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# DEDICATION

To my Teachers, His Holiness Bahá’u’lláh and His Holiness the Báb, Who have lifted me up from the depths of ignorance and guided my soul to its Creator;

To my Exemplar, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, upon whose “shoulders and lap” I have cried so often;

To my beloved Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, who has “walked by my side, hand in hand” through all of my trials, humiliations and ordeals;

To the Universal House of Justice for their patience with this stumbling soul, their tender love and the “fire” of their inspiration;

To my numerous teachers who have given so generously of their wisdom, example, and counsel in person and/or via their writings; a few of whom I would like to mention: Rúhíyyih Khánum, William Sears, Dhikru’llah Khadem, Rahmatu’lláh Muhájir, Olivia Kelsey, Daniel Jordan, Donald Streets, Stanwood Cobb, Irene Hartley, Nikos Kazantzakis, Alfred North Whitehead, Myrtle Deming, Hooper Dunbar, and Shamsi Sedaghat.

To my mother and father whose care and example enabled me to recognize the Light;

And to my children—Jamál, Jayá, Manuel, and Aaron--for their radiant acquiescence during the writing of this book that caused them the loss of so much time with Dad: trips to the beach, our friendly chit-chat, and the many more story books that could have been read together but never were.

# FORWARD

It is not an illusory dream for man to find happiness while still in this earthly life. Indeed, man has been created to be happy. With this end in mind, he has ever been transcending the dark planes of contingent existence towards spheres of luminosity and freedom.

Science, both material and spiritual, studies man in four basic aspects: the physical, the mental, the psychological, and the spiritual. In the physical aspect man can be said to have attained to the summit of his development. Some have attempted to find happiness through training specific abilities and skills and achieving outstanding physical and sporting feats, winning Olympic gold medals or entering the Guinness Book of World Records. In his mental aspect, man has made great strides in pushing the limits of the faculties inherent in the mind: intelligence, perception, understanding, memory and common sense. Thanks to the power of the mind, he has successfully searched out the secrets of nature, brought them to the visible plane, and through science and technology has put that hidden knowledge to his service, to make his life more and more comfortable, but also, alas, to exercise an oftentimes dangerous dominion over Nature itself. For man’s mind is like unto a mirror that can reflect both the realities of the material world and the realities of the spiritual realms.

In his psychosocial aspect, man has advanced in an ever-widening awareness of himself, as well as of his relationships with his fellowmen, relationships that have become more and more complex throughout the socializing process in history, from family to clan to tribe to city-state, to nation, and now his imminent entry into a World Commonwealth. In this last stage of his evolution on the planet, man will enjoy the fruits and splendors of unity thanks to a more collective conscience. In other words, history has witnessed the transition of man from a merely individual awareness to the social man with a consciousness of world citizenship.

In the spiritual aspect, man’s soul has always been illuminated by Divine Revelation, ever since he was called into being by the Creator out of His Love. In the course of this process of revelation, great Divine Teachers appeared to educate mankind, from sages, mystics and saints to Prophets and Manifestations of God. It is through these special beings that man has been awakened to the truth that the fullest realization of the individual is to follow in the ways of the All-powerful Creator and fulfil the purpose of his existence: to know and love God.

However, and despite his mighty efforts and achievements in all aspects of his nature day by day, man is still torn in contrasting directions in his struggle to live a balanced, harmonious and really happy life. Now, as a great blessing for the human race, the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh has dawned, bringing ordinances, principles and Laws in conformity with the requirements of this new age of a global society when man will finally be able to realize to fuller measure and in an integral manner the diverse aspects of his identity, particularly his spiritual potentialities, for in his essence man is above all spirit; called upon to evolve through all the worlds of existence, material and spiritual.

For the first time in the history of written thought somebody who has been enlightened by the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh has taken upon himself to thoroughly search the Writings presently available in English, for the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in the Ocean of God’s Revelation for today, and found ways to apply them to the basic aspects of human nature. The result is a mighty resource tool entitled A Bahá’í Life in Dynamic Harmony (BLDH). This book, arising from meticulous life-long study of the Bahá’í writings and other authors whose outlook is akin to this Revelation, makes an interesting combination with the author’s own experiences. BLDH constitutes a veritable treasure house for all those who wish to find the key to enjoying life to the fullest, in preparation for the real life, the life of the spirit in the Heavenly Dominions.

The thirty-six processes described in *A Bahá’í Life in Dynamic Harmony* and synthesized in a mandala or Medicine Wheel inspired by the age-old wisdom of Native American shamans, put the person of Bahá’u’lláh on center stage as Manifestation of God for today to kindle in man’s heart the flame of the sincerest love that gives life to his soul and assures him an unbroken connection to God. As a fruit of this immense love for Bahá’u’lláh the seeker for happiness only longs to obey His Laws in which he sees the instrument of his true and abiding freedom.

The contents of BLDH are the result of the consequent effort to combine theory with practice of daily living and reconcile the eternal dichotomy of BEING and DOING that we have to face day to day in each and every decision that we make. Prevailing trends are polarized around one or the other of those two outlooks on life. Actually, happiness is achieved only if and when we strive to erect within us, to the utmost of our ability, the precepts revealed by God, and manifest them in praiseworthy deeds, in actions performed for the good of society and thus bear witness that deeds are the means for us to manifest all that God has revealed to us and truly become the image and likeness of God.

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(Translated from the Spanish by Istvan Dely)

# PREFACE

O My Servant! Free thyself from the fetters of this world, and loose thy soul from the prison of self. Seize thy chance, for it will come to thee no more.1 –Bahá’u’lláh

*A Bahá'í A Bahá’í Life in Dynamic Harmony* (BLDH) is my approach to living the Bahá’í life that focuses on the fundamental process of transforming personal crises and failures into spiritual lessons of great value and stepping stones to future success. I started writing a book about BLDH in 1987. The manuscript has gone through several iterations. Another one after this 2025 edition is in the offing. Because I lived most of my family life before the Universal House of Justice set forth the “change of culture” in 1996, the members of the younger Bahá'í generation will not be familiar with some aspects of the Bahá'í culture that I describe. It is my hope that, nevertheless, they will be able to apply the principles and key life processes as they participate in “the evolving framework for action.” It is my hope that *A Bahá’í Life in Dynamic Harmony* will contribute in some small way to fulfilling the need for personal transformation emphasized by The Universal House of Justice:

It is not enough to proclaim the Bahá’í message, essential as that is. It is not enough to expand the rolls of Bahá’í membership, vital as that is. Souls must be transformed, communities thereby consolidated, new models of life thus attained. Transformation is the essential purpose of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh, but it lies in the will and effort of the individual to achieve it in obedience to the Covenant.2

During my many years as a Bahá’í I have struggled to live the Bahá’í life. When I analyze my failures and weaknesses, in most cases the cause has been my incompetence in one or more of the thirty-six key life processes presented in this program. As Bahá’ís we are faced with such a multitude of challenges and responsibilities that we are prone to feeling overstressed and out of control. It is my heart-felt desire that *A Bahá’í Life in Dynamic Harmony* will serve others, as it has me, as a practical method for “keeping a handle on things” and avoiding the numerous pitfalls that have hindered my own spiritual development.

I grew up in Ohio during the 1950’s and 60’s immersed in materialism and hedonism. Before I found the Bahá’í Faith, I was pretty much a typical American youth--of the variety that Shoghi Effendi describes as “the comfort-loving...those obsessed by material pursuits.”3 When I fell in love with the Teachings of Baha’u’llah, I found that I had to replace many old values, ways, and habits with new ones. It soon became clear to me that some were easy to replace but that a handful of very stubborn, old-world-order ways of thinking, feeling and acting would be my major challenges and that the transformation would be a life-long project.

I fought throughout my life and am fighting still, but a sediment of darkness continues to remain in my heart, and the struggle continually recommences.4 --Nikos Kazantzakis

After having identified my weaknesses, I proceeded to implement a simple formula: pray, meditate, and deepen daily; serve, be active, teach, make the Bahá’í pilgrimage, and go pioneering. I realized that the process of transformation would take time, but I also knew that Bahá’u’lláh would guide me. Throughout my life, periods of growth have alternated with severe, personal tests and difficulties of crisis proportion. I have repeatedly underestimated the subtlety and craftiness of the “enemy” --my lower self, my ego; my material, animal nature--referred to by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá aptly as “the insistent self.”5 I have found the roots of my old values and habits to be deeper than I calculated when I first became a Bahá’í. Too often I concentrated so much on the “outer” administrative and teaching work that I become blind to my inner weaknesses. My prayers became too shallow and my deepening too superficial. My Bahá’í activities were numerous, but I found that the ever-growing responsibilities and requirements that were thrust upon me over the years were impossible to sustain without periods of crisis requiring intense, personal reflection and inner work in order to attain deeper levels of detachment and purity and, consequently, higher levels of service.

At times during my life my spiritual progress has come to a standstill or even regressed and my ability to continue serving the Cause in a significant way became acutely endangered.

How often we seem to forget the clear and repeated warnings of our beloved Master, who, in particular during the concluding years of His mission on earth, laid stress on the ‘severe mental tests’ that would inevitably sweep over His loved ones of the West--tests that would purge, purify and prepare them for their noble mission in life.6 --Shoghi Effendi

It was during one of these times of crisis in 1981, a moment of dire need, that a Native American from British Columbia, Canada introduced me to the Native American Indian Medicine Wheel. It became an invaluable instrument for organizing my efforts to both recover from my personal difficulties and to reach and maintain a higher level of service.

As a result of reflecting on the Medicine Wheel, I decided that my only hope was to analyze my mistakes, to redouble my efforts, and to try new methods for self-transformation. In short, I decided to make a “journey within” to confront in battle my intimate enemy--my ‘ego’; rout him out of every crevice and cave; lay traps for him at every turn; never to give up; never to give in, even in the face of setbacks, even to my last breath on this earthly plane!

Come, let me fete you, beloved foe,

for I tire of this old-born war.

It would shorten did I not so ruinously adore

each endearing stratagem your consummate cunning devises;

your enamouring intransigence enchants me,

your very implacability an aphrodisiac.7

--Robert White

Total victory has not been won during these ensuing years; for it never will be won. The ego is always with us and this earthly life is one of becoming more perfect each day, not one of attaining perfection. The beloved Guardian, through his secretary, tells us that:

the complete and entire elimination of the ego would imply perfection--which man can never completely attain--but the ego can and should be ever-increasingly subordinated to the enlightened soul of man. This is what spiritual progress implies.8

Looking back over the years, however, I can see that, even though saintliness may never be attained, progress has definitely been made. Throughout my life personal battles have been lost and won, and I know that this will never change. The difference now, however, is that I am much more *consciously aware* of and *knowledgeable* about the key processes involved in victory and how neglecting them leads to defeat. I realize now that, although the “war” will never be entirely won, the “weapons” that Bahá’u’lláh has bestowed upon us are numerous and of superb quality and that there is great joy to be had by “notching our rifles” after each victory.

A beachhead beckons. I read auguries of triumph

in my campfire’s dwindling plumes.

Remove the garland, still the lyre, my love.

It is dawn: the engagement resumes.9

--Robert White

This introduction to *A Bahá’í Life in Dynamic Harmony* is an invitation to those who wish to join in this spiritual battle, the goal of which is no less than the conquering of one’s lower self to the highest degree possible during this earthly stage of our eternal journey towards God. Shoghi Effendi himself had to take up this struggle and called upon the believers to do the same. In a fascinating talk, Hand of the Cause of God Leroy Ioas relates what Shoghi Effendi said about his forced departure from the Holy Land after receiving the shocking news of being appointed Guardian:

I left the Holy Land, and I went up into the mountains of Switzerland, and I fought with myself until I conquered myself. Then I came back and I turned myself over to God and I was the Guardian. Now . . . every Bahá’í in the world, every person in the world has to do exactly that same thing. Whether you are a Hand of the Cause, whether you are a Knight of Bahá’u’lláh, whether you are a member of a National Assembly, whether you are a teacher, whether you are a pioneer, whether you are an administrator, regardless of what you are, whatever you are doing in the Cause, every Bahá’í must fight with himself and conquer himself. And when he has conquered himself, then he becomes a true instrument for the service of the Cause of God--and not until that. And he will not achieve as great a success until he has done it.10

*A Bahá’í Life in Dynamic Harmony* has been designed for those who, like the author, have serious cases of “abundant, old-world-order luggage.” Because of the implacability of the “enemy” and the gravity of the “war,” the program is very structured and is intended to be used as a whole on a regular basis. It can be implemented, however, gradually, flexibly, step-by-step over time according to the needs of the individual. The intensity of its application will correspond to the intensity of the feelings of desperation, yearning, and desire of each person.

From my youth onward, my principal anguish, and the wellspring of all my joys and sorrows, had been this: the incessant, merciless battle between the spirit and the flesh . . .. Every man is half God, half man; he is both spirit and flesh. . .. A weak soul does not have the endurance to resist the flesh for very long. It grows heavy, becomes flesh itself, and the contest ends. But among responsible men, men who keep their eyes riveted day and night upon the Supreme Duty, the conflict between flesh and spirit breaks out mercilessly and may last until death.11 --Nikos Kazantzakis

Ultimately all the battle of life is within the individual.12 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply indebted to Amatu´l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum who was a guiding light to me during my entire Bahá’í life. It was she who inspired my wife and me and many other youths of the early 70’s to pack our bags and head for the pioneering field and it was Rúhíyyih Khánum who encouraged us to persevere and remain at our posts for as long as possible. I highly recommend to the reader her book *Prescription for Living* (which was praised by Shoghi Effendi11). In a certain sense *A Bahá’í Life in Dynamic Harmony* is a continuation of her theme. She diagnosed the diseases and prescribed the remedies on a collective scale.

BLDH, I hope, will help the friends to make a further, more personal, self-diagnosis and self-prescription, to arrange their living environments--physical, social, psychological and spiritual--and to guide their interactions with them in such a way that they will perpetually actualize their potentialities and acquire knowledge while placing these always at the service of humankind and the worship of our Wonderful Lord.

I also hope and pray that Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum will continue to inspire my life and that of the oncoming generations from her heights in the Abhá Paradise and through the legacy of her example, her writings, and her recorded talks.

# INTRODUCTION

A race of men, incomparable in character, shall be raised up which, with the feet of detachment, will tread under all who are in heaven and on earth, and will cast the sleeve of holiness over all that hath been created from water and clay.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

As Bahá’ís we readily understand the truth that change is occurring at an ever-accelerating rate. In fact, it is we, the spiritual descendants of the Dawn-Breakers, who are in charge of bringing about the greatest change in the history of the world--the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth. Nevertheless, the fast pace of change and the increasing complexity of our personal, family, social, professional, and Bahá’í community lives can cause us to lose our equilibrium and sense of harmony resulting in the occurrence of one crisis after another. In order to give attention to one area of need or difficulty we often unintentionally neglect another. Sometimes we can become so involved in teaching and administrative activities that we forget to spend time showing love to our family. At other times, we may give so much attention to our job that the goals of the teaching plan suffer. Or, we may serve the Faith with such intensity that we neglect our physical health. Experiencing the difficulty of planning and providing for the future while, at the same time, attending to our present duties, is not uncommon. The demands of the Faith, our family, and work often seem to be pulling us apart at the seams. At times life may become so complicated that we feel like we cannot continue the present pace. We may even feel paralyzed and unable to face the multitude of challenges surrounding us. Becoming an inactive Bahá’í then becomes one viable means for coping with the situation.

*A Bahá’í Life in Dynamic Harmony* (BLDH) offers a scheme and specific techniques for handling the manifold responsibilities of a robust Bahá’í life. It will enable you to maintain a sense of tranquility, stability, and peace in the midst of “busy-ness,” excitement, adventure, and urgent challenge.

The term “Dynamic Harmony” was chosen as a means of juxtaposing two very contrastive ideas. The word “dynamic” originated from the Greek term *dynamikos* meaning powerful. According to Webster dynamic means “marked by continuous, usually productive activity or change; marked by energy: forceful.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá expounded on this concept as it applies to the physical creation, the intellect, consciousness, and religion:

Creation is the expression of motion. Motion is life. A moving object is a living object, whereas that which is motionless and inert is as dead. All created forms are progressive in their planes, or kingdoms of existence, under the stimulus of the power or spirit of life. The universal energy is dynamic. Nothing is stationary in the material world of outer phenomena or in the inner world of intellect and consciousness.

Religion is the outer expression of the divine reality. Therefore, it must be living, vitalized, moving and progressive. If it be without motion and nonprogressive, it is without the divine life; it is dead.2

The definitions of “harmonious” or “harmony” which apply to this program are: “having the parts agreeably related; internal calm: tranquility.”3

In 1929 an Indian Bahá’í pilgrim described Shoghi Effendi in these words: “He is so calm and yet so vibrant, so static and yet so dynamic.” Rúhíyyih Khánum said, “This is little short of a brilliant characterization of one aspect of the Guardian.”4

As heralds of the new World Order and the “new race of men”5 promised by Bahá’u’lláh, the interdependence of these dualistic qualities must be reflected in the microcosm of our individual and family lives and in the macrocosm of our Bahá’í social life. In *The Promise of World Peace,* the Universal House of Justice refers to the erection of “a social system at once...dynamic and harmonious....”6 The pattern of our lives must be characterized by intense activity, continual transformation, and internal calm. Using an example from nature, our lives must manifest the three qualities of the swan: (1) the swan’s transformation from “an ugly duckling” --born on land, waddling awkwardly, yet destined to move and live in another environ--into a highly admired, beautiful, graceful bird of the wetlands; (2) the swan’s seemingly effortless gliding when viewed moving across a pond; *and* (3) the continual, unnoticed, intense activity of the swan’s webbed feet below the water paddling rapidly!7

As we work towards bringing more Dynamic Harmony into our lives, we must also balance a sense of urgency with patience. It will require perhaps several generations for us to achieve even a semblance of the new race of men and women. Nevertheless, one thing is certain--the accomplishments of our younger brothers and sisters, our children, our grandchildren, our students, or those who would follow our example can only begin where we have left off. They stand on the shoulders of our attainments. How far they reach will depend greatly on whether we are spiritual giants or spiritual dwarfs. The higher we scale the mountain of virtues, deeds, and spiritualized habits the lesser will be the amount of terrain to be covered by our progeny. For example, if we were not brought up with the habit of beginning each day with prayer, we can acquire this habit and develop it in our children, thereby freeing them to carry on their spiritual battles at a higher level. And when Bahá’í children outstrip their parents in any area of human endeavor our attitude should not be one of surprise but, rather, one of expected fulfillment. For if our children are not better than we are, then we have indeed failed in our trust. The purpose, then, of *A Bahá’í Life in Dynamic Harmony* is to offer a structured program to help you hasten the achievement of that noble end placed before us by Bahá’u’lláh: “a transformation in the whole character of mankind.”8

The principles and processes of the BLDH program have been built around an ancient device known as a Native American Indian Medicine Wheel. It will help you organize the Bahá’í writings into a personalized plan for self-transformation and will serve you as an aid for meditation, reflection, and memory; helping you keep your attention riveted on the most vital aspects of your life.

I invite you now to engage in a few preliminary exercises, to explore the program’s principles and to experiment with their implementation. In order to achieve maximum benefit, I suggest that you read the book twice; once in order to get a grasp of the parts and a second time to “see” the program as a whole with the richness of interconnections amongst its parts. If you do not have time for this, I recommend two other approaches which are simpler: read the first two sections about the basic principles which undergird the program and the BLDH Circle itself and then turn to the chapters that interest you, or, simply refer directly to the chapters which deal with your areas of need.

# PRELIMINARY EXERCISES IN SELF-ANALYSIS

Before presenting the specific BLDH principles and techniques, I would like you to carry out the following five simple exercises regarding the various ways you use your time, how they might be categorized, and how they might revolve around a particular “life theme.” Doing them is not absolutely necessary for understanding the program, but they will help you adapt it and apply it to your own life.

**EXERCISE 1:**

On a sheet of paper, leaving a generous left-hand margin, write a list of all your regular activities, responsibilities and duties. They can occur on a daily, weekly, monthly or yearly basis. Whatever the activity is, it must take time. For example, “to be trustworthy” is a responsibility but it does not indicate a use of time whereas “give the dog a bath” does. Try to use as few words as possible.

**EXERCISE 2:**

Now you have an idea of just how multifarious your life is. One of the best ways to organize a diverse array of things is to classify them. For this purpose, we will use the following categories (with their abbreviations) the choice of which will be explained later: SPIRITUAL (Sp), PHYSICAL (Ph), SOCIAL (So), and PSYCHOLOGICAL (Ps). To the left of each activity write an “Sp” if it is spiritual/religious in nature; write a “Ph” if it is directed toward the maintenance of your physical well-being or the material environment around you; write a “So” if the activity represents time spent in the development of social relations with others by choice or by obligation, or time spent alone; and write “Ps” to label all activities in which time is spent in thinking, planning, or developing your mind, intellect, and talents. If activities do not fit neatly into a category, just do your best or leave it blank.

**EXERCISE 3:**

You are now ready to further categorize each activity in terms of whether it is associated with either your inner life or your outer life. Make a separate column by drawing a vertical line to the left of the first column of labels. Write an “I” to the left of each activity which is “inner,” personal, spiritual, or intimate in nature. Write an “O” to the left of each activity that is more “outer,” public, social, concrete or visible in nature. This is very difficult. There is no clear-cut division. Just do the best you can.

**EXERCISE 4:**

On another unlined sheet of paper, draw a large circle. In the middle of the circle draw an “X” the four endpoints of which touch the circle. Outside the circle above the top quadrant write “spiritual activities.” Below the bottom quadrant write “physical activities.” To the right of the right-hand quadrant write “psychological activities.” And to the left of the left-hand quadrant write “social activities.” Finally, in the center of the circle, which is also the center of the “X,” place a medium-sized question mark, i.e., a “?”.

Now, answer the following question knowing that, at this moment in your life, you may not have an answer or it may require a great deal of thoughtful reflection. What constitutes the “center” of your life, around which revolves, directly or indirectly, your hopes, dreams, plans, finances, and activities? Know also that you may have two answers—a social one and a more private one. Some examples that Stephen Covey gives in *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* are: church, spouse, family, money, possessions, job, self, or, basic principles or laws. If you are able to identify your “center,” erase the question mark and write its name.

**EXERCISE 5:**

This exercise will be an ongoing activity throughout your study of the program. Remove the BLDH Circle for Bahá’ís found in the appendices (Appendix I). Don’t worry if some of the activity categories, such as “time management” or “visualization” are not clear to you. An explanation of each process found on the Circle will be given later. Compare your list with the categories found on the Circle. See if each of your activities is covered by one of the categories on the Circle. If any are not, you will have to decide whether or not the activity is critical for your personal growth and well-being. If you want to create your own personalized Circle, depending on your age and personal circumstances, you may want to add, delete or change the title of some of the categories. For example, not everyone is married. Some people live with a roommate. Youth usually prefer to change “spouse” to “parents” and to add “brother,” “sister,” or “siblings.”

Regarding the five-pointed star and the “B” in the center of the BLDH Circle, as you probably correctly presumed, the “B” stands for “Bahá’u’lláh.” Later in the program you will learn about the multiple meanings of the star, why I chose these two symbols, and how I have struggled to keep them in the center of my life.

Now, if you would like, you can begin to sketch on a sheet of paper (preferably in pencil) the activity categories and center of your own personal Circle along with other relevant notes. Keep this paper and your original list handy for continual revisions as you go through the program. For easy reference, remove the perforated Appendix 1.1: BLDH Circle for Bahá’ís and perhaps use it as a bookmark. (Appendix 1.2, a copy of Appendix 1.1, should remain in the book for the reference of future readers.)

With the initial experience of these five preliminary exercises, you are now ready to explore the basic principles that undergird the BLDH program.

# SECTION I: BASIC PRINCIPLES

The BLDH program is based on a set of nine general principles that both form its foundation and play an integral role in the consideration of each process and technique: wholeness, transformation, the inner life and the outer life, beauty, unity, order, contrast, balance and harmony. What follows is an explanation of each principle.

CHAPTER 1: WHOLENESS

This limitless universe is like the human body, all the members of which are connected and linked with one another with the greatest strength . . .. The parts of this infinite universe have their members and elements connected with one another, and influence one another spiritually and materially.

. . . The beings, whether great or small, are connected with one another by the perfect wisdom of God, and effect and influence one another.1 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Reality is one, seamless whole. All things, all processes--material and spiritual, physical and conceptual--are connected and affect one another. Because the number of elements, members, beings, things, processes, activities, etc. is infinite, their management becomes very complicated. The easiest way to reduce complexity and increase manageability is to classify the array of elements. Hence, in the preliminary exercises above we first classified our activities into four groups: spiritual, physical, social, and psychological; and then into two further sub-sets: inner and outer. In actual life this is impossible to do; all of these aspects flow into one another and can never be completely separated. The classification only enhances conceptual clarity, and facilitates planning and evaluation. Because the chosen categories are broad, we can use them to understand any aspect of our lives from a wholistic approach; that is, trying to see as much as possible how *everything* in our lives has an effect on *everything else*. For example, when we want to examine our health from a wholistic[[1]](#footnote-1) point of view we need to consider our spiritual health, our social health, our psychological or “mental” health, and our physical health; realizing that each one has an impact on the other. The same approach is used when we reflect on our responsibilities, our goals, our problems, our solutions, and so on. The BLDH Circle, which we will examine more closely later, exemplifies, simplifies, and facilitates this wholistic approach to life management.

In order to understand the principle of WHOLEness we must also understand “PARTness.” The relationship is relative. Any whole can be broken down into parts; and that same whole is also a part of a more complex whole. For example, a family contains separate members, but it also forms a part of a larger whole--the community that, in turn, forms a part of a still larger whole--the nation. An atom contains protons, neutrons, electrons, quarks and other sub-atomic particles, and, at the same time, can form one of the “building blocks” of a molecule which, in turn, can form part of an organism, and so on. In other words, wholes can always be viewed as parts, and parts can always be viewed as wholes. This concept will play an important role later in your understanding of the relationship between the inner and the outer life, and the design of the BLDH Circle.

When we apply the concepts of WHOLENESS and “PARTNESS” to the life of a human being the picture becomes especially fascinating. As Bahá’ís we know, on the one hand, that every created thing contains at least one of the signs or attributes of God2 and that humans can reflect all of the attributes of God.3 We also know that our human nature contains a “spiritual or higher nature” and a “material or lower nature.”4 This material nature is manifold. It contains “the perfections of the mineral, of the vegetable, and of the animal.”5 The organization of the parts, “perfections,” or levels within a whole is hierarchical in nature; that is, the higher, more comprehensive, complex, dynamic, and autonomous levels6 dominate and superimpose their purposes upon the lower levels within it. For example, because the purposeful nature of a plant is to grow, the atoms within it are obliged to move right along into the growing process--rather than whizzing about to and fro at random.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that it is the “height of exaltation,” “the perfection,” the “real prosperity” of a lower-level entity (mineral, vegetable, or animal) to pass into, become part of, and be dominated by the will and purposes of a higher-level entity.7 And so it is for humankind that our highest “honor and exaltation,”8 is to be attained by submitting our lower, material nature to the dominance of our higher, spiritual nature which seeks always to carry out the Will of God and to be pleasing to Him. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that “if the divine power in man [his angelic side] . . . overcomes the satanic power [his animal side] he becomes the most excellent of creatures.”9 This universal process, He explains, is one of the meanings of the “mystery of sacrifice.”

As to the fourth significance of sacrifice, it is the principle that a reality sacrifices its own characteristics. . ..

Every man trained through the teachings of God and illumined by the light of His guidance, who becomes a believer in God and His signs and is enkindled with the fire of the love of God sacrifices the imperfections of nature for the sake of divine perfections. Consequently, every perfect person, every illumined, heavenly individual stands in the station of sacrifice.10

The hierarchical, manifold nature11 of human beings is symbolically represented by the diagram of concentric circles in Figure 1.1 below. These circles could extend indefinitely outward showing higher material and spiritual systems to which we belong and infinitely inward representing the ever more minute elements and processes of which we are composed.12 Thus, though it sounds paradoxical, we are “contained by the universe” as one of its parts and we, as a “whole,” “contain the universe.”

Man is said to be the greatest representative of God, and he is the Book of Creation because all the mysteries of beings exist in him.13 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

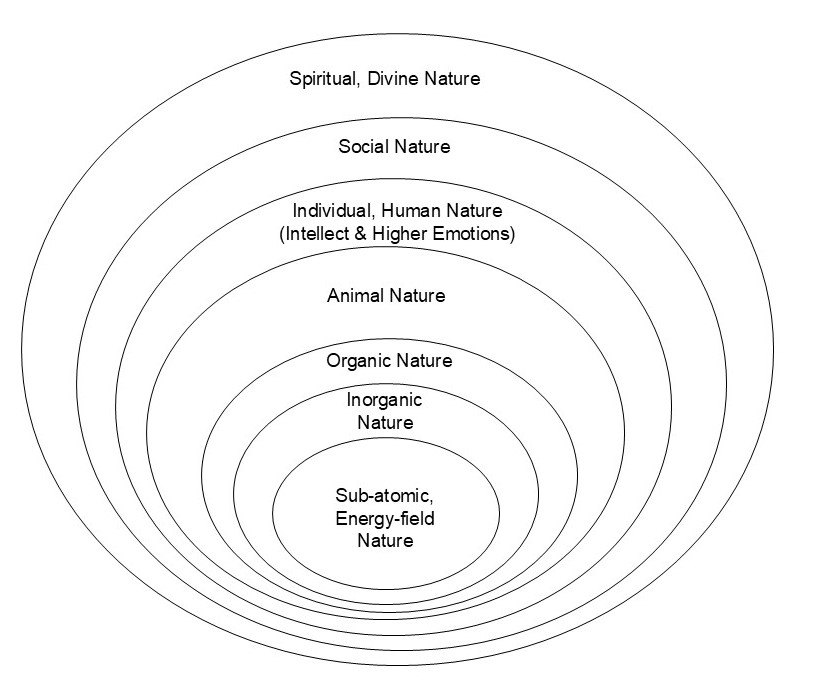


Figure 1. 1: Manifold, hierarchically-organized nature of human beings

The diagram in Figure 1.1 illustrates how, within us, there exist several interconnected “layers” of lower-level natures. Our sub-atomic nature is affected by ions. Our inorganic nature is affected by our intake and absorption of minerals. Our organic nature is affected by our intake of amino acids, vitamins and other organic substances, all of which impact human growth and reproduction--the two prime characteristics that we share with the vegetable kingdom. Our animal nature is affected by sensory perception and motor movement. At the lowest level we utilize the senses and our motoric ability to seek sensory pleasure and avoid sensory pain. Our human nature is affected by ideas, thought, rationality and the higher feelings of caring, loving, and fairness. Our social nature is affected by our sense of *belonging* to a higher, greater entity: a partnership, a family, a community, a nation, a race, and a common species--humankind. Our spiritual, divine nature responds to the unknown and the ultimately unknowable including that Unknowable Essence referred to in many cultures as God. It is seen in reverence for what is sacred, worship, love for God, altruism, self-sacrifice, radiant acquiescence under all circumstances and many other spiritual qualities.

To live a noble life means to operate under the laws of the higher rather than the lower spheres or strata of our manifold nature. We must live angelic, saintly, heroic, divinely inspired lives; detached from the attractions of the lower levels. To live on the animal plane means to succumb to hedonism--the seeking of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. To live on the organic plane means to live as a “vegetable”; being slothful, lazy, and apathetic. To live on a higher, spiritual, divine plane means to entertain ideals, goals, and lofty aspirations, and to make sacrifices (to overcome any resistance or barriers) in order to attain those noble ends. The definition of a saint is a person whose higher, divine nature dominates (without abusing) her or his lower, animal/organic/inorganic nature.3

When I meditated further on Figure 1.1, I discovered some uncomfortable insights. When I oversleep and the sun is high above the horizon, and all I want to do is forget the world, I am behaving like a stone, for even the vegetable kingdom will lift its head to the heavens as soon as the sun rises. When I overeat, I am more like a poor vegetable which drowns when given too much water because it has no “shut off” mechanism. For even animals rarely overeat. And when I am tempted by sexual passion, with its characteristic “blindness;” its total absence of all foresight regarding consequences, I know that it is the lowliest of the “beastly” kingdom within me, for not even all animals engage in sexual activity with any member of the opposite sex at any time of the month or year.

On the other hand, the diagram reminded me that it is our nature to become part of greater, more comprehensive organisms or wholes which go beyond our own personal nature as an individual. The submission to these higher levels instead of the lower levels becomes a great source of happiness and fulfillment in our lives. Being part of a matrimony, a family, a world-wide Bahá’í community; being a fellow-builder of Bahá’u’lláh’s new World Order, a soldier in God’s very own army, a “wayfarer” becoming ever more God-like on the journey towards the Supreme Goal--all of these have noble ends and purposes far beyond ourselves in both space and time, and all of these bring us immense joy, heavenly bliss, and everlasting tranquility. It is toward these spheres that we must always turn our hearts and minds. God has given us the unique ability to live in the higher, broader spheres of life or lower, narrower ones. The choice is ours.

One of the determining factors which leads people to live on higher or lower planes; to work for a humanitarian cause or to become a drug addict, for example, is the ability and, oftentimes, good fortune to find meaning and purpose in life. It is our nature as human beings to search for our place, our role in the evolution of the cosmos. Whether we are aware of it or not, we are meaning-seeking creatures. A sense of meaningfulness arises out of a sense of “connectedness.” Anything in isolation--a person, a letter of the alphabet, an atom--loses its meaning, its purpose. Feeling connected to God and his creation, to the Central Figures, to our divinely ordained institutions, to humankind, our fellow believers, and our families--this is another way of understanding the importance of living in those outer spheres illustrated in Figure 1.1 It is what gives us that feeling of “connectedness,” of *belonging* in the world, of having an important part to play in the unfoldment of the Whole.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. In the BLDH program, what are the four categories of reality? What are the two sub-categories of each main category?
2. Is it possible for something to be a part and a whole at the same time? Explain giving an example.
3. What does ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mean when He says that man is the “Book of Creation”?
4. What are the “divine perfections” the acquisition of which, require sacrifice? What “imperfections of nature” need to be sacrificed in order to acquire “divine perfections”?
5. We, as individuals, are able to form part of what greater entities?
6. How does “connectedness” promote a sense of “meaningfulness” and fulfillment? Give an example. How does the opposite sometimes occur and what are the results?

CHAPTER 2: TRANSFORMATION

Is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions? For if the character of mankind be not changed, the futility of God’s universal Manifestation would be apparent.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

Transformation is the purpose of religion and it has been chosen as the central theme of the BLDH program. Understanding its meaning and its dynamics, therefore, are of utmost importance. In the above passage Bahá’u’lláh equates “transformation” with “change” as they pertain to the improvement of human character. My studies have led me to understand that this fundamental process also underlies all other levels of God’s creation. Physical scientists have gradually shifted from perceiving and investigating “atoms of matter” to perceiving and investigating “atoms of change.”2 This is the new “unit of study” in an increasing number of fields: physics, geology, biology, genetics, evolution, ecology, social and economic development, business and industry, learning, brain research, human development, and many others.3

One of the pioneers of this “shift” in perception was British philosopher, mathematician, logician, and “‘father’ of process thought”4Alfred North Whitehead.5 And one of the major interpreters of Whitehead, for me and for hundreds of his students, was the late Professor Daniel C. Jordan.6 I will try to explain simply and briefly my understanding of change from their viewpoint.7

Whitehead saw “change” as the most common phenomena around us. In the physical cosmos it is the one thing that never changes. All phenomena undergo change or flux.

That ‘all things flow’ is the first vague generalization which the unsystematized, barely analyzed, intuition of men has produced. . .. The flux of things is one ultimate generalization around which we must weave our philosophical system.8

Change, Whitehead observed, was not chaotic but orderly, following a generally predictable pattern of unfoldment. This inherent, underlying character of change he called “process.” This patterned, process of change, he noticed went through various phases. The first phase is the phase of potential. Before something exists in the physical world, it first exists in the world of potentiality; the world of imagination and ideas. If you look around you, the things you see: the chairs, the house, the cup, etc. first existed as ideas in the minds of their designers. The fruit tree exists in the seed potentially. If you cut the seed open you will not see a miniature of the future tree, but, nevertheless, it is there in a different form of reality, in a different realm, in a spiritual, invisible realm of potential. When potential reality is transformed into observable reality, we have a unit of change, or, a term often preferred by Whitehead, a unit of “becoming.” The causes of change are, generally speaking, both material and spiritual.9 A collision of two objects or an invasion of an army is an example of material causation. Examples of the spiritual causes of change are ideals, subjective aims, goals, and “dreams” of what we want to happen. They are forms of potential which operate like magnets “attracting us” to them or as “lures” drawing us toward them and “causing” us to change. The proofs of their existence are the results we see around us: the things, the events, and the activities, which existed first only as ideas. This occurs, according to Whitehead, at all levels of existence. The possibility that the same characteristics of change occur at all levels from microcosmic to macrocosmic is confirmed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in his discourse on evolution:

Universal beings resemble and can be compared to particular beings, for both are subjected to one natural system, one universal law and divine organization. So you will find the smallest atoms in the universal system are similar to the greatest beings of the universe.10

Bahá’u’lláh anticipated and undoubtedly *precipitated* this revolutionary shift in the understanding of the nature of reality in the physical sciences and, also, in the fields of personal and social transformation.11 For example, regarding the physical plane, He explains that the “world of creation,” which He calls “the mirror of His beauty,” also contains invisible potentialities capable of being transformed into visible reality:

The greater the effort exerted for the refinement of this sublime and noble mirror, the more faithfully will it be made to reflect the glory of the names and attributes of God, and reveal the wonders of His signs and knowledge. Every created thing will be enabled (so great is this reflecting power) to reveal the potentialities of its pre-ordained station, will recognize its capacity and limitations . . .12

On the human plane, in His effort to help us change our character, Bahá’u’lláh repeatedly counsels us to focus on our potentiality. A great deal of His Revelation can be viewed as His unveiling of the divine, exalted nature of our potentialities, a feat which modern science has not been able to do:

The potentialities inherent in the station of man, the full measure of his destiny on earth, the innate excellence of his reality, must all be manifested in this promised Day of God.13

Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value.14

In him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed.15

Bahá’u’lláh also continually reminds us that it is our duty to manifest the potentialities of ourselves and the world which have been revealed through His Writings and that His Teachings contain the power to affect such a transformation:

It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written [by His pen] into reality and action . . .16

Through the Teachings of this Day Star of Truth every man will advance and develop until he attaineth the station at which he can manifest all the potential forces with which his inmost true self hath been endowed.17

Besides telling us *what* we must accomplish, Bahá’u’lláh reveals to us the knowledge of *how* to translate potentialities into visible realities by emphasizing a key requisite--the exercise of our own will-power:

All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition.18

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in His role as interpreter and expounder of His Father’s teachings, develops this idea further giving two additional requisites:

The attainment of any object is conditioned upon knowledge, volition and action. Unless these three conditions are forthcoming there is no execution or accomplishment.19

Hence, our taking charge of personal and social transformation--the translation of potential realities into manifest realities--depends on our ability to enrich our knowledge, strengthen our volition, and increase the effectiveness of our actions. The BLDH program will explore and help you achieve each of these three requisites.

In my efforts to apply the Bahá’í Teachings and the process philosophy of reality to my own life and to the BLDH program, I have conceived the transformation process as consisting of repetitive, yet ascending cycles of widely varying duration, each consisting of five general phases, one flowing into the other: (1) a phase of *satisfaction* and contentment with the status quo, (2) a phase of *disintegration* and discontent with the way things are going, brought about by various causes, (3) a phase of *visualization* and formulation of new possibilities, plans, aims, goals, and ideals, (4) a phase of *implementation*, action, experimentation, trial and error, sacrifice and suffering, (5) a phase of *consolidation*, integration, practice, joy, elation, and success, and, finally, a return to a new phase 1 of increased satisfaction operating at a higher level of complexity, closeness to God, happiness, dynamism, and autonomy. This scheme is applicable to all aspects of our lives--personal and social. Never are all aspects at the same phase at the same point in time. It is most probable that we are usually experiencing all five phases simultaneously but in different spheres of our lives. The cyclic scheme is expressed symbolically in Figure 2.1. Let us now examine each phase in more detail. In the following discussion, when life “aspects,” “areas,” “departments,” etc. are mentioned, I am referring primarily to the thirty-six key life processes on the BLDH Circle which you may want to refer to as you read.

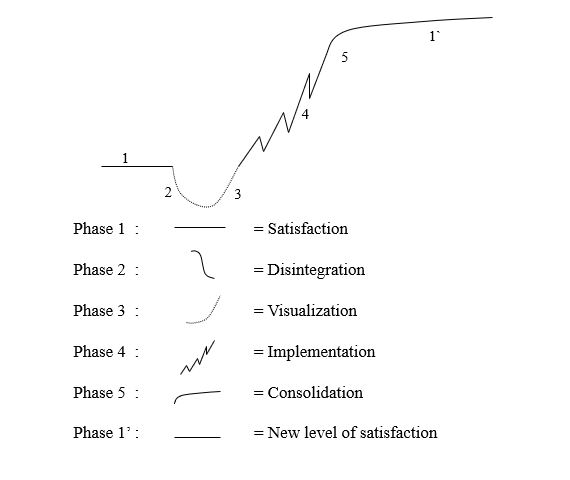


Figure 2.1 Five phases of personal transformation

**PHASE 1: SATISFACTION**

This is a phase of “smooth sailing,” of contentment with the present scheme of things, and of mastery. During this phase we are very capable of just coasting along and taking it easy; and often justifiably so. Hence, the symbol of a straight, smooth, horizontal line represents this phase in Figure 2.1 In this phase everything, for example, is going well at work, we are happy with our marriage and children, Bahá’í activities are fulfilling and enjoyable, and so on. In many ways it is important that we maintain many “departments” of our lives at this phase because we are thereby enabled to handle other, more stressful phases in other areas of our lives. During this phase our prayers are for God’s protection; that He keep things moving along smoothly. For example, someone might pray for the well-being of her spouse and family while she is away on a highly important, stressful business trip which could result in a significant promotion. Or, consider the opposite situation; someone who thanks God for not having to take on new demands at work because so much of his attention and energy is being given to handling a marital problem at home.

As you can see, this phase is very valuable. But, if we keep any aspect of our lives at this phase for too long, it is dangerous; it will become stagnated. It is the nature of all the components of our lives, guided by the ideals found in our Bahá’í teachings and by new discoveries in the sciences, to grow, to become, to develop, and to be continually transformed and made better. Stagnation leads to “illness”: spiritual, psychological, social, or physical. As the Japanese have shown the world so well in the field of technology; anything can be improved.

**PHASE 2: DISINTEGRATION**

Symbolized in Figure 2.1 by a broken, downward directed line, this term perhaps sounds terrible, but the sub-process of disintegration is a vital phase of transformation. It can occur very naturally and intentionally or, at times, it can be earth shattering; a traumatic trial or calamity catching us completely off guard. It is a phase when we become aware that things are not functioning as well as they should or could; that our former “maps of reality” contain errors. It is a phase of doubting, of questioning, of self-assessment and reflection. At times things seem to be falling apart.

“Disintegration,” in general, is brought about by the placement of tension on the “old way” until the breaking point is reached and a “new way,” more in harmony with the Teachings, is brought into being. This can occur in many ways: the onset of sheer boredom with Phase 1; reading the Writings and learning that our behavior, communities, Feasts, Reflection Meetings, Devotional Meetings, Spiritual Assemblies, Conventions, etc. are not what they should or could be; a serious illness in the family which requires major changes in our work and home routines; learning that your spouse has a more intimate relation with someone else because he or she has put your marriage on the “back burner” of life; learning about new research on nutrition which will require a change of eating habits; and so on. But, of all of these, perhaps the healthiest form of experiencing disintegration is to regularly compare our conduct, activities, and lifestyle with the standards set forth in the Writings and in the life of Their Exemplar, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The discrepancy between the two should always lead to a healthy discontent with the status quo in any area--be it our prayer-life, our thought-life, our community life, or others. Why wait for calamities to force us to change? Why be only reactionary? Why not pursue transformation on a regular, continual basis and thereby prevent as many major calamities as possible?

In the world of nature, disintegration is also referred to as decomposition or entropy. For a long time, I wondered what the purpose of entropy was in the unfoldment of the cosmos. I understood that the direction of evolution was always upward, towards higher levels of complexity, dynamism, autonomy, and unity. What, I asked myself, was the purpose of the disunifying, downward disintegration of life systems? I found the answer in the writings of Alfred North Whitehead who had been a better observer of the lessons of nature. In the physical realm, when a plant, for example, decomposes, its constituent elements are freed to form part of a new plant. Perhaps the new plant is better adapted to survive in its environment. Thus, evolution is carried forward. If the new, better-adapted plant had no building blocks with which to form itself, evolution would come to a standstIL In general, then, old entities, often outmoded, break down into their constituent parts in order to provide material for creating new, hopefully better adapted entities, thereby opening the way for new, more highly-evolved forms.

We see this happening before our very eyes in the case of the disintegration of many of the traditional religious institutions. Because they are not adapting to the spirit of the new age, the age of the “global village” and the “oneness of humankind” they are losing many followers either in actual numbers or in belief. These “constituents” are then “free” to form part of a new religious organization, hopefully the Bahá’í Faith, which is an entity better adapted to the present and future needs of the world. The same process is occurring with outworn modes of government and economic systems.

At the personal level we see disintegration occurring in our dysfunctional, inadequate routines; habits; ways of doing things; ways of perceiving ourselves and the world; ways of thinking, feeling, planning, and communicating; and so on. In order to transform these, we have to select a particular aspect, examine each of its component phases, and find out what is not working, and then learn new ways of going about life.

I have already mentioned the role of the Bahá’í writings in stimulating disintegration. Thornton Chase summarized a fascinating, related talk given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá while he was on pilgrimage in 1907:

Then he [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] talked of the necessity of decomposition of all things before a recomposition could take place, and said that it was the power of the Word of God which decomposed the self of man in order that he might be recreated.20

Could this be what Bahá’u’lláh was referring to in His meditations on the purpose of trials and calamities, followed immediately by His description of His power to disintegrate and recreate all things?

O Thou . . . Whose trial is the healer of the sicknesses of them who have embraced Thy Cause, Whose Calamity is the highest aspiration of such as are rid of all attachment to any one but Thyself!

Glorified . . . art Thou . . . Who through but one word of Thy mouth, caused all things to expire and dissolve asunder, and Who, by yet another word, caused whatever had been separated to be combined and reunited!21

In a similar passage Bahá’u’lláh proclaims the impact of His Revelation. In reference to personal transformation, it helps us to understand the disintegration phase as only part of a purposeful, beneficial process. And, although this will never take away the suffering often felt during this trying phase, it gives us hope that we can become part of Bahá’u’lláh’s “new creation,” His “new race of men”:

Through that Word the realities of all created things were shaken, were divided, separated, scattered, combined and reunited, disclosing, in both the contingent world and the heavenly kingdom, entities of a new creation . . ..22

The disintegration phase viewed as part of a whole, as part of the process of transformation, gives it meaning and renders it more tolerable. The field of psychology is beginning to see its value and to deal with it in a positive way instead of handling it with sedatives and anti-depressants. For example, psychiatrist M. Scott Peck in his superb book, *The Road Less Travelled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth* has given this phase a new interpretation. Speaking of “the healthiness of depression”23 he points out that “depression is signaling that major change is required for successful and evolutionary adaptation.”24 William Bridges, consultant on human development and author of *Transitions: Making Sense of Life’s Changes*, describes how the phase of “disorientation” is “not enjoyable,” but can be “meaningful.”25

Coming out of the disintegration phase and into the visualization phase is not always easy. It is possible to get stuck in self-doubt, egotism, laziness, or depression. Dream therapist, Dr. Gayle Delaney, describes this sad condition:

I have seen too many clients who have used therapy and growth-oriented disciplines as tools for contemplating and theorizing about themselves without making any concrete attitudinal or behavioral changes. Without these changes, they have remained prisoners to destructive and self-defeating patterns that keep them feeling inadequate, lonely, angry, or lead them into one painful relationship after another.26

Changing ourselves is often difficult and painful. As Bahá’ís, however, we have been given additional tools; spiritual “weapons” with which to wage our battles. Above all, we have our tremendous love for Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and, along with it, a healthy sense of fear of losing their love through negligence or outright disobedience. Another powerful tool is prayer. During the phase of disintegration, we can pray for forgiveness for our old pattern of behavior, if it was sinful, and we can pray for illumination and guidance in “this hour of darkness” assured that, sooner or later, the “light of day” will break upon our lives. It is through our coming to understand that we, via our own unaided efforts, are totally incapable of transforming ourselves and through our having faith in Bahá’u’lláh’s power to send us divine assistance, that we will be given the wisdom and the courage to face the unknown future lying before us.

Man’s preoccupation with his own patterns, though an aspect of his creativity, has been perceived as a tragedy; his ability to break out of them may indeed be his single moment of glory. But more tragic than his self-suffocating patterns is his assumption that he can break out of them alone. He seems singularly inept at doing so, for every attempt, indeed, seems to tie the knot tighter. It is not merely the need to break patterns which characterizes us, however, but the recognition that we have such needs. And that recognition, in turn, brings with it a sense of humility about our means. And that humility introduces us to the first intimations of our dependence upon Divine assistance to break the old and create the new patterns. This, perhaps, is our moment of glory. Such an acute level of self-scrutiny and sincerity is not always easy for one who prides himself on his independence and superiority over the orangutan.27 --Bahíyyíh Nakhjavání, *Four on an Island*

With these understandings and means in hand we are now ready to discuss the phase of visualization.

**PHASE 3: VISUALIZATION**

The phase of visualization is one of hope, of new vision, seeing new possibilities, of discovering and feeling unknown potentialities stirring within us. It is symbolized in the diagram by a broken yet upward bound line. Our prayers for illumination have been answered; a way forward has been shown to us. It is a time for visualizing a desired improvement, for setting goals and sub-goals guided by the ideals set forth in the Writings--a time for making plans; setting time frames; and gathering information, materials, energy, and plenty of faith and courage through prayer and deepening.

Each of the above tasks will be explored more in depth later in the program. But as we proceed to develop “tools of transformation,” let us ever bear in mind that it is God Who has given us these tools, and that, ultimately, it is our reliance on His grace, His love, and the transforming power of His Word which will bring us victory.

The . . . task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish . . .. The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change.200 --Bahá’u’lláh

I testify that within Thy grasp are held the reins of all things. Thou changest them as Thou pleasest. . ..

Thou art He Who changeth through His bidding abasement into glory, and weakness into strength, and powerlessness into might, and fear into calm, and doubt into certainty.29 --Bahá’u’lláh

**PHASE 4: IMPLEMENTATION**

The implementation phase is characterized by purposeful, tireless action; experimentation; trial and error; perseverance in the face of seeming failure; intense, experiential learning; continual revision of former approaches; struggle; and suffering. I have symbolized this phase with a jagged yet ascending line in Figure 2.1. It represents the “two steps forward, one step backward, two steps forward” pattern of progress.

On this plane, the traveller meeteth with many a trial and reverse. Now is he lifted up to

heaven, now is he cast into the depths. As it hath been said: “Now Thou drawest me to the throne

of the realms above, again Thou scorchest me in the fire of hell.”30 --Bahá’u’lláh

During this period, we must be content and thankful with even a thimbleful of change. Bahá’u’lláh encourages us to be better without demanding leaps and bounds: “Let each morn be better than its eve and each morrow richer than its yesterday.”31 And we must never be discouraged by failures knowing that the progress of the Faith of God itself follows this same pattern of crisis and victory, of setbacks leading to glorious achievements.32 Yet, when we do become discouraged, for this is part of being human, and think that we are not progressing, the best mental therapy I have found is to stop for a moment in the upward climb, look down at the levels from where we have come, and then congratulate ourselves on the progress made thus far. Looking upward and forward all the time can wear us out. Looking back, we can remind ourselves with verbalizations such as this: “Yes, Bahá’u’lláh is confirming my efforts. Yes, I have translated potentiality into reality; and therefore, there is no reason to believe that I will not continue to be successful.”

A true lover of this uphill phase of struggle was Greek philosopher and writer Nikos Kazantzakis. In Athens, after contemplating the symmetry and perfect geometry of the Parthenon, he considered it a “faultless thought enmarbled” but it failed to touch his heart. He related the Parthenon to “even” versus “odd” numbers in the context of human struggle in a humorous yet fascinating and moving way (I have illustrated this in Figure 2.2. Note the similarity of pattern with the transformation diagram in Figure 2.2):

I felt that the Parthenon was an even number such as two or four. Even numbers run contrary to my heart; I want nothing to do with them. Their lives are too comfortably arranged, they stand on their feet much too solidly and have not the slightest desire to change location. They are satisfied, conservative, without anxieties; they have solved every problem, translated every desire into reality, and grown calm. It is the odd number which conforms to the rhythm of my heart. The life of the odd number is not at all comfortably arranged. The odd number does not like this world the way it finds it, but wishes to change it, add to it, push it further. It stands on one foot, holds the other ready in the air, and wants to depart. Where to? To the following even number, in order to halt for an instant, catch its breath, and work up fresh momentum.33

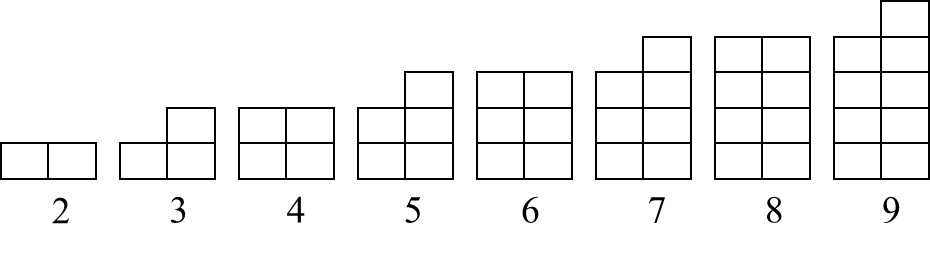


Figure 2. 2: Even and Odd “Steps” of Transformation

During this phase of struggle and action, of “letting go” of our old self, our prayers go up in our plea for strength, for the removal of difficulties and obstacles, for courage to make the sacrifices so beautifully called for by the Blessed Beauty in one of His odes written during His “days of retirement in the mountains of Sulaymáníyyih”:

If thine aim be to cherish thy life, approach not our court; but if sacrifice be thy heart’s desire, come and let others come with thee. For such is the way of Faith, if in thy heart thou seekest reunion with Bahá; shouldst thou refuse to tread this path, why trouble us? Begone!34

The BLDH Circle is a symbol of this “way of Faith” breaking it down into paths of sacrifice: the path of service, the path of prayer, the path of budgeting our money, the path of sincere communication and so on--all leading to the center: “reunion with Bahá’u’lláh.”

**PHASE 5: CONSOLIDATION**

The consolidation phase is the stage of attainment symbolized in Figure 2.1 by the upward, then over-the-edge-of-the-plateau, solid line. It begins by “seeing the light at the end of the tunnel” --the “we’re almost there” feeling--and ends with complete achievement. We are coming out of the phase of intense transition and we can smell the fragrance of victory soon to be ours. We have gained new skills, new knowledge, new virtues, new values, new habits, etc. Now, during the consolidation phase we continue to practice them, we continue to fine-tune them. It is a time of integration of new skills into the very clay of our being, our way of life, our routines and habits, until finally we are “over the top” having arrived at complete mastery and a new, higher phase of satisfaction; the new ability being so much a part of us that we hardly have to think about it anymore. The joy of arrival calls for celebrations, rewards, and prayers of praise and thanksgiving! What used to be only a dream on the horizon has become manifest before our very eyes! We are filled with a feeling of elation of having connected our efforts with the very purpose of God’s Revelation--transformation!

Every victory, every momentary balance on the ascent fills with joy every living thing that breathes, grows, loves, and gives birth.35 --Nikos Kazantzakis

I can’t help but remember our four children as they learned to walk; first, only watching others; then, trying, holding on to chairs and the hands of others; falling time after time until finally, the first, glorious, unaided steps met with applause, screams of delight, hugs and kisses from Mom and Dad--and this, to be followed by days of continued practice and refinement until soon the former toddler is racing lickety-split from one end of the house to the other!

