



Walking Together on a Path of Service

Ruhi Institute



Book 7

Walking Together on a Path of Service

Ruhi Institute

Books in the Series:

- Book 1** *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*
includes: "Understanding the Bahá'í Writings"
 "Prayer"
 "Life and Death"
- Book 2** *Arising to Serve*
includes: "The Joy of Teaching"
 "Deepening Themes"
 "Introducing Bahá'í Beliefs"
- Book 3** *Teaching Children's Classes, Grade 1*
includes: "Some Principles of Bahá'í Education"
 "Lessons for Children's Classes, Grade 1"
 "Conducting Classes for Children"
- Book 4** *The Twin Manifestations*
includes: "The Greatness of this Day"
 "The Life of the Báb"
 "The Life of Bahá'u'lláh"
- Book 5** *Teaching Children's Classes, Grade 2*
includes: "Lessons for Children's Classes, Grade 2"
- Book 6** *Teaching the Cause*
includes: "The Spiritual Nature of Teaching"
 "The Qualities and Attitudes of the Teacher"
 "The Act of Teaching"
- Book 7** *Walking Together on a Path of Service*
includes: "The Spiritual Path"
 "Becoming a Tutor of Books 1-6"
 "Promoting the Arts at the Grassroots"
- Book 8** *The Covenant*
includes: "The Covenant of God"
 "The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh"
- Book 9** *Family Prosperity*
includes: "Bahá'í Family Life"
 "Giving: The Spiritual Basis of Prosperity"

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TO THE COLLABORATORS

The system for the delivery of courses in a national community that has chosen to use the Ruhi Institute materials is generally put in place through the efforts of a relatively few Bahá'ís already deepened in the Faith. Having familiarized themselves with the content of Book 1, these friends are able to offer it in various settings, under the guidance of their national or regional institute. As the system begins to take root, the institute endeavors to increase the number of believers who have completed the first two or three books in the sequence and, to this end, conducts formal training courses for those who are capable and eager to serve as tutors of study circles. Gradually the pool of tutors upon which the institute can draw increases and the system becomes firmly established. This, it may be said, constitutes a first stage in the unfolding of the institute process in such a country.

Early on, it was recognized by the Ruhi Institute that, if courses were to reach large contingents of believers, the capacity to multiply the number of study circles would have to be inherent to the system itself. The main sequence of courses would need, at some point, to impart to the participants the knowledge, qualities and skills that would enable them to serve as tutors. The Institute was set on establishing within a population a dynamic process of teaching-learning. In this process, individual believers enter a path of service by studying the first few units with the help of a tutor. Through their continued participation in the courses, their knowledge of the Faith grows and their capacity to serve it increases. Eventually they reach a point where they learn to assist others to initiate and follow a similar path of spiritual development. Every participant in the courses of the Ruhi Institute, therefore, has the opportunity to be both a student and a tutor.

Years of action and reflection, during which materials were written and modified in the light of experience, led the Institute to the conclusion that the proper place for a course for the preparation of tutors was after Book 6. The aim of Book 7 would be to introduce certain concepts to the participants and offer them some insights into the attributes of an effective tutor. It was understood, however, that one course covering the units of this book would not be sufficient for such training. Thus, the opportunity would need to be provided to those performing this act of service to come together periodically to polish their skills and enhance their understanding. Regular gatherings for tutors, then, became an essential element in the system.

The purpose of the first unit of Book 7, "The Spiritual Path", is to raise awareness of the spiritual dynamics of advancing along a path of service to the Cause and increase understanding of the forces at work. The second unit, "Becoming a Tutor of Books 1-6", examines some of the concepts, attitudes, skills and abilities that contribute to the capability of helping a group of believers go through the first six courses. The third unit, "Promoting the Arts at the Grassroots", is designed to create appreciation for the role of artistic endeavors in the activity of a study circle.

The main sequence of courses offered by the Ruhi Institute has been conceived in terms of three cycles, each one concerned with the spiritual and moral empowerment of the believers from a particular perspective. Book 7 completes the first of these, centered on the practice of the freedom the individual has to undertake acts of service within the framework of the teachings of the Faith and the guidance provided by its institutions. Those who have finished the book are urged to form new study circles for which they will serve as tutors and, at the same time, move on to the study of Book 8, "The Covenant", which begins a cycle of courses dedicated to the individual and the community. This will be followed by the third cycle focusing on the individual and society.



The Spiritual Path

Purpose

**To gain increased awareness of the spiritual dynamics
of advancing along a path of service to the Cause
and acquire an understanding of the forces at work.**

SECTION 1

Like most others who take up the study of Book 7, you have probably had the opportunity to go through some, if not all, of the previous six books of the Ruhi Institute. In these and other studies you have undertaken, you have endeavored to increase your knowledge of the Faith, gain insight into spiritual truths, and develop skills and abilities of service. Your association with the Institute, we have mentioned before, can be described in terms of walking a spiritual path. As you advance on this path, you grow spiritually and enhance your capacity to contribute to the progress of the Cause, participating in increasingly more complex areas of activity. Having already rendered valuable service in this way, you now wish to assist others to initiate and follow a similar path. To begin, you will find it helpful to reflect on the nature of spiritual growth itself, which is the theme of this unit.

SECTION 2

On this earthly plane of existence we endeavor to develop the spiritual qualities which we potentially possess. The way we possess spiritual qualities is profoundly different from the way we own material things. When a mirror reflects the sun, in a sense it possesses the image of the sun. But, in fact, the sun is not in the mirror. Our spiritual qualities are gifts from God that we receive as we turn the mirrors of our hearts towards Him. But divine attributes are at most dimly reflected in hearts that are covered and obscured by the dust and dross of this world. It is appropriate, then, that the first passage we study in this course on the spiritual path should be one stressing the importance of polishing the mirror of the heart. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

“The most important thing is to polish the mirrors of hearts in order that they may become illumined and receptive of the divine light. One heart may possess the capacity of the polished mirror; another, be covered and obscured by the dust and dross of this world. Although the same Sun is shining upon both, in the mirror which is polished, pure and sanctified you may behold the Sun in all its fullness, glory and power, revealing its majesty and effulgence; but in the mirror which is rusted and obscured there is no capacity for reflection, although so far as the Sun itself is concerned it is shining thereon and is neither lessened nor deprived. Therefore, our duty lies in seeking to polish the mirrors of our hearts in order that we shall become reflectors of that light and recipients of the divine bounties which may be fully revealed through them.” ¹

Complete the following sentences:

- a. We should _____ the mirrors of our hearts in order that they may become _____ an _____ of the _____ light.

- b. One heart may _____ the capacity of the _____ mirror; another heart may be _____ and _____ by the _____ and _____ of this world.
- c. The same Sun _____ upon _____ the polished mirror and the mirror covered and obscured by the dust and dross of this world.
- d. In the mirror which is polished, _____ and _____ we may see the Sun in all its _____, _____ and _____, revealing its _____ and _____.
- e. In the mirror which is _____ and _____ there is no _____ for _____.
- f. Our duty lies in seeking to polish the mirrors of our hearts in order that we may become _____ of the divine light and _____ of the _____ which may be fully _____ through them.

2. Decide whether the following statements are true or false:

- a. A polished mirror reflects the light of the physical sun. T F
- b. An unpolished mirror does not reflect the light of the physical sun. T F
- c. The Sun of Truth shines upon pure hearts. T F
- d. The Sun of Truth shines upon hearts obscured by the dust and dross of this world. T F
- e. Pure hearts reflect the light of the Sun of Truth. T F
- f. Hearts obscured by the dust and dross of this world reflect the light of the Sun of Truth. T F

3. Decide which of the following are "dust and dross of this world":

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| _____ Attachment to worldly possessions | _____ Self-love |
| _____ Love for humanity | _____ Knowledge |
| _____ Greed | _____ Love of luxury and comfort |
| _____ Envy | _____ Arrogance |

4. Decide which of the following help us "polish the mirrors of our hearts":

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| _____ Joy | _____ Preferring others to ourselves |
| _____ Faith | _____ Love for humanity |
| _____ Kindness | _____ Love of God |
| _____ Knowledge | _____ Prayer |
| _____ Competing with others | _____ Goodly deeds |
| _____ Thinking of the imperfections
of others | _____ Studying the Creative Word |

5. To keep the dust and dross of this world from gathering on the mirrors of our hearts, we have to make constant effort. Decide whether the following statements are true or false:

- a. Prayer alone will polish the mirrors of our hearts. T F
- b. Goodly deeds alone will polish the mirrors of our hearts. T F
- c. Prayers together with goodly deeds will polish the mirrors of our hearts because they attract the bounties of God. T F
- d. Only through the bounty of God can we polish the mirrors of our hearts. T F
- e. It is possible to lose one's purity of heart. T F
- f. At some point in our lives, the task of polishing the mirrors of our hearts comes to an end. T F

6. Answer the following questions:

- a. What is the purpose of a pure heart? _____

- b. What can a heart that is not pure achieve? _____

- c. What happens to the mirror of a heart that is not turned towards the Sun of Truth? _____

7. Discuss the following question in your group:

How do we all—teachers, parents, brothers and sisters, the extended family, as well as friends—protect children from the dust and dross of this world?

SECTION 3

The light that reflects in a mirror is its wealth. Without the light, the mirror is worth little. Our spiritual qualities, our knowledge, our service to humanity constitute our true wealth. Material possessions are necessary and acceptable, but only if they are used for the promotion of human virtue and happiness. Bahá'u'lláh says:

“Man’s merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches. Take heed that your words be purged from idle fancies and worldly desires and your deeds be cleansed from craftiness and suspicion. Dissipate not the wealth of your precious lives in the pursuit of evil and corrupt affection, nor let your endeavors be spent in promoting your personal interest.”²

‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

“. . . the happiness and greatness, the rank and station, the pleasure and peace, of an individual have never consisted in his personal wealth, but rather in his excellent character, his high resolve, the breadth of his learning, and his ability to solve difficult problems.”³

1. Complete the following sentences:

- a. Man’s merit lies in _____ and _____.
- b. Man’s merit does not lie in the display of _____ and _____.
- c. We should take heed that our words be purged from _____ and _____.
- d. We should take heed that our _____ be _____ from idle fancies and worldly desires.
- e. We should take heed that our deeds be cleansed from _____ and _____.
- f. We should take heed that our _____ be _____ from craftiness and suspicion.
- g. We should not waste the wealth of our precious lives in the pursuit of _____ and _____.
- h. We should not waste the _____ of our _____ in the pursuit of evil and corrupt affection.
- i. Our efforts should not be spent in promoting our _____.

- h. Service to our family increases our spiritual wealth. T F
- i. Service to our friends increases our spiritual wealth. T F
- j. Service to our community increases our spiritual wealth. T F
- k. It is possible to be happy without material wealth. T F
- l. A dishonest person with a great deal of money has true wealth if he spends it in service to humanity. T F
- m. The secret of acquiring wealth is to promote and protect one's own personal interests. T F
- n. In order to be truly happy one has to be materially poor. T F
- o. You can buy anything with money including salvation. T F
5. Discuss the following questions in your group:
- a. What are the consequences of acquiring wealth unethically, to the individual and to society?
- b. Under what conditions is material wealth acceptable?
- c. How does one's service to the Cause increase one's own true wealth and the wealth of others?
6. Memorize the following quotation:

"O My servants! Were ye to discover the hidden, the shoreless oceans of My incorruptible wealth, ye would, of a certainty, esteem as nothing the world, nay, the entire creation." 4

SECTION 4

We have said that spiritual qualities are precious gifts given to us by God. We must also remember that He has given us all the powers we need to receive and cherish these gifts and develop our qualities. Every human being has been endowed with the capacity to know God, to love Him and to carry out His commandments. We also have been endowed with innumerable other potentialities. However, the measure of capacity is not the same for everyone, and God will not ask from us that which is beyond our capacity. What we are asked to do is to develop to its fullest that which we potentially possess.

To develop our spiritual qualities, we must be aware of the high spiritual station that God has destined for each of us and steadily move towards it. Our eyes should be

fixed on excellence; we should not be satisfied with mediocrity. Living according to the standards of today's society lulls us into mediocrity. Many people think that excellence is achieved through competition with others. But, in fact, competition entangles us even further in the trappings of society. The force that drives us towards excellence should be our ardent desire to achieve what God has bountifully ordained for us. Striving for excellence means striving to develop to its fullest that with which we have been endowed. Shoghi Effendi tells us:

"The chosen ones of God . . . should not look at the depraved conditions of the society in which they live, nor at the evidences of moral degradation and frivolous conduct which the people around them display. They should not content themselves merely with relative distinction and excellence. Rather they should fix their gaze upon nobler heights by setting the counsels and exhortations of the Pen of Glory as their supreme goal. Then it will be readily realized how numerous are the stages that still remain to be traversed and how far off the desired goal lies—a goal which is none other than exemplifying heavenly morals and virtues." ⁵

1. Let us now reflect on the concept of "capacity". Decide whether the following statements are true or false:
 - a. All people have the capacity to know and love God. T F
 - b. All people have the capacity to reflect the names and attributes of God. T F
 - c. All people have the capacity to reflect the names and attributes of God to the same degree. T F
 - d. The reason some reject the Manifestation of God is that they lack the capacity to know and love God. T F
 - e. An unkind person does not have the capacity to be kind. T F
 - f. A person who was brought up to be dishonest does not have the capacity to be honest. T F
 - g. It is possible to know the capacity of another. T F
 - h. Each of us knows his or her own capacity. T F
 - i. Only God knows how much capacity each of us has. T F
 - j. Parents are responsible for developing their children's potentialities. T F
 - k. Teachers are responsible for developing their students' potentialities. T F

l. Communities are responsible for developing the potentialities of their individual members. T F

m. An individual is responsible for developing his or her own potentialities. T F

2. Now that we have thought about the concept of "capacity", let us turn to the quotation above.

a. The chosen ones of God should not look at:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

b. They should not content themselves with:

1. relative _____ 2. relative _____

c. Rather than being content with relative excellence, they should _____

d. They should fix their gaze on nobler heights by _____

e. Once they set the counsels of God as their supreme goal, they will realize _____

3. To rise above the depraved conditions and moral degradation of society, we need to develop spiritual qualities. The first column below lists some of the depraved conditions of society and the second some of the qualities required to combat them. To each condition, match the quality that most directly seems to combat it.

_____	Oppression	Chastity
_____	Materialism	Obedience
_____	Lawlessness	All-embracing love
_____	Moral laxity	Honesty
_____	Corruption	Detachment
_____	Fanaticism	Courage
_____	Arrogance	Tranquillity of conscience
_____	Violence	Justice
_____	Pursuit of mis-directed pleasures	Humility

4. Some of the attitudes and qualities that protect us from frivolous conduct are respect, reverence and courtesy. Can you mention three more?
- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

5. The first column below gives some examples of relative excellence and the second some examples of true excellence. Match the examples of relative excellence to those of true excellence.

- | | |
|---|--|
| _____ To study hard enough to make sure you receive a passing grade in class. | a. To always obey laws. |
| _____ To give to the Fund some of the money you have left over after paying your monthly expenses and setting aside a little for entertainment. | b. To strive to fully understand the subjects you are studying in class. |
| _____ To only avoid doing something wrong when you think you might get caught. | c. To have overflowing love and respect for all humanity. |
| _____ To treat people of other races and classes with tolerance. | d. To actively promote the welfare of your fellow human beings. |
| _____ To harm no one. | e. To give generously and sacrificially to the Fund. |

6. Discuss the following questions in your group:
- a. Why should we not be content with “relative distinction and excellence”?
- b. What should our standard of excellence be?
- c. Some people think that competition is the only way to achieve excellence. In the Hidden Words, Bahá'u'lláh tells us: **“Of all men the most negligent is he that disputeth idly and seeketh to advance himself over his brother.”**⁶ How do you think excellence can be achieved, if it is not through competition?
- d. We have said that pursuing excellence implies striving to develop one’s capacity to the fullest. Is the measure of our capacity fixed or does it change as we grow spiritually? Can a person change his or her character?

SECTION 5

The human heart was created to love. It is in its nature to be bound to something. If it is not to be attached to earthly things and is to be able to reflect the light of God, it has to be bound to God. There are many ways of expressing love. We love our families, our friends, our community, and our country. However, all of these forms of love are limited. The only unlimited love is the love of God. His love is all-embracing. When our hearts are pure and reflect His love, we express unlimited and unselfish love for the entire human race. Unless our love for others is illumined by the limitless love of God, it can take on undesirable characteristics, such as jealousy, possessiveness, and prejudice.

There is one very important characteristic of love we must all understand. Love is always accompanied by fear. This does not mean that we fear the ones we love. What we fear is either losing our loved ones or losing their love. Thus, together with the love of God, we must also have the fear of God in our hearts—fear that our actions, our wrongdoings, will prevent the love of God from reaching us. This is not to say that our actions will stop God from loving us, for His love is infinite and never ceases to rain down upon humanity. But the things we do may become like barriers that will not allow His love to reach us.

The development of spiritual qualities is entirely dependent on both the love of God and the fear of God. Many passages from the Writings clarify our understanding of these two essential forces of our spiritual lives. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

“For love of God and spiritual attraction do cleanse and purify the human heart and dress and adorn it with the spotless garment of holiness; and once the heart is entirely attached to the Lord, and bound over to the Blessed Perfection, then will the grace of God be revealed.

“This love is not of the body but completely of the soul. And those souls whose inner being is lit by the love of God are even as spreading rays of light, and they will shine out like stars of holiness in a pure and crystalline sky. For true love, real love, is the love for God, and this is sanctified beyond the notions and imaginings of men.”⁷

Bahá'u'lláh says:

“He that seeketh to be a helper of God in this Day, let him close his eyes to whatever he may possess, and open them to the things of God. Let him cease to occupy himself with that which profiteth him, and concern himself with that which shall exalt the all-compelling name of the Almighty. He should cleanse his heart from all evil passions and corrupt desires, for the fear of God is the weapon that can render him victorious, the primary instrument whereby he can achieve his purpose. The fear of God is the shield that defendeth His Cause, the buckler that enableth His people to attain to victory. It is a standard that no man can abase, a force that no power can rival. By its aid, and by the leave of Him Who is the Lord of Hosts, they that have drawn nigh unto God have been able to subdue and conquer the citadels of the hearts of men.”⁸

1. Complete the following sentences:

- a. The love of God and spiritual attraction do _____ and _____ the human heart.
- b. Once the human heart is entirely _____ to the Lord, and _____ over to the Blessed Perfection, then will the _____ of God be revealed.
- c. This love is not of the _____ but completely of the _____.
- d. Those souls whose inner being is _____ by the love of God are even as spreading rays of _____.
- e. Those souls whose inner being is lit by the love of God _____ like _____ of _____ in a pure and crystalline sky.
- f. For _____ love, _____ love, is the love for _____, and this is sanctified beyond the _____ and _____ of men.

2. Answer the following questions:

- a. What cleanses and purifies the human heart? _____

- b. What do you understand by the phrase "the grace of God will be revealed"?

- c. What condition does the heart have to fulfill in order to attract the grace of God?

- d. Is the love of God a physical or spiritual condition? _____
- e. What do we become when our souls are lit by the love of God? _____

- f. What is true love? _____
- g. How does an individual whose inner being is illumined by the love of God affect others? _____

3. Using the following words, write sentences about various forms of love. A few examples are given to assist you.

Joy	<u>The love of God brings joy to our hearts.</u>
Freedom	<u>The source of our true freedom is the love of God and being bound to Him.</u>
Greed	<u>Love of worldly things can lead to greed.</u>
Jealousy	<u>If our love for our friends is not illumined by the love of God, it can lead to jealousy.</u>
Light	_____
Sorrow	_____
Disappointment	_____
Life	_____
Passion	_____
Longing	_____
Grace	_____
Bondage	_____
Possessiveness	_____
Fear	_____
Mercy	_____
Compassion	_____
Holiness	_____
All-embracing	_____
Justice	_____
Knowledge	_____
Courage	_____

4. Complete the following sentences:

- The fear of God is the _____ that can render us victorious when we choose to be a helper of God in this Day.
- The fear of God is the _____ whereby we can achieve our purpose.
- The fear of God is the _____ that defends His Cause.
- The fear of God is the _____ that enables His people to attain to victory.

- e. The fear of God is a _____ that no man can abase.
 - f. The fear of God is a _____ that no power can rival.
 - g. The fear of God aids those who have drawn nigh unto Him to _____ and _____ the _____ of the hearts of men.
5. Discuss the following questions in your group:
- a. How do we show our love for God?
 - b. How do we show our fear of God?
 - c. Why is the love of God important in the development of spiritual qualities?
 - d. Why is the fear of God important in the development of spiritual qualities?
 - e. When we are in the presence of something far greater than ourselves, how do we feel? Do we feel awe? Do we feel awe when contemplating the Might and Grandeur of God? How is this feeling of awe related to the fear of God?

SECTION 6

We know that we are all walking a path towards God, the ultimate object of our love and devotion. Each step we take in this path increases our love for Him. And with each step the mirrors of our hearts become more polished and we further develop our spiritual qualities. That which illumines this path is the law of God. Unless we obey His laws, we will find ourselves in darkness and lose the path. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh speaks thus of the laws of God:

“The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behooveth everyone who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration.”⁹

“O ye peoples of the world! Know assuredly that My commandments are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures.”¹⁰

In one of His Tablets, He says:

“Indeed, the laws of God are like unto the ocean and the children of men as fish, did they but know it.” ¹¹

And in the Seven Valleys, He says:

“In all these journeys the traveler must stray not the breadth of a hair from the ‘Law’, for this is indeed the secret of the ‘Path’ and the fruit of the Tree of ‘Truth’; and in all these stages he must cling to the robe of obedience to the commandments, and hold fast to the cord of shunning all forbidden things, that he may be nourished from the cup of the Law and informed of the mysteries of Truth.” ¹²

1. The above quotations imply that:

- a. Our first duty is to recognize the Manifestation of God. T F
- b. After we have recognized Him, our next duty is to obey Him. T F
- c. Recognition of the Manifestation of God is more important than obedience to His laws. T F
- d. Obedience to the laws is more important than recognition of the Manifestation of God. T F
- e. By the phrase “inseparable twin duties”, we should understand that recognition of the Manifestation of God without obedience to His laws is not acceptable. T F
- f. By the phrase “inseparable twin duties”, we should understand that obedience to the laws of God without recognition of His Manifestation is not acceptable. T F
- g. God has given us laws because He loves us. T F
- h. God has given us laws so that we will fear Him. T F
- i. We should obey God’s laws out of fear of punishment. T F
- j. We should obey God’s laws because we love Him. T F
- k. We should obey God’s laws in order to attract His mercy. T F
- l. God only loves those who obey Him. T F
- m. Those who obey God open their hearts to receive His love. T F

n. God is only merciful to His obedient servants. T F

o. Man cannot live outside the ocean of God's laws. T F

2. Complete the following sentence:

In all these journeys, the traveler must _____ not the breadth of a _____ from the _____, for this is indeed the secret of the "Path" and the _____ of the Tree of "Truth"; and in all stages he must cling to the robe of _____ to the _____, and hold fast to the cord of shunning all _____ things, that he may be _____ from the cup of the _____ and informed of the mysteries of _____.

3. Which of the following are laws?

- _____ God is one.
- _____ Every Bahá'í should pray daily.
- _____ Every Bahá'í is a follower of Bahá'u'lláh.
- _____ Every Bahá'í should contribute to the Bahá'í Fund.
- _____ God has given everyone the capacity to recognize His Manifestation.
- _____ Every Bahá'í should obey the Universal House of Justice.
- _____ Men and women are equal.
- _____ Bahá'ís should educate their children.

4. What does it mean to be an obedient servant of God?

- _____ To constantly question the wisdom of what God has ordained
- _____ To constantly protest against or disregard the decisions of Bahá'í institutions
- _____ To blindly follow those who we believe to be obedient servants of God
- _____ To investigate the truth with the intention of accepting and living by it
- _____ To walk in His path in accordance with His decrees

5. How do we learn about God's laws?

- _____ By following others
- _____ By going to meetings
- _____ By reading the Writings every morning and evening
- _____ By praying
- _____ By deepening our knowledge of the Faith

6. The laws of God could be described as:

- _____ The secret of the path in all the journeys of the traveler
- _____ The fruit of the Tree of Truth
- _____ The lamps of God's loving providence
- _____ The keys of God's mercy
- _____ The ocean in which all human beings are immersed

7. Discuss the following questions in your group:
 - a. What is the purpose of God's laws?
 - b. Why should we obey God's laws?
 - c. Are there some laws that are more important than others and should therefore receive more attention?
 - d. Which one is more acceptable to God: a Bahá'í who does not follow the laws of Bahá'u'lláh, or someone who lives according to the laws of his own religion but refuses to accept Bahá'u'lláh?

