and special days; and by how they live. In this there appears to be similarity to other religious traditions, though closer examination reveals some important differences.

(i) Places of worship

Bahá'u'lláh left instructions that His followers should build temples, houses of worship, in every city and every country. These "Dawning Places of God's Praise" should be beautiful in design and workmanship. They should stand in beautiful gardens and be surrounded by buildings dedicated to



educational, social and charitable purposes. The House of Worship is intended to cater for more than the spiritual needs of the community.

So far the international Bahá'í community have built continental Houses of Worship in seven locations: Wilmette (USA, North America), Frankfurt (Germany, Europe), Kampala (Uganda, Africa), Sydney (Australia), Panama City (Central America), Apia (Western Samoa, Pacific Islands), and New Delhi (India, Asia). The construction of the House of Worship for South America in Santiago, Chile, is currently underway. All Houses of Worship are open to people of every faith. There are no sermons, rituals or clergy, only the sound of the human voice raised in prayer, singing or chanting from the Holy Scriptures of different faiths.

Although the Faith is widespread throughout the world, individual local communities are often very small and do not yet have a specially built place of worship. Small local communities meet in each other's houses for worship and Holy Day celebrations. Occasionally a community may hire a hall or something similar if they want to host a meeting for more than one community to celebrate a Holy Day together.

Some of the larger local communities can afford to purchase a house and having been granted a 'change of use' order by the local council, thus designating this house as the local 'Bahá'í Centre'. Such a building will normally house the meeting room for the Local Spiritual Assembly, a larger room for community meetings such as the Nineteen Day Feast and Holy Day celebrations, possibly a community library and 'classrooms' for adult and children's groups, and often there will also be guest bedrooms, lounge, bathroom, kitchen etc. for visitors.

In many countries there is now a 'National Bahá'í Centre', which is a larger version of the local centres, again a purchased rather than a purpose-built building.



(ii) Worship

In most faiths prayer is the primary act of worship. Bahá'u'lláh has made a private daily prayer obligatory for all Bahá'ís. This obligatory prayer is really a minimum, and all Bahá'ís are encouraged to turn to God in prayer and meditation every morning and evening. The Writings of both Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá have much to say on the subject of prayer and its importance. Both revealed a number of prayers for the use of their followers at various times and for various purposes.

Prayer is however not just saying words. For a Bahá'í, their whole life can become a prayer if lived in an attitude of thankfulness and service to humankind. In the Bahá'í Faith Bahá'u'lláh has ordained that one's work can be an act of worship if dedicated to the service of God's cause.

Congregational prayer has no part in the Bahá'í Faith (except for the Prayer for the Dead), although community worship does. Abdu'l-Bahá said that where many are gathered together their force is greater than an individual. Every nineteen days a community will meet for the 'Nineteen Day Feast' which consists of three parts, of which the first part is a devotional programme. Selections from the Bahá'í scriptures and prayers are read, sung or chanted aloud by different individuals in turn. No one is forced to read or pray aloud, but there is an open invitation to all present, including children, to take part if they wish. The prayers and readings will usually be chosen by the family 'hosting' the Feast in their home.

Communities will also begin Holy Day celebrations with a devotional similar to that of a Nineteen Day Feast. Communities might also meet for prayers for particular reasons, such as the success of a new venture (e.g. beginning a teaching programme, starting children's classes or junior youth groups). Individual Bahá'ís and communities also organize devotional meetings open to people of all faiths. Study circles, which are also open to all, will usually begin and end with a short devotional period.

One important difference in the Bahá'í Faith is that there is no form of ceremony or ritual in community worship - there is nothing like the



Christian Eucharist service. This lack of ritual makes one of the functions of priesthood redundant. There is no professional clergy in the Bahá'í Faith as the other functions of such a group are also unnecessary in this dispensation. The teaching and interpretation of the Word of God is now a personal search for truth, while law and judgment are functions of the elected administrative bodies.