After having discussed all five phases of transformation and having attained a new phase 1 of increased satisfaction, we need to take a closer look at this new beginning. We are now in a position to teach others what we have learned and experienced, and can enjoy making our own “variations on the theme.” A time of rest may well be deserved. We are at an “in-between time” when we can enjoy thoughts and feelings such as those expressed in this sensitive, prayer/poem by educator Muriel Blackwell:

Life’s Plateaus

Lord, thank you for the plateaus of life,

Times of neither ascents or descents,

Times when I feel not the pressure

of upward struggle

Nor the tension and uncertainty

of downward path.

For this period of evenness--for this plateau--

Thank you, Lord.

For here I rest,

Gather strength,

Renew my faith,

And feel your presence.

Here I evaluate and contemplate

The ascents and descents.

You planned the plateaus, Lord.

Give me the wisdom to use them.36

The phase of satisfaction is important and enjoyable, but it also holds its own dangers.

The upward path towards an ideal of perfection, with the end in sight, gives a thrill keener than any prolonged halt in a stage of attainment with major variations completely tried out. Thus the wise advice is, Not to rest too completely in any continued realization of the same perfection of type.37 --Alfred North Whitehead

During the days of the beloved Guardian, after mighty victories had been won and celebrated during teaching plans, when the friends were “tired but blissful,”38 he would warn the Bahá’ís not to “rest on their laurels,”39 but to arise and set their sights on new horizons. We must ever keep in mind that this phase is only a “campfire between battles.”

Always, whenever I reach some certainty, my repose and assurance are short-lived. New doubts and anxieties quickly spring from this certainty, and I am obliged to inaugurate a new struggle to deliver myself from the former certitude and find a new one--until finally that new one matures in its turn and is transformed into uncertainty. . .. How, then, can we define uncertainty? Uncertainty is the mother of a new certainty.40 --Nikos Kazantzakis

This overview of the principle of transformation will be reviewed and explored in greater detail in the section on the inner Psychological Quadrant of the BLDH Circle which contains some of the most fundamental processes of “becoming”–meditation, goal-setting, time management, visualization, and reflection. We are now ready to explore further what Bahá’u’lláh meant when He referred to a transformation “that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its [mankind’s] inner life and external conditions.”41

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. According to Bahá’u’lláh, what is the purpose of every Revelation of God’s Manifestations?
2. In the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, what is the most common characteristic of all things great and small?
3. Bahá’u’lláh tells us that the aim of the transformation of any and all things should be to enable them to reflect in the world to an ever-greater extent what?
4. What is the relation between the realm of potentialities and the world of actualized reality? Name some entities or virtues that you have seen manifested that existed first only in the world of potentiality?
5. In the BLDH program, what are the five phases of transformation? What are the characteristics of each? Have you experienced each phase? Give examples.

CHAPTER 3: THE INNER LIFE AND THE OUTER LIFE

They who are the people of God have no ambition except to revive the world, to ennoble its life, and regenerate its peoples. Truthfulness and good-will have, at all times, marked their relations with all men. Their outward conduct is but a reflection of their inward life, and their inward life a mirror of their outward conduct. No veil hideth or obscureth the verities on which their Faith is established. Before the eyes of all men these verities have been laid bare, and can be unmistakably recognized. Their very acts attest the truth of these words.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the meaning, the relationship and the dynamics of the inward and outward aspects of our lives and to later apply this understanding to a wholistic program for personal and social improvement. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that this aim is the very purpose for which the Prophets have appeared. They educate humankind, He says, “along every line” so that all peoples “may advance in all aspects of human endeavor, whether outward or inward, hidden or visible, material or spiritual, until they make of this mortal world a widespread mirror, to reflect that other world which dieth not.”2

In the past, individuals often chose or were obliged to excel inwardly or outwardly, not both. Monks, nuns, women and even great men of ideas chose the inner world. Their lives variously revolved around seclusion, prayer, meditation, study, asceticism, fasting, formal group worship, household and family, thought and discussion. The outer world was dominated by the “man of action,” the conqueror, the ruler, the explorer, the hunter, the entrepreneur. Today the Call is to make “The Great Synthesis” --to strive for excellence both outwardly and inwardly.

Strain every nerve to acquire both inner and outer perfections for the fruit of the human tree hath ever been and will ever be perfections both within and without.3 --Bahá’u’lláh

In civilizations dominated by materialism, little attention is given to the inner life. Consequently, its achievements are limited, and the good that is attained is matched by a corresponding advance of evil and moral decay. In civilizations dominated by spirituality, little attention is given to the outer life. As a result, its achievements in the realms of religion and morals are offset by a lack of advancement in the physical sciences, health, technology, economics and other fields which provide for material well-being. The divine civilization that we are building will be based on a different principle, a new dynamic. My understanding is that wholesome, ecologically sustainable advances in the outer, material world, aimed at the greatest good for the greatest number of beings everywhere, will depend on corresponding advances in the transformation and spiritualization of human character.

The Bahá’í writings indicate that one feature of this correspondence is that spiritual development is to be given attention first, thereby providing a firm foundation for the production of higher quality “advances” in the outer realm. For example, in the field of government, Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary), tells us that “laws and institutions [which regulate the outer life of conduct], as viewed by Bahá’u’lláh, can become really effective only when our inner spiritual life has been perfected and transformed.”4

Regarding the field of social transformation, the beloved Guardian, in a particularly descriptive and moving passage, expounds upon the task of transforming first ourselves and *then* society:

Let every believer, desirous to witness the swift and healthy progress of the Cause of God, realize the twofold nature of his task. Let him first turn his eyes inwardly and search his own heart and satisfy himself that in his relations with his fellow-believers, irrespective of colour and class, he is proving himself increasingly loyal to the spirit of his beloved Faith. Assured and content that he is exerting his utmost in a conscious effort to approach nearer every day the lofty station to which his gracious Master summons him, let him turn to his second task, and, with befitting confidence and vigour, assail the devastating power of those forces which in his own heart he has already succeeded in subduing. Fully alive to the unfailing efficacy of the power of Bahá’u’lláh, and armed with the essential weapons of wise restraint and inflexible resolve, let him wage a constant fight against the inherited tendencies, the corruptive instincts, the fluctuating fashions, the false pretenses of the society in which he lives and moves.5

Applying this same principle to the field of teaching, Bahá’u’lláh tells each believer to, “before all else, teach his own self, that his speech may attract the hearts of them that hear him.”6 The Master said that there would be “no result whatsoever” unless the teacher first worked on becoming “pure,” “attracted,” and a “shining torch” in “the love of God.”7 In reference to how to achieve successful teaching campaigns Shoghi Effendi tells us that it would be “highly unlikely, nay, rather impossible, that any enterprise should prosper and develop short of divine bestowals and confirmation” and that the latter could be attained by “first and foremost” resorting “to every possible means to purge one’s heart and motives” and by observing “the specific times for the remembrance of God, meditation, devotion and prayer.”8

In his pilgrim’s notes Hand of the Cause of God William Sears quotes the Guardian who describes the pilgrimage as only one phase of a two-phase, organic whole, composed of mutually required opposites: “The pilgrimage is given that you may take in and then give out, to receive and then impart, to absorb and then bestow. Without this there has been no pilgrimage. It will dissolve into nothing.”7

Another characteristic of the correspondence between the inward and outward life is the notion of degree, i.e., the greater the accomplishments on the inner plane of existence, the greater will be the achievements on the outer plane. These two characteristics can be seen in the beloved Guardian’s oft-quoted exhortation:

One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely, the *extent* [emphasis added] to which our inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh.10

I would like to further isolate and identify this extremely important characteristic of the correspondence between the extent or intensity of the effort or sacrifice made on the inner plane with the degree of success in the outer realm. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá pointed out this characteristic in the organic relationship between suffering and character development:

The mind and spirit of man advance when he is tried by suffering. The more the ground is ploughed the better the seed will grow, the better the harvest will be. Just as the plough furrows the earth deeply, purifying it of weeds and thistles, so suffering and tribulation free man from the petty affairs of this worldly life until he arrives at a state of complete detachment.11

Shoghi Effendi also used an analogous process found in nature to describe this concept of purposively deepening our inner development in reaction to and in preparation for outer expansion:

Every outward thrust into new fields, every multiplication of Bahá’í institutions, must be paralleled by a deeper thrust of the roots which sustain the spiritual life of the community and ensure its sound development. . .. That this community . . . may maintain a proper balance between these two essential aspects of its development . . . is the ardent hope of my heart. 12

If we look around us there are many examples of this symbiotic-like, reciprocal relationship. Our respiratory process is composed of two phases: breathing in and breathing out; the greater is the one, the greater must be the other. The height of a building depends upon the depth of its foundation, hidden below the ground. The distance that an arrow travels forward depends on how far the string is pulled backward. The amount of spending done in the market place depends on how much saving was done at the bank; and many others.

In an attempt to capture the mirror-like relationship, the degree of reciprocity, and the order of importance between the inner and outer dimensions of life, I have chosen a symbol based on the sine curve with a baseline passing horizontally through the middle. (See Figure 3.1) The inner life is represented first by the curve below the line; the outer life by the curve above the line.[[2]](#footnote-2) For every activity in the outer life there is a corresponding activity in the inner life. (See Figure 3.2 for a few illustrated examples.) The following is a list of some commonly related pairs, many of which are found in the Writings.

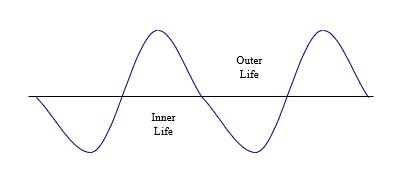


Figure 3. 1: The Inner Life and the Outer Life

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **INNER LIFE** | **OUTER LIFE** |
| hidden | manifest |
| invisible | visible |
| unseen | seen |
| spiritual | material |
| psychological | physical |
| potential reality | observable reality |
| rest | action |
| dream / sleep state | waking state |
| thoughts | deeds |
| receiving / feeling love | giving / showing / demonstrating love |
| acquiring knowledge of God | showing love to His creation |
| principles in the Writings | principles implemented |
| consolidation | expansion |
| personal / intimate life | social / public life |
| fasting | a new year of activities |
| prayer | service |
| meditation | work |
| deepening | teaching |
| houses of worship | their dependencies |
| planning | doing |
| imagining | creating |
| designing | building |
| theory | practice |
| communication with one’s self | communication with others |
| acquiring virtues | acquiring skills |
| beautifying your character | beautifying your physical environment |
| purity of heart | cleanliness of body |
| preparing our soul for the next life | carrying forward civilization in this life |
| the journey within | the journey without |

Make ye then a mighty effort . . . that in every kind of excellence the people of God shall surpass all other human beings; that both outwardly and inwardly they shall prove superior to the rest 13

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

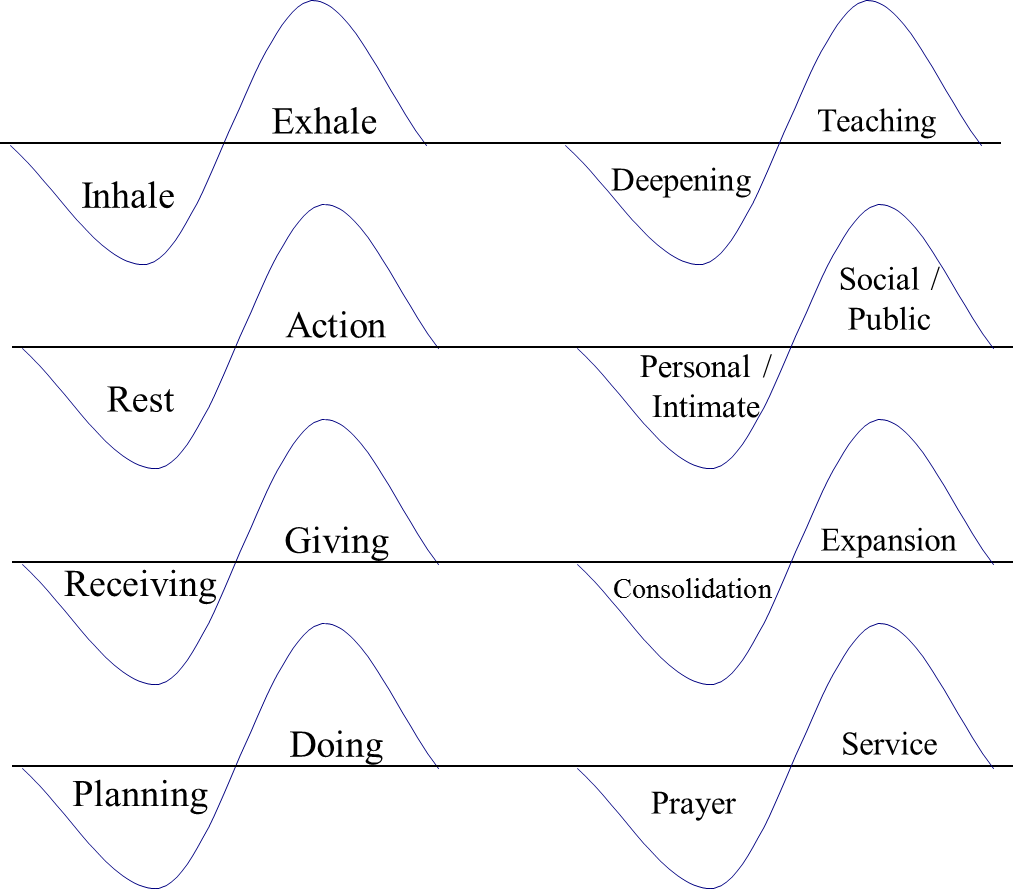


Figure 3. 2: Relationships of Rest & Action, Receiving & Giving, Prayer & Service, etc.

The feature of “degree of reciprocity” is expressed in the two drawings in Figure 3.3. One shows a pronounced curve representing effective living. The other shows a flattened curve symbolizing ineffective living. The analogy is that the quality and height of achievement in the outer life depends on the quality and depth of the inner life. But the impact of one upon the other is not unidirectional; it is reciprocal. For example, the tests and trials of the outer life can also enrich our inner life by deepening our understanding of and our appreciation for the spiritual principles Bahá’u’lláh has given us. Each aspect depends upon, and finds its fulfillment in the other; they mutually require one another. It is their reciprocal interaction that brings about the development of each. For instance, new vision calls for action; the results of the action call for inward reflection. Their interdependence and unity form a dynamic, dialectical relationship. Consequently, the cause of failure in some exterior, visible endeavor can often be traced to some failure on the inner, invisible, or more intimate dimension. For example, when we can’t seem to find anyone to whom to give the Message, we might ask ourselves, “Am I praying daily to Bahá’u’lláh to send me someone to teach?” And correspondingly, our inner life can be affected by the outer world. I have seen, for instance, people who, unable to cut off a negatively-influencing friendship, were drawn away from the Bahá’í activities; and then, suddenly waking up to their predicament, wonder how the disintegration of their spiritual life came about.

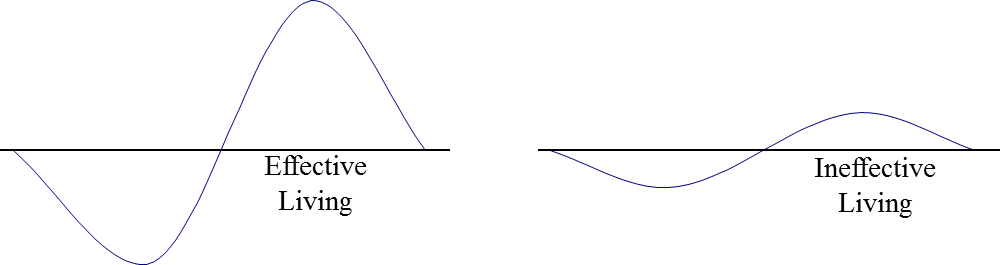


Figure 3. 3: Effective vs. Ineffective Learning

Ideally, however, in the long run, our Bahá’í life will be seen as a rolling series of waves each gaining greater heights of attainment and increasing depths of spirituality with each pulsating, passing day. (See Figure 3.4.)

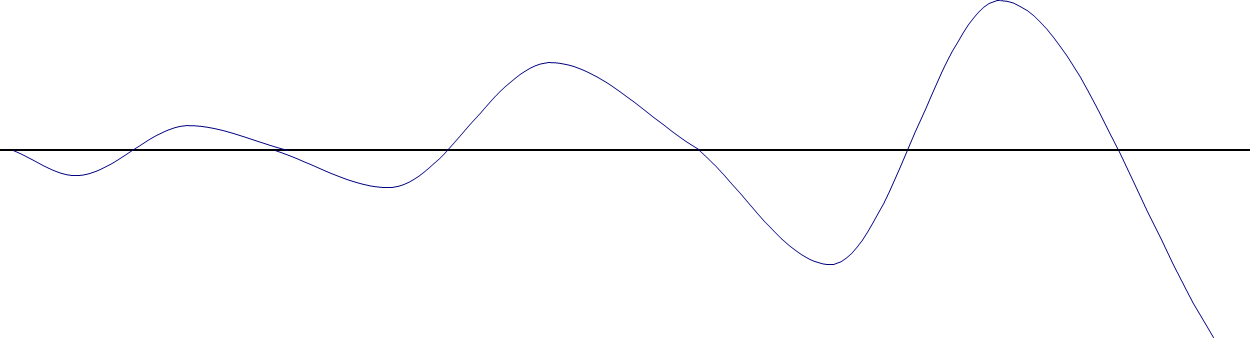


Figure 3. 4: The Ever-Increasing Depths of Spirituality and Heights of Attainment

Another related feature of the inner life/outer life relationship is the issue of quality time versus quantity of time. A small amount of high-quality time dedicated to the inner life processes can often sustain an outer life activity requiring a great deal of time. For example, a half hour of intense, sincere prayer can sustain us throughout an entire morning of teaching and consolidation work; nine days of pilgrimage can sustain us spiritually through years of dedicated service; ten minutes of affectionate communication with a child can provide emotional sustenance for an entire school day. On the other hand, a father can think he spends a considerable amount of time with his family, but, if this time is only spent “in their presence” watching television or reading a newspaper, the quality of that time is very low. He is not interacting with his family but rather with the person on the television program or the author of the newspaper article. It is the “richness of the experience” which must be our focus and not simply “putting in time” whether it be with our family, in our worship, or at work.

In the following passages Bahá’u’lláh gives priority to the quality, depth, sincerity, and meaningfulness of an activity over its duration:

Were a man to read a single verse with joy and radiance it would be better for him than to read with lassitude all the Holy Books of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.14

One hour of reflection is worth seventy years of pious worship.15

This principle is expressed in Figure 3.5. The vertical axis symbolizes the depth or quality of a process and the horizontal axis represents the amount of time. It expresses the principle that a balanced life does not require that equal amounts of time be dedicated to each of its component processes. True balance simply means dedicating quality time to the inner activities before engaging in the corresponding outer activities.

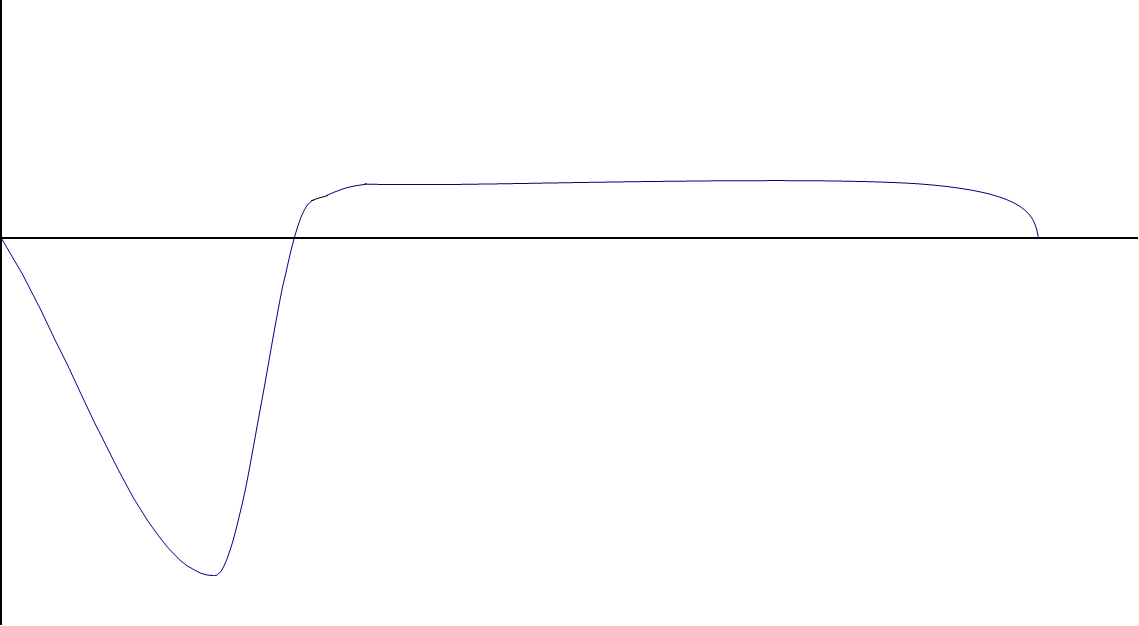


Figure 3. 5: Quality of Time vs. Quantity of Time

Two other aspects are important to keep in mind. One is that the duration of an inner or outer period, or, of a complete cycle composed of both phases, has no definite duration. It may be a question of seconds or even years. Towards one end of the spectrum, we know that we think a thought one moment and act on it the next. Towards the opposite end, we might consider the example of the life of Mullá Husayn who, at the age of eighteen, began his studies in Karbilá under the tutelage of Siyyid Kázim-i-Rashtí: “For nine years he sat at his feet, and imbibed the lesson which was destined to prepare him for the acceptance of the Message of the Báb. The nine remaining years of his life were spent in the midst of a restless, a feverish activity which carried him eventually to the field of martyrdom, in circumstances that have shed imperishable lustre upon his country’s history.”16 Thus, we can conceive of life being composed of cycles within cycles: daily cycles within monthly cycles within yearly cycles within cycles of major life and after-life phases. This concept is represented in Figure 3.6.



Figure 3. 6: Cycles within Cycles

Sometimes we have only an intuitive feeling that we are moving into or out of the different phases of life. At other times we consciously plan for or around different phases; for example, praying intensely and exercising daily to get in shape for a teaching trip to a remote area which can be reached only on foot. And, of course, there are always those times when we are completely caught off guard by the accidents and transitions of life.

In relation to the five-phase theory of personal and social transformation presented in the previous chapter, the inner life phases are, generally speaking: disintegration and visualization. The outer life phases are: implementation, consolidation, and satisfaction.

The whole/part concept, discussed in Chapter 1, is also related to the outer/inner concept discussed here. Both are relative concepts which can be “nested” hierarchically. For example, if you look at the BLDH Circle, you can see that family life, compared to social/public life, is more inner and intimate, but it is more outward in comparison to our marital life, which is even more inward and intimate. Or, consider nutrition and exercise; these are very personal and intimate compared to taking care of a building, but compared to prayer, they are very outward and physical. Even in the realm of virtues, purity of heart, for example, could be considered more inward than courtesy. Hence, a life process can be either inner or outer relative to what it is compared to. This concept is referred to by Bahá’u’lláh in *The Seven Valleys*:

. . . let thine eminence consider his own self: Thou art first in relation to thy son, and last in relation to thy father. In thine outward appearance thou tellest of the appearance of power in the realms of divine creation; in thine inward being thou revealest the hidden mysteries which are the divine trust deposited within thee. And thus firstness and lastness, outwardness and inwardness, are, in the sense referred to, all true of thyself . . .

These statements are made in the sphere of that which is relative.17

Reality, then, appears to be like an “infinite onion” --composed of layer upon nested layer; a single, unified, graduated, continuum stretching uninterruptedly from spiritual to material. Each layer, each gradation is both a part and a whole; it is both inner and outer.[[3]](#footnote-3)a

Then what existence have words, on such a plane, that “first” and “last”, or other than these, should be mentioned or described? In this realm, the first is the same as the last, and the last is the same as the first.18 --Bahá’u’lláh

We will refer to this principle as we proceed through the program. Next, we will consider the theme of beauty and the importance of manifesting this attribute of God in both our inner and outer life.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. According to Bahá’u’lláh, what should be the relationship between our inward life and our outer conduct?
2. What are some examples of inner perfections? Of outer perfections?
3. How is it possible that success in some “outer” sphere of life can be ruined by the lack of development in some “inner” aspect of life? Give an example. Which should be given priority, inner development or outer development?
4. What is the relation between trials and suffering and character development?
5. How can, for example, family activities, be considered an aspect of both the inner and the outer life in relation to other activities?

CHAPTER 4: BEAUTY

The purpose of this program, as we have already seen, is to support the friends in their efforts to achieve the “object of every Revelation,” namely, “to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind.”1 A person’s character is composed of characteristics or attributes. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá exhorts everyone to deliver themselves from “the animal characteristics and qualities”2 and “to characterize themselves with the characteristics of God.”3 Bahá’u’lláh informs us that in each person “are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God.”4 It would be impossible to discuss all of these attributes and names, nor is it the intention of this book to explore *what* qualities the Bahá’ís are to acquire, but rather how to acquire them. Nevertheless, in order to give the transformational process a highly-focused, yet comprehensive purpose, which, at once, inspires, enchants, and moves us to action, the manifestation of “beauty” has been chosen, for both emotional and rational reasons, as one of the central themes of Life in Dynamic Harmony .

Conceptually, as will be demonstrated later, beauty is one of the most all-encompassing and widely applicable attributes. But, more than anything, I chose “beauty” because it is so deeply and closely associated with Bahá’u’lláh. When I meditate on His Writings, I always feel deeply moved by the repeated yet varied use of this name to describe and designate Bahá’u’lláh. The title which most endears me to His heart and by which He has referred to Himself is “The Blessed Beauty.” He has also referred to Himself as “The Ancient Beauty,” “The Veilless Beauty,” “The Manifestation of Thy beauty” and “The Day-Star of Thy beauty.” Bahá’u’lláh, in one of His prayers calls upon God by His “Beauty that shineth forth above the horizon of eternity, a Beauty before which as soon as it revealeth itself the kingdom of beauty boweth down in worship, magnifying it in ringing tones.”5 In the Writings we find God addressing Bahá’u’lláh as “My Beauty” and “Him . . . Who hath appeared in the robe of Thy most pure and august Beauty.”6

Bahá’u’lláh, addressing humankind, declares, “I . . . have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty”7 and He exhorts each of us: “Rejoice in the gladness of thine heart, that thou mayest be worthy to meet Me and to mirror forth My beauty.”8 To reflect the image of God’s “beauty” --and all of the other attributes which make Him “beautiful” --in both our inward life and outward conduct becomes, then, a central aim of our existence.

Alfred North Whitehead, one of the foremost philosophers of the twentieth century, goes so far as to claim that “the teleology [purpose] of the Universe is directed to the production of Beauty”9 and he designates it as one of the distinguishing features of civilization: “I put forward as a general definition of civilization, that a civilized society is exhibiting the five qualities of Truth, Beauty, Adventure, Art, Peace.”10

Exactly what is beauty? The dictionary definition which is most in harmony with this program states that beauty is “that quality or aggregate of qualities in a thing which gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit: physical, moral, or spiritual loveliness.”11 Whitehead expressed his admiration of “beauty of right conduct,” “intellectual beauty,” “sensible [physical] beauty,” and “moral beauty.”12

The ancient Greeks, who made an intensive study of aesthetic design, identified five component qualities of beauty: unity, order, contrast, balance, and harmony.13 The Greeks applied these principally to the fields of architecture, geometry, mathematics, and the arts. They are so fundamental and general, however, that they can be applied to all aspects of life. By doing so we can continually bring the divine attribute of “beauty,” into our inner life, our outer life, and the world through the cultivation of beautiful ethics, thoughts, words, and deeds; the construction of beautiful gardens, homes and buildings; the production of beautiful art, music, and dance; the development of beautiful relationships and Bahá’í communities--all contributing to the creation of a beautiful, new World Order, a Divine Civilization. Beauty can manifest itself even in the simplest things, such as the setting of a dinner table, the particular arrangement of books and photographs on a shelf, the selection of readings and songs chosen for the Nineteen Day Feast, the words we say, and the words we choose *not* to say. All of these apparently small acts add up to the formation of our character, our lifestyle, and the society around us. For the purposes of this program, these five principles which underlie the production of beauty--unity, order, contrast, balance, and harmony--will be applied primarily to the coordination of the thirty-six life processes delineated on the BLDH Circle, and will each be discussed in the following chapters.

To end things on a lighter note, I would like to share with you an acronym designed to help my high school students remember the components of beauty. The first letter of the five components of beauty spells BOUCH: Beauty, Order, Unity, Contrast, and Harmony. If you lose your “Balance” in life you fall and are left with a big “OUCH!”

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. Why was “the creation of beauty” chosen as one of the nine principles undergirding the BLDH program?
2. According to Whitehead, what is the purpose of the universe? Does this make sense to you? Explain.
3. What are the five component qualities of beauty identified by the Greeks? Explain the suggested acronym for remembering them.
4. How have you brought beauty into your life and the world?

CHAPTER 5: UNITY

The word “unity” comes from the Latin *unitas* meaning “one.”1 In order for our lives to express unity, all of our various spiritual, psychological, social, and physical activities, must revolve around one center; one purpose; one ultimate goal. This supreme, overarching aim of life is expressed in various ways in the Bahá’í Writings. In general, from what I understand, Bahá’u’lláh tells us that we were created to everlastingly draw nearer unto God and that this can be accomplished in several ways and through fulfilling various related purposes: by knowing, loving, and worshiping our Creator; by accepting and obeying Bahá’u’lláh, the Manifestation of God for this era; by knowing our own true Selves; by loving, serving, and teaching humanity; by promoting the oneness of humankind; by acquiring virtues; by transforming our character; by “seeing” God in His “book of creation” and caring for that creation; by continually carrying forward the advancement of civilization; by building the Kingdom of the Father on Earth; and others.2 This unity of purpose is what holds together our personal identity and character, our marriage, our family, our Bahá’í community, and, eventually, it will hold together the entire world.

All of the processes on the BLDH Circle are unified by these ultimate, inter-related ends which in turn lead to The Supreme Goal, The One Being. Thus, whatever we do, it is guided by this unity of purpose. If we buy a car, it is to enable us to better serve others and the Faith; if we buy new clothes, it is to represent the Faith and our vocation with greater dignity; if we obtain a professional degree, it is to serve humanity more fully; if we have children, it is to raise them up to remember their Lord amongst humankind; if we exercise and rest, it is to be more fit and refreshed in order to be able to show, through our actions, more love to others.

In order to ascertain the wisdom and advisability of a certain activity we should always ask ourselves, “Will this take me closer to God, or will it take me further from Him? Does this connect to my purpose in life or is it frivolous, selfish, an unnecessary luxury or wasteful?”

This theme will be discussed further in the chapter on “The Center of the BLDH Circle.”

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISUSSION**

1. As Bahá’ís, what is the single purpose around which all else revolves and which gives our lives a sense of unity and direction?
2. What are some of the ways that this purpose can be achieved?

CHAPTER 6: ORDER

Order is defined by Webster as a “regular arrangement; any methodical or established succession or harmonious relation; method; system.”1 This could be extended to include the related concept of pattern: something that repeats itself; also, the idea of organization is closely associated.

Bahá’u’lláh, in The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, exalted this attribute by designating the divine system He had come to establish as “this new World Order.”2 He, in that same Most Holy Book emphatically stated that “the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world” is “the precepts laid down by God,”3 thereby establishing “order” on the foundation of law and justice.

Alfred North Whitehead associated order with goodness and considered it a prerequisite for the attainment of excellence: “There is a natural affinity between order and goodness. It is not usual to accuse people of ‘disorderly conduct.’ Undoubtedly there are limits to the excellence of mere order. It can be overdone. But there can be no excellence except upon some basis of order.”4 Dr. Daniel C. Jordan repeatedly quoted Whitehead as having made the fascinating and profound statement that “order is the lure of beauty;”5 that is, if you focus first on establishing order in anything, beauty will soon be following behind like a fish drawn to bait.

We can apply these universal concepts of order in our family life in several ways: by establishing ground rules based on fairness; by clarifying the rights, duties and prerogatives of each person; and by establishing spiritual and physical routines and habits, for example, by planning recurring activities such as prayer, exercise, cleaning up the house and so on so that they take place at the same special time each day or week.

The Hand of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum considered “habit-forming” to be “a great asset to us”: “Our capacity for doing the same thing over and over again, until it becomes second nature, is our pillar of strength and one of the greatest factors in our progress.”6

Whitehead placed great importance on the establishment of routines: “Unless society is permeated, through and through, with routine, civilization vanishes. . .. Society requires stability and stability is the product of routine. But there are limits to routine, and it is for the discernment of these limits, and for the provision of the consequent action, that foresight is required.”7 He explained that there is “a power of conforming to routine, of supervising routine, of constructing routine, and of understanding routine both as to its internal structure and as to its external purposes.”8

If we apply this latter statement to our home life we might, for example, assure that the whole family eats dinner together (conforming), that the children’s teeth are brushed (supervising), that there is consultation regarding who will give the dog a bath and when (constructing), that an explanation is given for why we pray daily (understanding), that we demonstrate how to put things where they belong explaining each step along the way (internal structure of a routine), and that the whole family realizes that a neat and orderly home with established ways of doing things makes us feel unified and happy and that it makes our guests feel comfortable and welcome (external purpose of routines).

In relation to the phases of transformation, order is related to the “plateau” of satisfaction. By establishing order in as many departments of our life as possible, a firm launching pad is provided from which we can “launch” ourselves into a cycle of growth in some other chosen area--knowing full well, all the time, that eventually even the “launching pad” will need maintenance, repairs, and perhaps even an entirely new design.

Whitehead’s comments about the limits of routine and order, and the need for “foresight” will be discussed in the chapters on contrast, balance, and harmony.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. How is “order” defined within the BLDH program? What do “order,” “pattern,” “routine,” and “habit” all have in common?
2. What is the meaning of Whitehead’s statement, “Order is the lure of beauty”?
3. How can the quality of order be expressed through our daily routine and healthy habits? Give some examples.

CHAPTER 7: CONTRAST

Contrast is achieved when two things or processes, when compared, “exhibit noticeable differences.”1 Order alone becomes monotonous; something “different” --something “contrasting” is needed. In the words of Alfred North Whitehead: “Contrast elicits depth, and only shallow experience is possible when there is a lack of patterned contrast.”2

In reference to our need to experience both joy and sorrow in life Rúhíyyih Khánum tells us that “without extremes there is no contrast and life becomes a dull monochrome, an interminable grey day, with no shadow, to be sure, but always deprived of the glory of the sunlight.”3

For the purposes of this program, we will associate the idea of contrast with “something different,” newness, novelty, change, flux, transformation and adventure. Order is associated with permanence, stability, satisfaction, conservation, and peace. It is hardly possible to discuss the one set of ideas without considering the other. If our lives become excessively ordered, boredom sets in and we need to introduce novelty; not for the sake of change for change’s sake, but, hopefully, in consonance with our principle of unity: changing things with a lofty purpose ultimately in mind; even if it means simply making people happy, for who can put up with the routines of service to humanity without a buoyant spirit? As with beauty, even small acts can bring about that needed, refreshing, introduction of novel contrast: changing the centerpiece on the dining room table, putting on a puppet show for the first time at a Nineteen Day Feast, trading household duties, and so on.

And if things become too chaotic in our lives what is perhaps needed is a firmer foundation of order, which includes the setting of priorities. Having “too many irons in the fire” is a frequent “disorder” in the lives of Bahá’ís. It often leads to mediocrity or, worse still, the downfall of trustworthiness.

What is needed then is a delicate balance between order and contrast.

The spirit of change, and the spirit of conservation. There can be nothing real without both.4

--Alfred North Whitehead

The art of progress is to preserve order amid change, and to preserve change amid order. . ..

What is required . . . is order entering upon novelty: so that the massiveness of order does not degenerate into mere repetition; and so that the novelty is always reflected upon a background of system.5 --Alfred North Whitehead

This important question of balance will be further explored in the following chapter.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What does “contrast” contribute to the creation of a beautiful life?
2. What is the problem with having an overabundance of order? Can there be too much contrast, newness, or change in one’s life?
3. What are some ways that contrast can be brought into one’s life or the life of the community?

CHAPTER 8: BALANCE

To help us understand this life management principle, it is helpful to imagine a traditional, physical “balance” made of two pans hung from a fulcrum used to measure equal weights. This also evokes the image of blindfolded “Lady Justice” holding such a scale to render fair judgements. It wouldn't, for example, be fair to spend a great deal of time with one of our children and little with another. A useful definition of “balance” from Webster is “a state of equipoise . . . or equilibrium of any opposing forces, physical or otherwise.”1 The concept of opposing forces pushing against one another or, better still, pulling something in opposite directions, is very useful; for do we not often feel *torn* between spiritual aspirations and animal desires, between spending time at work and spending time with our family? Balance helps to keep us from going to extremes. Other definitions of balance include the ideas of “equilibrium; steadiness; stability; even adjustment.”2 These, to me, are very close to the principle of “order.” They give us a sense of permanence and organization. Surely, we want our personal and family life to be stable.

Thus far, the definitions of balance have a connotation of “twoness;” of balancing two things. But, as can be seen on the BLDH Circle, there are several aspects to be taken into account. In this respect a more complex definition of balance is helpful: “a combination of factors, elements, or the like, . . . such that the proportions are correct for a certain purpose.”3 This meaning helps us get away from the strict idea of equal amounts: of time, of money, etc. Life management becomes more like cooking: a gallon of work, a cup of high-quality time with the family, a handful of intense prayers, a dash of exercise--all can add up to a tasteful, fulfilling, *balanced* day aimed at accomplishing particular purposes.

One last variation on the meaning of balance that needs to be considered is the idea of “dynamic equilibrium” or “running balance,” as opposed to “standing balance.”4 This idea incorporates the additional dimension of movement; in our case, it is the movement towards goals--transformation. A moving Circle on a car needs to be in balance; a runner or a ballet dancer move in a chosen direction and are always in balance. If they fall, it is because they lost their “dynamic balance.” Or, consider the example of the rock or mountain climber, my favorite image. S/he is moving towards lofty heights, the peak being the ultimate goal. S/he seldom lifts both feet at once. One is used as the stabilizing foundation while the other is suspended in air grasping for a new, higher foothold which then becomes the new foundation while the other foot goes searching for new heights. The climb is composed of these small carefully chosen steps. In our lives there are times when our family and work serve as our stabilizing force while we are engaged in an intensive project aimed at carrying forward the Cause of God. At other times the Faith is our sustaining foundation when we are out of work, searching for a new job; or during stressful transitions in our family life such as moving from one city to another, death, illness, separation, and others. These definitions of balance delineated above can be applied to and can enhance your understanding of the following discussion.

When we apply the concept of balance, equilibrium, and due proportion to the material field of technology we obtain smoothly operating Circles, gears, flyCircles, household appliances, and machinery in general. When we implement the concept of balance to the intake of nutrients in the realm of biology, we have healthy plants, animals, and human bodies.

The outer, physical causal factor in disease . . . is a disturbance in the balance, the proportionate equilibrium of all those elements of which the human body is composed.5 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

When balance is applied to the realm of aesthetics and the arts, beauty is enhanced. When we apply it to the social realm, we achieve a society based on equality and justice. When we apply this important concept to our personal lives, we enjoy a sense of spiritual, mental, and emotional balance; and a high level of physical health; our households run smoothly; there is, in our homes, a feeling of fairness and equity, of unrushed, graceful living. And someday, when the entire human race applies balance to the “whole”; to the physical, human, and spiritual realms of life, we will achieve “ecological balance” in the deepest and grandest sense of the term.

What are some of the symptoms of imbalance in our personal lives? Dr. Agnes Ghaznavi, former Bahá’í Continental Counselor and psychotherapist points out a few in the general population:

Some [people] are workaholics; some are infatuated with their spouse or partner; some adults’ loyalty towards their parents take abnormal proportions; some are steeped in materialism and cannot free themselves from the craving for possessions, property, or shares, and so have no time to give to human relationships; some are bigoted and fanatical in their beliefs. These are just a few of the causes of imbalance.6

I would add a couple of other symptoms. One is “health fanaticism” --an over concern for body building, exercise, vitamins, diet, etc.--dedicated to developing and preserving something which is doomed to extinction anyway, at the expense of developing “soul powers,” i.e., virtues--the only “possessions” we actually take with us to the next life. Also, the disproportionate attention given to pastimes: hobbies, sports, vacations, etc. Work is degraded to serving simply as the money-machine for attaining these ends. Dr. Ghaznavi goes on to pinpoint an imbalance to which Bahá’ís can be especially prone:

A different aspect of being out of balance is the exclusive zeal and exaggeration of some people in devoting all their free time to ministering to the needs of a beloved cause. These people often use the word “service” when speaking of their exclusive passion. With time, though, it appears that they are having more and more difficulties in other areas of their lives--with their work, or children, or marriage partner.7

Some of the more severe consequences of imbalance include: becoming inactive in or even dropping out of the Faith, divorce, drugs, alcoholism, suicide, bankruptcy, disease, mental illness, and violence.

Bahá’u’lláh, in advising us not to go to extremes, uses the term “moderation” --a term closely related to “balance” in meaning. Here are just a few of His gem-like counsels:

Whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence.8

Whoso cleaveth to justice, can, under no circumstances, transgress the limits of moderation.9

If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation.10

In all matters moderation is desirable. If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a source of evil.11

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in his discussion of health, applied the principle of balance not only to the intake of nutrients but also to the equilibrium of other “elements” --moral, ethical, and social in nature:

It is certainly the case that sins are a potent cause of physical ailments. If humankind were free from the defilements of sin and waywardness, and lived according to a natural, inborn equilibrium, without following wherever their passions led, it is undeniable that diseases would no longer take the ascendant, nor diversify with such intensity.

. . . With this [eating food compounded of many and differing ingredients], and with the perpetrating of vile and ignoble acts, his attention was engrossed, and he abandoned the temperance and moderation of a natural way of life. The result was the engendering of diseases both violent and diverse.12

As we meditate on the BLDH Circle we are helped to visualize the opposing yet complimentary forces in our lives and to gain clearer insights into the significance of the principles given to us in the Bahá’í writings. For example, the Circle illustrates the need to balance the opposing spiritual and material quadrants, a theme emphasized by the Master.

Man has two powers, and his development two aspects. One power is connected with the material world and by it he is capable of material advancement. The other power is spiritual and through its development his inner, potential nature is awakened. These powers are like two wings. Both must be developed, for flight is impossible with one wing. Praise be to God: material advancement has been evident in the world but there is need of spiritual advancement in like proportion.13

We can also clearly see the opposing social and Psychological Quadrants. The beloved Guardian tells us that these, too, need equilibrium: “We believe in balance in all things; we believe in moderation in all things--we must not be too emotional, nor cut and dried and lacking in feeling. . .. Very few people, as you as a psychologist know, have attained perfect equilibrium in their minds or their lives--their acts--the same is certainly true of the Bahá’ís . . .”14

The BLDH Circle represents Bahá’í life as having four major areas of endeavor with thirty-six key, sub-processes all of which need to be coordinated and balanced. When we look at the whole multi-faceted Circle, we can call to mind the advice of Shoghi Effendi: “Bahá’ís should seek to be many-sided, normal and well balanced, mentally and spiritually.”15

As desirable as achieving balance is, it also presents a perplexing question, which, I believe, plagues us all. By giving adequate attention and time to all aspects of our life, how do we keep from getting spread so thin that we are simply satisfying the minimum needs of each area instead of producing something of outstanding quality, whether it be a relationship, a Feast, a teaching plan, or a work of art? A thoughtful response to this issue was given by Ian Semple, former member of the Universal House of Justice:

It is a great problem in individual spiritual growth for the aspiring follower of the Way to distinguish between moderation and mediocrity. We are called to heights of perfection, higher than we can contemplate, but are exhorted to moderation in all things. How can this be?

It is, I believe, but one aspect of the need for the individual to promote in himself the growth of all virtues and capacities, but in due balance one with another. When they get out of balance a distortion of character is produced.16

But how then, do we achieve excellence in all things? The answer seems to be found in the example of the mountain climber who does not progress with *both* feet *simultaneously--nor* does he leave one foot behind? He concentrates on placing the free foot, barely noticing the stable one, and then vice versa. Thus, each aspect of our lives receives attention at a certain time, during a certain period, during a certain epoch in our lives. The age-old wisdom of the Bible expresses well this enlarged vision of balance and many of the other principles presented thus far:

For everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose unto heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die;

A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

A time to kill, and a time to heal;

A time to break down, and a time to build up;

A time to weep, and a time to laugh;

A time to mourn, and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together

A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to get, and a time to lose;

A time to keep, and a time to cast away;

A time to rend, and a time to sew;

A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate;

A time of war, and a time of peace.17

The BLDH Circle can be used to see this broadened view of balance on several different levels. On a grand, over-generalized scale, we can see life beginning in the Physical Quadrant. During womb-life, infancy, and much of childhood the focus is on biological growth, development, and maturation--the Physical Quadrant. During the “school-years” the major focus is on psychological/intellectual quadrant. After this period young graduates are then able to focus on the social quadrant: choosing a life-time partner for eternity and bringing children into this world, and starting a family --crucial matters based, for the first time in a person’s life, on choice instead of destiny. And, finally, come the twilight years when our focus is on the Spiritual Quadrant. It is a time of life when many of our friends and family members are gone, when we no longer have to worry about earning a living and developing professionally. Naturally our thoughts turn more towards the spiritual aspects of this life and the afterlife.

On smaller scales we can apply this same idea of giving certain aspects more devoted attention without losing our “foothold” in other areas. For example, before making a long teaching trip, it would be wise to spend an extra amount of time on strengthening family relationships by showing an abundant amount of love. When physically ill, we need to dedicate ourselves to rest, diet, prayer, and thoughts of healing. During weekends, more time can be given to teaching and leisure. In the early morning, attention is given to prayer and meditation; and so on. Each quadrant on the Circle and each of the separate processes should receive special attention at different times resulting in a well-balanced day, week, month, year, and life in general with all of its various phases and stages. Techniques to facilitate this will be presented in the chapter on time management.

To conclude this chapter on balance, I think it is necessary that we step back for a moment and look at the “wholeness of our life” within the context of a larger whole--the age, epoch, and teaching plan in which we are living, and even the unified whole of this life and the next. Bahá’u’lláh tells us: “Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.”18 This exhortation demands that our particular “mix” and balance of the elements on the Circle should be different than that of the Bahá’ís of past or future ages, epochs, and plans. This means that there can be no perfect balance for all peoples at all times. In fact, a certain “disequilibrium” is needed in order to meet the needs of our age; in order to emphasize some things more than others, like the pianist who strikes some notes harder than others at different times during the various movements of a musical composition--at one moment we are relaxed, at the next we feel the tension building as a transition to another movement begins.

Whitehead explores this seeming paradox:

It is a curious fact, somewhat lost sight of in Greek thought, that, not withstanding the law of the Golden Mean between contrasted components, yet a certain excessiveness seems a necessary element in all greatness. In some direction or other we must devote ourselves beyond what would be warranted by the analysis of pure reason.

The proper balance depends on the character of the epoch in question and on the capacities of particular individuals.19

Thus, as we contemplate the BLDH Circle, we see that some people have more talent in one area than in another and will naturally devote to that aspect a greater amount of their time.

And as we pursue the development of our personal capacities for the service of the Cause and humankind, we have the interpretations of the Master and the Guardian and the guidance of the Universal House of Justice to steer our understanding of Bahá’u’lláh’s counsel to “be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age.” Shoghi Effendi repeatedly reminds us that we are living in the Formative Age, not the Golden Age; that we must build the Administrative Order and bring in the masses, not spend our time in frivolous pursuits. And we hear the cry of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ringing in our ears:

Now is the time of laying the foundation. Now must we gather brick, stone, wood, iron, and other building materials. Now is not the time of decoration. . .. Teach the Cause. Teach. Teach. Convey the Message. Awaken the souls. . .. When the “Most Important” work is before our sight, we must let go the “Important” one. . .. While we are carrying this load we cannot carry any other load!20

Trying not to be fanatical yet faithful to these words, each of us must try to find our own proper balance, taking into account our talents, our opportunities, our circumstances and the needs of the Faith. Certainly here, too, we find unity in diversity for is it not true that there is a larger balance that only God can see; He who sees both this life and the recompense of the next? Didn’t the Martyrs, too, lead balanced lives in the larger sense? Didn’t those who went blazing through this life, burning themselves up, knowing that their time was short, see the larger balance: The Báb, Quddús, Mullá Husayn, Táhirih, Badí, Thomas Breakwell, Shoghi Effendi, Martha Root, Dorothy Baker, Dr. Muhajer, Dr. Hidáyatu'llah Ahmadiyyih, Raul Pavón, Dan Jordan; just to name a few?

This then brings us to the final theme of the need for “harmony”: harmony with the needs of our age, with the goals of the teaching plans, with the people in our lives, etc.--a theme which will be discussed in the following chapter.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. How is “balance” related to “fairness”? Give an example from your life.
2. What opposing forces in our lives need to be balanced?
3. How can the principle of proportionality contribute to the achievement of a balanced life style?
4. What is the meaning of “dynamic balance”? Give an example of how this concept can be applied to life management.
5. What are some of the causes of imbalance in our lives?
6. How is the concept of moderation related to balance? Give an example.
7. The design of the BLDH Circle shows us that what aspects of life need to be balanced? Give examples.
8. What do you think Whitehead means when he says that “a certain excessiveness seems a necessary element in all greatness”? Can you offer some examples from lives of great people? From your life?
9. How does the following Biblical verse help us to understand how to fulfill the need for achieving excellence in a particular aspect of our lives while simultaneously meeting our need for balance and stability: “For everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose unto heaven”?
10. How do the special needs of the historical moment in which we are living affect the particular “mix” of activities that we incorporate into a well-balanced life?

CHAPTER 9: HARMONY

In music “harmony” means “an agreeable blending of notes.” It can also be defined as “the just adaptation of parts to each other in any system or combination of things, or in things intended to form a connected whole;” also as “such an agreement between the different parts of a design or composition as to produce unity of effect or an aesthetically pleasing whole.”1 Thus, here, in our discussion of the last basic principle of the BLDH program, we have touched again on the concepts of “whole-part relations,” “unity,” and the “production of beauty.”

The difference between harmony and balance is not easy to isolate. Balance appears to aim at having the right parts and in the right amounts or proportions. Harmony seems to focus more on the aesthetic blending, integration, and mutual adaptation of those parts. A choir, for instance, may have a good balance of sopranos, tenors, baritones, and bases, but the further challenge is to get them to sing a four-part harmony. A sports team may have a well-rounded, balanced set of players, but the key is to get them to play together harmoniously.

Harmony also goes a step beyond just balancing opposites to the extent of integrating them into one entity. For example, Bahá’u’lláh, explaining the nature of the Manifestation of God, states that “in His person solidity and fluidity have been joined and combined.” He then gives a description of His “immovable constancy” and “restlessness” in the path of God.2 Shoghi Effendi describes how “in the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.”3 His example calls us to harmonize many seemingly opposite qualities and elements which Whitehead explains, “stand to each other in mutual requirement.”4 For your meditation, here is a sampling:

joy - sorrow

attraction to good - proneness to evil

call to “great deeds” - enjoyment of life’s trivialities

our Godliness - our worldliness

our divine nature - our animal nature

our heart - our mind

being spiritually-minded - being practical

call to arise, to sacrifice to teach the Faith - exhortation to give family requirements priority over teaching

our need for order - our need for novelty

our proclivity towards sin - our love of God’s forgiveness and mercy

the tears of our suffering - the fire of our love

our desire for freedom from restrictions - our need for obedience to the laws

our love of permanence - our longing for change

our need to be alone at times - our delight in the company of others

meekness and humility - dignity and nobility

k to sacrifice your health for the Cause - it’s ok to preserve your health to serve the Cause

laughter - earnestness

yearning and longing desire - contentment and gratitude

impatience to teach - patience while teaching

call to excellence in all things - moderation in all things

broad academic study - depth in knowledge of Teachings

Regarding the last pair of disparate activities, the Guardian (through his secretary) said, “One might liken Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings to a sphere; there are points that are poles apart, and in between the thoughts and doctrines that unite them.”5 The BLDH Circle illustrates this sphere, the “points poles apart,” and what holds them together: the gravitational pull of the Center--our love for Bahá’u’lláh and His Revelation.

Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum sees this harmonization, integration, and blending of opposed elements as a smooth linking together: “There are grand opposites in life, grand extremes, and yet these opposites and extremes are always smoothly linked together, work together, indeed produce the state of balance which makes the universe so ordered and perfect.”6

This reference to the orderliness of the universe brings us to an additional dimension of harmony. One dimension is the harmonious combination of the parts within a whole, for example, the elements listed above which apply to our individual lives. The other dimension is the harmonious connection between this whole--our life--and other wholes at all hierarchical levels: mineral, vegetable, animal, human, and divine. Hence, our lives need to be in harmony with nature, our spouse, our family, our co-workers, the Bahá’í community, our ideals, the goals of the teaching plan, and the needs of our epoch and age.

In regards to human relations Bahá’u’lláh declares: “Under all conditions, whether in adversity or at ease, whether honoured or afflicted, this Wronged One hath directed all men to show forth love, affection, compassion and harmony.”7 And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, for the sake of husbands and wives, begs God to “cause them to become the signs of harmony and unity until the end of time.”8

In the realm of harmony with ultimate purposes, Whitehead associates this with peace: “Peace . . . is the harmony of the soul’s activities with ideal aims that lie beyond any personal satisfaction.”9

Kazantzakis compares man to the animal kingdom to clarify the relationships amongst sin, freedom, liberty, divine law, and harmony:

O divine rhythm. Seeds in the ground, birds, stars--all obey. Only man lifts his hand in rebellion and wants to transgress the law and convert obedience into freedom. This is why he alone of all God’s creatures is able to sin. To sin what does that mean? It means to destroy harmony.10

Together with the birds and stars I yoked myself to the eternal Circle and for the first time in my life, I believe, felt what true liberty is: to place oneself beneath God’s--in other words harmony’s--yoke.11

Thus harmony, as applied to our personal, family, and community life, has various levels of implication: scheduling local Bahá’í projects around regional and national events; programming activities which are in tune with God’s principles (like socializing with spiritually-minded rather than worldly-minded people), planning activities which complement one another (like eating nutritional food and strengthening family bonds through conversation), preventing conflicting activities from occurring at the same place and time (like family members in the same room – one trying to study, one cracking open nuts to make cookies, and the others practicing a dance, all at the same time); and so on.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What does “harmony” mean? How is it different from “balance”? Give an example.
2. In the Faith, what helps us to unite and harmonize opposing elements in our lives?
3. In the last example about family members wanting to carry out incompatible activities in the same room at the same time, how could harmony be established?

# SECTION II: THE CIRCLE OF BAHÁ’Í LIFE IN DYNAMIC HARMONY

This section will familiarize you with the historical roots of the BLDH Circle, its organization, its symbolism and its uses. You will see how this tool can be used to integrate the basic principles presented in the previous section and the key life processes to be explored in the next section. As with all the sections of this book, I again recommend that you keep the BLDH Circle at hand while you read in order to gradually internalize its meaning and symbolism.