SECTION 7

We cannot walk the path that leads us to the presence of God blindly. Recognition of the Manifestation of God opens our eyes. We come to know that which conduces to our upliftment and that which leads to our abasement. As we study the Revelation brought to us by the Manifestation, we become aware of God's purpose for humankind. In everything we see a sign of His Might and His inscrutable Wisdom. The knowledge we gain through the Manifestation of God, and the love we feel towards Him, give us assurance. Our hearts no longer vacillate and tremble.

As we humbly walk this path, we grow in faith and certitude. And as the measure of our faith increases, so does our capacity to receive the bounties of God and develop our spiritual qualities. But faith is not merely "knowing". If we are truly certain of the truth of the Teachings of the Manifestation, we must act upon them. Knowing the truth but acting contrary to it or hesitating to act upon that which we know shows weakness of faith. That is why faith is conscious knowledge expressed in action. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

"Although a person of good deeds is acceptable at the Threshold of the Almighty, yet it is first 'to know', and then 'to do'. Although a blind man produceth a most wonderful and exquisite art, yet he is deprived of seeing it. Consider how most animals labor for man, draw loads and facilitate travel; yet, as they are ignorant, they receive no reward for this toil and labor. The cloud raineth, roses and hyacinths grow; the plain and meadow, the garden and trees become green and blossom; yet they do not realize the results and outcome of all these. The lamp is lighted, but as it hath not a conscious knowledge of itself, no one hath become glad because of it. Moreover, a soul of excellent deeds and good manners will undoubtedly advance from whatever horizon he beholdeth the lights radiating. Herein lies the difference: By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds." ¹³

1. Complete the following sentences:
 - a. A blind man produces a most wonderful and exquisite art, but _____

- b. Most animals labor for man, draw loads and facilitate travel, but _____

- c. The cloud rains, roses and hyacinths grow; the plain and meadow, the garden and trees become green and blossom; but _____

- d. The lamp is lighted, but _____

- e. A human being performs excellent deeds, but first _____

2. For each of the following words, write a sentence that includes the word "faith". An example is given to assist you.

- Immovable His faith was like a mountain; it was immovable.
- Unquestioning _____
- Vitality _____
- Firm _____
- Increase _____
- Newly-awakened _____
- True _____
- Steadfast _____
- Undoubting _____
- Genuine _____
- Unshakable _____

3. Decide whether the following statements are true or false:

- a. The source of faith is knowledge of God and recognition of His Manifestation. T F
- b. Faith in Bahá'u'lláh implies obeying His commands. T F
- c. If one has faith in the Manifestation of God, one will always obey His commands. T F
- d. To have faith means to never ask questions. T F
- e. Faith increases as one's knowledge of God increases. T F
- f. Faith increases as one acts in accordance with the Teachings of the Manifestation of God. T F

- g. Doubt is the opposite of certitude. T F
- h. Faith and certitude are the same things. T F
- i. To reach the state of certitude one has to go through doubt first. T F
- j. To have blind faith is a sign that one has reached the state of certitude. T F
- k. To have immovable faith is the same as being fanatic. T F
- l. Faith is not something one can lose. T F

4. Write down some things of which you are certain. Two examples are given to assist you.

- a. I am certain that the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh will be established.
- b. I am certain that, in spite of all opposition, the Faith will be triumphant.
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____

5. Discuss the following in your group:

- a. If you believe in Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings but, in a difficult situation and under a great deal of pressure, decide that it is not to your advantage to act according to the principle of honesty, what are you doubting?
- b. What does one do with one's doubts? How does one get from doubt to certitude? How are knowledge and action involved? What role does prayer play? How is the grace of God involved?
- c. Faith is a gift that we receive from God.

SECTION 8

Faith is the bedrock upon which we build our spiritual existence. We know the truth of the Revelation of God and do not hesitate to act accordingly. We know our love for God and His Manifestation and are steadfast in it. We are certain that the Will of God

will be done and submit our own will to His. Yet, our knowledge of God's spiritual and material creation is limited, and we never know what is to happen from one day to the next. So, with hearts full of hope, we constantly anticipate the outpouring of God's bounties upon us. We trust in God's mercy and are ever hopeful of receiving His blessings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

"Never lose thy trust in God. Be thou ever hopeful, for the bounties of God never cease to flow upon man. . . . Man is under all conditions immersed in a sea of God's blessings. Therefore, be thou not hopeless under any circumstances, but rather be firm in thy hope." ¹⁴

"If the heart turns away from the blessings God offers how can it hope for happiness? If it does not put its hope and trust in God's Mercy, where can it find rest? Oh, trust in God! for His Bounty is everlasting, and in His Blessings, for they are superb. Oh! put your faith in the Almighty, for He faileth not and His goodness endureth for ever! His Sun giveth Light continually, and the Clouds of His Mercy are full of the Waters of Compassion with which He waters the hearts of all who trust in Him. His refreshing Breeze ever carries healing in its wings to the parched souls of men!" ¹⁵

1. Complete the following sentences:

- a. We should be hopeful, for the _____ of God will never _____ to flow upon man.
- b. We should not be hopeless under any circumstances, but be _____ in our _____.
- c. We should not be _____ under any _____, but be firm in our hope.
- d. The clouds of God's _____ are full of the Waters of _____.
- e. With the Waters of _____, God waters the _____ of all who _____ in Him.

2. Decide whether the following statements are true or false:

- a. Trust in God is a source of hope. T F
- b. The real source of hope is confidence in one's abilities. T F
- c. Hope springs from confidence in God's all-embracing mercy. T F
- d. Faith in the truth of the Teachings of God's Manifestation is a source of hope. T F

- e. The greatest sources of hope are material possessions and connections with people in power. T F
- f. Only naive people are hopeful. A realistic person has reason to doubt everything. T F
- g. Hope only springs from the hearts of fools. T F
- h. If we are content with the Will of God then we do not need hope. T F
- i. We can be content with the Will of God and, at the same time, with hearts full of hope, long to receive greater and greater shares of His bounty. T F
3. Hopefulness implies that when we set a goal to develop certain spiritual qualities:
- a. We are certain that we will achieve our goal. T F
- b. We need to constantly remind ourselves that we may not achieve our goal. T F
- c. We need not make any effort. T F
- d. We only need to be confident in our own capacity as it is the main factor that will determine our success. T F
- e. We have to work for our goal, but it is through God's bounty that we will achieve it. T F
4. Which of the following sentences are spoken by a hopeful person?
- a. Of course I believe that human beings are created noble, but I will never live to see the day when people act nobly. Yes No
- b. Our community is going through great difficulty, but I am sure that as we open our hearts to the bounties of God, soon we will achieve unity and begin to grow again. Yes No
- c. Our numbers are so small, that no matter how hard we try we cannot make any changes to the world and its condition. Yes No
- d. I will not bother to go to a doctor because I won't get better anyway. Yes No
- e. I'm no good, and there's no sense in trying to change me. Yes No

- f. I know my limitations but I always try to do my best. Yes No
- g. During the most difficult times of my life, I look for divine assistance, and always receive it. Yes No
- h. Some of the children in my class misbehave, but I know that if I patiently help them, they will progress. Yes No

5. Memorize the following prayer:

“He is the Compassionate, the All-Bountiful! O God, my God! Thou seest me, Thou knowest me; Thou art my Haven and my Refuge. None have I sought nor any will I seek save Thee; no path have I trodden nor any will I tread but the path of Thy love. In the darksome night of despair, my eye turneth expectant and full of hope to the morn of Thy boundless favor and at the hour of dawn my drooping soul is refreshed and strengthened in remembrance of Thy beauty and perfection. He whom the grace of Thy mercy aideth, though he be but a drop, shall become the boundless ocean, and the merest atom which the outpouring of Thy loving-kindness assisteth, shall shine even as the radiant star.

“Shelter under Thy protection, O Thou Spirit of purity, Thou Who art the All-Bountiful Provider, this enthralled, enkindled servant of Thine. Aid him in this world of being to remain steadfast and firm in Thy love and grant that this broken-winged bird attain a refuge and shelter in Thy divine nest that abideth upon the celestial tree.”¹⁶

SECTION 9

A close companion of hope is longing desire. A heart that does not long to receive the bounties of God is lifeless. A soul that does not burn with the desire to reach the presence of God can but wander in the desert of waywardness. Longing and desire are properties of the human heart. But the object of desire must be heavenly qualities, spiritual joy, acceptance at the divine threshold and humble service to His Cause. For if the dictates of self and passion direct desire towards the world and its vanities, the very force that impels the progress of the soul will be exhausted. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

“The fountain of divine generosity is gushing forth, but we must have thirst for the living waters. Unless there be thirst, the salutary water will not assuage. Unless the soul hungers, the delicious foods of the heavenly table will not give sustenance. Unless the eyes of perception be opened, the lights of the sun will not be witnessed. Until the nostrils are purified, the fragrance of the divine rose garden will not be inhaled. Unless the heart be filled with longing, the favors of the Lord will not be evident. . . . If an ocean of salubrious water is surging and we be not thirsty, what benefit do we receive? If the candle be lighted and we have no eyes, what enjoyment do we obtain from it? If melodious anthems should rise to the heavens and we are bereft of hearing, what enjoyment can we find?”¹⁷

In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, we read:

“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.”¹⁹

1. Complete the following sentences:

- a. The fountain of divine generosity is _____ forth, but we must have _____ for the living waters.
- b. The fountain of _____ is gushing forth, but we must have thirst for the _____.
- c. The delicious foods of the heavenly table will not sustain us unless our souls _____.
- d. The _____ of the heavenly table will not sustain us unless our souls hunger.
- e. The favors of the Lord will be evident when our hearts are filled with _____.
- f. The _____ of the Lord will be _____ when our hearts are filled with longing.
- g. We must stop being conscious of our _____.
- h. Our hearts should _____ with the _____ to serve His mission and proclaim His call.
- i. Our hearts should burn with the desire to _____ and _____.
- j. Eloquence and the power to change human hearts will come as a matter of course when we have _____ and let _____.

2. On the basis of the first quotation above, write five sentences that begin with the word “unless”.

- a. Unless _____

- b. Unless _____

- c. Unless _____

- d. Unless _____

- e. Unless _____

3. Decide whether the following statements are true or false:

- a. All desire is praiseworthy. T F
- b. Only desire for heavenly perfections is praiseworthy. T F
- c. If we do not desire heavenly perfections, we will not achieve them. T F
- d. It is sufficient to teach the Cause of God out of a sense of duty. T F
- e. When teaching the Cause of God, our hearts should be filled with longing desire to teach. T F
- f. If we want to accomplish anything, our hearts must fervently desire it. T F
- g. Longing desire is a prerequisite for receiving God's favors. T F
- h. Desire for material things is acceptable when it is secondary to desire for the bounties of the Holy Spirit. T F
- i. We would be much happier if we did not have any desires. T F
- j. We must always be vigilant that worldly desires do not rule our lives. T F
- k. The ultimate desire is to enter the presence of God. T F

4. Which of the following desires are worldly and which are heavenly? If worldly desires, are they acceptable or not?

To have a respectable job _____
To be happy _____
To achieve excellence _____
To see peace established on earth _____
To have many children _____
To teach the Cause to others _____
To have a happy family _____
To reach a state of certitude _____
To serve the Bahá'í community _____
To be known for service to the Bahá'í community _____
To be a good Bahá'í _____
To be known as a good Bahá'í _____
To develop the quality of kindness _____
To work for the happiness of others _____
To serve God's loved ones _____
To be elected to the Assembly _____
To witness the triumph of the Cause _____
To have personal prestige in the Bahá'í community _____
To have faith _____

5. Discuss in your group the following two statements:
- Meditating on life after death helps us acquire thirst for spirituality.
 - The ultimate desire is the desire to sacrifice all in the path of God and enter into His presence.

SECTION 10

Knowledge, faith, hope and longing desire are indispensable to those who walk the path of perfection. But, they are not sufficient. To accomplish anything, we must have the will to do so. And then, we must constantly put forth effort. Bahá'u'lláh says:

“Unto each one hath been prescribed a pre-ordained measure, as decreed in God's mighty and guarded Tablets. All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition. Your own acts testify to this truth.” 19

'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

"Indulge not your bodies with rest, but work with all your souls, and with all your hearts cry out and beg of God to grant you His succor and grace. Thus may ye make this world the Abhá Paradise, and this globe of earth the parade ground of the realm on high. If only ye exert the effort, it is certain that these splendors will shine out, these clouds of mercy will shed down their rain, these life-giving winds will rise and blow, this sweet-smelling musk will be scattered far and wide." ²⁰

1. Which of the following are implied by the first quotation?

- a. Since our capacities are pre-ordained by God, we do not need to make an effort to develop them. Yes No
- b. Since our capacities are pre-ordained by God, they will be developed whether or not we make an effort. Yes No
- c. God has given us each certain capacities, but they are only developed through the exercise of our own will. Yes No
- d. If we make an effort, we will each develop all the powers of the human soul to the highest degree of perfection. Yes No
- e. If we make an effort, we will each develop all that we potentially possess to the highest degree of perfection. Yes No
- f. Although we have all been given capacities, they will not necessarily be developed if we do not make an effort. Yes No

2. Complete the following sentences:

- a. All that we _____ possess can be manifested _____ as a result of our own volition.
- b. Everything that we potentially possess can be _____ only as a result of _____.
- c. We should not _____ our bodies with _____, but should _____ with all our _____ and should _____ to God with all our _____ and _____ Him to grant us His _____ and _____. In this way can we make this globe of earth the _____ of the _____ on _____.

- d. If only we exert the effort, it is certain that _____

- e. If only we exert the effort, it is certain that _____

- f. If only we exert the effort, it is certain that _____

- g. If only we exert the effort, it is certain that _____

3. Answer the following questions:

- a. If you know that you have the capacity to serve the Cause, will you succeed in developing your capacity as a result of that knowledge alone? What else do you need? _____

- b. If you know that you have the capacity to serve the Cause and are filled with the ardent desire to do so, will you succeed in developing your capacity? What else do you need? _____

- c. If you know that you have the capacity to serve the Cause, are filled with the ardent desire to do so and have the will to serve, will you succeed in developing your capacity? What else do you need? _____

- d. If you know that you have the capacity to serve the Cause and you have the desire and the will to do so and also make a constant effort to serve, will you succeed in developing your capacity? What else do you need? _____

4. Answer each of the following questions and explain the reason for your answer:

- a. Does the fact that God already knows our capacity to acquire heavenly perfections mean that their acquisition is not in our power but in His? _____

b. Do we have the free will to either develop our spiritual capacities or not develop them? _____

c. Does the fact that we have free will imply that we are responsible to God for the choices we make in our lives? _____

d. Suppose a student does not study for his exams and fails them, can he say that it was fate that caused him to fail? _____

e. Suppose a student has been very purposeful and determined in his studies and gets excellent grades, can his success be attributed to "good luck"? _____

f. Is it the effort one makes to achieve a goal that counts or the achievement of the goal itself? _____

g. If you meet resistance in trying to achieve a goal, does it mean that it was not meant to be and you should give up? If you continue to make an effort but without success, does it mean you should then give up? How do you know when you should stop trying to achieve something? _____

h. Does the fact that we must make an effort to develop our spiritual qualities mean that we can achieve our goal without supplicating God for His assistance? _____

- i. Why is prayer so essential for the development of our spiritual qualities? _____

5. Discuss the following statement in the context of will and effort:

The ship is on the sea. The point of its destination is set. The wind blows. The captain must use the sails of the ship to catch the wind and use the rudder to steer it, otherwise he will be blown off course and never get to his destination. The wind is sometimes gentle and sometimes strong. A skillful captain is able to guide the ship even through severe storms. But then may come a storm so strong that, despite all his efforts, the captain cannot hold the ship and loses it to the sea.

SECTION 11

Heavenly perfections are not acquired without sacrifice. The mystery of sacrifice is that we renounce that which is ours in order to receive that which belongs to God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains to us the mystery of sacrifice through the example of iron thrown into fire. The iron is grey, cold and hard. It must give up these properties in order to acquire the qualities of fire—become red, hot and fluid. Sacrifice involves parting with things to which we are attached, and therefore it entails pain. Yet, to the knowing heart the pain is sweet, for it is the bearer of true joy. 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us:

“ . . . look at me, follow me, be as I am; take no thought for yourselves or your lives, whether ye eat or whether ye sleep, whether ye are comfortable, whether ye are well or ill, whether ye are with friends or foes, whether ye receive praise or blame; for all of these things ye must care not at all. Look at me and be as I am; ye must die to yourselves and to the world, so shall ye be born again and enter the kingdom of heaven. Behold the candle, how it gives light. It weeps its life away drop by drop in order to give forth its flame of light.”²¹

“ . . . nearness to God necessitates sacrifice of self, severance and the giving up of all to Him. Nearness is likeness.”²²

1. Complete the following sentences:

If we wish to follow 'Abdu'l-Bahá, we should take no _____ for _____ or our _____, whether we _____ or _____, whether we are _____, whether we are _____ or _____, whether we are with _____ or _____, whether we receive _____ or _____; for all these things we must care not at all. We must _____ to _____ and to the _____, so that we shall be _____ and _____ the kingdom of heaven.

2. Answer the following questions:

- a. What happens to a candle when it is lit? _____
- b. Is it possible for a candle to give light without burning down? _____
- c. Of what worth is a candle that is never lit? _____
- d. Can a seed achieve its potential by retaining the form of a seed? _____
- e. What does a seed sacrifice in order to become a tree? _____
- f. What are some of the things we need to give up in order to develop spiritual qualities? _____

- g. Can we draw near to God without sacrifice? _____
- h. Do we develop spiritual qualities without sacrifice? _____
- i. Of what worth is a person who does not develop spiritual qualities? _____

3. The purpose of sacrifice is:

- _____ To attain eternal life
- _____ To draw nearer to God
- _____ To get rid of our material wealth
- _____ To get rid of our selfish desires
- _____ To test ourselves
- _____ To develop spiritual qualities
- _____ To suffer
- _____ To follow the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
- _____ To bring the light of guidance to the hearts of men

4. The station of sacrifice is great indeed. We should make sure that we do not trivialize it by constantly boasting that every little thing we do is a great act of sacrifice. Let us think about sentences in which the word "sacrifice" is used inappropriately, for example: "I sacrificed watching my favorite TV show to go to the Nineteen Day Feast." Is the use of the word "sacrifice" justified here? It is true that something has been given up, but are we not trivializing the station of sacrifice by referring to such a thing as "sacrifice"? Let us take another example: "I sacrificed my weekend to go on a short teaching trip." What does this sentence imply? Does it imply that we really like teaching the Cause? What is it that we

have given up? What pain was involved? Write a number of sentences in which the use of the word "sacrifice" is unwarranted.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____
- h. _____
- i. _____
- j. _____

5. Discuss the following statement in your group:

The ultimate sacrifice is martyrdom. Most of us are not called upon to become martyrs but to live a life of service to the Faith. Sacrifice is the hallmark of a life of service.

6. Discuss the relationship between sacrifice, pain and joy.

7. Memorize the following quotation:

"Thus I exhort each of you . . . to sacrifice all your thoughts, words and actions to bring the knowledge of the Love of God into every heart." ²³

SECTION 12

Throughout this course, we have explored the path of an individual's spiritual growth. We have examined the conditions of a heart that reflects the attributes of God. We have meditated on the love of God and the fear of God and on the absolute necessity of obeying His commands. We have considered the dynamics of faith, hope and longing desire. We have seen how advancing in spirituality requires will, determination and effort and calls for sacrifice. What we must remember is that regardless of hardships and moments of crisis, we walk the path of spiritual growth in a state of joy. Joy is a quality of the human soul and not an emotion resulting from outside influences. Naturally there are times when we feel sad and there are times when we feel happy. But the fundamental condition of our hearts is one of joy—the joy of knowing God, the joy of recognizing His Manifestation, the joy of being immersed in the ocean of His mercy.

'Abdu'l-Bahá was the essence of joy. Throughout your life, you should regularly read the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, memorize them and reflect on their meaning while remembering the example of His life. So intense should be your study of His words and

statements that they become an integral part of your thinking. At every moment, whether happy or sad, in difficulty or ease, at work or rest, you should be able to call His words to mind, remember Him and be filled with joy. To begin, you may wish to memorize the following quotations from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

“. . . ye must in this matter—that is, the serving of humankind—lay down your very lives, and as ye yield yourselves, rejoice.” ²⁴

“If only thou couldst know what a high station is destined for those souls who are severed from the world, are powerfully attracted to the Faith, and are teaching, under the sheltering shadow of Bahá'u'lláh! How thou wouldst rejoice, how thou wouldst, in exultation and rapture, spread thy wings and soar heavenward—for being a follower of such a way, and a traveler toward such a Kingdom.” ²⁵

“Hold ye fast to the hem of God's garment, and direct all your efforts toward furthering His Covenant, and burning ever more brightly with the fire of His love, that your hearts may leap for joy in the breathings of servitude which well out from the breast of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.” ²⁶

“Let us put aside all thoughts of self; let us close our eyes to all on earth, let us neither make known our sufferings nor complain of our wrongs. Rather let us become oblivious of our own selves, and drinking down the wine of heavenly grace, let us cry out our joy, and lose ourselves in the beauty of the All-Glorious.” ²⁷

“Ye are the angels, if your feet be firm, your spirits rejoiced, your secret thoughts pure, your eyes consoled, your ears opened, your breasts dilated with joy, and your souls gladdened, and if you arise to assist the Covenant, to resist dissension and to be attracted to the Effulgence!” ²⁸

“At all times do I speak of you and call you to mind. I pray unto the Lord, and with tears I implore Him to rain down all these blessings upon you, and gladden your hearts, and make blissful your souls, and grant you exceeding joy and heavenly delights. . . .” ²⁹

“My only joy in this swiftly-passing world was to tread the stony path of God and to endure hard tests and all material griefs. For otherwise, this earthly life would prove barren and vain, and better would be death. The tree of being would produce no fruit; the sown field of this existence would yield no harvest. Thus it is my hope that once again some circumstance will make my cup of anguish to brim over, and that beauteous Love, that Slayer of souls, will dazzle the beholders again. Then will this heart be blissful, this soul be blessed.” ³⁰

“Then rose the Sun of Truth and the splendors of the Kingdom were shed over east and west. Those who had eyes to see rejoiced at the glad tidings and cried out: ‘O blessed, blessed are we!’, and they witnessed the inner reality of all things, and uncovered the mysteries of the Kingdom. Delivered then

from their fancies and their doubts, they beheld the light of truth, and so exhilarated did they become from draining the chalice of God's love, that they utterly forgot the world and their own selves. Dancing for joy they hastened to the place of their own martyrdom and there, where men die for love, they flung away their heads and hearts." 31

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28. *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas* (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1930), vol. 1, p. 145.
29. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, no. 17, p. 40.
30. *Ibid.*, no. 190, p. 237.
31. *Ibid.*, no. 16, p. 36.



Becoming a Tutor of Books 1-6

Purpose

To explore some of the concepts and acquire some of the attitudes and skills that contribute to the capability of helping a group of friends go through Books 1-6.

Practice

To form a study circle and accompany it through at least one book.

SECTION 1

The purpose of this unit is to assist you in your endeavors to contribute to the development of the human resources of your community. The specific subject of discussion will be your role as a tutor of Books 1 to 6. Everyone associated with the Ruhi Institute can participate in its programs in at least two ways: first as a student in the increasing number of courses that gradually become available, and second as a tutor of the courses one has already completed. This latter act of service is usually performed in a study circle consisting of a few interested friends and, occasionally, at a central location with a much larger group. To become an effective tutor requires some initial training followed by participation in periodic meetings of consultation, organized by the Institute, in which experiences are analyzed and skills and abilities further enhanced.

As we take part in either of these two types of activities, we should remember that the Institute does not use certain words as titles. "Tutor", "trainer", "coordinator" are for us words that refer to functions we perform at a given time and not to positions we hold in the community. So it is not meaningful for someone to say that I am a "Ruhi Tutor", or that I am a "Ruhi Trainer". This is not to imply that serving as a tutor, helping a group of friends to go through one book after another, is a trivial pursuit. We can, without question, strive to be good tutors, and then try to become excellent tutors. There are qualities, attitudes, skills and abilities that we have to develop, essential concepts that we must understand, and areas of knowledge we have to explore in order to be capable of guiding a study circle effectively.

We know, of course, that our spiritual qualities constitute the foundation of our capabilities and determine, in the final analysis, the extent of our success. That is why the first unit of this book was concerned with the nature of the spiritual path we all tread. In this second unit we will focus more on some of the concepts, attitudes and abilities that contribute to the making of an effective tutor.

SECTION 2

Let us begin our discussion by examining the concept of motivation. Without motivation the participants of your study circles will learn little and their numbers will dwindle. How to maintain a high level of enthusiasm in a group will be a question you will ask yourself often. You will face the challenge of motivating your friends when you invite them to join the courses of the Institute and, later on, each time the group comes together. Why should these friends of yours decide to study the courses of the Ruhi Institute?