(iii) Holy Days and Festivals

The Bahá'í Faith recognizes certain days as special. As with all Holy Days and Festivals there is an element of *remembering* important people or events from the history of the community. The Festivals are *celebrated annually* with some kind of *community participation* which sets the Festival day apart from a normal day. All Bahá'í days start at sunset.

The Bahá'í Holy Days and Festivals are:

21 March:	Feast of Naw-Rúz (Bahá'í New Year)
21 April–2 May:	Festival of Ridván (the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh) in 1863
23 May:	Declaration of the Báb in 1844
29 May:	Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh in 1892
9 July:	Martyrdom of the Báb in 1850
20 October:	Birth of the Báb in 1819
12 November:	Birth of Bahá'u'lláh in 1817
26 November:	Day of the Covenant (commemorating Bahá'u'lláh's appointment of Abdu'l-Bahá as the Centre of His Covenant)
28 November:	Ascension of Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921

The ways in which these days are celebrated vary according to the solemnity of the occasion. The first seven listed above are Holy Days. Work should be suspended and children should not attend school. Work need only be suspended on the first, ninth and twelfth days of the Ridván Festival (21st and 29th April, and 2nd May). Most Bahá'í communities combine a



devotional programme with appropriate social activities such as parties, concerts, picnics, children's outings etc.

People often ask if Bahá'ís have 'a Christmas', meaning is there a time of great celebration including the passing on of good wishes and presents? In the sense of remembering and celebrating the birth of the Manifestation, Bahá'ís celebrate the Birthday of Bahá'u'lláh with a devotional programme and usually some social gathering to which non-Bahá'í friends are invited.

As far as present giving is concerned, that usually occurs in the period of the intercalary days between the eighteenth and nineteenth months of the Bahá'í year. The nineteenth month is the month of the Fast, a time of spiritual renewal and preparation for the New Year. During the Fast, Bahá'í social activities tend to be restricted (by mutual agreement and convention rather than by necessity or rule).

The period of 26 February to 1 March are known as the intercalary days (Ayyám-i-Há). Ayyám-i-Há is devoted to spiritual preparation for the Fast and offering hospitality, including parties, giving presents, service activities and charity.

The month of the Fast ends with the Feast of Naw-Rúz (New Year) on 21st March. Bahá'ís will often celebrate this by sending cards and greetings for the New Year and again have social gatherings, including parties and concerts. These are often arranged by one community in a large enough building for them to invite other communities to join with them.

(iv) Rites of passage

In this dispensation Bahá'u'lláh has eliminated most forms of religious rite or ritual and thus there are no ceremonies which could be called 'Rites of passage'.



Birth: there is no ceremony or rite in the Bahá'í Faith to mark the birth of a baby. There is no objection to friends coming together for a short devotional programme and social event for the naming of a baby. Abdu'l-Bahá wrote,

“When thou wishest to name a babe, prepare a meeting therefore; chant the verses and commune, and supplicate and implore the Threshold of Oneness and beg the attainment of guidance for the babe and wish confirmed firmness and constancy; then give the name and enjoy beverage and sweetmeat.”

Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 149-150

In Britain it is possible to obtain a 'Bahá'í Birth Certificate' from the Office of Records when parents register the birth of their baby with the Bahá'í National Office. The certificate records the name and place of birth of the baby, its parents' names and the date of birth according to both the Gregorian and Bahá'í calendars.

Coming of age: again there is no ritual or ceremony to mark coming of age, or maturity. Bahá'u'lláh set the age at which a person is expected to take responsibility for themselves in obeying the laws of the Faith in regard to prayer, fasting, marriage etc. at fifteen. A person may declare their belief in Bahá'u'lláh at any age, and children of Bahá'í parents under the age of fifteen are considered to be Bahá'ís, but some national assemblies require children reaching the age of fifteen to make a personal declaration and be enrolled in the Faith as 'Bahá'í Youth'. Individual families and communities may decide to celebrate the declaration of a youth with a gift, devotional programme and social event but this is by no means either a regular or universal occurrence. This 'coming of age' does not include administrative functions such as voting or serving on Spiritual Assemblies. The minimum age for this is 21. It can be accompanied by a further personal declaration and enrolment as a Bahá'í adult, with the relevant change being recorded in the Records office.