CHAPTER 10: THE NATIVE AMERICAN MEDICINE WHEEL

The BLDH Circle is based on the Native American Indian Medicine Wheel. It is a greatly modified version to be sure, but the basic purpose--the enhancement of harmony, transformation, well-being, and oneness--has remained the same. The circle is an ancient symbol found in some form of the graphic art, dances, dwellings, and stone structures of nearly every tribe in North and South America.1 A basic, circular, stone Medicine Wheel consists of thirty-six separate stones arranged to form a large circle containing a center stone surrounded closely by an inner circle of stones out from which radiate four lines of stones corresponding with the four cardinal directions: “The Creator stone, or symbol, is the center of the Medicine Wheel as the Creator is the center of all life, always creating without beginning or ending, always moving, always continuing. From this center radiates the energy that creates all the rest of the Circle.”2 Each of the other stones also has symbolic meaning such as elements of nature, seasons, and spiritual qualities. Twenty thousand similar stone Circles existed in the Americas before European colonization:

These Medicine Wheels served many purposes for the Native people of the Americas. They were the ceremonial centers of culture, astronomical laboratories, and places people would come to mark the times and changes in their own lives as well as the life of the earth. They were places to pray, meditate, contemplate, strengthen your connection with nature, and come to a higher degree of understanding of yourself and your relationship with all the creation. Medicine Wheels were usually placed on areas where the energy of the earth could be strongly felt, and their use in ceremony made this energy get even stronger.3

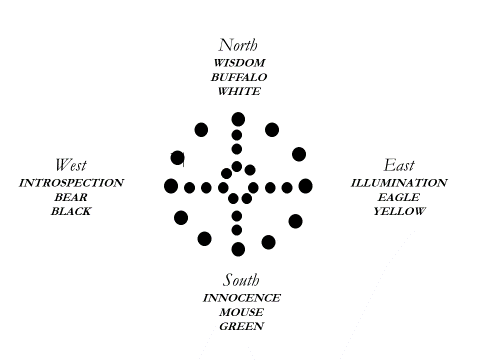


Figure 10.1: Diagram of a Native American Indian Medicine Wheel made of stones4

Consequently, Medicine Wheel areas became what people now call vortexes: places of intense earth energy and healing. The new areas where Medicine Wheels have been built are serving the same function.5

The BLDH Circle is based on the graphic Native American Indian Medicine Wheels which have the same purposes as the stone Circles but which are more contemplative and less ceremonial in nature. The four lines or quadrants contained in the Native American Indian Circles can symbolize various things:

the four grandfathers, the four winds, the four directions, the four stages of life and many other things that can be talked about in sets of four. Just like a mirror can be used to see things not normally seen (like behind us, or around a corner), the Medicine Wheel can be used to help us see or understand things we can’t quite see or understand because they are ideas and not physical objects.6



Figure 10.2: A painting of a Native American Indian Medine Circle showing the four seasons and other symbols7

The BLDH version contains the four aspects of human nature: spiritual, physical, psychological, and social--the same four used on many Native American Indian Medicine Wheels but organized and sub-divided differently.8

The Medicine Wheel has helped me tremendously in the organization and transformation of my life. I will be forever indebted to Native American Indians for teaching me about this valuable tool. Because this program may be of particular interest to them, in Appendix 4 I have told in more detail my experience of learning about the Circle and my vision of the future of the Native American Indian Bahá’ís.

During my continued investigation of the Medicine Wheel, I was delighted to come across the writings of Sun Bear, a sacred teacher of Chippewa descent. I felt a great harmony with his teachings and his vision--so much so that they renewed my hope that perhaps the BLDH Circle could serve as a small contribution to the spread of the Medicine Wheel as a very powerful and practical symbol for wholeness, transformation, beauty and the other universal qualities of life presented earlier:

In the late 1970’s, Spirit gave me [Sun Bear] a powerful vision. In this vision I saw a hilltop bare of trees. A soft breeze was blowing, gently moving the prairie grass. I saw a circle of rocks that came out like the spokes of a Circle. Inside this large circle was another circle of rocks, nearer to the center. As I was looking at this vision, I knew this was the buffalo skull, the skull of the Grandmother. . .. The people I saw . . . were singing songs for the healing of the Earth Mother. A leader among them was saying, “Let the Medicine of the sacred circle prevail. Let many people across the land come to this circle and make prayers for the healing of the Earth Mother. Let the circles of the Medicine Wheel come back. . ..”

So many people have danced with the Circle. For some this has been a brief whirl; for others a dance that has profoundly changed their whole lives. As with all dances, the steps change a little with each dancer. Some people have danced with the Circle so powerfully that their steps have added richness and variety to the original vision. That is all good.9

It appears that the vision of Sun Bear is growing and that the Medicine Wheel is being found to be useful in various ways by a variety of peoples. For instance, the Four Worlds International Institute in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada used the Circle as a conceptual organizer in their efforts to eliminate alcohol and drug abuse in Canadian Native Societies.10 At the Harvard School of Education faculty members have “adapted the Circle to illustrate relationships between disciplines.”11 In *The Seven Habits of Effective People* Stephen Covey uses a medicine-wheel-like diagram to visualize his “Four Dimensions of Renewal” which are the same as those found on the BLDH Circle.12

The next chapter will consider the BLDH Circle within the context of a similar phenomenon called a “mandala.”

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. Stone Medicine Wheels consist of thirty-six stones. How are they arranged?
2. In Sun Bear’s vision, at the center of the stone Circle there was a buffalo skull. Why would this make an appropriate center for the plains Indians?
3. In the times before the European colonization, how were the stone Medicine Wheels used by the people?
4. How is the BLDH Circle different from the Native American Indian Medicine Wheels? How are they the same?
5. What do you think of Sun Bear’s vision?

CHAPTER 11: UNIVERSAL MANDALAS

I learned about the “mandala” (Sanskrit for “circle”) long after the BLDH Circle had gone through various revisions. Previous to my investigations I had only been familiar with the widely known, black and white, ying and yang, circular symbol, and some of the mandala-like Buddhist yantras. Whether the mandala is a form of the Native American Indian Medicine Wheel or vice versa, depends on who you talk to. As it turns out though, the use of circles and foursomes to organize knowledge is a fairly, cross-cultural phenomena. Carl G. Jung described it as “probably the simplest model of a concept of wholeness, and one which spontaneously arises in the mind as a representation of the struggle and reconciliation of opposites.”1 He considered the mandala to be one of the universal archetypes of humanity’s collective unconscious as manifested in the dances and circular images which are drawn, printed, or modeled in nearly all societies. He traveled around the world investigating universal symbols and found the mandala image in Hindu culture, Tibetan Buddhism, Christian symbolism, alchemy (“the synthesis of the four elements [fire, water, earth, air] which are forever tending to fall apart”), Native American Indian cultures, Dervish (Islamic) monasteries, the visions of Old Testament prophets (Ezekiel, Daniel, Enoch), the “emblems of the seraphim which were transferred to the evangelists” and as spontaneously occurring in dreams and imaginations of modern individuals.2 I also find it fascinating that Stonehenge in Wiltshire, England is composed of concentric circles of stones.

Yaya Diallo in *The Healing Drum: African Wisdom Teachings* describes the traditional, mandala-like dances of his tribe:

The significance of the circle in the Minianka community dances deserves to be appreciated.

The circle expresses cultural values. The first value is continuity: no one can say where the circle begins or where it ends. All the people, young and old, are included in this continuum. The circle also expresses equality. All on the circumference are equidistant from the center, and all have a right to be in the circle.3

Jung describes the graphic form of the mandala as:

a circle, more especially a magic circle, and this form of symbol is not only to be found all through the East, but also among us [Europeans]; mandalas are amply represented in the Middle Ages. The specifically Christian ones come from the earlier Middle Age. Most of them show Christ in the centre, with the four evangelists, or their symbols, at the cardinal points. This conception must be a very ancient one because Horus was represented with his four sons in the same way by the Egyptians. . .. For the most part, the mandala form is that of a flower, cross, or Circle, with a distinct tendency toward four as the basis of the structure.4

Regarding the common “fourness” of mandalas Jung says that “very frequently they contain a quaternity or a multiple of four, in the form of a cross, a star, a square, an octagon, etc.”5 It is interesting to note the similarity of the comments of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on the symbolism of the cross:

As for the symbols of the cross, appointed in former times: Know verily, that the cross form is a wonderful figure and consists of two right lines placed crosswise--one perpendicular to the other--and this figure exists in all things.

Meditate upon these words and pay attention to the tissue in all existing substances, either plant, animal or man, and thou wilt see that they all are formed of the cross figure or two crosswise lines. Consider this intently with true meditation. Then thou wilt be taught by the Holy Ghost that it is for this reason that God hath chosen this symbol to be displayed as the token of sacrifice in all periods of the ages.6

Concerning the center of mandalas, Jung found that in both Eastern and Western versions it commonly expresses “a God-image, namely the image of Deity unfolding in the world, in nature, and in man” and shows the connection between “the human essence and the divine.” 7 He also relates the center with the concept of the Self explaining that its basic motif is:

the premonition of a centre of personality, a kind of central point within the psyche, to which everything is related, by which everything is arranged, and which is itself a source of energy. The energy of the central point is manifested in the almost irresistible compulsion and urge to become what one is, just as every organism is driven to assume the form that is characteristic of its nature, no matter what the circumstances. This centre is not felt or thought of as the ego but, if one may so express it, as the self. Although the centre is represented by an innermost point, it is surrounded by a periphery containing everything that belongs to the self--the paired opposites that make up the total personality. . .. The self, though on the one hand simple, is on the other hand an extremely composite thing, a “conglomerate soul,” to use the Indian expression.8

In the introduction to her *Mystery of Mandalas*, a captivating and inspiring collection of mandala images, German painter, Heita Copony, describes the components and dynamics of a typical mandala:

There are three principles of order to be found in the structure of a mandala: the center, the radiation emanating from the center, and the periphery of the circle. The center represents the mysterious spiritual force, the birth place of all existence in space and time. The emanation streaming from the center works outward toward the periphery of the circle, uniting the inner with the outer, and then moves from the periphery back to the innermost central point. So the entire mandala is concentrated in its central point, from which all movement emanates and to which everything leads. The central point appears as the beginning and the end of all possible ways. . .. The outer circle is to be understood as the border which protectively embraces the sacred site.9

In his psychotherapeutical work, Professor Jung noted that individuals who are “in conditions of psychic dissociation or disorientation,” for instance, in children whose parents are going through a divorce or in adults who “are confronted with the problem of opposites in human nature and are consequently disoriented,” spontaneously create pictures of mandalas. He explains that this process has therapeutic benefits because “the severe pattern imposed by a circular image of this kind compensates the disorder and confusion of the psychic state--namely, through the construction of a central point to which everything is related, or by a concentric arrangement of the disordered multiplicity and of contradictory and irreconcilable elements.” 10 He explains that “a rearranging of the personality is involved, a kind of new centering . . . They [the mandalas] then have the purpose of reducing confusion to order . . . At all events they express order, balance, and wholeness. Patients themselves often emphasize the beneficial or soothing effect of such pictures.” 11

Of course, as an educator, I ask myself, “Why should we wait for personal crises to benefit from mandalas and Medicine Wheels? Why not consciously use them in a regular, purposive, *preventative* way, for regaining balance and harmony *before* a breakdown occurs?”

As you can imagine, after I began to investigate mandalas and the uses of visualization tools in the work of Jung and others, I gained a deeper understanding of why I was so naturally attracted to the Medicine Wheel concept. I only wish that I would have come upon the material on mandalas much earlier in my development of the BLDH Circle; I could have saved myself a lot of mental puzzlement. Many of the elements and dynamics described above, I intuitively included in the BLDH Circle, but at first, I had no conception whatsoever of an inner and outer circle, nor did I know what the center was. All of this unfolded over time, the images and counsels in the Bahá’í writings providing a rich source of ideas.

Although the term “mandala” seems to be more universally known and used, I have, nevertheless, used the term “circle” in this program in order to distinguish from Eastern mandalas and Native American Medicine Wheels.

The work of Jung and other investigators in the fields of psychology, holistic medicine, and education have helped legitimize the use of the Medicine Wheel concept as a professional community or personal tool. In the next chapter the scriptural, symbolic, and scientific bases for the particular conceptualization and organization of the BLDH Circle will be presented.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What does the word “mandala” mean in Sanskrit?
2. The use of the circle, the cross, and foursomes has been found in what cultures?
3. In the African Minianka community circle dances, how does the circle of people symbolize continuity? How does it symbolize equality?
4. According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, what has the symbol of the cross signified “in all periods of all ages”? How could the crossing of the lines forming the quadrants in the center of the BLDH Circle symbolize part of the process of self-transformation?
5. Carl G. Jung relates the mandala to the concept of the self. In this concept, what does the center represent? How does it function?
6. Heita Copony describes three principles of order found in the mandala. What are they? What does the center represent according to Copony?
7. How does Jung explain the beneficial and soothing effects his patients often experienced when they drew mandalas as therapy for psychic disorientation or disassociation?

CHAPTER 12: THE PARTS OF THE BLDH CIRCLE

This chapter will further explain the particular symbolic, scriptural, and scientific bases of the BLDH Circle and how it has been used to integrate fundamental principles and processes. The principles were presented in Section I. The carefully selected, key life processes will be explained briefly here and more thoroughly in Sections III-VI.

**THE CIRCLE**

The circular shape expresses the qualities of wholeness, oneness, unity, and interconnectedness. (See Appendix I.) None of the processes outlined on the BLDH Circle can be completely isolated. We are usually thinking, doing, relating to others, and feeling all at the same time. The wholeness has been divided into four quadrants for the purpose of conceptual clarity. The divisions allow us to focus on any of the key processes in isolation from the others; to analyze it; evaluate it; and, as research has shown, due to its partial autonomy, improve the targeted process.

**JUSTIFICATION OF THE FOUR QUADRANTS**

The four quadrants representing the four aspects of human nature as they appear on many Native American Indian Medicine Wheels are: spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental (See Appendix 1.1 or 1.2). I have combined the emotional and mental aspects into the psychological dimension and I added the “social” dimension in order to increase comprehensiveness. This is only one way of analyzing human beings. There are many other ways used by various philosophers, theorists, psychologists, and religious leaders. I do not believe that there is *one best way* of describing human nature or reality in general. Each description or conceptualization is like a map. One region can have a variety of maps depending on what you look at: geography, topography, population, political boundaries, highways, agricultural production, etc. Each map illumines a particular aspect of the one region. Another example is a building. One drawing can show you the facade; what it will look like from the outside. Other drawings can show, story by story, the floor plans, or the electrical circuitry, or the plumbing, or the air conditioning, or the heating duct work, and so on. Each drawing represents a reality, is helpful, but no single drawing can show everything. Thus, the Medicine Wheel can be considered as one possible model which can be changed and adapted to meet various purposes. It represents the nature of a human being--the most complex entity in the creation--an entity which lends itself to a variety of conceptual and analytical classifications and schemata. For instance, UNICEF, in its definition of health refers to “physical, mental and social well-being”1 while UNESCO describes the “spiritual, moral and material advancement of the whole human being.”2 Nikos Kazantzakis utilizes the traditional trilogy: body, mind, and soul.3 Professors Daniel C. Jordan and Donald T. Streets refer to the “biological” and “psychological” aspects of human potential. They divide psychological potential into five sub-categories: psychomotor, perceptual, cognitive, affective and volitional.4 Alfred North Whitehead states that every existing entity “is essentially bipolar, physical and mental.”5

I have chosen to maintain the original four categories with the addition of “social” to “emotional” because they are comprehensive enough to subsume most of the categories mentioned above. A couple of the limitations of this classification system will be discussed as we proceed.

I also used the four categories--spiritual, physical, psychological, and social—because they are very much in harmony with many of the Bahá’í writings. For example, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speaks of “spiritual health” and “physical health”6 and, as mentioned previously, He refers to the higher, spiritual nature and the lower, material nature of man.7 For this reason I placed the Spiritual Quadrant at the top of the BLDH Circle and the Physical Quadrant at the bottom.

Regarding our emotional nature, the Bahá’í writings often utilize the term “heart.” Bahá’u’lláh, in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, states that His Most Great Name “bringeth rapture to the heart” and He enjoins us to recite the verses of God “in such wise as to captivate the hearts of those yet wrapped in slumber”.8 The Báb describes the emotional consequences of remembering and extolling Bahá’u’lláh: “God will cause your hearts to be dilated with joy, and do ye not wish your hearts to be in such a blissful state?”9 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recommends singing prayers together in “a sweet voice that touches the heart.”10

In reference to the psychological or mental aspect of human nature Bahá’u’lláh speaks of those who are “fair-minded” and have “inquiring minds.”11 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to the “mental faculties” as “properties of the soul”12 and “the mind” as the “supreme emblem of God” which “stands first in the order of creation and first in rank, taking precedence over all created things;”13 He also refers to our mental capacity as the “intellect,” “the power of intellectual investigation,” the “acquisition of higher knowledge,” and “the ideal endowment of scientific investigation.”14

Using an expanded scheme, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that man’s “nature is threefold: animal, human and divine. The animal nature is darkness; the heavenly is light in light.”15 In this respect the BLDH Circle can be seen as having three levels. Our animal nature is represented by the lower Physical Quadrant, our human nature by the middle Social Quadrant and Psychological Quadrant, and our divine nature by the upper Spiritual Quadrant. This same, three-level concept corresponds to three of the categories of spirit delineated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: the animal spirit (our lower nature), the human spirit (which all people have [the Master says that “the mind is the power of the human spirit”]), and the spirit of faith (not possessed by everyone) which corresponds to the Spiritual Quadrant.16

If we allow the star-center of the Circle to symbolize the soul, the following statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá captures a fundamental dynamic of the four quadrants and their center: “When man does not open his *mind* and *hear*t to the blessing of the *spirit*, but turns his *soul* towards the *material* side, towards the bodily part of his nature, then is he fallen from his high place and he becomes inferior to the inhabitants of the lower animal kingdom”17 (emphasis added).

In one of the Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, He describes Bahá’í marriage as the “mutual attachment of *mind* and *heart*” and He counsels husband and wife to be “united both *physically* and *spiritually*”18 (emphasis added).

**THE VIRTUES OF THE FOUR QUADRANTS**

Because the BLDH Circle is action-oriented, I have chosen not to include the listing of corresponding virtues. The focus is on *how* to acquire virtues. Nevertheless, in order to be comprehensive, I have decided to include a brief discussion of this theme in order to show how the Circle can also help us to focus our attention on the development of particular categories of virtues.

Some virtues apply to all four quadrants such as love, responsibility, and trustworthiness. Others tend to be more in one quadrant than another. For example, Bahá’u’lláh has given us a beautiful set of virtues that are oriented more towards the Spiritual Quadrant--our relationship with God. In this passage it is important to note that Bahá’u’lláh refers to virtues and attributes as “acts” not just ideals. A virtue which stays in the realm of potentiality is only a possibility, but when it “ingresses” into our habitual, daily activities, it becomes a true virtue in the sight of Bahá’u’lláh. After describing steadfastness in the Cause of God as the “king of all acts” Bahá’u’lláh explains that:

the virtues and attributes pertaining unto God are all evident and manifest, and have been mentioned and described in all the heavenly Books. Among them are

trustworthiness,

truthfulness,

purity of heart while communing with God,

forbearance,

resignation to whatever the Almighty hath decreed,

contentment with the things His Will hath provided,

patience, nay, thankfulness in the midst of tribulation, and,

complete reliance, in all circumstances, upon Him.

These rank, according to the estimate of God, among the highest and most laudable of all acts. All other acts are, and will ever remain, secondary and subordinate unto them. (this author’s arrangement)19

In the psychological/intellectual quadrant we might include: justice, dividing truth from falsehood, fairness, equity, uprightness, ethicality, detachment, frankness, reasonableness, knowledgeableness, and intelligence.

In the social quadrant we might place: love, kindness, friendliness, sympathy, empathy, sincerity, pity, compassion, morality, understanding, forgiveness, magnanimity, generosity, spontaneity, and warm-heartedness.

In the Physical Quadrant we could focus on: cleanliness, orderliness, stamina, perseverance, thrift, efficiency, attention to detail, thoroughness, practical-mindedness, being hard-working, and providing for family.

**THE COLORS OF THE FOUR QUADRANTS**

The colors of the BLDH Circle were added at the request of my high school students. They facilitate the interiorization of the Circle and deepen its symbolic and metaphorical meaning. Researchers have investigated the effects, symbolism, and associations of color.20 I have chosen the simplest colors and the more obvious symbolic meanings.

For the Spiritual Quadrant, which contains essential activities for firmness in the Covenant, I have chosen yellow in order to symbolize the light of the spirit and the heaven of divine guidance. Bahá’u’lláh refers to *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* as “a Book which hath become the Lamp of the Eternal unto the world” and “the Dawning-place of God’s commandments.”21 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us:

Look ye not upon the creatures, turn ye to their Creator. See ye not the never-yielding people, see but the Lord of Hosts. Gaze ye not down upon the dust, gaze upward at the shining sun, which hath caused every patch of darksome earth to glow with light.22

Green was chosen for the Physical Quadrant. It stands for Earth, the source of our wealth, our physical well-being and our animal inheritance. While our hearts, minds, and spirits may be flying high in other realms, our feet must be firmly planted on the good earth of practical-mindedness, material means, and hard work.

Blue represents the cool, calm, rationalistic calculations of the intellect; most clearly represented by the “true seeker,” the “independent investigator,” and the “minister of justice” who must detach themselves from both the love and hate of the social quadrant before making decisions and judgements. Whitehead speaks of “critical analytical thought, probing with cool dispassionateness into ultimate meanings.”23 Blue also connotes water and the “sea of knowledge.”24

The social quadrant has been colored red, the color of blood, symbolizing the human heart and the fire, heat, and passion of love.

The metaphor of the colors can be further extended by associating them with the four elements of the ancients: air (spiritual), earth (physical), fire (emotional), and water (mental).

Blessed be the earth and water, and blessed be fire and air

that shape and join the soul and body of mortal man,

and blessed that master-craftsman who so planned all things25

Odysseus in *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* by Nikos Kazantzakis

The BLDH Circle itself is set on a background of black which symbolizes the darkness of ignorance, the unknown, the border of our limitations against which we are continually pushing in all four directions and in each process on the Circle; trying to continually expand our lives and bring in more and more light of knowledge, guidance, virtue, love, and well-being. (See Figure 12.1.) Our penetration of the black darkness is not equal in all directions, but we should try our best to keep the expansion and transformation moving outward in all directions in order to continually transform potential virtue into virtuous acts and behavior.

The virtues of humanity and the possibilities of human advancement are boundless. There is no end to them, and whatever be the degree to which humanity may attain, there are always degrees beyond.26 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

To push evolution forward is to engage in personal transformation--to use our energies to create fundamentally new and better relationships--with all that is human and non-human. This is the essence of meaningfulness, fulfillment, and transcendence.27 --Magdalene Carney

Does not every struggling soul seek the same thing: to smash frontiers?28 --Nikos Kazantzakis

Figure 12.1 is a graphic expression of this idea. It can be viewed as a developmental profile. (The personal growth of the hypothetical person that it represents seems to have a one-to-one correspondence with “word length”!) The object is to analyze our strengths, represented by long arrows, and our weaknesses, represented by short arrows; identify areas of greatest need; create a program for intervention; and, over time, build a well-rounded character.

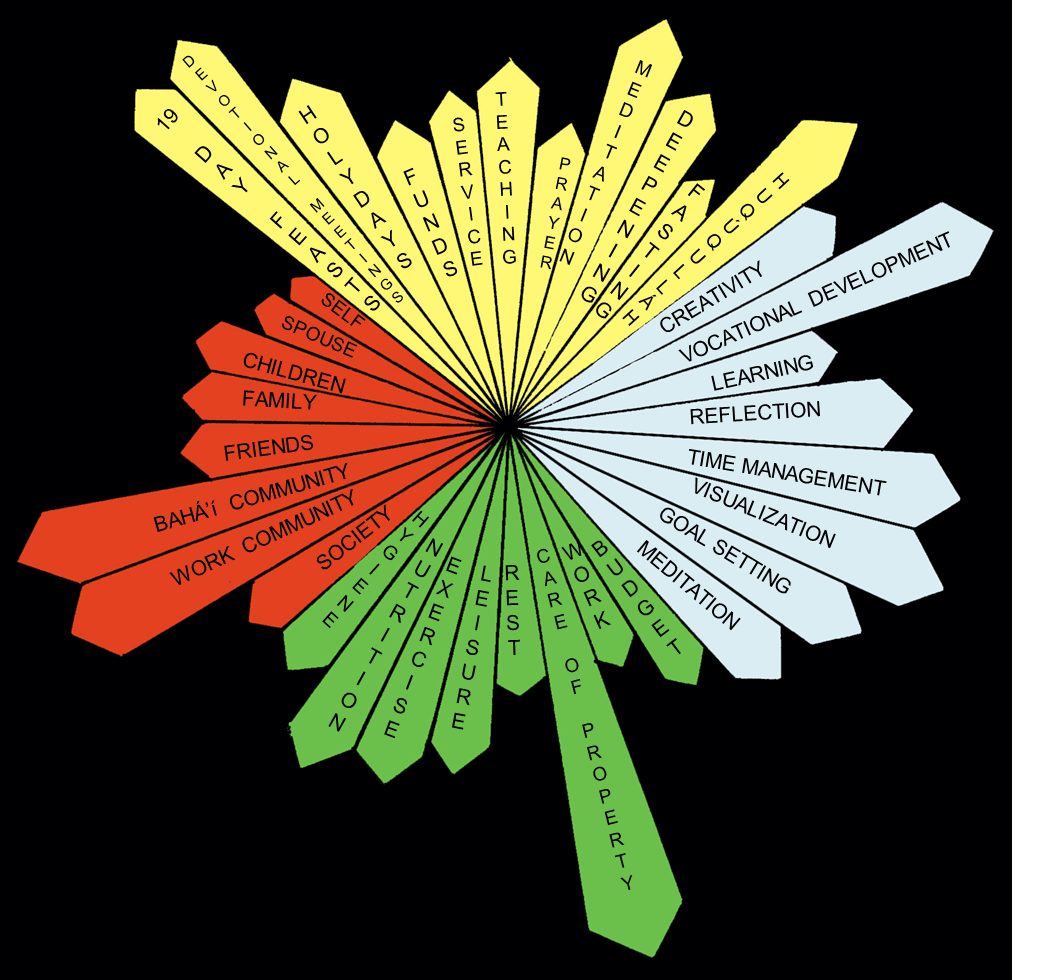


Figure 12. 1: All Processes Radiating from the Center of the BLDH Circle at Different Rates and Degrees of Development

**THE SYMBOLS OF THE FOUR QUADRANTS**

Although having symbols or icons for each quadrant (and possibly each process) is not necessary, I find it intriguing. Some are obvious. (See Figure 12.2.) The Spiritual Quadrant could be represented by the sun in reference to “the Sun of Truth” or by a lamp in relation to the “lamps of God’s laws.” The emotional quadrant could be represented by a heart. I have chosen a series of concentric hearts to symbolize the hierarchical “nestedness” of the relationships represented in this quadrant. For the Physical Quadrant we have already mentioned the earth. It connotes Mother Nature, ecology, and taking care of our body and the home of our body--this beautiful planet. The sword has been chosen to symbolize the psychological/intellectual quadrant. It is the cold, blue-steel blade of the rational, analytical mind, which cuts wholes into differentiated parts for investigative analysis and classification. It judges right from wrong.

O My friend, . . . gaze toward the Kingdom of El-Abhá . . . with a sword which divides truth from falsehood.29 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Also, if we see the Circle as a mirror, the sword is in our right hand which fits appropriately with Jung’s analysis of dream symbology in which he states that “the right arm is always the symbol of power.”30 It is also of interest to note that in one of His prayers Bahá’u’lláh entreats God to cause His servants to “turn away from the left hand of idle fancies and vain imaginings to the right hand of confidence and certitude.”31 In a fascinating passage from *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*, Kazantzakis personifies the mind and the heart plotting to struggle together to free the world from slavery to the lower self. An old man (the mind), recently captured as a slave and chained addresses the approaching Odysseus:

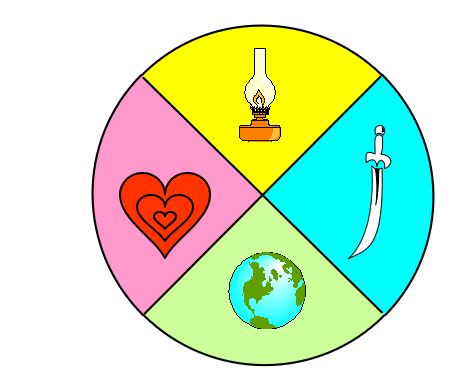


Figure 12. 2: Symbols for Each Quadrant of the BLDH Circle

Welcome, O equal friend, you come in good hour!

We two shall now march on and save the entire world!

I shall march first with sword in hand and slash new roads;

I'll smash the chains of slavery, knock down castle walls,

and you shall plod behind and set all things in order.

I'm Freedom’s true right hand, armed with flashing sword,

and you're her left heart-hand that pains for all the world.

Forward, the time has come! Follow your leader! March!32

**THE INNER AND OUTER CIRCLES**

The inner and outer circles symbolize the interior and exterior dimensions of life. As was discussed earlier, inner and outer are relative and somewhat arbitrary terms. For example, “creativity,” depending on its nature, could be either inner or outer. When I drew the line between the group of processes in each quadrant, I considered only the relations of the processes within that particular quadrant and not their relations to the processes in the other quadrants. The reasoning for each division will be presented later in the corresponding section.

**THE thirty-six KEY LIFE PROCESSES**

Thirty-six life processes were carefully chosen for their key role in affecting self-transformation and were placed in the corresponding, inner or outer section of each quadrant. The number of processes per section was limited to seven or less to facilitate memory.33 I will discuss the choice and placement of each process in the relative section. For now, just keep in mind that, except for the center, they are processes or activities occurring either in the brain or in relation to the external world; that each one takes time; and that they all need to be planned for, strengthened, and enriched. The BLDH program not only enhances the development of each process in isolation but also provides a scheme for improving their relationship and integration with one another, for the smooth transition from one process to another, and for the coordination of the inflow and outflow of four types of energy--spiritual, psychological, physical, and social.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. In the design of the BLDH Circle, what qualities does the circle express?
2. Is the use of the four categories–spiritual, physical, psychological, and social–the only way to classify the manifold nature of human beings? Explain.
3. Name some virtues for each quadrant that are more strongly related to one quadrant than to the others.
4. What do the four colors symbolize?
5. What icons were chosen to symbolize each quadrant? Why? Could you create icons for each of the thirty-six processes?
6. What do the inner and outer sections of the BLDH Circle represent?
7. What do all of the thirty-six key life processes have in common?

CHAPTER 13: THE CENTER OF THE CIRCLE OF BAHÁ’Í LIFE IN DYNAMIC

And since such a Personage is superior to all others in spiritual perfections and heavenly attainments, and is indeed the focal centre of divine blessings and the pivot of the circle of light, He will encompass all others....

When ye consider this matter with care, it will become apparent that this is according to a universal law, which one can find at work in all things: the whole attracteth the part, and in the circle, the centre is the pivot of the compasses.1 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

In this chapter I will give you the basic meaning of the symbols I have placed at the center of the BLDH Circle. (There are many other symbols that could be used to represent the same concepts.) Then I will discuss how the concept of “the center” was developed.

The “B” represents Bahá’u’lláh as the Manifestation of God; the Intermediary between the Self and the creator. (In your own BLDH Circle, you may prefer to place The Greatest Name in Arabic, the ring stone emblem, or some other symbol.) The “B” also reminds us of the Qiblih, the point around which our entire life and being revolve. It is the same type of “B” as the gilded one found on the entrance gate to the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh2 and on the front of the Shrine of the Báb.

The five-pointed star, according to the Guardian, is, “strictly speaking . . . the symbol of our Faith, as used by the Báb and explained by Him.”3 It simultaneously calls to mind several images. It reminds us of His Holiness the Báb and His Shrine, which has several of these stars beautifully engraved on marble plaques on its outer walls. It represents this glorious Cause, the “gift” for which Bahá’u’lláh suffered decades of exile and imprisonment and for which the Báb sacrificed His life. It can also remind us of the “scroll of blue paper, of the most delicate texture, on which the Báb, in His own exquisite handwriting . . . had penned, in the form of a pentacle, what numbered about five hundred verses, all consisting of derivatives from the word ‘Bahá.’”4

The five-pointed star also symbolizes the soul--the “inner person.” In reference to the two, five-pointed stars on the ring-stone symbol, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that, besides representing Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb, the twin Manifestations of God for this day, “they also represent the body of man, with the head, the two arms and the two legs, since this diagram has five points.”5 The star as person has also been placed symbolically: with two feet on the earth of practical-mindedness, with the right hand armed with the sword of the intellect and the power of volition, with the left heart-hand of passionate longing, the face turned always upward to the heaven of the Covenant, the person is thus fully equipped to engage in the spiritual conquest of his/her self and the world!

Regarding the general scriptural symbolism of stars, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that “they are types of guides; for, verily, the star is a guide to people, even in the most gloomy darkness, on both land and sea. In former centuries, people were guided by the pole-star in whatever direction they went.”6 In this context we can see another metaphor in the Circle: the center Day-Star--the pole-star of our lives--guiding the four directions of our destiny through the surrounding darkness of the uncertain future.

Considered together, the “B” and the star thus represent the love, the light, and the presence of God “standing within” us, “mighty, powerful, and self-subsisting.”7

Regarding the colors, the “B,” like the gilded ones on the gates at the Holy Places, should preferably be colored gold, the “most precious” of elements. The star is white; the only color which contains all the other hues of the spectrum and thereby represents the union of all the quadrants in their servitude to the Center. These are just some of the possible associations and meanings. If you decide to make your own Circle, I am certain that you will enjoy finding other symbols that have personal meaning to you.

When I first began creating the BLDH Circle I had no idea for what the center could stand. I knew that I wanted an action-based program for organizing, making sense of, and transforming my life. When I showed one of the earlier versions to a friend, he asked with dismay, “Where is Bahá’u’lláh?” My answer was, “He’s everywhere--in my prayers, my work, my meditations, etc. And besides, this is a process-based program for managing time. Bahá’u’lláh isn't an activity or a process.” Later, I became increasingly attracted to and curious about, what was then, the empty center. I asked myself, “What in my life could be represented by the center--that theoretical, midmost point of the circle around which everything revolves while it alone remains motionless, changeless, permanent, and stable? Could it be God, my soul, Bahá’u’lláh, none of them?” It was only through my deepening and research that it occurred to me that it could be all three--with no incoherence or contradiction. Gradually, I began to realize that my entire life and being revolved around the adoration of my Creator, my love for Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb, and the development of my soul; and that I needed to open a new, non-process, non-action-oriented category of the Circle.[[4]](#footnote-4) What follows is a selection of choice quotations from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh that have confirmed me in this personal search for understanding the Center of my existence.

O Son of Spirit! . . . Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.8

No God is there save Thee, Who art the Object of my heart’s adoration, and the Source and Center of my soul!9

O Son of Utterance! Thou art My stronghold; enter therein that thou mayest abide in safety. My love is in thee, know it, that thou mayest find Me near unto thee.10

O Son of Being! Thou art My lamp and My light is in thee. Get thou from it thy radiance and seek none other than Me.11

He hath known God who hath known himself.12

The motionless, fixed quality of the center of the BLDH Circle--symbolizing God, Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb, and our immortal soul--is of utmost importance. The processes around the center bring about transformation and change. The center, in contrast, is our anchor in these tempestuous times; the eye of the hurricane in this devastating age of transition. It provides the permanence needed to balance the flux of our lives; the stable foothold for the transformational ascent. Meditating on the center helps us to remember that no matter what befalls us, no matter what trials we go through-- “the changes and chances of this world”13--that we can count on God to be there and that through Bahá’u’lláh, His divine assistance will come to our aid.

Several titles of God can be associated with the stationary, calm, changeless, magnetic center of the Circle: “the unchangeable Being,” “the Ever-Abiding,” “the Eternal King,” “the King of everlasting days,” “the One,” “the Single,” “the Source of all Sources,” “the Cause of all Causes,” and “the Unifier.”14 Bahá’u’lláh referred to Himself as “the Point of Adoration of all who are in the heavens and all who are on earth.”15 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stated that “...any movement animated by love moveth from the periphery to the centre, from space to the Day Star of the universe.”16 Other similar passages reinforce the changeless character of the Center: “this is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future,”17 “this is the changeless commandment of God,”18 “in the Rose Garden of changeless splendour a flower hath begun to bloom.”19

The following is an enlightening conceptualization of the human soul by Bahá’í psychiatrist, Abdu'l Missagh Asghar Ghadirian, which I find to be highly congruous with the BLDH Circle concept:

In my understanding of the Bahá’í concept of the reality of man, the soul occupies a unique place in the life of an individual. It is like a centre for human reality around which revolve the intellectual, emotional, physical, social and cultural dimensions of human existence. These various dimensions are not isolated from each other, rather they flow one into another. In a well-balanced life, the soul remains as the centre of spiritual gravity bringing all other essential dimensions into creative harmony and interaction. Some individuals, because of their innate potential and perception and aided by education, may make more significant progress in one of these aspects of existence than in others. For example, among those who excel in the intellectual sphere, we find the great scholars of science and literature, while others who are truly enlightened and advanced in the spiritual realm may attain celestial attributes and saintly character. There are yet others who have made special progress in physical development, e.g. athletes may become champions of sport and so on. It is to be emphasized, however, that a unique progress in any one of these facets of the human reality, will not occur in isolation but rather with associated changes in other dimensions. Therefore, a learned scholar may attain a significant spiritual insight into the mystery of the universe or become an esteemed figure in public relations or, on the contrary, drift into a reclusive life.20

I would only add to this that the purpose of the Circle is to keep us conscientiously moving forward, albeit at different paces, in the advancement of all areas in order to become well-rounded and well-balanced persons.

In reference to traditional Eastern philosophy Jung points out that “the Oriental [person] attributes unquestionably divine significance to the self, and according to the ancient Christian view self-knowledge is the road to knowledge of God.”21

Sun Bear, the Chippewa sacred teacher, helped me to see that the center is still but also dynamic. Here he explains his understanding of the Medicine Wheel’s center as representing the Creator:

The Center of the Medicine Wheel, the Creator, stands alone. The object depicting the Creator force can be a stone of any sort, a buffalo skull, or an object of deep significance to the people building the Circle. . .. The Creator is the beginning of life and its ending, the great mystery within all things and around all things, the universal energy, that which many people address as God. In many Native languages the word for the Creator was not a noun. The word was a verb, indicating the movement, the activity, the motion, the pulsation of this sacred, never-ending force. . ..

The Creator stone is the place on the Medicine Wheel that teaches you about your own ability to create, about your faith, about your own sacredness, and about your ability to develop to your fullest.

When you are afraid, when you do not have enough energy, when you either fear that you can create things with your mind or that you cannot create things with your mind [*sic*, perhaps “hands”], when you feel that you do not really have a deep knowledge of the universe, you should go to the Center of the Medicine Wheel and ask for the help that you need. When you are not quite sure what your spiritual values are or you feel the need for change or when you desire an initiation into a different way of seeing life, at all of these times you should go to the Center of the Medicine Wheel, to the Creator.22

The universal nature of the need to have a psychological “center” of one’s being, regardless of one’s beliefs, and the beneficial effect of the magnetic, unifying power of the center are emphasized by Kazantzakis:

Every integral man has inside him, in his heart of hearts, a mystic center around which all else revolves. This mystic whirling lends unity to his thoughts and actions, it helps him find or invent the cosmic harmony. For some this center is love, for others kindness or beauty, others the thirst for knowledge or the longing for gold and power. They examine the relative value of all else and subordinate it to this central passion. Alas for the man who does not feel himself governed inside by an absolute monarch. His ungoverned, incoherent life is scattered to the four winds.23

For a Bahá’í this “absolute monarch” which stands at the center of one’s being is, no doubt, the “higher Self,” the soul, the voice of God and His commandments within us, the ear of God with which we hear,24 our higher conscience, which guides and harmonizes the development of the thirty-six key life processes. Over the years I have found that, even though I have always been an active Bahá’í, I have not always been successful in keeping Bahá’u’lláh and my own true spiritual Self/soul in the center of my life. Sometimes my life has lost its focus and other centers of interest have dominated my thoughts, feelings, and aspirations: social relations, physical desires, professional aims, and other various and sundry idle fancies and vain imaginings. I am usually not aware that I am gradually getting off track (like the proverbial frog that doesn’t realize that the temperature of the water is rising to the point of boiling him to death!). Then some crisis comes along, tests me, jolts me “awake,” and forces me to realize that my focus has slipped away from its Sacred Center and onto some other aspect of the Circle, or entirely off the Circle! The struggle then becomes “to hold the center;” to keep Bahá’u’lláh as the Soul of one’s soul around which all else revolves. Further reflection usually shows that not only has my center slipped but I have also slipped up on one and usually more than one of the key life processes.

In Carl G. Jung I found a companion with whom I could share my quest for understanding the manifold meaning of the center of the mandala / Medicine Wheel / BLDH Circle and of my own personal frustrations and aspirations. Through a dream Jung came to a new realization:

I saw that here the goal had been revealed. One could not go beyond the center. 25 The center is the goal, and everything is directed toward that center. Through this dream I understood that the self is the principle and archetype of orientation and meaning. Therein lies its healing function. For me, this insight signified an approach to the center and therefore to the goal. Out of it emerged a first inkling of my personal myth. . ..

Without such a vision I might perhaps have lost my orientation . . .

The years when I was pursuing my inner images were the most important in my life--in them everything essential was decided.26

I hope that the reader will be moved to use the BLDH Circle as a tool to explore and reflect upon his or her own inner images and use of time, energy, and resources in relation to his or her own chosen central life theme.

The next chapter will take a step backwards and look again at the Circle as a whole.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What does the “B” at the center of the BLDH Circle symbolize?
2. Regarding the five-pointed star:
   1. What does it symbolize?
   2. What does each of the five points represent?
   3. What else can it call to mind?
3. When we are going through trials, tests, and / or tribulations how can we “turn to our Center” for help, energy, healing, guidance, and consolation?
4. What might cause us to “lose our Center,” i.e., to shift the organization of our priorities, thoughts, hopes, time, activities, and financial resources around purposes other than approaching God? Give an example. What could the short and long-term consequences be? How could our “getting off Center” during our life be increasingly reduced?

CHAPTER 14: THE SYMBOLISM OF THE BLDH CIRCLE AS A WHOLE

The BLDH Circle is an attempt to capture the “whole” of Bahá’í life in one, uninterrupted glance, in one multi-faceted symbol. Unlike an outline or a treatise with chapters, its design incorporates color, visual patterns, symbols, and spatial relationships, in addition to a carefully conceived classification of concepts. This helps activate the right hemisphere of the brain and thereby facilitates our ability to remember the whole, the sub-divisions and their elements. It allows us, in one, unified visual field, to see what are often presented as separate themes or opposing aspects as distinguishable but not separable parts of a single, greater whole. In the words of Harvard professor, Donald W. Oliver, upon contemplating the mandala-like, I Ching symbol system: “The world is thus presented as a unity of related plurality, rather than as a series of adversarial fragments which compete with each other for domination or privilege.”1 The Circle also helps us to see the interrelatedness and interdependence of all of life’s processes and to put the entire scheme to work in our daily life to attain ever-higher degrees of happiness, meaning, and purpose. Other authors, thinkers, programs, and investigators have explored its separate aspects in much greater detail and their expertise should be drawn upon to strengthen any weaknesses and to enrich our areas of special talent. The aim of the Circle and the BLDH program is one of breadth, not depth.

As a symbol, the Circle can have a powerful influence in our lives, but, on the other hand, it is only that, a symbol which can never replace determination and yearning desire, a symbol which can be continually molded and remolded to meet our particular purposes. Expounding upon their benefits Jung states that “it is a fact that symbols, by their very nature, can so unite the opposites that these no longer diverge or clash, but mutually supplement one another and give meaningful shape to life.”2 Dr. Michael Samuels, an expert on visualization, explains some of the inner dynamics of symbols:

Awareness of a symbol, even without interpretation, changes a person’s universe. For the symbol always operates first on a non-verbal, non-rational level, exciting in a common way the very physiology of the people perceiving the symbol. Each universal symbol has a specific generalized effect on the perceivers. It’s as if the energy in the original form is transmitted to the people who perceive the symbol.3

Regarding the need for schemes, the Circle being but one type, to remain flexible, theoretical physicist, David Bohm, cautions:

We should know we are making models and realize they are not models of ultimate reality, but proposals. They are part of the dance of the mind . . . We are proposing that if we carry out this dance in this way, that the general result will be more harmonious--not in the nature of something static--but rather in the nature of a creative movement.4

In relation to the meaning of the BLDH Circle as a whole, Heita Copony gives a perceptive description of the nature of “opposites” expressed in her inspiring painting “Planetary Mandala”:

Neither can exist without the other. This is an analogy to what we experience on the way through a mandala, from the periphery of external life, through the gates to an inner world, then to the center of spiritual sight. Our external and our internal life correspond and mirror one another; introversion and extroversion must be balanced as the forces and impulses of the divine center take form in the physical world. We sense this to be the ultimate purpose and reason for human development.5

C.G. Jung also went through a progressive unfoldment in his understanding of the mandala:

Only gradually did I discover what the mandala really is: “Formation, Transformation, Eternal Mind’s eternal recreation.” [Faust]6 And that is the self, the wholeness of the personality, which if all goes well is harmonious, but which cannot tolerate self-deception. . ..

I began to understand that the goal of psychic development is the self. There is no linear evolution; there is only a circumambulation of the self. Uniform development exists, at most, only at the beginning; later, everything points toward the center. This insight gave me stability, and gradually my inner peace returned. I knew that in finding the mandala as an expression of the self I had attained what was for me the ultimate. Perhaps someone else knows more, but not I.”7

Another way of understanding the BLDH Circle is to see it as a symbolic mirror of the self which has the power to help us look “behind us” at past behavior, at our “present reflection,” or around the corner (where we have not yet been) and into the future to contemplate our ideal state of being, our goals, and our dreams. The mirror metaphor also conveys the idea of striving to reflect the “image of God” in our lives.

O My brother! A pure heart is as a mirror; cleanse it with the burnish of love and severance

from all save God, that the true sun may shine therein and the eternal morning dawn. Then wilt

thou clearly see the meaning of “Earth and heaven cannot contain Me; what can alone contain Me

is the heart of him that believeth in Me.” And thou wilt take up thy life in thy hand and with

infinite longing cast it before thy newly found Beloved.8 --Bahá’u’lláh

The image of a target is also a very helpful symbol for understanding the Circle. Using the Biblical Hebrew term *hamartia* for “missing the point” or “missing the mark” which became translated as “sin,” 9 we can visualize the Circle as a target. By engaging in activities on the Circle as set forth in the Bahá’í writings, we will be brought closer to the presence of Bahá’u’lláh--our Center, our Aim, our Goal, our Heaven and Haven. If we engage in activities which are “outside” of the Circle such as gambling, stealing, backbiting, drinking alcohol, promiscuity, etc., we have either “missed the target” or we have been shooting at the “wrong target.” In either case, we have fallen into sin, must pick ourselves up, activate our faith in God’s mercy, ask for His forgiveness, work up courage, and then try and try again. Bahá’u’lláh tells us that “mortal man is prone to err.” 10 As in archery, only practice makes perfect. As we sharpen our aim, we might also keep in mind the Biblical Hebrew word *metanoia* which was translated as “pain” and from which “penitence” and “repentance” were derived. The original meaning was “a transformation of the mind.” 11

Still another way of viewing the concepts represented by the BLDH Circle is the development of a new, collective, world-embracing myth, that is, a new cosmology, a new way of living, a new set of beliefs about life and reality. At present, at best, we have a new personal/minority myth, but soon it will grow to be a myth believed and *lived* by all people, in all places, at all times.

In connection with the idea of collective myths, I find it intriguing to expand the BLDH Circle concept to contemplate the collective, mandala-like structures in the Faith and their enrichment of the meaning of the Circle.

In 1973 at the National Bahá’í Youth Conference in Oklahoma City, Hand of the Cause of God William Sears talked to us about the circular gardens in Bahjí surrounding the Most Holy Shrine. He told us that only the last quarter of the gardens remained to be completed and that, when it was, the Cause of God would roll forward like a giant Circle astounding all of us by its power and growth. In 1977, when my wife and I were on pilgrimage, we circumambulated the Most Holy Tomb using the outer walkway but only with great difficulty. The gardens and wide, paved paths had not yet been completed. In 1978 came the fall of the Shah of Irán and the return of years of intense persecution bringing in their wake the marvelous growth of the Faith. In the meantime, I had forgotten about Mr. Sears’ statement until I saw the videotape of the May 29, 1992 Commemoration of the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh at Bahjí. Seeing those 3,000 people from every country of the world circumambulating the Most Great Tomb on the now completed, candle-lit walkway, the memories came flooding back to me of the joy and exultation of William Sears as he painted a verbal panorama of the glorious victories to come. Now I was seeing it with my very own eyes. And as I watched the friends converging on the Qiblih, the holiest spot on the face of the earth, literally from the four corners of the Earth; the native peoples performing their traditional acts of homage; and listened to the recited prayers, the chanted Tablets, and the words of praise and thanksgiving from The Universal House of Justice to honor the memory of the “life of the most precious Being ever to have drawn breath on this planet;” 12 I wondered to myself, “Could this not represent for the native peoples of the Americas, the Most Great Medicine Wheel? And could it not, for the peoples of the East, symbolize the Most Great Mandala?” And as I meditate on the BLDH Circle I see more clearly how, just as the stone paths designed by the beloved Guardian enable us to physically circumambulate and approach the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh, described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the “luminous Shrine,” “the place around which circumambulate the Concourse on High;”13 so must my thoughts, my words, and my actions revolve around and lead me to the presence and good-pleasure of the Blessed Beauty.

Aid me, O my Lord, to attain His hallowed court, and to circle round His person, and to stand humbly at His door. 14 --Bahá’u’lláh

I found this same mandala-related principle in the Guardian’s moving description of the Shrine of the Báb. He sees the whole, outer, world order revolving around the “pivotal position” of the “Herald of our Faith,” and, in reference to the spiritual world, he cites the Master’s words describing the Báb’s Tomb as “the Spot round which the Concourse on high circle in adoration.” I have selected and arranged only a few of the many appellations used by Shoghi Effendi in order to highlight the nine concentric spheres nesting His Holy Remains.

“The outer most circle . . . the entire planet”

“the ‘Most Holy Land,’” “the Qiblih of the nations”

“the Mountain of God,” “the Vineyard of the Lord”

“the extensive properties,” “surrounding the Sepulchre”

“an enclosure comprising gardens and terraces”

“the Shell designed to adorn the original structure”

“the Tomb itself . . . constructed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá”

“the Vault wherein reposes the Most Holy Casket”

“the alabaster Sarcophagus” containing the “Jewel”

“the Báb’s Holy Dust”15

Two other structures also convey the BLDH Circle image of outer-world activities of service integrated with an inner, spiritual center of inspiration. One is the Arc on Mount Carmel; the other is the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár. The Arc is composed of a semi-circle of buildings comprising the administrative center of the Faith, the aim of which is to build the Kingdom of the Father on Earth. But in the center of the Arc is the quiet, peaceful garden containing the shrine of the Greatest Holy Leaf with the tombs of the other members of the Holy Family nearby. At the head of the Arc, the Seat of the Universal House of Justice faces directly toward the Qiblih. The Guardian states that this “permanent world Administrative Center of the future Bahá’í Commonwealth” was “destined never to be separated from . . . the Spiritual Centre of that Faith.”16

The concept of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár consists of a spiritual center of worship, the Temple, encircled by “a number of dependencies dedicated to social, humanitarian, educational, and scientific pursuits.”17 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in reference to the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár, explained how the “world of existence may be likened to this temple and place of worship” and how the “outer edifice is a symbol of the inner.”18 Shoghi Effendi “indicates that it exemplifies in tangible form the integration of ‘Bahá’í worship and service.’”19 In the following passage the Master emphasizes this organic unity:

The Mashriqu’l-Adhkár is one of the most vital institutions in the world, and it hath many subsidiary branches. Although it is a House of Worship, it is also connected with a hospital, a drug dispensary, a traveller’s hospice, a school for orphans, and a university for advanced studies. . .. The Temple is not only a place for worship; rather, in every respect is it complete and whole.20

The nine-sided House of Worship itself is circular in shape and, in the very center, on the ceiling of the dome, is placed the symbol of the Greatest Name. Sitting in the middle of a Bahá’í Temple gazing up at the dome, you feel like you are at the center of a giant, three-dimensional mandala. C.G. Jung observed that the lotus flower is often expressed in Eastern mandalas. No wonder then that the House of Worship in India has attracted so many thousands of visitors. Jung also mentions that the Western equivalent of the lotus flower is the rose.21 I can’t help but wonder, “What would a rose-shaped Temple look like?”

This concludes our exploration of only some of the symbolic significances and associations of the BLDH Circle. The purpose has been to enrich its possible meanings for you. Now we will examine the ways it can be put to use in our everyday life.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. The Circle of Bahá'í Life in Dynamic Harmony symbolically attempts to reduce chaos to order by capturing in one glance the “whole” of what?
2. How does the meditation on symbols such as the BLDH Circle enhance the self-transformation process?
3. How does the BLDH Circle function like a mirror? According to Bahá’u’lláh, what should the end result be of our hearts reflecting the “true sun”?
4. How is the Circle like a target? What is the relation of this metaphor to the Hebrew meaning of “sin”?
5. How is the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh, its gardens, and its paths like a Medicine Wheel?
6. How is the Shrine of the Báb like a mandala?
7. What is at the quiet center of the Arc of the highly dynamic institutions of the Faith on Mount Carmel? What meaning do you think the Guardian was trying to convey with this arrangement?
8. How is the institution of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár like the BLDH Circle?

CHAPTER 15: POSSIBLE USES OF THE BLDH CIRCLE

The uses, functions, and purposes of the BLDH Circle are both general and specific. For general uses it can be used as:

* a quadratic, theoretical life management framework,
* a scheme of general ideas for organizing knowledge, information, and experience,
* a holistic tool for self-diagnosis,
* a mandala or yantra[[5]](#footnote-5) for meditation and centering,
* a reminder of all the things in life for which we should feel thankful,
* a memory device to help us recall our recurring responsibilities and our goals,
* a device for managing multiple and often conflicting demands, needs, and wants in healthy and creative ways,
* a self-actualization method for developing our talents and for transforming our weaknesses into strengths,
* a time management system,
* a program for strengthening will-power,
* a lifestyle and values clarification instrument,
* a holistic model for reflecting on one’s composite self: as it was or could have been, as it is, and how it might be,
* a focusing device for consultation and planning for individuals, couples, families, summer school committees and spiritual assemblies, and/or
* a gauge for constantly adjusting and readjusting our key life processes as does a pilot use her instruments to continually correct the plane’s flight trajectory as changing wind direction and wind speed constantly cause the plane to stray from the pilot’s chosen destination.

These will be referred to in the following chapters. The following, more specific uses are explained below:

* to find sources of stress and burnout caused by imbalance,
* for wholistic problem-solving and goal achievement,
* for planning,
* for creating a “My Life” notebook,
* for creating community ceremonies

**FINDING SOURCES OF STRESS AND BURNOUT CAUSED BY IMBALANCE**

The Circle of Bahá'í Life in Dynamic Harmony can be placed anywhere that it can be referred to regularly and easily--on a wall, on your computer screen, on a bulletin board in front of your desk, by your reading chair, by a regularly used mirror, in the back of your planner, or beside your bed. (One Bahá’í community placed a poster-sized Circle in their Bahá’í Center. A school counselor placed a poster-sized, Universal Circle on her office wall.) Meditate on the Circle asking yourself, “Where do I feel stress?” If you live where traffic lights are common, you might classify each activity as being green for “all goes well,” yellow for “caution, there may be trouble,” or red for “emergency, attention is immediately needed in this area before a crisis occurs.” With use, the Cirlce will become internalized and can then be referred to any time and any place independently of the printed Circle.

When we find “yellow” and “red” areas, we are becoming wholistic “general practitioners,” diagnosing “dis-ease.” Sometimes simple adjustments are all that are needed. But in more severe cases we should realize that we are not alone in this world and that God has provided us with specialists whose expertise we should consult. There is no profession generalized enough to cover the entire Circle. Only we can know how we feel as a “whole” person. The professionals and other experts have specialized knowledge of only the parts. If you examine the Circle closely, you will see that for nearly every process there is an expert willing to help you. The Bahá’í writings counsel us to consult these specialists. When you refer yourself to any of them you are often making an intelligent “prescription” for yourself, admitting humbly and wisely that there are limits to self-sufficiency. For example, in the Physical Quadrant we have physicians, repair persons, and financial advisors to assist us. In the Psychological Quadrant we have career management experts and educators. In the social quadrant we have social psychologists and psychiatrists. In the Spiritual Quadrant we have our administrative institutions, counselors, and auxiliary board members. All of them truly are gifts from God to help us increase our well-being.

If you meditate carefully on the Circle, you will notice that each area represents a very powerful force in your life, each of which can in some way be the cause of “tearing you asunder” or serving you as a source of fulfillment, energy, and happiness. As we use the Circle to diagnose imbalances, the focus needs to be on carefully molding our life in such a way that each process becomes a joy instead of a burden--our children, our work, our Feasts, our meditations; yes, even budgeting our money, knowing that this is the means to achieve many of our other ends. There is a saying that goes, “If you take care of your job, your job will take care of you.” This same bit of folk wisdom can be applied to the entire Circle:

If you take care of your obligation to pray,

your supplications will attract the blessings of Bahá.