As an initial step in our exploration of this question, we may divide the factors that motivate people into two categories: transitory and permanent. In the first fall those factors that excite people momentarily and spur them on to action, usually for a short period of time. The second category consists of those factors that generate motivation, with roots deep in a person's heart. Consider, for example, the following invitation you may extend to a friend:

I would like to invite you to join a study circle we have recently established in our community. There are already twelve people in our group, and I am sure you will

like every one of them. We have a great deal of fun together. We study twice a week for a couple of hours but also engage in other activities. This Saturday, for example, we will have a picnic, to which you are most welcome, and some of us are thinking of forming a football team.

In which category would you place the type of motivation sought by this appeal? There is, of course, nothing wrong with the invitation as formulated above. The extra-curricular activities mentioned are suitable for a study group, especially one consisting of young people. That such activities would persuade a person to join a study circle is also quite reasonable. What is being suggested here, however, is that this type of motivation is usually transitory. It works for a time, but eventually ceases to be effective. When you depend only on enthusiasm generated in this way, you put yourself in a very difficult position. You constantly have to invent "fun things to do", until finally, you become exhausted. That learning should be fun does not imply that education is the same as entertainment.

In order to fulfill the purpose of a study circle, which is the spiritual and intellectual education of the participants—their spiritual and moral empowerment—you need to seek sources of motivation that are more permanent. You are already well familiar with many of these sources and will easily remember them if you reflect on your own reasons for participating in the institute process. What prompted you to study the various courses, and what creates in you now the desire to enhance your capability to act as a tutor of these same courses?

SECTION 3

You have heard it said that enthusiasm is contagious. The zeal and the vigor with which you approach your duties, therefore, will help motivate your friends in the study circle. This enthusiasm is not to be understood as mere excitement, as simply a momentary and superficial emotion. It is the natural expression of inner joy, a joy that is the quality of one's soul and not the result of passing circumstances. In the various units you will be studying with your friends, reference is often made to this joy, for example, in the first unit of Book 2, the subject of which is the joy of teaching. Section 12 of "The Spiritual Path" is also concerned with joy. Read that section again. How do the comments made there apply to you in your desire to serve as a tutor? With the group in which you are studying this unit today, discuss how reflecting on the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, reading and memorizing His words, and calling to mind His inexhaustible love will be a source of enduring joy to you.

Clearly, the joy from which springs your zeal to serve as a tutor, and which therefore generates enthusiasm in the participants of a study circle, is a quality of a pure heart. Again, purity of heart has been a subject of our discussion on various occasions. Specifically, in one of the units of Book 6 we discussed purity of heart and purity of intention and examined three impurities that affect our teaching efforts: a desire for recognition, a sense of superiority, and ambition. Let us think about how these can diminish the effectiveness of a tutor:

1. Do you think the students can sense the purity of the tutor's intentions? _____

2. How would the motivation of the students be affected if they sensed that their tutor felt superior to them? _____

3. How would their motivation be affected if they thought that their tutor had formed their study circle in order to feel important in the community? _____

To help you think further through the question of purity, we have listed below some possible reasons that a person may have for serving as a tutor. A few are absolutely unacceptable and are included here only for the sake of contrast. The others, while appropriate, reflect different degrees of detachment from the world. First eliminate those that, without question, are unacceptable and then order the others according to degree of detachment.

A tutor may form a study circle because he or she:

- _____ Enjoys seeing people progress.
- _____ Wants to grow spiritually.
- _____ Hopes to eventually become a regional coordinator and receive a small stipend.
- _____ Wants to impress the Auxiliary Board member.
- _____ Is thinking of becoming a schoolteacher and would like to try serving as a tutor first.
- _____ Wants to be liked by other people.
- _____ Wants to be respected by other people.
- _____ Wants to see the process of entry by troops advance.
- _____ Likes to do things and get results.
- _____ Wants to be considered a leader in the community.
- _____ Is enamored of the Well-Beloved.
- _____ Is enraptured by the summons of God.
- _____ Wants to contribute to the global plans given to the Bahá'í world by the Universal House of Justice.
- _____ Has inhaled the fragrance of disinterested service to the Cause.
- _____ Wants to attract the blessings of God to his or her community.
- _____ Has no other wish but to please God.

SECTION 4

As you strive to assist others in studying Books 1 through 6, you will become increasingly convinced that understanding is in itself the greatest of all motivators. There is a longing in every human heart for meaning; there is a natural craving for knowledge of the outer and inner realities of creation. Education has to address this longing. When it does so, it succeeds in tapping the roots of motivation. We suggest that you meditate on the following words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá from a Tablet in which He praises the efforts of an eminent Bahá'í to train teachers of the Cause through what He refers to as the "teaching meeting":

"O Company of God! To each created thing, the Ancient Sovereignty hath portioned out its own perfection, its particular virtue and special excellence, so that each in its degree may become a symbol denoting the sublimity of the true Educator of humankind, and that each, even as a crystalline mirror, may tell of the grace and splendor of the Sun of Truth.

"And from amongst all creatures He hath singled out man, to grant him His most wondrous gift, and hath made him to attain the bounties of the Company on High. That most precious of gifts is attainment unto His unfailing guidance, that the inner reality of humankind should become as a niche to hold this lamp; and when the scattering splendors of this light do beat against the bright glass of the heart, the heart's purity maketh the beams to blaze out even stronger than before, and to shine in glory on the minds and souls of men.

"The attainment of the most great guidance is dependent upon knowledge and wisdom, and on being informed as to the mysteries of the Holy Words. Wherefore must the loved ones of God, be they young or old; be they men or women, each one according to his capabilities, strive to acquire the various branches of knowledge, and to increase his understanding of the mysteries of the Holy Books, and his skill in marshaling the divine proofs and evidences.

"The eminent Şadru'ş-Şudúr, who hath verily attained a most exalted station in the Retreats of Bliss, inaugurated the teaching meeting. He was the first blessed soul to lay the foundation of this momentous institution. God be praised, during the course of his life he educated persons who today are strong and eloquent advocates of the Lord God, disciples who are indeed pure and spiritual descendants of him who was so close to the Holy Threshold. After his passing, certain blessed individuals took steps to perpetuate his teaching work, and when He learned of it, this Captive's heart rejoiced." ¹

These words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá offer us valuable insight into the desired dynamics of a study circle. According to the above passage, the greatest gift bestowed on us by God is the gift of attaining His guidance. To attain this most great guidance, we need knowledge and wisdom, and must become informed of the mysteries enshrined in the Holy Words. It is only natural, then, that receiving the bounty of His guidance and exploring the mysteries of the Holy Words constitute in themselves a primary source of motivation. Your challenge is to ensure that the participants of the study circle are in fact engaged in such a thrilling exploration and do receive this wondrous gift.

To further appreciate this point, turn now to the books of the Ruhi Institute you have already studied and identify at least five sections, each of which increased measurably your understanding of a spiritual subject. Mention some of the insights you gained from the study of each section.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

In the same Tablet presented to you above, 'Abdu'l-Bahá reveals a prayer of particular beauty. You may wish to memorize it and call it to mind each time you take on the function of a tutor in a study circle.

“O God, O Thou Who hast cast Thy splendor over the luminous realities of men, shedding upon them the resplendent lights of knowledge and guidance, and hast chosen them out of all created things for this supernal grace, and hast caused them to encompass all things, to understand their inmost essence, and to disclose their mysteries, bringing them forth out of darkness into the visible world! ‘He verily showeth His special mercy to whomsoever He will.’

“O Lord, help Thou Thy loved ones to acquire knowledge and the sciences and arts, and to unravel the secrets that are treasured up in the inmost reality of all created beings. Make them to hear the hidden truths that are written and embedded in the heart of all that is. Make them to be ensigns of guidance amongst all creatures, and piercing rays of the mind shedding forth their light in this, the ‘first life’. Make them to be leaders unto Thee, guides unto Thy path, runners urging men on to Thy Kingdom.

“Thou verily art the Powerful, the Protector, the Potent, the Defender, the Mighty, the Most Generous.”¹

SECTION 5

When you serve as a tutor of a study circle, you will need to assess whether the participants have acquired a reasonable degree of understanding of the material. In describing the courses of the Ruhi Institute, we often refer to three levels of comprehension, a subject to be addressed in a later section. By this statement, we do not mean, of course, that understanding actually has three levels. It is simply our way of bringing to the attention of the Ruhi Institute collaborators that the participants in its courses are expected to achieve an understanding of the immediate meaning of the passages they study, to think about applying them in real life, and to reflect on some of their implications. In this context, you should be aware that, in general, understanding is not something one achieves and is done with. It is true that there are many ideas which are understood once and for all. But a profound comprehension of most issues develops over a long period of time. The question you will have to ask yourself frequently in accompanying a group through the courses, then, is not whether the participants "have understood" but whether they "have advanced" in their understanding of a given subject.

Your ability to foster and assess understanding will require you to continually develop such attributes as sensitivity, detachment and generosity and draw on your powers of perception and intuition. You will need to listen to everyone carefully. Often an individual does not have sufficient words to express his or her own thoughts, but actually comprehends quite well the subject under discussion. You should not focus on words alone, but go beyond them and look for intended meaning. To do so, you must have faith in your friends, hold the conviction that each has significant things to say.

Answering questions and contributing to discussion are not the only indicators of understanding. The participants' behavior is another indicator—their level of concentration, the expression on their faces, and their interactions with other members of the group. Even when they are reciting passages from memory, you may be able to discern the extent of their comprehension by listening to the way in which words are being uttered.

The exercises included in the material constitute, of course, an important tool for nurturing understanding. While often the discussion of the exercises should move along without your assistance, there will be times when you need to offer comments to help the participants grasp a certain idea. You may wish to select a few sections from the three units of Book 1 and go through the exercises, deciding which ones will require your intervention.

The following exercise will help you reflect on your ability to foster and assess understanding. Read each of the sentences below and mark the ones with which you agree.

- When I am studying a passage from the Writings with others, it is my duty to make sure that they understand the passage in the same way I do.
- When I am studying a passage from the Writings with others, I must respect their understanding, but still hold on to my own ideas, since they are the correct ones. After all, I am the tutor and have a clearer understanding than others.
- When I am studying a passage from the Writings with others, I learn many things from our discussions, no matter how much I already know.
- When I am studying a passage from the Writings with others, I should present my ideas with humility and not impose my own views on them.
- When I serve as a tutor, although I should not impose my own understanding of the material on the members of the study circle, I need to make sure that they do not reach conclusions contrary to the explicit meaning of a passage from the Writings.
- One of the participants in the study circle suggests that the principle of moderation implies that it is all right for us to drink alcohol, as long as we do not get drunk. I will be imposing my own ideas on the group if I point out that this is not the case.
- I should never express my own views when I am serving as a tutor of a study group.
- The purpose of the discussion in our study circle is for me to teach the correct meaning of the material.
- The purpose of the discussion in our study circle is for everyone to express whatever comes to his or her mind because self-expression is the highest value we hold.
- The purpose of the discussion in our study circle is for the members to help one another reach a deeper understanding of what is being studied.

- _____ Detachment from my own opinions means that I should allow the discussion of the study circle to go on, even when I see it is not getting anywhere.
- _____ To be detached from their own opinions, the members of the study circle should accept as true everything everyone says.
- _____ Detachment from my own ideas enables me to listen to others more carefully.

SECTION 6

Closely associated with thirst for knowledge and understanding is a powerful spiritual force: attraction to beauty. Consider, for example, the following passage from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh:

“Tear asunder, in My Name, the veils that have grievously blinded your vision, and, through the power born of your belief in the unity of God, scatter the idols of vain imitation. Enter, then, the holy paradise of the good-pleasure of the All-Merciful. Sanctify your souls from whatsoever is not of God, and taste ye the sweetness of rest within the pale of His vast and mighty Revelation, and beneath the shadow of His supreme and infallible authority. Suffer not yourselves to be wrapt in the dense veils of your selfish desires, inasmuch as I have perfected in every one of you My creation, so that the excellence of My handiwork may be fully revealed unto men. It follows, therefore, that every man hath been, and will continue to be, able of himself to appreciate the Beauty of God, the Glorified.”³

And in another passage He issues forth this call:

“Hear Me, ye mortal birds! In the Rose Garden of changeless splendor a Flower hath begun to bloom, compared to which every other flower is but a thorn, and before the brightness of Whose glory the very essence of beauty must pale and wither. Arise, therefore, and, with the whole enthusiasm of your hearts, with all the eagerness of your souls, the full fervor of your will, and the concentrated efforts of your entire being, strive to attain the paradise of His presence, and endeavor to inhale the fragrance of the incorruptible Flower, to breathe the sweet savors of holiness, and to obtain a portion of this perfume of celestial glory. Whoso followeth this counsel will break his chains asunder, will taste the abandonment of enraptured love, will attain unto his heart's desire, and will surrender his soul into the hands of his Beloved. Bursting through his cage, he will, even as the bird of the spirit, wing his flight to his holy and everlasting nest. . . .

“The everlasting Candle shineth in its naked glory. Behold how it hath consumed every mortal veil. O ye moth-like lovers of His light! Brave every danger, and consecrate your souls to its consuming flame. O ye that thirst after Him! Strip yourselves of every earthly affection, and hasten to embrace your

Beloved. With a zest that none can equal make haste to attain unto Him. The Flower, thus far hidden from the sight of men, is unveiled to your eyes. In the open radiance of His glory He standeth before you. His voice summoneth all the holy and sanctified beings to come and be united with Him. Happy is he that turneth thereunto; well is it with him that hath attained, and gazed on the light of so wondrous a countenance.” 4

You must feel certain in your heart that the members of your study group have a natural attraction to beauty. If during their study of the institute courses, they are helped to see the sublimity of God's Revelation and to appreciate the beauty of the Revealed Word, the joy they will feel in each session will be a most powerful source of motivation for them. As you reflect on this point, you will find it useful to look again through the books you have already studied and choose four or five sections that offered you glimpses of the Beauty of the Beloved. For each section, say a few words about that which attracted you so.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

SECTION 7

The profound meaning and beauty of the Revealed Word, contained in the many passages quoted in the materials, will be the strongest source of attraction to the participants. But the environment that you create in your study circles will also be important. A force of attraction is generated within a group of people working together in a loving atmosphere. Thus, you will constantly need to be aware of the atmosphere of the study circle and ensure that it contributes to the participants' spiritual upliftment.

One important factor will be the physical environment in which the group meets. Unfortunately, in today's world, physical beauty is often associated with wealth. But a lavish setting is not what is required. There is beauty in nature, in orderliness, in tidiness. You will want to make sure that the environment in which your group studies is one that satisfies the individual's yearning for beauty and perfection, whether the group is sitting under the shade of a tree or gathering in an expensively decorated living room, a humble hut or an institute facility.

Your own behavior is another factor that will contribute to the atmosphere of the study circle. Behavior can be beautiful and can, therefore, have the power to attract. There is beauty in kindness, in gentleness, in respect for others. To consider this point further, think of different occasions when your sense of beauty has been insulted. Sadly, this happens all too often in the workplace, in places of leisure, in gatherings of friends, in family get-togethers, and even in educational establishments. Examples of this kind of behavior include:

- People shouting at each other
- People using offensive language
- Someone embarrassing another person in front of others
- People looking at and treating others as if they were sex objects
- People acting under the influence of alcohol

Can you give a few more examples?

Now turn to the question of your study circles. It is hard to imagine that the ugly behavior mentioned above would ever be displayed in that setting. But you will have to watch for more subtle forms of conduct that could undermine the atmosphere of loving-kindness. Here are, for example, some difficult situations. For each you are presented with an inappropriate response, which you are asked to correct.

1. One of the participants is slumped down and doodling on his materials. An inappropriate response would be: "You are not paying attention." You would say:

2. One of the participants speaks so softly that it is impossible for the others to hear. An inappropriate response would be: "Can't you speak any louder?" You would say:

3. One of the participants in the study circle gives an obviously wrong answer to a question. An inappropriate response would be: "Does anyone have the right answer?" You would say: _____

4. Two of the participants are whispering to each other and giggling. An inappropriate response would be: "Do you want to share the joke with the rest of us?" You would say: _____

5. One of the participants asks a question that does not relate to what the group is studying. An inappropriate response would be: "That has nothing to do with what we are talking about." You would say: _____

6. Two of the participants start to argue over one of the exercises, each insisting that his or her opinion is correct. An inappropriate response would be: "Stop it. You're both wrong." You would say: _____

7. One of the participants gives an answer that is not in agreement with the quotation being studied. An inappropriate response would be: "Don't you understand the quotation you just read?" You would say: _____

8. One of the participants is getting off the subject. An inappropriate response would be: "Please stick to the subject." You would say: _____

It is suggested that you end your study of this section by memorizing the following quotation, extracted from a much larger passage from *God Passes By* in which Shoghi Effendi delineates the main features of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*:

"Apart from these provisions Bahá'u'lláh exhorts His followers to consort, with amity and concord and without discrimination, with the adherents of all religions; warns them to guard against fanaticism, sedition, pride, dispute and contention; inculcates upon them immaculate cleanliness, strict truthfulness, spotless chastity, trustworthiness, hospitality, fidelity, courtesy, forbearance, justice and fairness; counsels them to be 'even as the fingers of one hand and the limbs of one body'; calls upon them to arise and serve His Cause; and assures them of His undoubted aid."⁵

SECTION 8

In the first seven sections of this unit, we explored the issue of motivation. Clearly, in such a brief discussion, we could not do justice to this vital subject. All we

could do was to identify a few sources of motivation with the hope that, as you gain experience, you will gradually discover the secrets of keeping the participants of your study circle enthused. The next subject we would like to discuss is participation, which naturally follows the previous theme, for, only if the students participate actively in learning will they maintain a high level of motivation.

It is often said that the courses of the Ruhi Institute are participatory. In this context you have probably heard phrases such as “participatory method” and “participatory approach”. Method”, “approach”, “technique” are commonly used words in the field of education, and it is important for you to reflect on their meaning. Although, in general, we prefer that you gain an appreciation for the significance of words through usage, in this case, dictionary definitions may be of some help to you. *Method* is usually defined as “a means or manner of procedure, especially a regular and systematic way of accomplishing something”, or as “an orderly arrangement of parts or steps to accomplish an end”. The definition of the word *approach*, in the manner we employ it, would be “a way or means of reaching something”, or “the method used in dealing with or accomplishing”. And, the word *technique* may be defined as “the systematic procedure by which a complex or scientific task is accomplished”. As you can see, these definitions are very similar. You will pick up on the differences in their meaning as you advance in these lessons.

Let us begin our discussion on this subject by saying that the Ruhi Institute’s fundamental concern with participation is not at the level of method and technique. What we seek is for the student to take charge of his or her own learning. This can occur even when the teaching method is not participatory. An example will help to clarify this point.

Suppose that a very knowledgeable Bahá’í visits your region, and you attend his or her lecture on some aspect of the Faith. The speaker gives a rather lengthy talk, and because of the size of the audience, it is not possible to have a discussion at the end. Clearly the method employed on this occasion is not participatory. Yet, given your interest in the subject, you are completely engaged in learning during the entire period of the lecture. You listen, you think about every word uttered by the speaker, you organize a series of questions in your mind, and later, you look into several books to find answers.

Now imagine thousands upon thousands of students throughout the world sitting in classrooms, bored, yawning, listening to teachers who lecture at them. This is not the picture to be found in every school, but there are enough such classrooms around that you must have seen one or two. What is the difference between the two situations, in both of which the same method of teaching is employed?

The difference, of course, lies in the degree of the students’ participation in the teaching-learning event. In the first case, you are the active agent of learning. The lecturer delivers a speech, but you are in charge of your own education. You have assumed the responsibility of learning and, in this sense, are participating fully in the educational activity. The opposite is happening in the second situation. The students are passive. The teacher is doing all the work and carries the entire weight of the teaching-learning experience.

This brief comparison of two educational situations clarifies what we mean by the statement that the Institute’s approach is participatory. We expect that, in the study circles for which you serve as a tutor, the students will be the active agents of learning.

You are to ensure that they assume ownership of their education. During the hours you are studying together, their minds should be fully engaged and the emphasis of teaching-learning should be on learning, for which the students feel the weight of responsibility.

Unlike the example of your own attendance at a conference, it is highly improbable that you will achieve the level of participation required if you simply lecture at the students. It is in this sense that you need methods and a set of techniques. The books of the Ruhi Institute will provide you with the tools that will make it possible for you to adhere to its participatory approach. The principal objective of this unit is to enhance your ability to use these books.

Before turning to this task, we ask you to bring to mind certain images and think about them in terms of a study circle. While none of the images below describes fully your role as a tutor, some of them will further your understanding of the teaching-learning dynamics being called for here. A few of these images are totally inappropriate. First cross those out and, for the remaining ones, explain in what sense each image is useful.

1. A fire that you are feeding: _____

2. Empty glasses that you are filling up: _____

3. Saving accounts in a bank into which you are depositing money: _____

4. Candles that you are lighting: _____

5. Friendships you are nurturing: _____

6. A team with whom you are building something: _____

7. The foundation of a great edifice you are laying: _____

8. Mines full of precious gems you are working: _____

9. A football game you are umpiring: _____

10. A competition you are judging: _____

11. A ship you are sailing: _____

12. Plants you are watering: _____

What we have said about participation implies that every student must take an active role in his or her own learning. There are certain things people do that are usually associated with being active in a learning situation and others that indicate passivity. Decide whether the following kinds of behavior represent an active or passive state.

listening attentively, listening absent-mindedly, yawning,
 daydreaming, dozing off, questioning, thinking, writing,
 reading, discussing, memorizing, explaining, analyzing,
 concentrating, giggling, doodling

ACTIVE

PASSIVE

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

SECTION 9

Here is an imaginary conversation between the tutor who is helping you study Book 7 and one of the participants during a break. It may clarify the issues under discussion.

- *I am beginning to understand the concept of participation in a new way. I used to think that the Ruhi Institute was strictly about reading passages from the Writings, answering some questions, and then going around the group and expressing opinions.*

- *I have also heard such an oversimplified description in the past. Unfortunately, it gives the impression that participation is some kind of a formula.*
- *But after studying a few books, one realizes that there is much more to the approach than one first imagines.*
- *What is true, of course, is that the material we study depends heavily on Bahá'í text and places a strong emphasis on reading and understanding passages from the Writings. It is also true that the questions and exercises require the participants to discuss things among themselves.*
- *But some are saying that discussion should not be encouraged, that we should just get the members of our study circles to answer the questions and move on as quickly as possible.*
- *That is another extreme statement that one hears every once in a while. People should, of course, be allowed to express themselves. What is being asked for is disciplined consultation. The purpose of discussion is to increase understanding. The mere expression of random thoughts does not help achieve that goal. But when you serve as a tutor, you should not be too rigid. It is all right for people to say what they wish, even though their contributions may at times not be relevant to the consultation. However, if you see that the group is going totally off the subject and for too long a time, then you will need to help your friends get back to the study of the material. This will actually not be too difficult, since your relations with the group will be based on courtesy and kindness.*
- *But it will not be easy all the time. In the study circles in which I have participated, sometimes there were individuals who could not stop talking. Then there were a few who never said a word.*
- *I assure you that with experience you will learn how to deal with both cases. One thing you need to remember is never to embarrass anyone, the talkative or the silent. First you have to make sure that you do not become frustrated and angry with the one who takes too much of the time of the group. Look inside your heart and find the necessary love and let this love embrace him or her. Once you have established this bond you will be able to communicate with small gestures or a few kind words that he or she should be more precise and give a chance to others to participate.*
- *And the silent ones?*
- *That is actually a most interesting subject. You see, sometimes we tend to attach too much importance to talking. If someone is silent we become nervous. We even think that quiet people and shy people are not very intelligent. The worst thing you can do is to put people on the spot, asking them to say something when they just do not want to. Talking is not necessarily an indication of participation. If you observe the group, which after all is small, you can see who is engaged in learning, who is listening, thinking, and carrying out the exercises with diligence. The shy members of the group will gradually build confidence and participate in the discussions, but let this happen naturally.*

The challenge of keeping the consultation going is not an easy one, and you will learn to master this skill as you gain practical experience. Here are some situations. The two suggested responses in each case are both valid, but under different circumstances. Describe the circumstances in which each of the two responses would be the most effective.