Marriage: In the Bahá'í Faith marriage is "highly recommended but not obligatory" (*Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book of Bahá'u'lláh,* A. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1973). Both parties in a marriage must be at least fifteen years of age and both must consent to the marriage, as must their parents.

Arranged marriages are forbidden, as is polygamy. Bahá'ís can choose a marriage partner from any religious or racial background, and if the chosen partner is of another faith, participation in the marriage ceremony of the other faith is permissible as long as (a) it does not involve a declaration of faith in that other religion and (b) it occurs in the same twenty-four-hour period as the Bahá'í ceremony.

The Bahá'í wedding ceremony requires only the recitation by both bride and groom, in the presence of two witnesses, of the following verse which constitutes the marriage vow: "***We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God***". When a couple are arranging their Bahá'í wedding, they can choose the readings and prayers they would like for the devotional programme, but must include the above-mentioned verse.

If the law does not recognize a Bahá'í marriage, a couple must have a civil ceremony on the same day. In England, Northern Ireland and Wales it is necessary to have a civil marriage as well as the Bahá'í wedding. In Scotland Bahá'í marriages have been legal since 1978 and Bahá'í Marriage Officers are officially recognized.

Death and burial: Bahá'ís believe that the body is the temple of the spirit. The body should be treated with respect once the spirit has left it. The body is to be buried and allowed to decompose naturally; cremation is forbidden. The body should not be transported for burial more than one hour's journey from the place of death.

Any believer over the age of maturity (15) should be buried in a shroud of silk or cotton with a burial ring bearing the inscription:

"I came forth from God, and return unto Him, detached from all save Him, holding fast to His name, the Merciful, the Compassionate".



The burial ceremony should be simple, dignified and uplifting. Prayers and readings can be chosen by the bereaved family as they wish. The only compulsory part of the funeral service is the Prayer for the Dead, which must be said before interment by one believer while all present stand.

In Britain there are no Bahá'í cemeteries and most Bahá'ís are buried in municipal cemeteries. A simple gravestone may be engraved with a nine-pointed star and a verse from the Bahá'í scriptures.

(v) The Fast

The nineteenth month of the Bahá'í year, the month of 'Alá (Loftiness), is the month of the Fast. For nineteen days (2-20 March inclusive), adult Bahá'ís abstain from food and drink between the hours of sunrise and sunset. The Fast is intended to be a time of spiritual renewal during which a person meditates and prays and attempts to enhance their spiritual forces.

Abstinence from food and drink is symbolic of renouncing attachment to the material world. The Fast is compulsory for all Bahá'ís between the ages of 15 and 70 who are in good health. Expectant and nursing mothers, travellers, those engaged in hard physical labour, and those in poor health are exempt. Keeping the Fast is seen as a privilege rather than a burden. Fasting should not be undertaken in a grudging manner but rather joyfully as an opportunity to draw closer to God.

(vi) Pilgrimage

In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, (the 'Most Holy Book', Bahá'u'lláh's book of laws and ordinances for this dispensation), Bahá'u'lláh specifically ordained pilgrimage to the Most Great House in Baghdad (the house in Baghdad in which Bahá'u'lláh resided during His years of exile in Iraq) and the House of the Báb in Shíráz, Iran. To these two holy places, Abdu'l-Bahá added the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí near Acre, Israel.



To visit these is obligatory ***"if one can afford it and is able to do so, and if no obstacle stands in one's way....."*** (Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in the *'Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*). In 1979 the House of the Báb in Shíráz was destroyed in the persecutions of the Bahá'ís by the Iranian revolutionaries. The site is now a road and public square.

Under present day circumstances only one of the three designated Holy Places is accessible for Bahá'í pilgrims - the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí. The Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel has also become a Holy Place and modern pilgrims follow a programme which involves visiting both Shrines, the Bahá'í World Centre on Mount Carmel and other Bahá'í holy places in the Haifa-Acre area.