If you take care of your family,

your loved ones will be there for you in times of need.

If you take care of your house,

your home will shelter you from rain, wind, and cold.

If you take care of your studies,

your skills will provide you with a fulfilling, wealth-creating craft or profession.

**WHOLISTIC PROBLEM-SOLVING AND GOAL ACHIEVEMENT**

This will be discussed in further detail later, but I want to give you at least a global perspective now. After a diagnosis has been made and priorities set, you can use the BLDH Circle as a wholistic approach to solving problems or reaching goals. For example, imagine a person who loses his temper easily and yells at his children or other family members too often. He has decided to try to become more patient, sympathetic, and understanding. Utilizing the *spiritual* processes, he can *pray* for these qualities and *meditate* on pertinent passages from the Writings. In the *Psychological Quadrant*, he can *learn* more about patience from psychology books and *visualize* himself being patient. In the *social* dimension, he can consult (*communicate*) with family members asking them to encourage him in the endeavor. In the *Physical Quadrant*, he might check his *nutritional* intake to see if something might be causing irritability--such as the lack of B-vitamins, or a hyper-sensibility to caffeine or sugar.

Another example is the care of those who are ill. In the *Physical Quadrant* they need proper hygiene, nutrition, rest, pleasant surroundings, and soothing music. From the *spiritual* dimension they need prayers. *Socially* they should receive visits from friends and family. *Psychologically* they need to regularly visualize themselves as being well.

**PLANNING**

The BLDH Circle can be used to assure that we allocate enough time and energy to all of the key aspects of life. It can be used alone or in consultation with our spouse, our family, or our community. It can be used to plan a daily schedule, a weekly or monthly calendar, an intensive institute program, or for making long-range plans. For instance, a family might plan together a daily prayer session, a weekly family night, week-end teaching trips, a monthly outing, and long-range plans for institute campaigns or vacations.

**CREATING A “MY LIFE” NOTEBOOK**

The BLDH Circle can be used as a table of contents for a 3-ringed notebook or computer file containing dividers or sub-files: one for each quadrant (or even each process) and one for the center. Each section can contain a variety of possible things pertaining to the particular topic such as:

* inspirational quotations from the Bahá’í writings or other authors,
* favorite poems,
* drawings, magazine clippings, or art work which represent an ideal towards which we are striving,
* our own written thoughts, worries, and dreams,
* a list of goals for any particular area, or
* a list of accomplishments. (This may seem egotistical, but it helps to see our progress and provides evidence that we are receiving divine assistance, that yes, we are winners, victorious soldiers capable of doing “great things!”)

This kind of notebook helps us to be more explicit and detailed in our goal-setting. Its contents will be forever changing as we grow closer to our Ideal Self. Youth particularly enjoy making “My Life” notebooks. They are searching for ways to get to know themselves and to help them decide the perennial questions:

* What are my talents?
* How can I develop my abilities to serve the needs of the age in which I live?
* What do I want to do with my life?

It is fascinating to see adolescents awaken to the reality of the Circle. They come to realize: “Wow! I am all these things! I yearn to know the mysteries of God. I have a body to take care of. The world of knowledge beckons. I am attracted to the opposite sex. I love my Bahá’í community. I am helping to build a new World Order. I have talents I never knew I had. Boy, am I ever complicated!” The notebook can be reviewed as often as needed, but doing so at least once a year will help you to see how you have grown and changed. One of the best times to use the “My Life” notebook is during the Fast when we take more time for reflection and meditation.

**CREATING COMMUNITY CEREMONIES**

Inspired by Sun Bear, my Native American friends in Canada, and the thoughts and feelings I had while circumambulating, with hundreds of other friends, the Shrines of Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb, I have learned a new respect for ceremony. I have opened my mind to the possibility of creating new ceremonies which are continually being enriched and recreated. According to Sun Bear, ceremony is “a way for humans to center their energy,” to connect to “spirit powers who can help heal both humans and the earth.”15 In the Bahá’í Faith there is very little prescribed ceremony or ritual. Nevertheless, people love even simple ceremonies. As a European American I have lost much of my heritage and I come from a nearly ceremony-free upbringing. However, in Bahá’í communities which have no specific cultural background, and even in those which do, I believe that simple ceremonies can serve as a useful tool if kept free from the formation of fixed, rigid, empty, meaningless rituals. Can we not, in our celebrations, observations and children’s classes continually create new ceremonies, which will help the participants to honor and revere all that is worthy in life? I think that many of us Occidentals need to rediscover ceremony as an avenue for creative expression. In the words of Sun Bear:

When humans participate in ceremony they enter a sacred space. Everything outside of that space shrivels in importance. Time takes on a different dimension. Emotions flow more freely. The bodies of participants become filled with the energy of life, and this energy reaches out and blesses the creation around them. All is made new; everything becomes sacred.2

After you become more familiar with the BLDH program and Circle, you can read in Appendix 5 a description of a vision of an BLDH Circle Ceremony.

The following sections and chapters will present the basic dynamics and principles underlying each of the thirty-six key life processes and will further describe basic relationships amongst them. The treatment, as I mentioned before, will not be in depth because the purpose of this program is one of breadth--to consider the “whole” and the relationships amongst the parts. It will be left to the reader to make any needed, in-depth study of the parts. What I have focused on are the thoughts and examples from the lives of others which have inspired and helped me, techniques and methods which I have found useful, and references which readers may wish to pursue.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISUSSION**

1. What are some of the possible uses of the BLDH Circle?
2. How would you like to use it?
3. If you created a “My Life” notebook based on the Circle, what would you include in each section?

# SECTION III: THE SPIRITUAL QUADRANT

The troubles of this world pass, and what we have left is what we have made of our souls; so it is to this we must look--to becoming more spiritual, drawing nearer to God, no matter what our human minds and bodies go through.248 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

The human body, its brain, the information we have acquired about the natural and technical realms, and the need to earn a living and accumulate material wealth last but for a time. The soul, however, is eternal. Therefore, its development should receive priority. For this reason, the Spiritual Quadrant dominates the BLDH Circle and will be discussed first. The eleven key life processes contained therein are the essential means which Bahá’u’lláh has given to us for nurturing and strengthening our soul. In our inner, personal life we engage in fasting, prayer, meditation, and deepening. In our outer life we teach, serve, observe Holy Days (and make the pilgrimage if possible), worship together during the Nineteen Day Feast and other devotional meetings, pay Huqúqu’lláh when we have accumulated a stipulated amount of wealth, and give regularly to the Fund.

The Spiritual Quadrant is “The Quadrant of the Covenant.” It is the quadrant of God’s laws; His institutions; and His life-giving, life-guiding principles. It focuses on those ordinances and exhortations of Bahá’u’lláh which engage us in action rather than on prohibitions, essential as these are for spiritual growth. Both are important, both require attention and reflection, but the emphasis of the BLDH program is on the “what we *should* do’s” rather than on the “what we should *not* do’s.” If we fill our life with prayer and teaching and the giving of our time and energy to the Cause, there will be less “space” for committing that which is abhorred by God.

O Lord, help me to be meek and lowly, and strengthen me in severing myself from all things and in holding to the hem of the garment of Thy glory, so that my heart may be filled with Thy love and *leave no space* for love of the world and attachment to its qualities.2 (emphasis added)

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Consequently, the Spiritual Quadrant is also “The Quadrant of Obedience.” There can be no doubt; if we do nothing more than obey Bahá’u’lláh by engaging in these eleven processes on a regular basis, we will have magnificently expressed our abiding love for Him and will have assured the well-being of our souls.

O Son of Being! Walk in My statutes for love of Me and deny thyself that which thou desirest if thou seekest My pleasure.3 --Bahá’u’lláh

O Son of Man! Neglect not My commandments if thou lovest My beauty, and forget not My counsels if thou wouldst attain My good pleasure.4 --Bahá’u’lláh

Such are the laws which God hath enjoined upon you, such His commandments prescribed unto you in His Holy Tablet; obey them with joy and gladness, for this is best for you, did ye but know.5

--Bahá’u’lláh

In my own life, whenever I have managed to be obedient, the fruits have been abundant: peace of mind, tranquility of heart, spiritual happiness, material well-being, health, contentment, order, meaningful living, and harmony in all my relations: with God, with others, with myself, and with nature.

Bahá’u’lláh extols steadfastness in His Cause and in His love and unconditional acceptance of and faith in the blessed words, “He doeth whatsoever He willeth,” and He describes the attainment of these qualities as “this sublime station, this exalted rank, this ultimate purpose.”6

The beloved Guardian equates obedience with faith and lovingly exhorts us not “to falter or hesitate”:

Are we to doubt that the ways of God are not necessarily the ways of man? Is not faith but another word for implicit obedience, whole-hearted allegiance, uncompromising adherence to that which we believe is the revealed and express will of God, however perplexing it might first appear, however at variance with the shadowy views, the impotent doctrines, the crude theories, the idle imaginings, the fashionable conceptions of a transient and troublous age? If we are to falter or hesitate, if our love for Him should fail to direct us and keep us within His path, if we desert Divine and emphatic principles, what hope can we any more cherish for healing the ills and sicknesses of this world?7

The symbol of the Spiritual Quadrant is the lamp of God’s laws. Its color--yellow--represents the divine guidance shining from God’s laws, which guide us through the darkness of this age.

O ye peoples of the world! Know assuredly that My commandments are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants.8 --Bahá’u’lláh

The sincere among His servants will regard the precepts set forth by God as . . . the Lamp of wisdom and loving providence to all the denizens of earth and heaven.9 --Bahá’u’lláh

Therefore, as we engage in spiritual battle with our lower, animal self, our ego, let us keep in mind the supreme position and glory of “obedience to God’s laws”; its wisdom and its never-ending blessings.

One day God sprang on earth with iron weapons armed

and struck Odysseus with his foot till he sprang up

and marshaled his loose wits, as cries of love and war

rang out and ruthless great commandments throbbed in light:

“I am your own dread God, your Chief of Staff in War!

You're not my slave, you're now no plaything in my hands,

nor yet a trusted friend, nor yet a favorite son,

but comrade and co-worker in the stubborn strife!

Manfully hold the pass entrusted to you in war;

learn to obey--only that soul may be called free

who follows and takes joy in goals greater than he.

Learn to command, only that soul on earth who knows

how to give harsh commands can be my mouth or fist.

What is my road? A rough, rude, limitless ascent!

To say: No one but I can save the whole wide world!

Where are we going? Shall we win? Don’t ask! Fight on!”

Thus did dread God command within the lone man’s breast,

and the lawmaker’s mind grew light,

the air grew mute,

and he sped swiftly toward his city with great joy

to find smooth slabs of upright stones on which to carve

the great and difficult laws entrusted him by God.10

--Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*

Obedience requires that we not only engage in certain activities, but, also, that we fulfill the second part of Bahá’u’lláh’s exhortation quoted above: “...deny thyself that which thou desirest if thou seekest My pleasure.” Hence, the Spiritual Quadrant also becomes “The Quadrant of Detachment and Sacrifice.”

We are born into the matrix of the material world just as the butterfly begins its life as a caterpillar confined to living on the ground. Becoming detached from material comforts and pleasures is a life-long process. By concentrating on becoming attached to the activities in the Spiritual Quadrant, our attachments to our “womb-world” will fall away as naturally and as surely as the butterfly emerges from its cocoon or the blossom sacrifices its beautiful petals to the emerging fruit. When the process is viewed as a whole; when we “see the end in the beginning”11 it is as if there is no sacrifice at all.

It seems that God knows that, as human beings, we have a deep need to always be attached to something. We cannot live in a vacuum. God’s way is to persuade and encourage us to give up lower, less worthy attachments for higher, more noble ones. He sends down that which “draweth us nigh” unto Him.12 He weans us from the material breast of the lower world of nature, but immediately provides us with spiritual nourishment and delights. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in His prayers for children, often implores God to begin the process of “nourishing” the attachment of the young ones to “the bosom of Thy love,” “the breast of Thy loving-kindness,” the “milk from the breast of Thy Providence,” “the breast of Thy mercy,”13 and so on.14 For adults, for example, God may be weaning us drinking wine, but, at the same time, He helps us to become “intoxicated” with a different kind of wine.

O God, my God! Fill up for me the cup of detachment from all things, and in the assembly of Thy splendors and bestowals, rejoice me with the wine of loving Thee.15 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

In a single breath we are called upon to give up one love for “Another”; to sacrifice vices for virtues; passions for “Passions.”

We do not fight our dark passions with a sober, bloodless, neutral virtue which rises above passion, but with other, more violent passions.16 --Nikos Kazantzakis

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in describing Sádiq, one of the early believers, stated, “His detachment from the things of this world and his attachment to the life of the spirit are indescribable.”17

Let us then become thoroughly attached to Bahá’u’lláh and the eleven, key life processes in the Spiritual Quadrant which He has “sent down.” It is through these that we will become virtuous and develop strong souls for the service of the Cause here and in the life to come.

These virtues do not appear from the reality of man except through the power of God and the divine teachings, for they need supernatural power for their manifestation.18 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

From this perspective the Spiritual Quadrant becomes “The Quadrant of Virtues, Ethics, and Morals.” The other quadrants are somewhat amoral in nature. Our mental capacities, physical abilities and resources, and our social attachments can be used for evil ends; ends which oppress or harm others. They can also be directed to spiritual and moral ends; ends that will contribute to the building of the Father’s Kingdom on Earth. It is the role of the processes in the Spiritual Quadrant to serve as “moralizing forces” which direct the processes contained in the other quadrants.

If we examine the lives of the world’s worst dictators, leaders of totalitarian systems, and tyrants, down through the ages, it is possible to find examples of excellence in the psychological, physical, and social quadrants. They might be intelligent, self-disciplined, orderly, well-mannered, and have great physical prowess. They might even have deep affections for their family, friends, and country; but they will often be lacking the uniquely spiritual qualities of humility, sincere attachment to prayer, submission to God’s ordinances, chastity, and a divinely induced love for all of God’s creatures, for all of his peoples, regardless of their origin or social stature.

Let us now take a closer look at the Inner Spiritual Quadrant.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. Why, in some respects, should the Spiritual Quadrant and its eleven processes take precedence over the other three quadrants and 25 processes?
2. Why can the Spiritual Quadrant be considered “The Quadrant of the Covenant”?
3. Why can the Spiritual Quadrant be considered “The Quadrant of Obedience”?
4. In today’s society obedience to laws and rules is often considered an undue constraint on one’s personal freedom. The attitudes that laws and rules are “made to be broken,” or “to be followed only when convenient or absolutely necessary,” is not uncommon. In the Bahá’í point of view the laws that Bahá’u’lláh has given us are loved and gladly obeyed as a means of pleasing Him and achieving greater liberty and freedom. Reflect upon or discuss these differences in attitudes and understanding of freedom. Why do you think there is such a difference?
5. Besides achieving greater liberty, what are some other benefits of obeying God’s laws?
6. Which laws are the most difficult in your opinion? Why do you think so?
7. When the Central Figures exhort the believers to detach themselves from worldly desires, they usually recommend replacing them with even greater attachment to something divine or spiritual. Can you find an example in the Writings?

# SECTION III, PART I: THE INNER SPIRITUAL QUADRANT

The separation of the eleven processes into the inner and outer spheres of the Spiritual Quadrant is based on a very general notion of their relativity. The inner processes: fasting, prayer, meditation, and deepening, although they can be carried out with others, are primarily personal in nature and can be considered as the quintessential tools for self-transformation and the development of our inner, spiritual life. The outer processes: teaching, service, paying Huqúqu’lláh, giving to the Fund, observing Holy Days, engaging in group worship during devotional meetings, and engaging in community life during the Nineteen Day Feast; though fundamentally spiritual in nature; are more outward, visible, material, and social expressions of the inner life. Like the rest of the processes on the Circle, they have been separated for merely conceptual purposes and to enable the BLDH user to more easily focus on a particular process which needs improvement. In daily living they are intimately intertwined with one another and with the other processes on the Circle.

The inner processes have not been ordered chronologically or by importance, but an attempt has been made to create a logical, easy-to-recall sequence. The organizing principle is the occurrence of natural associations. Fasting and the obligatory prayers have been referred to by the beloved Guardian as “the two pillars that sustain the revealed Law of God.” 1 Prayer and meditation appear together in several of the letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi:

The core of religious faith is that mystic feeling which unites man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of *meditation and prayer*.2 (emphasis added)

*Prayer and meditation* are very important factors in deepening the spiritual life of the individual, but with them must go also action and example, as these are the tangible results of the former. Both are essential.3 (emphasis added)

In his suggestions made to Ruth Moffet regarding the dynamics of prayer, the Guardian refers to meditation as the “last half” of prayer.4 Thus they might be considered to be two sides of one coin. Exactly where one side leaves off and the other begins is impossible to tell; one flows into the other.

A third pair of oft-associated processes is meditation and deepening (or study of the meaning of the Words of God).

Meditate upon that which hath streamed forth from the heaven of the Will of thy Lord, He Who is the Source of all grace, that thou mayest grasp the intended meaning which is enshrined in the sacred depths of the Holy Writings.5 --Bahá’u’lláh

It is incumbent upon you to ponder in your hearts and meditate upon His words. . .6

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Deepen your knowledge of the Cause 7 --Shoghi Effendi

If you read the utterances of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with selflessness and care and concentrate upon them, you will discover truths unknown to you before and will obtain an insight into the problems that have baffled the great thinkers of the world.8 --Shoghi Effendi

It would be difficult to overemphasize the importance of the processes contained in the Inner Spiritual Quadrant of the BLDH Circle. They are our primary connection with “The Cause of Causes,” “The Source of all Sources,” our all-loving Creator and “Incomparable Friend;” 9 and they are the primary means for sustaining the higher-order process of self-transformation.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. On what basis have the eleven processes in the Spiritual Quadrant been separated into the inner and outer spheres of the Circle?
2. In the Inner Spiritual Quadrant:
   1. Why have fasting and prayer been placed adjacent to one another? That is, what do they have in common?
   2. Prayer and meditation have been placed next to each other. How are these processes closely related?
   3. Meditation and deepening are also together. How are they related?

CHAPTER 16: FASTING

We have commanded you to pray and fast from the beginning of maturity; this is ordained by God, your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

The Bahá’í “fasting period, which lasts nineteen days starting as a rule from the second of March every year and ending on the twentieth of the same month, involves complete abstention from food and drink from sunrise till sunset.”2 For those of us from Christian backgrounds this may seem very severe and difficult, almost extreme, but two historical facts need to be kept in mind. One is that, according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “in the beginning the disciples and Christians fasted. Later the assemblages of the chief Christians changed fasting into lenten observances.”3 Therefore, in a sense, we have slipped from the original rigor of the early Christians. Also, we should remember that in the Muslim faith the fast lasts for 30 days and is usually longer than twelve hours because abstention is observed during all the hours when there is light. Hence, from the point of view of a Mohammedan, the Bahá’í fast is quite moderate.

For a new Bahá’í from a culture that is not accustomed to fasting, the challenge can be great. I recall a fellow new believer who would go so far as to invent “journeys” on weekends during the fast in order to eat a few choice morsels. Bahá’u’lláh, of course, is completely cognizant and understanding of the feebleness of human nature:

The fears and agitation which the revelation of this law [fasting] provoke in men’s hearts should indeed be likened to the cries of the suckling babe weaned from his mother’s milk, if ye be of them that perceive . . .4

Knowing this ability of people to only gradually put into practice the ordinances of God, Dr. Muhájir, in fledgling Bahá’í communities, would introduce the laws only one at a time.5 In his wisdom he knew that the basis of transformation and obedience was the new believers’ growing love for Bahá’u’lláh. This was the foundation that he would strengthen and upon which he would lovingly place the revealed laws of God.6

It is this love for the Blessed Perfection that should be the cornerstone of our enthusiastic obedience to the law of fasting. He Himself makes reference to this prime motive: “Observe, for My Beauty’s sake, the fast, O people . . .”7 The Master has given a fascinating explanation of one of the reasons for fasting. Because “. . .the Blessed Beauty [like the Manifestations of God before Him], when busy with instituting the Divine Teachings and during the days when the Verses (the Word of God) descended continuously, through the great effect of the Verses and the throbbing of the heart, took no food except the least amount. . ..” and because “. . . every sincere soul who has a beloved longs to experience that state in which his beloved is . . .., it becomes necessary that the friends should follow that example.”

Still another purpose of the fast, according to Bahá’u’lláh, is for the well-off to feel sympathy with the poor: “All praise be unto God, Who hath . . . enjoined on them [His servants] the Fast that those possessed of means may become apprised of the woes and suffering of the destitute.”8

The importance of the law of fasting and its vital role in self-transformation are difficult to over-emphasize.

As the sun and moon constitute the brightest and most prominent luminaries in the heavens, similarly in the heaven of religion of God two shining orbs have been ordained--fasting and prayer . . .. fasting is its sun, prayer, its moon.9 --Bahá’u’lláh

In the imagery of the BLDH Circle: both are in the shining, guiding, yellow light of the Spiritual Quadrant; and, both are in the center of the Spiritual Quadrant; the other laws and exhortations revolving around them.

In the view of the Guardian, fasting “constitutes, together with the obligatory prayers, the two pillars that sustain the revealed Law of God.”10 (See Figure 16.1)

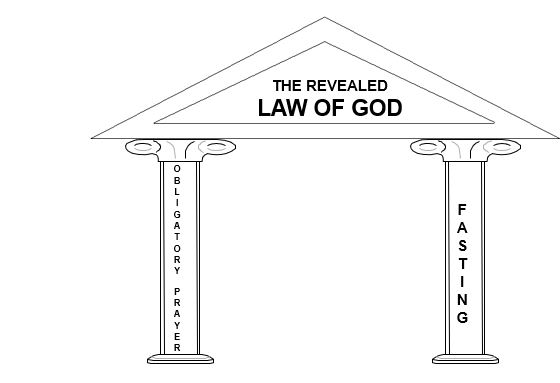


Figure 16. 1: Fasting: One of the Two Pillars Sustaining the Law of God

In relation to the transformation process, the benefits of fasting are multiple. From the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá we learn that fasting:

* “is an outer token of the spiritual fast”;
* “is a symbol of self-restraint, the withholding of oneself from all appetites of the self, taking on the characteristics of the spirit, being carried away by the breathings of heaven and catching fire from the love of God.”11
* “is the cause of awakening and mindfulness”;
* “[is] conducive to protection and preservation from tests.”12

From the explanations of the Guardian given through his secretary we learn that the fast:

* (and the obligatory prayers) “act as stimulants to the soul, strengthen, revive and purify it, and thus insure its steady development”;
* “is essentially a period of meditation and prayer, of spiritual recuperation, during which the believer must strive to make the necessary readjustments in his inner life, and to refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces latent in his soul”;
* “[is] fundamentally spiritual in character”;
* “is symbolic, and a reminder of abstinence from selfish and carnal desires.”13

In my own experience the fasting period is a time for slowing down; a time for making “the journey within” in order to improve the quality of “the journey ‘without’.” (See Figure 16.2) Fasting interrupts our routines and habits; enables us to establish the spiritual routine and discipline of dawn prayers (if we haven't already done so); promotes reflection; and provides a “life space” for making those long-postponed, sorely-needed spiritual “repairs” and for setting new directions in our chosen destiny.

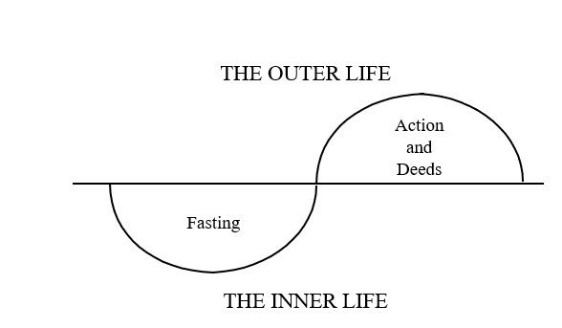


Figure 16. 2: Fasting Purifies and Intensifies Our Inner Life

In my own life the fast has served as an outstanding proof of the Power of God. When He commands, my lower self obeys, but when I command, the obedience of my lower self is sorely lacking in consistency. For me, for example, abstaining from food during the fast has become s*o easy*, yet, during the other months, for weight loss purposes, it is *so hard*. The difference between the influence of my own will compared to the influence of God’s will never ceases to amaze me. Nevertheless, our bewildering ability to control the lower self during the fast shows the potential, God-given strength that is within us.

O Son of Utterance! Thou art My stronghold; enter therein that thou mayest abide in safety.14 --Bahá’u’lláh

Over the years the fast has become for me less of a physical challenge and more of a spiritual one. At first, I was pleased with simply fulfilling the letter of the law; now, each year, I am faced with living up to its spirit--the essence of which is to draw closer to Bahá’u’lláh and to transform myself.

For me, dawn prayers have a special flavor during the fast. I feel an added closeness to Bahá’u’lláh. Perhaps because of the extraordinary beauty and significance of the prayers for the fast, and perhaps because I know that all day long I will be reminded of Him--His law, His love for me, and my love for Him--every time I go to drink water (a frequent activity during my years in the tropics!) and every time I want to eat something (a too frequent desire in my case!).

I have also developed a special love for the hour before sunset during the fast. I set this time aside for prayer and meditation. Physically, I am close to the end of an ordeal; and spiritually, I find it to be a very poignant time because I feel like I am about to give another gift to my Beloved--another day of fasting completed, hopefully, in both the letter and the spirit of the law. And a time that is even more meaningful for me is the last hour of the last day of the Fast. At this time I feel very clearly and very heavily the turning of yet another year; a moment full of regrets of having accomplished so little, yet full of excitement for the arrival of Náw Rúz and full of hope for a new year to be filled with deeds that the Blessed Perfection will consider acceptable and pleasing. During one of these precious “hours,” many years ago, I penned the following ode to a personified fast.

**Farewell to the Fast**

O my dear, beloved Fast:

I am in tears over your departure. My cherished friend, my companion during these last nineteen days and during these last fourteen years, how I will miss you! Such a refuge from attachment you have been to me! How numerous the lessons you have taught me! How grateful I am to the One Who arranged our acquaintance and established our ever-growing relationship! How I longed for your arrival and how I lament our separation! My debt to you is deep, eternal and affectionate. A year must pass before we meet again. During this coming year may I be loyal to your spirit--growing in detachment, spirituality and lofty-mindedness; and always longing to cast my life before the Beloved of All Hearts!

Until we meet again, my friend,

Your devoted servant

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What two laws constitute the “pillars that sustain the revealed Law of God”?
2. What are some of the purposes of the fast?
3. What are some of the benefits of the fast?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will carry out the next fast with a deeper fulfillment of the spirit of the law.
* In order to deepen myself I will study *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*, a compilation of the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 2000) and/or *Fasting: A Bahá’í Handbook*, by Duane L. Herrmann, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, c. 1987).
* I will increasingly use the long, dawn prayer for the fast (the one with the refrain) as recommended by the Hands of the Cause of God Rúhíyyih Rabbani15 and Zikrullah Khadem.16
* I will arise early enough to have time for both dawn prayers and family prayers.

CHAPTER 17: PRAYER

O Son of Light! Forget all save Me and commune with My spirit. This is of the essence of My command, therefore turn unto it.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

**THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF PRAYER**

Prayer can be considered to be both a means and an end in itself. It is the principal means for spiritual purification and transformation (both personal and social), and, as an end in itself, it is a happy, joyful state of being.

For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling which unites man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer. And this is the reason why Bahá’u’lláh has so much stressed the importance of worship. It is not sufficient for a believer merely to accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality which he can acquire chiefly by means of prayer. The Bahá’í Faith, like all other Divine Religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character. Its chief goal is the development of the individual and society, through the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers. It is the soul of man which has first to be fed. And this spiritual nourishment prayer can best provide. Laws and institutions, as viewed by Bahá’u’lláh, can become really effective only when our inner spiritual life has been perfected and transformed. Otherwise religion will degenerate into a mere organization, and becomes a dead thing.

The believers, particularly the young ones, should therefore fully realize the necessity of praying. For prayer is absolutely indispensable to their inner spiritual development, and this, as already stated, is the very foundation and purpose of the religion of God.2 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

Prayer can also be considered as a spiritual habit and discipline which needs to be cultivated, especially for those who, like myself, come from a culture in which the experience of prayer consisted only of occasional bed-time prayers as a child, blessing the food at mealtime and on special feast days, ceremonial prayer at special events such as graduations, and congregational prayer at church on Sundays. My experience of prayer in the Ohio town where I grew up, with a few bright exceptions, was mostly as a decoration, a mundane routine which was carried out but not deeply thought about or felt. We went through the motions of prayer, but it was an empty form devoid of personal meaning. As human beings it seems that it is part of our nature to “desire,” especially physical pleasures. It does not come naturally for us to desire spiritual, heavenly things that cannot be perceived directly by the senses. In order to help us learn to love prayer and communion with God, Bahá’u’lláh made daily prayer obligatory. He requires that we sample at least a bite-size portion of His Divine Words on a regular basis. It is as if He were saying, “Trust me. Try it. I know that you will eventually develop a taste for it and then come back for more.” The Báb described this natural weakness of human nature in this way: “I worship Thee by virtue of Thy summoning me unto Thee, for had it not been for Thy summons I would not have worshiped Thee.” 3 Therefore, I truly believe that as Bahá’ís we should not feel guilty or ashamed if we are not inclined towards prayer or if we find it to be a difficult habit to develop. In my own case, I became a Bahá’í principally because of the practical solutions that it had to offer the world. Only later, through deepening, did I slowly discover the mystical side of the teachings and gradually form a very personal relationship with each of the Central Figures of the Faith. To develop the habit of prayer has been a struggle for me, but the fruits have been most worthwhile.

So how does one begin to cultivate a love for prayer? We must build on our foundation--our belief and faith in God’s Messenger; belief and faith in His Words; that if we try and we practice and we struggle that we will eventually make prayer a part of our inmost being--as natural as eating and breathing; as sweet as cake, pie, and ice cream. If we have a strong desire to achieve competence in prayer and to have a rich prayer life, then half of the battle is won because we can turn this desire into “a prayer for a better prayer-life”:

Cause me to taste, O my Lord, the divine sweetness of Thy remembrance and praise. I swear by Thy might! Whosoever tasteth of its sweetness will rid himself of all attachment to the world and all that is therein, and will set his face towards Thee, cleansed from the remembrance of anyone except Thee.4 --Bahá’u’lláh

I think that one of the greatest “discoveries” for me was to realize that God didn’t want me to just worship Him, that He did not need my praise and glorification, that these were gifts that He gave me for my own benefit, and that what He wanted was to enter into a “two-way” conversation with me.

O Son of Glory! Be swift in the path of holiness, and enter the heaven of communion with Me.5 -- Bahá’u’lláh

O Moving Form of Dust! I desire communion with thee, but thou wouldst put no trust in Me.6 -- Bahá’u’lláh

It never ceases to amaze me that God does not only listen to prayers, but that He also *answers* prayers; that He not only *hears* us, but that He also “*speaks*” to us.

No God is there but Thee, Who hearest and art ready to answer.7 --Bahá’u’lláh

Thou, in truth, art the God of strength and power, Who art meet to answer them that pray Thee.8 --Bahá’u’lláh

(See Chapter 18 on Meditation for Spiritual Purposes for a discussion of how to listen to God.)

Another fascinating aspect of prayer which I find to be attractive is the sheer pleasure of prayer as described in the Writings.

Verily, by His remembrance the eye is cheered and the heart is filled with light.9 --Bahá’u’lláh

Verily, these are [those who “truly believe in Him Whom God shall make manifest”] souls who take delight in the remembrance of God, Who dilates their hearts through the effulgence of the light of knowledge and wisdom. They seek naught but God and are oft engaged in giving praise unto Him.10 --The Báb

The greatest happiness for a lover is to converse with his beloved, and the greatest gift for a seeker is to become familiar with the object of his longing; that is why with every soul who is attracted to the Kingdom of God, his greatest hope is to find an opportunity to entreat and supplicate before his Beloved, appeal for His mercy and grace and be immersed in the ocean of His utterance, goodness and generosity.11 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

There is nothing sweeter in the world of existence than prayer.

Man must live in a state of prayer. The most blessed condition is the condition of prayer and supplication. Prayer is conversation with God. The greatest attainment or the sweetest state is none other than conversation with God.12 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

The spiritual man finds no delight in anything save commemoration of God.13 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

For those who think that achieving such an intense state of love for pray is reserved for Eastern cultures, let us take as a role model the life of Hand of the Cause of God Dorothy Baker who spent most of her active Bahá’í life in Lima, Ohio. Mrs. Javidukht Khadem once stayed with Dorothy Baker at her home. During her visit Dorothy did Mrs. Khadem the favor of driving her to see her brother. Mrs. Khadem describes the experience that occurred along the way.

I [Dorothy] have to do something that I forgot. I promised to pray for Elsie Austin, because she wants to get to Africa, and the door is closed. Will you help me? And I [Javidukht] said, “Sure.” I did not know what she wanted. She said, “I want to say the ‘Remover of Difficulties’ 95 times.”

She said it very slowly, and with each word her tears poured down. She didn’t even notice me. I looked at her. I had never experienced anything like this. The tears covered her face, and dropped onto her clothes. I did not even count the number of prayers she said, but when she finished she pulled the car over to the side of the road, and she passed out.

I opened the car door and called, “Dorothy, Dorothy, Please!” After about ten minutes she opened her eyes, and was so happy! She said, “I am sorry, honey, that I bothered you so much.” I asked her, “Is this the way you always pray?” She answered, “Is there any other way?”14

**WHEN PRAYING IS DIFFICULT**

But what do we do when, even though we know what a true prayer-state *should* be like, we cannot bring ourselves to pray? One of the causes identified by William and Madeline Hellaby is an inability to deal with sin.

You hear people say that they cannot pray. What they mean is that they do not want to pray, because the effort of really coming to grips with their sin is too demanding and they are at least honest enough to know that to pray for forgiveness when they were not really sorry for their sinning would be hypocrisy.15

Bahá’u’lláh, in the following passage, acknowledges that there are times when we are disinclined to pray or to praise God because of our sins, yet it is through His prayerful meditation that He renews our reliance on prayer and communion with our Creator.

Every time I venture to make mention of Thee, I am held back by my mighty sins and grievous trespasses against Thee, and find myself wholly deprived of Thy grace, and utterly powerless to celebrate Thy praise. My great confidence in Thy bounty, however, reviveth my hope in Thee, and my certitude that Thou wilt bountifully deal with me emboldeneth me to extol Thee, and to ask of Thee the things Thou dost possess.16

Personally, I am still trying to come to grips with some of my own sins. But the beauty of prayer is that it always offers “a door of escape” and hope for salvation for I can pray to God to enable me to open my eyes, to fully accept my wrong-doing, to attain a state of repentance, and to eventually beg for forgiveness.

But whatever the cause may be for not wanting to pray, the greatest remedy is simply to get back to praying as best we can even in a small way.

After the incident described above, Javidukht Khadem asked Dorothy Baker, “Do you always say your prayers like that? Do you say your Obligatory Prayer every day like that?” Her answer was, “Did you ever read that you must wait to pray until you are feeling spiritual? Every morning I say many prayers, so that I will be spiritual enough to say my Obligatory Prayer.”17 To pray when you “just can’t pray” is, as I see it at this time in my life, an act of faith. In the worst of circumstances, I recommend “clinging in desperation” to The Greatest Name. Don’t worry about your state of mind or heart or body, just repeat it over and over again. A soothing effect will be felt--sooner or later. The same can be done with the prayer known as “The Remover of Difficulties.”

Another technique is to simply recite, with as much sincerity as you can muster, a short, familiar, favorite prayer, and then let it go at that. Don’t force yourself. Simply take comfort in the advice of Bahá’u’lláh:

Were a man to read a single verse with joy and radiance it would be better for him than to read with lassitude all the Holy Books of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.18

**THE NECESSITY OF PRACTICE**

Like any highly-refined skill, to experience the presence of God in prayer (and throughout the day and night) requires practice, patience, and perseverance.

In *Portals to Freedom* Howard Colby Ives describes the “ups and downs” of his own spiritual life via a fable about a traveler who finds his “Home of dreams” in the midst of a wilderness. But no sooner had he stepped inside than “a heavy hand grasped him by the neck and--back he was again in that dread wilderness.” The traveler’s renewed search for the Home, his finding it, and the experience of being jerked back again to the wilderness are repeated over and over. He finally gives up the hope of remaining continually in the Home and instead devised the strategy of marking the Way back. He “oriented” himself “by the sun,” “marked the trees,” and finally “he beat a Path.”19 This allegorical Path is basically religion and its key processes--prayer and the other ten processes in the Spiritual Quadrant--which have been given to us to help us “practice the presence of God.”

Labour is needed, if we are to seek Him; ardour is needed, if we are to drink the nectar of reunion

with Him; and if we taste of this cup, we shall cast away the world.20 --Bahá’u’lláh

The steed of this valley [Search] is patience; without patience the wayfarer on this journey will reach nowhere and attain no goal. Nor should he ever become downhearted: If he strive for a hundred thousand years and yet fail to behold the beauty of the Friend, he should not falter. For those who seek the Kaaba of “for Us” rejoice in the tidings “In Our ways shall We assuredly guide them.”21 --Bahá’u’lláh

Draw nigh unto God and *persevere* in communion with thy Lord . . .22 (emphasis added)

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

The story is told about the famous Polish pianist, Ignacy Jan Paderewski, who observed that if he missed only one day of practice, he could notice the difference in his public performance; that if he missed two days of practice, his critics noted the drop in excellence; and if he missed three days of rehearsal the audience noticed the lack of quality in his performance. This must be our approach to prayer. We should be “afraid” to enter upon a new day without first having put on the armor and protection of prayer. And we should become sensitive to the difference between a day or a project carried out *with* prayer and a day or a project carried out *without* prayer. Shoghi Effendi tells us that “the friends must observe the specific times for the remembrance of God, meditation, devotion and prayer, as it is highly unlikely, nay, rather impossible, that any enterprise should prosper and develop short of divine bestowals and confirmation.”23 In my own life I have begun to notice some of the signs of the effects of prayer: a brighter, more optimistic outlook; more patience during the thousand and one things that can go wrong during a day; showing more love and less short-temperedness; being able to more quickly and naturally “capture” opportunities to teach or mention the Faith to friends and strangers; accomplishing more in less time; greater concentration; greater ability to “smell the roses” along the way, noticing the delightful “small things of life”; and having a better sense of humor.

One’s heart must be sensitive to the music of prayer. He must feel the effect of prayer. He must not be like an organ from which softest notes stream forth without having consciousness of sensation in itself.24 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

**ESTABLISHING ROUTINES**

Developing daily routines will help make prayer an integral part of our life; will provide the time for practice; and will help carry us through those times when we are not feeling very spiritual. They will not, however, serve as a substitute for sincerity, ardor, and what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to as “the holy ecstasy of prayer.” 25 In the above-quoted passage the Guardian referred to “the specific times for the remembrance of God, meditation, devotion and prayer.” In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* Bahá’u’lláh exhorts us:

Recite ye the verses of God every morn and eventide. Whoso faileth to recite them hath not been faithful to the Covenant of God and His Testament, and whoso turneth away from these holy verses in this Day is of those who throughout eternity have turned away from God.26

In His explanation of which verses to recite, Bahá’u’lláh explains that “the intention is all that hath been sent down from the Heaven of Divine Utterance. The prime requisite is the eagerness and love of sanctified souls to read the Word of God.”27

In an explanatory note in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* we learn that “Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written to one of the believers in the East, has clarified that the term ‘verses of God’ does not include the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; he has likewise indicated that this term does not apply to his own writings.”28 Therefore, our morning and evening devotions should be comprised of prayers, tablets, and meditations from the Writings of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh.

**Obligatory Prayer**

As a new Bahá´í one of the first routines to establish is the remembrance of God via the recitation of the short, the medium, or the long Obligatory Prayer at the proper time each day.

All praise be unto God, Who hath revealed the law of obligatory prayer as a reminder to His servants . . .29

--Bahá´u´lláh

The short Obligatory Prayer is to be recited once in twenty-four hours at noon.30 “At noon” means during the six or so hours between midday and sunset.31 (I was so happy to learn this definition of noon because as a fledgling Bahá´í I used to watch the clock to try to offer this prayer punctually at midday!) The medium Obligatory Prayer is to be recited in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. “At evening” means between sunset and two hours after sunset.32 The long Obligatory Prayer is to be recited once in 24 hours.

It should be kept in mind that reciting any of the three prayers completely fulfills one’s spiritual obligation. No one prayer is superior to the other. We are free to choose whichever prayer fits our practical and spiritual needs. But choose one we must.

Be not neglectful of obligatory prayer and fasting. He who faileth to observe them hath not been nor will ever be acceptable in the sight of God 33 --Bahá´u´lláh

Rúhíyyih Khánum once told the story of a Bahá´í in India who described how he would drag himself out of bed in the cold of night after suddenly realizing that he had forgotten to recite his Obligatory Prayer. (Of course, at that hour, he had no choice but to recite the long Obligatory Prayer.)

Regarding the long Obligatory Prayer, Bahá´u´lláh recommends the condition in which it should be recited and describes the results of its recitation:

. . . the long Obligatory Prayer should be said at those times when one feeleth himself in a prayerful mood. In truth, it hath been revealed in such wise that if it be recited to a rock, that rock would stir and speak forth; and if it be recited to a mountain, that mountain would move and flow. Well is it with the one who reciteth it and fulfilleth God´s precepts. Whichever prayer is read will suffice.34

Like the other laws of God such as fasting and the pilgrimage, there is the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. Like any routine, reciting the Obligatory Prayer can become a meaningless monotony. To avoid this, we should take to heart the counsels of Bahá´u´lláh regarding how to recite the Obligatory Prayer:

O My brother! How great, how very great, can the law of obligatory prayer be, when, through His mercy and loving kindness, one is enabled to observe it. When a man commenceth the recitation of the Obligatory Prayer, he should see himself severed from all created things and regard himself as utter nothingness before the will and purpose of God, in such wise that he seeth naught but Him in the world of being. This is the station of God’s well-favored ones and those who are wholly devoted to Him. Should one perform the Obligatory Prayer in this manner, he will be accounted by God and the Concourse on high among those who have truly offered the prayer.35

**Morning and Evening Family Devotions**

In our family we established varying routines over the years depending on the age of our children. When they were young, in the evening we would “tuck them into bed” with prayers and songs. As they became older, we began taking turns choosing a passage from the Writings to read before each meal. We were careful not to confuse this with the Christian tradition of blessing the food. As our kids grew up this became the only evening time when we could be more certain of everyone being together. This family routine adds a certain gracefulness and formality to the meal. For the younger children present, a paraphrasing of the passage is sometimes needed. And occasionally a discussion of the meaning and application of the verse continues after the initial reading. When non-Bahá’í guests come for dinner we suspended this routine in order to avoid confusion. Over the years, this and other devotional routines became so habituated that, if they are not carried out for some reason, there is a feeling of “Hey, something is missing. Something is not quite right.”

We found that saying prayers and reciting Tablets right after the dinner meal worked well while our children were young but later, during adolescence, their evening school and social commitments pulled them away quickly after dinner.

For many years we said prayers together as a family before heading off to school and work. This worked fine until our boys started hitting adolescence and found that they needed to study later, needed more sleep, and simply couldn't pull themselves out of bed in the mornings. At one time, when all of us worked or studied in the same school, we prayed together in the car on the way to school.

Saying prayers together as a family in the morning need not be a formal, boring, stifling affair. One of the most beautiful and inspiring descriptions of family prayers is that of the Holy Family while in the prison of ‘Akká as observed by Florence Khan during her pilgrimage in 1906 in the days of the Master when Shoghi Effendi was one of the children of the household.

Florence waited every day for the little knocking at her door which invited her to morning prayers with the Holy Household.

Reaching their long reception room[[6]](#footnote-6)a with its latticed blinds, she would remove her shoes and enter in stocking feet. A gentle breeze blew through the blinds, and beyond them she could see the green vineyards of Mount Carmel, spread out in the morning sun. Alone, at the head of the room on a divan, sat the Greatest Holy Leaf. Regal and yet at the same time self-effacing, she wore the graceful flowing head scarf and garments of the East. Another divan ran the length of the room under the many windows, and at its head, at the right-hand upper corner and near His sister, sat ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Halfway down from the Master was His consort, Munírih Khánum. Beside her, one of her daughters was chanting prayers of Bahá’u’lláh and verses from the Qur’án. At the further, the ‘lower’, end of the room were little boys and girls of the Household, and from time to time one or another child would sweetly chant.

Here too were the tall samovars, and quietly moving about, women in Eastern dress were serving hot tea in small glasses placed on saucers. The tea was being unobtrusively served and drunk simultaneously with the prayers. The meeting was not cold and formal--it was natural and easy, more like people gathered as a family to listen to music.

Florence especially remembered one grandchild, Shoghi Effendi, chanting in a slightly sleepy voice that reminded her of the dawn chirpings of awakening birds.

Invited to sit by Khánum, Florence said she regretted that she knew so little Persian. Khánum’s translated response was: ‘Your spiritual eyes see, your spiritual ears hear, and that is much better than knowing Persian.’

From time to time the Master, sitting quietly on the divan, would look over toward Mount Carmel and the Shrine and watch the birds Circleing under the bright blue sky.

A woman attendant expressed the wish that He would soon be released after His by now four years within the walls of ‘Akká. (In the event, there would be another three years before the gates would at last fly open to release Him.)

He answered patiently but concluded with, ‘Let us speak of other things.’36

Trying to get four children to be ready for school and to prayers on time is no easy task, but the effort is worthwhile. Some of my favorite memories are the gathering of the family around the “spiritual hearth” each morning to supplicate God’s grace, chant prayers, sing songs, and set out on the right foot at the beginning of each day. At times we tried awards such as stickers and for a long time we used an attendance chart. There was no yelling, screaming, or punishing. The chart was just there and I would mark punctual attendance with a happy face. It was my way of saying to the kids that morning devotions were important and that I valued their presence. It didn’t work perfectly but it did make a difference.

The prayer circle in Bahá’í life extends from the individual, to spouses, to family, and then to neighborhood or community. This latter aspect is discussed as a vital process for self-transformation in “Chapter 24: Devotional Meetings.”

**Dawn Prayers**

I want to make special mention of dawn prayers because I have found them to be both a particular challenge and an extraordinary blessing. There are many passages from the Writings which recommend dawn prayers. From the Pen of Bahá’u’lláh we read:

Reflect, O people, on the grace and blessings of your Lord, and yield Him thanks at eventide and dawn.37

Occupy thyself in remembrance of the Beauty of Him Who is the Unconstrained, at early morn and seek communion with Him at the hour of dawn.38

At the dawn of every day he [the true seeker] should commune with God, and with all his soul persevere in the quest of his Beloved.39

I beseech Thee, O my God, by the fire of Thy love which drove sleep from the eyes of Thy chosen ones and Thy loved ones, and by their remembrance and praise of Thee at the hour of dawn . . .40

Do Thou ordain for her that which Thou didst ordain for such of Thy handmaidens as circle round the throne of Thy majesty, and gaze, at eventide and at dawn, on Thy beauty.41

The blessed Báb also refers to praying at the hour of dawn:

Wash away my sins and the sins of those who seek Thy forgiveness at dawn . . .42

The writings and utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, too, prescribe praying at dawn:

Thou seest me . . . supplicating Thee in the dead of night and at the break of dawn, entreating and invoking Thee at morn and at eventide . . .43

With this prayer doth Thy servant call Thee, at dawntide and in the night-season.44

Supplicate unto Him and beseech in the middle of the night and at early morn just as a needy and captive one beseeches.45

Supplicate to God, pray to Him at midnight and at dawn.46

At every instant, I beg for your assistance, bounty, and a fresh favor and blessing, so that ... each one of you may, at dawn, turn unto the Holy Land and may experience spiritual emotions with all intensity.47

Arising at dawn to say prayers is not a national custom from where I come. Although my parents and many of my relatives are from farming families accustomed to beginning morning chores while it is yet dark; and although the folk wisdom of Benjamin Franklin reminds us that “Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise;” I and many of my fellow countrymen have lost the pious discipline of arising early. The Guardian, who received pilgrims from around the world, was well aware of this national characteristic. Alice Dudley, in her Pilgrim’s notes, relates the following incident:

When he [Shoghi Effendi] asked me if I had seen the Shrine of the Báb yet, I told him I had gotten up at 4:00 a.m. to see it and he was surprised that an American had gotten up so early. He jokingly replied that it was because I was Scandinavian. He expected early rising of the English but not of the Americans.48

This “sleepy-head” reputation must have been a common perception of the American Bahá’ís from the earliest days at the World Centre, for Genevieve Coy tells of a similar incident during her Pilgrimage in the days of the Master:

On the previous evening we had told Rúhí Effendi that we were going up to the Tomb early in the morning. But when he saw us there, he said, “You really came! I didn’t think you would! Americans never get up early!” At which we laughed much!49

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained the meaning of dawn prayers to one of the believers:

Regarding thy question about the morning prayer. Both meanings are included in the word dawn--the natural dawn, and the dawn of the Kingdom. When a soul rises in the morning from sleep, before everything else, he must commemorate the name of God in order that he may obtain spirituality and illumination.50

Apparently, in order to clarify the meaning of “before everything else” to Lua Getsinger the Master told her, “. . . you must never eat material food in the morning until you have had spiritual food.”51

When I consider the material meaning of “dawn” as explained by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, I can’t help but feel uncomfortable about sleeping in, especially when I meditate on the Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh:

O Bond Slave of the World! Many a dawn hath the breeze of My loving-kindness wafted over thee and found thee upon the bed of heedlessness fast asleep. Bewailing then thy plight it returned whence it came.52

When I first became a Bahá’í, I was a college student accustomed to staying up late and rolling out of bed and into my jeans just ten minutes before my 8:00 a.m. class. Over the years I have learned to get up earlier for prayer and for several other routines which will be discussed later.

As I became more aware of the inner life of the mind, I began to realize that when I did sleep in--especially on weekends--this was the time when I was most prone to entertain vain imaginings and idle fancies. The need to begin the day with the cleansing Word of God became an increasingly critical need.

O Essence of Desire! At many a dawn have I turned from the realms of the Placeless unto thine abode, and found thee on the bed of ease busied with others than Myself. Thereupon, even as the flash of the spirit, I returned to the realms of celestial glory and breathed it not in My retreats above unto the hosts of holiness.53 --Bahá’u’lláh

If you're not use to it, getting up early can be quite a challenge. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá acknowledges this common difficulty while pointing out the vitalizing power of worship: “. . . at the hour of dawn my drooping soul is refreshed and strengthened in remembrance of Thy beauty and perfection.”54 In future, when we have the social support of a Bahá’í society and each community has a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, arising for dawn prayers will be easier. But for now, many of us, especially Americans, must swim upstream against the current of old-world-order norms and act as pioneers in the development of spiritual routines and holy discipline. As with the establishment of any wholesome habit the key to success is to make a plan for gradual implementation. A good time to begin is during the fast when we get up early anyway. Or, you can begin with praying at dawn just one day per week such as Sunday. After this becomes easy, try it for two days, then three days and so on. Even if you establish the habit and then lose it due to illness or depression, it can be rebuilt in the same way.55

Getting up earlier requires, of course, that we go to bed earlier. And going to bed earlier requires that we accomplish all of our essential duties before bedtime which often means that we have to sacrifice some leisure-time activity.

Artemus Lamb, our Bahá’í counselor when we lived in Honduras, encouraged us to arise at 5:00 a.m. in order to deepen and pray together. He and his wife, Dee, had done this for years. When I asked him what he did when he was especially tired, he explained that, when necessary, after devotions, he would return to bed for more rest. This technique was also used by Hand of the Cause Zikrullah Khadem.56 In tropical climates “siestas” are still acceptable and common. We have learned to use these short afternoon naps from time to time to make up for lost sleep, without sacrificing morning prayers.

For me, dawn prayers have gradually become the fountain-head of my spiritual development. Describing the power of the Word of God, Bahá’u’lláh states: “Every single letter proceeding out of the mouth of God is indeed a mother letter, and every word uttered by Him Who is the Well Spring of Divine Revelation is a mother word, and His Tablet a Mother Tablet.” He explains that these “mother” words, letters and Tablets are “endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame” and can generate “all the manifold arts which the hands of man can produce” and “unfold the knowledge of the most marvelous sciences . . .”57 When I asked myself, “What is the daily activity which first puts me into contact with the Creative Word?” the answer was, “dawn prayers.” This then became for me the highly desired “mother act” in my personal life; a habit important to be formed because from it all beneficial thoughts, actions, and providential events were born. It is through the process of praying at dawn that we can draw close to our Lord, receive His inspiration and then enter the work place prepared to inspire others through our example.

Prayer and supplication are so effective that they inspire one’s heart for the whole day with high ideals and supreme sanctity and calmness.58 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

**Personal Prayer**

Besides prayers with our spouse, our family, and the Bahá’í community at dawn, in the evening, or at any other time, we need to find a time and a place to pray alone. Bahá’u’lláh counsels each of the friends to intone “in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God.”59 His Holiness the Báb gives this explanation:

The reason why privacy hath been enjoined in moments of devotion is this, that thou mayest give thy best attention to the remembrance of God, that thy heart may at all times be animated with His Spirit, and not be shut out as by a veil from thy Best Beloved. Let not thy tongue pay lip service in praise of God while thy heart be not attuned to the exalted Summit of Glory, and the Focal Point of communion.60

If you don’t have an appropriate room for private prayers you might consider creating an Indian-style, ashram-like corner as described and recommended by C.G. Jung: “. . . it may be only a corner of a room separated off by a curtain--to which the inhabitants can withdraw. There they meditate for perhaps a quarter or half an hour, or do Yoga exercises.”61 Stanwood Cobb had a favorite place under a tree at his home which he used regularly for meditation. Another alternative is the “ashram of the West” --the bathroom! This has often served as my place of privacy for years! I was tickled to learn that Dorothy Baker did the same. The following is an interesting description of the content and routine of her personal devotions related by Hand of the Cause John Robarts who also was a great advocate of prayer.

She [Dorothy Baker] came to Rice Lake (summer school) in 1943. We were talking about prayer and she said, “I don’t always do it, but I like to arise in the early morning, before all the rest of my household, so I can have some quiet time to myself. I can go into the bathroom and lock the door. Two prayers I like to say are the Tablet of Ahmad and the Long Obligatory Prayer. Sometimes I have time for only one. I find that when I say the Long Obligatory Prayer my personal affairs go well--I seem to be inspired. And when I say the Tablet of Ahmad, all my Bahá’í work goes well.62

Still another “private chamber” is the car. When I am driving alone, especially on long trips, I like to do what I call “nibbling on spiritual peanuts.” I sing some verse, particularly the Remover of Difficulties. Sometimes I say just a few. Sometimes I say many. I started this habit during my college days. After reading Bahá’u’lláh’s exhortation to recite The Remover of Difficulties “five hundred times, nay, a thousand times, by day and by night, sleeping and waking, that haply the Countenance of Glory may be unveiled to their eyes, and tiers of light descend upon them,”63 I began saying it when I drove home from college during vacations between Columbus and Findlay, Ohio.