1. One of the participants has been asked a question, but is taking a long time to answer.

a. You wait quietly until she finally answers. _____

b. You gently direct the question to another participant, asking if he or she can be of some help. _____

2. One of the participants is always the first to offer the answer to a question, making it difficult for the others to speak.

a. You address some of the questions to individual members of the group, calling on them by name. _____

b. At some point, when you are outside the group and having a good, friendly conversation with him, you remind him that he is quick to think, which is a wonderful characteristic, but that he needs to wait sometimes so that others can also participate. _____

3. One of the participants has not contributed to the discussion for a long time.

a. Every once in a while, when you are sure that he will have something to say, you ask him a direct question. _____

b. You leave him alone, allowing him to remain silent for as long as he wishes. _____

4. You find that the participants are all hesitant to enter into a discussion of the questions being posed to them.
 - a. You explain the subject under discussion in a language that is more accessible to everyone, using examples as necessary. _____

 - b. You choose the participant that seems to have the most confidence and ask him or her a direct question to open up the consultation. _____

SECTION 10

Let us now turn to the question of method. In this connection we should mention here that the Ruhi Institute has many programs, including several for social and economic development. What we have been discussing up till now, and what will continue to be the focus of our attention, are the various aspects of its program related to the expansion and consolidation of the Faith. Below are some of the features of the methodology employed by the Ruhi Institute in order to achieve the purpose of this program, which is to enhance the capabilities of the believers to serve the Cause.

The courses the Institute offers are studied at the local level in small groups, each benefiting from the assistance of a more experienced person who acts as a tutor. Even when a course is held for a relatively large number in an institute facility and for an extended period of time, the participants are divided into small groups with one or more tutors rotating among them and helping them with their studies.

The program under consideration is organized around a sequence of courses. The sequence is defined in terms of a path of service. As the participants go through a series of books, they acquire knowledge, gain spiritual insight and develop skills to perform specific acts of service in the context of the large-scale expansion and consolidation of the Faith. From this main sequence branch off other series of courses concerned with knowledge and skills needed in particular areas of action, for example, in teaching children's classes.

One of the tasks of the Institute is to help each participant establish a pace at which he or she will advance through the sections, units and books. Thus, there is no fixed time for the completion of a unit. What generally occurs is that small groups of individuals who tend to progress at the same pace end up studying together. They read and discuss each section and then carry out the exercises that accompany it, either individually or in group. In this process, the tutor highlights the most significant points and answers questions if necessary.

The units of the main sequence, as well as the material for other courses branching off from it, place a strong emphasis on the study of Bahá'í texts. Enhancing the participants' understanding of the Writings is a fundamental aim of the Ruhi Institute. Equal emphasis is given to the application of the Teachings to one's own life, to the life of the community and to the process of sustained growth. Memorization of passages from the Writings is considered important, although pressure on those who find this task difficult is avoided.

While the execution of projects of expansion and consolidation is not the responsibility of a training institute, some of the units do ask for practice in specific acts of service. The Ruhi Institute in collaboration with other institutions, then, accompanies the participants of its courses as they put into practice what they have learned, at least in the beginning stages of their services. In one area of service, namely, the education of children and junior youth, the Institute's involvement goes beyond practice. Here it actually follows those it trains in their efforts, and assumes the administration of children's classes and junior youth groups at the regional level.

All the training events of the Ruhi Institute are governed by a spirit of fellowship and joy. There is a basic simplicity that characterizes the educational process. No rituals or fixed set of steps are to be followed. The participants of the courses invariably show a high degree of discipline in their studies, which they approach with marked seriousness. The discipline emerges not from imposed arbitrary rules, but from the motivation to learn and to serve.

Many of the subsequent sections of this unit are dedicated to the further exploration of some of the elements of the methodology described above. At this point, it may be useful for you to discuss with your group the ideas listed below and write a few sentences about each. Over time you will be able to observe how your understanding of these ideas evolves.

1. Serving as a tutor: _____

2. Following a sequence of courses: _____

3. Participating in a study circle: _____

4. Enhancing one's understanding of the Writings: _____

5. Carrying out exercises included in the material: _____

6. Putting into practice what one is learning: _____

7. Studying within a system that allows for flexibility: _____

SECTION 11

If there is one concept that we hope characterizes the approach of the Ruhi Institute, it is flexibility. However, protecting a system from rigidity is not an easy task, especially when it becomes widely used in diverse circumstances around the world. There is a tendency in most of us to introduce unnecessary rules and regulations into the pursuits we undertake. This is almost always done with the best of intentions and, in fact, we are seldom aware that we are yielding to a rather natural tendency. The following imaginary conversation between someone serving as a tutor of Book 7 and a group of participants who have just studied the previous sections may help you identify possible rigidities and then learn to avoid them.

- *Participant 1: I am a little confused about what we have studied in Section 10. When I first started studying the courses, I was told that the "Ruhi method" consists of a series of steps: We read a passage from the Writings, each one asks a question about what we read, someone answers the question following the passage as closely as possible, and then we memorize it. I think that a couple of other steps were also mentioned, but I don't remember just now.*
- *Participant 2: I first went through Book 1 in a three-day course in which everything was fixed. There were many rules about what we could and could not do. I actually enjoyed it because there was a very spiritual atmosphere. But I remember that a few people became upset and left after the first morning session. What is interesting to me is that when I joined a study circle and we went through Book 2 at our own pace, my spirit was equally uplifted but without all that pressure.*
- *Participant 3: I was surprised to notice that, in this unit, the word "tutor" is seldom used to refer to someone; instead the phrases "acting as a tutor" and "serving as a tutor" are repeated. I studied Book 1 with someone who was actually quite humble but insisted on calling himself a "Ruhi trainer", and I understood that he had been trained by a person called a "Ruhi coordinator".*

- *Participant 4: I went to a very stimulating course for training tutors of Book 1. For the first few hours we played games to get to know each other and trust each other. Then someone suggested that we “empty” ourselves so we spent an afternoon talking about whatever was on our minds. I thought that was part of the “Ruhi method” and tried to do the same when I started a study circle and, I must admit, several participants did not like it.*
- *Tutor: I don’t think any of the ideas you have described is wrong or undesirable in principle. The problem is that referring to them as elements of a “Ruhi method” introduces rigidity into a process that is otherwise simple, joyful, and sensitive to a diversity of needs. For example, you all remember that at the beginning of Book 1, a technique is used whereby the participants ask simple questions of one another. The use of this technique has a clear purpose, which is to help the participants focus on Bahá’í text. But once such a habit is created, why would one continue to employ a technique that can easily become mechanical. Of course, there might be occasions now and then in other units when the technique is useful, but it should certainly not be called the “Ruhi method”. What is more, it is not necessary to ask everyone to repeat the same question one after another, which would naturally only annoy them. Usually after one or two repetitions, the purpose of the exercise is achieved.*

The issue of games also has to be approached with sensitivity. I know for sure that many study circles do not play the kind of games you mentioned, but I have heard of others that wanted to include them in their group activities. As to the question of “emptying” oneself, in some group or another the participants may have felt that they needed to talk about their thoughts and feelings a little to get to know one another better, but surely this is not a requirement of a study circle. Similarly, I have heard of study circles that wished to give themselves a name in order to strengthen group identity. Again, there is nothing wrong with this, but it is not a requirement. You should, of course, appreciate that the Ruhi Institute cannot issue a series of do’s and don’ts since this would, itself, lead to rigidity. Much is left, therefore, to the judgment of the tutor who should decide which activities, in addition to the basic study of the material, are to be introduced in order to enhance learning.

SECTION 12

Let us begin our exploration of the salient features of the Ruhi Institute’s methodology by examining in some detail the main sequence of courses. We have already indicated that this sequence is like the trunk of a tree from certain points of which branch out other series of courses, each concerned with acts of service that often pertain to specific cultural and social conditions.

Earlier in this book you had an opportunity to reflect on the nature of the spiritual path that we all, each in his or her own particular manner, tread. One of the primary concerns that the Ruhi Institute has tried to address over the years is how it can assist the participants of its courses in walking this path. The challenge, as you are well aware, is not to push or carry the students on the path, but rather to accompany them in their efforts

to advance systematically along it. Soon after its establishment, the Institute arrived at the conclusion that, to meet this challenge, it would focus on enabling its participants to perform specific acts of service. From that point forward, the path under discussion was referred to as a "path of service".

Let us consider, then, the sentence, "I walk a path of service." What is the real identity of the "I" in this sentence? What is the nature of the path, and what does walking it entail?

Book 1 addresses the first of these questions. Three aspects of Bahá'í identity are explored: "The reality of my existence is my soul which passes through this world to acquire the attributes it needs for an eternal and glorious journey towards God. My most cherished moments are those spent in communion with God, for prayer is the daily nourishment that my soul must receive if it is to accomplish its exalted purpose. My main occupation is the study of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, deepening my understanding of His Teachings and learning to apply them to my own daily life and to the life of the community." To create an awareness that these are, in fact, the central elements of a Bahá'í identity is the aim of *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*.

Your capability to serve as a tutor will be enhanced if you now examine the three units of Book 1 with these thoughts in mind. You already realize, of course, that the three ideas mentioned above are actually treated in the reverse order in the book. This, the Institute has found, enhances a vision of life that is centered on God and His Revelation, rather than on one's own self. The comments and exercises below will help you in your group discussion on this subject.

The first unit of Book 1, "Understanding the Bahá'í Writings", focuses on one-sentence statements from the Writings. Emphasis is on the immediate meaning of each statement and its direct implications for one's life. Furthermore, there is an insistence on keeping discussion at a certain level of "simplicity". Simplicity, however, does not imply lack of depth, nor should it be confused with oversimplification. To appreciate this, try to describe the following four categories of educational materials and some of their effects on the students:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a. Simple and superficial | c. Complicated and superficial |
| b. Simple and profound | d. Complex and profound |

It is clear that newly enrolled believers who have had little exposure to the Writings, especially those who are not accustomed to reading, find it helpful to begin the study of the Revelation with short, one-sentence statements. What is noteworthy, however, is that the first unit of Book 1 also appeals to many veteran believers who are well familiar with the Writings. Why is this straightforward approach to studying the Writings so effective? One answer may be that those in both groups become more conscious of their Bahá'í identity. They begin to see plainly how, by forming the habit of reading passages from the Writings every day, they allow the Teachings to shape their thoughts and actions, and not the conflicting influences of society coming from the songs they hear, the magazines they read, the television shows they watch—in short, from the constant propaganda to which they are subjected.

The habit of studying passages from the Writings and reflecting on their meaning and implications has profound effects on other habits of the mind that we all have to develop. Below are two sets of statements. The statements in the first column describe extreme conditions, while those in the second are desired goals to be achieved. As Bahá'ís, every one of us has left behind the extreme conditions and is moving toward the desired goals. The same is true of our Bahá'í communities. Draw an arrow from each statement in the left-hand column to the one in the right-hand column indicating this movement.

Views of the world are formed by mere transitory opinions.

Decisions are made in the light of the Teachings of the Faith.

It is a struggle for the community to reach agreement on even the simplest of matters.

The standard of the Faith is consistently used to measure the value of words and action.

It is difficult to make distinctions between good and bad, right and wrong; everything is relative.

Unity of thought and action in the community is easily built, and progress achieved.

Decisions are made entirely on the emotions of the moment.

A proper framework is formed within which the world is viewed.

One of the objectives of the next unit of Book 1 is to foster an understanding of what it means to live in a state of prayer. To live in a state of prayer does not imply reciting prayers all day. Rather it suggests an attitude of constant supplication to God, imploring His mercy and forgiveness and beseeching His aid. You may find it useful to go through the unit "Prayer" and identify those passages and exercises that you feel contribute most to the participants' efforts to attain this state of being.

The third unit, “Life and Death”, focuses on the nature of our existence. Decide which of the exercises in the unit assist the participants most in defining their Bahá’í identity.

SECTION 13

We have already seen how Book 1 invites us to reflect on the significance of the word “I” in the sentence “I walk a path of service.” Book 2, *Arising to Serve*, begins the exploration of such a path and the manner in which it may be trodden.

In trying to design courses that would assist each participant in tracing and following a path of service, the Ruhi Institute had a number of choices. It could adopt, for example, the more common approach of Bahá’í deepening programs, namely, that of presenting to the students an adequate knowledge of the Faith—its principles, its spiritual and social teachings, its history, its laws, and its administration. It would then expect that this knowledge in itself would motivate each individual to arise and serve the Cause. What would have to be added would be some training in specific skills, reinforced by constant encouragement.

After examining a number of such alternatives, the Institute decided to adopt a pedagogy that would attend simultaneously to the knowledge, skills and qualities to be progressively acquired by those who wish to dedicate themselves to the Cause. By combining in its approach these requirements, the Institute felt that it would, so to speak, help the participants learn about the path as they walked it by performing specific acts of service.

The next challenge was to define the first act of service, one that would build on the concepts that had been imparted in Book 1. It was hoped, of course, that even though Book 1 dealt largely with the issue of identity, it would have stimulated some activity among its participants, for example, the study of prayers with other believers or the holding of devotional meetings. The question was, then, What should be the first act of service to be formally studied in Book 2?

The choices were many. The functioning of Local Spiritual Assemblies, the education of children, the celebration of the Nineteen Day Feast, the implementation of teaching campaigns—each of these called for courses with their own materials and methods. But the Institute was mainly concerned with sustained large-scale expansion of the Faith. Years of experience gave a clear indication that this would not be achieved unless programs were in place for the systematic deepening of the believers as their numbers steadily increased. One such program that was proving successful consisted of a series of visits to the homes of newly enrolled believers in order to share with them certain themes fundamental to their understanding of the Cause and to their confirmation in the Faith. Thousands of believers were receiving such visits in the areas served by the Institute, and it was evident that the program could only be further expanded if many individuals could be trained to carry out this task with confidence. Sharing deepening themes with newly enrolled believers, then, became the first act of service to be addressed by the Institute.

In an effort to contribute to the development of this ability, Unit 2 of Book 2, “Deepening Themes”, presents a story that takes the students through a series of visits to the home of a couple newly enrolled in the Faith, during which certain themes are shared with them. In areas where large-scale expansion occurs, this is a much-needed service. Yet, even in places that have not witnessed accelerated expansion, Unit 2 is useful, for it provides those who study it with a vision of what large-scale expansion and consolidation entails. More importantly, it contributes to the enhancement of two capabilities we all must acquire, those of conversing on spiritual matters and of nurturing others. Too easily we can fall into the habit of teaching people the Faith and leaving them to themselves after they have accepted Bahá'u'lláh.

Below are some of the qualities, attitudes and abilities that contribute to the capability of nurturing others. You may wish to look through Unit 2 and identify places in the story where these qualities, attitudes and skills are reflected:

1. Generosity: _____

2. Humility: _____

3. **Sincerity and purity of motive:** _____

4. **Trustworthiness:** _____

5. **Patience:** _____

6. **Kindness:** _____

7. **Optimism and hopefulness:** _____

8. **Faith in people's ability:** _____

9. **Appreciation for diversity:** _____

10. **Lack of prejudice:** _____

11. **A willingness to accept imperfection and errors:** _____

12. **Ability to encourage others:** _____

13. **Ability to listen to others:** _____

14. **Ability to see where a person's capacities lie:** _____

15. **Ability to communicate love:** _____

16. **Ability to communicate assurance:** _____

The third unit of Book 2, "Introducing Bahá'í Beliefs", is not concerned with a specific act of service, but with some of the skills and habits essential to teaching the Cause. It aims at helping the participants acquire the ability to incorporate into their conversations Bahá'í ideas. We all need to develop the habit of speaking about various aspects of the Faith in a natural way. As we do this, we move away from fragmented thinking and act more and more consistently. It is suggested that you present to the group with which you are studying the present unit a few instances when you were able to incorporate into your conversation some Bahá'í ideas as a result of your own study of Unit 3 of Book 2.

When the Ruhi Institute first began offering the content of what is now Unit 2, it noticed that some of the friends who visited the homes of newly enrolled believers were persistent in their efforts, while others soon stopped. The difference seemed to lie in the fact that those who persisted found joy in the very act of teaching itself, independent of the immediate results. The first unit of Book 2, "The Joy of Teaching", was designed to address this issue. As stated in the introductory section "To the Collaborators", the unit follows the sequence of ideas below. Read through the ideas and think about them in terms of your efforts to serve as a tutor of a study circle. Write a short paragraph that explains in what way this act of service will be a constant source of joy to you.

1. When we teach the Cause we partake of a special blessing—that of sharing with others the Word of God revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. This blessing fills us with profound spiritual joy.
2. Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation can be compared to an ocean in the depths of which lie pearls of divine guidance. We should make every effort to reach the shores of this ocean and to receive its benefits.
3. The ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is astonishingly near to us. If we but wish it, we can reach its shores in the twinkling of an eye.
4. Having received the bounty of recognizing Bahá'u'lláh, we wish to share the pearls of divine guidance contained in His Revelation with others. In doing so, we use the power of His own Word; it alone can transform the hearts of men.
5. Of all the activities that occupy us in our daily lives, those that involve sharing the Word of God with others are special.
6. The joy that fills our hearts when we teach the Cause comes from the act of teaching itself—sharing with others the Word of God revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. Being concerned with other things, such as praise and recognition, spoils this joy. Detachment is a requirement of joyful teaching.
7. We must also be willing to exert effort and make sacrifices. We should remember that, in doing so, we are gaining spiritual happiness and furthering our spiritual progress. Sacrifice involves renouncing that which is lower for that which is higher. Though it entails pain, it is in reality the bearer of joy.

Lesson 1: _____ Lesson 9: _____
Lesson 2: _____ Lesson 10: _____
Lesson 3: _____ Lesson 11: _____
Lesson 4: _____ Lesson 12: _____
Lesson 5: _____ Lesson 13: _____
Lesson 6: _____ Lesson 14: _____
Lesson 7: _____ Lesson 15: _____
Lesson 8: _____

Memorization of prayers and quotations: _____

Songs: _____

Stories: _____

Games: _____

Coloring: _____

Now look through the third unit, "Conducting Classes for Children", and think about its content. One of the main concepts discussed is discipline. Below are a few statements. Decide which ones are consistent with the concept of discipline as presented in the unit.

- _____ Discipline should be harsh.
- _____ Discipline, if it is to endure, must come from inside the person.
- _____ True freedom depends on self-discipline.
- _____ When discipline is imposed, it stifles creativity.
- _____ Discipline protects creative initiative from self-indulgence and the irresponsible repetition of errors.

- _____ If a teacher infuses in the students the love of God, rules and discipline are not needed.
- _____ Without self-discipline it is impossible to develop spiritual qualities.
- _____ Children need freedom to discover things for themselves; discipline can only interfere with the process of discovery and true learning.
- _____ Children thrive on discipline; they learn more effectively in a well organized, structured environment.
- _____ Individuals acquire wisdom by adopting the humble posture of a learner. The discipline imposed by this posture of learning frees one from fear of failure and opens the way for the constructive exercise of initiative.
- _____ Rectitude of conduct provides a framework of discipline and order for individual and social progress.
- _____ The exercise of discipline cannot be taken to mean any form of violence or abuse, whether psychological or physical, for violence is fundamentally incompatible with the nobility of the human spirit and harms human development.

Discuss the following question with your group: In what way does the concept of discipline apply to the study circles each of you has or will establish, given that the participants are not children but youth and adults?

SECTION 15

Having examined two highly meritorious acts of service in Books 2 and 3, let us now look at the next book in the Institute's main sequence, which turns again to the question of Bahá'í identity, the "I" in the statement "I walk a path of service." History shapes much of the identity of the individual, as well as entire peoples. When connection with history is severed, confusion sets in and people become as rootless trees. But where, we may ask, during this age of transition in the life of humanity, when the old order is disintegrating and a new creation appearing in its place, is each person to find the historical roots of his or her existence? This is a difficult question for most, but for Bahá'ís, the answer is simple enough: We must seek the elements of our identity in the myriad events that have brought the Cause of God forward from that fateful evening when the Báb declared His Mission to Mullá Husayn.

Book 4, *The Twin Manifestations*, is dedicated to the study of the life history of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. In the first unit, the significance of this Day, the Day of God, is briefly examined. Units 2 and 3, then, familiarize the student with the Ministries of these two Sacred Beings. The spiritual import of the episodes is underscored through the study of relevant passages from the Writings. As mentioned in the section "To the Collaborators", the participants of the course are encouraged to learn to narrate the history in some detail; developing the necessary skills to do so constitutes one of the objectives of the book.

to those in Book 3 in that each one is concerned with the development of a spiritual quality. The second set of fifteen introduces the children to the lives of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. The lessons do not present a detailed chronological account of their lives, but are organized around certain concepts that help the children get a glimmer of the Station and the Ministries of the Twin Manifestations. It is through these lessons, then, that the children begin to acquire a knowledge of the Manifestations and become aware of the source of all good.

As you go through the thirty lessons with your group today, you should examine the content not only in terms of your own experience, but that of the communities in your area. Books for training children's class teachers for the subsequent grades will form a special branch stemming out after Book 5 on the main sequence. As these become available, more and more communities will be able to draw on the services of a number of teachers who can conduct classes for several age groups simultaneously on a given weekend. This is the ideal to be achieved as soon as possible. God willing, you will be able to convey a sense of this urgency to the members of your study circles. For now, it is suggested that you review the first fifteen lessons in Book 5 and make a list of the qualities treated in each:

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Lesson 1: _____ | Lesson 9: _____ |
| Lesson 2: _____ | Lesson 10: _____ |
| Lesson 3: _____ | Lesson 11: _____ |
| Lesson 4: _____ | Lesson 12: _____ |
| Lesson 5: _____ | Lesson 13: _____ |
| Lesson 6: _____ | Lesson 14: _____ |
| Lesson 7: _____ | Lesson 15: _____ |
| Lesson 8: _____ | |

Next make a list of the concepts around which each of the subsequent fifteen lessons is organized:

- Lesson 16: _____
- Lesson 17: _____
- Lesson 18: _____
- Lesson 19: _____
- Lesson 20: _____
- Lesson 21: _____
- Lesson 22: _____
- Lesson 23: _____
- Lesson 24: _____
- Lesson 25: _____
- Lesson 26: _____

Lesson 27: _____

Lesson 28: _____

Lesson 29: _____

Lesson 30: _____

Discuss with your group how the various elements of the second set of fifteen lessons help the children to grasp these concepts and write your thoughts below:

Introductory statements: _____

Questions: _____

Memorization of prayers and quotations: _____

Songs: _____

Historical episodes: _____

Games: _____

Drama: _____

Drawing: _____

SECTION 17

Walking a path of service throughout one's life clearly implies teaching. As we have said on a number of occasions before, teaching the Cause of God should be viewed as more than an act of service. Although the propagation of Bahá'u'lláh's Message is one of the most essential services we can render, teaching is also a state of being, one in which we are constantly sharing with others that which has so bountifully been given to us. In this light, the theme of "being" and "doing" runs through the three units of Book 6, and as a tutor, you will have to make sure that the interdependence of the two is fully appreciated by the participants of your study circles.

It should be clear to you that the capability of teaching the Cause of God, whether according to individual plans or through collective action, cannot be developed in one course. The conditions of humanity differ considerably from place to place, and every culture, age group and set of circumstances presents its own challenges to the teacher. Nonetheless, there are certain basic universal truths on which this capability can be built, and it is these that are the central concern of Book 6.

In your efforts to help your friends develop this capability, you will need to read the section "To the Collaborators" carefully and discuss it with others who are aspiring to become effective tutors of Book 6. It is essential for you to be well familiar with the three units, and to this end you should analyze each one separately and identify the concepts, qualities, attitudes and skills that are being addressed. To begin, you may wish to carry out the two exercises below.

One of the aims of the book is to examine in the light of the Writings various notions about the nature of teaching and how it should be approached. Below are a few ideas that some of the members of your study circles may have about teaching when they begin to study Book 6. How will their thinking have changed by the end of the course? Write down what they may say as a result of having studied the book.

1. "Only those who have a profound knowledge of the Cause should teach."

2. "We should wait until we are fully deepened before we teach."

3. "By participating in teaching campaigns every once in a while, we fulfill our duty and do not need a personal teaching plan."

4. "What is important is to say the right things to the seeker; the spiritual condition of the teacher is secondary."

5. "It is the inner condition of the teacher that really matters; therefore, we should not teach until we acquire the qualities of a true Bahá'í. Then our example will be the best teacher, and there will be no need for words."

6. "The way our message is packaged is what really counts."

7. "Teaching the Cause is like recruiting people to join a progressive social movement. It is sufficient to share the principles of the Faith with people because that is what attracts them most."

8. "There is so much receptivity, especially among the masses, that what we need to do is to bring people into the Cause in large numbers. Since they don't understand things deeply anyway, we should tell them a few attractive ideas about the Faith so that they accept."

9. "In large-scale expansion, deepening is secondary because it takes generations for a people to change; what we should focus on is enrolling large numbers of new believers."