3 ETHICAL ISSUES

The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh are very much of this world. Throughout His writings are clear calls for a new society based upon certain fundamental principles which emphasize the unity of all people, the oneness of humanity. The global society is the society for this age, the age of humanity's maturity.

Bahá'u'lláh's Writings were prophetic in portraying the difficulties and issues, which would face the world in the twentieth century and beyond. He was well aware that they needed resolution before humanity could achieve a truly mature society. He said that through an irresistible process, traditional barriers would break down and the crises affecting the people of earth would show them the necessity of working together for the good of all. Even so, the best intentions and the best solutions of humanity would fail unless inspired by the guidance of "the Divine Physician".

The following extracts are taken from leaflets produced by the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Warwick. All quotations are from the Bahá'í Writings.

3.1 Ecology

The Bahá'í approach is one of wholeness and oneness - in other words it is a holistic religion. Bahá'ís see life as they see faiths and people - as a whole:

“... even as the human body in this world, which is outwardly composed of different limbs and organs, is in reality a closely integrated, coherent identity, similarly the structure of the physical world is like unto a single being whose limbs and members are inseparably linked together.”

Respect for the earth

Bahá'ís have an attitude of reverence for the earth and all its creatures:



“Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My name, the Maker, the Creator.....Nature is God’s Will and is its expression...”

Respect for all creatures

Kindness to animals is given great importance in the Bahá’í scriptures:

"It is essential that ye show forth the utmost consideration to the animal....."

"Train your children from their earliest days to be infinitely tender and loving to animals."

Balance and harmony

Mankind has a faculty which the animals and plants do not have, the power to discover the secrets of nature. We therefore have a responsibility to use this power only in a positive way, to ensure that balance is maintained in the world. Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, warned more than a hundred years ago that there are things in the earth which, ***"are capable of changing the whole atmosphere of the earth"***, and from which ***"contamination would prove lethal"***.

The preservation of life

Change is natural and continual in all life but disruptive and powerful change caused by human greed and thoughtlessness does not give nature time to adapt.

"... civilization ... will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men....If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness..."

We must learn to live in harmony with our planet. This requires a more spiritual, less selfish attitude than that which is too often found today. We need to preserve the diversity of life forms not only for their own sakes, but for ours too.



What are Bahá'ís doing about ecology?

The most well-known Bahá'í environmentalist was probably Richard St. Barbe Baker, who founded the "Men of the Trees" organization more than 70 years ago. He saw the need to plant millions of trees to stop the desert spreading, and he understood how trees actually encourage rainfall in dry areas. With active help from local people in Eastern Africa, he laboured for years, seeing his ideas put into practice.

In 1986, the Bahá'ís were invited to become part of the Network on Conservation and Religion begun by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). In this network WWF is working with seven world faiths to help preserve the environment. More recently, the Bahá'ís have begun a world-wide tree planting initiative and have reconvened the World Forestry Charter Gatherings.

3.2 Education

"Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit there from."

The importance of universal education

"... inasmuch as ignorance and lack of education are barriers of separation among mankind, all must receive training and instruction.....Universal education is a universal law."

"The primary, the most urgent requirement is the promotion of education. It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward."

Moral education

"Every child is potentially the light of the world - and at the same time its darkness..."



"The most essential thing is that people must be educated in such a way...that they will avoid and shrink from perpetrating crimes, so that the crime itself will appear to them as the greatest chastisement ...Therefore no crimes will be committed."

A common curriculum

"Having one course of education promotes unity among mankind. When all mankind shall receive the same education and the equality of men and women be realized the foundations of warfare will be utterly destroyed."

Bahá'ís believe that there should be a world language and script, chosen or invented, which would be taught in all schools, along with the mother tongue of the region:

"They would, in this way, be acquiring only two languages, one their very own native tongue, the other the language in which all the peoples of the world would converse."

The responsibility of parents

Parents have the responsibility of educating their children from birth. An unusual feature of Bahá'í beliefs is that, if there has to be a choice, girls should be educated in preference to boys:

"Most important of all is the training of girl children, for these girls will one day be mothers, and the mother is the first teacher of the child."