Dorothy Baker would say the Tablet of Ahmad nine times while driving to meetings of the National Spiritual Assembly. She would also recite this prayer nine times in the morning before the meetings (no matter how long they went on the night before) to bring about unity,64 and she would use it to calm her nerves and to attract divine inspiration before speaking at large college audiences.65

Dr. Muhájir’s daily devotions always included the Prayer of Visitation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.66 Besides praying alone every morning for at least an hour,67 he would also pray at night. His prayer life, like the rest of his life, can best be described as “intense”:

The habit of praying for hours at night continued throughout his [Dr. Muhájir’s] life. He only prayed for spiritual things. When asked to pray for material objects his usual answer was that he did not have any desire to waste God’s time by bothering Him with such nonsense. I [his wife Írán] was present on many occasions when, for the success of a teaching project, the purchase of a Bahá’í Centre, or the opening of a new area to the Faith in some remote corner of the world, he repeated the prayer of the Báb, ‘say: God sufficeth all things above all things . . .’ 314 times,68 chanting the Tablet of Ahmad and the Fire Tablet after each hundredth repetition. He very seldom prayed on his own behalf, unless it was for success in his teaching work. After he was appointed a Hand of the Cause he said daily prayers to be worthy of this great bounty and to be able to serve the beloved Guardian; and he supplicated Bahá’u’lláh to give him humility and to safeguard him so that he would remain steadfast in His Covenant.69

If these few examples from the lives of the Hands of the Cause may seem beyond our reach, we can take comfort in the more moderate prayer-life of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum who was also a Hand of the Cause. Violette Nakhjavání, in her tribute to her, states that “although Rúhíyyih Khánum did not consider herself a pious person who spent much time in prayer, I believe she had a genuine reverence which was very private and unpretentious.” She goes on to tell how Rúhíyyih Khánum attributed her public speaking success to her recitation, as recommended by the Guardian, of the prayer which begins “O Lord, my God and my Haven in my distress! My Shield and my Shelter in my woes!...” and to her turning to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for inspiration.70

Regardless of the amount of time spent in prayer, certainly the sincerity and intensity of the prayers of these Hands can be held up as ideals and strived for with every ounce of our wIL My favorite model for reciting the long Obligatory Prayer is Dorothy Baker as described by a frequent roommate of hers at Bahá’í gatherings:

The chime of an alarm clock. The silvery pre-dawn light in the room and Dorothy rising from her bed to say the Long Obligatory Prayer, sometimes childishly rubbing the sleep from her eyes. Then the dignified and graceful movements71 like the classic postures of a religious dance. She became the Prayer. Every changing mood of the prayer was reflected in her being: the awed adoration, the bowed humility, the anguished moments of contrition, the final meditative calm.72

In my own personal, morning devotions I like to begin by reciting the Greatest Name 95 times.[[7]](#footnote-7)a This helps me feel the presence of Bahá’u’lláh. After reciting the Greatest Name, I say the long Obligatory Prayer and the short prayer for teaching which asks God to guide us to souls whose hearts are prepared to accept the Cause and to guide them to us.73 I then pray using my own words in order to focus on more specific commitments and needs. When I have time, I also enjoy reciting the Tablet of Visitation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and, when I have a very special need, the Tablet of Ahmad and/or the Fire Tablet.

**“Preventative Prayer” Lists**

Another routine--Preventative Prayers--is one that I created in response to a personal need. Sometimes a certain person, project, institution, or spiritual quality would be in dire need of prayers. I would pray, but at the same time I would realize that I should have been praying for them before the crisis, illness, or dire need arose. I needed to practice “preventative spiritual maintenance.” So, I devised a list of themes, made copies of it and glued it in the back of my prayer book. Beside each theme, I simply make a tally mark to keep track of the sequence. Then, during prayers each day, I not only say a prayer for present needs but also a “preventative prayer.” It takes some organization and discipline but it has proven helpful and gives me the feeling that I am regularly sending out positive, Creative-Word assistance for worthy purposes. You may want to create your own personal list. If so, you might like to get started by seeing this one:

* Forgiveness
* Praise and Thanksgiving
* Firmness in the Covenant
* Spiritual Qualities in General
* Detachment
* Purity
* Teaching and the Teaching Plan
* Remover of Difficulties for:
* Institutions
* The Bahá’í Funds
* Humankind
* The Bahá’ís
* Bahá’ís of Iran
* Healing for:
* For the Departed:
* My Spouse and My Marriage
* My Children and Grandchildren
* My Mother, Father and Family

**RELATION OF PRAYER TO OTHER PROCESSES**

In the BLDH program prayer is viewed as the vital link between the Word of God and our feelings, thoughts, and intentions, which, in turn, guide our actions. Transformation should be viewed as a single, grand process, of which prayer is a key sub-process or stage. We should be careful not to separate the realm of worship from the realm of action. Faith needs to be expressed in deeds. The Kingdom of the Father in Heaven must be translated into the Kingdom of the Father on Earth--both socially and personally.

Because prayer is communion or conversation with God, it is composed of two parts: expression and listening. Expression takes the form of praising, thanking, and supplicating. Listening takes the form of feeling inspiration and receiving guidance during meditation (or contemplation). Meditation can be considered as the second half of prayer. The two are often intermingled. For conceptual purposes meditation has been considered separately in the following chapter.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. Why should we make time to prayer?
2. Why do you think Bahá’u’lláh ordained obligatory prayer?
3. What is the wisdom of praying alone, with one’s spouse, with one’s family, and with members of one’s community?
4. Why do you think praying at dawn is especially recommended in the writings?
5. What are some of the obstacles to creating and maintaining a habit of daily prayer? How could each be overcome?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will increase the frequency of my dawn prayers.
* I will pray before going to bed.
* I will consult with my family regarding how to begin having morning and evening devotions together.
* I will pray with my spouse at least once per week.
* I will memorize a very powerful prayer such as one of the obligatory prayers or the Tablet of Ahmad.
* I will memorize one of my favorite prayers.
* I will study one or more of the following publications:
  + *Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation and the Devotional Attitude*, compiled by The Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1980),
  + *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting: Selection of Extracts and Prayers from the Bahá´í Writings*, compiled by The Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá´í World Centre, 2000),
  + *Du'á: On Wings of Prayer*, by Ruth J. Moffett, (Happy Camp, Calif.: Naturegraph Publishers, Inc., 1984), and/or
  + *Prayer: A Bahá’í Approach* by William and Madeline Hellaby, (Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1985).

CHAPTER 18: MEDITATION FOR SPIRITUAL PURPOSES

O brother, we should open our eyes, meditate upon His Word, and seek the sheltering shadow of the Manifestations of God...1 --Bahá’u’lláh

**THE FACULTY OF MEDITATION: ITS IMPORTANCE AND ITS VARIOUS USES**

There are several terms which are synonymous with or similar in meaning to meditation: contemplation, reflection, pondering, fantasizing, musing, and others. They are used interchangeably in the writings of the Faith and in literature in general. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that meditation is a single faculty like a single mirror, but that it has two uses--material and spiritual; in other words, the single mirror can be turned to both heavenly and earthly concerns. For this reason, it appears twice on the BLDH Circle--as a psychological/intellectual process and as a spiritual process. Regarding the use of meditation for material purposes the Master explains:

The meditative faculty is akin to the mirror; if you put it before earthly objects, it will reflect them. Therefore, if the spirit of man is contemplating earthly subjects, he will be informed of these.2

This faculty brings forth from the invisible plane the sciences and arts. Through the meditative faculty inventions are made possible, colossal undertakings are carried out; through it governments can run smoothly.3

Concerning the spiritual uses of meditation ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

But if you turn the mirror of your spirits heavenwards, . . . the rays of the Sun of Reality will be reflected in your hearts, and the virtues of the kingdom will be obtained.4

On the Circle you can see the light from Bahá’u’lláh and the Spiritual Quadrant illuminating the “mirror” of spiritual meditation. The Master tells us further that through spiritual meditation the believer “receives the breath of the Holy Spirit. . .. divine inspiration . . . [and] the bestowal of the Spirit.”5 He even considers spiritual meditation to be the best and highest use of the meditative faculty:

Therefore let us keep this faculty rightly directed--turning it to the heavenly Sun and not to earthly objects--so that we may discover the secrets of the Kingdom, and comprehend the allegories of the Bible and the mysteries of the spirit.6

**THE PURPOSES AND NATURE OF SPIRITUALLY-ORIENTED MEDITATION**

“A servant is drawn unto Me in prayer until I answer him, and when I have answered him, I become the ear wherewith he heareth …”7 (a “famed tradition” quoted by Bahá’u’lláh in *The Seven Valleys*)

Meditate upon that which hath streamed forth from the heaven of the Will of thy Lord, He Who is the Source of all grace, that thou mayest grasp the intended meaning which is enshrined in the sacred depths of the Holy Writings.8 --Bahá’u’lláh

In the Spiritual Quadrant the faculty of meditation is used for two purposes: (1) for receiving divine guidance, and (2) for seeking understanding of the Word of God. The first is more passive in nature; it is receptive; it is akin to listening; it requires being sensitive to feelings, subtle thoughts, and intuitions[[8]](#footnote-8)a. The second is more active in nature; it seeks to penetrate mysteries and the unknown through contemplating and comprehending the Divine Verses. The former is closely associated with prayer. It is, in practice, the second half of prayer. The latter is closely related to deepening and the study of the Holy Writings.

Meditation in the Spiritual Quadrant can naturally flow into meditation as defined in the Psychological Quadrant. The difference is one of direction and focus. In the Spiritual Quadrant the mirror of meditation is turned to the spiritual world --listening to God’s voice and seeking the meaning of His Revealed Word. In the Psychological Quadrant this faculty is turned more towards the entertainment of possibilities in the realms of the intellect, problem-solving, and action. The Guardian explains the dual uses of this single faculty and identifies it as an essential ingredient of the spiritual life.

Meditation amongst some sects and with some people is a wasting of time in pursuing abstractions or imaginings. But real meditation, the dwelling on some thought in order to carry it nearer to fruition, or to round it or grasp it better--whether that thought be a passage from the teachings or some problem of an intellectual nature or otherwise --is constructive and, if practiced, can do a great deal of good to the individual. Meditation and prayer can be complementary. It is certain that no one, the believers included, meditates enough these days, and they should certainly exercise this faculty which the Master makes clear is one of the distinctive characteristics of man.9

Roughly we can say that, through deeds and through prayer, one can come into the flow of the Holy Spirit. People are not, as you put it, self-supporting spiritually, because they neither pray enough, nor do they live the ethical teachings of the Faith, our Faith or any other Faith. There is a great deal of so-called thinking done nowadays, but very little right-acting, and very little real communion with God. It is not surprising, therefore, that peoples’ spiritual life is so inadequate to meet the trials of a disintegrating civilization.10

**Listening to God’s Voice**

Shoghi Effendi, during a conversation with Ruth Moffet, referred to meditation and contemplation as the second half of prayer.11 Moments of meditative “listening” can be interspersed with moments of supplication and praise, or, it can occur after we pray. It is at this time that we can receive divine guidance.

When in prayer we are freed from all outward things and turn to God, then it is as if in our hearts we heard the voice of God. . .. All of us when we attain to a true spiritual condition can hear the voice of God speaking to us . . .12 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Receiving guidance should not be confused with receiving a direct Revelation from God. We know that God is the Ultimate Source of all inspiration; that the prime intermediary between God and humankind is Bahá’u’lláh; and that other intermediaries can inspire us with guidance, i.e., the other Central Figures, other souls, and even our own spirit.

It is an axiomatic fact that while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit. In that state of mind you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed . . .13

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

This may seem miraculous and difficult, but ‘Abdu’l-Bahá assures us that, if certain spiritual prerequisites are met, we will be able to use meditation in this way:

We must strive to attain to that condition [hearing the voice of God] by being separated from all things and from the people of the world and by turning to God alone. It will take some effort on the part of man to attain to that condition, but he must work for it, strive for it. We can attain to it by thinking and caring less for material things and more for the spiritual. The further we go from the one, the nearer we are to the other--the choice is ours!14

As I mentioned earlier, for me, one of the most fascinating aspects of the spiritual life and one of the most marvelous attributes of God is that He listens and then answers. The Guardian tells us that answers can come in the form of opportunities, thoughts, messages, books, and recalling or being given a needed principle.15 The great truth that God communicates with His loved ones is expressed in various ways by Bahá’u’lláh:

He, verily, is the Best-Beloved, the Answerer of Prayers.16

Who is there that hath cried after Thee, and whose prayer hath remained unanswered?17

He is the prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God!18

He is in truth the One Who doth hear and answer the call.19

Loving hands are uplifted to the heaven of Thy grace and generosity: Where are the rains of Thy bestowal, O Answerer of the worlds?20

The history of the Faith is replete with stories about how answers to prayers have been given via meditation. I have chosen two as food for thought. A Letter of the Living, Muqaddas, was one of the several disciples of the Báb who recognized Him while in the midst of prayer and meditation.

I [Muqaddas]. . . requested his [Mullá Husayn’s] host to allow me the privacy of a room in his house where, alone and undisturbed, I could commune with God. In the midst of my contemplation, I suddenly remembered the face of a Youth whom I had often observed while in Karbilá, standing in an attitude of prayer, with His face bathed in tears at the entrance of the shrine of the Imám Husayn. That same countenance now reappeared before my eyes. In my vision I seemed to behold that same face, those same features, expressive of such joy as I could never describe. He smiled as He gazed at me. I went towards Him, ready to throw myself at His feet. I was bending towards the ground, when, lo! that radiant figure vanished from before me. Overpowered with joy and gladness, I ran out to meet Mulla Husayn, who with transport received me and assured me that I had, at last, attained the object of my desire.21

Sometimes, in order to protect a believer from persecution, “Bahá’u’lláh used to send a few Tablets without names to a well-known Bahá’í, asking him to give each to any one of the believers he felt moved to give them to. Those who received a Tablet in this way discovered that Bahá’u’lláh had indeed intended it for them.”22 In a Tablet to Hand of the Cause Ibn-i-Asdaq, Bahá’u’lláh gave him instructions regarding how to deliver nine Tablets without names. On a separate list the names were listed with no indication as to which Tablet was for whom. He was to:

carry out certain devotions, then to position the Tablets in a high place, and while turning his heart to Bahá’u’lláh to reach for one, write on it whichever of the nine names came to mind, and deliver it to him. It is also indicated by Bahá’u’lláh’s amanuensis that more Tablets would be sent to Ibn-i-Asdaq for distribution in the same fashion.

As it was the will of Bahá’u’lláh for each individual to receive the very Tablet which was intended for him, this method of spiritual communication, which He Himself had authorized, became truly effective. Each recipient clearly saw that the contents of his Tablet fit precisely his own personal circumstances and answered his questions.23

Bahá’u’lláh continues to wield this same power to communicate with his followers. Certainly, we can ask for and receive His guidance for the teaching work, our personal affairs, and any other need we may have. We need to learn to listen to the voice of the spirit. We can practice following our intuition by putting into action ideas born during meditation. If, after persevering, the door remains closed, we know that it wasn’t true inspiration. But, when the idea is successful, we need to trace it backwards to the initial, intuitive experience in order to more clearly identify the feeling of “guidance” in future.

**Repetition of the Greatest Name**

In its letter of December 28, 1999, The Universal House of Justice, as a means of allaying a “growing thirst for spiritual life and moral clarity” announced that “all elements of the laws dealing with obligatory prayer and fasting are, without any exception, now applicable.” This included the repetition of the Greatest Name as an object of meditation:

We have...decided that it is timely for Bahá’ís in every land to take to their hearts the words of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: “It hath been ordained that every believer in God, the Lord of Judgement, shall, each day, having washed his hands and then his face, seat himself and, turning unto God, repeat “Alláh-u-Abhá” ninety-five times. Such was the decree of the Maker of the Heavens when, with majesty and power, He established Himself upon the thrones of His Names.” Let all experience the spiritual enrichment brought to their souls by this simple act of worshipful meditation.

It is of interest to note that this type of exercise also enhances physical health. Elena Serocki, in a summary of hundreds of research studies that document the connection between faith and healing, states:

Humans under psychological stress experience raised blood pressure and heart and breathing rates, straining the body and lowering immunity, says Dr. Herbert Benson of Harvard Medical School and author of *The Relaxation Response*. In many studies, Benson has found that an opposite response can be elicited by combining two steps: repeating a prayer, word, sound, phrase or movement, and disregarding other thoughts. Meditation, prayer, tai chi and yoga all provoke this healthful state.24

**The Subjects of Spiritually-Oriented Meditation**

Bahá’u’lláh directs us to meditate on the Word of God. He affirms that three of the results will be happiness, steadfastness in His Cause, and the discovery of the purpose of God.

Happy is the man that pondereth in his heart that which hath been revealed in the Books of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Meditate upon this, O ye beloved of God, and let your ears be attentive unto his Word, so that ye may, by His grace and mercy, drink your fill from the crystal waters of constancy, and become as steadfast and immovable as the mountain in His Cause.25

Do thou meditate on that which we have revealed unto thee, that thou mayest discover the purpose of God, thy Lord, and the Lord of all worlds. In these words the mysteries of Divine Wisdom have been treasured.26

In order to be continually and regularly meditating on the Creative Word of God, we need to surround ourselves with it. Stanwood Cobb remarked that a common problem in Bahá’í life is that we “shut the door” to the flow of the Holy Spirit into our lives. He explained that the Divine Power is always there at our disposal, but we have to “keep the door open.” And the way to do this, he said, was to “surround ourselves” with spiritual literature: books, magazines, and pamphlets.27 (And now we can add to his list digital sources of the Writings, music, talks, etc.) I keep Bahá’í books by my bed, in my study, in my office, in my brief case, and sometimes in my shirt or coat pocket.[[9]](#footnote-9)a For many years the Office of Pioneering sent pioneers beautiful, illuminated, inspirational quotation from the Writings. I “wall-papered” the inside of my medicine cabinet with them. My shaving and teeth-brushing routines took on a new spiritual dimension! (Munching on spiritual “peanuts,” as you know, is one of my favorite past times!) During my college days at Ohio State, Olivia Kelsey, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh, once commented to me, “You know, Keith, some of the older believers in the community think that it is disgraceful and irreverent for the Bahá’í youth to go around with prayer books in the back pocket of their jeans. But I don’t think so. I think that the Guardian would be tickled pink.” So, guess who went around with *Bahá’í Prayers* in his back pocket for the next two years? (Now, the same prayers can be kept in the same back, jeans pocket on a Smart Phone!)

Peter Kahn once told us a story of an incident which helped him to understand the meaning of meditative deepening. He loaned a copy of *Gleanings* to a friend who was a railway worker (I believe in Australia). When he visited him after a few days he asked him how he liked it. The man answered that he was enjoying the book very much. Dr. Kahn left him and returned several days later assuming that surely by then he had finished reading it. When he asked him how his reading was proceeding the friend responded that he loved the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh. When he asked him if he had finished, the friend showed how much he had read. Peter Kahn was surprised to see that he had only read a few pages. When he expressed his surprise, the friend told him how he was “reading” *Gleanings*. Each evening he would memorize a passage, then, while he was working on the railroad, he would turn the passage over and over in his mind. The next day he would proceed to the next passage and do the same. Dr. Kahn was extremely impressed with this way of meditating and highly recommended it to us.28

During the 1983 International Convention that I attended, Hand of the Cause of God ‘Alí-Akbar Furútan went to the end of the line of delegates who were waiting their turn to make recommendations to the Convention. The person Mr. Furútan was standing behind noticed him and gave him his place in line. This kept happening until he was “passed” all the way to the microphone. When he got there, he simply said that he didn’t know whether or not the Universal House of Justice would approve, but, at night, before he goes to sleep, he listens to cassette recordings of the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh. Then he sat down.

When you don’t have access to the Writings you have to rely on your memory. In Colombia the believers are excellent at memorizing entire Tablets. I am not. I can memorize them, but then I forget them. I have a small, select repertoire that I repeat over and over again. It grows, but at a snail’s pace. For those who share this weakness, we can take refuge in Rúhíyyih Khanum who also bemoaningly regretted not having memorized more of the Writings (especially when she was driving for long hours during her three, African safaris without even a radio to listen to). Dorothy Baker used a very practical technique which I have found to be very helpful. She would simply choose an attribute of God and meditate on it.29 These can be found at the end of each prayer and an excellent list of them has been compiled by Rúhíyyih Khanum in *The Desire of the World*.30 Besides the attributes which I have already mentioned, some which particularly fascinate me are: God as “humorist”,31 “Thou Who art the most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the hidden,”32 “the Incomparable Friend,” “the Supreme Companion,”33 and, the meekness of God: “Glorified, glorified be His [God’s] meekness--a meekness that hath melted the hearts of them that have been brought nigh unto God!”34

In answer to a question regarding how to give the Bahá’í Message, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá placed teaching in the context of a natural flow of prayer, meditation, deepening, and action with a unique emphasis on meditating on the next life in order to acquire a desire to be spiritual:

In a loud voice He answered in these words:

“The first thing to do is to acquire a thirst for spirituality, then Live the Life! Live the Life! Live the Life! The way to acquire this thirst is to meditate upon the future life. Study the Holy Words, read your Bible, read the Holy Books, especially study the Holy Utterances of Bahá’u’lláh. Prayer and Meditation, take much time for these two. Then will you know the Great Thirst, and then only can you begin to Live the Life!”35

Rúhíyyih Khanum affirms the value of meditating on the future life:

Death is always with us, and yet we almost never think of it unless it is forced on our attention . . ..

If people thought just a little more of what death is, its purpose, the nature of the change it brings about, they would not only live differently but with far more conscious direction to their lives, with more poise and more assurance than they do at present. Life should be viewed always in the perspective of death.36

To gain a clearer idea of the future life, I enjoy listening to the YouTube talks of Mr. Hooper Dunbar on this subject and reading about near death experiences, now referred to as NDEs. Since the breakthrough publication of Raymond Moody’s *Life After Life* in 1975, a vast amount of literature and research on this subject has been produced, the content of which is very much in harmony with the Bahá’í teachings on death and the next phase of the journey of the soul.

When I meditate on arriving in the next world, I love to recall a story told to me by Dr. Hushang Ma’ani when I lived in Columbus, Ohio. In the days of the Guardian there was a servant who had been faithfully serving the Holy Household since the time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. One day Shoghi Effendi approached him. He told him that he had been a good and faithful servant for many years and that he would like to do him a favor, any favor. The servant answered that the only thing he wanted was to be able to continue to serve him. The Guardian accepted his humble request and then added, “And when you arrive in the Abhá Kingdom I will be waiting to greet you. Then, I will take your hand and place it in the hand of the Master.” Besides being a beautiful story worthy of our reflection, it was also a prophecy, for Shoghi Effendi passed away before the servant did.

**The Spirit of Faith**

Meditation can be considered as a faculty of the human spirit. It can be utilized by everyone--agnostics and atheists included. As was mentioned earlier, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that meditation’s highest purpose is for discovering heavenly mysteries and realities.

When you compare, on a time line, the duration of your life on this planet--60-100 years if you are fortunate--with the eternal life of the soul, there is simply no comparison. It becomes obvious that our major task is to prepare ourselves for the spiritual journey of the soul into the other worlds of God.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that turning the meditative mirror of the spirit towards the divine in life requires an additional power, the spirit of faith.

But the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities. It is like a mirror which, although clear, polished and brilliant, is still in need of light. Until a ray of the sun reflects upon it, it cannot discover the heavenly secrets.37

The spirit of faith is the second, spiritual birth referred to by Christ.38 It is our acceptance of, faith in, and obedience to Bahá’u’lláh. In my experience, this spirit of faith needs to be renewed on a daily basis. It is not just a “one-time event”: “Yesterday I was lost, today I am saved; I have become a Bahá’í, my work is complete.” No, the task of reinvigorating the spirit of faith is a daily chore. It is the purpose of the processes described in the Spiritual Quadrant of the BLDH Circle to help us activate this spirit of faith. The power of the spirit of faith is tremendous! Its role in the transformation process is vital and essential.

It [the spirit of faith] comes from the breath of the Holy Spirit, and by the divine power it becomes the cause of eternal life. It is the power which makes the earthly man heavenly, and the imperfect man perfect. It makes the impure to be pure, the silent eloquent; it purifies and sanctifies those made captive by carnal desires; it makes the ignorant wise.39 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What is the difference between meditation for spiritual purposes and meditation for other non-spiritual purposes?
2. Are they both acceptable? Which is superior? Why?
3. What is the difference between meditation as described in the writings and vain imaginings and idle fancies?
4. When can spiritually-oriented meditation take place in one’s daily life? What factors can prevent one from meditating on the Word of God and spiritual themes? What can be done to overcome these barriers?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* Instead of simply saying a prayer, getting up, and then walking away; I will take time for meditation, for “listening” for inspiration and guidance during and/or after my daily prayers.
* I will surround myself with the Word of God and take time for “prayerful meditation on the teachings,” so that I “may understand them more deeply, fulfil them more faithfully, and convey them more accurately to others.”[[10]](#footnote-10)a
* I will read:
  + *Paris Talks* of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 173-176,
  + Section XLV: “Reverence and Spirituality” in *Lights of Guidance*, from the messages of The Universal House of Justice, compiled by Helen Hornby, (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1994), 540-44,
  + *Meditation*, by Wendi Momen (Oxford: George Ronald, 1996), and/or
  + *Lessons from the Light: What We Can Learn from the Near-Death Experience* by Kenneth Ring (Needham, MA: Moment Point Press, 2000).

CHAPTER 19: DEEPENING

Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

Deepening means to increase, enrich, and correct our knowledge and understanding of the Faith in order to more fully live the Bahá’í life and to better teach others. Compared to meditation it is a broader concept and process. Deepening utilizes many sub-processes or tools. Meditating on the Revealed Word is just one of them. Others include reading, recitation, memorization, prayer, group worship, group study classes, seminars, courses, conferences, teaching, and others.

The image of diving into the depths of the Ocean of Bahá’u’lláh’s Words in order to discover pearls of wisdom is especially appropriate for the BLDH program because it is the degree of the profundity of our understanding that will determine the height of our accomplishments in the outer realm of action and deeds. Pearls do not float on the surface of the ocean ready for easy gathering. A pearl diver must have stamina, determination, and perseverance in order to find the object of his quest. The deeper he goes and the more time he spends in his search, the more likely he will be to discover larger pearls which shallower divers are not able to find, and, thereby, earn more and accomplish more in other areas of his life. (Refer to Figure 3.2.)

O My servants! My holy, My divinely ordained Revelation may be likened unto an ocean in whose depths are concealed innumerable pearls of great price, of surpassing luster. It is the duty of every seeker to bestir himself and strive to attain the shores of this ocean, so that he may, in proportion to the eagerness of his search and the efforts he hath exerted, partake of such benefits as have been pre-ordained in God’s irrevocable and hidden Tablets.2 --Bahá’u’lláh

**THE FREQUENCY AND DURATION OF DEEPENING**

Peruse ye every day the verses revealed by God. Blessed is the man who reciteth them and reflecteth upon them. He truly is of them with whom it shall be well.3 --Bahá’u’lláh

Recite ye the verses of God every morning and evening.4 --Bahá’u’lláh

Read ye the sacred verses in such measure that ye be not overcome by languor and despondency. Lay not upon your souls that which will weary them and 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; this will draw you nearer to God, did ye but comprehend.5 --Bahá’u’lláh

The Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh are so great, and deal with so many aspects of both the inner life of man and his communal life, that it takes years to really plumb them to the depths.6 --Shoghi Effendi, through his secretary

There is no limit to the study of the Cause. The more we read the writings, the more truths we can find in them and the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous.7 --Shoghi Effendi, through his secretary

Dorothy Baker, during her early adulthood, as instructed by her spiritual mother and grandmother, Mother Beecher, would read from the Writings every day. In a note home she says, “Tell G.G. [Mother Beecher] that I am remembering to read a half hour a day and that all the world is rosy.”8

In addition to the techniques for “capturing” moments for meditation discussed in the previous chapter, I have found it helpful to establish a habit of reading each night before going to sleep. Over the years I have developed the habit, perhaps a rather strange habit, of reading five or so books at the same time: always something from the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh combined with other Bahá’í and non-Bahá’í books on various subjects.

In my briefcase I always carry a folder of deepening materials for idle moments such as when I'm waiting in a line, travelling, riding in a bus, or waiting for a doctor’s appointment: *The Hidden Words*, compilations such as *The Power of Divine Assistance*, the latest message from the Universal House of Justice, and others.

**THE OVER-ARCHING PURPOSES OF DEEPENING**

To strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of the significance of Bahá’u’lláh’s stupendous Revelation must, it is my unalterable conviction, remain the first obligation and the object of the constant endeavor of each one of its loyal adherents.9 --Shoghi Effendi

This is the theme we must pursue in our efforts to deepen in the Cause. What is Bahá’u’lláh’s purpose for the human race? For what ends did He submit to the appalling cruelties and indignities heaped upon Him? What does He mean by a “new race of men”? What are the profound changes which He will bring about? The answers are to be found in the Sacred Writings of our Faith and in their interpretation by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and our beloved Guardian. Let the friends immerse themselves in this ocean, let them organize regular study classes for its constant consideration, and as reinforcements of daily prayers and reading of the Word of God enjoined upon all Bahá’ís by Bahá’u’lláh.10 --The Universal House of Justice

**THE INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL CONDITIONS FOR DEEPENING**

The understanding of His words and the comprehension of the utterances of the Birds of Heaven are in no wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit.11

--Bahá’u’lláh

**SOME OF THE BENEFITS OF DEEPENING**

Were any man to ponder in his heart that which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed and to taste of its sweetness, he would, of a certainty, find himself emptied and delivered from his own desires, and utterly subservient to the Will of the Almighty. Happy is the man that hath attained so high a station, and hath not deprived himself of so bountiful a grace.12 --Bahá’u’lláh

There is no greater pleasure than to study God’s Word with a spiritual mind.13 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

No comfort is greater and no happiness is sweeter than spiritual comprehension of the divine teachings.14

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Indeed if an avowed follower of Bahá’u’lláh were to immerse himself in, and fathom the depths of the ocean of these heavenly teachings, and with utmost care and attention deduce from each of them the subtle mysteries and consummate wisdom that lie enshrined therein, such a person’s life, materially, intellectually and spiritually, will be safe from toil and trouble, and unaffected by setbacks and perils, or any sadness or despondency.15 --Shoghi Effendi

**THE TOOLS OF DEEPENING**

**Memorization**

Every breast which committeth His Words to memory, God shall cause, if it were that of a believer, to be filled with His love . . .16 --The Báb

To deepen in the Cause means to read the writings of Bahá’u’lláh and the Master so thoroughly as to be able to give it [the Bahá’í message] to others in its pure form.17 --Shoghi Effendi

Memorization of the writings is a sensitive topic that needs to be approached with a sympathetic understanding of the wide range of memorization abilities amongst the friends and a clear understanding of the purposes of this process. Some people are good at memorizing and others are not. Hand of the Cause of God Zikrullah Khadem had an excellent memory and could recite the entire *Kitáb-Íqán*. But, as has been mentioned previously, Rúhíyyih Khánum, also a Hand of the Cause and the wife of the Guardian, bemoaned her poor ability to memorize the writings. The late Dr. Mel Levine, one the foremost authorities on learning in North America, in his landmark book *One Mind at a Time*, discusses the wide range of abilities that exist amongst people in attention, short-term memory, working memory, and long-term memory. All of these are necessary for committing passages to memory and later recalling them. Therefore, I believe that we should not judge people’s level of devotion based on their memorization ability because each person’s brain has a different endowment. Rather, we should do our best and encourage children to do their best without inadvertently creating feelings of guilt when someone has a brain that does not memorize well or creating undue feelings of pride when someone finds memorization to come naturally.

Regarding the purposes of memorization, as will be seen in the following discussion, memorized passages are to be recalled, recited, and used; not forgotten. In the field of education, the use of rote memorization of unimportant, little understood, soon-to-be-outdated information; its regurgitation on tests; and its all too soon relegation to the dust heap of “the forgotten”; has been strongly criticized. But here we are talking about the Word of God. When young children or adults memorize verses from the Writings their comprehension may be limited at first but greater understanding will come later as the verses are recalled and meditated upon. The meanings are manifold and inexhaustible. Each verse can be turned over and over in the mind like a multi-faceted jewel each angle of which offers a unique, beautiful pattern.

The Central Figures of the Faith encouraged the friends to memorize the Word of God for various reasons.

Blessed art thou, who hast fixed thy gaze upon Me, for this Tablet which hath been sent down for thee--a Tablet which causeth the souls of men to soar. Commit it to memory, and recite it. By my life! It is a door to the mercy of Thy Lord. Well is it with him that reciteth it at eventide and at dawn.18 --Bahá’u’lláh

Protect Thou, O God, whosoever learneth this prayer by heart and reciteth it in the day-time and in the night season.19 --The Báb

We should memorize the *Hidden Words*, follow the exhortations of the Incomparable Lord, and conduct ourselves in a manner which befitteth our servitude at the threshold of the One True God.20

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Teach your children what hath been revealed through the Pen of Glory. Instruct them in what hath descended from the heaven of greatness and power. Let them memorize the Tablets of the Merciful . . .21 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

As can be deduced from these exhortations, memorization, in the Bahá’í way of life, is highly purposeful and useful. It is not an empty exercise or a show of mental prowess. The following are categories that I have found helpful in my attempts to create a well-rounded store of memorized passages:

* Obligatory Prayers;
* Quotations to help us with our inner life in general and to help us “live the life,” especially the *Hidden Words* and the Tablet that begins, “Be generous in prosperity. . .”;
* Tablets and verses which address a particular, personal weakness (even though it hurts to recite them), i.e., passages aimed at “converting satanic strength into heavenly power.”22);
* Especially potent Tablets and prayers such as “The Tablet of Ahmad,” and “The Remover of Difficulties”;
* Prayers which are practical and used frequently in the company of others: healing, unity, meetings, teaching, protection during journeys, and others;
* Quotations that one feels especially fascinated by and attracted to. (They may serve a practical purpose or be simply beautiful. They touch you in a special way somewhere in the core of your being.); and
* Quotations especially useful for teaching the Faith. (I have found teaching pamphlets and booklets to be a good source for these.)

This last category is by far not the least in importance. The Guardian, in the quotations cited above, equated it with deepening. Bahá’u’lláh expounds upon the power of this method:

The sanctified souls should ponder and meditate in their hearts regarding the methods of teaching. From the texts of the wondrous, heavenly Scriptures they should memorize phrases and passages bearing on various instances, so that in the course of their speech they may recite divine verses whenever the occasion demandeth it, inasmuch as these holy verses are the most potent elixir, the greatest and mightiest talisman. So potent is their influence that the hearer will have no cause for vacillation. I swear by My life! This Revelation is endowed with such a power that it will act as the lodestone for all nations and kindreds of the earth. Should one pause to meditate attentively he would recognize that no place is there, nor can there be, for anyone to flee to.23

As was typical of Hand of the Cause Dorothy Baker, her approach to this challenging exhortation was very practical and straight forward:

Truly it is not how much time you spend reading the Writings, it is how much you think about what you have read. I find it best to choose each morning some one phrase, some one quotation from the Writings, and then carry it with me all day, thinking about it at odd moments. That way I have it in my memory and in my heart. You try it, and pretty soon you will be full of the Words of Bahá’u’lláh, right up to your ears--so full that they have to come out your mouth!24

In Colombia the discipline of memorization was learned during the teaching and consolidation campaigns. Each day was a sequence of spiritual processes: in the morning--dawn prayers, memorization and recitation, and deepening (especially in the history of the faith); in the afternoon--teaching and consolidation and children’s classes; and in the evening-- community meetings for deepening and consultation.

For our family morning devotions, we used this model to design a “miniature campaign” of 20-25 minutes consisting of five minutes of memorization and recitation, five minutes of prayer and songs, five minutes for a story from the history of the Faith, and a few minutes to consult about the agenda for the day. It may not sound like much time for each item, but believe me, when you add up those daily “five minutes” over the course of years it is amazing how many history books you can cover and how many prayers you can memorize--even if it’s only one sentence at a time.

After our children recited each of their memorized prayers and verses, we would hand copy them into their very own “memorization book” so that they could have a visible record of their accomplishments and so that they could “brush them up” from time to time.

**Group Worship and Prayer**

Group worship and prayer are two other tools for deepening our knowledge and understanding of the Faith.

Gather ye together with the utmost joy and fellowship and recite the verses revealed by the merciful Lord. By so doing the doors to true knowledge will be opened to your inner beings, and ye will then feel your souls endowed with steadfastness and your hearts filled with radiant joy.25 --Bahá’u’lláh

When we lived in Tegucigalpa, Honduras we were fortunate to live in a neighborhood with two other Bahá’í families. We enjoyed getting together for reciting prayers and Tablets each day before going to work.

Whether in private or with others, prayer can be used to enhance the key life process of deepening.

Pray God that you may be enabled to comprehend the mysteries of the divine Testaments . . .26 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

**Study Classes, Lectures, and Seminars**

He urges you to study deeply the teachings, teach others, study with those Bahá’ís who are anxious to do so the deeper teachings of our Faith, and through example, effort and prayer bring about a change.27 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

The friends should deepen their knowledge and this can be achieved if, together with the lectures, there are study classes and seminar work carried on by the same lecturer . . .28

--Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

If you live in a community that has enough members who desire to get together for deepening, I urge you to take advantage of the situation. My family moved several times from one pioneer post to another. Each community was different. When we lived near friends who enjoyed getting together for deepening, we always looked forward to and cherished the memory of those evenings when the minds and hearts soared together as we struggled to grasp the new horizons which Bahá’u’lláh has opened before our eyes.

**Reading of Books Balanced with Association with the Friends**

It behooves you now to try to deepen your knowledge of the history and the teachings of the Faith and get acquainted with the principles that stand at the basis of its present-day Administration--The best way to attain that goal is through continued cooperation with the friends and through participation in their spiritual activities--For you cannot catch the spirit of the Cause through the reading of books alone--you should reinforce the knowledge you get through Bahá’í Writings with a wholehearted association with the friends.29

-- Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What is deepening?
2. What are the various purposes of deepening?
3. How often should one deepen? For how much time?
4. What are the spiritual conditions required for understanding the utterances of Bahá’u’lláh? Why do you think they are so important?
5. What are some of the methods for deepening?
6. Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum once explained that, to her, deepening means “to return.” What do you think she meant?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will arrange special times for deepening with myself, my spouse, my family, and/or my Bahá’í friends.
* I will memorize passages from the Writings in one or more of the categories mentioned above.
* I will create a well-rounded, personal, deepening program which will always include the study of the Writings of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh and which will be balanced with the study of the writings of the two interpreters, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian; messages from the Universal House of Justice, and literature about the Bahá’í Faith and other faiths.
* I will increase my knowledge of the importance of deepening by studying:
  + *The Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith*, compiled by The Universal House of Justice, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1983) and/or
  + Section XLVIII. A. “Deepening” in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, compiled by Helen Hornby, 3rd rev. ed. (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1994), 566-70.

**SECTION III, PART 2: THE OUTER SPIRITUAL QUADRANT**

The Outer Spiritual Quadrant is composed of those spiritual processes which are more social and material in nature as opposed to personal and more purely spiritual. Of course, we can pray, deepen, and meditate together at Bahá’í meetings; but the meaning derived from these processes is quite personal in nature. The differences are relative and the division into two quadrants is mainly for conceptual and presentational purposes.

Like the Inner Spiritual Quadrant, the processes have been grouped according to associative pairs in order to facilitate memorization and to increase clarity. At the top of the Spiritual Quadrant and the entire BLDH Circle, stands “teaching.” The beloved Guardian exhorts us to make it “the dominating passion of our life.”30 Hence, “teaching” dominates the Circle. It is closely associated with service. Their relation can be viewed from two perspectives.

Service can be viewed as a form of teaching. That is, there are two categories of teaching: (1) directly teaching through words and explanation, and, (2) indirectly teaching through service to others; through deeds and actions, that is, living the life.

Teaching can also be considered a sub-category of service. There are many ways to serve the Cause and teaching is just one of them: administration, giving children’s classes, conducting a deepening institute, serving as a tutor for a study circle, writing a Bahá’í history book, caring for a Bahá’í property, pioneering, etc. The Guardian referred to teaching as “the head cornerstone of all Bahá’í service.”31

There is a triad of processes related to community gatherings. They are ordered from the most to the least frequent: daily or weekly Devotional Meetings; the monthly Nineteen Day Feasts; and then the annual, eleven Holy Days. These gatherings are each different in character but they all involve the coming together of the friends for spiritual and social purposes. Because of their social nature, they have been placed close to the Social Quadrant which emphasizes quality communication amongst the members of the Bahá’í community.

The last pair of processes is: paying Huqúqu’lláh and giving to the Funds. Although different in nature, they both involve the personal management of fiscal resources for the benefit of the Faith.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. Why was “teaching” placed at the top of the Outer Spiritual Quadrant and the entire Circle?
2. How can “service” be considered a form of “teaching” and “teaching” a form of “service”?
3. Why were “Holy Days,” “Devotional Meetings,” and “Nineteen Day Feasts” grouped together near to the Social Quadrant?
4. Why were “Huqúq’ulláh” and “Funds” placed together?

CHAPTER 20: TEACHING

Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth.1--Bahá’u’lláh

As with the themes of the other chapters, so much has already been written about what Shoghi Effendi refers to as “the preeminent task of teaching the Faith,”2 so much advice is already available to the reader, and my own efforts are so limited, that the best I can do is to offer you some of the quotations, the ideas, the stories, and the experiences which move me; which get me out of bed and into the teaching field; a few teaching techniques and pointers which I have found particularly useful; and some words of counsel from Hands of the Cause of God Dr. Rahmatu'llah Muhájir and Enoch Olinga.

**THE CALL TO ARISE**

As in the quotation of Bahá’u’lláh cited above, the Central Figures and the Guardian are continually encouraging us to “arise,” to arouse ourselves, to move, and to sacrifice our comforts in order to teach the Cause of God. They also promise us that when we do arise Bahá’u’lláh will be with us and that He will send assistance.

Verily, We behold you from Our realm of glory, and shall aid whosoever will arise for the triumph of Our Cause with the hosts of the Concourse on high and a company of Our favoured angels.3 --Bahá’u’lláh

The Guardian (through his secretary) once wrote to a believer, “If one seeks the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, they can find it in rich abundance in the Teaching Field.”4 The confirmations come because, in our great love for Bahá’u’lláh, we want to follow his exhortations:

O SON OF MAN! Neglect not My commandments if thou lovest My beauty, and forget not My counsels if thou wouldst attain My good pleasure.5

O SON OF BEING! Walk in My statutes for love of Me and deny thyself that which thou desirest if thou seekest My pleasure.6

And one of His greatest exhortations in His book of laws, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, is to teach and propagate the Faith after His ascension:

Be not dismayed, O peoples of the world, when the day-star of My beauty is set, and the heaven of My tabernacle is concealed from your eyes. Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.7

How can we serve our Beloved and show Him how much we love Him?

Say: To assist Me is to teach My Cause.8 --Bahá’u’lláh

And when we teach His Cause, we have “fulfilled the conditions implied in the verse: ‘Whoso maketh efforts for Us,’” and, therefore, we will “enjoy the blessing conferred by the words: ‘In Our ways shall We assuredly guide him.’”9

These confirmations of the Holy Spirit are of all kinds: new understandings of the teachings, spiritual transformation, happiness, opportunities which miraculously present themselves, problems which are mysteriously solved, and, above all, witnessing souls accept their Lord. By pioneering to Latin America, my eyes were blessed by witnessing the process of mass teaching. The spiritual conflagration which such an experience sets in motion in the community and in one’s own soul is worth all of the treasures of the world.

It is better for a man to guide one soul than to possess all that is on earth, for as long as that guided soul is under the shadow of the Tree of Divine Unity, he and the one who hath guided him will both be recipients of God’s tender mercy, whereas possession of earthly things will cease at the time of death.10 --The Báb

Lord! . . .. perfect their joy by aiding them to arise for the triumph of Thy Cause.11 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

The following is a passage from one of my favorite talks by the Master regarding teaching. It sets the example and has, for many years, helped me to keep myself focused on the teaching mandate.

All the meetings must be for teaching the Cause and spreading the Message, and suffering the souls to enter into the Kingdom of Bahá’u’lláh. Look at me. All my thoughts are centred around the proclamation of the Kingdom. I have a lamp in my hand searching throughout the lands and seas to find souls who can become heralds of the Cause. Day and night I am engaged in this work. Any other deliberations in the meetings are futile and fruitless. Convey the Message! Attract the hearts! Sow the seeds! Teach the Cause to those who do not know. It is now six months that Siyyid Asadu’lláh implored that I write a few lines to my sister, my daughters. I have not done this because I find I must teach. I enter all meetings, all churches, so that the Cause may be spread. When the “Most Important” work is before our sight, we must let go the “Important” one. If the meeting or spiritual assembly has any other occupations the time is spent in futility. All the deliberations, all consultations, all the talks and addresses must revolve around one focal centre, and that is: Teach the Cause. Teach. Teach. Convey the Message. Awaken the souls. Now is the time of laying the foundation. Now must we gather brick, stone, wood, iron, and other building materials. Now is not the time of decoration. We must strive day and night and think and work; what can I say that may become effective? What can I do that may bring results? What can I write that may bring forth fruits? Nothing else will be useful to-day. The interests of such a Glorious Cause will not advance without such undivided attention. While we are carrying this load we cannot carry any other load!12

I love to meditate on the terms used by the Guardian which give teaching its proper place in our lives:

Let us arise to teach His Cause with righteousness, conviction, understanding and vigor. Let this be *the paramount and most urgent duty* of every Bahá’í. Let us make it *the dominating passion of our life*.13 (emphasis added)

Upon every participator in this concerted effort [a teaching campaign]. . . rests the spiritual obligation to make of the mandate of teaching so vitally binding upon all, *the all-pervading concern of his life*.14 (emphasis added)

**ACHIEVING BALANCE WHILE EMPHASIZING TEACHING**

The problem of to what extent we should sacrifice our time for the interest of the Cause depends for its solution upon individual means and circumstances. It is a personal problem that we ought to settle individually. One person may give all his time to teaching and rely upon small personal income and another may find himself more fitted to business and give his share of service in the form of financial assistance.15 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

My own experience has been a shifting one. When younger, I had more time and fewer resources to give to the Cause. Later, with four children either in or heading into college, I needed to focus more on my profession in order to provide for them. But I was also able to give more to the Fund than before and I was able to help administer the Faith in ways which were not possible during my younger years. I am now retired with much less income but much more free time, hence, I am able to dedicate more of my life to teaching and service.

It seems that we must adjust our lives to our changing conditions and those in the environment around us. At times we must pace ourselves, even mark time, at other times we must run to keep up with an unfolding opportunity.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, elderly and infirm, launched his travels soon after He was released from prison. Then, exhausted from His teaching trip in Europe, He was forced to seek the needed balance of rest during the winter in Egypt which, in turn, prepared Him to launch an even more arduous journey to America.16

In the midst of trying to lead a life that is well-rounded, yet dedicated to teaching, we have the life of Hand of the Cause Dr. Muhájir to serve as a role model; an example of how to put into practice the words of the Master quoted above. No matter what my personal circumstances and no matter how feeble are my attempts, I try to hold, as an ideal to be continually struggled for, his words of exhortation for the pioneers (and no doubt for all of the friends):

Don’t look at your own power. Look at the power behind you. The pioneers should know the goals. They should be resourceful and be able to do everything, write articles, print them, organize and accompany some travelling teacher projects. Think that all the responsibility is theirs. They should be in every area, not in one only--high schools, towns, villages. Every Saturday and Sunday they should go somewhere. At midnight they should be writing, at four a.m. saying prayers. This is the way, 24 hours a day. Even when sleeping, dream what to do. If all do this, the work will go fast. Every moment have a new idea for teaching and put it into action.17

This may seem impossible, but the principle is one of expectations--for ourselves and for others. During one of his visits to Colombia, when the question of how much to expect from the believers was discussed, Dr. Muhájir wrote on a piece of paper for Dr. Farzam Arbab, “The less you expect, the less you achieve.” On the back he wrote in Persian “three verses of a poem, reportedly a favorite of Mullá Husayn’s, on the dangers of seeking comfort and the importance of extreme effort to succeed in our activities.” He treasures that piece of paper and that piece of advice to this day.18

When I find it difficult to arise, I remember this story about the Master:

Whenever He thought of setting down His burden of work, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said He could hear the voice of His beloved Father, Bahá’u’lláh, calling to Him: “March! March!”19

I also call to mind the analogy given by Mr. Furútan to pilgrims. The Cause is like a very fine coach, but to serve its purpose it needs horses to draw it forward. These are the Bahá’ís. And when the horses begin to lag the driver cracks his whip to make them pull harder. These are the unnecessary tests and difficulties which we bring upon ourselves. They are sent to us by Bahá’u’lláh for our training and to help us refocus our attention on serving the Cause.[[11]](#footnote-11) This image brings the words of Nikos Kazantzakis ringing to my ears:

If the mind cannot, if it was not made to attempt the heroic and desperate breach beyond frontiers, then if only the heart could!

Beyond! Beyond! Beyond! Beyond man I seek the invisible whip which strikes him and drives him into the struggle.21

His words help me to gird up my loins for the severity of the struggle:

We must reconcile ourselves heroically to the fact that peace, carefree joy, and so-called happiness belong to other ages, past or future, not to our own. Our age has long since entered the constellation of anguish. . ..21

And at the same time, his words help me to maintain a clear vision of the glorious future which lies before us by grasping tightly to “the great hopes which enable us to hold ourselves still erect and to gaze confidently before us, past the tempest, at the destiny of man.”22

Towards the end of her life, when facing the probability of undergoing needed surgery, Dorothy Baker, who, in her early family-raising years had little time for any Bahá’í activities other than deepening, remarked to a fellow believer, “I cannot bear the thought of inactivity! I want to be teaching full speed every day till the day I report to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in person!”23

In 1961 Dr. Muhájir wrote in his diary:

Now I am free to travel and I hope Bahá’u’lláh, in His compassion, may enable me to travel continuously until 1963 and the end of the Ten Year Crusade. I do not want to rest, even for a second. I hope this tired and broken body will be able to bear it.24

In response to Ali-Kuli Khan’s repeated request for martyrdom, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said:

While suffering death in the pathway of God is the highest attainment, still, that dying which continues on throughout life, giving life to other souls, is the station of “living martyrdom.” The death of a martyr means the immediate end to all his afflictions and tests: martyrdom is the easiest way to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. But those who rise up to serve the Cause, to bear afflictions and undergo tribulations and trials in order to draw souls into the holy Faith--those are living martyrs, their labor goes on and on, and their noble work, the regeneration of all humankind, will win them the highest of rewards, for ever and ever. My prayer for you . . . is that you will reach that goal, the goal of the living martyrs.25

My understanding of this advice is that physical martyrdom takes only one, single decision of sacrifice and this station is attained. But attaining the station of living martyrdom requires a multitude of decisions of sacrifice, hour after hour, day after day, year after year; decisions that require us to give up what is important for that which is most important.

**INDIVIDUAL TEACHING**

In my own experience, the most difficult phases of person-to-person, heart-to-heart teaching are the beginning and the closing. What happens in between usually flows along quite easily. In a park; in a home; along a street; in a bus, plane, or taxi I simply begin with something obvious and common depending on the circumstances: the weather, sports, the chickens, the children, whatever. If I am the stranger in a neighborhood, I try to answer their unasked questions: Who are you? Where do you come from? Why are you here? In rural areas along the Caribbean Coast of Colombia people are naturally curious about outsiders and are glad to have some novelty in their day. In urban areas I often ask people about their lives: Where are you from originally? How long have you been living here? Do you have children? There is no pat formula because people vary so much from one culture to another. I have been fortunate to have lived most of my Bahá’í life in a tropical Caribbean culture in which the people are very warm, open, friendly, and conversational. When Dr. Muhájir would arrive in a country for the first time, he would ask about its customs and the common topics of conversation. The idea is to establish some kind of relationship and an atmosphere of friendliness and trust before telling them about the Faith.

My favorite opening questions are quite simple: “Do you know about the Bahá’í Faith?” or, “Have you heard about the Bahá’í Faith?” Sometimes I ask, “Do you like to read?” I have found that most people say, “Yes” and willingly accept a pamphlet which then serves as a conversation-starter. Even if they are illiterate, they usually explain (with due pride) that they have children or someone at home who can read to them and they gladly receive Bahá’í literature.

Before I begin telling the person about Bahá’u’lláh and His Revelation, I do not always feel enthusiasm. I may be tired and, in tropical areas, usually hot and sweaty. I simply open my mouth and begin. An inspiring story from the travels of Dr. Muhájir by train in India will illustrate this point about teaching even under unfavorable conditions:

The compartments [on a train] were so crowded that even a slight movement was impossible. Rahmat would stand for hours in the aisles and just lean on the wall. At night, Shírín [Boman] Khánum would ask some of the passengers to take pity on the foreign gentleman, so that he might sit on his small suitcase near the window and lean his head on the window sil. The windows had no glass, and the dust of the deserts, combined with the soot of the train, the extreme heat of summer--or the biting cold of winter--and the smell of breath and perspiration, created a stifling atmosphere which even the natives could not bear. She remembers Rahmat would stand serenely, fanning himself with a notebook, while chanting prayers and Indian songs.

. . .. During their train journeys Rahmat would urge Shírín Khánum not to waste time. He would say, ‘I will pray and you teach. Where else will we find such a captive audience?’26

What I find is that enthusiasm and my love for Bahá’u’lláh arise in the conversation. I know that I want to communicate both a feeling and information. I want to tell them about this new message from God; that God is one; that He wants us to live as one family in one common Faith; that it was Bahá’u’lláh Who brought this message; and that to do so He suffered greatly. I want them to feel moved and simply by telling the story I am moved myself--over and over again. I never teach the Faith the same way twice. If I did, the explanation would become rote, I would become bored and so would the listener. I try to take examples from the surroundings: trees, flowers, lamps, a house, the sun, children, etc. A few illustrations from teaching booklets are also helpful but not necessary.

The length of the explanation depends on the questions and the response of the listener. I ask, “What do you think about this Message? or, “. . . these Teachings?” If all has gone well, I simply explain that if someone believes that these teachings are true that he or she can become a Bahá’í; that in the Bahá’í Faith we have no entrance exams or baptismal ceremonies; and that we simply register the names and addresses of the followers for communication purposes. If I have a registration card, I show it to them; even during firesides in my home and to my contacts who are highly-educated professionals. Then I ask them, “Would you like to be a Bahá’í?” Sometimes they say, “Yes.” Sometimes they look at the card and I explain how it is to be filled out. If they want, I will do it for them, but, as Dr. Muhájir taught us,[[12]](#footnote-12)a I have them at least write their name if they can. After the card is filled out, I tell the new Bahá’í to remember the date on the card because it is extremely important: “It is the day when you had the good fortune to hear the Message of Bahá’u’lláh and accept it.”

If they do not want to become Bahá’ís, I ask them if they have any questions and if they want to investigate the Faith further. If so, I leave them with some literature and a means of contacting the Bahá’ís if at all possible.

For the persons who declare their belief in Bahá’u’lláh, the next step, of course, is to get them started with some kind of deepening and teaching activity—prayers, devotional meetings, participation in a campaign, correspondence courses, deepening booklets, Ruhi Institute courses, conferences--whatever consolidation system that has been made available.

Above all, as we face daily the teaching mandate given to us by Bahá’u’lláh, let us always remember the last words written by Dr. Muhájir in his notebook: “TEACHING THE FAITH IS EASY”27 and then move into the realm of action with trust and confidence.

**FIRESIDE TEACHING**

In our family, fireside teaching consisted of two types: informal and formal, or, indirect and direct. The informal, indirect method consisted of simply inviting a person or a couple to our home for hospitality. It was either a simple visit or a dinner. The purpose was to establish or deepen a friendship as a prelude to teaching the Faith.

Every Bahá’í, as a part of his spiritual birthright, must teach, and the one avenue where he can do this most effectively is by inviting friends into his home once in nineteen days, and gradually attracting them to the Cause. After the individuals have confidence in the pioneer, and the pioneer in the individuals, then they can be taught and confirmed in the Faith. This method is far more effective than advertising in newspapers, public lectures, etc. The Guardian is encouraging the believers over the world, including those on the home fronts, to engage in this method of teaching.28 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

This indirect method could also occur outside one’s home by simply socializing and conversing with someone to initiate or build upon a friendship, for example, inviting her or him to have a cup of coffee or tea at a café, to go for a walk or hike together, etc.

As the growth process continues to gain intensity, the friends’ efforts to engage in meaningful conversations bring them into many social spaces, allowing a wider array of people to become familiar with the teachings and consider seriously the contribution they can make to the betterment of society.29 --The Universal House of Justice

The formal, direct fireside or informational meeting is a more highly organized endeavor. We gave this type of fireside the last Saturday of each month. In this way both the contacts and other Bahá’ís could easily remember when the next one would occur. All family members participated in some way. The following duties were distributed. They changed according to the ages of the children and who is at home and available:

- maintain a list of contacts and their addresses;

- organize themes and speakers;

- send invitations;

- organize three displays: free literature, a lending library, and books for sale;

- put literature away after the meeting;

- serve as master of ceremonies;

- organize refreshments;

- dust, sweep, and clean the meeting area;

- make sure that all light bulbs are working;

- arrange the furniture;

- arrange the sound equipment (background music);

- select background music;

- arrange the screen when a video or DVD is to be shown;

- serve refreshments;

- clean up glasses, plates, and napkins; and

- put furniture and equipment back where they belong after the fireside.

