

Moderation and the Art of Teaching: Deepening and Handout

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Aims of the deepening:

- 1) To uplift the spirits
- 2) To refine understanding of the nature of teaching.
- 3) To increase confidence in teaching.
- 4) To develop skill in teaching.
- 5) To answer questions

Structure:

A) Prayers, introductions and voicing hopes for the deepening

B) Part I: Some General Principles.

1) The nature of teaching: The role of utterance. Teaching through example vs. teaching through words.

2) The nature of utterance: The two aspects of utterance (penetration and moderation).

3) Influence: Penetration. The fundamental importance of spirituality and love.

4) The importance of moderation.

C) Part II: Developing Moderation

1) 4 areas of moderation in teaching: receptivity, background, language, atmosphere.

2) Receptivity: Degrees of receptivity. Judging receptivity. Adapting to receptivity. Increasing receptivity.

3) Background: Teacher free to choose methods that suit him. Every seeker should be approached from his own angle. Discovering seeker's angle. Types of seekers.

4) Language: Form is important. Two crucial qualities (extreme kindness and mildness) necessary in our choice of words. Examples. The power of the Word.

5) Atmosphere: The atmosphere of attraction. Creating an atmosphere of attraction. The atmosphere of estrangement. Avoiding the atmosphere of estrangement. Atmosphere and the questions of when (when to speak, when to listen, when to explain, when to stop).

D) Evaluation

HANDOUT

1) Teaching the Faith

"Open, O peoples the city of the human heart with the key of your utterance." Baha'u'llah, Gleanings XXXIX.

Other references (in suggested order): Selections from the Writings of the Bab (SWB), p.133 Keeness of Vision (KV) p. , Entry By Troops (EBT), p.42

2) Importance of Utterance (i.e. words or language)

"Through the power of good words, the righteous have always succeeded in winning command over the meads of the hearts of men." Baha'u'llah, TB p. 85

"The heart is like a box, and language is the key. Only by using the key can we open the box and observe the gems it contains.... The explanation of the divine teachings can only be through this medium." `Abdu'l-Baha, "Promulgation of Universal Peace", p.60

"Say: In this Day two decrees are beloved and to be desired. The first is wisdom and utterance. The second is steadfastness in the Cause of thy Lord, the Most Compassionate.... For its is through the instrumentality of these twin decrees that the Cause of God hath been and will continue to be established amongst God's servants. This inasmuch as were it not for wisdom and utterance, ...none would remain to guide people unto the religion of the One True God." Baha'u'llah, Tablet of Medicine, provisional translation by Khazeh Fananapazir and Stephen Lambden.

Other references in suggested order: Tablets of Baha'u'llah revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas (TB), p.57, 197, 88-89, 172; UHJ Compilation: The Gift of Teaching, p.12; Entry By Troops, section 43.

3) Two aspects of utterance

"Utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation." Baha'u'llah, TB, p.143

Other references: TB, p.172, p.198-199; Entry By Troops, section 49, p.51-52.

4) Influence

"As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement, which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure.... Utterance must needs possess penetrating power. For if bereft of this power it would fail to exert influence. And this penetrating influence dependeth on the spirit being pure and the heart stainless." Baha'u'llah, TB, p.198-199

Other references: Tablets of the Divine Plan, p.20, p.49; The Gift of Teaching pp. 10, 11, 15; Entry By Troops, section 26, p.34.