One of the basic Bahá'í principles is that individuals should investigate truth for themselves. Bahá'ís bring up their children in the knowledge of all religious beliefs so that at the age of 15 they may make their own decision.

The future

The purpose of Bahá'í education is primarily to fulfill the spiritual potential of each individual. In conjunction with this, the fulfillment of the intellectual and practical potential will enable the individual to serve his or her fellow-beings and contribute to the general welfare of the world of humanity. Bahá'ís believe that humanity has a glorious future. As education becomes universal and spiritually based, surprising results will follow.



3.3 Family life

To Bahá'ís, a happy family life is extremely important. It helps to produce happy, healthy individuals and it is the basis of a healthy society. Bahá'í family life is based upon Bahá'í marriage. Both are based on a spiritual attitude and values.

"The true marriage of Bahá'ís is this, that husband and wife should be united both physically and spiritually, that they may ever improve the spiritual life of each other, and may enjoy everlasting unity throughout all the worlds of God."

The first purpose of marriage is this spiritual companionship. The second purpose is the rearing of children in the spiritual and loving atmosphere of this kind of marriage.

Bahá'í parents seek to do everything they can to bring up their children in the love of God, to be of good character and to acquire knowledge which is useful, so that they can become healthy, happy and useful members of society. The raising of children is a very important and difficult task and a great responsibility. They will need to devote considerable time to the children's upbringing and some other activities will probably need to be sacrificed.

"...know ye in God's sight, the best of all ways to worship Him is to educate the children and train them in all the perfections of humankind...."

Due to the laws of nature, the mother generally has had a particular responsibility for the rearing of the children in the early part of their lives, during which time the father has financial responsibility for his family, but there is no reason why roles cannot be reversed or responsibilities shared. It is up to the couple to arrange their lives as they think best. The important thing is that the children receive the love and attention they need to develop happily in mind, body and spirit.



Rights and duties

Each member of the family has certain rights, which must be respected by other members of the family, and each has certain duties to the others.

"The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed."

Just as: *"...it is the duty of parents to perfectly and thoroughly train their children"*, so it is the duty of children to respect their parents: *"Say O My people! Show honour to your parentsBeware lest ye commit that which would sadden the hearts of your fathers and mothers."*

Resolving problems

When a problem occurs or a decision needs to be made, members of the family should pray about it, individually and together, so that a solution may be found. The members of the family should also consult together in order to solve their problems or make their decisions. This includes young children who should be taught from an early age the value of consultation.

"Family consultation, employing full and frank discussion, and animated by awareness of the need for moderation and balance, can be the panacea for domestic conflict."

Unity

Where a whole family are Bahá'ís they will share a common aim and set of values and it should be easier to maintain unity in the home. But where there are differences of religion this should not be allowed to cause disunity in the family. For instance, if one member of a family is a Bahá'í and the others are not, this may cause problems. If a parent is a Bahá'í, he or she should remember: *"service to the Cause should not produce neglect of the family"*.

And if a son or daughter is a Bahá'í, and the parents are not, this is the advice:



"Should anyone give you a choice between the opportunity to render service to Me and a service to them, choose ye to serve them, and let such service be a path leading you to Me".

"It is one of the essential teachings of the Faith that unity should be maintained in the home".

"If love and agreement are manifest in a single family, that family will become illumined and spiritual...."

3.4 Law and order

"Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness, of justice, of tranquillity and peace cease to shine".

The problems of law and order in many countries of the world are multiplying. There are many reasons for this but fundamentally it is because we are in a transition period between the old order of society and the new world civilization which is evolving. Many people no longer have high moral standards based on religious beliefs. There is no common agreement on what is right and wrong. Theft is often not considered to be wrong if the victim is the place of work, the government or a large institution. Respect for the rights of others is not universal.

Inequality

One of the many causes of crime is poverty or inequality. We need to create a fairer world society, in which gross inequalities between different parts of the world and different elements of society will become a thing of the past. An international economic system, with laws based on justice for all, would eventually eliminate the extremes of both poverty and wealth. There should be no excuses for crime.