Having these duties fairly distributed amongst family members ahead of time helped things to run smoothly and it enhanced the feeling that the fireside “belongs” to everyone--even the little ones.

The fireside began with informal conversation until most people arrived; music (when musicians were available); and a prayer. A short talk or video was presented. After this people were invited to a refreshment table. (We found that this helped to break up a large group into small discussion groups.) Later we often had music and singing of some kind which people enjoyed immensely. Some people would leave at this point, but others stayed. We had no set closing time. At times, contacts remained until after midnight. We flowed with the degree of spiritual “thirst.” Sometimes they had many questions. Other times they were just in need of companionship, love, and a sympathetic ear.

We used this fireside method of teaching for years. Sometimes only three or four people came, sometimes ten or twenty. It was a slow but sure way of bringing people into the Faith, especially people of capacity. When the guest list needed to be refreshed with new blood, it meant that it was time for another public event. Public presentations of the Faith were a key source of new contacts.

The friends must realize their individual responsibility. Each must hold a fireside in his or her home, once in Nineteen Days, where new people are invited, and where some phase of the Faith is mentioned and discussed. If this is done with the intent of showing Bahá’í hospitality and love, then there will be results. People will become interested in “what” you are interested in, and then be interested in studying. Individual firesides will bring the knowledge of the Faith to more people, under favorable circumstances, and thus constantly enrich its circle of friends, and finally its members. There is no substitute for the teaching work of the individual.30

--Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

By having one formal fireside and one informal fireside each Gregorian month, we were able to fulfil the Guardian’s desire that each person have a fireside every nineteen days. If all types of informal, friendship-building “conversations” that could lead to sharing the teachings are included, following the guidance of the Guardian becomes even more feasible. That is, place, time, and degree of formality, are secondary. It is the sincere, relationship-building and the gradual introduction of the Teachings that are important.

When I was a new Bahá’í, one of the friends told me that the Guardian had once stated that a meeting with one contact is a Fireside; with more than one person attending, it is a public meeting. I have never found a source for this statement, but, over the years, I have found wisdom in it. When we are with only one acquaintance, friend, or inquirer, s/he is more likely to open up and share what is happening in her or his life and/or to ask questions about the Faith that s/he might be too timid, shy, or embarrassed to ask if there is someone else present that s/he does not know. As “spiritual physicians,” after making a “diagnosis” of her/his needs, we can then “prescribe” a “medicine,” i.e., the appropriate Bahá’í teaching, quotation, writing, prayer, pamphlet, or book.

**TRAVEL TEACHING**

‘Abdu’l-Bahá said that just the act of moving from place to place for the purpose of promoting the Cause of God would attract divine assistance and blessings.31 Dr. Muhájir told the believers:

Don’t sit at home. Movement is an essential part of the progress of the Faith.32

Movement, just movement of Bahá’ís from place to place exerts a spiritual impact. Move! Pioneer! The further you go the greater the reward.33

For the Faith to spread around the world, the greatest power is the power of movement and action. Only when we are a part of this movement will the bounty of Bahá’u’lláh be with us. Prayer is essential but simply sitting at home and saying prayers when one has the ability to move is not enough. We must move.34

He saw this movement as being essential for consolidation as well as expansion. It stimulates the believers and the travel teacher. It gets non-Bahá’í community members talking about the Faith which leads them to investigate the Faith.He emphasized:

the importance of frequent contacts with friends in all communities. [He said that] the exchange of energy among the friends dissolves every barrier and transports the heart into a world in which there are no limits. The energy which comes from whoever serves with abnegation and absolute confidence in Bahá’u’lláh is incredible.35

Amongst the pioneers and travel teachers in Honduras there was always great unity. During the nine years we lived there, especially because the country was so small and it was so easy to travel and have continual contact with the friends, we felt this tremendous energy of service. There was somewhat of an unwritten rule. Weekday evenings were for administration and activities in the city. Weekends were kept free for travel teaching.

Personally, I am a poor traveler. I can’t sleep in buses, I don’t sleep well in strange beds, and my digestive system is easily upset. There is much practical advice for travel teachers in Rúhíyyih Khánum’s *A Manual for Pioneers*. I would only like to add a few mundane tips which help keep me travelling for the Faith, in spite of myself.

There is no doubt that the farther you go from so-called “civilization” the more receptive are the souls to the Faith. Going there is both necessary and deeply rewarding. In order to get there the journey is often rigorous. I have learned the hard way that it is well worth keeping yourself in good physical condition throughout the year so that during vacation-time teaching trips you won’t have any trouble walking and/or climbing great distances. Difficult trips need to be carefully prepared for in many ways--spiritually, financially, and physically.

I am inept at washing clothes by hand and my few feeble efforts have not been enough to convince me to learn. Fortunately, in rural areas, I always found someone who was glad to earn a small amount of money for washing my clothes and often I was able to teach them the Faith. Fortunately for me, in Latin America there was always great female sympathy for the helpless man who can neither cook nor sew nor wash clothes. Somehow, I was always taken care of.

An even more mundane topic is bowel movements. I suffered from constipation on teaching trips because I didn’t eat enough vegetables and fruits and because I missed having my own bathroom. However, I learned a very helpful trick from Wanita George.[[13]](#footnote-13)a She advised me to begin taking a gentle laxative as soon as I started my trip. Besides preventing constipation, keeping on the “loose” side helped me not to worry so much about the conditions of the toilet or the lack thereof. (I still remember the first time I asked a farmer where the bathroom was. He kindly led me to the back door of his house, opened it, pointed to the field and said, “At your service.”) Some people find “cascara sagrada” bark36 and / or papaya to be quite effective.

Getting a good night’s rest for me was important. In Honduras we slept on floors. In Colombia hammocks were part of the travel teacher’s standard equipment. After two nights of discomfort I am thoroughly exhausted, then, being so tired, I can sleep anywhere.

While travelling in the United States, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá woke up one morning with a stiff neck. He explained that when He arrived in the U.S. one of the friends talked Him into using a pillow; that He had gotten used to it and now, because for one night he didn’t have a pillow, he had gotten a stiff neck. He kind of remonstrated with Himself out loud saying that in ‘Akká he had never used a pillow and had slept just fine, and that this just goes to show that you should never allow your body to get too used to comforts!37

While travelling on the train across North America the Master demonstrated a curious balance of spartanism and the need for a good night’s rest. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and His five companions began the journey by sleeping in the car that had upright seats instead of obtaining pullman (bed) accommodations. The next night:

again He would not take pullman accommodations, even though requested by the friends, saying that they should not be dependent on bodily comforts: “We must be equal to the hardships of traveling like a soldier in the path of Truth and not be slaves to bodily ease and comfort.”38 The following night there is no record that the companions requested pullman accommodations. Apparently, they had accepted the hardships of the chair car. In any event, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told them to reserve six berths for that night because too much austerity was not good. They suggested that perhaps only one might be secured for Him, and He replied, “No, we must share equally.”39

If you have trouble sleeping on floors, in hammocks, or in chairs, you might try travelling with a low, fold-up cot like Rúhíyyih Khánum did in Africa. In Honduras I tried this when travelling from Tegucigalpa to Choluteca and it worked well. Or, you might consider obtaining a special mat or air mattress especially designed for camping.

My attitude is that if you need certain conditions for travel, try to obtain them. It’s better than allowing the lack of them serve as an excuse for not travel teaching.

**MASS TEACHING**

The following are my notes from conferences given by Hands of the Cause Dr. Rahmatu'llah Muhájir and Enoch Olinga in Tegucigalpa and La Ceiba, Honduras respectively during the year 1977. I am usually not such a great note-taker, but, since the talks were translated, the speakers had to go slowly and there were pauses between each statement during which I could set down their counsels. Because, to my knowledge, a summary has not been published elsewhere and, because I have found these words of advice to be so helpful, I decided to include them here.

Dr. Muhájir talked about the “Direct Teaching Method.” He spoke forcefully and adamantly yet happily. He spoke about other topics also, but the following applies more to our theme. He said that there were “three sensitive areas” in direct teaching:

1. Don’t be deceived by a low spirit before going out to teach. Once you begin, the confirmations will come. You will become happy and confident.
2. Beginning a conversation, entering a home: Be courteous, sensitive to receptivity, enthusiastic. You are bringing to them the most precious gift in creation. Expect that they will be happy to receive it, and will be willing to put aside what they are doing to learn about a new message from God Himself.
3. After presenting the Faith and the people agree with the teachings and believe they are true then we should assume that they would like to be Bahá’í. They should be told and shown how to become a Bahá’í and welcomed to their new family.

Enoch Olinga spoke about the station of the believers and that of Bahá’u’lláh in relation to teaching. I was deeply impressed by the power of his voice, his self-confidence, and by the number of times that he mentioned Bahá’u’lláh. Everything seemed to be derived from love for Bahá’u’lláh:

We must deepen in the Cause in order to know better Bahá’u’lláh and His station. When we truly understand His station, we love Him more. When we love Him more, we teach His Cause. When we teach the Cause, we win goals; we are happy, we grow spiritually.

Those who don’t teach are weak spiritually. Saying dawn prayers every morning makes us strong. People are attracted to us. We must be happy; show deeds; then teach with words; bring more people into the Cause.

We must love Bahá’u’lláh so that His love will arrive to us. Bahá’u’lláh has promised to help us when we arise.

Unlettered Bahá’ís have a higher station than the Pope who has rejected Him. (The Guardian said this.) Bahá’ís who follow the laws have a higher station than those who don’t.

What is a Bahá’í? [A person who] accepts Bahá’u’lláh and His laws. (This is the responsibility of every soul on the planet.) [A Bahá’í] doesn’t drink; is kind, courteous, and truthful.

How to teach:

1. Love Bahá’u’lláh.
2. Love the people.
3. Concentrate on the teaching work.
4. Trust in Bahá’u’lláh.
5. We are instruments.
   1. The instruments must be in tune. They are put in tune by the Player.
   2. If one string breaks another is put in its place.
6. Bahá’u’lláh is very close to us.
7. Don’t teach with superiority or in our own name.
8. Go in Bahá’u’lláh’s Name.
9. He will guide us to waiting souls.
10. Importance of prayer:
    1. Bahá’u’lláh’s Spirit descends.
    2. All is ready.
11. Goals are not the only goal.
    1. We must love Bahá’u’lláh and the people.
    2. Goals will take care of themselves.
12. Bahá’u’lláh is in the place we are going to; already waiting, preparing people.

We then went with Enoch Olinga and his wife Elizabeth to a nearby village to teach the Faith.

**INTEGRATING THE INNER QUADRANT PROCESSES WITH TEACHING**

Shoghi Effendi, through his secretary, has delineated a “flow” of processes beginning with the processes in the inner realm and leading gradually to the outer realm of action and teaching:

The beloved Guardian has stressed over and over again, that to effectively teach the Faith, the individual must *study* deeply, the Divine Word, imbibe Its life-giving waters, and feast upon Its glorious teachings. He should then *meditate* on the import of the Word, and finding its spiritual depths, *pray* for guidance and assistance. But most important, after prayer is *action*. After one has prayed and meditated, he must arise, relying fully on the guidance and confirmation of Bahá’u’lláh, to teach His Faith. *Perseverance* in action is essential, just as wisdom and audacity are necessary for effective teaching. The individual must sacrifice all things to this great goal, and then the victories will be won.40 (emphasis added)

I want to close this chapter with one of my favorite, daily, teaching prayers which is not usually published in the prayer books:

O Lord! Open Thou the door, provide the means, prepare the way, make safe the path, that we may be guided to those souls whose hearts are prepared for Thy Cause and that they may be guided to us. Verily, Thou art the Merciful, the Most Bountiful, the All-Powerful.41 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What should the “paramount and most urgent duty,” “the all-pervading concern,” “the dominating passion” of every Bahá’í be? Why do you think this is so?
2. What are the two types of firesides? How often should we host one type or the other?
3. What are some common obstacles to teaching? How can they be overcome?
4. How should one prepare one’s self to teach? (Hint: Use your Circle.)
5. What happens if we do not teach the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh? What happens when we do?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will pray each day for success in teaching.
* I will mention the Faith or teach the Faith to someone at least once each day.
* I will hold an informal and/or formal fireside in my home every Nineteen Days.
* I will maintain a relationship with five contacts at least one of whom will become Bahá’í by the end of a year.
* I will study:
  + *Promoting Entry by Troops* compiled by the Research Department of The Universal House of Justice (Haifa, Israel, 1994),
  + *The Individual and Teaching--Raising the Divine Call: Extracts from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi* compiled by the Research Department of The Universal House of Justice (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1977), and/or
  + *A Special Measure of Love: The Importance and Nature of the Teaching Work among the Masses* compiled by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974).
* I will go travel teaching to:
* I will pioneer to:

CHAPTER 21: SERVICE

Man’s merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

Service is a many-faceted process. Different passages from the writings illuminate its various aspects. The BLDH program identifies three general types of service each of which has several sub-categories: service to humanity, service to the Cause of God on a day-to-day basis, service to the Cause via larger-scale projects. The Bahá’í writings illuminate the principles underlying these various types of service.

As Bahá’ís we are called upon to serve all of humankind without making any distinction based on race, nationality, social class, or age:

Guard against idleness and sloth, and cling unto that which profiteth mankind, whether young or old, whether high or low.2 --Bahá’u’lláh

That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race.3 --Bahá’u’lláh

The best of men are those who serve the people.4 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Think ye at all times of rendering some service to every member of the human race.5 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

If thou seekest eternal glory, let thyself be humble and meek in the presence of the beloved of God; make thyself the servant of all, and serve all alike. The service of the friends belongs to God, not to them.6 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Bahá’u’lláh Himself has chosen service to humanity as one of the principal purposes of His mission:

That which hath been set forth and will be revealed in the future is but a token of this Servant’s ardent desire to dedicate Himself to the service of all the kindreds of the earth.7

In order to serve humanity, we don’t have to go far from home; according to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, it includes serving our own parents:

Verily, We have enjoined on every son to serve his father.8

At times, when circumstances such as illness or financial difficulties require that we help or take care of our parents, we may feel frustrated because we would rather be serving the Faith directly in the fields of teaching, administration, or consolidation. Bahá’u’lláh, however, gives priority to serving one’s parents and He stipulates that such service is a means for drawing closer to Him:

Should anyone give you a choice between the opportunity to render a service to Me and a service to them [one’s parents], choose ye to serve them, and let such service be a path leading you to Me.9

Indeed, this type of service extends to the whole family and is given great priority in the teachings of the Faith:

Surely Shoghi Effendi would like to see you and the other friends give their whole time and energy to the Cause, for we are in great need for competent workers, but the home is an institution that Bahá’u’lláh has come to strengthen and not to weaken. Many unfortunate things have happened in Bahá’í homes just for neglecting this point. Serve the Cause but also remember your duties towards your home. It is for you to find the balance and see that neither makes you neglect the other. We would have many more husbands in the Cause were the wives more thoughtful and moderate in their Bahá’í activities.10 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

Although Bahá’í services should be undertaken with a spirit of sacrifice, one cannot lose sight of the importance given in our Holy Writings to the responsibilities placed on parents in relationship to their children, as well as to the duties of children towards their parents.11 --The Universal House of Justice

Serving our family takes priority over serving the Faith, but serving the Faith takes priority over serving humanity through philanthropic endeavors:

He feels that although your desire to partake actively of the dangers and miseries afflicting so many millions of people today, is natural, and a noble impulse, there can be no comparison between the value of Bahá’í work and any other form of service to humanity . . ..

No one else can do this work except those who have fully realized the meaning of the Message of Bahá’u’lláh

. . ..

The believers are building a refuge for mankind. This is their supreme, sacred task, and they should devote every moment they can to this task.12 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

In order to equip the believers with the skills to better serve the Faith, the Universal House of Justice, in its 1996 Ridvan Message, placed great importance on the need to create training institutes:

What the friends throughout the world are now being asked to do is to commit themselves, their material resources, their abilities and their time to the development of a network of training institutes on a scale never before attempted. These centers of Baha'i' learning will have as their goal one very practical outcome, namely the raising up of large numbers of believers who are trained to foster and facilitate the process of entry by troops with efficiency and love.

In its 2002 Ridvan Message, the Universal House of Justice went on to emphasize three areas of service to the Faith that need to be given special attention by the friends:

Where a training institute is well established and constantly functioning, three core activities— study circles, devotional meetings, and children’s classes—have multiplied with relative ease. Indeed, the increasing participation of seekers in these activities, at the invitation of their Bahá’í friends, has lent a new dimension to their purposes, consequently effecting new enrolments. Here, surely, is a direction of great promise for teaching work. These core activities, which at the outset were devised principally to benefit the believers themselves, are naturally becoming portals for entry by troops. By combining study circles, devotional meetings and children’s classes within the framework of clusters, a model of coherence in lines of action has been put in place and is already producing welcome results. Worldwide application of this model, we feel confident, holds immense possibilities for the progress of the Cause in the years ahead.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Service--to God, His Cause and humankind—, in my opinion, is both a means for bringing about the Most Great Peace and an end in itself--an over-arching goal of life. Service is the pole star that should orient all of our endeavors. All other processes and possessions, as enjoyable as they may be in and of themselves, should, ultimately, be considered as means for attaining this end of service to others rather than as ends to be pursued for their own sake.

The Means and the End

Exercise...to have the strength to serve better.

Eat...to have the energy to better serve.

Sleep...to serve with greater joy.

Vacation...to rejuvenate the spirit of service.

Earn money...to provide services.

Obtain an education...to serve with excellence.

Buy a new car...to expand service.

Buy new clothes and jewelry...to serve with beauty.

Buy a home with a large social area...to serve through firesides.

In the light of this principle, I recommend that any purchase and any decision be prefaced with the question, “Will it help me, directly or indirectly, to serve better?” Of course, “serving better” should be thought of not only in terms of efficiency and functionality but also in regards to the increase of such qualities as physical vitality, enthusiasm, balance, beauty and gracefulness.

In the BLDH Circle “service” and “teaching” --the “head cornerstone”13--are placed at the top of the Circle. All other processes are means to these noble ends:

Man must become evanescent in God. Must forget his own selfish conditions that he may thus arise to the station of sacrifice. It should be to such a degree that if he sleep, it should not be for pleasure, but to rest the body in order to do better, to speak better, to explain more beautifully, to serve the servants of God and to prove the truths.14 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

To serve God’s Faith is a privilege and a blessing. Humble, unflagging servitude at His Holy Threshold is a “glorious and exalted” station in and of itself:

Cling, O ye people of Bahá, to the cord of servitude unto God, the True One, for thereby your stations shall be made manifest, your names written and preserved, your ranks raised and your memory exalted in the Preserved Tablet. Beware lest the dwellers on earth hinder you from this glorious and exalted station.15 --Bahá’u’lláh

[Man] should seek to be attentive, serve the Cause of God and sacrifice his own stations for those of God.16

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

In an expanded, action-oriented definition of the religious life, the Master equates service with worship and prayer:

All effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity. This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer.17

He points out that service, together with prayer, constitute the two most effective “tools” for spiritual growth:

Know that nothing will benefit thee in this life save supplication and invocation unto God, service in His vineyard, and, with a heart full of love, be in constant servitude unto Him.18

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, whose name means “Servant of Bahá’u’lláh,” was the perfect example of the Bahá’í life. He taught us through word and deed that it is better to serve than to be served; better to wait upon others than to be waited upon. He chose servitude as His title, His most distinctive attribute, and His ultimate goal:

My name is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

My qualification is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

My reality is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

My praise is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Thraldom to the Blessed Perfection

is my glorious and effulgent diadem, and

servitude to all the human race

my perpetual religion. . ..19

No name,

no title,

no mention,

no commendation hath he nor will ever have except

‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

This is my longing.

This is my supreme apex.

This is my greatest yearning.

This is my everlasting glory!

Express ye the same thing which is issued from my pen.

This is the duty of all.

Consequently

the friends of God must assist and help ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

in the adoration of the True One;

in the servitude to the human race;

in the well-being of the human world and

in divine love and kindness.20

Serving God is not always easy. Firstly, it is difficult “to arise”; to arouse ourselves to action; to show initiative; to engage in “doing.” Secondly, it is hard to persevere in service in the face of resistance and even opposition. Bahá’u’lláh, however, our “Unflagging Encourager,” if we engage regularly in prayer, meditation, and deepening, will breathe into us faith and courage:

Strive thou day and night to serve the Cause of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, and be thou detached from all else but Him.21

Arise, and serve Him Who is the desire of all nations . . .22

Whoso hath recognized Me will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.23

O ye servants of the Merciful One! Arise to serve the Cause of God, in such wise that the cares and sorrows caused by them that have disbelieved in the Dayspring of the Signs of God may not afflict you.24

Perseverance in service to the Cause attracts Divine Assistance and triggers the influx into our lives of the life-giving, healing power of the Holy Spirit which, in turn, assures that our sincere endeavors will bear fruit:

Arise ye, under all conditions, to render service to the Cause, for God will assuredly assist you through the power of His sovereignty which overshadoweth the worlds.25 --Bahá’u’lláh

When he [man] attains to this station [of sacrifice], the confirmations of the Holy Spirit will surely reach him, and man with this power can withstand all who inhabit the earth.26 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

There is nothing that brings success in the Faith like service. Service is the magnet which draws the Divine Confirmations. Thus, when a person is active, they are blessed by the Holy Spirit. When they are inactive, the Holy Spirit cannot find a repository in their being, and thus they are deprived of its healing and quickening rays.27 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

In the teachings of the Faith great emphasis is placed on cooperation, reciprocation, and working in groups at all levels of society. Nevertheless, in the arena of service to the Cause, a healthy dose of competition is called for:

Vie ye with each other in the service of God and of His Cause. This is indeed what profiteth you in this world, and in that which is to come.28 --Bahá’u’lláh

There are many fields of service: teaching, administration, giving a year or two of full-time service, pioneering, Bahá’í scholarship, giving Bahá’í children’s classes, organizing a devotional meeting, serving as a study circle tutor, giving generously to the various funds, even remaining steadfast in the face of trials:

Thou didst write: “How can I serve Thee?” The greatest service is thine own firmness and steadfastness and thy withstanding severe trials when they come. Through firmness thou wilt perceive the opening of the doors of grace.29 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

It is also important to distinguish between (1) services which occur on a regular, day-to-day basis such as caring for our children, serving as a secretary of a local spiritual assembly or giving a children’s class, and (2) services which are larger in scale, often full-time projects such as teaching trips, giving a year of service, participating in campaigns during vacations, etc. The first category includes those services that are given priority in the writings. For example, taking care of our family has priority over the teaching work. And serving on a spiritual assembly is a “call to service” which should not be neglected in favor of some other personal project that we would like to carry out for the Faith.

The second category consists of extra, non-essential, yet central concerns that can be engaged in only if the rest of our life is running smoothly. (This will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter on “Goal-Setting.”)

In choosing a field of service a balance is needed between two principles. On the one hand we should be flexible and serve the Faith in whatever way is needed. We should not ask, “How would I like to serve the Cause?” but rather ask, “What service does the Cause need?” We should think, “If the Faith needs travel teachers, I will travel. If the Faith needs teachers for children’s classes, I will volunteer. If the Bahá’í Center needs to be painted, I will paint it.”

On the other hand, if circumstances permit, we need to specialize and to show individual initiative in finding ways that we can serve the Faith in our own unique way:

A unity in diversity of actions is called for, a condition in which different individuals will concentrate on different activities, appreciating the salutary effect of the aggregate on the growth and development of the Faith, because each person cannot do everything and all persons cannot do the same thing.30 --The Universal House of Justice

I found that in the pioneering field the first principle applies strongly. As a pioneer you are possibly one of only a handful of active Bahá’ís in the region and you simply have to do everything--publicity, firesides, study circles, deepening, devotional meetings, children’s classes, travel teaching, electing assemblies, etc. The disadvantage is that you always feel that you are spread too thin and that you are doing very little with excellence. On the other hand, in my own case, the situation forced me to develop skills that I never dreamed of having. I was always being stretched beyond my old self.

It is only as a Bahá’í community grows that there can be more specialization. Therefore, if you live in a community that is large, mature, and divorse, you should appreciate the opportunity you have to be able to offer a specialized service which you highly enjoy and which you can carry out with a high degree of detail and perfection.

In general, the balance I try to strike is to involve myself in administration-sponsored activities at various levels while carrying out parallel projects which I have initiated myself. This requires saying “no” to some requests for service, but I find that I am happier when I am involved in both types of service. Often it boils down to dividing my time between “what I *have* to do for the Faith” (because it simply cannot *no*t be done) and “what I *want* to do for the Faith” (because God has given me certain talents and abilities which I enjoy offering as service).

Another blessing of choosing pioneering as a field of service is the closeness one feels to Bahá’u’lláh. Moving one’s home, trying to adapt to a new culture, and learning a new language while, at the same time, trying to be an effective Bahá’í can be extremely trying. However, each difficulty and trial has a particular sweetness because you can continually say, “I am going through this for You, Bahá’u’lláh, and only for You.” If you had stayed at home you might have had exactly the same problem, maybe even worse, but in the pioneering field all calamities seem to take on a special “glow” --like offering flowers before an altar.

Examples of sacrificial service abound in the annals of the Faith. The life of the Master, of course, is our *sine qua non* for studying the Bahá’í way of serving God. One of my favorite stories describes one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s unique qualities: “He couldn't help but help.” It was during His elderly years when, after being deprived from visiting His Father’s Tomb for four years, He was again able to pump water from a well and carry it in jugs in order to water the flowers and plants in the garden surrounding Bahá’u’lláh’s Shrine. One day He was pumping water from the well when suddenly He was not able to move. His muscles had become stiff from too much strain. The friends had to carefully take His hand off the pump and carry Him into the house. They told Him that He should let them water the garden and that He should not overwork Himself. His only reply was, “What else can I do for Bahá’u’lláh?”31

There are three kinds of souls, three kinds of prayers.

One: I am a bow in your hands, Lord. Draw me lest I rot.

Two: Do not overdraw me, Lord. I shall break.

Three: Overdraw me, and who cares if I break!

Choose!32

--Nikos Kazantzakis

Rúhíyyih Khánum tells about her experience when the Guardian had just finished writing *God Passes By* and was trying to complete the copies of the manuscript in order to have the book published in time for the Holy Year in 1944. She describes how they had to stay up working into the early hours of the morning placing the phonological marks on five copies of the manuscript. Shoghi Effendi would read out the marking, “Accent mark over the ‘a’; underline the ‘kh’” and so on; while Rúhíyyih Khánum would patiently put in the marks. They continued doing this, she said, until their eyes were blood-shot with fatigue. After they finished, they felt extremely tired yet deeply happy.33

At the request of Dr. Muhájir, Nooshin Eskandari, a pioneer in Ecuador, held ten children’s classes a day, six days a week in preparation for a children’s conference.

Nooshin recalls that Rahmat asked her to personally train 1000 children for the conference. Her pleas that such a task was impossible had no effect on him. He advised her never to say “impossible” when working for the Faith. After the conference she complained to Rahmat that no one had appreciated her hard work. Rahmat just pushed her complaints aside and told her that if she had done it for Bahá’u’lláh she should not expect praise from others. He said to her, “I never get praise from anyone, why should you?” He directed her to other activities and assured her that he would pray for her and that she should be certain that Bahá’u’lláh never forgets anyone’s service to His Cause.34

Sometimes negative examples can be of use to us also. I recall working on a Bahá’í exhibit once with a fellow believer who was a psychiatrist. The work was tedious and very time consuming. At one point he looked at his watch and announced how much his time had been worth at the rate of so many dollars per hour--the amount he charged his patients. The tone was very subtle, but it breathed of: “The Bahá’í community just doesn’t appreciate how much my time is worth.” I wasn’t surprised, a few years later, when I inquired about his activities, to learn that he had become totally inactive.

On the bright side of the moon, I vividly recall another professional who worked as the secretary of a national spiritual assembly. The Assembly would meet late into the night on Friday, all day on Saturday and on into the night, and then Sunday until the afternoon. As everyone else was getting ready for a leisurely bus ride home, he could be seen at his desk beginning the month’s correspondence. During weekdays, after a hard day’s work, he would go to the national assembly’s office and work from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.

At the Bahá’í radio station in South Carolina I was deeply moved to meet an elderly not-yet-Bahá’í who came in every day after his work as a crane operator at a steel mill in order to give a Bahá’í program. When he came into the station, I asked him how he felt and he replied, “Oh, a little tired.”

I have known Bahá’ís who have walked for hours along beaches, through jungles, and across mountains to take the message of Bahá’u’lláh to remote places. I have seen believers practically go without sleep for days on end in order to prepare a conference. I have seen pioneers go hungry yet remain at their post. I have seen travel teachers with the skin on their feet rotting from fungus, stumbling from one village to the next in order to complete a teaching campaign. I have seen elderly pioneers forego the comforts of a home for the aged in their mother country in order to “leave their bones” at their chosen post.

All of these and many other sterling examples of service have enriched my life, challenged me, and inspired me. It is such acts of sacrifice that can serve to recompense in some small way the losses and the suffering of our fellow believers in Iran. It is such acts of sacrificial service that can allow us to continue to be worthy descendants of the Dawn Breakers. I can almost hear the voice of the Master calling to us, as described by Howard Colby Ives:

We came at last to the steps leading up to the entrance door. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá paused with one foot resting on the lower step while the little group slowly passed him and entered the house. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made as if to follow, but instead he turned and, looking down at me from the little elevation of the step, with that subtle meaning in eyes and voice which seemed to accompany His slightest word, and which to me was always so unfathomable and so alluring: He said that I must always remember that this is a day of great things, very great things.

I was speechless. It was not for me to answer. I did not have the faintest inkling of what lay behind the words, the resonant voice, that penetrating glance. Then He turned and again made as if to ascend but again He paused and turned His now luminous face towards me. My foot was raised to follow but as he turned, I, of course, paused also and hung uncertainly between rest and motion.

He repeated, saying to me *so* earnestly, that I must never forget this, that *this is a day for very great things*.

What could He mean? What deep significance lay behind these simple words? Why should he speak so to me? Had it anything to do with that still alluring thought of renunciation?

Again ‘Abdu’l-Bahá turned to ascend and I made to follow; but for the third time He paused and, turning, as it seemed, the full light of His spirit upon me, He said again, but this time in what seemed like a voice of thunder, with literally flashing eyes and emphatically raised hand: that I should remember His words that This is a Day for *very great things*--VERY GREAT THINGS. These last three words rang out like a trumpet call.35

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. Give some examples of situations in which people are showing that they prefer “to be served” rather than “to serve.” How can this belief be changed?
2. How can types of service be categorized? According to the writings, which is the most important? Which type is the least important?
3. What three specific services or lines of action have been given priority by the Universal House of Justice for the foreseeable future?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will take care of a family member who has special needs.
* I will teach a children’s class or accompany a youth group.
* I will serve as a tutor of a study circle.
* I will conduct a deepening class.
* I will offer my home for a devotional meeting or a weekend institute.
* Each month I will write a news article for my community’s bulletin.
* Each day I will carry out a going-out-of-my-way act of kindness for someone.

CHAPTER 22: HUQÚQU’LLÁH

Should anyone acquire one hundred mithqáls of gold, nineteen mithqáls thereof are God’s and to be rendered unto Him, the Fashioner of earth and heaven. This We have commanded you, though We are well able to dispense with you and with all who are in the heavens and on earth; in it there are benefits and wisdoms beyond the ken of anyone but God, the Omniscient, the All-informed.1 --Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*

The law of Huqúqu’lláh, the Right of God, will be discussed in the light of self-transformation primarily and social transformation secondarily. For a complete understanding of the full import and ramifications of this “great law”2 the reader should consult the many fine publications regarding Huqúqu’lláh. It is beyond the scope of this program to go into depth on this subject. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to overemphasize the importance of this regularly recurring activity; this divine injunction; this “great bounty”3 which is so vital for our spiritual growth. Of all of the duties which God has placed on humanity in this age, Bahá’u’lláh has placed the payment of Huqúqu’lláh third in priority even taking precedence over pilgrimage:

Say: O people, the first duty is to recognize the one true God--magnified be His glory--the second is to show forth constancy in His Cause and, after these, one’s duty is to purify one’s riches and earthly possessions according to that which is prescribed by God. Therefore it beseemeth thee to meet thine obligation to the Right of God first, then to direct thy steps toward His blessed House. This hath been brought to thine attention as a sign of favour.4

One of the most concise explanations of Huqúqu’lláh is given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

In brief, after having deducted the yearly expenses, if there is still any surplus left, then Huqúq will be applicable to this surplus at the rate of 19% and no further payment of Huqúq will fall due on it. In the following year however, after the annual expenses, if there is still an excess of income over the expenditure of that second year, then Huqúq will be applicable to the amount of the excess only.5

Shoghi Effendi gave this further clarification:

Regarding the Huqúqu’lláh . . .. this is applied to one’s merchandise, property and income. After deducting the necessary expenses, whatever is left as profit, and is an addition to one’s capital, such a sum is subject to Huqúq. When one has paid Huqúq once on a particular sum, that sum is no longer subject to Huqúq, unless it should pass from one person to another. One’s residence, and the household furnishings are exempt from Huqúq... Huqúqu’lláh is paid to the Centre of the Cause.6

**MY INITIAL REACTIONS TO THE LAW OF HUQÚQU’LLÁH**

When I received the first English publication regarding Huqúqu’lláh, I thought to myself, “Now the ‘heavy Hand of God’ is upon us. He has been very lenient with His children here in the West, now we will feel the weight of His demanding laws. The Bahá’í ‘tax system’ is now going into effect.” How thoroughly wrong I was and how completely awed I was when I read the Words of Bahá’u’lláh! There was no heavy-handedness at all! Bahá’u’lláh combined, as always, the qualities of a loving Father with high expectations of his children; a Father Whose mercy outweighs His justice. Of all the writings of the Faith that I had perused thus far, the pronouncements of Bahá’u’lláh on the Huqúqu’lláh were the ones which most thoroughly and movingly convinced me that we have indeed arrived at the hour of the maturity of the human race.

I had never dreamed of such a unique system of collecting “taxes.” What worldly government would ever conceive of allowing its citizens to calculate their own tax payments, to determine their own time of payment, to keep their own records, and to determine their own exemptions? And what tax collector would ever think of making only brief, general reminders to the public; and then accept payments only if the person did so with joy, radiance, and even insistence? And what government could ever assure its citizens that both material and spiritual benefits would be returned to the payee?

After I read the compilation on Huqúqu’lláh there was no doubt in my mind whatsoever that we had entered upon the Kingdom of God on Earth because nothing could be further away from the characteristics of the “kingdoms of man” thus far experienced in all of human history. A great relief came over me. I felt my own level of maturity take a quantum leap. I felt like I was being treated like a fellow companion of the True Friend instead of a selfish “subject” of a cruel king. I knew that if anyone were to accuse the Faith of promoting a totalitarian, one-party, “Big Brother” -type government; that the law of Huqúqu’lláh would be one of the strongest arguments in our favor because there is no “looking over the shoulders” of anyone in this glorious New World Order.

**THE REQUISITE SPIRITUAL CONDITIONS FOR ACCEPTANCE OF PAYMENT**

Offering payment is not expected to be easy. It separates the ardent from the lukewarm lovers of God. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes it as a spiritual test:

Know thou . . . that the Huqúq offering is but a test applied by Him unto His servants and maidservants.7

It is by our responding to this test with radiant acquiescence that our souls will become more detached and virtuous, and will then receive added strength which, in turn, will enable them to reflect to an even greater extent the attributes of God.

In a fascinating article, Dr. William Hatcher, Deputy-Trustee of Huqúqu’lláh, identified four motivations which “might be predominant in our relationship to a law such as Huqúqu’lláh: (1) fear of the consequences of failure; (2) the promise of reward; (3) a sense of duty--an expression of faithfulness; (4) the pure love of God, without any hope of reward or fear of the consequences of failure.”8 The latter, no doubt the most altruistic motivation, is an expression of the verse: “Walk in My statutes for love of Me . . .”9

Offering payment to the institution of Huqúq’ulláh provides us with a unique opportunity for manifesting various spiritual characteristics. Bahá’u’lláh describes in several ways how it should be offered:

with utmost joy and radiance

in a spirit of perfect humility and lowliness10

[in a] spirit of joy, fellowship and contentment11

with the utmost radiance, gladness and willing acquiescence12

with utmost pleasure and gladness, nay with insistence13

spontaneously and in a spirit of radiant acquiescence14

with willingness15

manifesting a spirit of resignation and content16

in a spirit of willing submission17

If these qualities are not manifested, especially the quality of willingness, Bahá’u’lláh instructs the trustees of Huqúqu’lláh not to accept the payment:

Deeds must be performed with willingness and in all circumstances high regard must be given to the dignity of the Cause of God. Formerly We have mentioned that were a person to possess the whole world and would tender his possessions at the cost of degrading the honour of the Cause, even to the extent of a grain of mustard, it would be essential and imperative to refuse to accept such wealth. Such is the Cause of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. Well is it with them that act accordingly.18

I recall once, while acting as a treasurer, receiving a contribution to the Fund with an attached letter the gist of which was: “What is the big idea of setting monthly contribution goals! Giving to the fund is voluntary and the regularity is to be determined by each person. Here! *Take* my contribution.” I felt like he was yelling at me and *throwing* his donation at me. If it had been a Huqúqu’lláh payment I think it should have been returned.

Another principle, emphasized by Bahá’u’lláh, which should be applied to the payment of Huqúq (and the Fund); one which is the central focus of the BLDH Circle; is that of moderation and balance:

Thou hast written that they have pledged themselves to observe maximum austerity in their lives with a view to forwarding the remainder of their income to His exalted presence. This matter was mentioned at His holy court. He said: Let them act with moderation and not impose hardship upon themselves. We would like them both to enjoy a life that is well-pleasing.19

**BLESSINGS AND BENEFITS RECEIVED BY OFFERING HUQÚQU’LLÁH**

The mere act of passing from a state of not paying Huqúqu’lláh to a state of faithfully paying it is evidence of spiritual transformation and growth. But this single act also sets into motion powerful spiritual forces which bring in their wake manifold benefits. These blessings can be classified as follows: (1) material benefits for the progress of the Cause of God (2) benefits for society--especially for the poor and needy, (3) benefits for the Bahá’í community, (4) material and spiritual benefits bestowed upon the payee in this world, and (5) benefits accruing to the payee in the next world, many of which are incomprehensible to us. The following is a categorized selection of quotations from Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings in which He expounds upon the transforming power of this mighty ordinance.

**1. Benefits for the progress of the Cause of God:**

Beseech ye God that he may enable everyone to discharge the obligation of Huqúq, inasmuch as the progress and promotion of the Cause of God depend on material means.20

**2. Benefits for society:**

Beseech ye God--magnified be His glory--to grant that His loved ones may be privileged to take a portion from the ocean of His good-pleasure, for this would serve as the means for the salvation of mankind, . . .21

From the pen of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá we read:

Thus every true and sincere believer will offer Huqúq to be expended for the relief of the poor, the disabled, the needy, and the orphans, and for other vital needs of the Cause of God, even as Christ did establish a Fund for benevolent purposes.22

**3. Benefits for the Bahá’í community:**

Beseech ye God--exalted be His glory--to enable the people to honour the obligation of Huqúq, for had everyone perceived the advantage of such a deed and desisted from withholding the Right of God, the friends in that region would not have experienced any hardship.23

Previously We wrote to thee that had the friends there observed the payment of Huqúqu’lláh, the people of that region would have enjoyed ease and comfort.24

**4. Spiritual and material benefits for the individual:**

The one true God--exalted be His glory--hath ever been and will continue to be exalted above every expression of praise and is sanctified from the world of existence and all the riches therein. Whatsoever proceedeth from Him produceth a fruit the benefits of which revert to the individuals themselves.25

The blessings flowing from this deed shall fall to the donors themselves.26

Beseech ye God--magnified be His glory--to grant that His loved ones may . . . of their own accordance carry out that which would purify them and cause them to attain everlasting life. . ..27

Say, through this injunction God desireth to purify your possessions and enable you to draw nigh unto such stations as none can attain, except those whom God may please.28

[Offering Huqúq] is an effective means for the purging, the purification and sanctification of the souls of men and a source of prosperity and blessing. Happy are they that have observed His commandments.29

It is clear and evident that the payment of the Right of God is conducive to prosperity, to blessing, and to honour and divine protection.30

It [Huqúq] is a source of grace, abundance, and of all good.31

The question of Huqúqu’lláh is highly significant. It hath been and will always be conducive to divine increase, prosperity, dignity and honour . . ..32

The observance of this ordinance hath been and will always be conducive to prosperity, to divine increase and to salvation. Great is the blessedness of him who hath observed that which is prescribed in the Book of God, the Gracious, the Mighty.33

This ordinance is binding upon everyone, and by observing it one will be raised to honour inasmuch as it will serve to purify one’s possessions and will impart blessing, and added prosperity.34

Beseech ye the one true God to enable His loved ones to offer that which is the Right of God, inasmuch as the observance of this injunction would cause one’s possessions to be purified and protected and would become the means of attracting goodly gifts and heavenly blessings.35

If the people had not withheld the Right of God they owe but rather had paid what was due, or would pay it now, they could be recipients of God’s loving-kindness. We entreat God to graciously grant them abundance.36

If the people attain the privilege of paying the Huqúq, the one true God, exalted be His glory, will of a certainty confer blessing upon them. Moreover, such payment will enable them and their offspring to benefit from their possessions. As thou dost observe, large portions of people’s wealth are lost to them as God causeth strangers, or heirs in comparison with whom strangers would have been preferable, to lay hands on their possessions.37

**5. Benefits in the next world and benefits which are inscrutable:**

Someone must needs remind the servants of God, that perchance they may be privileged to meet their obligation of Huqúq, thus attaining a sublime station and gaining a reward that would last for ever.38

It [Huqúq] is a bounty which shall remain with every soul in every world of the worlds of God, the All-Possessing, the All-Bountiful.39

They that have kept their promises, fulfilled their obligations, redeemed their pledges and vows, rendered the Trust of God and His Right unto Him--these are numbered among the inmates of the all-highest Paradise.40

Verily He desireth for you the things that are inscrutable to you at present, though the people themselves will readily discover them when their souls take their flight and the trappings of their earthly gaieties are rolled up. Thus warneth you the Author of the Preserved Tablet.41

Indeed there lie concealed in this command, mysteries and benefits which are beyond the comprehension of anyone save God, the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.42

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUQÚQU’LLÁH AND THE FUND**

Comparing and contrasting Huqúqu’lláh and the Fund will help to clarify our understanding of each. After studying the law of Huqúqu’lláh, I was especially impressed with a fundamental difference between it and the Fund. Giving to the Fund is an act of taking what belongs to you personally and *giving* it to God. It expresses and helps to develop the qualities of detachment and generosity. In contrast, paying Huqúqu’lláh is an act of *returning* to God what is rightfully His. It is a deed which manifests the attributes of trustworthiness and responsibility. We are showing God that we are able to take care of an amount of wealth that He has entrusted to us by returning it to Him, in its full proportion, when it is due. God, Who has given us everything that we have, is simply asking for His fair portion which He will spend on the welfare of His Cause and His creatures. To me it is one of the unique features of the Kingdom of the Father when “God will walk with man.”43 It is as if God wants to participate openly in the affairs of His loved ones in order to express His great love for them and to demonstrate His affectionate generosity.

I recall a story told by Hand of the Cause of God Tarázu'lláh Samandarí during the World Congress in 196344 and which he retold in *Moments with Bahá’u’lláh*. For me this incident captures the essence of the law of Huqúqu’lláh and I recommend meditating on it. When he was 16, Mr. Samandarí made his pilgrimage to Bahjí during the last days of Bahá’u’lláh in 1892. Several times he attained the presence of Bahá’u’lláh. One day, when he was in Bahá’u’lláh’s room with several other pilgrims, Bahá’u’lláh chanted the *Lawh-i Sultán* for about half an hour. Mr. Samandarí relates what then took place:

After He finished His chanting and reading, Bahá’u’lláh said: “Taráz Effendi, stand up and give one of these roses to each person here.” The roses had been brought from the garden of Junayna and were resting on a pure white sheet that covered His mattress. I obeyed at once and gave one rose to each person.

Then He said: “And give Us Our share.”

So, I took one rose and presented it to Him, the One Who spoke from Mt. Sinai, with my own hand!

Then He said: “Take one for yourself, also.”

And I picked one for myself.

Then He said: “Fí amánu'lláh--go in God’s care!”45

The following is a simple chart showing some of the distinctive and shared features of Huqúqu’lláh and the Fund.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Huqúqu’lláh | Fund | Shared Features |
| A law in its own right. | A temporary means of fulfilling the law of Zakát--a charity payment46 | Both are spiritual obligations -- no social pressure is placed on the individual |
| Returning to God what is rightfully His. | Giving to God what belongs to the believer. | In both cases, it is the believer who determines the amount offered |
| Develops the spiritual qualities of trustworthiness and responsibility | Develops the spiritual qualities of detachment and generosity | Both develop the qualities of resignation, submission and others |
| Specifies a % payment on fixed “blocks” of surplus wealth | No minimum or maximum amounts are set. | Both accept small yet sacrificial donations |
| Use of determined by the Universal House of Justice | Use of determined by institutions at all levels of society | Both can be used to promote the Cause and to support charity |
| Cannot be earmarked for special purposes | Can be earmarked for special purposes |  |

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What is the spirit of the relationship between the Creator and humankind expressed in the Right of God?
2. What would motivate a Bahá’í to comply with the law of Huqúq’lláh?
3. What are some of the consequences of paying Huqúq’lláh?
4. How is paying Huqúq’ulláh different from giving to the Fund?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will study *Huqúqu’lláh* compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (Thornhill, Ontario: Bahá’í Canada Publications, 1986).
* I will study *The Law of Huqúqu’lláh: An Overview* by Cyrus Alá'í (Palabra Publications, 3735 B Shares Place, Riviera Beach, FL 33404).
* I will calculate my Huqúqu´lláh offering each year during the month of \_\_\_\_\_\_.
* I will contribute a sacrificial amount to Huqúqu’lláh even though I do not have the minimum, required amount of surplus wealth.
* I will conduct a deepening class on Huqúqu’lláh for my community.

CHAPTER 23: THE FUNDS

Cause me, O my Lord, to be of those who, with their substance and their own selves, have fought valiantly in Thy path.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

The purpose of this chapter is not to make an exhaustive study of the Bahá’í funds. Rather, what I have chosen to do, is to weave together the quotations, principles, stories, and experiences which have enriched my relationship with the Fund in the hope that they will stimulate the reader to achieve ever higher realms of detachment and commitment.

There are many motivations for giving to the various funds and obeying Bahá’í laws and ordinances in general. Four of them were discussed in the previous chapter. Personally, I am most moved by the idea of being privileged to help God to build His Kingdom on earth--of being allowed to collaborate with Bahá’u’lláh in the raising up of His new World Order. Building a refuge for the disillusioned, oppressed, and forsaken masses--what enterprise could be of greater importance? Nevertheless, in my Bahá’í life, I have found obstacles which have kept me from giving more to the Fund

--obstacles which have been diminished in their influence by my growing understanding of the spiritual principles underlying God’s creation and His Faith.

One of the most important concepts which needs to be grasped is the relationship between giving and receiving. (See Figure 3.2) It appears that God has constructed reality in such a way that the more one gives, the more one receives. On the surface it doesn’t make sense. “The more you give the less you have” and “there is not enough to go around for everyone” are the common sense attitudes of most people. Therefore, “give as little as you can” has become the social norm in materialistic societies. Hence, the fear of poverty, of shortages, and of “having to go without” becomes a major obstacle to giving to the Fund.

My generation in North America was raised by the generation which lived through the Great Depression. This had its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, we learned the value of thrift and economy. A cherished memory in our home was having a “truck patch” on the edge of town which we used for growing vegetables. I vividly remember the yearly canning of vegetables--corn, beets, string beans, etc.--and the row upon row of jars of food on racks in the basement. Besides being a great savings, it was a great way of bringing the family together. Later, this process turned into freezing vegetables and also meat. Half of a steer would be purchased, butchered, packaged, and frozen to be eaten in the course of the year. On the other hand, the emphasis on “always being prepared for a rainy day” needed to be balanced with concepts such as: sacrifice for God’s Faith, spontaneous generosity, and, when necessary, faith-based risk-taking.

But common sense is also expressed in the adage, “You get out of something what you put into it.” The difficulty with giving to the Fund is that the rewards are quite mysterious and often invisible. We know that God will take care of those who support His Cause, but we’re not always certain how. Facing that unknown--”but how?” --causes anxiety and even fear which can only be transformed into courage by activating our faith through the processes of prayer, meditation, and deepening. These give us spiritual strength.

Once, as a local treasurer, I read the following words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at a Nineteen Day Feast:

In brief, O ye friends of God, rest assured that in place of this contribution, your commerce, your agriculture and industries shall be blessed many times. Whosoever comes with one good act, God will give him tenfold. There is no doubt that the living Lord shall assist and confirm the generous soul.2

One of the friends stood up and asked, “But what about me? I am not a farmer or a businessman. I have a fixed salary. How could my salary possibly be increased tenfold?” I didn’t know how to answer him. I only said, “Well, that’s what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said.” Over the years I watched this same gentleman give generously to the Fund and obtain one better-paying job after another. He is now earning far more than “tenfold” his salary at that time when he asked that question.

Bahá’u’lláh tells us: “To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.” We must trust that, if we give, all will be “well” with us; that, if we make efforts for Him, He will guide us in His ways. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that this principle of reciprocity underlies the entire creation:

For all beings are connected together like a chain; and reciprocal help, assistance and interaction belonging to the properties of things are the causes of the existence, development and growth of created beings.3

It only takes a small step of logic to extend this principle to the spiritual world by including God as one of the “beings” to Whom we are also connected and He to us. Hence, “reciprocal help, assistance, and interaction” go beyond just the realm of contingent beings.

Rúhíyyih Khánum applies this same general principle to work. Her words of counsel, however, apply equally to the Fund:

We have a terrible disease which might be described as the “gimmes.”

We want to take in all the time, but seldom want to give out. The result is that we are suffering from auto-intoxication, our personalities are clogged up because the circulation has been stopped. Like a stream we should give out our energies and take in new force as the logical sequence of the process. . ..

To give out is to receive. It is a mysterious process, but the more you expend of the finer substances of your character the more they seem to grow and multiply within you.4

The Guardian, in a statement worthy of deep meditation, applies this same, universal, spiritual axiom to our relationship with the Fund:

We must be like the fountain or spring that is continually emptying itself of all that it has, and is continually being refilled from an invisible source. To be continually giving out for the good of our fellows undeterred by the fear of poverty and reliant on the unfailing bounty of the Source of all wealth and all good--that is the secret of right living.5

My ability to rely on “the unfailing bounty of the Source of all wealth” was greatly increased when I read and meditated on the story of Hájí Muhammad-Báqir. During the days when the Blessed Perfection was in Baghdad, he begged Bahá’u’lláh for riches. Soon, through successful business transactions in Tabríz he obtained his heart’s desire. The events that followed were predicted by Bahá’u’lláh in a Tablet to Hájí Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí. After attaining his wealth, Hájí Muhammad-Báqir became inactive in the Faith. He went so far as to deny his Faith before the Persian Ambassador in Constantinople. Bahá’u’lláh was obliged to forbid the believers to meet with him and He said that it was just the beginning of his tests. Hájí Muhammad bought large quantities of cotton then suddenly the price of cotton dropped. He wrote to Bahá’u’lláh asking for forgiveness and renewed wealth. Bahá’u’lláh revealed a Tablet saying that soon he would have enormous earnings. The price of cotton sky-rocketed and his wealth increased tenfold. He became the richest merchant in Constantinople. Again, his wealth became an obstacle. He abandoned the Cause and cut off his relations with Bahá’u’lláh. After some years, Bahá’u’lláh sent Hájí Amín, His Trustee, to investigate the situation. Through an interview he found that Hájí Muhammad-Báqir had completely forgotten Bahá’u’lláh and the Cause. In the course of the conversation he even stated, pointing to his money chest, “My god is in this box!” Hájí Amín reported this to Bahá’u’lláh Who became very sad: “As He was pacing up and down, he stopped, held out His hand, palm open, and said ‘With this hand We conferred upon him riches.’ Then with a sudden movement, He withdrew, closed His hand, and said, ‘Now with the same hand We take it back from him.’” Soon Hájí Muhammad lost all of his possessions. He again repented and asked Bahá’u’lláh for forgiveness. Bahá’u’lláh told him that God had taken away his riches so that he would return to Him and become firm in His love. He instructed Hájí Muhammad to leave Constantinople and to occupy himself with the transcription of Tablets. He spent the rest of his life in poverty. His faith increased and he became very devoted to the Cause.6

This story gives us a new view of wealth. If we have riches, beyond taking care of our needs and those of our family, they are to be used for helping us to promote the Cause of God. They are means, not ends. If we are not wealthy, it could be for two reasons: either we are being protected from the tests of wealth, or, we just have not yet found the means for becoming wealthy. It appears that motives are a key factor.

While in the Yucatán peninsula, Hand of the Cause of God Ugo Giachery made a profound statement to the indigenous believers. He was talking, through a translator, about the Fund. One of the Bahá’ís said, “Tell him that we cannot give to the Fund because we are too poor.” Mr. Giachery answered, “Tell them that if they want to *guarantee* their poverty they should continue not giving to the Fund.”7

Talking to a group of villagers in Zaire, Dr. Muhájir is reported to have stated:

Friends, I was born in a mud hut like you. My grandfather was poor but wanted to give a university education to his children. He wrote to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and asked what to do. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá replied, “Contribute to the Fund.” He obeyed and all of us got a university education.8

Indeed, there are unfathomable mysteries in this Cause. One of the unwelcome pieces of knowledge that comes to a treasurer is that of knowing who in the community does and does not give to the Fund. During my periods of service as a treasurer this has always been a source of consternation, but it has also become a means of confirmation because, over a period of years, a pattern could be detected. Those who were generous to the fund prospered. I have seen Bahá’ís lift themselves out of absolute poverty through a combination of generous giving, hard work and mysterious blessings from on high.

There is another principle which demonstrates the intimate connection between the material and the spiritual worlds; between contributions to the Fund and our personal, spiritual development. Figure 3.1 expresses this fundamental concept which underlies the BLDH program. Namely, that our inner and outer life reflect one another. And because the outer life is more visible, it can be used to diagnose the state-of-being of the inner life. Bahá’u’lláh tells us that “For everything there is a sign.”9 Shoghi Effendi states that the sign of faith and devotion is the degree to which we support the Fund. The Fund, therefore, can be used as an external means for measuring our inner, spiritual state. (This is one of the reasons why the Fund has been placed in the Outer Quadrant of the BLDH Circle.)

Contributions to this fund constitute . . . a practical and effective way whereby every believer can test the measure and character of his faith, and to prove in deeds the intensity of his devotion and attachment to the Cause.10

Every Bahá’í, no matter how poor, must realize what a grave responsibility he has to shoulder in this connection, and should have confidence that his spiritual progress as a believer in the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh will largely depend upon the measure in which he proves, in deeds, his readiness to support materially the Divine institutions of His Faith.11

Another topic which confuses some Bahá’ís is the question of how much to give to each of the various funds. This was superbly clarified in a letter from the Department of the Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice in which the dynamics of hierarchically organized parts and wholes were applied to the relationship amongst the funds.

At the level of the individual believer, attention to the needs of the funds of the Faith parallels the principles which govern other multiple loyalties. The first loyalty of a Bahá’í is to the whole of mankind, for the benefit of the part is best achieved through the welfare of the whole. But this widest loyalty does not eliminate the lesser loyalties of love for one’s country, for the area in which one lives, or for one’s family. They all constitute a network of interdependent and mutually beneficial loyalties. So it is with the individual believer’s relationship to the International, Continental, National and Local Funds.12

Figure 23.1 was designed to help the friends better understand the “nested” relationship of the various funds. When one gives to the International Fund, for example, these monies can be used by the World Centre to support projects at the continental, national, regional, and local levels in many parts of the world.