Now it is suggested that you consider the nature of the presentation made to the seeker. Book 6 offers an example of how to introduce the Faith through the story of Anna and Emilia. To be sure, the manner in which Anna presents to Emilia Bahá'u'lláh's Message is not suitable in all circumstances. This point should be fully understood by the participants of your study circles. As a tutor of the book you will have to make sure that they reflect on how they themselves will introduce the Faith to those they teach. What they will need to realize, however, is that not every way of putting the Message together is effective. Analyzing Anna's presentation to Emilia will help them to appreciate this. All effective presentations of the Faith have certain characteristics in common. Bearing

in mind Anna's introduction, decide which of the following are characteristics of an effective presentation and which ones definitely are not:

An effective presentation:

- Is straightforward. Yes No
- Is clear. Yes No
- Projects an attitude of openness. Yes No
- Projects the strength of the presenter's faith. Yes No
- Focuses on Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God and clearly identifies His Teachings as the source of what is being said. Yes No
- Introduces the concept that there are laws in the Faith that must be followed. Yes No
- Makes it clear that there is an administration in the Faith to be obeyed. Yes No
- Introduces all the Central Figures of the Faith. Yes No
- Explains enough of the history of the Faith to create a connection between the listener and the Twin Manifestations. Yes No
- Avoids going into a detailed analysis of the relationship of Bahá'u'lláh to earlier Manifestations. Yes No
- Conveys enthusiasm. Yes No
- Draws abundantly on passages from the Writings. Yes No
- Makes use of analogies. Yes No
- Is logical. Yes No
- Appeals to both the heart and the mind of the listener. Yes No
- Makes it clear that becoming a Bahá'í carries with it responsibilities. Yes No
- Avoids burdening the seeker with too many details. Yes No
- Is inviting. Yes No
- Reflects faith in the listener's capacity to recognize the Manifestation of God for today. Yes No
- Is pushy. Yes No
- Focuses on details. Yes No
- Manipulates the seeker's emotions. Yes No
- Is argumentative. Yes No
- Implies that the Bahá'í community is perfect as it is today. Yes No
- Plays on the seeker's fears. Yes No
- Is vague. Yes No
- Is based mostly on prophecies. Yes No

SECTION 18

We have completed our overview of the first six books of the Ruhi Institute's main sequence of courses. It is hoped that this overview will have provided you with insight into what the Institute means by the phrase "walking a path of service". Book 7,

which you are now studying, is dedicated to an act of service crucial to the functioning of the Institute itself, namely, helping a group of friends go through the first six courses in the sequence. The sequence will continue with other books, but we need not consider them here. What may be useful at this point is to discuss briefly some courses that may branch off the main sequence. Such courses are usually designed to meet specific needs and opportunities. A few examples will give an overall picture.

- As more and more people go through the courses of the Ruhi Institute and apply what they have learned in service to their own communities, new opportunities begin to emerge. For instance, in many parts of the world, the study of Book 1 inspires the friends to hold devotional meetings in their communities. A National Spiritual Assembly or Regional Council may wish to promote this activity. Once some experience has been gained, the institute in the country or region may then be asked to identify instances of success, analyze the most effective approach, and develop a short course on how to establish devotional meetings in local communities. This course, which may in fact be rather short, could well be the first on a branch immediately following Book 1. Not everyone who studies Book 1 will necessarily wish to assist in establishing such meetings, but at least one or two from each study circle might be helped to perform this act of service. Another course on the same branch could be one that explains in depth the most profound and beautiful ideas contained in the Long Obligatory Prayer.
- A second branch may appear just after Book 2. As you know, at the end of the second unit of that book the participants are encouraged to hold their first meeting for deepening a group of newly enrolled believers. Materials have been developed in Southeast Asia, which draw on the experience of that region and others, to raise the friends' awareness of the equality of men and women through a series of meetings. These materials, already adopted by several institutes worldwide, are proving to be highly effective. Here again, not everyone who studies Book 2 will want to be trained in the use of the materials and form groups in local communities to study them, but no doubt in each study circle there will be a few who wish to do so. Further along on the same branch there might well be courses to train interested individuals to work in various capacities for the advancement of women.
- Another series of courses branching out after Book 2 might address health education. A set of modules is being developed in Africa for training workers in primary health care at several levels of complexity. The first of these focuses on training a family health educator, a person who learns to bring together a few members of the large extended families in a locality and explain to them certain basic concepts, assisting them in their efforts to improve the health of the rest of their families. A number of institutes around the world, essentially those in countries where the public health system is weak, will probably establish this branch of courses.
- One branch that the Ruhi Institute itself is developing consists of courses for the training of Bahá'í children's class teachers. As you know, Books 3 and 5 on the main sequence aim at imparting the knowledge, skills and qualities needed to conduct classes for six- and seven-year-old children. As explained earlier, the spiritual education of children is of such importance that all those studying the books

of the Institute are encouraged to acquire some experience in this area—even if only with one or two children in their own families—and contribute to its advancement. But not everyone following the main sequence will want to persist in this area of service. Thus, after Book 5 will appear a branch of courses dedicated to the training of teachers of children classes for ages eight and upward. These courses will progressively become more complex so that, upon the completion of the series, the teachers will have gained many insights into the field of education.

- Yet another example is a series of courses that may branch out after Book 6. Courses on this branch would focus on imparting the knowledge, skills, qualities and attitudes necessary for sharing the Message of the Faith with specific populations. Book 6 discusses universal aspects of teaching, and following its completion, students would benefit from exploring the subject of teaching in the context of a particular population. For example, Section 16 of the second unit examines with the students some of the attitudes that should be adopted in presenting the Faith. But the meaning of the concepts discussed can vary from culture to culture. For instance, what it means to be provocative or laid back in the teaching field depends on peoples' customs. These are the types of issues, then, that courses branching out after Book 6 would address.

The above describes one way in which an institute program for the development of human resources for the expansion and consolidation of the Faith may unfold. What is important for you to realize is that the program will not be the same for every institute that has chosen to use the Ruhi Institute materials. As a tutor of a study circle, you are not required to be concerned with the development of courses. The institute that you are serving will assume this task, designing and adapting materials as needs dictate. You should, however, be aware that courses other than the main sequence exist and, accordingly, observe your students and ensure that those capable and eager are encouraged to participate in them. Further, we hope that you will remember one concept alluded to in the first example above, namely, that training materials are not very effective if developed in isolation from experience. The books of the Ruhi Institute are not the product of any one individual's mind or the mere consultations of a group carried out in abstract, divorced from practice. Rather, they have been written over many years as the Institute learned in detail how each act of service could be performed successfully. If one follows this approach, the completion of a book takes a long time, often a decade or more. The process is slow, but the results of patience are rewarding.

SECTION 19

Let us now turn to the next element of the methodology employed by the Ruhi Institute: the study circle. Like many institutes, the Ruhi Institute began its operations by bringing a number of believers, sometimes as many as forty, to a central place to participate in courses of a certain duration, anywhere from two or three days to several weeks. Even today, some courses are conducted at the Institute's main facility, for example, a two-month course for youth wishing to offer a period of service to the Faith.

From the outset, however, the value the Institute attached to participatory methods guided it to develop its materials for small-group study. It also realized early on that

its approach would have to respect the pace at which different individuals learn. Thus, in order to study the materials, those who had gathered at the central facility for each course would be divided into smaller groups, with the friends who learned at the same pace working together. Competition, they were told, did not have any place in the Institute. Everyone would advance according to his or her own possibilities, which would change as the educational process went forward. This is the background from which have emerged the present books of the Institute.

Later, when the challenges of extending its operations were to be faced, the characteristics inherent in the materials allowed the Institute to take its courses to the local level with relative ease through the system of delivery built around the "study circle". You are, of course, well familiar with this system of distance education. As it has become more widespread, many questions have arisen regarding the nature of the study circle. Below are only a few such questions:

- Does a study circle need to have a certain set of rules that its members must follow?
- Does a study circle meet on a regular basis for a set period of time?
- Does it follow some kind of fixed program?
- Does the membership of a study circle ever change?
- Can the membership of a study circle include those who are not yet Bahá'ís?
- Does a study circle organize the Nineteen Day Feast for the local community?
- Can it organize the Nineteen Day Feast for its own members?
- Can it take on its own teaching goals?
- Does it organize teaching activities for its own members?
- Do its members participate as a group in the teaching activities of the community?
- Does a study circle organize the children's classes of the local community?
- Can a study circle organize a social evening of music for the local community?
- Can a study circle organize recreational activities for its members?
- Can a study circle organize recreational activities for the members of the local community?
- Does a study circle carry out service projects for the local community?
- Does a study circle deepen on the Writings of the Faith, in addition to studying institute courses?
- Can a study circle arrange devotional meetings for the local community?
- Can it arrange devotional meetings for its own members?
- Can it arrange a graduation ceremony after the completion of a course?

The list would become rather long if we were to include all the questions here. As you probably expect, our answer to many of them would be, "Well, it depends." There are, however, certain statements that can be made about study circles, defining their general features. Examine the following paragraphs and discuss them with your group. We hope they contain the basic ideas you need to answer questions that may arise in your own specific situation.

A study circle is one element of a distance education system administered by the institute, designed to take its program for the development of human resources to the local level. It usually consists of eight to ten friends in a given locality, who, with the help of a tutor, study the program's sequence of courses together at their own pace. It should be noted that a study circle is not one of the structures of the Administrative Order, like an Assembly or a committee. There is a great deal of

flexibility in the functioning and membership of a study circle. Some groups may wish to meet once a week over an extended period, while others may choose to meet daily, or for a weekend every so often. Upon the completion of a book, all of the members may go on to study the next one together. But some may leave the group and join another at a later time. As the members of the group advance in the sequence, new friends who have studied elsewhere may join them. This may happen at the start of a course or even in the middle of one, provided the new member can easily catch up with the group and not cause undue delay. The same tutor may stay with the group from one book to the next. But is also possible for the tutor to change after the completion of a book. Some members of the study circle will eventually reach a point in the main sequence where they themselves are trained as tutors and then initiate new study circles, performing this act of service while they continue along in their own studies.

There is no minimum number of participants required before a study circle can be formed. There have been many successful ones with only two or three members. If the number of participants becomes large, it is advisable for them to be divided into smaller groups—all meeting at the same time and in the same place, if so desired—and the help of additional tutors to be sought. The members of a study circle might consist of friends who have known one another for a long time. But a group might also be made up of individuals who have separately responded to the call of the institute to establish a study circle in the community. As part of an intensive teaching campaign in an area, the institute deploys some of its collaborators to the localities to form study circles among the newly enrolled believers and others interested in the Faith. In an increasing number of localities the friends are approaching schools, clubs and local organizations, finding people who wish to study the institute courses, though they are not Bahá'is.

As an element of a distance education system, the study circle has two essential functions: One is the study of the institute courses, and the other is practice. While all of the courses in the main sequence, and the branches stemming off from it, aim at imparting knowledge of the Faith, providing insight into spiritual matters, and developing skills and abilities of service, some place emphasis on the latter. In order to develop these abilities, it is not enough for the participants to simply study the materials and complete the exercises. Opportunities need to be created for them to put the skills they are acquiring into practice. For example, if the members of the study circle are to gain confidence in their ability to share deepening themes with newly enrolled believers, the aim of the second unit of Book 2, it is desirable for them to visit the homes of nearby families with a more seasoned friend and acquire some experience in carrying out this act of service. There is a point, of course, where practice ends and performing an act of service on an ongoing basis—and as an element of the plans and projects of a community—begins. Care must be exercised that practice does not become so elaborate and organized that the study circle turns into a committee, for example, in charge of the deepening of the believers, thus losing sight of its main purpose.

Besides studying the materials and discussing them as a group, the members of a study circle engage in artistic pursuits together—music, poetry, painting, crafts, drama and story-telling, especially the narration of episodes from "The Dawn-

Breakers”—which contribute to the enhancement of understanding and to spiritual development. There are also other elements that may or may not be included in the method of study. For example, in a number of places, study circles have decided that playing cooperative games will help their members improve their skills of working together and facilitate learning. Whether to employ such additional means is left to the discretion of the tutor, who needs to take into account the culture, ages and preferences of the participants.

Beyond the two essential functions of study and practice, a study circle will often undertake several extracurricular activities, depending on the nature of the group and the circumstances of its community. Some study circles may decide to organize social events for the community. Others may carry out service projects. The members of a study circle may, under certain conditions, sponsor a weekly devotional meeting. Upon the completion of a course, the members might invite the community to a special celebration. Naturally, a study circle will not assume duties and responsibilities that belong to the institutions of the Faith. The celebration of the Nineteen Day Feast, for example, is organized by the Local Spiritual Assembly, not a study circle. But the group can decide that it will put its full force behind the celebration, contributing to its organization as needed. Of course, if a community is in the early stages of development and does not have the bounty of being guided by a Local Spiritual Assembly, the study circle might well become a nucleus of community life.

It should be noted that the accomplishments of a study circle as an isolated entity are necessarily limited. It is only when a number of study circles are established in an area that their natural interactions will create the spiritual power needed to sustain accelerated growth. The institute through its regional and area coordinators ensures that a high level of spirit is maintained through occasional meetings for all the study circles in an area, regular gatherings of tutors, special campaigns in which every study circle is visited and helped to move forward, and through festivals and celebrations. It is in this way that the study of institute courses becomes part of the culture of a region.

Whatever activities a study circle undertakes, it is important that no feelings of exclusivity ever be allowed to develop among its members. Their activities should serve to bind the group together in fellowship and at the same time attract others to their mode of learning. The meetings of the study circle itself are joyous and relaxed. There is no need for rituals in the study of the materials. This does not mean that there is not some degree of formality in the meetings of the group. The normal rules of punctuality and courtesy apply to study circles, as they do to any other setting, but they should not give rise to rigid schemes. Above all, it should be remembered that the purpose of the institute is to raise up human resources for the expansion and consolidation of the Faith, and the members of the study circle should place themselves at the disposal of the institutions of the Cause and help them to carry out their plans and programs.

Having discussed the above paragraphs in your group, decide which of the following describe the proper atmosphere of a study circle.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Active | <input type="checkbox"/> Full of laughter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sober | <input type="checkbox"/> Relaxed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tranquil | <input type="checkbox"/> Tedious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Focused | <input type="checkbox"/> Secretive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loud | <input type="checkbox"/> Exclusive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intense | <input type="checkbox"/> Tense |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Joyful | <input type="checkbox"/> Loving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agitated | <input type="checkbox"/> Conducive to learning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scholarly | <input type="checkbox"/> Dynamic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vibrant | <input type="checkbox"/> Challenging |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intellectually stimulating | <input type="checkbox"/> Emotionally draining |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Serious | <input type="checkbox"/> Intellectually draining |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rigid | <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual |
| <input type="checkbox"/> United | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-righteous |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Harmonious | <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritually uplifting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Competitive | <input type="checkbox"/> Emotionally uplifting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conducive to excellence | <input type="checkbox"/> Formal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creative | <input type="checkbox"/> Informal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disciplined | <input type="checkbox"/> Exciting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Purposeful | <input type="checkbox"/> Exhilarating |

People come together on numerous occasions for many different reasons. Compare the characteristics of a study circle with:

1. A committee meeting: _____

2. A classroom: _____

3. A group of friends having an intellectual discussion: _____

4. A party: _____

SECTION 20

Having clarified the nature and purpose of a study circle, we may now examine briefly how it operates in practice. You already know that there is no fixed program to which the group must adhere. So rather than prescribing a set of steps to be followed in order, we will ask you to reflect on certain instances of activity in a study circle. The situations depicted will be varied, and you will not necessarily encounter all of them in your future services. But thinking about a wide range of situations should help you form an image in your own mind of the kind of study circles you will establish.

At the end of each description, you will be presented with one or two questions. They do not require extensive answers and are only meant to assist you in formulating a proper image.

1. You have just initiated a study circle with eight of your friends. Their ages range from 16 to 19. After devotions, you say a few words on the nature of institute courses in general and then ask them to speak, if they wish, about what they expect to learn in the course they are about to begin. Only three of them offer any comments and, seeing the reluctance of the others, you do not insist on their doing so. You proceed to introduce the first unit of Book 1, explaining with notable brevity its purpose, its content, and the way the group will study it. What do you say?

2. In the same session, immediately after your introduction, the participants begin to study Section 1 of the first unit. You decide that it is best to go through this section as a group, rather than in pairs. You ask one of the participants to read the first quotation aloud and then pose the question that follows to the rest. They understand from the explanation you have given that the purpose of this exercise is to help them focus on the immediate and explicit meaning of a quotation before thinking about its application and implications. They all look back at the materials and a couple of them respond to the question by reciting the quotation. You

then ask another participant to do the same with the second quotation and continue this way until the end of the section. Later, when you reach the next set of quotations, you divide the participants into four groups of two, inviting them to carry out this activity in pairs. What will you be doing while this is going on? To what extent will you interfere in the work of each pair? What will you do if one pair has difficulty formulating questions? What will you do if one pair finds the exercise easy and goes through it thoroughly but quickly? What will you do if one of the participants resists giving straightforward answers and somehow misses the importance of this first level of comprehension?

3. Several weeks later, the same group is studying Section 2 of the third unit of Book 1, which discusses the relationship between the soul and the body. The introductory paragraph has been read aloud twice, and now everyone is doing the exercises individually. There is silence in the room, and the atmosphere is one of serious and disciplined reflection. You approach each participant as you notice that he or she requires help, and answer questions in a low voice. Write a few words here about the nature of the discipline that governs this activity. What is the source of such discipline?

4. In the same session, after everyone has completed the exercises, the group engages in a discussion of the salient points of the section. Which of the exercises will you open up for group discussion?

5. In another community, you have formed a study circle made up of two large extended families and are going through the first unit of Book 1 with them. The youngest members of the group are two cousins of 15, while the oldest is a grandmother in her sixties. During the period dedicated to memorization, you notice that, because of age difference, the abilities of the participants to memorize vary greatly. As expected, the younger ones find it rather easy. The grandmother, too, memorizes quite well, for she has never let go of the tradition of learning passages by heart. But some of the middle-aged members have difficulty. You make

sure that you give attention to these members, assisting them and encouraging them in their efforts. When the time comes for everyone to recite a quotation by heart, you suggest that these friends keep their books open to help them say the quotation. Why is this preferable to simply allowing them to skip memorization? Should the ones who are quick to memorize also keep their books open when reciting quotations?

6. You are serving as a tutor in a study circle mostly made up of young people in a community which has very little Bahá'í activity, although it has seen many enrollments over the years. The Local Spiritual Assembly is elected annually with some assistance, but it rarely meets. The establishment of your study circle is part of the plans of the institutions of the Faith to revive community life there. You have just finished studying Book 1, and the participants are ready to undertake some activity. You decide that this is a situation in which the group itself may sponsor a weekly devotional meeting, inviting family members and friends. How would you suggest to the participants to go about organizing the event?

7. On another occasion, you are working with a study circle in a community that has had a Local Spiritual Assembly for many years. The group has finished studying Book 1, and the members are eager to carry out some act of service. There is a weekly devotional meeting in the community sponsored by the Local Assembly, but it is not held regularly and attendance is low. You realize that it would be inadvisable for the study circle to initiate a separate devotional meeting. What needs to happen in this case is for the group to support the existing one. You decide that, as a first step, you should consult with the Local Assembly. How do you proceed?

8. In another community you are helping two groups, one made up of ten youth between the ages of 15 and 17 studying the Institute's main sequence of courses, and the other consisting of eleven junior youth who are going through the book, *Drawing on the Power of the Word*. The groups meet separately one after the

other, once a week. The older youth are working on the second unit of Book 2, "Deepening Themes". Although some of them were shy when they first came together, they are now all quite comfortable around one another. They have just finished performing the short skits called for in the last exercise of Section 1 and have entered the next section, in which they are expected to learn a lengthy passage about the Eternal Covenant of God to present to newly enrolled believers. You ask them to go around in a circle, each reading one paragraph aloud. The passage is read twice in this manner. Now you ask one of the youth to read the first paragraph, then put the book down and try to say the ideas in his or her own words. Everyone in the group helps the student along without pressuring him or her in any way. Once they have gone through the entire passage, you divide them into twos and threes, asking them to carry out the same task in small groups. At what point do you decide that this activity has achieved its purpose and that it is time to move on?

9. Some weeks later, the group of older youth above has completed its study of the second unit of Book 2, and the time has come for them to put into practice what they have learned. There are a good number of Bahá'ís in the locality, and arrangements are being made for the election of the Local Spiritual Assembly at Ridván, which is several months away. In a regional gathering, you ask the Area Teaching Committee to provide you with the membership list of the community. When the group next meets, you show the list to the youth, and it turns out that each one knows four or five of the families on it. Together, you draw up a plan for them to share the deepening themes with the believers they know. You accompany every one on his or her first visit. During the weeks that follow, you discuss with the youth at each meeting of the group their experiences. Some are achieving good results, but there are two or three who feel that the families are too busy to receive them and do not really like their conversations. Since the activity works well for most, you realize that there must be something in the approach of these specific friends causing the difficulty. How do you go about helping them?

10. As part of their studies, the junior youth with whom you are working in the same community have their own practice to carry out. They are preparing a presentation for their families and friends, in which each one will give a talk on a chosen subject. In what ways can you have the older youth help the younger ones so that this event will be successful and they will feel encouraged?

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11. As a result of studying the second unit of Book 2, the older youth in the above community have become greatly enthused about the concept of the Nineteen Day Feast. You encourage their study circle to establish the devotional and social parts of the Feast. You suggest that they also dedicate some time to consultation at each meeting, but explain that the administrative portion of the Feast must await the election of the Local Spiritual Assembly the following Ridván. To which institutions do you report the steps taken by the study circle?

12. You are working on Book 2 with a group of young people in a small community with a long-standing Local Spiritual Assembly, trying to face the challenge of stimulating growth. Since there are no newly enrolled believers with whom the participants can share the deepening themes in the second unit, you have them role-play, with one acting as the visiting teacher and the others as the members of a large extended family. Later, as they go through the third unit, "Introducing Bahá'í Beliefs", you ask them to practice what they are learning by entering into conversations on social and spiritual subjects at school. You explain to them that, as a result of their conversations, they may well be able to invite some of their friends to form another study circle in the community, for which you will be happy to serve as a tutor. Why is it so important for those who study Book 2 to carry out the practice either in Unit 2 or Unit 3, or both as circumstances dictate?

13. On another occasion, you are helping a group of young people study Book 3, *Teaching Children's Classes, Grade 1*. They are working on the second unit, which includes the fifteen lessons for the classes. Having gone over the first few lessons in some detail, you suggest that the youth each try teaching them to two or three children they know—their younger brothers and sisters, their nieces and nephews, or the children of their neighbors. The next time the study circle meets, you discuss their experience with them. It is clear that they all found teaching even a couple of children overwhelming and that they are in need of encouragement. What do you say?

14. In going through Book 5 with another group, you point out how the lessons for seven-year-olds have features not found in the ones for six-year-olds. For example, you explain that the introductory statements and stories in the lessons for first grade are written at a level understandable to the children. All the teacher has to do is to say them as they are presented. In Book 5, especially in the second set of fifteen lessons, the introductions and the historical episodes are written for the teacher. He or she will need to simplify them for the children, putting them into a language they can readily grasp. You illustrate to the study circle how this is done by reading one of the historical episodes and then telling it as you would to children. Demonstrate to your group today how you will do this.
15. You have finished studying the second unit of Book 4 with a group of young people, all attending secondary school. They have learned to narrate each of the episodes of the life of the Báb as they have gone through the various sections of the unit. Now they are arranging an evening gathering for a small group of friends, in which they will take turns narrating the events of the Báb's life, beginning with His childhood and ending with His martyrdom in Tabriz. Can you describe a possible program for that evening?

16. The Area Teaching Committee where you live is organizing a summer teaching campaign. You are working with a study circle made up of young people, who have just begun Book 6. You talk to them about the campaign, and they decide that they would like to have extra meetings in order to finish the book in time for the campaign. You readily agree. What are some of the things you will need to do to ensure that the youth are able to take part in the campaign?

17. You know a person in the community who excels in a particular craft and have consulted with her about the possibility of offering a few lessons to the members of your study circle. She has told you that, in four sessions, she can teach them some of the basic skills of her craft. Under normal circumstances the group meets once a week. After consulting together, everyone agrees to meet twice a week for

a month, one time to work on the materials and the other to develop this artistic expression. Why it is correct to treat these sessions as part of the formal study of the group and not as an extracurricular activity?

18. One of the participants in your study circle has exceptional musical talent. In the course of your conversations with her, you learn that she has taken music lessons in the past, but abandoned them, against her parent's wishes. What can you say to encourage her to develop this God-given talent?

19. The members of your study circle want to form a football team and play with teams in the nearby communities. You think this is a wonderful idea and encourage them to do so. But soon you begin to realize that this extracurricular activity is affecting their studies. You are consulting with them on how to keep a balance in their activities, reminding them not to forget the primary purpose of the study circle. What do you say?