5) Importance of Moderation

"Moderation is indeed highly desirable. Every person who in some degree turneth towards the truth can himself later comprehend most of what he seeketh. However, if at the outset a word is uttered beyond his capacity, he will refuse to hear it and arise in opposition." Baha'u'llah, the Gift of Teaching, p.7

Other references: TB, pp.143, 172, 198-199; Gift of Teaching, p.13, Entry By Troops, p.53-54

6) Moderation and Receptivity

a) Seeking receptivity

"Through the potency of the Name of the Best-Beloved, invite thou the receptive souls unto God's holy court" Baha'u'llah, TB p.236-237

"To find these receptive souls and teach them, is the duty and privilege of every single Baha'i." "...make a special point of praying ardently not only for success in general, but that God may send you the souls that are ready. There are such souls in every city..." "You should study those who attend the meetings, and when you find one who you feel would become a strong and active Baha'i, then you should concentrate on teaching them. Thus, if you are able to confirm some souls, you will have rendered distinguished and outstanding service." Shoghi Effendi, Gift of Teaching, pp.26, 27, 31

b) Degrees of receptivity and adapting to them

"The portion of some might lie in the palm of a man's hand, the portion of others might fill a cup, and of others even a gallon-measure" Baha'u'llah, Gleanings V

"Follow thou the way of thy Lord, and say not that which the ears cannot bear to hear, for such speech is like luscious food given to small children.... Therefore unto everyone who hath a right, let his settled measure be given." `Abdu'l-Baha, Gift of Teaching, p.13

"We should... adap[t] our message as best we can to the capacity and 'ripeness' of the one we are seeking to teach" Shoghi Effendi, Gift of Teaching, p.18

c) Judging receptivity

"The soul is... a heavenly gem...whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel." Baha'u'llah, Gleanings LXXXII

"We must follow the example of the Master and follow our 'inner light'..." "The believers ought to give the Message even to those who do not seem ready for it, because they can never judge the real extent to which the Word of God can influence the hearts and minds of the people, even those who appear to lack any power of receptivity to the teachings." Shoghi Effendi, Gift of Teaching, pp. 18, 22

"An eager response to the teachings will often be found in the most unexpected quarters". Universal House of Justice, Entry By troops, section 26.

d) Increasing receptivity

"...in the course of their speech they may recite divine verses whenever the occasion demandeth it, inasmuch as these holy verses are the most potent elixir, the greatest and mightiest talisman. So great is their influence that the hearer will have no cause for vascillation." Baha'u'llah, TB p.200

"Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth." Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, LXXIV

"Souls are inclined to estrangement. Such methods should be adopted that the estrangement be first removed, then the Word will have effect.

"If one of the believers be kind to one of the negligent ones and with perfect love should gradually make him understand the reality of the Cause... doubtless he will become changed; excepting abnormal souls who are reduced to the state of ashes and whose hearts are like stones, yea, even harder." 'Abdu'l-Baha, Gift of Teaching, p.11

"Success in a fertile area awakens a response in those who were at first uninterested." Universal House of Justice, Entry by troops, section 26

Receptivity - Other references: Gleanings XXXVII; Gift of Teaching, pp.18, 25, Entry By Troops, section 49, p.52-53

7) Moderation and Background

"The sanctified souls should ponder and meditate in their hearts regarding the methods of teaching." Baha'u'llah, TB, p.200

"There are innumerable ways of teaching the Cause. You can choose the one that suits best your nature and capacity." "...it is a sign of an able teacher to know how to best adapt his methods to various people whom he happens to meet. There is no one method one can follow all through. But there should be as many ways of approach as there are types of individual seekers." "Every inquirer has to be approached from his own angle. Those who are essentially of the mystic type should first be given those teachings...which emphasise... spiritual realities; while those who are practically minded and of a positive type are naturally more ready and inclined to accept the social aspect of the Teachings.... gradually the entire message, in all its aspects... should be explained to the newcomer." Shoghi Effendi, Gift of Teaching, pp.19, 21.