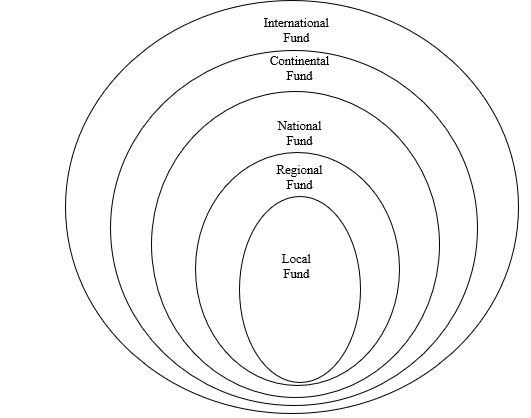


Figure 23. 1: Funds Prioritized

Whenever I have been asked, “How much should I give?” the best answer I have found is that of the Guardian to this same question: “Give until it hurts.”13 If we don’t feel any pain, then we are not giving with sacrifice--a necessary element for giving.

As to the idea of “giving what one can afford”; this does by no means put a limit or even exclude the possibility of self-sacrifice.

There can be no limit to one’s contributions to the national fund. The more one can give the better it is, specially when such offerings necessitate the sacrifice of other wants and desires on the part of the donor. The harder the sacrifice the more meritorious will it be, of course, in the sight of God. For after all it is not so much the quantity of one’s offerings that matters, but rather the measure of deprivation that such offerings entail. It is the spirit, and not the mere fact of contributing that we should always take into account when we stress the necessity for a universal and whole-hearted support of the various funds of the Cause.14 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

As the saying goes, “No pain, no gain.” If there is no sacrifice there is no transformation and progress. The former way of living must be given up for a new way of living. The Fund, therefore, offers an ideal realm for practicing sacrifice and reaping its benefits.

Until a being setteth his foot in the plane of sacrifice, he is bereft of every favour and grace; and this plane of sacrifice is the realm of dying to the self, that the radiance of the living God may then shine forth. The martyr’s field is the place of detachment from self, that the anthems of eternity may be upraised. Do all ye can to become wholly weary of self, and bind yourselves to that Countenance of Splendours.15 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Our sacrifices to the Fund bring us not only spiritual growth but also the good pleasure of our Lord. The story is told of a lady in Persia who with great sacrifice sold a rug to give a single bent coin to the Trustee. When the Trustee handed over to the Master the bag of money from his trip, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá held it in His hand and said that there was a missing donation. The Trustee was extremely distraught and didn’t know what to do. He retired to a room, knelt down and began praying. In the course of His prayers he noticed a pain in his knee. Upon investigating the cause of the pain, he discovered that a hole had been torn in his pocket and that a coin had slipped into the lining of his coat and that it was the coin that was causing the pain in his knee. When he took it out, he found that it was the same bent coin of the lady who had sold the rug. He quickly took it to the Master. The Master took it from him, held it up and happily exclaimed, “This is the most important contribution of all!”16

When Amelia Collins gave a special, very generous donation to the Guardian, as she was wont to do, it brought tears to his eyes.17 What greater reward can we desire?

The following story concerns the concept of formal versus informal giving. In a carefully calculated, formal manner we need to calculate how much we will give each month--an amount which entails sacrifice but not extreme austerity. Some of the friends add to this amount their transportation costs for teaching trips or administrative meetings. When they tell me that they are not certain whether or not to give more I tell them the story that was told to me by a Persian friend: “In Iran giving to the Fund is like saying ‘Alláh'u’Abhá.’ Every time we see a Bahá’í we say, ‘Alláh'u’Abhá’ and every time that we have an opportunity to do so, we give to the Fund.” So I tell the friends, “Fine, put the Fund in your monthly budget; pay for your travels; but don’t hold back when there are other opportunities such as: special calls for critical needs such as construction funds for the World Centre or houses of worship; and during the Nineteen Day Feasts, institutes, conferences, summer schools, children’s classes, conventions, etc. Whenever you see a fund box, say, ‘Alláh'u’Abhá’ by making a donation. Just keep digging deeper and trust that there will always be enough to give more, plus enough for living expenses and savings.” To myself, I say, “Well, Bahá’u’lláh owns everything that I have. He gave it to me. If it were His will, I would have nothing. Now, let’s see here, how much do I need to pay my bills and take care of my personal, family, and retirement needs?”

When it comes down to practical concerns like trying to remember to give to the fund, I have found various techniques to be helpful:

- include giving to the Fund in the family budget (perhaps via automatic bank transfers if possible);

- write “Fund” into your calendar;

- place a fund envelope with other bills to be paid;

- place a “piggy bank” for the fund where pockets are emptied of loose change; and/or

- send a written commitment to the treasurer and ask him, when you forget, to remind you of your monthly donation.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. Why should we give to the Fund?
2. What are some of the consequences of giving to the Fund?
3. What are some of the obstacles to giving to the Fund? How might they be overcome?
4. How can our giving to the Fund be used as a measure of our faith, devotion, and attachment to the Cause?
5. Which particular fund is the most important? Why?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* + I will contribute a sacrificial amount on a regular basis to the various funds keeping in mind their hierarchy of importance.
  + I will study the compilation on the Fund titled *Lifeblood of the Cause* (Bahá’í Publishing Trust of England).
  + I will read pages 250-266 regarding the Fund in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, compiled by Helen Hornby, 3rd rev. ed. (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1994).
  + I will study the letter from the Department of the Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice dated 31 October 1993 regarding “the relative priority of the various funds of the Faith.”

CHAPTER 24: DEVOTIONAL MEETINGS

Blessed is he who, at the hour of dawn, centring his thoughts on God, occupied with his remembrance, and supplicating His forgiveness, directeth his steps to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár . . .[[15]](#footnote-15) –Bahá’u’lláh1

The Universal House of Justice, in its 1996 Ridván Message (153 B.E.) stated, “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.”2 In their 28 December 1999 message to the Bahá’ís of the world, they went on to explain that:

the spiritual growth generated by individual devotions is reinforced by loving association among the friends in every locality, by worship as a community and by service to the Faith and to one’s fellow human beings. These communal aspects of the godly life relate to the law of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár [House of Worship] which appears in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas [Most Holy Book (of laws)]. Although the time has not come for the building of local Mashriqu’l-Adhkárs, the holding of regular meetings for worship open to all and the involvement of Bahá’í communities in projects of humanitarian service are expressions of this element of Bahá’í life and a further step in the implementation of the Law of God.

Having others with whom one can worship is truly a blessing because regular devotional meetings, in addition to the devotional portion of the Nineteen Day Feasts, can be such a marvelous support for self-transformation. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá once explained to Miss Ethel J. Rosenberg the wisdom of congregational worship:

Man may say: “I can pray to God whenever I wish, when the feelings of my heart are drawn to God; when I am in the wilderness, when I am in the city, or wherever I may be. Why should I go where others are gathered upon a special day, at a certain hour, to unite my prayers with theirs, when I may not be in a frame of mind for praying?”

To think in this way is useless imagination, for where many are gathered together the force is greater. Separate soldiers fighting alone and individually have not the force of a united army. If all the soldiers in this spiritual war gather together, then their united spiritual feelings help each other, and their prayers become acceptable.3

The key factors for success with devotional meetings, in my experience, are the degree of consecration and devotion of the friends and the geographical location of the friends in relation to one another and/or the Bahá’í Center, if the community has one. Practical considerations make it much easier to organize devotional meetings in villages than in large urban areas. In cities, neighborhood-based meetings work best, the Bahá´í Center serving as just one of several gathering points for devotional meetings. Of course, when the friends are kindled with the fire of the love of God, not even great distances and other inconveniences can keep them apart.

Certainly, having daily, morning, devotional meetings is moving as close as possible to the purpose of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs. But, if work schedules, distances, and transportation systems do not allow for the whole community or groups of friends to gather each morning, then, at this point in the development of the community, whatever is convenient and practical can be arranged. For example, some believers meet weekly during evening hours. Like Houses of Worship, devotional meetings are for everyone, both Bahá´ís and their non-Bahá´í friends and neighbors.

Regarding what constitutes a House of Worship, Bahá´u´lláh states, “The Mashriqu´l-Adhkár is each and every building which hath been erected in cities and villages for the celebration of My praise.”4 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá traced the roots of the future Houses of Worship to the humble abodes of the friends: “In Persia there are many [Mashriqu’l-Adhkárs]; some are houses which have been utilized for the purpose, others are homes entirely devoted to the divine Cause, and in some places temporary structures have been erected.”5 Hence, homes and Bahá´í centers where devotional meetings are held can be viewed as the humble beginnings of the future, majestic, nine-sided, Bahá´í Temples. To a group of pilgrims Shoghi Effendi once described, in a very succinct yet inspiring way, the future role of Houses of Worship in a Bahá´í community life that balances worship and service: “The friends must have a very clear conception of their responsibilities and duties: 1) derive inspiration from Source of Guidance (Mashriqu’l-Adhkár), starting near dawn, 2) go to Hazira (work), and inspire others by their service. Prayer and work, meditation and work; balance of [the] two.”6

My first experience with the power of devotional meetings was in Columbus, Ohio during the early 1970’s. The older believers7 had a long-standing practice of getting together Wednesday evenings for what they called “a prayer meeting.” This was not just another event on the calendar. Because I spent a great deal of time deepening and conversing with Knight of Bahá’u’lláh Olivia Kelsey at her apartment during those days, I overheard some of the arrangements as they were being made. All during the week there was an exchange of phone call conversations regarding friends who were ill, families who were having problems, and teaching efforts that needed spiritual support. There was no backbiting and gossip, just concern. It was a community that felt that the difficulties of one were the difficulties of all. So, when Wednesday night came around the friends entered the devotional meeting with a great deal of momentum and purpose. They knew that together their prayers would have more potency. They arrived with their “guns loaded,” so to speak, and what they shot off together to heaven’s gate became cannon blasts! Because I was studying at a university campus far from the meeting place, I was only able to attend a few of these gatherings, but I still get goose bumps when I recall the feelings of earnestness, urgency, and power that those prayers evoked in my inner most being. Those believers had absolutely no doubt that they were being listened to and that their supplications would be answered. In fact, as the days after the devotional meetings rolled by, their conversations would become excited as they would relate to one another exactly *how* their prayers had been answered, sometimes in very miraculous ways.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. Devotional meetings are the predecessors of what divinely ordained institution?
2. If a person says his or her obligatory prayer every day, why should he or she also attend a devotional meeting?
3. Prayer should be followed by what other key life process? Why?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will study the 19 September 2001 memorandum “Definition and Scope of ‘Devotional Meetings’” by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice.8
* I will consult with my family about the possibility of praying together each morning before we go to school and work.
* I will consult with fellow Bahá’ís who live near me to decide if, where, and when we can begin devotional meetings.
* I will invite interested friends and neighbors to attend a devotional meeting in my home.

CHAPTER 25: THE NINETEEN DAY FEAST

Verily, it is enjoined upon you to offer a feast, once in every month[[16]](#footnote-16), though only water be served; for God hath purposed to bind hearts together, albeit through both earthly and heavenly means.1 --Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*

As a tool for personal and social transformation, it would be difficult to give the institution of the Nineteen Day Feast too much importance. In the above injunction Bahá’u’lláh describes it as a principal “means” which God has designed for uniting the hearts of humankind--the chief goal of the Bahá’í Dispensation. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in three awe-inspiring statements, equates a properly carried out Feast with the Lord’s Supper and guarantees His presence at the gathering:

If the Feast is arranged in this manner and in the way mentioned, that supper is the ‘Lord’s supper,’ for the result is the same result and the effect is the same effect.2

Should you act and live according to these behests, know verily, of a certainty, that that Feast is the Heavenly Food. That Supper is the ‘Lord’s Supper!’ I am the Servant of that gathering.3

Make ye an effort in every meeting that the Lord’s Supper may become realised and the heavenly food descend. This heavenly food is knowledge, understanding, faith, assurance, love, affinity, kindness, purity of purpose, attraction of hearts and the union of souls. It was this manner of the Lord’s Supper which descended from the heavenly kingdom in the day of Christ. When the meeting is conducted after this manner, then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also is present in heart and soul, though His body may not be with you.4

In another Tablet the Master states, “Give ye great weight to the Nineteen Day gatherings, . . .”5 Elsewhere he points out the necessary conditions for a high-quality Feast in order to attract His presence and obtain the effects of the Lord’s Supper:

You must continue to keep the Nineteen Day Feast. It is very important; it is very good. But when you present yourselves in the meetings, before entering them, free yourselves from all that you have in your heart, free your thoughts and your minds from all else save God, and speak to your heart. That all may make this a gathering of love, make it the cause of illumination, make it a gathering of attraction of the hearts, surround this gathering with the Lights of the Supreme Concourse so that you may be gathered together with the utmost love.6

He then reveals a prayer to be recited *before* entering the Feast and then lays down the necessary spiritual conditions of the gathering itself:

Each one of you must think how to make happy and pleased the other members of your Assembly, and each one must consider all those who are present as better and greater than himself, and each one must consider himself less than the rest. Know their station as high, and think of your own station as low.7

In this same vein, while in London, England, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá counseled the friends to be extremely sensitive to the feelings of others:

Even if there is the slightest feeling between certain souls--a lack of love--it must be made to entirely disappear. There must be the utmost translucency and purity of intention.8

In a statement published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, which was wholeheartedly approved by the Guardian, the importance of the Feast is emphasized:

It is incumbent upon every believer, unless ill or absent from the city, to attend each of these Feasts. . ..

These meetings may be regarded as the very heart of our Bahá’í community life.9

The acceptable excuses for missing a Feast--illness and travel--have always served me well as rules of thumb along with a wise piece of advice which we received from fellow pioneers in Honduras:

My wife and I follow an unwritten rule: we always try to support any activity and event sponsored by the assembly--even if only one of us is able to go. And it has never failed, that our degree of spiritual happiness is always greater after the meeting than it was before the meeting.10

At the same time, the Guardian cautions us not to over-emphasize attendance at the Feast:

Attendance at Nineteen Day Feasts is not obligatory but very important, and every believer should consider it a duty and a privilege to be present on such occasions.11

In my experience, the key to having good attendance at Feasts is three-fold: (1) the friends need to be deepened regarding the nature and importance of the Feast, (2) Feasts need to be made as attractive, friendly, and sacred as reasonably possible; something to look forward to, and (3) as many community members as possible need to be involved. Youth, children and adults, for example, can be asked to recite, from memory, prayers and passages from the Writings; to bring decorations, flowers, or, for an evening Feast, candles; or, to present Bahá’í book reviews, poetry recitals, puppet shows, plays, and musical compositions. Everyone needs to feel responsible for the Feast. No one has the right to complain about boring Feasts. Instead, each of us must ask ourselves, “What can I contribute to make this a happy, spiritual occasion?”

A successful Feast does not need complex preparations. One of my most moving memories is of a Feast which was held in a humble Bahá’í home in Danli, Honduras. It was a sun-shiny afternoon; so, the host family decided to celebrate the Feast in their back patio. All of the children scurried around helping with the preparations. The packed earth floor was swept. A rustic, wooden table was placed beneath a beautiful shade tree. A table cloth and flower vase appeared out of nowhere followed shortly by a simple but lovely bouquet of red, tropical flowers gathered by some children. Chairs and benches were brought out of the house. Others were borrowed from the neighbors. As prayers began on that quiet afternoon, I felt an indescribable state of inner peace and love for the members of the dear host family and the host community. The feeling of unity and of being true brothers and sisters in Bahá’u’lláh’s family was so intense that you could almost touch it. The heavenly spirit of that humble Feast has always served as my longed-for standard. And, whenever I see flowers at a Feast, I am reminded of that wonderful occasion.

As a community, we need to get to the point where we feel like the Feast is water and we are fish who have been gasping for oxygenated water for eighteen days and who, upon finding this spiritual lake, go plunging in with joy and eagerness--with a sense of salvation.

As to the Nineteen Day Feast, it rejoiceth mind and heart. If this Feast be held in the proper fashion, the friends will, once in nineteen days, find themselves spiritually restored, and endued with a power that is not of this world.12 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Even when there are community members with whom we don’t particularly enjoy being, we need to consider the Feast as a marvelous opportunity for spiritual growth; a social laboratory in which Bahá’u’lláh is mixing together the different races, cultures, and temperaments; a forge in which He is pounding out a “new race of men.” Even when we don’t want to attend a Feast, we have to dig deep into our hearts, find Bahá’u’lláh standing there, and then simply arise, obey, and win His good-pleasure.

One of the most moving experiences I have ever had, in relation to the importance of the Feast, occurred during the upheavals in Nicaragua when General Somoza was struggling to hang on to his dictatorship. The government starting bombing its own people in towns and villages in the territories controlled by the revolutionary Sandinista army. Refugees were flowing across the border into Honduras. A friend and I decided to go in search of Bahá’ís in the town of El Triunfo near the Nicaraguan border on the Pan-American highway. I can’t recall how we found the remnants of a humble, Nicaraguan, family of believers, but we did. They were living in a storage room of a Honduran family’s home. The grandmother described their horrendous odyssey, just barely escaping death at the hands of their own government. When I asked her if her family needed anything, she answered, “Oh no, we’re fine. We have what we need to live. Our only regret and greatest sadness is that, because we are guests in this home, we cannot celebrate the Feast in the proper way.” Her sad face, that heart-breaking scene, and those precious words, I will never forget.

As a final note, there is one other attribute of a beautiful Feast which needs to be given attention. Care needs to be taken in order to assure an aesthetic balance amongst the three portions of the Feast: devotions, consultation, and social interaction. William Sears counseled the North American believers to allow more time in their Feasts for the social portion. At the time he felt like the friends were spending a great deal of time on devotions and administrative matters, and then rushing through the social portion and out the door.13 Perhaps this was a carryover from the Christian, church-service tradition which has no community social portion. Shoghi Effendi pointed out that the other two parts of the Feast also need their proper proportion:

As to your question concerning Bahá’í feasts, Shoghi Effendi strongly feels that on such occasions the friends should emphasize both the spiritual and the administrative elements. For these are equally essential to the success of every Bahá’í festival. To maintain the right balance between them is, therefore, the duty and responsibility of every individual Bahá’í or group. Until the believers learn to combine the two, there can be no hope of their gaining any real and permanent benefit from such religious celebrations. A good part of the feast must of course be devoted to the reading of the Holy Words. For it is through them that the friends can get the inspiration and the vision they need for the successful accomplishment of their work for the Cause.14

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What, according to Bahá’u’lláh, is the main purpose of the Nineteen Day Feast?
2. Which of the three portions of the Feast is the most important? Explain your answer.
3. What makes a successful Feast?
4. What are the two legitimate reasons for missing a Feast? Is attending the Feast obligatory?
5. How does the Nineteen Day Feast function as a “social laboratory” for uniting humankind and forging a “new race of men”?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will attend the Nineteen Day Feast even when I feel disinclined to do so.
* I will volunteer to host a Nineteen Day Feast.
* I will go out of my way to make a special contribution to the Feast: flowers, refreshments, a radiant smile, a special song, a poem, a game, a puppet show about some aspect of the Faith, an attentive and sympathetic ear for the friends, etc.
* I will study the significance of the Nineteen Day Feast by reading:
  + *Bahá’í Meetings; The Nineteen Day Feast*, a compilation prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1976),
  + *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, compiled by Helen Hornby, 3rd rev. ed. (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1994), 240-47; and/or
  + *A Wider Horizon: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice 1983-1992*, compiled by Paul Lample, (Riviera Beach, FL: Palabra, 1992), 21, 66-70.
* I will investigate the possible use of the feast activity book by Elaine Zavitz and the “Children’s Feast Packets” (available from the U.S. Bahá’í Distribution Service).

CHAPTER 26: HOLY DAYS

Say: The Most Great Festival [the Ridván Festival] is, indeed, the King of Festivals. Call ye to mind, O people, the bounty which God hath conferred upon you. Ye were sunk in slumber, and lo! He aroused you by the reviving breezes of His Revelation, and made known unto you His manifest and undeviating Path.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

The role of the Bahá’í Holy Days in the spiritual transformation of our self and our loved ones, in the BLDH program, revolves around the instruction of Bahá’u’lláh cited above: “Call ye to mind . . ..” The Holy Days provide a time for the remembrance of God and the great events of the Bahá’í dispensation; an opportunity to travel through time to those sacred places in order to intensely relive the joyful and the sorrowful events in our rich, historical heritage.

For me, the Holy Days have become mental/spiritual “pilgrimages.”[[17]](#footnote-17) It is during these days that I recall my own pilgrimage to the Holy Land and I visualize the places there associated with the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. And, because I have never been there, I try to imagine, with the help of photographs and history books, the events that occurred in Tehran, Shíráz, Tabríz, Baghdad, and other places.

The power of these events is so great that their remembrance will be summoned up century after century and will be felt with great emotion, even as the Báb, while imprisoned in the castle of Máh-Kú, shed tears of grief while listening to the recital of the account of the martyrdom of Imám Husayn, an event which occurred more than a millennium earlier.2

A detailed explanation of the Bahá’í Holy Days can be found in the editions of *The Bahá’í World* and in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, *Lights of Guidance*, and *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era*. One of my Bahá’í teachers once told me an easy way to remember the Holy Days. The events associated with the lives of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh are basically three: birth, declaration, and death. Hence, for the Báb we have three Holy Days: according to the solar calendar, the Birth of the Báb, October 20, 1819; the Declaration of the Báb[[18]](#footnote-18), May 23, 1844; and the Martyrdom of the Báb, July 9, 1850. For Bahá’u’lláh we have five Holy Days: the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh, November 12, 1817; the Declaration of Bahá’u’lláh (Feast of Ridván): the first day of Ridván, April 21, 1863; the ninth day of Ridván, April 29, 1863; and the twelfth day of Ridvan, May 2, 1863; and the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh, May 29, 1892.3 This gives us a total of eight Holy Days. The ninth is Naw-Rúz, the Bahá’í New Year which is celebrated on March 20 or 21 depending on the Spring Equinox.

One day, while reading, I learned that the Báb had referred to Naw-Rúz as the “Day of God.”4 As I meditated on this designation, an extremely happy and delightful feeling and thought came over me:

What a marvelous God we have! He has given us a day just to remember Him. There is no historical event associated with this special Holy Day. It is a day which calls to mind the “eternalness” of God and His creation --the spring equinox in the northern hemisphere; a time when the physical life of the planet is renewed over and over again, reminding us of the Divine Springtime, the eternal Covenant, and the Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. He is such a marvelous God! He so much wants us to enjoy His “Day of God” with Him that He forbade us to work on Naw-Rúz and “ordained” that we have a grand celebration in His honor. How wonderful He is!

Perhaps this wasn't a very reverent thought, but it made me feel so happy to realize that I am a dear companion of the “Incomparable Friend.”5

For the nine days listed above, work and school attendance are suspended. Two other Holy Days on which work need not be suspended are the Day of the Covenant (November 25), and the Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (November 27, 1921). Other special days which do not require the suspension of work are the Intercalary Days (‘Ayyám-i-Há; February 24- March 1).

My fondest memories have been of when we lived in communities strong enough to organize visits to homes for the aged or orphanages. The response was always so marvelous; the people were so easy to please with our simple songs, prayers, poetry, refreshments, small gifts, and, above all, our radiant spirits. These visits always provided excellent opportunities for teaching indirectly, through deeds, not only the elderly and the orphans, but, also, the staff in charge of caring for them.

But we did not always live in communities capable of organizing such charitable events. Because of having to ask permission to take off work to attend Bahá’í conferences and conventions, or for continuing our professional studies; we were not always able to suspend our work. Another common experience for pioneers and travel teachers is to become so involved with the assembly election process that we are not able to celebrate the first day of Ridván. But, when it has been possible to observe any of the Holy Days, it has greatly strengthened the Bahá’í identity of our family and we have enjoyed a temporary yet wonderful benefit: no one else takes off work and school for Bahá’í holidays! Hence, we have the beach or the park *all to ourselves*!

Something that developed over time was family traditions for Holy Days and special anniversaries. There are few rituals and ceremonies in the Faith. We have been liberated from time-worn traditions which have lost their true meaning and become very commercial in nature. And, we should beware of establishing any activity which could become crystallized into a fixed tradition. We should always feel free to change, enrich, and improve our celebrations and commemorations. Nevertheless, in our experience, we found that a balance is needed between activities which repeat themselves and novel ideas which no one has ever tried before. In our family, for example, our children grew up with the William Sears ‘Ayyám-i-Há recording of songs and history. When the Intercalary Day season arrived, these and other favorite songs filled our home. There are recordings of other special songs for Naw-Rúz and which tell about the events in the lives of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh which can be brought out and played year after year during these special days. Also, the reading of special prayers and certain passages from the Writings and from the Bahá’í history books can make nice traditions. Even during the Fast we always recited at sunset the prayer which begins “Praise be to Thee, O Lord my God! I beseech Thee by this Revelation whereby darkness hath been turned into light . . .”6

Another ‘Ayyám-i-Há tradition which developed in our family was the filling of a big glass jar with a variety of candies which were purchased only at that time of year. After evening prayers and the giving of simple gifts, everyone got to pick their favorite candy. For gift giving we found that the children enjoyed receiving one small gift each night of ‘Ayyám-i-Há. This also made them feel special because their friends only had a Christmas gift exchange one day of the year whereas we had four days and sometimes five! Other family traditions could include visiting the elderly and the Bahá’í families and taking them a plate of cookies, making special decorations, making a model of the Garden of Ridván, cooking together a favorite family recipe, or going to a park. The nice thing about traditions is that they give the family, especially the children, a sense of security and continuity; a feeling that: “This world may be full of drastic changes and shocking events but some things you can always count on and look forward to.”

One of my favorite community activities which I experienced in two communities was an all-night vigil for observing the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh and the Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This was only been possible when the friends didn’t have to work the following day. Having a large block of leisurely time together gives everyone in the community a chance to work out their interpersonal “wrinkles.” The children look forward to the “all-nighter” --prayers, music, an emotionally moving program, light snacks, a night time “siesta” for some, pillows and foam mattresses in every corner of the house, videos of the Faith, and to cap it off--a bond-building breakfast together before sending everyone home in a state of exhausted bliss.

We weren’t always able to do it, but our community also enjoyed making trips to the beach. The feeling of group identity and solidarity was wonderful. The children felt an enhanced sense of security because they realized that there is a whole bunch of “aunts,” “uncles,” and “grandparents,” who cared deeply about their welfare and loved them dearly. And the adults enjoyed the children because, if you missed holding a baby or playing a silly game, it seemed that there was always a small child who didn’t mind being held by others and eager young ones just waiting to engage the older folks in some fun activity.

Thanks especially to the experiences of our Holy Year commemorations; we found that, if the necessary planning and preparation could be carried out, Holy Day observances and celebrations made marvelous teaching events. Unlike Nineteen Day Feasts, contacts and the public (who are becoming increasingly more curious about and interested in the Faith) can be invited to Holy Day observances. The friends seem to be at their very best during these events and everyone goes away with a memorable experience.

**CONCLUSION OF THE SPIRITUAL QUADRANT**

We are spiritual warriors engaged in battle with forces of darkness: the inner darkness of the relentless ego and carnal passions, and the outer forces opposed to the unifying spirit of the age. Our Commander has not sent us into battle empty-handed. He has forged weapons of the finest caliber. Eleven of them have been discussed in this section on the Spiritual Quadrant. It is up to us to make important decisions: whether to obey or to rebel; whether to use our armaments wisely or to squander this rich spiritual heritage.

There is much darkness in me, much of my father. All my life I have fought desperately to transubstantiate this darkness and turn it into light, one little drop of light. It has been a harsh struggle without pity or respite. Had I tired for even an instant and allowed an interval in the hostilities, I would have perished. And if some-times I emerged victorious, what agony that entailed, how many wounds! I was not born pure, I have fought to become so. Virtue, for me, is not the fruit of my nature, it is the fruit of my struggles. God did not give it to me, I have had to labor in order to conquer it by sword. For me, virtue’s flower is a pile of transubstantiated dung.

This war never came to an end. I have not been completely vanquished so far, nor have I completely triumphed. I struggle continually. At any moment all of me may perish; at any moment all of me may be saved. I am still crossing the Hair Bridge that swings above the abyss.7 --Nikos Kazantzakis

In all these journeys the wayfarer must stray not a hair’s breadth 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 all that hath been enjoined, and hold fast to the cord of shunning all that is forbidden, that he may partake of the cup of the Law and be informed of the mysteries of Truth.8 --Bahá’u’lláh

We must therefore labour to destroy the animal condition, till the meaning of humanity cometh to light.9 --Bahá’u’lláh

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. Why do you think Bahá’u’lláh ordained the Bahá’í Holy Days?
2. What is one way to remember the nine Bahá’í holy days during which work is forbidden? What are they?
3. What can we do to assure that our Bahá’í holy days are deeply meaningful?
4. What are the eleven processes in the Spiritual Quadrant of the BLDH Circle? Which are inner and which are more outer in nature?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will attend Holy Day observances in my community.
* I will invite a friend or contact to the Holy Day commemorations.
* I will prepare something very special for these occasions--readings, refreshments, decorations, a song, a play, etc.
* I will set aside a generous amount of time for prayer, meditation, and reflection during Holy Days.
* During each Holy Day I will study the history of the event.

# SECTION IV: PSYCHOLOGICAL QUADRANT

The relationship between the Psychological Quadrant and the other quadrants--social, physical, and spiritual--is an integral one. The fact that our life psychological and thoughts have an impact on our emotions, our social relations, and even our physical well-being is now a well-established fact in scientific circles and is confirmed by the Bahá’í writings. References to this relationship will be cited in the discussion of the Physical Quadrant. The connection between mind and spirit needs to be clarified before entering into a discussion of the psychological processes.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá equates the human spirit with the rational soul and offers concrete analogies between them and natural phenomena:

The human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal is the rational soul, and these two names--the human spirit and the rational soul--designate one thing.1

But the mind is the power of the human spirit [the rational soul]. Spirit is the lamp; mind is the light which shines from the lamp. Spirit is the tree, and the mind is the fruit. Mind is the perfection of the spirit and is its essential quality, as the sun’s rays are the essential necessity of the sun.2

Using one of the Master’s analogies we might say then, in general terms, that the processes in the Spiritual Quadrant (fasting, prayer, deepening, teaching, etc.) nourish the roots of the tree of our soul while the psychological processes (such as learning, creativity, and visualization) strengthen or “polish” the fruit of the tree of the human spirit which is our mind or mental capacities.

As was stated earlier, the Psychological Quadrant is colored blue to represent the cool, calm waters of the intellect which are undisturbed by the passions of love or hate--one of the essential characteristics of “the true seeker.”

He must so cleanse his heart that no remnant of either love or hate may linger therein, lest that love blindly incline him to error, or that hate repel him away from the truth.3

The Psychological Quadrant is also symbolized by the sword which represents the mental power of justice which is able to analyze, evaluate, and then judge right from wrong. Also, like the sword, the intellect is an amoral force which can be used for good or for disastrous and evil purposes. Therefore, it, like the mind, must be guided by the Word of God.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What is the relation between spirit and mind according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá?
2. Do godless, evil people usually engage in the processes of the Spiritual Quadrant? Do they usually engage in the processes of the Psychological Quadrant? Which are more important? Why?

# SECTION IV, PART 1: THE INNER PSYCHOLOGICAL QUADRANT

The key processes in the Inner Psychological Quadrant are meditation, goal-setting, time management, visualization, and reflection. They are intimately related with one another and to three of the processes of the Inner Spiritual Quadrant: prayer, meditation for spiritual purposes, and deepening. They have been separated only for conceptual clarity; are not mutually exclusive; are not carried out necessarily in a sequential order; and can occur simultaneously.

It is the purpose of these processes to help us to translate our God-given potentialities, as revealed and described in the Sacred Writings, into actuality--into visible and discernable habits or patterned uses of energy. Bahá’u’lláh exhorts us to engage in this process in these words: “It is incumbent on every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which has been written into reality1 and action. . ..”2 He tells us that how much (of what has been written) we are able to translate into action has been determined by God: “Unto each one hath been prescribed a pre-ordained measure, as decreed in God’s mighty and guarded Tablets.”3 From this passage we know that not everyone has been given the same “measure” of potentiality. Only God knows the limit which He “guards” in His Tablets. We, as humans, can never judge the limits of others or ourselves. From our circumscribed standpoint, human potentiality must be considered to be unlimited. An empirical proof of this is memory. No scientific investigation, to my knowledge, has found a limit to memory. We can always acquire more experience and remember it.

The problem I have encountered in my own life is that I often know what the Bahá’í writings tell me to do and I know what action is required, but I fall down in the “translation” process. The Inner Psychological Quadrant was created to help us focus on this intermediary phase. For help, we do not have to look far. In the same passage quoted above, Bahá’u’lláh gives us the key: “All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition.”4 What is volition? The dictionary tells us that it is the “act of willing or choosing; exercise of the will; the power of willing or determination.”5 The key role of volition as the vital link between our knowledge of the writings and our actions is also emphasized by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “The attainment of any object is conditioned upon knowledge, volition and action. Unless these three conditions are forthcoming there is no execution or accomplishment.”6 In other passages volition is referred to as an innate power and is equated with striving, resolve, and firmness of purpose:

His [God’s] purpose . . . is to enable the pure in spirit and the detached in heart to ascend, by virtue of their own innate powers, unto the shores of the Most Great Ocean, that thereby they who seek the Beauty of the All-Glorious may be distinguished and separated from the wayward and perverse.7 --Bahá’u’lláh

O maidservant of God! Chant thou the Words of God, derive joy from their meaning, and strive to transform them into actions!8 –’Abdu’l-Bahá

They [the children] must be constantly encouraged and made eager to gain all the summits of human accomplishment, so that from their earliest years they will be taught to have high aims, to conduct themselves well, to be chaste, pure, and undefiled, and will learn to be of powerful resolve and firm purpose in all things.9 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Hence, in order to successfully transform ourselves, we must focus our attention firstly on acquiring knowledge, secondly on strengthening volition, and thirdly on arising to act. The BLDH program was designed to reinforce these three phases of transforming potentiality into action. (See Figure IV.1.1) The knowledge of our spiritual realities and potentialities lies in the Sacred Writings. Through His love for us, Bahá’u’lláh revealed the nature of our truest and highest Self. Therefore, we must study the Writings in order to find out what we could and should become and what we could and should be doing: teaching the Faith, pioneering, facilitating the entry of troops of people into the Cause of God, detaching ourselves from all created things, loving God above all else, looking upon our neighbor with a bright and friendly face and so on. When, through the processes of the Inner Spiritual Quadrant, we capture a vision of the multitude of possibilities: virtues to be developed, fields of service open to us, and actions that are praiseworthy, then we move into the Inner Psychological Quadrant on our way to the realm of action (which is discussed in a separate chapter even though it does not appear on the Circle). The Inner Psychological Quadrant was designed to strengthen volition by breaking it into steps, each of which can be continually improved. It is here that we (1) *meditate* on a limited number of possibilities which we have chosen, (2) select one possibility as a targeted *goal* which is broken into sub-goals and specific activities, (3) set a beginning time, duration, and ending time for the activities required to achieve the goal, (4) *visualize* regularly a state of goal-attainment, and, (5), after carrying out the plan in the realm of action, periodically *reflect* on our successes and failures in order to build self-confidence and to readjust our goals, plans,[[19]](#footnote-19)a and actions.10

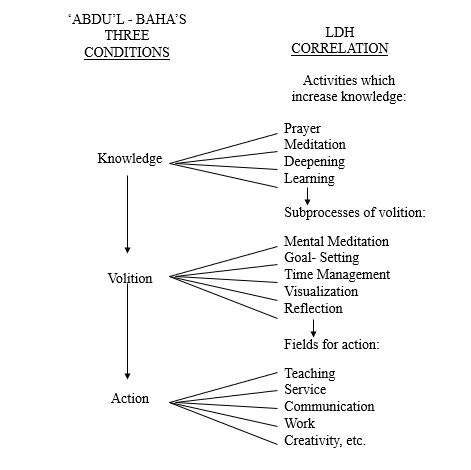


Figure IV.1. 1: BLDH Correlation with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Three Conditions for Attaining Any Object

The transformation process can be seen as one which flows through all four quadrants of the BLDH Circle. Transformation begins in the spiritual realm and then flows through the psychological realm,[[20]](#footnote-20)a possibly with some consultation in the social realm along the way, and on into the realm of action. This “flow” can also be seen in the five steps for solving problems suggested by the beloved Guardian to a pilgrim:

While in Haifa, the beloved Guardian of the Cause gave to the writer [Ruth Moffat], the most concise, complete, and effective formula she has ever seen, for the Dynamics of Prayer. After saying to stress the need of more prayers and meditation among the friends, he said to use these five steps if we had a problem of any kind for which we desired a solution or wished help.

**First Step:**

Pray and meditate about it. Use the prayers of the Manifestations as they have the greatest power. Then remain in the silence of contemplation for a few minutes.

**Second Step:**

Arrive at a decision and hold this. This decision is usually born during the contemplation. It may seem almost impossible of accomplishment but if it seems to be an answer to a prayer or a way of solving the problem, then immediately take the next step.

**Third Step:**

Have determination to carry the decision through. Many fail here. The decision, budding into determination, is blighted and instead becomes a wish or a vague longing. When determination is born, immediately take the next step.

**Fourth Step:**

Have faith and confidence that the power will flow through you, the right way will appear, the door will open, the right thought, the right message, the right principle, or the right book will be given to you. Have confidence and the right thing will come to your need. Then, as you rise from prayer, take at once the fifth step.

**Fifth Step:**

Then, he said, lastly, ACT; Act as though it had all been answered. Then act with tireless, ceaseless energy. And as you act, you, yourself, will become a magnet, which will attract more power to your being, until you become an unobstructed channel for the Divine power to flow through you.

Many pray but do not remain for the last half of the first step. Some who meditate arrive at a decision, but fail to hold it. Few have the determination to carry the decision through, still fewer have the confidence that the right thing will come to their need. But how many remember to act as though it had all been answered? How true are these words-- “Greater than the prayer is the spirit in which it is uttered” and greater than the way it is uttered is the spirit in which it is carried out.11

In these five steps we can, again, see a flow from the realm of spirit to the realm of action: prayer 🡪 contemplation/ meditation 🡪 decision-making 🡪 determination 🡪 faith and confidence 🡪 action. (See Figure IV.1.2) The BLDH program supports these processes in direct and indirect ways as shown in Figure IV.1.3. As was discussed in the chapters on the Inner Spiritual Quadrant, prayer and spiritual meditation can be considered as two sides of the same coin--speaking and listening--one flowing into the other. And meditation can also be considered as having two sides--spiritual and psychological. The spiritual side is directed towards the Words of the Manifestations. During this phase inspiration bubbles up into one’s consciousness. Spiritual meditation flows into psychological meditation as one turns from the spiritual world to the mental realm of possible concrete alternatives. Goal-setting supports decision-making by making the selected course of action more explicit and by breaking the decision down into sub-goals and activities which will lead, step by step, to the accomplishment of the chosen end. Time management enhances determination by giving the chosen activities a place in time. When the selected beginning-time arrives, action is facilitated and procrastination is undermined. It helps to keep our decisions from being “blighted” and “becoming a wish or a vague longing.” Visualization increases faith and confidence by enabling one to rehearse a decision in the spiritual/mental realm before attempting it in the physical realm. “Seeing” ourselves carrying out an activity, even mentally, increases our self-confidence when the time comes for real action. Reflection supports faith and self-confidence by providing a time for self-evaluation during which we congratulate ourselves for even small achievements, thereby heightening our sense of “Yes, Bahá’u’lláh is confirming me; yes, I can do it; yes, I am approaching my goal.” The outer quadrants of the BLDH Circle are fields for channeling the Guardian’s fifth step--action: teaching, service, work; even giving to the Fund and learning are actions.

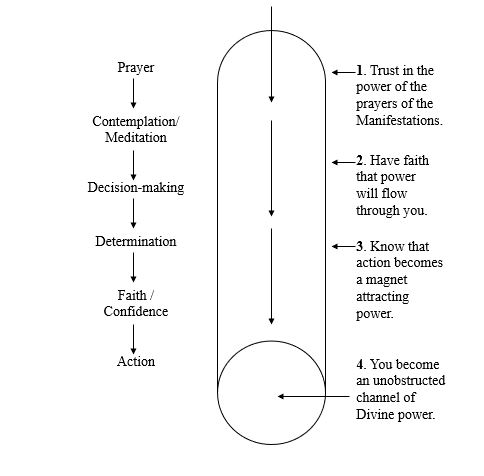


Figure IV.1. 2: The Dynamic Flow from the Realm of the Spirit to the Realm of Action

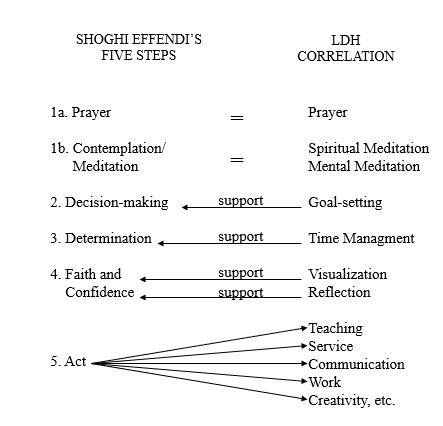


Figure IV.1. 3: BLDH Correlation with Shoghi Effendi’s Five Steps for Solving Problems

Now that you have seen a broad preview of the essential dynamics of the BLDH program, we will now proceed to take a closer look at the processes of the Inner Psychological Quadrant.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, what are the three requirements for “the attainment of any object”?
2. Which processes in the BLDH Circle support the acquisition of knowledge? (See Figure IV.1.1.)
3. What is volition? Bahá’u’lláh says that volition is necessary for what process to take place? Which processes on the Circle support volition? (See Figure IV.1.1.)
4. Where on the Circle is the realm of action? What are some of the more action-oriented processes on the Circle? (See Figure IV.1.1.)
5. What are the five steps recommended by the Guardian for solving problems or obtaining divine assistance? (See Figure IV.1.1.) Which BLDH processes support each of these five steps? (See Figure IV.1.2.)

CHAPTER 27: MEDITATION FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL PURPOSES

O people of Bahá! The source of crafts, sciences and arts is the power of reflection. Make ye every effort that out of this ideal mine there may gleam forth such pearls of wisdom and utterance as will promote the well-being and harmony of all the kindreds of the earth.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

**THE DEFINITION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL MEDITATION AND ITS ROLE**

**IN THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS**

The BLDH program defines psychological meditation broadly as “the entertainment of possibilities.”2 To “entertain” in this context means “to receive into or keep in the mind; to consider or dwell upon; as to ‘entertain’ an idea; to engage the attention of agreeably.”3 It is different from spiritual meditation which is defined in the Program as “the seeking of the meaning of the Sacred Writings.” As was discussed earlier, the two uses should be linked together; for as we receive inspiration via spiritual meditation, we should then turn towards the intellectual contemplation of the possibilities of how to implement in our lives the new understanding, insight, perspective, idea, plan, thought, or solution. As we entertain a range of possibilities, we are considering which potentialities to bring into being; either our own latent talents and capabilities or the potentialities in the world around us. (See Figure 27.1) As we contemplate alternatives we are “trying them on for size” in the world of the spirit. We are foreseeing the action and the possible consequences of the action. In this way we can oftentimes avoid taking undesirable actions. This valuable benefit of psychological meditation is described by the theoretical physicist David Bohm. He tells how the meditation needs to

‘display’ the intention along with its expected consequences through imagination, and in other ways . . .. As such a display is perceived one can then find out whether or not one still intends going on with the original intention. If not, the intention is modified, and the modification is in turn displayed in a similar way. Thus, to a certain extent, by means of trying it out in the imagination, you can avoid having to carry it out in reality and having to suffer the consequences, although that is rather limited.4

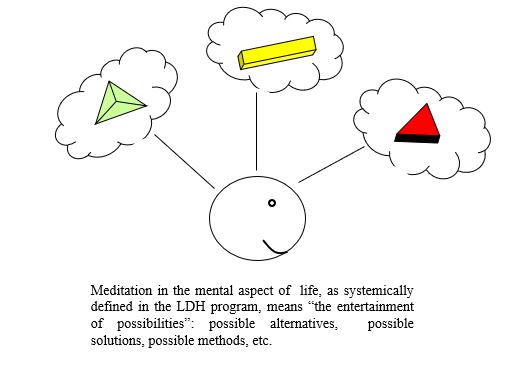


Figure 27. 1: Psychological meditation

Psychological meditation is one of the areas in which people differ so much one from the other: in their choices regarding which potentialities to actualize and the rate at which they transform them into reality. Recently a friend described to me how he had perceived his wife to be “blossoming, growing, and becoming better” and how he saw himself as standing still and becoming stagnant. This led to a crisis and a separation for a year. He began to take a hard look at himself, drew close to the Bahá’í Faith and its teachings, chose certain areas for improvement, and then started to become transformed. Most of the changes were intentional. He stopped drinking; he began taking care of himself by exercising and eating properly; and he read regularly the Bahá’í Writings. Other changes occurred unconsciously. He found that he had become less critical and more complimenting. He had even improved the quality of his vocabulary. After they got back together his wife commented, “You are not the same person as before. I love your changes and definitely want to have you by my side.” He had made a wise selection of areas in his personal life for transformation. I only hope that they will continue to encourage one another’s “blossoming” because this is the very essence of the purpose of life and the underlying reality of human nature.

**THE WORLD OF CONTEMPLATION AND REVERIE**

Meditation; concentrated, focused thought; as we have seen, is a powerful tool for transforming the world and ourselves.

O Thou the Compassionate God. . .. confer upon me thoughts which may change this world into a rose garden through the outpourings of heavenly grace.5 --’Abdu’l-Bahá

Alfred North Whitehead places great importance on the inner life of philosophical speculation, the power of choice in regards to the entertainment of ideas, and the impact of these on our daily life and on society in general:

A philosophic outlook is the very foundation of thought and of life. The sort of ideas we attend to and the sort of ideas which we push into the negligible background, govern our hopes, our fears, our control of behaviour. As we think, we live. This is why the assemblage of philosophic ideas is more than a specialist study. It moulds our type of civilization.6

The Master is reported to have stated, “Whatsoever a man concentrate upon, he will draw to himself.”7 Stanwood Cobb, in a simple yet profound poem, captures the essence of this powerful principle.

We Become What We Contemplate

Contemplate duty, and you become dutiful.

Contemplate beauty, and you become alluring.

Contemplate love, and you become lovely.

Contemplate humility, and you become evanescent.

Contemplate power, and you become effective.

Contemplate the Cosmos, and you become cosmic.

Contemplate God, and you become deific.

Contemplate Infinity, and you lose yourself in it.8

But what about the power and danger of negative thoughts, reveries, idle fancies, and vain imaginations? ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that “some thoughts are useless to man, they are like waves moving in the sea without result.”9 Or, if they would be carried into action, we would not truly desire the results and their accompanying consequences. We need to (1) become aware of our thoughts, (2) ask ourselves whether, if transformed into action, the results would be pleasing to God and worthy of praise, and (3) if the answer is positive, carry out the thought, but, if it is negative, detach ourselves from those thoughts which are useless, idle, and vain. Bahá’u’lláh expresses this process in these words: “The essence of true safety is to observe silence, to look at the end of things and to renounce the world.”10

Can we control negative mental fantasies, vain imaginings and their accompanying emotions of hate, jealousy, carnal passion, etc.? Can we purify our thoughts and our feelings? The answer is a redounding “yes!” --and even beyond “yes” --for Bahá’u’lláh *commands* us to struggle against idle fancies, to refuse to be controlled by our lower feelings, and, He warns us about their dire consequences.

Arise, O people, and, by the power of God’s might, resolve to gain the victory over your own selves, that haply the whole earth may be freed and sanctified from its servitude to the gods of its idle fancies--gods that have inflicted such loss upon, and are responsible for the misery of their wretched worshippers. These idols form the obstacle that impedeth man in his efforts to advance in the path of perfection.11

We, verily, have commanded you to refuse the dictates of your evil passions and corrupt desires, and not to transgress the bounds which the Pen of the Most High hath fixed, for these are the breath of life unto all created things.12

What are these useless thoughts, idle fancies, idols, and corrupt desires? A few examples should suffice: anything which passes beyond the bounds of moderation, all inordinate desires for material possessions, feelings of vengeance or resentment after the loss of a loved one, unchaste sexual desires, spending too much time “reliving” the way things used to be or contemplating situations which “could have been, but no longer can be,” and so on. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained to a pilgrim that evil thoughts can also come from others. He also explained how to struggle against them.

They come from other minds: they are reflected. One should not become a mirror for them to reflect them, neither should one try to control them for this is impossible: it only aggravates the difficulty, causing more to appear. One should constantly turn the mirror of his heart squarely toward God so that the Light of the Sun of Truth may be reflected there. This is the only cure for attacks of evil thoughts. The face of the mirror should be turned toward God and the back of the mirror toward the evil thoughts.13

In order to put this advice into practice and to wage war against harmful thoughts, I have found that a two-level approach is necessary: (1) emergency techniques and (2) a prevention plan. The most powerful emergency technique is given to us by Bahá’u’lláh Himself:

Burn ye away the veils with the fire of My love, and dispel ye the mists of vain imaginings by the power of this Name through which We have subdued the entire creation.14

He [the true seeker] should consume every wayward thought with the flame of His loving

mention . . .”15

Firstly, our love for Bahá’u’lláh must be so intense that we fear losing it. When we are so united with Him through love that we cannot stand to be separated from Him even by a thought, then we work harder to purify our hearts. Secondly, we must dispel unwanted thoughts “by the power of this Name.” Which name is He referring to?--to the Greatest Name: Bahá and its derivatives--Abhá, Bahá’u’lláh, Alláh'u’Abhá, Yá-Bahá’u’l-Abhá, and others. Hand of the Cause of God Dorothy Baker used this technique regularly. In response to a youth who asked her, “Is there something I can do to help me . . . be more like you?” she answered:

What helped me develop was a certain detachment from the world and all that pertains to it. At this stage in my life I fill my mind and thoughts only with spiritual things. When things of the world come into my mind I instantly think of the Greatest Name or some divine attribute.16

Another technique was given to us by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He exhorts us to oppose and destroy harmful thoughts by substituting them with beneficial ones:

I charge you all that each one of you concentrate all the thoughts of your heart on love and unity. When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love.17

One day I was driving through the countryside on a beautiful, sunny afternoon with an elderly friend,18 a battle-scarred warrior on the spiritual path, when, suddenly, out of the bushes along the side of the road, a large, multi-colored iguana scampered across the road in front of the car. He exclaimed: “There goes one of those nasty thoughts coming out of nowhere and zooming through our conscious!” Of course, the wise reaction is to keep on driving on the road towards one’s destination rather than stopping the journey to admire the graceful movements and alluring colors of our “mental iguanas,” or, perhaps even leaving our car to follow them into the hinterlands of our idle fancies and vain imaginations. We can also learn from psychiatrist Carl C. Jung who is renowned for his exploration and analysis of the inner workings of his thoughts and mental images.

Often, as I was writing, I would have peculiar reactions that threw me off. Slowly I learned to distinguish between myself and the interruption. When something emotionally vulgar or banal came up, I would say to myself, “It is perfectly true that I have thought and felt this way at some time or other, but I don’t have to think and feel that way now. I need not accept this banality of mine in perpetuity, that is an unnecessary humiliation.19

This human capacity to control the content and pattern of our thoughts, as opposed to feeling like helpless victims to their intrusion, is confirmed by Michael Samuels, M.D. who recognizes the benefits of guided mental imaging in the health field: “In general, memory images are controllable--that is, they can be summoned at will and those that arise spontaneously can be stopped whenever the person desires.”20

In some cases we are not only battling against our own, self-generated thoughts and images, but also against those which bombard us from the arts and mass media--advertisements, music with worldly content, movies, television[[21]](#footnote-21), visual arts, etc.--described in a document prepared under the supervision of The Universal House of Justice as “an almost universal celebration...of degeneracy and violence” which manifest “a condition approaching moral anarchy” and “suggest a future that paralyzes the imagination.”21 The best solution in emergency cases is given to us by the Master and Shoghi Effendi as related by Marzieh Gail.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá repudiated suggestive plays, gross movies. As Louis Gregory told us, the Master had attended a film in the Holy Land with two little boys of the Household, and disapproving of the picture had taken the boys by the hand and left.22

We were told that he [Shoghi Effendi] had gone to the Paris opera alone. He was a music lover, and would attend classical concerts in Europe later on, but this time he had bought a ticket for *Samson and Delilah* (Florence [Kahn] says Ida Rubenstein in *Cleopatra*) not the choice Florence would have made for him had she known. What he saw on the stage impelled him to rise in the midst of it and walk out, making this silent comment on the corruption of our age, in Paris of all places, walking before sharp and mocking eyes through the darkened house, up the red carpet and out and entirely alone.23

To this emergency solution we need to add today’s modern equivalencies: choosing carefully, flicking the switch, changing the channel, canceling the subscription, and others. We need to be ever-ready to protect our minds from corruption. But the Bahá’í approach to the problem of controlling the content of our thoughts, as with nearly every other problem, is to emphasize prevention. Bahá’u’lláh tells us to avoid whatever stimulates or triggers improper desires:

Attire, O my Lord, both by inner and outer being with the raiment of Thy favors and Thy loving-kindness. Keep me safe, then, from whatsoever may be abhorent unto Thee, and graciously assist me and my kindred to obey Thee, and *to shun whatsoever may stir up any evil or corrupt desire within me*.24 (emphasis added)

Shoghi Effendi is reported to have said that the Bahá’í principle in regards to relationships between the sexes outside the institution of marriage is to “avoid temptation.”25 Bahá’u’lláh reminds us that “most people are feeble and far-removed from the purpose of God.”26 Hence, we must use as many preventative methods as possible. These include: increasing our love and fear of God, obedience in even the less critical aspects of Bahá’í norms, prayer, and avoidance of tempting environments and situations.

Previously a passage was cited in which Bahá’u’lláh tells us to “burn . . . away the veils with the fire of My love.” We can increase our love for Him by studying His life and teachings and by serving His Cause. As our love for Him increases our fear of losing that love also increases. In many passages Bahá’u’lláh prescribes the fear of God as a defense against the influences of our lower nature. Here is one example:

O people of the world! Follow not the promptings of the self, for it summoneth insistently to wickedness and lust; follow, rather, Him Who is the Possessor of all created things, Who biddeth you to show forth piety, and manifest the fear of God.27

Our feelings of love and fear of God grow as we increasingly maintain the conscious awareness that our Lord knows fully our every thought and deed; and as we realize more fully that, when we think of an improper act and then carry it into action, we have actually sinned twice: once on the mental plane and again on the physical plane.

Every act ye meditate is as clear to Him as is that act when already accomplished. . .. All stands revealed before Him; all is recorded in His holy and hidden Tablets.28 --Bahá’u’lláh

In the same way that our thought-life guides and conditions our actions, so does our prayer-life guide and condition our thought-life. (See Figure 27.2) The Writings are replete with prayers for purifying our thoughts and hearts.

Do Thou protect them . . . that their eyes may be restrained from beholding anything that is not of Thee.29 --Bahá’u’lláh

Have mercy . . . O my God, upon Thy servants who are drowned in the midst of the ocean of evil suggestions.30 --Bahá’u’lláh

I entreat Thee . . . to blot out from my heart all idle fancies and vain imaginings, that with all my affections I may turn unto Thee, O Thou Lord of all mankind!31 --Bahá’u’lláh

Preserve me from the suggestions of self and desire. . ..32 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

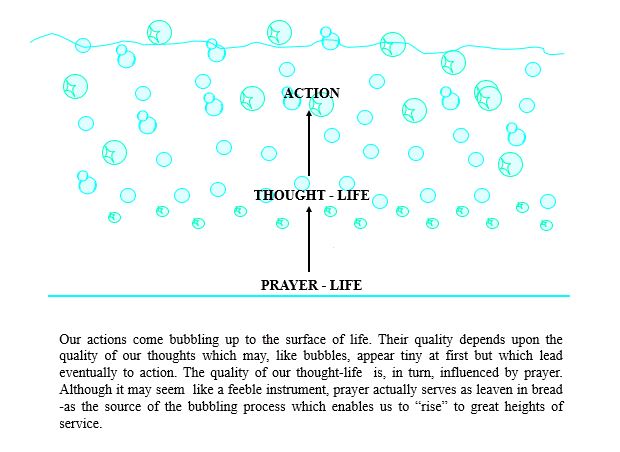


Figure 27. 2: The Connection between Prayer, Thought, and Action

To an individual troubled with an improper habit and mental fantasies the Universal House of Justice gave the following wise counsel:

Your problem, therefore, is one against which you should continue to struggle, with determination and with the aid of prayer. You should remember, however, that it is only one of the many temptations and faults that a human being must strive to overcome during his lifetime, and you should not increase the difficulty you have by over-emphasizing its importance. We suggest you try to see it within the whole spectrum of the qualities that a Bahá’í must develop in his character. Be vigilant against temptation, but do not allow it to claim too great a share of your attention. You should concentrate, rather, on the virtues that you should develop, the services you should strive to render, and above all, on God and His attributes, and devote your energies to living a full Bahá’í life in all its many aspects.”33

It is the purpose of the BLDH program to support this well-rounded, balanced approach to life.