SECTION 21

The sequence of courses, the study circle and the tutor are the three elements at the heart of the system shaped by the methodology of the Ruhi Institute. The discussion of the first two elements in the previous sections already says much about the third. For this reason, and to avoid offending your sense of modesty by focusing on you and your attributes, we will dedicate but this one section to "the tutor". We ask you, then, to review what you have studied up till now in this book and write one to two paragraphs about the endeavor on which you are embarking.

service of the friends belongs to God, not to them. Strive to become a source of harmony, spirituality and joyfulness to the hearts of the friends and the maidservants of the Merciful. This is a cause of great satisfaction to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’⁸

SECTION 22

Your deliberations on the various themes presented in this unit have probably convinced you that the capability to serve as a tutor of Books 1 to 6 is only acquired over time and through experience. Book 7 is far from being the ultimate material for “the training of tutors”. It is designed to introduce to you certain concepts and enhance your ability to help group after group advance through the Ruhi Institute’s main sequence of courses. One of the most fruitful ways to further your understanding of the relevant concepts, to polish your qualities and attitudes, and to improve your skills and abilities is to attend the regular gatherings for tutors organized by the institute in your area. In such meetings, varied experiences are analyzed and answers to scores of questions sought.

The introductory sections found in each book, “To the Collaborators”, are often used in these gatherings to clarify issues. To get a taste of this portion of the meeting, you are being asked to go through the “To the Collaborators” section of Book 1 with your present group. You will undoubtedly discuss a number of concepts, including the following:

- All the participants in the courses of the Ruhi Institute, whether they are studying the materials for the first time or acting as tutors, are engaged in a reciprocal process of learning.
- The responsibility of learning rests with each participant.
- In a process of education, in contrast to the mere acquisition of simple skills, it is essential that the participants become increasingly conscious of the meaning and significance of what they are doing.
- Participants in the courses of the Ruhi Institute are expected to achieve three levels of comprehension of the quotations they study: to understand the meaning of the words and sentences from the Writings, to see how concepts in the Writings apply to one’s daily life, and to grasp some of the implications of the quotations.
- The technique of dividing the participants into pairs, with one person reading a passage and the other formulating a related question, has a specific purpose and thus certain limitations in its usefulness.
- The ability to focus attention on the immediate and explicit meaning of passages from the Writings contributes to the creation of unity in Bahá’í communities.
- Long discussions on the meaning of single words out of the context of the material being studied can be counterproductive.
- A rhythm of progress should be established in the study of each course.
- Study groups should avoid, on the one hand, a superficial approach in which the exercises are not carefully analyzed and, on the other, a prolonged discussion of an idea that distracts from the main purpose of the unit.

- Some questions cannot be answered in a clear-cut way and are intended to raise awareness about a subject.
- Each unit in the book has an overall purpose.
- Each section generally contains only one or two principal ideas that it tries to convey.

With regard to levels of comprehension, the “To the Collaborators” section suggests that those preparing to serve as tutors of the book examine each unit and categorize the exercises according to the three levels mentioned. This would be a good activity for you to carry out with your group today. You should of course remember that, in referring to three levels of comprehension, the Institute is not putting forward a theory on the nature of “understanding”. There are probably many levels of understanding, and even in this simple scheme, whether an exercise is categorized in the first, second or third level is ultimately immaterial. Thinking about the exercises in terms of these levels is simply meant to help you decide how much time you will spend on each one, which points you will need to emphasize, and what you will want to achieve in the study of the various sections.

SECTION 23

Another activity undertaken in the gatherings of tutors is a review of one or more units, in which the content is examined in some detail and specific passages and exercises are discussed. To illustrate for you the kind of consultation in which you will engage during these gatherings, we will present to you in this and the next three sections a few imaginary conversations between a person of considerable experience and a group of tutors consulting together in the usual atmosphere of friendship, humility, and learning. Each conversation will be followed by one or two exercises for you to carry out. For the purpose of these pages, “A”, “B” and “C” will refer to three tutors taking part in the meeting and “R” to the resource person. They are discussing the exercises after the first set of quotations in Unit 1 of *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*. It would be helpful for you to turn to that section now.

- A: I would like to say that one comment in the section “To the Collaborators” of Book 1 has been of great help to me. It is related to Exercise 3 of the second section and the statement that “There are so few good people in the world that their actions do not have any effect.” Everyone in the group for which I was serving as a tutor rightly said the statement was false. When I asked them why, they gave many reasons, all of which were good. But I finally had to ask them to look at the first quotation of the preceding section and evaluate the statement in that balance. Then everyone realized that the sentence contradicted the words of Bahá’u’lláh. This realization brought confidence and excitement to the group.*
- B: But such clear answers for all of the exercises are not to be found in the quotations. Take the next statement in the same exercise that “Something is correct when it is in agreement with the opinions of other people.” None of the preceding quotations explicitly addresses this issue. Everyone usually says the statement is false. Should one just accept the answer or is some discussion necessary?*

R: This is something you have to decide according to the circumstances of the group. I know of some groups in which a little discussion on the implications of this statement has deepened the understanding of the participants. It is true that the Teachings of God determine what is right and what is wrong, but we also need to listen to the ideas and opinions of people. Yet how much importance we should place on these opinions and how far we should allow them to influence us are matters that deserve reflection. In one group for which I acted as a tutor, for example, the discussion touched on such subjects as wisdom and moral authority. But to tell you the truth, although illuminating, the consultation became too abstract. I should have brought the discussion to an end sooner—of course, in a polite and loving manner.

C: Exercise 5 in that section asks whether certain actions are in agreement with the words of a Bahá'í. The immediate answers are easy, and I think they are meant to be that way. But it seems to me that there is a purpose behind this exercise. Sometimes we can fall into the habit of telling people what to do and what not to do: Don't drink. Be chaste. Don't lie. I can see that the books of the Ruhi Institute try to avoid preaching at people. They help people think and make moral decisions. In the case of this exercise, realizing that by acting in a certain way they would put themselves in the category of those whose "words differ their deeds"—in the category of those who have received such a strong warning from Bahá'u'lláh—had a profound effect on the members of my study group. And, I enjoyed the exercise because we could talk about the wisdom of certain moral laws in a detached way, respecting the participants' dignity.

R: You have raised a good point. Here is a case where the exercise is deceptively easy. It sets the standard of Bahá'í behavior, without explicitly stating as much. Rather, it allows the students themselves to reach some understanding of the moral laws of the Faith. You have probably found that the five questions which follow that exercise have a similar effect, although they are not so straightforward. It is usually a good idea to have the students consult about them. Of course, you will not want the consultation to go off in too many directions, but the students need a chance to reflect on moral behavior. They also need to acquire an awareness that one's actions affect the world and the well-being of humanity, and gain an appreciation for the fact that one is responsible for one's actions.

Bearing in mind the above imaginary conversation, carry out the following exercises:

1. Consider the comment made by "B" above. Not in all instances can answers to the questions in the exercises be found by simply reading the quotations in the material. As you know, some of the exercises aim at helping the participants think about the application of passages from the Writings to one's daily life. The study of the Revelation should lead to concerted effort to apply the Teachings, which requires thinking, consulting and analyzing one's understanding in the light of experience. If this process is not well understood, unhealthy characteristics can appear in an individual or even in a community. For example, if someone constantly quotes from "scripture", ignores every other source of knowledge, and refuses to give any credence to accumulated experience, he or she will have a tendency to be narrow-minded. On the other hand, a person who attaches too

much importance to experience and human opinions and devalues the authority of the Holy Text falls prey to the kind of relativism according to which everything is a matter of culture or personal preference. Discuss in your group how both of these positions can result in superstition, intolerance, fanaticism and sloppiness.

2. The resource person's reply to "B" deserves some reflection. It may not be sufficient for the participants in your study circles to simply mark as false the statement "Something is correct when it is in agreement with the opinions of other people." You may need to discuss with them the importance of listening to others in many instances in life, for example, in seeking advice on certain matters. To facilitate such a discussion, you will have naturally given this matter some thought. On which of the following do you think one should seek advice?

- One's future studies
- One's future services to the Faith
- What part service to the Faith should play in one's life
- Whether or not one should serve the Faith
- The explanation of a passage in the Writings
- The meaning of a dream one has had
- The application of one of the laws of the Faith to a situation
- Whether or not one should obey the laws
- How to raise one's children
- Whether or not one should educate one's children
- Whether or not to forgive someone for a wrong he or she has done
- Whether or not to help someone in need of assistance
- Whether or not to purchase a new appliance for one's home on credit
- The treatment for a physical illness
- A problem one is having with a friend
- Whether or not to trust someone
- Whether or not to trust in God

3. It would be useful for you to think about the comments made by "C", and the remarks of the resource person that follow. Oftentimes when one is trying to get an idea across, one falls into the habit of "preaching" at people. But this approach seldom brings the desired results. Look at the exercise discussed by "C". Following the completion of the exercise a tutor could have the participants make a list of things they should not do because they are Bahá'is, and then speak to them in some detail on the importance of behavior, introducing the concept of administrative sanctions. Explain why such an approach would be neither effective nor advisable.

SECTION 24

Let us return to the imaginary conversation between the participants in the gathering of tutors. They are now discussing the remaining sections of the first unit of Book 1.

- A: I had some difficulty with the fourth question of Section 4. The participants in my study circle had very different ideas about whether it is possible to lie to oneself, and it was hard to reach consensus.*
- R: There are many questions throughout the various units whose purpose is to stimulate thinking and consultation. The issues involved are too complex to be resolved immediately, and the same person may change his or her opinion on the subject numerous times over the years. The answer to the question you mention happens to be positive: It is possible to lie to oneself and indeed many people do so. However, there are those who will think that, in the final analysis, a person knows that he or she is lying. This is not a matter that can be settled easily. What we can do is to give examples of certain situations and ask our groups to decide whether each represents a case of lying to oneself or not. We should then accept all answers and be content that the question has been discussed and everyone has advanced in his or her understanding. After all, the question is posed at the level of behavior, and not in a philosophical sense.*
- C: I may be jumping ahead but I want to share with you an experience and then ask a question. In our group, when we got to Exercise 4 of the last section, I began to feel that everyone was rushing through the true/false statements. So I suggested that we stop and talk about the discipline needed to overcome backbiting—the subject of that exercise. The discussion was fascinating. We realized that backbiting is in fact a social custom; it is a part of our culture. We went on to figure out some practical steps that would help us to avoid backbiting. This conversation took about fifteen minutes. We then returned to the exercise, which, it seemed to me, was carried out with better understanding. Do you think I was justified in asking for such a discussion?*
- R: I think you were entirely justified. You took advantage of the flexibility that is an important characteristic of the materials in order to enhance understanding. We all know, of course, that the true/false exercises in these units are not like the ones students get on tests in school. They often bring out subtleties and clarify implications of words and actions.*
- A: I wish I had done what you did in my group. Judging from some instances of disunity we have had recently, we do not fully appreciate the harm backbiting can cause in a group of friends.*
- B: Something happened to me that might interest you. The first time I studied this unit, I realized that it is necessary, on occasion, to present people with situations that contradict a passage from the Writings to stimulate thinking about its proper application. So when the group for which I am now serving as a tutor reached Exercise 2 of Section 6, which as you know asks the participants to review several phrases and decide if they proceed from a “kindly tongue”, I prepared a few statements of my own. One of the participants has a rather sharp tongue, and I*

thought that if I added to the exercise a few of the sentences he often uses, he would become aware of his own bad habit. Well, did I ever hurt him. When I read out the first sentence, an uneasy silence fell over the group and I found him looking at me with surprise. All of a sudden, I realized that I had been unkind myself and felt terrible. That is one thing I will never do again.

- R: Exercises depicting negative situations are useful only if they can be examined in a detached way, which is impossible when they point a finger at someone. If the person is someone present, he or she will be embarrassed. If not, then the group is backbiting about someone they know.*

Before we finish our discussion of the first unit, I would like to bring to your attention one last point. It is important not to pass over the brief statement at the end of the unit about reading from the Writings daily. You will need to discuss this in your groups and, if necessary, even help the participants choose passages that they can read in the morning and the evening for some time. To this end, you should make sure that they all have at least a copy of "The Hidden Words". If not, you will have to see to it that they are able to purchase one. In subsequent meetings of the study circle, then, you can ask those who wish to do so to share with the others some of the passages they have read.

You may find it useful to carry out the following exercise:

As mentioned by the resource person, the true/false exercises in the Ruhi Institute materials are different from the ones given in tests at schools, which often can be answered mechanically. They are designed to take the students through a sequence of thoughts or help them to examine a concept from various angles. It is suggested that you review the true/false exercises in the first unit of Book 1 with your group, giving specific examples as to how this technique is used to enhance understanding.

SECTION 25

Having reflected on the comments of a group of tutors and a resource person on the content of the first unit of Book 1, you may now wish to listen to one possible conversation about the second unit, "Prayer":

- A: My group was eager to begin the study of the second unit. They welcomed now the opportunity to study longer passages and discuss more elaborate ideas. They also showed interest in those exercises that asked about the meaning of specific words—"beseech", "supplicate", "intone", "recite", "scatter", "obligatory". We constructed various sentences with each word to make sure its meaning was clear and, once or twice, used the dictionary.*
- R: I think what you did is fine. The statement about dictionaries in the "To the Collaborators" section is not a prohibition on their use. It is just that words should be understood in their context, especially where passages from the Writings are concerned. The discussion of the meaning of a single word can be carried too far.*

- Sometimes when people try to look at a quotation word by word, the greater purpose, which is to understand the meaning of the passage, is forgotten. So, for example, in Section 4 in the unit on prayer, the questions regarding the meaning of the words "intonie", "recite" and "scatter" are there to focus the participants on certain concepts in the quoted passage; they are not exercises in vocabulary.*
- B:** *There is another kind of exercise introduced in Section 5 of the unit that the members of my study circle found very effective. It is the one in which the participants are asked to fill in the blanks in sentences based on a passage from the Writings.*
- R:** *That is another technique used throughout the various units of the books. It is designed to invite the participants to think about a passage by focusing them on the missing words. As you know, in some of the exercises in the later books, sentences are often repeated, with different words missing each time. But let us set aside the question of technique now and talk about some of the important concepts in the unit.*
- C:** *In the first section the question is asked, "Is the purpose of prayer only to ask for what we need?" My group had a good discussion on the purpose of prayer, not only on why we pray but also on our relationship with God.*
- A:** *Section 3 introduces the concept of the "state of prayer". Many of the participants in my group had never considered prayer in that way. Like myself when I first studied the unit, they had thought about prayer only in terms of something you do, not as a state you strive to reach. So we paused and talked about that idea before moving on to the next section.*
- B:** *In addition to the purpose of prayer and the state of prayer, the concept of praying with faith was something my group wanted to discuss at some length. This opened up a whole discussion on the attitudes with which we should approach prayer.*
- R:** *All these concepts are important to explore. Unfortunately, as religious feeling loses its depth in the world, more and more people either do not pray or treat prayer as a ritual. There is also the tendency to pray only when one is in crisis. That is why reflecting on such issues related to prayer is essential for those who seek the life of the spirit.*
- A:** *I have a question about Section 6. There the participants are asked to memorize three passages from the Long Obligatory Prayer. Should I have encouraged them to memorize the entire prayer?*
- R:** *Like so many other things, this depends on the participants. Some will have only just begun to acquire the habit of praying every day, so memorizing the three passage suggested will be sufficient. Later, they can learn the entire prayer. Of course, others may already know the Long Obligatory Prayer by heart. In any case, I have a feeling that, as tutors of the course, it would be a good idea for each of us to memorize it, if we have not already done so.*

It is suggested that you carry out the exercises below:

1. Suppose that the members of your study circle have difficulty answering the following questions in Section 7 of the unit. What comments would you contribute to the discussion on each to stimulate their thinking?
 - a. How can we forget all save God?
 - b. Why is it important to pray with faith?
 - c. What happens when we say our prayers but our minds are occupied with other things?

2. We have talked about the importance of memorization on numerous occasions. By now you yourself have learned many passages by heart and know the value of being able to draw upon the power of the Creative Word, whether in moments of personal reflection, in times of difficulty, or in teaching the Cause. You may have also taught small children how to memorize quotations from the Writings as one element of a Bahá'í children's class. Much of the experience you have acquired will be helpful to you now in working with the members of your study circles. At this point, it would be worthwhile for you to explore some of the ways you can help them succeed in memorization. After having done so, you may wish to memorize the following short passage:

“. . . and every breast which committeth His Words to memory, God shall cause, if it were that of a believer, to be filled with His love . . .”

SECTION 26

You know from your study of the “To the Collaborators” section that the third unit of Book 1, “Life and Death”, represents a special challenge for the students and the tutor alike. Let us see how one group of participants in a tutors' gathering might review the unit. You may turn to that unit now.

A: Although serving as a tutor for this course was difficult, I found it rewarding. I now understand what is meant by the statement in the “To the Collaborators” section that all the participants are engaged in a reciprocal process of learning. I gained so many insights in studying the material with my group. I had thought, for example, that the true/false statements in the first section were fairly straightforward, so I was surprised when a few of the participants in my group marked as “true” the statement in Exercise 2 that “Life consists of the things that happen to us every day.” And when we reached the next set of true/false statements in the following section, a couple of the same participants marked as true the statements that “Death is the end of life” and “Life ends with death.” I realized that we needed to discuss this theme a bit further. Some of the comments made during our consultations were very interesting and led to clarity in the minds of the participants.

B: I found, too, that the true/false exercises really helped us think through ideas. In Section 6, many of the participants marked as true the statement that “True life begins when one dies and goes to the divine Kingdom.” Then they came to the

next statement, "True life is the life of the soul", and realized that, if that statement was true, the one above it had to be false. I could see that everyone was thinking deeply about the nature of the soul. We had to break at the end of that session that day and, maybe it was my imagination, but I noticed a change in everyone when we met the following week.

- R: *The reason that people find the unit inspiring is precisely because it poses so many questions about the life of the soul in this and the next worlds of God. In relation to living the Bahá'í life, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have said that the first thing to do is to acquire a thirst for spirituality. To acquire this thirst, He has recommended, one should meditate on life after death.*
- C: *When we were studying Section 9, we had a very interesting discussion about the question, "Why would a soul exchange its heavenly home for the dust of this world?" One member of the group raised the point that spirituality is not something one achieves once and for all and that one always has to work at controlling one's lower nature. "There is always something trying to pull us down," she suggested. This prompted another participant to bring up the question of desire. She made the point that it is in the nature of the human heart to desire and that we have to rid ourselves of vain desires. We then discussed the nature of desire. We talked about the fact that some desires are good desires, for example, the desire to work hard in order to improve one's material condition. But we decided that even these should have certain limits. If one works so hard to improve one's material comfort that it interferes with one's service to the Cause, the desire has turned into something else, maybe greed. Then somebody asked, "What about the desire to please God?" and we realized that there are desires that we should not try to limit. We decided that, in fact, the stronger spiritual longings become, the more they control our vain desires and keep them in their proper place.*
- A: *What you said about desire reminds me of another section in the unit, with which I had difficulty. In Section 14, the participants are asked to name some "vain imaginings". For whatever reason, the members of my group had a hard time thinking of any. I had just assumed that they would come up with a few, so hadn't prepared myself beforehand. It was a bit awkward.*
- R: *It's all right to have these awkward moments every now and again. You shouldn't be discouraged. That is what "gaining experience" means. Now that you have shared your experience with us, we are all aware that it is a good idea to have a short list of "vain imaginings", in case we find ourselves in a similar situation.*

No doubt there are many other points in Unit 3 that would be considered by a group in a tutors' gathering, but we will end our imaginary conversation here. What might be useful at this stage is for you to discuss with your group today the last section of the unit. There, each participant is asked to think about how the understanding acquired in the study of the unit will affect his or her life and to reach some decisions in this respect. What is the significance of this section in the context of the overall purpose of Book 1? In what way are the four aspects of life mentioned in that section related to the question of identity?

SECTION 27

We began this unit by looking briefly at the question of motivation, exploring a few of its primary sources, including thirst for knowledge and attraction to beauty. This lead us naturally to a discussion on the issue of participation, on the basis of which we were able to enter into the subject of method. We then considered three elements of the system of distance education adopted by the Ruhi Institute: the main sequence of courses, the study circle, and the tutor. We have stated clearly that this unit in itself is not the ultimate "tutor training manual" and that you will need to continue enhancing your capability to serve as a tutor by attending the periodic gatherings organized for this purpose by the institute in your area. In the latter part of the unit, you were given a taste of what your participation in these meetings will entail. We hope that, at this point, if you have not formed a study circle in the past, you are eager to do so. The institute you are serving will assist you in this process. Let us take the opportunity in these final sections, then, to consult on the results you would expect to achieve from this endeavor.

There are three participants in the plans and projects of Bahá'í communities aimed at sustaining accelerated growth: the individual, the community, and the institutions. What contribution will the study of the Ruhi Institute books make to the progress of each of these three—the individual members of the study circle, the community where it is established, and the institutions administering the affairs of the Faith in that locality?

About the individual believer, the Universal House of Justice has written:

"The role of the individual is of unique importance in the work of the Cause. It is the individual who manifests the vitality of faith upon which the success of the teaching work and the development of the community depend. Bahá'u'lláh's command to each believer to teach His Faith confers an inescapable responsibility which cannot be transferred to, or assumed by, any institution of the Cause. The individual alone can exercise those capacities which include the ability to take initiative, to seize opportunities, to form friendships, to interact personally with others, to build relationships, to win the cooperation of others in common service to the Faith and society, and to convert into action the decisions made by consultative bodies. It is the individual's duty to '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.'

"To optimize the use of these capacities, the individual draws upon his love for Bahá'u'lláh, the power of the Covenant, the dynamics of prayer, the inspiration and education derived from regular reading and study of the Holy Texts, and the transformative forces that operate upon his soul as he strives to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles. In addition to these, the individual, having been given the duty to teach the Cause, is endowed with the capacity to attract particular blessings promised by Bahá'u'lláh. 'Whoso openeth his lips in this Day,' the Blessed Beauty asserts, '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.’”¹⁰

In light of the above statement, write a few words about what you hope the members of your study circles can accomplish, once they have gone through the first six books of the Ruhi Institute.

About the community, the Universal House of Justice has written:

“A community is of course more than the sum of its membership; it is a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders; it is a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress. Since Bahá’ís everywhere are at the very beginning of the process of community building, enormous effort must be devoted to the tasks at hand.

“As we have said in an earlier message, the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behavior: those patterns by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly is manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth. This calls for the integration of the component elements—adults, youth and children—in spiritual, social, educational and administrative activities; and their engagement in local plans of teaching and development. It implies a collective will and sense of purpose to perpetuate the Spiritual Assembly through annual elections. It involves the practice of collective worship of God. Hence, it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Bahá’í centers, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.”¹¹

Now write a few words about the changes you might hope to see in the culture of a community whose members are engaged in the study of Books 1 to 6.

- Rectitude of conduct
- Reliance on God
- Abundant joy and radiance of heart
- Generosity of soul, purity of heart, and clarity of mind
- An ever-deepening understanding of the guidance enshrined in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation
- An ever-deepening knowledge of the Teachings
- Recognition of the transforming power of the Word of God
- Freedom through obedience to the laws of Bahá'u'lláh
- Attraction to beauty and perfection underlying a desire to achieve excellence
- A consciousness of the oneness of humankind and a profound love for humanity
- A strong sense of history and of one's place in it
- Eagerness and burning desire to teach and serve humankind
- A posture of learning
- An undeviating sense of purpose and the will to accomplish things
- Steadfastness in the face of tests and trials
- Dedication to the application of the Teachings
- A sense of responsibility for one's personal growth and for the progress of the Bahá'í community
- A high level of commitment to the spiritual advancement of one's people
- A consciousness of the spiritual powers on which every individual believer can draw
- The capacity to take part in community action as a determined yet humble participant
- The ability to contribute to consensus and agreement through consultation
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

The various features of the study circles that you establish, and the activity that characterizes them, contribute to the development of these attributes. Write a few sentences as to how these features nurture one or more of the attributes listed above. In each case, an example is given to assist you.