"...the method of expression and the approach must be varied in accordance with the outlook and interests of the hearer. An approach designed to appeal to everybody will usually result in attracting the middle section, leaving both extremes untouched." Universal House of Justice, Entry By Troops, section 26

8) Moderation and Language

"Every word is endowed with a spirit, therefore the speaker should carefully deliver his words at the appropriate time and place, for the impression which each word maketh is clearly evident and perceptible.... One word may likened unto fire, another unto light... therefore an enlightened

man of wisdom should primarily speak with words as mild as milk, that the children of men may be nurtured and edified thereby... One word is like unto springtime... while another is like unto deadly poison. It behoveth a prudent man of wisdom to speak with the utmost leniency and forbearance so that the sweetness of his words may induce everyone to attain that which befitteth man's station." Baha'u'llah, TB, p.172-173

"A pleasing, kindly disposition and a display of tolerance towards the people are requisites of teaching the Cause. Whatever a person says, hollow and product of vain imaginings and a parrot-like repetition... though it be, one ought to let it pass.... One ought to say: right, admitted, but look at the matter in this other way, and judge for yourself whether it is true or false; of course it should be said with courtesy, with kindness, with consideration. Then the other person will listen, will not seek to answer back and to marshal proofs in repudiation. He will agree, because he comes to realize that the purpose has not been to engage in verbal battle and to gain mastery over him. He sees that the purpose has been to impart the word of truth, to show humanity, to bring forth heavenly qualities. His eyes and his ears respond, his true nature unfolds, and by the grace of God, he becomes a new creation.... The Most Great Branch gives a willing ear to all manner of senseless talk, to such an extent that the other person says to himself: He is trying to learn from me." Baha'u'llah, quoted in H. Balyuzi, "'Abdu'l-Baha", p.27

"we should not belittle anyone... saying: 'You know not but I know'. Rather, we should look upon others with respect, and when attempting to explain or demonstrate, we should speak as if we are demonstrating the truth, saying: 'Here these things are before us. Let us investigate to determine where and in what form the truth can be found.'... The teacher... should speak with the utmost kindness, lowliness and humility, for such speech exerts influence and educates the soul." 'Abdu'l-Baha, Gift of Teaching, p.12

"But we must be very gentle, tactful and patient, and not administer shocks to people." "We should meet... as equals, well wishers, people who admire and respect [them] and who feel that they will be interested, as we are, in a living religion." "The Guardian feels that perhaps a different approach...might attract them; one of being interested in their lives...and of trying to become their friend, rather than trying to change or improve them." Shoghi Effendi, Gift of Teaching, p.25,28, 30

9) Moderation and Atmosphere

A) The atmosphere of attraction

"They who are the beloved of God, in whatever place they gather and whomsoever they may meet, must evince, in their attitude towards God, and in the manner of their celebration of His praise and glory, such humility and submissiveness that every atom of dust beneath their feet may attest the depth of their devotion. The conversation carried by these holy souls should be informed with such power that these same atoms of dust will be thrilled by their influence." Baha'u'llah, Gleanings V

"Should one among the believers meet another, it must be as though a thirsty one with parched lips has reached to the fountain of life, or a lover met his true beloved." 'Abdu'l-Baha, tablets of the Divine Plan, p.52

"Ye have written as to the meetings of the friends, and how filled they are with peace and joy.

Of course this is so; for wherever the spiritually minded are gathered together, there in His Beauty reigneth Baha'u'llah. Thus it is certain that such reunions will yield boundless happiness.... Let their speaking, let their inner state be summed up thus: 'Keep all my words of prayer and praise confined to one refrain; make all my life but servitude to Thee.' That is, let them concentrate all their thoughts on teaching the Cause of God... on loving mankind... on being upright and detached, and fervent, and afire." "Why then are silent, why leaden and dull? Ye must shine forth like the lightning, and raise up a clamouring like unto the great sea... Now is the time to server, now is the time to be on fire.... We must gird ourselves for service, kindle love's flame, and burn away in its heat." "When you are about to begin your address, turn first to Baha'u'llah, and ask for the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, then open thy lips and say whatever is suggested to your heart; this, however, with the utmost courage, dignity and conviction." selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp.93, 266-267,