Substance abuse

Many crimes are committed while people are acting under the influence of habit-forming drugs or alcohol. If people had a real spiritual dimension to their lives they would have no need to use these substances, which cause people to temporarily lose their sense of right and wrong and can permanently impair the intellect.

“It is inadmissible that man, who hath been endowed with reason, should consume that which stealeth it away.”

The Bahá'í teachings state clearly that society must use every means at its disposal to prevent the trade in harmful drugs.

Proper treatment of criminals

Although individuals are encouraged to forgive those who commit crimes against them, society as a whole cannot do this:

“...if criminals were entirely forgiven, the order of the world would be upset. So punishments one of the essential necessities for the safety of communities.”

“The community has the right of defence and of self-protection; moreover, the community has no hatred nor animosity for the murderer; it imprisons or punishes him merely for the protection and safety of others.”

Preventing crime

Prevention is required rather than an attempt at containment.

“The communities must think of preventing crimes rather than of rigorously punishing them”.

Moral and spiritual training is required. A spiritual regeneration of the whole world is necessary for crime to be reduced to its minimum level.



3.5 The status of women

“As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be their”.

Equal status

It is a basic principle of the Bahá'í Faith that women should have equal status with men. This principle was first stated 160 years ago.

“Divine Justice demands that the rights of both sexes should be equally respected since neither is superior to the other in the eyes of Heaven.”

“God is the Creator of all mankind. He has endowed both sexes with perfections and intelligence....He has created them equal; in His estimate there is no question of sex. The one whose heart is purest, whose deeds are most perfect, is acceptable to God, male or female....”

“Equality between men and women does not and physiologically cannot mean that they have identical functions. In some things women excel men, in others men are better suited than women and in many things the difference in sex is of no consequence at all.”

Marriage

Bahá'í marriage is a partnership, where decisions should be made by consulting together:

“There are times when a wife should defer to her husband and when a husband should defer to his wife, but neither should unjustly dominate the other”.

“They are two helpmates, two friends, who should be concerned about the welfare of each other”.

Motherhood

“The difference of function is most apparent in family life. The capacity for motherhood has many far-reaching implications...”



“The great importance attached to the mother’s role derives from the fact that she is the first educator of the child. Her attitude, her prayers, even what she eats and her physical condition have a great influence on the child when it is still in the womb. When the child is born, it is she who has been endowed by God with the milk which is the first food designed for it, and it is intended that if possible she should be with the baby to train and nurture it in its earliest days and months.”

“It is up to each individual woman, if and when she becomes a mother, to determine how best she can discharge on the one hand, her primary responsibility as mother, and on the other, to the extent possible, to participate in other aspects of the society of which she forms a part.”

Education

“Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity of the sexes.”

Bringing peace

“Only as women are welcomed into all fields of human endeavour will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge.”

“The denial of equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world’s population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life and ultimately to international relations.”

The Bahá’í contribution

The Bahá’í International Community, which has consultative status at the United Nations, has an Office for the Advancement of Women. This Office promotes the status of women worldwide and works to improve their living conditions. Local initiatives also flourish. In India, for example, there are Bahá’í Vocational Training Institutes where women learn to read and write, study basic nutrition and hygiene and learn a useful craft. When they return



to their villages they are not only able to support themselves but have a positive influence on their community.

3.6 Treatment of animals

Kindness to animals

The Bahá'í Faith teaches that animals should be treated with kindness. Bahá'u'lláh listed kindness to animals as one of the qualities which must be acquired by anyone searching for God. All of creation is inter-related, and the realization of the oneness of all life is fundamental to the Bahá'í view. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh, said:

“Unless ye must, bruise not the serpent in the dust, how much less wound a man. And if ye can, no ant should ye alarm, much less a brother harm.”

The need for mankind to change its attitude towards animals could hardly be put more strongly than it is in the Bahá'í writings:

“To blessed animals the utmost kindness must be shown, the more the better. Tenderness and loving-kindness are basic principles of God’s heavenly kingdom. Ye should most carefully bear this matter in mind.”