1. The atmosphere of love that permeates a study circle:
 - a. The atmosphere of love that permeates a study circle strengthens the participants' love for humanity.
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

2. **The spirit of fellowship created among the participants in a study circle:**
- a. **The spirit of fellowship in a study circle reinforces the participants' commitment to the spiritual advancement of their people.**
 - b. _____

 - c. _____

3. **The environment of spiritual discipline in which a study circle meets:**
- a. **The environment of spiritual discipline in which a study circle meets assists the participants in achieving freedom through obedience to the laws of Bahá'u'lláh.**
 - b. _____

 - c. _____

4. **The participatory approach adopted by the Institute:**
- a. **The participatory approach adopted by the Institute engenders a sense of responsibility for one's personal growth and for the progress of the community.**
 - b. _____

 - c. _____

5. **The rhythm of study that is set in each group:**
- a. **The rhythm of study that is set in each group reinforces the participants' sense of purpose and their will to accomplish things.**
 - b. _____

 - c. _____

6. **The emphasis given to the study of the Sacred Writings:**
- a. **The emphasis on the study of the Sacred Writings gives rise to joy and radiance of heart.**
 - b. _____

c. _____

7. **Memorizing prayers and passages from the Writings:**

a. **Memorizing prayers and passages from the Writings contributes to clarity of mind.**

b. _____

c. _____

8. **Exercises in the material that focus on the immediate meaning of passages from the Writings:**

a. **Exercises that focus on the immediate meaning of passages increase the participants' ability to reach consensus through consultation.**

b. _____

c. _____

9. **Exercises that help the participants apply the Writings to their daily lives:**

a. **Exercises that help the participants apply the Writings to their daily lives strengthen their dedication to the ongoing task of applying the Teachings.**

b. _____

c. _____

10. **Exercises that try to give insight into the implications of passages from the Writings:**

a. **Exercises that give insight into the implications of passages from the Writings deepen the participants' understanding of the guidance enshrined in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.**

b. _____

c. _____

11. The flexibility inherent in the methodology of the Institute:
- a. The flexibility inherent in the methodology contributes to the development of attitudes essential for a posture of learning.
 - b. _____

 - c. _____

12. The practice of specific acts of service:
- a. The practice that the members of a study circle carry out increases their eagerness to teach and serve humankind.
 - b. _____

 - c. _____

13. The artistic pursuits in which a study circle engages:
- a. The artistic pursuits of a study circle awaken within its members attraction to beauty and perfection.
 - b. _____

 - c. _____

14. The extracurricular activities which a study circle undertakes:
- a. The extracurricular activities of a study circle contribute to the members' capacity to take part in community action as determined yet humble participants.
 - b. _____

 - c. _____

SECTION 29

The reflections in the previous section on the dynamics of a study circle, dynamics which are generated by its purpose to contribute to the spiritual and moral empowerment of the participants, must have reaffirmed your conviction that to become an effective tutor, one must learn to nurture others. You need to learn the art of encourage-

ment and develop the ability to cultivate talent. This is only possible if you detach yourself from your own accomplishments and rejoice in the growth and progress of your fellow believers. Indeed, this may well be the secret of an excellent tutor.

Let us end this unit by asking you to reflect on the following passage from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

“Today, all the peoples of the world are indulging in self-interest and exert the utmost effort and endeavor to promote their own material interests. They are worshipping themselves and not the divine reality, nor the world of mankind. They seek diligently their own benefit and not the common weal. This is because they are captives of the world of nature and unaware of the divine teachings, of the bounty of the Kingdom and of the Sun of Truth. But ye, praise be to God, are at present especially favored with this bounty, have become of the chosen, have been informed of the heavenly instructions, have gained admittance into the Kingdom of God, have become the recipients of unbounded blessings and have been baptized with the Water of Life, with the fire of the love of God and with the Holy Spirit.

“Strive, therefore, with heart and soul that ye become ignited candles in the assemblage of the world, glittering stars on the horizon of Truth and may become the cause of the propagation of the light of the Kingdom; in order that the world of humanity may be converted into a divine realm, the nether world may become the world on high, the love of God and the mercy of the Lord may raise their canopy upon the apex of the world, human souls may become the waves of the ocean of truth, the world of humanity may grow into one blessed tree, the verses of oneness may be chanted and the melodies of sanctity may reach the Supreme Concourse.

“Day and night I entreat and supplicate to the Kingdom of God and beg for you infinite assistance and confirmation. Do not take into consideration your own aptitudes and capacities, but fix your gaze on the consummate bounty, the divine bestowal and the power of the Holy Spirit—the power that converteth the drop into a sea and the star into a sun.

“Praise be to God, the hosts of the Supreme Concourse secure the victory and the power of the Kingdom is ready to assist and to support. Should ye at every instant unloosen the tongue in thanksgiving and gratitude, ye would not be able to discharge yourselves of the obligation of gratitude for these bestowals.”¹²

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5. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), pp. 214-15.
6. From the 2000 Ridván message to the Bahá'ís of the world, published in *The Five Year Plan: Messages of the Universal House of Justice* (West Palm Beach: Palabra Publications, 2001), p. 21.
7. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XCIV, pp. 193-94.
8. *Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha Abbas* (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1930), vol. 1, pp. 61-62.
9. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1976), p. 99.
10. From the 1996 Ridván message to the Bahá'ís of the world, published in *The Four Year Plan: Messages of the Universal House of Justice* (Riviera Beach: Palabra Publications, 1996), pp. 31-32.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.
12. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 68, pp. 110-11.



Promoting the Arts at the Grassroots

Purpose

To appreciate the role of artistic endeavors
in the activity of a study circle.

SECTION 1

In the first two units of this book, we explored concepts, qualities, attitudes and skills that shape your capability to serve as a tutor of Books 1 to 6 of the Ruhi Institute. Most of the time you will perform this act of service by establishing study circles in your own and neighboring communities, accompanying each group in its study of the Institute's sequence of courses and guiding the participants in the corresponding practice. The sequence of courses followed by the study circles has a single purpose: empowering the believers morally and spiritually in their resolve to tread a path of service to the Cause and to humanity.

The aim of this third unit is to reflect with you on another fundamental idea, namely, that you can make a significant contribution to the capabilities of service of those who take part in a study circle by encouraging them to develop their capacity for artistic expression, be it through music, poetry, painting, drama or any of the various types of crafts. To this end, we will urge you to include artistic endeavors in the activity of every study circle. You should not think of this as entertainment or as an extracurricular activity—for which there is ample room in the Institute's program—but as an essential element enhancing the spiritual development of the participants. To begin, examine the following questions:

1. What different types of music do people play or listen to in your region?
2. What are your favorite types of music? When do you listen to them? Why do you listen to them?
3. Is every type of music appropriate to every occasion?
4. Whistle, hum or sing one of your favorite tunes. Why do you like it?
5. Is storytelling a form of art? Is poetry an art form?
6. Recite a favorite poem or narrate a story.
7. What is the most popular form of drama in your region?
8. Aside from movies, videos or television, have you seen a dramatic performance recently? Can you describe it? What effect did it have on you?
9. Most cultures have their own well-known painters or sculptors. Name the prominent ones of your region. Have you seen any of their work in person?
10. Can you name a few crafts? Do you know a craft? Is there a craft you do not know but would like to learn?
11. Many cultures have traditional dances. Describe some of the traditional dances of your region. Are they used for special occasions? Are they performed by certain people only, or can anyone who wishes take part?

SECTION 2

In order to gain a better understanding of the role of the arts in the institute process, we will study a number of quotations in this and the following sections and ponder their meaning. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

"All Art is a gift of the Holy Spirit. When this light shines through the mind of a musician, it manifests itself in beautiful harmonies. Again, shining through the mind of a poet, it is seen in fine poetry and poetic prose. When the Light of the Sun of Truth inspires the mind of a painter, he produces marvelous pictures. These gifts are fulfilling their highest purpose, when showing forth the praise of God."¹

1. What is the highest purpose of artistic expression? _____

2. From where does the gift of art come? _____
3. How does the gift of art manifest itself through the mind of a musician? _____

4. How does the gift of art manifest itself through the mind of a poet? _____

5. How does the gift of art manifest itself through the mind of a painter? _____

6. Of the songs you know, choose one that you consider fulfills the purpose of praising God. In what way do you think the song is a gift of the Holy Spirit? _____

7. As the worldwide Bahá'í community grows, an increasing number of prayers and passages from the Writings are set to music. In the study circles for which you serve as a tutor, you will want the participants to learn as many of these as possible. Here is one that is well loved throughout the Bahá'í world.

Blessed Is the Spot

A A#7 A7 D
Blessed is the spot, and the house, and the place,

Bmin E A E7
And the city, and the heart, and the mountain,

A A#7 A7 D
And the refuge, and the cave, and the valley, and the land,

Bmin E7 A
And the sea, and the island, and the meadow

Bmin E A F#min
Where mention of God hath been made,

D E E7
And His praise glorified.

SECTION 3

'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

"It is natural for the heart and spirit to take pleasure and enjoyment in all things that show forth symmetry, harmony and perfection. For instance: a beautiful house, a well designed garden, a symmetrical line, a graceful action, a well written book, pleasing garments—in fact, all things that have in themselves grace or beauty are pleasing to the heart and spirit . . ."²

1. In what do the heart and spirit take pleasure? _____

2. Which of the following situations illustrate harmony?

a. Two people arguing and another person saying prayers. Yes No

b. A mother singing her baby to sleep while the other children are playing quietly. Yes No

c. A teacher with his or her feet up on the desk while talking to the children about courtesy. Yes No

d. Someone meditating on the Writings while the television is on. Yes No

e. A teacher shouting at a student, telling him to behave himself. Yes No

3. Now choose a song that is pleasing to the heart and spirit, and sing it.

4. Discuss with your group the various traditional dances of your region and decide among yourselves which movements in the dances portray grace and beauty.

5. Consider with your group how one's heart and spirit take pleasure and enjoyment in all things that show forth symmetry, harmony and perfection. What are some of the things you see or hear as you go about your daily life which are pleasing to the heart and spirit? _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
6. Think of a study circle for which you are serving as the tutor. Dramatize how each of the following would be carried out, first in a non-pleasing manner and then in a graceful manner.
- Greeting the participants as they arrive
 - Introducing a new participant
 - Asking someone to say a prayer
 - Greeting a latecomer
 - Encouraging someone to memorize
 - Requesting that the voice level of the class be lowered

SECTION 4

As we have read in the previous section “. . . all things that have in themselves grace or beauty are pleasing to the heart and spirit . . .”² We know from our discussions on the subject of motivation that attraction to beauty is one of the spiritual forces that lifts us up to higher realms of existence. It is this force that compels us to seek harmony in our daily lives and in our relationships with others. So, too, the visual arts, music and crafts are an expression of this essential longing of the human soul. What you need to remember is that the expressions of beauty in this world are but a reflection of the Beauty of the Most Beloved. They all perish, but the Blessed Beauty is eternal. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us:

“Mortal charm shall fade away, roses shall give way to thorns, and beauty and youth shall live their day and be no more. But that which eternally endureth is the Beauty of the True One, for its splendor perisheth not and its glory lasteth forever; its charm is all-powerful and its attraction infinite. Well is it then with that countenance that reflecteth the splendor of the Light of the Beloved One! The Lord be praised, thou hast been illumined with this Light, hast acquired the pearl of true knowledge, and hast spoken the Word of Truth.”³

Complete the following sentences:

1. _____ charm shall _____.
2. _____ shall give way to _____.
3. Beauty and _____ shall live their _____ and _____.
4. That which eternally _____ is the _____ of the _____.
5. The splendor of the Beauty of the True One _____.
6. The glory of the Beauty of the True One _____.
7. The charm of the Beauty of the True One is _____.
8. The attraction of the Beauty of the True One is _____.

In your efforts to ensure that the arts are incorporated into the activity of your study circles, you should bear in mind that you are concerned with both the form and the spirit. The outer form derives its value from the inner condition. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

"The body without spirit is not capable of real accomplishment. Although it may be in the utmost condition of beauty and excellence, it is, nevertheless, in need of the spirit. The chimney of the lamp, no matter how polished and perfect it be, is in need of the light. Without the light, the lamp or candle is not illuminating."⁴

In reflecting on the meaning of the above passage, think of a time when you told a story or heard one narrated that caught the imagination of those present. Presumably, the form was correct: Words were pronounced clearly; pauses were made in the right places; an appropriate rhythm was maintained; and gestures were used to underscore certain points. But this would not have been all that inspired the listeners. A certain feeling must have come through the narration. A spirit must have been present. Discuss in your group the source of that spirit. Is it not, in the final analysis, the Beauty of the Most Beloved?

SECTION 5

In trying to strengthen the force of attraction to beauty in the participants of your study circles and contribute to their spiritual development, you will want to expose them to various forms of art. There is, of course, much ugliness in today's world that presents itself in the name of beauty. You should exercise care to select those artistic expressions that appeal to the higher nature and should be wary of those that lead to abasement. Culture will also be one of your constant concerns. You will want to make sure that at least some of the artistic expressions you choose represent the richness of the culture of your own people.

To help you formulate in your own mind a plan of action in this essential area of activity, we will examine briefly in the next sections several forms of art, beginning with music. On the nature of music, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

“ . . . in this new age the Manifest Light hath, in His holy Tablets, specifically proclaimed that music, sung or played, is spiritual food for soul and heart.”⁵

“ . . . melodies, though they are material, are connected with the spiritual, therefore, they produce a great effect. A certain kind of melody makes the spirit happy, another kind makes it sad, another excites it to action.”⁶

“Singing melodies will bring animation and happiness to the world of humanity, the hearers will be delighted and joyful and their deeper emotions stirred. But this gladness, this sense of emotion is transitory and will be forgotten within a short time. However, praise be to God, thou hast blended thy tunes with the melodies of the Kingdom, wilt impart solace to the world of the spirit and wilt everlastingly stimulate spiritual feelings.”⁷

1. Complete the following sentences:

- a. In this new age, Bahá'u'lláh has specifically _____ that _____, sung or played, is spiritual food for _____ and _____.
- b. In this _____, Bahá'u'lláh has _____ proclaimed that music, _____ or _____, is _____ for soul and heart.
- c. Melodies, though they are _____, are connected with the _____.
- d. _____, through they are material, are _____ with the spiritual, therefore, they _____ a great _____.
- e. A certain kind of melody makes the spirit _____.
- f. Another kind of melody makes the spirit _____.
- g. Another kind of melody excites the spirit to _____.

2. Answer the following questions:

- a. What does it mean to “blend tunes with the melodies of the Kingdom”? _____

- b. What does this “blending” do? _____

The three passages above leave no doubt that music makes a significant contribution to spiritual upliftment. It is imperative, then, that a training institute program, the purpose of which is to enhance the capabilities of the friends to serve the Cause, incorporate music in some manner. The following words of Bahá'u'lláh from the Kitáb-i-Aqdas contain fundamental guidance for this activity:

“We have made it lawful for you to listen to music and singing. Take heed, however, lest listening thereto should cause you to overstep the bounds of propriety and dignity. Let your joy be the joy born of My Most Great Name, a Name that bringeth rapture to the heart, and filleth with ecstasy the minds of all who have drawn nigh unto God. We, verily, have made music as a ladder for your souls, a means whereby they may be lifted up unto the realm on high; make it not, therefore, as wings to self and passion. Truly, We are loath to see you numbered with the foolish.”¹

Given that music is such a powerful force, it would be worthwhile for you to pause here with your group and identify some songs known to all of you that lift one up “unto the realm on high” and others that act as “wings of self and passion”.

SECTION 6

Let us consider now various ways in which you can incorporate music into the educational practice of your study circles.

One of the favorite activities of study circles the world over is singing songs together as a group, with or without accompanying instruments. In studying Books 3 and 5, you acquired skills needed to teach songs to small children and practiced certain games that could be used to improve their sense of rhythm and their ability to carry a tune. Some of what you have learned will be of assistance to you now as you encourage the members of a study group to sing songs, to appreciate the messages they convey and, in general, to enjoy music, allowing it to uplift their spirits.

You will, of course, be sensitive to the fact that you are working with youth and adults and will avoid the mistake of treating them as children. You will also have to face challenges that are particular to the make-up of each group with which you work. The talents of the members and their knowledge of music will have developed to different degrees, with some quite accomplished and others not at all musically inclined. A few may feel inhibited to sing in front of others. Some may only want to hum a tune in a voice so low that it is impossible to hear them. Whatever their inclinations and talents, you should be willing to accept and encourage all of them and make sure that no one is ever embarrassed. In this respect, it is important for you to separate the question of performance by a talented individual from group singing. Both are valuable. But sometimes, the perfection sought by one stifles the participation of ordinary people in the other.

One further point deserves mention here. You are already aware from your study of Book 5 that songs can act as a powerful pedagogical tool. If the theme of a song is relevant to the subject under consideration, singing it can enhance understanding in ways

that discussion alone never would. You will need to bear this point in mind when choosing songs for group singing, ensuring, to the extent possible, that they reinforce the ideas being covered in the material.

In addition to group singing, individual members of your study circles may be willing to perform for the others, and you will certainly want to encourage them in such initiative. This may give you the opportunity to identify those who have special aptitude and help them, as a friend, to find ways to develop their talents, independent of the study circle.

Beyond these activities, you can achieve your overall purpose of promoting artistic expression by discussing with your study circles themes related to music, by inviting talented individuals in the larger community to speak to the members or perform for them, and by attending musical performances together. There are at least two objectives you can pursue through such endeavors:

1. You can assist the participants of your study circles in gaining a greater appreciation of the musical heritage of their people. Your discussions with them could take the form of an exploration into the various types of music common in the region. Examples of questions that could be examined are: Does the region have its own traditional work songs, such as those sung in the fields during harvest or when tending animals, or its own love songs, lullabies, children's songs and sacred music? Is there a certain kind of music traditionally used for special occasions, for example, weddings, funerals or celebrations? For each type of music identified, the group could then consider how it is passed from one generation to the next, how it differs from other types of music, and what emotions it evokes. You could also dedicate some time to the discussion of the instruments particular to the region, asking the participants in the study circle to name some of them. In addition, they could share with one another whatever they may know about who makes the instruments, how they are made, of what they are made, and for what kind of music they are suitable. Following such discussions, you may well be able to invite a musician, an instrument maker or a composer to speak to the study circle and illustrate his or her skills.

To think further about the nature of these explorations into culture, you may wish to write a short paragraph on the subject.

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2. Another objective you may pursue is to help the participants of your study circles to acquire a greater understanding of the role music can play in Bahá'í community life. As they progress in the study of the various books and they undertake specific acts of service, you will of course encourage them to take part in community events, whether local, regional or national, and contribute their musical talents.

The following statement of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is indicative of the effectiveness of music when a message is being delivered:

“... although music is a material affair, yet its tremendous effect is spiritual, and its greatest attachment is to the realm of the spirit. If a person desires to deliver a discourse, it will prove more effectual after musical melodies. The ancient Greeks, as well as Persian philosophers, were in the habit of delivering their discourses in the following manner: —First, playing a few musical melodies, and when their audience attained a certain receptivity thereby they would leave their instrument at once and begin their discourse. Among the most renowned musicians of Persia was one named Barbod, who, whenever a great question had been pleaded for at the court of the King, and the Ministry had failed to persuade the King, they would at once refer the matter to Barbod, whereupon he would go with his instrument to the court and play the most appropriate and touching music, the end being at once attained, because the King was immediately affected by the touching musical melodies, certain feelings of generosity would swell up in his heart, and he would give way. . . .”⁹

And, the effectiveness of music is increased many fold when it is inspired by the Teachings, even drawing upon the utterances of God:

“Music is an important means to the education and development of humanity, but the only true way is through the Teachings of God. Music is like this glass, which is perfectly pure and polished. It is precisely like this pure chalice before us, and the Teachings of God, the utterances of God, are like the water. When the glass or chalice is absolutely pure and clear, and the water is perfectly fresh and limpid, then it will confer Life; wherefore, the Teachings of God, whether they be in the form of anthems or communes or prayers, when they are melodiously sung, are most impressive.”¹⁰

In the light of quotations such as the above, you could discuss with your study circles the various kinds of music that would be appropriate for different community events. Your discussions could focus on questions such as the following: What kinds of songs are suitable for proclamation and teaching events? What are some examples of songs that spark interest in the Faith and attract people to it? What kinds of songs can contribute to the process of consolidation? What are some examples of songs that increase the friends' knowledge of the history of the

Faith and their love for Bahá'u'lláh and that touch their hearts and move them to serve the Cause? Which songs are appropriate for the observance of Holy Days and for the celebration of the Nineteen Day Feast?

It would be worthwhile for you to pause and write a few words on this topic, as you did with the subject of your musical heritage.

SECTION 7

Áqá Muḥammad-i-Tabrizí has recounted how, as a child of four or five, he would go with his family to the Mansion of Bahjí each Friday, as was customary among the believers at that time, to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. They would stay all day, making use of the rooms on the lower floor of the Mansion.

During one of these visits, the grown-ups were resting in their rooms at noontime. As it was a warm day, he rose from his couch and wandered to the upper floor of the Mansion, where he entered the large hall and eventually came upon the room used to store food. There he noticed a bag filled with sugar. He instinctively took a handful, put it in his mouth, and then filled both hands before leaving the storeroom. Back in the hall, he froze in his tracks upon seeing the Blessed Beauty pacing to and fro. Bahá'u'lláh approached him in a gentle manner, cast a loving glance at his hands, and slowly led the little boy to a large table in the middle of the hall. Picking up a plate of candies, He offered one to the child. "It seems you like sweets," Bahá'u'lláh said. "Eat well! Goodbye. And may God protect you."

Years later, Áqá Muḥammad would often speak of the love he felt in his heart for the Blessed Beauty—a love which, from that moment, had never left him.¹¹

Imagine yourself knowing scores of stories such as the above and being able to recount them at appropriate times in a study circle for which you are serving as a tutor. For example, you might tell the story of Áqá Muḥammad when the group is discussing the subject of discipline and exploring ways to deal with a child's mischievous behavior. What effect would this ability of yours have on the environment of learning you strive to create every time a study circle comes together?

Storytelling is an art which when used properly can inspire, animate, stimulate imagination, convey profound concepts, teach and even lead to change of behavior. We recommend with all earnestness that you learn this art and employ it judiciously in your study circles, whether you are participating in them as a student or as a tutor. The ability to tell stories in an attractive and inspiring way is something that you will develop through experience. Books 3 and 5 offer a few hints about the techniques of this often neglected art form. We will not discuss the necessary skills here, nor will we give you a long list of suggested stories to learn. What we do want to bring to your attention, however, is the special significance of episodes from the history of the Faith and the unique value of *The Dawn-Breakers* as the source of such episodes. The Guardian has referred to this work as an "essential adjunct" to teaching programs and an "unchallengeable textbook" in summer schools. Further, he has called it a "source of inspiration in all literary and artistic pursuits," an "invaluable companion in times of leisure," an "indispensable preliminary to future pilgrimage to Bahá'u'lláh's native land," and an "unfailing instrument to allay distress and resist attacks of a critical, disillusioned humanity."¹² On the importance of that book, he has written to an individual believer:

"Utilize, as extensively as you possibly can, the wealth of material which Nabil's stirring and precious narrative contains, and let it be your chief instrument wherewith you can feed the flame of enthusiasm that glows in every Bahá'í heart and upon which the success of your magnificent, your incessant efforts must ultimately depend."¹³

In a letter written on his behalf, we read:

"Nabil's narrative is not merely a narrative; it is a book of meditation. It does not only teach. It actually inspires and incites to action. It quickens and stimulates our dormant energies and makes us soar on a higher plane. It is thus of an invaluable help to the historian as well as to every teacher and expounder of the Cause."¹⁴

Although you already know many episodes from the history of the Faith, and can probably narrate them in some detail, we include in this lesson a passage from *The Dawn-Breakers*, the account of the seven martyrs of Tíhrán. As an exercise, you are asked to read it a number of times and then narrate it, being careful to do so as accurately as possible. This passage provides you with a good example of the kind you will want to learn for use in your study circles, for it lends itself to being told either in part or in full, as occasion demands.

"The circumstances of the martyrdom of my arrested brethren in Tíhrán—for such was their fate—I now proceed to relate. The fourteen disciples of the Báb, who had been captured, remained incarcerated in the house of Maḥmúd Khán-i-Kalantar from the first to the twenty-second day of the month of Rabí'u'th-Thání.

Táhirih was also confined on the upper floor of that same house. Every kind of ill treatment was inflicted upon them. Their persecutors sought, by every device, to induce them to supply the information they required, but failed to obtain a satisfactory answer. Among the captives was a certain Muḥammad-Ḥusayn-i-Marághí'í, who obstinately refused to utter a single word despite the severe pressure that was brought to bear upon him. They tortured him, they resorted to every possible measure in order to extort from him any hint that could serve their purpose, but failed to achieve their end. Such was his unswerving obstinacy that his oppressors thought him to be dumb. They asked Hájí Mullá Ismá'íl, who had converted him to his Faith, whether or not he could talk. 'He is mute, but not dumb,' he replied; 'he is fluent of speech and is free from any impediment.' He had no sooner called him by his name than the victim answered, assuring him of his readiness to abide by his will.

"Convinced of their powerlessness to bend their will, they referred the matter to Maḥmúd Khán, who, in his turn, submitted their case to the Amír-Nizám, Mírzá Taqí Khán, the Grand Vazír of Násiri'd-Dín Sháh. The sovereign in those days refrained from direct interference in matters pertaining to the affairs of the persecuted community, and was often ignorant of the decisions that were being made with regard to its members. His Grand Vazír was invested with plenary powers to deal with them as he saw fit. No one questioned his decisions, nor dared disapprove of the manner in which he exercised his authority. He immediately issued a peremptory order threatening with execution whoever among these fourteen prisoners was unwilling to recant his faith. Seven were compelled to yield to the pressure that was brought to bear upon them, and were immediately released. The remaining seven constitute the Seven Martyrs of Tíhrán:

"1. Hájí Mírzá Siyyid 'Alí, surnamed Khál-i-A'zam, the Báb's maternal uncle, and one of the leading merchants of Shíráz. It was this same uncle into whose custody the Báb, after the death of His father, was entrusted, and who, on his Nephew's return from His pilgrimage to Hijáz and His arrest by Ḥusayn Khán, assumed undivided responsibility for Him by pledging his word in writing. It was he who surrounded Him, while under his care, with unfailing solicitude, who served Him with such devotion, and who acted as intermediary between Him and the hosts of His followers who flocked to Shíráz to see Him. His only child, a Siyyid Javád, died in infancy. Towards the middle of the year 1265 A.H., this same Hájí Mírzá Siyyid 'Alí left Shíráz and visited the Báb in the castle of Chihriq. From thence he went to Tíhrán and, though having no special occupation, remained in that city until the outbreak of the sedition which brought about eventually his martyrdom.