"It is for this wholesome, warming, spiritualizing love [of God] that the world is thirsting today. The Baha'is will never succeed in attracting large numbers to the Faith until they see in our individual and community life acts, and the atmosphere, that bespeaks the love of God." Shoghi effendi, Entry By Troops, section 11

"they should realize that the atmosphere of true love and unity which they manifest within the Baha'i Community will directly affect the public, and be the greatest magnet for attracting and confirming them. "when we put our trust in Him, Baha'u'llah solves our problems and opens the way." Shoghi Effendi, the Gift of Teaching, pp.25, 26

b) The Importance of Joy and Enthusiasm

"O Friends! You must all be so ablaze in this Day with the fire of the love of God that the heat thereof may be manifest in all your veins, your limbs and members of your body, and the peoples of the world may be ignited by this heat and turn to the horizon of the Beloved." Baha'u'llah, Gift of Teaching, p.7

"As to the fundamentals of teaching the Faith: know thou that delivering the Message can be accomplished through goodly deeds and spiritual attributes, an utterance that is crystal clear and the happiness reflected from the face of that one who is expounding the teachings." Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p.175

"The teacher, when teaching, must be himself fully enkindled, so that his utterance, like unto a flame of fire, may exert influence and consume the veil of self and passion. He must also be utterly humble and lowly, so that others will be edified... otherwise his teaching will have no effect." "When a speaker's brow shineth with the radiance of the love of God, at the time of the exposition of his subject, and he is exhilarated with the wine of true understanding, he becometh the centre of a potent force which like unto a magnet will attract the hearts. this is why the expounder must be in the utmost enkindlement." 'Abdu'l-Baha, the Gift of Teaching, 11, 12.

"He always taught cheerfully and with gaiety, and would respond gently and with good humour, no matter how much passionate anger might be turned against him by the one with whom he spoke. his way of teaching was excellent." 'Abdu'l-Baha, of Ismullahu'l Asdaq, Memorials of the Faithful, p.6

c) Avoiding the Atmosphere of Estrangement

"It ill beseemeth thee to turn thy gaze unto former and more recent times. make thou mention of this day and magnify that which hath appeared therein. It will in truth suffice all mankind. Indeed expositions and discourses in explanation of such things cause the spirits to be chilled. It behoveth thee to speak forth in such wise as to set the hearts of true believers ablaze and cause their bodies to soar." Baha'u'llah, TB, p.142

"Read ye the sacred verses in such a measure that ye be not overcome by languor and despondency. Lay not upon your souls that which will weary them or weigh them down, but rather what will lighten and uplift them, so that they may soar on the wings of the Divine verses towards the Dawning Place of His manifest signs". Kitab-i-Aqdas 149

"Do not argue with anyone, and be wary of disputation. Speak out the truth. If your hearer accepteth, the aim is achieved. If he is obdurate, you should leave him to himself, and place your trust in God. Such is the quality of those who are firm in the Covenant." 'Abdu'l-Baha, Gift of Teaching, p.14

"O handmaid of the Lord! Speak thou no word of politics; thy task concerneth the life of the soul, for verily this leadeth to man's joy in the world of God. Except to speak well of them, make thou no mention of the earth's kings, and the worldly governments thereof. Rather...tell thou of abiding joy and spiritual delights, and godlike qualities, and of how the Sun of Truth hath risen above the earth's horizons." Selections from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p.92

"Refrain, under any circumstances, from involving yourselves, much less the Cause, in lengthy discussions of a controversial character, as these, besides being fruitless, actually cause incalculable harm to the Faith. Baha'u'llah has repeatedly urged us not to engage in religious controversies, as the adepts of former religions have done. The Baha'i teacher should be concerned, above all, in explaining the message... rather than in attacking other religions. he should avoid all situations that, he feels, will lead to strife, to hair-splitting and interminable discussions." "We must always teach constructively, and be very sure that none of us, through disagreement among ourselves or indiscretion, cool off the souls of the seekers." Shoghi Effendi, Gift of Teaching, p.23, 25