Measure against this standard the way live animals are transported in inhumane conditions on their way to be killed, or in crates from tropical countries to our pet shops; caught or hunted for pleasure; used in laboratories to test drugs or cosmetics; or bred to be used as status symbol items of clothing.

Animals as food

In some of the more industrialized societies, farming is big business, intent on supplying the market with maximum efficiency and profit. Animals are part of the production line and factory farms are the norm. Chickens and turkeys which never see the light of day are unnaturally fattened for the market. Eggs are produced in houses where hens are packed into cages with mesh floors, with all natural movement constrained. Such practices would



seem to be at odds with the Bahá'í teachings on the treatment of animals. The writings make it clear that keeping animals for food is ultimately unnecessary:

“As humanity progresses, meat will be used less and less, for the teeth of men are not carnivorous....The human teeth, the molars are formed to grind grain. The front teeth, the incisors, are for fruits etc. It is therefore quite apparent according to the implements for eating, man’s food is intended to be grain and not meat. When mankind is more fully developed, the eating of meat will gradually cease.”

Man’s responsibility for animals

“It is not only their fellow human beings that the beloved of God must treat with mercy and compassion, rather must they show forth the utmost loving-kindness to every living creature. For in all physical respects, and where the animal spirit is concerned, the selfsame feelings are shared by animal and man.....ye do worse to harm an animal, for man hath a language, he can lodge a complaint, he can cry out and moan; if injured he can have recourse to the authorities and these will protect him from his aggressor. But the hapless beast is mute, able neither to express its hurt not take its case to the authorities.....Train your children from their earliest days to be infinitely tender and loving to animals. If an animal be sick, let the children try to heal it, if it be hungry, let them feed it, if thirsty, let them quench its thirst, if weary, let them see that it rests.”



4 RESOURCE MATERIALS

Websites

www.bahai.org

www.bahai.org.uk

www.bahai-publishing-trust.co.uk (Bahá'í Books UK)

www.bahai.org/warwick (incl. leaflets from Warwick Bahá'í bookshop)

www.bahaullah.org (on the Life of Bahá'u'lláh)

www.media.bahai.org (downloadable images)

www.bbc.co.uk/religion

Recommended literature (available from Bahá'í Books UK)

'About the Bahá'ís' (magazine from Bahá'í Publications Australia)

'Abdu'l-Bahá – Paris talks

'Abdu'l-Bahá – Some answered questions

Bahá'u'lláh – Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'u'lláh – The Hidden Words

Bahá'í International Community – The prosperity of mankind

Esslemont, J. E. - Bahá'u'lláh and the new era

Mehrabi, J. – Stories of the life of Abdu'l-Bahá

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the UK - Principles of Bahá'í Administration

Warwick leaflets (covering a wide range of topics) – from the Bahá'ís of Warwick Bookshop



LIST OF PUBLICATIONS BY THE BAHÁ'Í RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AGENCY (BREA)

For schools and parents:

- a) Pastoral care leaflet for schools in England
- b) Pastoral care leaflet for schools in Wales

For SACRE members:

- 1) A guide to seeking, maintaining & enhancing Bahá'í membership on Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) in England and Wales.

For RE teachers:

- 2) The Bahá'í Faith: information for teachers.
- 3) A religious perspective on the environment: the Bahá'í Faith.
- 4) Living the Bahá'í life: worship.
- 5) Human rights: a Bahá'í focus.

More titles to follow in this series.

In collaboration with the Warwick Bahá'í bookshop:

The Bahá'í Faith: photocopiable worksheets for teachers of RE (Key Stages 2 & 3 in England).

How to order:

Please email BREA's administrator (brea@bahai.org.uk) if you would like a hard copy. Prices vary between £4 and £5.50 (excl. postage).

The pastoral care leaflets are available direct from Warwick Bookshop (<http://www.warwickbahaibookshop.co.uk>) at a cost of 10p each plus p&p.