"Though his friends appealed to him to escape the turmoil that was fast approaching, he refused to heed their counsel and faced, until his last hour, with complete resignation, the persecution to which he was subjected. A considerable number among the more affluent merchants of his acquaintance offered to pay his ransom, an offer which he rejected. Finally he was brought before the Amír-Nizám. 'The Chief Magistrate of this realm,' the Grand Vazír informed him, 'is loth to inflict the slightest injury upon the Prophet's descendants. Eminent merchants of Shíráz and Tíhrán are willing, nay eager, to pay your ransom. The Maliku't-Tujjár has even interceded in your behalf. A word of recantation from you is sufficient to set you free and ensure your return, with honors, to your native city. I pledge my

word that, should you be willing to acquiesce, the remaining days of your life will be spent with honor and dignity under the sheltering shadow of your sovereign.' 'Your Excellency,' boldly replied Hájí Mírzá Siyyid 'Alí, 'if others before me, who quaffed joyously the cup of martyrdom, have chosen to reject an appeal such as the one you now make to me, know of a certainty that I am no less eager to decline such a request. My repudiation of the truths enshrined in this Revelation would be tantamount to a rejection of all the Revelations that have preceded it. To refuse to acknowledge the Mission of the Siyyid-i-Báb would be to apostatize from the Faith of my forefathers and to deny the Divine character of the Message which Muḥammad, Jesus, Moses, and all the Prophets of the past have revealed. God knows that whatever I have heard and read concerning the sayings and doings of those Messengers, I have been privileged to witness the same from this Youth, this beloved Kinsman of mine, from His earliest boyhood to this, the thirtieth year of His life. Everything in Him reminds me of His illustrious Ancestor and of the imáms of His Faith whose lives our recorded traditions have portrayed. I only request of you that you allow me to be the first to lay down my life in the path of my beloved Kinsman.'

"The Amír was stupefied by such an answer. In a frenzy of despair, and without uttering a word, he motioned that he be taken out and beheaded. As the victim was being conducted to his death, he was heard, several times, to repeat these words of Háfiz: 'Great is my gratitude to Thee, O my God, for having granted so bountifully all I have asked of Thee.' 'Hear me, O people,' he cried to the multitude that pressed around him; 'I have offered myself up as a willing sacrifice in the path of the Cause of God. The entire province of Fárs, as well as 'Iráq, beyond the confines of Persia, will readily testify to my uprightness of conduct, to my sincere piety and noble lineage. For over a thousand years, you have prayed and prayed again that the promised Qá'im be made manifest. At the mention of His name, how often have you cried, from the depths of your hearts: "Hasten, O God, His coming; remove every barrier that stands in the way of His appearance!" And now that He is come, you have driven Him to a hopeless exile in a remote and sequestered corner of Ádhirbáyján and have risen to exterminate His companions. Were I to invoke the malediction of God upon you, I am certain that His avenging wrath would grievously afflict you. Such is not, however, my prayer. With my last breath, I pray that the Almighty may wipe away the stain of your guilt and enable you to awaken from the sleep of heedlessness.'

"These words stirred his executioner to his very depths. Pretending that the sword he had been holding in readiness in his hands required to be resharpened, he hastily went away, determined never to return again. 'When I was appointed to this service,' he was heard to complain, weeping bitterly the while, 'they undertook to deliver into my hands only those who had been convicted of murder and highway robbery. I am now ordered by them to shed the blood of one no less holy than the Imám Músáy-i-Kázim himself!' Shortly after, he departed for Khurásán and there sought to earn his livelihood as a porter and crier. To the believers of that province, he recounted the tale of that tragedy, and expressed his repentance of the act which he had been compelled to perpetrate. Every time he recalled that incident, every time the name of Hájí Mírzá Siyyid 'Alí was mentioned to him, tears which he could not repress flowed from his eyes, tears that were a witness to the affection which that holy man had instilled into his heart.

"2. Mírzá Qurbán-'Alí, a native of Bárfurúsh in the province of Mázindarán, and an outstanding figure in the community known by the name of Ni'matu'lláhi. He was a man of sincere piety and endowed with great nobleness of nature. Such was the purity of his life that a considerable number among the notables of Mázindarán, of Khurásán and Tihrán had pledged him their loyalty, and regarded him as the very embodiment of virtue. Such was the esteem in which he was held by his countrymen that, on the occasion of his pilgrimage to Karbilá, a vast concourse of devoted admirers thronged his route in order to pay their homage to him. In Hamadán, as well as in Kirmánsháh, a great number of people were influenced by his personality and joined the company of his followers. Wherever he went, he was greeted with the acclamations of the people. These demonstrations of popular enthusiasm were, however, extremely distasteful to him. He avoided the crowd and disdained the pomp and circumstance of leadership. On his way to Karbilá, while passing through Mandalij, a shaykh of considerable influence became so enamored of him that he renounced all that he had formerly cherished and, leaving his friends and disciples, followed him as far as Ya'qúbiyyih. Mírzá Qurbán-'Alí, however, succeeded in inducing him to return to Mandalij and resume the work which he had abandoned.

"On his return from his pilgrimage, Mírzá Qurbán-'Alí met Mullá Husayn and through him embraced the truth of the Cause. Owing to illness, he was unable to join the defenders of the fort of Tabarsí, and, but for his unfitness to travel to Mázindarán, would have been the first to join its occupants. Next to Mullá Husayn, among the disciples of the Báb, Vahíd was the person to whom he was most attached. During my visit to Tihrán, I was informed that the latter had consecrated his life to the service of the Cause and had risen with exemplary devotion to promote its interests far and wide. I often heard Mírzá Qurbán-'Alí, who was then in the capital, deplore that illness. 'How greatly I grieve,' I heard him several times remark, 'to have been deprived of my share of the cup which Mullá Husayn and his companions have quaffed! I long to join Vahíd and enroll myself under his banner and strive to make amends for my previous failure.' He was preparing to leave Tihrán, when he was suddenly arrested. His modest attire witnessed to the degree of his detachment. Clad in a white tunic, after the manner of the Arabs, cloaked in a coarsely woven 'abá, and wearing the head-dress of the people of 'Iráq, he seemed, as he walked the streets, the very embodiment of renunciation. He scrupulously adhered to all the observances of his Faith, and with exemplary piety performed his devotions. 'The Báb Himself conforms to the observances of His Faith in their minutest details,' he often remarked. 'Am I to neglect on my part the things which are observed by my Leader?'

"When Mírzá Qurbán-'Alí was arrested and brought before the Amír-Nizám, a commotion such as Tihrán had rarely experienced was raised. Large crowds of people thronged the approaches to the headquarters of the government, eager to learn what would befall him. 'Since last night,' the Amír, as soon as he had seen him, remarked, 'I have been besieged by all classes of State officials who have vigorously interceded in your behalf. From what I learn of the position you occupy and the influence your words exercise, you are not much inferior to the Siyyid-i-Báb Himself. Had you claimed for yourself the position of leadership, better would it have been than to declare your allegiance to one who is certainly inferior to you in knowledge.' 'The knowledge which I have acquired,' he boldly

retorted, 'has led me to bow down in allegiance before Him whom I have recognized to be my Lord and Leader. Ever since I attained the age of manhood, I have regarded justice and fairness as the ruling motives of my life. I have judged Him fairly, and have reached the conclusion that should this Youth, to whose transcendent power friend and foe alike testify, be false, every Prophet of God, from time immemorial down to the present day, should be denounced as the very embodiment of falsehood! I am assured of the unquestioning devotion of over a thousand admirers, and yet I am powerless to change the heart of the least among them. This Youth, however, has proved Himself capable of transmuting, through the elixir of His love, the souls of the most degraded among His fellow men. Upon a thousand like me He has, unaided and alone, exerted such influence that, without even attaining His presence, they have flung aside their own desires and have clung passionately to His will. Fully conscious of the inadequacy of the sacrifice they have made, these yearn to lay down their lives for His sake, in the hope that this further evidence of their devotion may be worthy of mention in His Court.'

"'I am loth,' the Amír-Nizám remarked, 'whether your words be of God or not, to pronounce the sentence of death against the possessor of so exalted a station.' 'Why hesitate?' burst forth the impatient victim. 'Are you not aware that all names descend from Heaven? He whose name is 'Alí, in whose path I am laying down my life, has from time immemorial inscribed my name, Qurbán-'Alí, in the scroll of His chosen martyrs. This is indeed the day on which I celebrate the Qurbán festival, the day on which I shall seal with my life-blood my faith in His Cause. Be not, therefore, reluctant, and rest assured that I shall never blame you for your act. The sooner you strike off my head, the greater will be my gratitude to you.' 'Take him away from this place!' cried the Amír. 'Another moment, and this dervish will have cast his spell over me!' 'You are proof against that magic,' Mírzá Qurbán-'Alí replied, 'that can captivate only the pure in heart. You and your like can never be made to realize the entrancing power of that Divine elixir which, swift as the twinkling of an eye, transmutes the souls of men.'

"Exasperated by the reply, the Amír-Nizám arose from his seat and, his whole frame shaking with anger, exclaimed: 'Nothing but the edge of the sword can silence the voice of this deluded people!' 'No need,' he told the executioners who were in attendance upon him, 'to bring any more members of this hateful sect before me. Words are powerless to overcome their unswerving obstinacy. Whomsoever you are able to induce to recant his faith, release him; as for the rest, strike off their heads.'

"As he drew near the scene of his death, Mírzá Qurbán-'Alí, intoxicated with the prospect of an approaching reunion with his Beloved, broke forth into expressions of joyous exultation. 'Hasten to slay me,' he cried with rapturous delight, 'for through this death you will have offered me the chalice of everlasting life. Though my withered breath you now extinguish, with a myriad lives will my Beloved reward me; lives such as no mortal heart can conceive!' 'Hearken to my words, you who profess to be the followers of the Apostle of God,' he pleaded, as he turned his gaze to the concourse of spectators. 'Muḥammad, the Day-Star of Divine guidance, who in a former age arose above the horizon of Hijáz, has today, in the person of 'Alí-Muḥammad, again risen from the Day-Spring of Shíráz, shedding the same radiance and imparting the same warmth. A rose is a rose in

whichever garden, and at whatever time, it may bloom.' Seeing on every side how the people were deaf to his call, he cried aloud: 'Oh, the perversity of this generation! How heedless of the fragrance which that imperishable Rose has shed! Though my soul brim over with ecstasy, I can, alas, find no heart to share with me its charm, nor mind to apprehend its glory.'

"At the sight of the body of Hájí Mirzá Siyyid 'Alí, beheaded and bleeding at his feet, his fevered excitement rose to its highest pitch. 'Hail,' he shouted as he flung himself upon it, 'hail the day of mutual rejoicing, the day of our reunion with our Beloved!' 'Approach,' he cried to the executioner, as he held the body in his arms, 'and strike your blow, for my faithful comrade is unwilling to release himself from my embrace, and calls me to hasten together with him to the court of the Well-Beloved.' A blow from the executioner fell immediately upon the nape of his neck. A few moments later, and the soul of that great man had passed away. That cruel stroke stirred in the bystanders feelings of mingled indignation and sympathy. Cries of sorrow and lamentation ascended from the hearts of the multitude, and provoked a distress that was reminiscent of the outbursts of grief with which every year the populace greets the day of 'Áshúrâ.

"3. Then came the turn of Hájí Mullâ Ismâ'íl-i-Qumí, who was a native of Farâhân. In his early youth, he departed for Karbilâ in quest of the Truth which he was diligently striving to discover. He had associated with all the leading 'ulamás of Najaf and Karbilâ, had sat at the feet of Siyyid Kázim, and had acquired from him the knowledge and understanding which enabled him, a few years later when in Shíráz, to acknowledge the Revelation of the Báb. He distinguished himself by the tenacity of his faith and the fervor of his devotion. As soon as the injunction of the Báb, bidding His followers hasten to K̄hurásân, reached him, he enthusiastically responded, joined the companions who were proceeding to Badasht, and there received the appellation of Sirru'l-Vujúd. Whilst in their company, his understanding of the Cause grew deeper and his zeal for its promotion correspondingly increased. He grew to be the very embodiment of detachment, and felt more and more impatient to demonstrate in a befitting manner the spirit with which his Faith had inspired him. In the exposition of the meaning of the verses of the Qur'án and the traditions of Islám, he displayed an insight which few could rival, and the eloquence with which he set forth those truths won him the admiration of his fellow-disciples. In the days when the fort of Ṭabarsí had become the rallying center for the disciples of the Báb, he languished disconsolate upon a sick-bed, unable to lend his assistance and play his part for its defence. No sooner had he recovered than, finding that that memorable siege had ended with the massacre of his fellow-disciples, he arose, with added determination, to make up by his self-sacrificing labors for the loss which the Cause had sustained. That determination carried him eventually to the field of martyrdom and won him its crown.

"Conducted to the block and waiting for the moment of his execution, he turned his gaze towards those twin martyrs who had preceded him and who still lay entwined in each other's embrace. 'Well done, beloved companions!' he cried, as he fixed his gaze upon their gory heads. 'You have turned Ṭihrán into a paradise! Would that I had preceded you!' Drawing from his pocket a coin, which he handed to his executioner, he begged him to purchase for him something with which he could sweeten his mouth. He took some of it and gave the rest to him,

saying: 'I have forgiven you your act; approach and deal your blow. For thirty years I have yearned to witness this blessed day, and was fearful lest I should carry this wish with me unfulfilled to the grave.' 'Accept me, O my God,' he cried, as he turned his eyes to heaven, 'unworthy though I be, and deign to inscribe my name upon the scroll of those immortals who have laid down their lives on the altar of sacrifice.' He was still offering his devotions when the executioner, at his request, suddenly cut short his prayer.

"4. He had hardly expired when Siyyid Husayn-i-Turshízí, the mujtahid, was conducted in his turn to the block. He was a native of Turshíz, a village in Khurásán, and was highly esteemed for his piety and rectitude of conduct. He had studied for a number of years in Najaf, and was commissioned by his fellow-mujtahids to proceed to Khurásán and there propagate the principles he had been taught. When he arrived at Kázimayn, he met Hájí Muḥammad-Taqí-i-Kirmání, an old acquaintance of his, who ranked among the foremost merchants of Kirmán, and who had opened a branch of his business in Khurásán. As he was on his way to Persia, he decided to accompany him. This Hájí Muḥammad-Taqí had been a close friend of Hájí Mirzá Siyyid 'Alí, the Báb's maternal uncle, through whom he had been converted to the Cause in the year 1264 A.H., while preparing to leave Shiráz on a pilgrimage to Karbilá. When informed of the projected journey of Hájí Mirzá Siyyid 'Alí to Chihriq for the purpose of visiting the Báb, he expressed his eager desire to accompany him. Hájí Mirzá Siyyid 'Alí advised him to carry out his original purpose and proceed to Karbilá and there await his letter, which would inform him whether it would be advisable to join him. From Chihriq, Hájí Mirzá Siyyid 'Alí was ordered to depart for Ṭihrán, in the hope that after a short stay in the capital he would be able to renew his visit to his Nephew. Whilst in Chihriq, he expressed his reluctance to return to Shiráz, inasmuch as he could no longer endure the increasing arrogance of its inhabitants. Upon his arrival in Ṭihrán, he requested Hájí Muḥammad-Taqí to join him. Siyyid Husayn accompanied him from Baghdád to the capital and through him was converted to the Faith.

"As he faced the multitude that had gathered round him to witness his martyrdom, Siyyid Husayn raised his voice and said: 'Hear me, O followers of Islám! My name is Husayn, and I am a descendant of the Siyyidu'sh-Shuhadá, who also bore that name. The mujtahids of the holy cities of Najaf and Karbilá have unanimously testified to my position as the authorized expounder of the law and teachings of their Faith. Not until recently had I heard the name of the Siyyid-i-Báb. The mastery I have obtained over the intricacies of the Islamic teachings has enabled me to appreciate the value of the Message which the Siyyid-i-Báb has brought. I am convinced that, were I to deny the Truth which He has revealed, I should, by this very act, have renounced my allegiance to every Revelation that has preceded it. I appeal to every one of you to call upon the 'ulamás and mujtahids of this city and to convene a gathering, at which I will undertake in their presence to establish the truth of this Cause. Let them then judge whether I am able to demonstrate the validity of the claims advanced by the Báb. If they be satisfied with the proofs which I shall adduce in support of my argument, let them desist from shedding the blood of the innocent; and if I fail, let them inflict upon me the punishment I deserve.' These words had scarcely dropped from his lips when an officer in the service of the Amír-Nizám haughtily interjected: 'I carry with me your death-warrant signed and sealed by seven of the recognized

mujtahids of Tīhrán, who have in their own handwriting pronounced you an infidel. I will myself be answerable to God on the Day of Judgment for your blood, and will lay the responsibility upon those leaders in whose judgment we have been asked to put our trust and to whose decisions we have been compelled to submit.' With these words he drew out his dagger and stabbed him with such force that he immediately fell dead at his feet.

"5. Soon after, Hájí Muḥammad-Taqí-i-Kirmání was led to the scene of execution. The ghastliness of the sight he beheld provoked his violent indignation. 'Approach, you wretched and heartless tyrant,' he burst forth as he turned to his persecutor, 'and hasten to slay me, for I am impatient to join my beloved Ḥusayn. To live after him is a torture I cannot endure.'

"6. No sooner had Hájí Muḥammad-Taqí uttered these words than Siyyid Murtaḍá, who was one of the noted merchants of Zanján, hastened to take precedence of his companions. He flung himself over the body of Hájí Muḥammad-Taqí, and pleaded that, being a siyyid, his martyrdom would be more meritorious in the sight of God than that of Hájí Muḥammad-Taqí. As the executioner unsheathed his sword, Siyyid Murtaḍá invoked the memory of his martyred brother, who had struggled side by side with Mullá Ḥusayn; and such were his references that the onlookers marvelled at the unyielding tenacity of the faith with which he was inspired.

"7. In the midst of the turmoil which the stirring words of Siyyid Murtaḍá had raised, Muḥammad-Ḥusayn-i-Marághí'í rushed forward and begged that he be allowed to be martyred immediately ere his companions were put to the sword. As soon as his eyes fell upon the body of Hájí Mullá Ismá'il-i-Qumí, for whom he entertained a deep affection, he impulsively threw himself upon him and, holding him in his embrace, exclaimed: 'Never will I consent to separate myself from my dearly beloved friend, in whom I have reposed the utmost confidence and from whom I have received so many evidences of a sincere and deep-felt affection!'

"Their eagerness to precede one another in laying down their lives for their Faith astonished the multitude who wondered which of the three would be preferred to his companions. They pleaded with such fervor that eventually they were beheaded, all three, at one and the same moment.

"So great a faith, such evidences of unbridled cruelty, human eye has rarely beheld. Few as they were in number, yet when we recall the circumstances of their martyrdom, we are compelled to acknowledge the stupendous character of that force which could evoke so rare a spirit of self-sacrifice. When we remember the exalted rank these victims had occupied, when we observe the degree of their renunciation and the vitality of their faith, when we recall the pressure which from influential quarters had been exerted to avert the danger with which their lives were threatened, above all when we picture to our minds the spirit that defied the atrocities which a heartless enemy so far demeaned themselves as to inflict upon them, we are impelled to look upon that episode as one of the most tragic occurrences in the annals of this Cause."¹⁵

SECTION 8

Another powerful form of art is drama. Dramatic productions can be grandiose, with elaborate settings, costumes and props. As far as your study circles are concerned, you will not of course be thinking about drama in such complex terms. But even the rudimentary use of drama can have profound effects.

The atmosphere of a study circle and the spirit of fellowship among the members should be such that they feel free to act situations out, to put on skits, and to dramatize historical episodes—much like the atmosphere of a large extended family. Within such an environment, you will find it easy to take advantage of the many instances in which the books themselves call for the participants to perform skits and role-play in order to further their learning. For, in addition to its value as an art form, drama is an important pedagogical tool. As such, it is particularly valuable because it can lead to changes in behavior that would otherwise be difficult to achieve. Through it, one can see oneself, in real or imaginary situations, and unconsciously examine one's own habits. Think, for example, how much effect the very simple "positive-negative" skit suggested in the first unit of Book 2 has had on the participants of study circles.

Beyond the drama-related exercises found in the books themselves, there will be occasions when the members of a study circle will want to include a dramatic presentation in a program they organize for an audience. One such occasion is the celebration that is often held upon the completion of a course, to which the families and friends of the participants are usually invited. At these events, the members would not only make dramatic presentations, but also recite poetry, give talks, tell stories and perform music. Although in general the kind of drama we are considering does not require settings and costumes, even when performed in front of an audience of families and friends, the group does not need to shy away from such accessories altogether. Sometimes a small gesture, like putting on a hat, can increase the dramatic value of an activity.

Similarly, a few puppets can be effective in dramatizing a situation with a moral message. Some types of puppets are very sophisticated and require proficiency, but often simple ones will suffice for your purposes. With some paper and colored pens, for example, one can make a set of finger puppets. From the paper, one simply cuts a head of a person or animal, with strips extending to each side that can be wrapped around a finger tip.

Here again, you should look to your own culture and draw upon the theatrical heritage of your people in choosing forms of expression in this area. Every culture has ways of portraying through drama episodes from its history and the tales of its heroes and heroines. Your study groups can use these traditional methods and approaches with a new spiritual and moral content inspired by the Faith. At the opening of the Four Year Plan in 1996, the Universal House of Justice referred to the value of folk art:

"In all their efforts to achieve the aim of the Four Year Plan, the friends are also asked to give greater attention to the use of the arts, not only for proclamation, but also for the work in expansion and consolidation. The graphic and performing arts and literature have played, and can play a major role in extending the influence of the Cause. At the level of folk art, this possibility can be pursued in every part of the world, whether it be in villages, towns or cities."¹⁶

SECTION 9

Artistic expression includes a vast area of human endeavor referred to as crafts. Here, scores of materials—leather, wool, cotton, silk, stone, clay, glass, metal, wood, wax, straw, dried flowers, and so on, and so on—are transformed in myriad ways by the skillful hands of craftsmen into objects, both practical and not, taming the inherent qualities of the materials to create beauty. The list of crafts is long indeed. Among the most well-known are weaving, embroidery, needlepoint, knitting, crocheting, sewing, dying, ceramics, pottery, jewelry-making, leatherwork, basket-weaving, carving, woodwork, frame-making, candle-making, toy-making, puppet-making, print-making, lace-making and quilting. You should be able to add some to the list. After doing so, discuss with your group which are the most prominent ones in your region.

As for your study circles, unless you happen to be proficient in one or more crafts, your best course of action will be to find people, whether in the Bahá'í community or the community at large, and set up several sessions for them to teach the participants. Remember that we do not consider this an extracurricular activity, but an important element in the methodology of study employed by the Institute. To develop the ability to work with one's hands is not a secondary educational objective. It is an imperative in the overall training of an individual. We ask you, then, to pay special attention to the following two quotations from the Writings and discuss them fully in your group:

“One of the names of God is the Fashioner. He loveth craftsmanship. Therefore any of His servants who manifesteth this attribute is acceptable in the sight of this Wronged One. Craftsmanship is a book among the books of divine sciences, and a treasure among the treasures of His heavenly wisdom. This is a knowledge with meaning, for some of the sciences are brought forth by words and come to an end with words.”¹⁷

“The one true God, exalted be He, loveth to witness handiworks of high craftsmanship produced by His loved ones. Blessed art thou, for what thy skill hath produced hath reached the presence of thy Lord, the Exiled, the Wronged. Please God every one of His friends may be enabled to acquire one of the crafts, and be confirmed in adhering to what hath been ordained in the Book of God, the All-Glorious, the All-Wise.”¹⁸

SECTION 10

As you have surely gathered from your study of this unit, the task being asked of you does not require you to be an accomplished artist. You need not be an actor, a playwright, a poet or a musician to promote the arts at the grassroots level. Nor is a study circle the occasion to prepare individuals for earning a livelihood through arts and crafts.

What you need to remember is that the Institute is fundamentally concerned with spiritual and moral empowerment. Exposing its students to various forms of artistic expression constitutes one element in this process. By being a promoter of arts and crafts at the grassroots in ways that have been described in this unit, you will be opening up creative channels through which can flow inspiration and the force of attraction to beauty.

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