Bahá’u’lláh counsels us to “dispel . . . the mists of vain imaginings by the power of this Name.” The Greatest Name can also be used for the prevention and the conditioning of our thought life. Bahá’u’lláh, in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdás*, prescribes the repetition of Alláh-u-Abhá 95 times each day.34 In this same Most Holy Book He exclaims:

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.35

Used for this purpose, the Greatest Name can be considered a short prayer or invocation to call out for Bahá’u’lláh’s assistance, protection, and inspiration.

The following pilgrim’s notes of Mrs. I. D. Brittingham based on statements made in 1918 by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá regarding the Greatest Name have, since my early days as a Bahá’í, increased my use of and attachment to the Greatest Name:

The daily use of the Greatest Name repeated 95 times is a command revealed in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. By this devotion the heart of man may be illumined with the Lights of Bahá’u’lláh. Ninety-five is the numerical value of the word “Lellah” (for the sake of God) . . . The Greatest Name should be found upon the lips in the first awakening moments of the early dawn. It should be fed upon by constant use in daily avocation; in trouble, under opposition; and should be the last word breathed when the head rests upon the pillow at night.

It is the cause of comfort, protection, happiness, illumination, love and unity. The Greatest Name saved Adam when he fell from Paradise from utter destruction. It saved Noah from the flood. It saved Moses from the Burning Bush. It has saved all; and now it has been manifested for all . . .36

And when we do commit an improper or corrupt act, we need to prevent it from recurring. We need to trace the action to the thought which triggered it and then, if possible, trace the thought to the thing, the person, the circumstance, or the environment which stimulated the undesirable thought in the first place. And then, with all of our might, cunning, and concentration, we must devise a strategy to “shun whatsoever” or *who*soever “may stir up any evil or corrupt desire” within us.

In summary, in order to prevent immoral actions, we must first avoid them in the mental world. We must purify our thoughts; condition them through prayer; and inspire them via the Word of God in order to increase and strengthen the number of thoughts which are beautiful, God-pleasing, worthy of praise and capable of transforming “this world into a rose garden.”37 With hard work, struggle, and, in the words of our Beloved Guardian, “daily vigilance in the control of one’s carnal desires and corrupt inclinations”38 we will, no doubt, attain to the station of the wayfarer described by Bahá’u’lláh in the Valley of Knowledge:

His inner eye will open and he will privily converse with his Beloved; he will unlock the gates of truth and supplication and shut the doors of idle fancy.39

**FORMAL MEDITATION TECHNIQUES**

Before closing this chapter, I want to discuss briefly the possibility of utilizing formal meditation techniques. As Bahá’ís, we are instructed to meditate, but we are not told to use any particular technique.40 We are free to choose any technique which is beneficial to us. We may choose traditional techniques, techniques which have been developed by specialists, or we may develop our own, individual technique. Over the years I seem to have combined all three approaches. I have been trained in the Transcendental Meditation (TM)41 method of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, a traditional approach to meditation; and in the Silva Method techniques of José Silva. There are others which are, no doubt, excellent, but these are the only two formal methods which I can speak about with first-hand experience. I have taken some of the principles of these techniques and combined them with my own.

Transcendental Meditation I found to be useful as a method for relaxation. It also helped me to become more aware of my thoughts and to control them. There is substantial research which supports TM’s claims to be a health-promoting practice.42 It is a mantra-based method. A mantra is a special sound used in meditation to calm one’s thoughts and to carry the meditator to a deeper level of consciousness. As a Bahá’í, I use the Greatest Name as a mantra and much more --a prayer, an invocation, a supplication, a greeting, and a song--but, nevertheless, for me, it also serves as a mantra. The connection between Bahá’u’lláh’s ordaining its repetition 95 times each day and the traditionally-known, and recently discovered benefits of mantra-based meditation is too obvious to be ignored. I am not qualified to go into more detail, but I have found the pilgrim notes of May Maxwell, in which she compiled some statements of Mirza Abu'l-Fad'l regarding the Greatest Name, to be particularly intriguing.

In every age the Manifestations have revealed a Name by which their followers could call upon the Infinite powers of the Almighty. This name expresses the attributes of God, and His Revelation for that age. It is the epitome of that Mysterious Power which the Messengers of God have brought to earth.

In the time of the Jews it was Jehovah. In the time of Buddha it was OM. In the time of the Christians it was Christ. In the Book of Revelation it says: “In that Day I will write upon them My New Name.” (Rev. 2:17-3:12)

Now in this Great Day, the Blessed Báb has revealed this New Name of ABHÁ, which is in the Persian and Arabic languages, is the superlative of Glory--the Most Glorious.

The name by which the Bahá’ís call upon the Power of God (in worship) is Alláh-u-Abhá, meaning “God the Most Glorious” . . .43

Although I found TM to be helpful, I much preferred the techniques of the Silva Method.44 I only took the first two courses so I can only recommend these. I found the Silva Method to be much more dynamic and much more in tune with my Western approach to life. The method aids me to control my breathing, to relax *and* to carry out visualization techniques which are much more action-and-results-oriented than in TM. After the passage of more than four decades, I still use some of the Silva techniques on a daily basis. I use it: to become tranquil, to program myself for short naps, to fall asleep, to wake up at a certain time, to visualize goal-attainment (to be discussed later), and for centering. This latter meditative process I have found to be of great importance.

Centering promotes the “unity” of the Self. Decentralizing forces direct our energies outward. Our attention is drawn away from our True Center--Bahá’u’lláh and the spiritual world that He invites us to explore. The detractors are numerous and ever-increasing: the Internet, our Smart Phone, television, radio, mundane music, advertisements, backbiting, fault-finding, news, amusements, interruptions, work, caring for children, clubs, meetings, and just plain “doing” in general. We occidentals tend to over extend ourselves in the realm of doing. Stanwood Cobb once stated that Americans need to learn “to do nothing.”45 This will allow us to direct our attention inward; to make “the journey within”; to become centered; and, then; to take a good hard look at our inner life and private character, and contemplate how we might improve ourselves.

There are many ways to become centered in order to enter the meditative state: using a formal meditative technique; being silent in natural surroundings; through prayer; listening to calming music; via mind control techniques; drumming; chanting; using visualization techniques; walking; repeating mantras aloud; visually contemplating yantras and/or mandalas such as the BLDH Circle. Centering techniques help us to turn towards our personal and collective Center--Bahá’u’lláh, the “Qiblih” of our being. When we turn our backs to the whirl and motion of the activities around us and face the Desire of the World, we become calm, collected, and centered; achieving, thereby, a tranquil state of reflection, prayer, meditation, or visualization. The Circle symbolizes and enhances this process.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. According to Bahá’u’lláh, what is the source of crafts, sciences, and arts?
2. What is the BLDH definition of “psychological meditation”? How does this contrast with the BLDH definition of “spiritual meditation”?
3. What is the relation between prayer, thought, and action?
4. What are some of the ways that negative thoughts can be controlled?
5. What are some of the possible uses of the Greatest Name?
6. What is the basic Bahá’í approach to the issue of relationships between the sexes outside of the institution of marriage? What are some examples of how this approach can be put into practice?
7. What are some of the obstacles to finding time for psychological meditation? How might they be overcome?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* When faced with a personal, work-related, or intellectual problem, I will not be in such a stressful rush to arrive at a solution and make a decision. Rather, I will take time to pray for guidance and inspiration and to submit the problem to my powerful, God-given, meditative faculty in order to explore possible solutions before making a final decision leading to goal-setting and action.
* I will take time out to be alone in order to contemplate the wonders and mysteries of nature and life in general.
* I will read *The Silva Method* by José Silva with Philip Miele (London: Souvenir Press Ltd, 2000) or try out the free Starter Kit lessons at www.silvamethod.com.

CHAPTER 28: GOAL-SETTING

Let the flame of search burn with such fierceness within your hearts as to enable you to attain your supreme and most exalted goal--the station at which ye can draw nigh unto, and be united with, your Best-Beloved.1

--Bahá’u’lláh

**THE DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE OF GOAL-SETTING**

As human beings, by nature we are attracted to the unknown, the transcendent, and to the unexperienced. We seek to understand our Creator, His creation and our place in it. We are motivated by a desire to control and have an impact on ourselves and on our environment. The everyday form of this is known as curiosity. We want to know how things work --machines, muscular systems, thought, prayer, etc.--and we want to learn how to use them to make life better. This leads naturally to the formulation of intentions, aims, and goals. Goal-setting, in the BLDH program, is systemically defined as the selection of one of several possibilities which is to be transformed into reality and action, and the breaking down of this goal into sub-goals, each with its corresponding course of action.

At life’s most decisive moment . . . the young man pushes aside the multitude of possibilities open to him; selects one and one only, identifies his destiny with it, and enters adulthood . . .”2 --Nikos Kazantzakis

One of the distinguishing characteristics of human beings is this unique ability to imagine ideal states, purposes, and goals; and then to organize time, resources, and energy around their accomplishment. Without these visions of possibilities and goals we revert to more animal-like behavior which is characterized by the seeking of physical pleasure and the avoidance of pain; or, even worse, we fall into a state of depression and despair. The latter circumstance is well-described by Yaya Diallo, an African healer. He cases helps us to see the connection between goals, aspirations, and well-being.

It is difficult to treat severe of disappointment in life, when people lose their hope, self-respect, and reason for living. One can sustain the loss of a mother, father, or spouse, but once hope and motivation are gone, it is difficult to carry on with life. An external loss may precipitate the internal loss of wIL For example, a woman is respected in a household where she has her role and place. Suddenly she is repudiated by her husband. She goes through a number of dissatisfactory relationships while progressively losing her self-confidence. Finally, she is recognized as *sikere-folo*. She awakens from sleep each morning with no positive aspiration for herself or anyone else. The healer must work, whether with herbs, music, or words, to restore trust and hope in such a case.3

Viewing “the restoration of hope” as essential for healing, Bahá’u’lláh can be considered the Most Great Healer for who else has given such hope to humankind in this “darkest hour?”

Having goals enables us to set in motion the dynamics of sacrifice--the willingness to give up something of lesser importance for something of greater importance; even life itself, if necessary.

If thine aim be to cherish thy life, approach not our court, but if sacrifice be thy heart’s desire, come and let others come with thee. For such is the way of Faith, if in thy heart thou seekest reunion with Bahá; shouldst thou refuse to tread this path, why trouble us? Begone! --Words of Bahá’u’lláh as recorded by Nabíl in *The Dawn Breakers*4

Sacrifice helps us to develop the spiritual qualities of detachment, selflessness, perseverance in the face of resistance and difficulties, and willingness to endure hardships of any kind.

Not everyone has a strong need for goal-achievement. Years of research in the behavioral sciences has shown that “some people have an intense need to achieve; others, perhaps the majority, do not seem to be as concerned about achievement.”5 No doubt the Bahá’í community reflects these same proportions. We are, after all, a microcosm of society. However, if you have purchased or have borrowed this book and are reading this chapter, you probably belong to the minority of achievement-conscious persons. The Bahá’í movement depends on success-oriented believers. We have been “eating, drinking, and breathing” goal-setting and goal-winning ever since the Tablets of the Divine Plan were first released in New York City during the first part of the last century. Since then our lives have been guided by one teaching plan after the other. Over time we are becoming experts in long-range and short-range goal-setting and goal-attainment.

**IDEALS VS. GOALS**

What is the difference between ideals and goals? Ideals, in the BLDH program, are mental images of perfect states of excellence. They are not physical things but they can be manifested. They can always be approached but never fully attained. Ideals always lie beyond what has been achieved. As soon as they are approached the standard of excellence is set even higher. Some examples are: ecological balance, sustainable development, justice, order, peace, truth, unity, beauty, love, justice, cooperation, the new World Order, the Kingdom of the Father on Earth, nearness to God, and reflecting the image of God in our lives.

Life can only be understood as an aim at that perfection which the conditions of its environment allow. But the aim is always beyond the attained fact.6 --Alfred North Whitehead

There are perfections beyond perfections. All realization is finite, and there is no perfection which is the infinitude of all perfections.7 --Alfred North Whitehead

Goals represent possible concrete translations of ideals into action. Goals, like ideals, are states of excellence, but they are more attainable. Some examples are: daily prayer, bringing one soul into the Faith each year, pioneering, detaching ourselves from a particular worldly habit, and memorizing some of the *Hidden Words* that relate to our needs. They carry us closer to our ideals, but, after they are achieved, new goals must be set which aim at a further realization of the ideal. The close kinship between ideals and goals can be seen in this passage from Nikos Kazantzakis’ *Report to Greco*.

It is our duty to set ourselves an end beyond our individual concerns, beyond our convenient, agreeable habits, higher than our own selves, and disdaining laughter, hunger, even death, to toil night and day to attain that end. No, not to attain it. The self-respecting soul, as soon as he reaches his goal, places it still further away. Not to attain it, but never to halt in the ascent. Only thus does life acquire nobility and oneness.8

What ideals and goals have in common is that they act as magnets which attract or “lure” us forward into unknown and unexperienced areas. This idea is expressed in Figure 28.1. It shows a person being attracted to a goal or ideal. Having praiseworthy aims and purposes gives a vector force to life along which we can organize our resources. Having goals helps us to distinguish the important from the unimportant. Along the way there are forces which work with us and forces which operate against us. The challenge is to identify and then decrease or eliminate the resisting forces (or even convert them into supporting forces) while, at the same time, strengthening the supportive forces. The resistive forces can be reduced but never entirely eliminated. They are inevitable, necessary and good because they help us to become strong. Like lifting weights to build muscles, if there is no resistance, the muscles will not be strengthened. A sports philosopher wisely observed that in every game situation there are always two principles in operation. There is always a goal and there is always resistance to the goal. If you remove the resistance you have undermined the game. There is no challenge. Can you imagine a chess game with only one set of chessmen, or a soccer game with only one team? The “game of life” is no different. God has placed us in this king-size gymnasium called “the universe” to help us strengthen our spiritual powers commonly known as “virtues,” e.g., faith, confidence, patience, trustworthiness, radiant acquiescence, submission, honesty, love, compassion, and many more. These are the spiritual muscles of our soul and they are strengthened through resistance--trials, difficulties, tribulation, suffering, and sacrifice. There is no other way. As soon as you set any goal get ready for trouble. No aim worthy of attainment is easily achieved and there are few pleasures more exhilarating in life than to see what was at first only a dream on the horizon become transformed into visible reality.

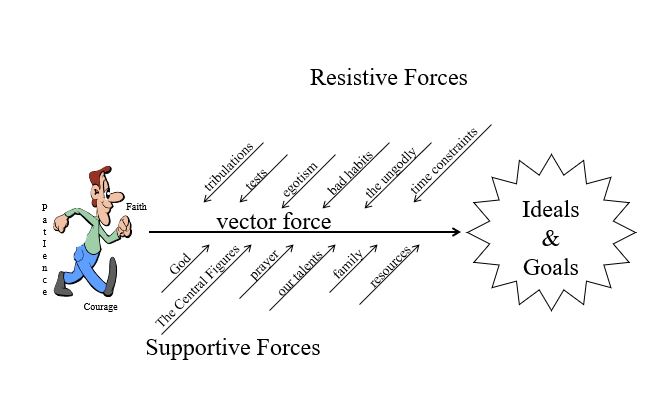


Figure 28. 1: Force Field Diagram

The mind and spirit of man advance when he is tried by suffering. . .. Look back to the times past and you will find that the greatest men have suffered most.9 --’Abdu’l-Bahá

Success is not measured by what a man accomplishes, but by the opposition he has encountered, and the courage with which he maintained the struggle against overwhelming odds.10

--Charles A. Lindbergh

As yet, man has found no other means to elevate himself--none but the routing of matter and the submission of the individual to an end which transcends the individual, even though that end be chimerical. When the heart believes and loves, nothing chimerical exists; nothing exists but courage, trust, and fruitful action.11 --Nikos Kazantzakis

Certain degrees of stress and strain are essential ingredients of life, and an entirely stress-free life does not exist. Moreover, a mild to moderate amount of stress will stimulate human growth and creativity.12 --Dr. ‘Abdu’l-Missagh Ghadirian

**LONG-RANGE VS. SHORT-RANGE GOALS**

What is the relation between long and short-range goals? Long-range goals must be broken down into steps. The steps are the short-range goals. Sometimes people and writers in the field refer to them as “short-term objectives.” A long-range goal might be pioneering to Africa. The corresponding short-range goals might be (1) finish career studies, (2) learn about African cultures, and (3) learn the language of an African nation where pioneers are needed. When people do not accomplish their fondest dreams it is often because they have not learned to break the long-range goal into achievable, “bite-size” steps or sub-goals--activities which can be carried out on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis--activities, which, when taken together, add up to the transformation of a lofty dream into tangible reality.

What is the difference between long and short-range goals? The only difference is the span of time. There is a continuum from short to long. Goals may be as brief as, “What am I going to do in the next moment?” and as extensive as “What am I going to do with my life?” In general, long-range goals should be inspiring and motivating, covering a time span of five years or even a lifetime and more to accomplish. Short-range goals should be more down-to-earth and mundane in character, and they should be fully achievable.[[22]](#footnote-22) For example, a long-range goal might be to work with other Bahá’ís for the transformation of the country in which you live into the first all-Bahá’í nation. A corresponding short-range goal which will contribute to the attainment of the long-range goal might be to pioneer to a goal community in order to establish a Local Spiritual Assembly there within two years. This latter goal will, in turn, need to be further broken down into sub-goals.

**ONE-TIME-EVENT GOALS VS. RECURRING-EVENT GOALS**

Some goals are planned, accomplished, and then finished; for example, “I will save money for six years and then make my pilgrimage to the World Centre.” Other goals are aimed at establishing recurring activities. Ideally, they will result in the establishment of a new habit which will not have to be the constant focus of attention; for example, “I will arrange my affairs in order to provide a regular time and place for (1) dawn prayers, (2) exercise, and (3) reading to keep abreast of new developments in my profession.”

**“WHAT” GOALS VS. “HOW” GOALS**

Goals are usually broken down into two types of sub-goals: goals which answer the question, “What do I want to accomplish?” and goals which answer the question, “How do I want to accomplish it?” The BLDH Circle processes focus on the “how” of goal attainment. Each person chooses his or her particular “what.” For example, your “what” goal may be, “I want to get along better with my boss.” Your corresponding “how” goals might be, “I will *pray* and *meditate* about the situation, an ideal scene in which my boss and I are getting along happily together, *learn* more about *visualize* human relationships by reading a book on this theme, *arrange time* to visit my boss in order to try out the new techniques I have learned and to build a more positive relationship.”

**GOAL-CLARIFICATION EXERCISES**

In order to help you get in touch with your desires and goals, or to simply review them, the following exercises may be of help to you.

**Exercise 1: Translating Long-range Goals into Short-term Objectives**

1. Imagine that you have arrived in the Abhá Kingdom. Bahá’u’lláh asks you to name your most important accomplishments. How would you like to answer His question? Be specific. Would you like to say that you had founded a social-economic development project? That you had given thousands of dollars to the Fund? That you had achieved excellence and renown in your professional field? That you had reared beautiful Bahá’í children? That you had brought many people into the Faith? That you had written books to deepen the friends? That you had pioneered to a difficult pioneer post where it was not possible to mention the Faith openly? Make a list of approximately twelve accomplishments (goals) which you would like to achieve in your lifetime. (Example: I will become a commercial artist in order to earn a living and promote the Faith through the media.)
2. Write a list of the most important goals you would like to achieve within the next five years. (Example: I will obtain a degree in commercial art.)
3. Write a list of five or six goals for one year. (Example: I will attend the annual commercial art exposition in the state capital.)
4. Make similar lists for six months, one month and one week from now. Choose only three or four of your most important goals. (Examples: Within six months I will save enough money to travel to the commercial art exposition. Next month I will interview two commercial artists in order to learn more about the pros and cons of the profession. Each week I will set aside one hour to read articles from commercial art periodicals.)
5. The last list to write is your daily goals. (Example: I will spend at least thirty minutes each day practicing commercial art techniques.)[[23]](#footnote-23)a
6. Finally, check to make certain that all of your goals are aligned as in the examples above.

**Exercise 2: Lifestyle Goals**

In addition to setting lifetime-accomplishment goals it is also important to determine lifestyle goals, i.e., to decide how you want to live your life. Take about twenty minutes to write lifestyle goals for categories such as the following:

Place: country, town, suburb, city; near the sea, the mountains; house, apartment, condominium?

Distance from work: commuting time limit, driving, bicycling, or walking distance; or work out of own home?

Supervisor: be own boss; work in a small organization, a large organization?

Travel: seldom, occasional; frequent?

Colleagues: work alone; with spouse; with a competent professional team?

Exercise: aerobics, sports teams, walking, cycling?

**Exercise 3: “More of, Less of” Goals**

Make two columns on a sheet of paper. Title one column “What I Want More Of” and the other “What I Want Less Of.” Think of all the aspects of the BLDH Circle: studies, recreation, career plans, family life, etc. Take 15-20 minutes to list at least six items for each column. For each item on the “More Of” side try to come up with a corresponding item on the “Less Of” side which will, consequently, need to be lessened.

This exercise will help you identify some activities which need to be reduced or eliminated in order to provide time for the accomplishment of your goals. For example, you may want MORE time for practicing a musical instrument or some other creative hobby. This might have to be balanced with spending LESS time on social media. Usually, in order to obtain more of something, we have to sacrifice something else. This list can be updated from time to time each year as an effective way to begin setting new goals and objectives.

Doing something every day towards your goals will make you feel great. Many successful people review them for a few minutes each day and rewrite them each month, during the Fast, on their birthday, or during a vacation.

For married couples and families, I highly recommend that these exercises be done by each person separately but at the same time. Then goals should be analyzed, compared, and consulted upon. We should ask ourselves how we can support one another to achieve the desired goals and check for goals which are conflicting. The conflict could be within our own list of goals or with someone else’s goal. For example, someone might want to travel and study but cannot afford to do both. Or, someone in the family may want to take a vacation to the mountains and someone else wants to tour famous cities.

**TECHNIQUES FOR RESOLVING GOAL CONFLICTS**

1. Satisficing: Work on both goals just enough to satisfy yourself or those involved. In the examples above the person might travel but less extensively and study but at a less expensive university. The family might split the vacation time by touring an attraction-filled city on their way to staying in a cabin in the mountains.
2. Sequential Attention: Give attention to the conflicting goals in the order of preference or practicality; for example, “First I will study, then I will save money to travel” or “This year we will tour cities, next year we will go to the mountains.”
3. Priority Setting: Giving more importance to one goal than to another. (Examples: “I can’t afford both so I will sacrifice travel in order to study.” “We currently live in a city and it is important for the kids to learn to love nature and the wilderness, therefore, we will go to the mountains.”)
4. Changing Goals: Goals naturally change because our interests change. New opportunities and directions open up to us and with time we get to know our capabilities and aspirations better. (Example: “I won’t travel or study. I will work in order to save money for the World Centre’s latest construction project.” “Uncle Federico has been inviting us to go to the seashore for years. Why don’t we go there instead of to the city or the mountains?”)

**PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESSFUL GOAL-SETTING**13

The following rules of thumb need to be balanced with principles from the teachings of the Faith. This will prevent us from applying them in a limiting rather than a liberating manner.

1. Allow ample time to achieve the goal.

For example, learning to play folk songs on a guitar cannot usually be accomplished in one month. Perhaps two years would be more realistic depending on the amount of time you set aside for practice and your natural talent. The usual human tendency is to underestimate the time it takes to do anything, especially in areas which are new to us. A good rule of thumb is to estimate the amount of time needed and then double or triple it. This principle needs to be balanced with a sense of urgency, that time is short, and that, whatever we are about, we need to get on with it because we need to be increasingly engaged in giving the healing message of Bahá’u’lláh to a sore-tried humanity in its hour of need and building His new World Order.

1. Make sure that you have the skills necessary to attain it.

For example, if you want to become an engineer, you will need to have a certain aptitude for mathematics. This principle needs to be balanced with an understanding that neither must we wait to be fully prepared to tackle a new goal.

How often . . . have the lowliest adherents of the Faith, unschooled and utterly inexperienced, and with no standing whatever, and in some cases devoid of intelligence, been capable of winning victories for their Cause, before which the most brilliant achievements of the learned, the wise, and the experienced have paled.14 --Shoghi Effendi

1. Limit the number of goals that you are actively concentrating on.

Research on highly successful people shows that “three to five goals are the ideal number of goals peak performers concentrate on.”15 At the same time, however, my own experience has proven to me that the mere act of setting a goal in some area, regardless of the number of goals, is often enough to bring it into actuality. I have found, over time, looking back at the numerous goals that I have set for each key process on the BLDH Circle, that many of them have been accomplished with little or no effort at all. It was as though just visualizing the attainment of the goal set in motion forces which brought it into being.

1. Set your goal far enough above your present level that you will be stretched. It should not be too easy and it should not be so beyond yourself as to lead to continual frustration and disappointment. For example, if you want to become a painter you should not begin with a goal of producing an oil portrait. Rather, you might first set the sub-goal of learning how to draw.

David C. McClelland and his associates at Harvard University, over a period of more than two decades, have found that “individuals with a high need for achievement seemed careful to measure where they were most likely to get a sense of mastery--not too close to make the task ridiculously easy or too far away to make it impossible. They set moderately difficult but potentially achievable goals”16--goals that stretch the individual.

For persons who are perfectionists to such an extreme that they are unable to adhere to their goals, Dr. David D. Burns, professor of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, recommends setting more modest goals which have a high probability of being reached and even surpassed.17

This principle needs to be balanced with a clear realization that “the range of potentially achievable goals is very wide indeed.” For each goal that we set, we have to decide whether we will strive for a maximum or a minimum level of achievement. When the goal involves service to the Faith or spiritual growth, we should always choose the maximum.

Make ye a mighty effort, and choose for yourselves a noble goal.18 --’Abdu’l-Bahá

The good deeds of the righteous are the sins of those who are near to God.19 --’Abdu’l-Bahá

Dr. Muhájir said “the youth should aim for the moon and they will be able to catch the eagle. If they aimed for the eagle they would catch the rock.”20 When it came to setting goals for the Faith he always encouraged the believers to “THINK MAXIMUM.”21 His rule of thumb for himself and others was always, “The less you expect, the less you achieve.”22

Give me a command, beloved grandfather . . ..

Reach what you can, my child . . ..

Grandfather, give me a more difficult, more Cretan command . . ..

Reach what you cannot!23

--Nikos Kazantzakis

I will conclude the discussion of this, what may appear to be, a very confusing principle, by saying that the key to success seems to lie in the growth of “self-knowledge.” What is important is that we not sit still; that we set goals and move towards them as efficiently and quickly as possible. Some people respond better to challenging rather than moderate goals and vice versa. Each person is different and must find his or her own disparity level--the distance between the goal and where one is at presently.

1. Choose a goal in your power to control and do not depend on changes in other people. For example, imagine that you have the goal of improving the nutritional content of your lunch. One way to do this would be to improve the menu of the cafeteria where you study or work. But since you cannot control the menu, it would probably be better to bring your own lunch while, at the same time, trying to bring about change in the cafeteria menu.

This needs to be balanced with the principle of reliance on the power of God and the power of prayer.

I testify that within Thy grasp are held the reins of all things. Thou changest them as Thou pleasest.24 --Bahá’u’lláh

1. Write your goal in measurable, observable terms whenever possible. For example, if your goal is to study from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. each day, this is easily evaluated. However, some goals are not easily observed. For instance, if you have the goal of becoming closer to God, you will have to judge your success at least partially by your feelings. Nevertheless, it is an excellent goal.)
2. Record your behavior daily and accurately. (This will be discussed further in the chapter titled “Reflection.”)
3. Reward yourself daily and in large enough doses for difficult goals, especially those which are mundane, tedious, and boring. Many goals are intrinsically rewarding, such as learning how to drive a car. You enjoy the fruits of your efforts immediately. Some examples of of rewards are: extra prayer time, extra deepening time, reading a new Bahá’í book, watching a movie, visiting a special friend, reading a novel, listening to a favorite musical recording, going for a walk, taking a one-day vacation, and so on.

The way I made it through college was by rewarding myself with reading a chapter from a Bahá’í book for every chapter I read from my textbooks. (The only problem was that too often the Bahá’í book was so fascinating that I over-rewarded myself!)

1. Rearrange the physical environment to help you reach your goal. For example, hang motivating pictures, place passages from the Writings and written reminders in strategic places, buy only the necessary food if you are dieting, and so on.
2. Choose one of your least difficult problems for the first project. For example, when trying to get into shape, it might be easier to first lose weight and then, later, lift weights to build muscle.
3. Provide role models for yourself. For, example, study the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and other exemplary persons. Hang pictures of them in your bedroom.My whole life I was dominated by great figures, perhaps because I read the lives of the saints so passionately when I was a child, yearned to become a saint in my turn, and after that devoted myself with equal passion to books about heroes--conquerors, explorers, Don Quixotes.

Whenever a figure chanced to combine heroism with sanctity, then at last I possessed a model human being.25 --Nikos Kazantzakis

Hero together with saint: such is mankind’s supreme model. Even in my childhood I had fixed this model firmly above me in the azure sky.26 --Nikos Kazantzakis

In front of my desk I have hung photos of the Holy family, Hands of the Cause of God, and other friends who have been an inspiration in my life. Just looking at them reminds me to “never give up and never give in.”

1. Have someone help you design your project or practice with you privately before you try your new skill in public. For, example, if you are learning how to praise instead of criticize others, find someone who is good at it and schedule time with him or her to practice and try out the new praising phrases.
2. Read about the projects of others for achieving goals like yours. For example, if you are trying to become more spiritual, read about the lives of saintly people in biographies.
3. Carry out the negative consequences of not reaching your daily goals, that is, not giving yourself a reward. For example, if you promised yourself a movie for having finished a report, but you did not complete it, then you should not allow yourself to see the movie.

Exercise 1: Take at least one goal and go through all fourteen principles, setting up plans for each.

Exercise 2: Choose a goal. On a sheet of paper answer the following questions.27

1. What, specifically, do you want to accomplish in the next two years? (Not just what you should do.)
2. What specific steps do you plan to take to achieve this goal?
3. What obstacles in yourself will you have to overcome to achieve this goal?
4. How do you feel about the possibility of achieving this goal?
5. How do you feel about the possibility of failing to achieve it?
6. Where will you go specifically for help in accomplishing your goal?
7. How strongly do you want to achieve this goal? Hardly at all 🡨 🡪A great deal
8. How honest do you feel you have been in answering these questions? Hardly at all 🡨 🡪 Extremely
9. What support network person(s) will I communicate with while I implement this strategy?
10. When will I begin communicating with someone in my support network regarding my progress and my needs for assistance and additional resources?

**USING THE BLDH CIRCLE AS A GUIDE FOR GOAL-SETTING**

The BLDH Circle provides other categories which can stimulate thinking regarding goal-setting needs. A few target areas can be selected, or, prioritized goals can be set for all areas. Goals can be chosen that are related to the content of one of the key processes, or, the goal can be directly related to the process itself. For example, I can set a goal of praying daily for detachment, or, I can set a goal of increasing the amount of time that I dedicate to prayer.

After a goal is set, the BLDH Circle can be used to formulate an integrative plan of action. If, for example, we want to set the goal of praising others more often and being more radiantly acquiescent, we can *pray* for these qualities, *meditate* on pertinent passages from the Writings or incidents in the life of the Master, *learn* more about the effects of praise and a positive attitude from psychology books, make certain that our *nutritional* intake contains an efficient amount of B-vitamins (the anti-stress vitamins) and ask a *friend* to give us feedback (*communication*) regarding our progress. In this way we are approaching the problem wholistically. We are focusing our spiritual, psychological, physical and social powers and resources on a single problem to bring about personal transformation.

When taken together, the sum total of all of our goals from the four quadrants becomes our “Composite Ideal Self.” Having and being aware of this Ideal Self is extremely important. It “lures” us forward into the unknown, unchartered waters of our life; into the adventure of achieving previously undreamt-of possibilities. But by no means is it a static image. As soon as we approach our Ideal Self, we begin to transform it; developing new talents and abilities; always setting the standard higher.

**SETTING PRIORITIES**

With so many demands on our time: the need to teach and be extremely active in the Faith, to be exemplary in our work, to be in the forefront of our profession, to spend quality time with our family, to keep healthy and fit, only to mention a few; it becomes difficult to decide which duties are the most important and it is impossible to give equal time and attention to all aspects of our life. The centrifugal force of these demands in my own life seems, at times, to be pulling me apart at the seams. During these periods, when I meditate on the BLDH Circle, I see myself being drawn and quartered by the exigencies of the four quadrants. Then my gaze falls on that Blessed Center--my Supreme and Most Exalted Goal--and I thank Bahá’u’lláh for being the centripetal force of love in my life which somehow keeps me from falling to pieces.

Nothing is too much trouble when one loves.28 --’Abdu’l-Bahá[[24]](#footnote-24)a

In reference to the urgency of teaching, the Master tells us that “when the ‘Most Important’ work is before our sight, we must let go the ‘Important’ one.29 Trying to differentiate the two is a daily challenge for me. Over the years, my investigations of the Bahá’í writings and history, my experiences, and my meditations have led me to set the following priorities. I have stated them in the first person because I do not want to suggest that they should be exactly the same for everyone. They have worked for me, but you may want to arrange them somewhat differently for yourself.

1st Priority: My relationship with Bahá’u’lláh and His Covenant

2nd Priority: My relationship with my spouse

3rd Priority: My relationship with by children and family

4th Priority: My work

5th Priority: Carrying out significant projects for the Faith

6th Priority: Carrying out philanthropic and social-economic development projects

Whenever I have confused this order of priorities, I have gotten into trouble and whenever I have followed it, the results have been harmony, peace of mind, and joy. Let us examine these priorities more closely.

The Center of my life is Bahá’u’lláh. During a national teaching conference in Colombia in October of 1993, Dr. Farzam Arbab spoke repeatedly about the need to place Bahá’u’lláh at the center of our existence, to place the self to one side, and to strive for purity. If I feel love for Bahá’u’lláh and I have done nothing to keep His love from reaching me, then all else will go well. By increasing my love for Him, I will more fully obey His laws. These two aspects--love and obedience--go hand in hand; they require one another.

O Son of Being! Walk in My statutes for love of Me and deny thyself that which thou desirest if thou seekest My pleasure.30 --Bahá’u’lláh

O Son of Man! Neglect not My commandments if thou lovest My beauty, and forget not My counsels if thou wouldst attain My good pleasure.31 --Bahá’u’lláh

If I love Bahá’u’lláh, this love will spill over into love for God’s creation: for my immediate family and for all of humankind--even for the earth itself and all living things. I will want to care for them, and to teach the Faith to everyone I meet. My desire to be obedient to the Covenant will find its expression in a thousand wonderful ways.

The ultimate application of this supreme priority is that if anything should obstruct my obedience to the Covenant, it will be sacrificed. If, God forbid, my wife should become a Covenant-breaker, I must be prepared to divorce her. And, conversely, if I should become a Covenant-breaker, I expect my wife to divorce me. Far from weakening our commitment to one another, a mutual understanding and acceptance of this primordial commitment strengthens our marriage bond, for, the closer we are to the Blessed Beauty, the closer we are to one another. This important dynamic is expressed in Figure 28.2. If a friend insists that I do something contrary to the Bahá’í laws, I would rather break off the friendship. If my work requires that I do something contrary to the standards of the Faith, I would rather be without work. This principle was well-expressed in a loving yet frank letter written by Ali-Kuli Khan to his close friend, Howard McNutt, who was having difficulty with firmness in the Covenant at the time:

I wish to tell you that all my friendship for you has been due to our mutual devotion to this Cause, and if anything comes up which may call your attitude toward the Cause into question, you will of course grant that I shall remain with the Cause rather than with you; for I am willing to sacrifice my three children for the Cause if need be . . .32

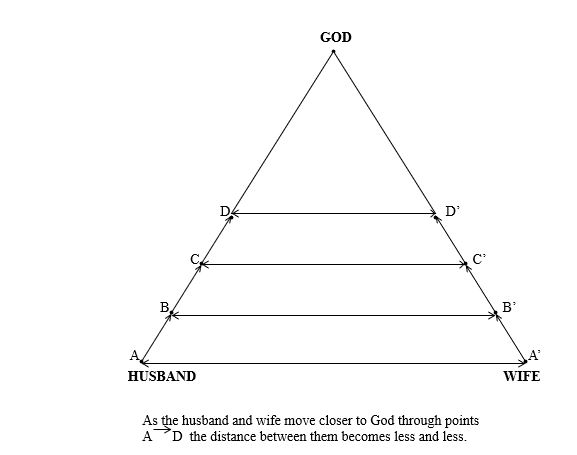


Figure 28. 2: The Dynamic Relation of Husband, Wife, and God

Why is my relationship with my wife the most important aspect of my life next to my relationship with God? Because the marriage bond is eternal and not ephemeral. She is the one soul, the one friend and companion with whom I am sure to be throughout eternity. If things go wrong with my work, with my relationships with others, with my body or my mind, she is the one who will be by my side. Therefore, if things are not right between us, if there is a lack of love, loyalty, unity, or harmony, then I cannot be content with my endeavors to build relationships with my children, with carrying out exciting projects in my profession, with teaching projects, or social-economic service projects. The beloved Guardian drives this point home in many ways. Here are two examples:

Marriage is a very sacred institution. Bahá’u’lláh said its purpose is to promote unity. If the friends neglect, for the sake of the Cause, this institution, they place the Faith in a poor light before the public.33

He disapproves of the way some Bahá’ís, in the name of serving the Cause, disencumber themselves of their husbands, or go and get new ones!34

My children and parents are next in importance. My parents spent years raising me and serving me. Certainly, I will return this kindness when the need arises. I have taken on the responsibility of bringing my four children into this life, therefore, I have the duty to care for them.

No matter how urgent and vital the requirements of the teaching work may be, you should under no circumstances neglect the education of your children, as towards them you have an obligation no less sacred than towards the Cause.35 --Shoghi Effendi, through his secretary

Although Bahá’í services should be undertaken with a spirit of sacrifice, as pointed out by the Universal House of Justice, one cannot lose sight of the importance given in our Holy Writings to the responsibilities placed on parents “in relationship to their children, as well as to the duties of children towards their parents.”36

Whenever I have lost a job, whenever I have been ill or depressed, it is my family which has been the greatest source of comfort, support, and encouragement. I cannot neglect the well-being of my children or my parents in order to carry out professional, teaching, or service projects.

In my life I have placed my work next in priority. The Faith requires us to have a craft or a profession which we are to carry out with excellence. My work provides resources with which I can support my family, pay Huqúqu’lláh, and give to the Fund. Therefore, I try not to arrive tired and ill to work because of being involved in teaching or philanthropic endeavors. If I have planned a teaching trip, I need to allow time before returning to work to rest and recover from exhaustion and sometimes the intestinal disorders common to the places where I have lived.

Even some of the most renowned servants of the Faith have had to give priority to their career during periods of their life. The late David Hoffman, long-time member of the Universal House of Justice, and his wife Marion, at one point in their lives, had been prevented from being active for two years due to business concerns.37 The late Dr. Hidáyatu'lláh Ahmadiyyih, the Counselor who set the United States and other countries ablaze with mass teaching, once told me that he had become inactive while studying medicine. Then, one day, a friend invited him to a Feast. From that day on his level of activity increased. Dr. Daniel C. Jordan once spoke to a group of his students about the life of Hand of the Cause Paul Haney. Apparently, his studies in economics prevented him from attending Nineteen Day Feasts. Some of the friends criticized this behavior. Also, he never went pioneering. Nevertheless, he served the Cause in many valuable ways for many years and was eventually appointed a Hand of the Cause of God by Shoghi Effendi.38 Dr. Muhájir was not able to go pioneering and launch his mass teaching endeavors until he completed his medical studies at the age of twenty-nine.39

My fourth priority is carrying out significant projects for the Faith in the teaching and administrative spheres. It is my fourth priority because the above-mentioned aspects must be strong in order for me to be successful in this area of my life. This is different than loyalty to the Covenant. The Covenant makes certain minimal, unavoidable demands on my life. Carrying out large projects, however, is more along the lines of “maximum” service to the Cause. Giving time generously to this priority is one of my greatest loves and desires. It is the fruit of my life. But, in order for the fruit to be sweet, the tree must have healthy roots, trunk, branches, and leaves. If adequate attention is given to these, then the delicious fruit will be certain to appear. In a letter written on its behalf, the Universal House of Justice clarifies this point (emphases are added):

The House of Justice points out the unity of your *family* should take *priority over* any other consideration. Bahá’u’lláh came to bring unity to the world, and a fundamental unity is that of the family. Therefore, we must believe that the Faith is intended to strengthen the family, not weaken it. For example, *service to the Cause* should not produce neglect of the family. It is important for you to *arrange your time* so that your family life is *harmonious* and your household receives the attention it requires . . .. Family *consultation* employing full and frank discussion, and animated by awareness of the need for *moderation* and *balance*, can be the panacea for domestic conflict.40

I have known Bahá’ís who have given long months and even years of full-time service to the Faith. The ones who have been successful have had a firm foundation in the Covenant; a strong marriage; an adequate source of income; and supportive, sympathetic children. I have seen those who have lacked these bases become inactive, drop out of the Faith, become divorced, and/or suffer the disappointment of seeing their children not choosing to be Bahá’ís.

My last priority is involvement with voluntary development and philanthropic projects: membership in community service and cultural organizations; social-economic projects; community literacy, cleanliness, health, or anti-drug campaigns; volunteer service; and so on. These projects are wonderful means for serving humanity and they provide a rich source of contacts that can, with time, be taught the Faith through example and words. However, the direct work of raising up Bahá’u’lláh’s new World Order has higher priority.

He [the Guardian] feels that, although your desire to partake actively of the dangers and miseries afflicting so many millions of people today, is natural, and a noble impulse, there can be no comparison between the value of Bahá’í work and any other form of service to humanity.

If the Bahá’ís could evaluate their work properly they would see that whereas other forms of relief work are superficial in character, alleviating the sufferings and ills of men for a short time at best, the work they are doing is to lay the foundation of a new spiritual Order in the world founded on the Word of God, operating according to the laws He has laid down for this age. No one else can do this work except those who have fully realized the meaning of the Message of Bahá’u’lláh, whereas almost any courageous, sincere person can engage in relief work, etc.

The believers are building a refuge for mankind. This is their supreme sacred task and they should devote every moment they can to this task.41 --Shoghi Effendi, through his secretary

Our engagement in the technical aspects of development should, however, not be allowed to supplant the essentials of teaching, which remains the primary duty of every follower of Bahá’u’lláh. Rather should our increased activities in the development field be viewed as a reinforcement of the teaching work, as a greater manifestation of faith in action. For, if expansion of the teaching work does not continue, there can be no hope of success for this enlarged dimension of the consolidation process.42 --The Universal House of Justice

See Figure 28.3 for a diagram which expresses the concept of “foundational priorities.” With its aid we can understand a further dimension of life. Although having a strong marriage and raising Bahá’í children is a praiseworthy service, one which I have thoroughly enjoyed for more than three decades, one can also clearly understand why some Bahá’ís choose not to marry and why others long for early retirement. Bahíyyih Khánum chose not to marry in order to serve Bahá’u’lláh more completely. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself was reluctant to marry because of His desire to serve the Cause of His Father.43

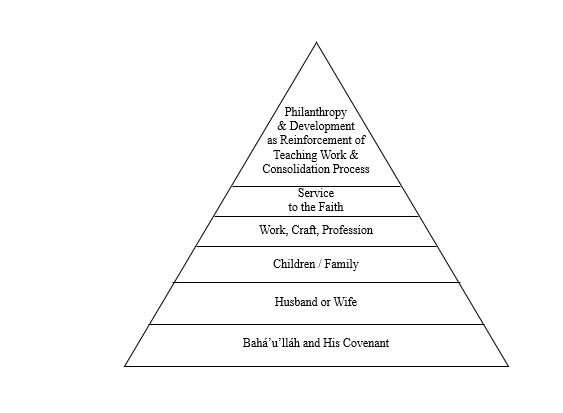


Figure 28. 3: Priority-Setting Guide

**Exercise 3: A Meditative Exercise Using the BLDH Circle**

Follow along as I demonstrate one possible way of using the BLDH Circle for the setting of goals and priorities.

I first set my gaze on the Center of my Life--the Blessed Perfection--and I ask myself, “How is my relationship with Bahá’u’lláh? Do I feel close to Him? Is He pleased with me?” To help me answer this question the corollary question naturally comes to mind, “How is my relation with the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh?” My gaze rises to the luminous quadrant of the spirit and the Covenant, and I ask myself, “Am I praying, teaching, giving to the Fund, etc.?” My eyes then move to the left-hand quadrant of the heart and to the inner circle of intimacy: “How is my relationship with my wife and my children? Do I spend special, high-quality time with them?” My eyes then turn further to the left as I consider my relationships in my work community and then down to the Physical Quadrant where I contemplate the status of my work in general, for without these I cannot provide for my family or support the Fund. Up from the world of “means” I then gaze at the world of “ends” --the outer sphere of the Spiritual Quadrant--and if all of the previous checkpoints are healthy, then I can ask myself, “Am I engaged in or can I become involved in a major, significant service for the Faith?” I think to myself, “These great undertakings will constitute one of the major and distinctive fruits of my life. My obedience to the Covenant and the fulfillment of my minimum obligations will help the Faith, but it is the major, sacrificial services which will carry it forward to new heights. Teaching trips, public events, building a Bahá’í Center, organizing youth groups, and so on--these will open new territory for the Cause. But they are only possible if my other, foundational priorities are in a healthy state.” And last of all, if everything is running smoothly, I contemplate the “service” category of the Spiritual Quadrant and I ask myself, “Can I squeeze in time to work for a philanthropic enterprise which will both serve others and place me in contact with like-minded people who may be interested in hearing the message of Bahá’u’lláh?”

The next chapter deals with time management. It offers specific techniques for improving our ability to so arrange our lives that we have enough time to accomplish everything that is important.44

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. How are ideals and goals different? How are they alike?
2. What role does goal-setting have in the self-transformation process? What happens when we don’t have goals? What can happen if longer-range goals are not broken into sub-goals?
3. What is the importance of having a role model or exemplar and how is this related to the goal-setting / goal-achieving process?
4. What is the difference between “life-time” goals and “life style” goals?
5. What are the four techniques for resolving goal conflicts?
6. When we don’t achieve a goal as planned, how can the BLDH Circle be used to reapproach the unattained goal?
7. What is the logic of the prioritized order of the five aspects of life expressed in Figure 28.3?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will set “lifetime accomplishment goals” and “life-style goals” and review them at least once each year.
* I will set “more-of” and “less-of” goals alone or in collaboration with my spouse or a friend.I will reflect on the thirty-six key life processes of the BLDH Circle, choose one to five processes that need the most improvement and set a goal for each.
* I will set daily goals and review them each evening.

CHAPTER 29: TIME MANAGEMENT

There never seems to be enough time to do the things you want to do once you find them.

--Jim Croche, “Time in a Bottle”

We have found this precious Faith; we have become Bahá’ís; we want to give as much time as possible to the carrying forward of such a glorious Cause; and we shoulder gladly this burden without relinquishing any of the obligations current amongst our friends and neighbors: children, home care, laundry, work, time with spouse and family, care of pets; sufficient rest and leisure, meal preparation, car maintenance; and so on. If anyone needs help with managing time it is the Bahá’ís! So much is expected of us. So much depends on us. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that “Waste of time is not acceptable in the Cause of God . . .”1 The beloved Guardian continually reminds us of the shortness of time in words such as these:

The field is so immense,

the period so critical,

the Cause so great,

the workers so few,

the time so short,

the privilege so priceless,

that no follower of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh,

worthy to bear His Name,

can afford a moment’s hesitation.2

Hand of the Cause of God Dr. Muhájir, as he calls us to greater heights of dedication, points out that time is one of the things we need to most readily, and willingly sacrifice.

We have to sacrifice the most precious thing that we have--TIME. Anything else that we possess does not equal time. Time which passes cannot be recaptured. Can you be younger today than yesterday? So use your time correctly.3

He said that he loved the youth except for one thing--they think they will never grow old.4 Regarding the proper balance of time spent on administration and teaching Dr. Muhajir said:

Communities where most of the Bahá’ís are busy in committees suffer in the teaching field. Bahá’ís should give fifty per cent of their time to teaching instead of just ten.5

This sense of urgency and the need to dedicate large amounts of time to the Faith must be balanced with a feeling of gracefulness and effortlessness. This keeps us from becoming anxious, even frantic and losing our basic sense of happiness.[[25]](#footnote-25)a In the heat of His travel teaching trip across the United States the beloved Master was described in these words:

He was ever at the service of any or all who needed Him. From five o'clock in the morning frequently until long after midnight He was actively engaged in service, yet no evidence of haste or stress ever could be seen in Him . . .. He had been heard to say, “and there is always time.”6

The image of the swan comes to mind: beautiful, calm and graceful above the water; yet feet churning quickly and purposively below the water.

At one point during her years in Lima, Ohio, the Hand of the Cause of God Dorothy Baker was feeling overtaxed and stressed. This led to an intriguing experience and a profound change of attitude regarding time management. Her numerous time constraints had “all combined to shake Dorothy’s confidence in her ability to accomplish everything with even moderate success.” These constraints included Sunday night meetings, preparing talks, setting up the den for the Friday night Bahá’í Men’s Club, children’s classes, weekly ladies’ luncheon, seeing her children through their teens, supporting her husband through rough economic times, membership on the Central States Summer School Committee, preparing summer school classes, and more. Then one day while regaining consciousness after dental surgery she heard a voice that seemed to come from the room in which she was: “You see, there is time for everything.” She interpreted this as divine guidance.

Whatever obstacles stood in her way, from then on she knew that the attitude that would lead to blessings was one of fearless acceptance of her responsibilities without the anxiety that had once accompanied them. The limitations were gone; as long as she didn’t stand in her own way there would be time in her life for everything she truly wanted to do. Anxiety about finding time and fear of failure were nets in which she no longer needed to entangle herself.7

The Hand of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, in a talk to North American Bahá’í parents, relented the fact that life had lost a certain gracefulness. She recalled that it used to be that everyone would gather around the dinner table for a pleasant evening meal instead of each eating alone and then madly rushing off in separate directions.8

Our struggle is not only against negative attitudes and changing family values but also against the changing social-economic milieu. Professional pollster Louis Harris made the observation, “Time may have become the most precious commodity in the land.” A 1989 Harris survey indicated that “the amount of leisure time enjoyed by the average U.S. citizen has shrunk by 37% since 1973. Over the same stretch, the average workweek, including commuting time, has moved up from less than 41 hours to nearly 47 hours.”9 Watching crewmen fire a ship for twelve hours a day, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá commented sadly, “These men do not have time to be spiritual.”10 Finding time for graceful family living, for prayer and meditation, and for serving the Faith requires that we take very seriously the injunction of Shoghi Effendi to demonstrate to the world “an efficiency in our character and work.”11

Describing this characteristic in the life of Hand of the Cause Dorothy Baker, Artemus Lamb comments:

At one of my first conventions in the USA . . . Dorothy was chairman of the Convention. In her opening remarks she stated that often it was thought that spirituality and efficiency did not go together--that it was either one or the other --however, she did not believe this was so, and she hoped this Convention would be both spiritual and efficient. Now as I write this, I realize that it was this balance in Dorothy that impressed me so greatly.12

‘Abdu’l-Bahá stated that in the future, in order to sustain a family, three hours per day of work would be sufficient.13 This is, no doubt, one aspect of a very marvelous future for which we should work hard in order to bequeath it as a gift to the coming generations. In the meantime, however, the mastery of some basic time management principles and techniques can help us greatly.

**TIME MANAGEMENT DEFINED**

In the BLDH program time management is defined as the ability to arrange one’s affairs so that responsibilities and goal-oriented activities are given a planned beginning time, a sufficient duration, and an ending-time resulting in a lifestyle characterized by continuous self-transformation, efficiency, and beauty. (See Figure 29.1) In order to be adept at self-transformation we must control our key transformational processes such as prayer, deepening, communicating, and teaching. Because these processes have durations, we can use time as a tool; as a handle. By controlling and manipulating the “handle” of time we can control the processes. Consequently, time management can become a great boon for translating potentiality into “action and reality.”

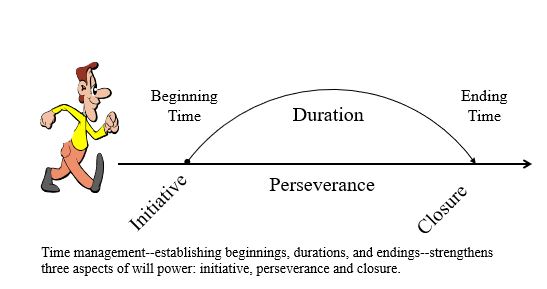


Figure 29. 1: Time Management Phases

**EIGHT BASIC TECHNIQUES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF TIME[[26]](#footnote-26)a**

1. Do central concerns and essentials first.

2. Group related activities.

3. Schedule recurring activities.

4. Divide big jobs into workable steps.

5. Use a timetable.

6. Concentrate on doing one thing at a time.

7. Finish fully.

8. Follow the four D’s:

Delegate it, Delay it, Dump it, or Do it NOW.

The following is an explanation of each technique and some related exercises.

**1. DO CENTRAL CONCERNS AND ESSENTIALS FIRST**

Setting priorities is a basic first step in managing your time. In the previous chapter we discussed the basic priorities of Bahá’í life, but the process continues on down to the details of daily living. As an aide to decision-making, priorities can be further categorized as shown in Figure 29.2.14

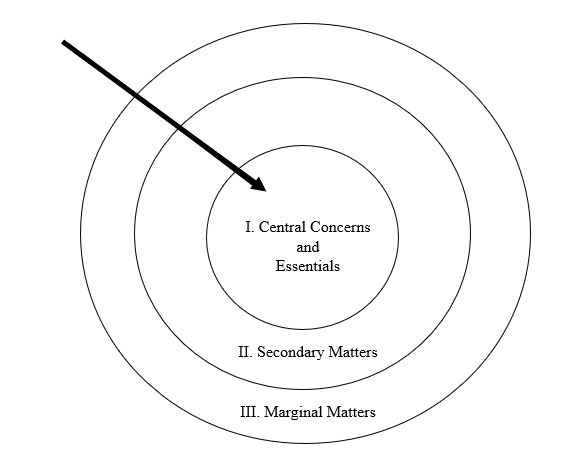


Figure 29. 2: Focusing on Priorities

*Central Concerns* are our lifetime goals and aspirations. We should do something every day towards attaining these accomplishments. *Essential*s are things that you *must* do such as reports and projects which have deadlines. Essentials are duties that are so important that, if you do not do them, unwanted problems will be caused. Whenever possible, essentials should be connected to central concerns. For example, if you have regular professional development days at your place of work and you want to know more about a particular topic, you can offer to make a presentation on it for one of the sessions. Or, if you have regular Bahá’í deepening classes in your community, and you are curious about some aspect of the history or teachings of the Faith, you can offer to give a course on it.

*Secondary Matters* are worthwhile activities but, (1) they are not related directly with central concerns, and (2) if they are not carried out, no serious trouble will be caused. For example, imagine that you have the goal of teaching ten adults how to read and write during a one-year period. A friend asks you to join a Red Cross brigade which answers emergency calls on weekends. You would like to participate. You know that it would be an exciting, worthwhile activity; that it would be a valuable community service and provide an excellent source of contacts for teaching the Faith; and that you could fit it into your schedule. However, you also realize that participating in the Red Cross would diminish the probability that you would accomplish your literacy goal. Therefore, you consider it a secondary matter, apply the “sequential attention” technique, and tell your friend that you will reconsider the invitation after you have completed your adult education commitment.

*Marginal Matters* are the small, bothersome, time-consuming little jobs and activities that can eat up our day: ridding up our room, sorting and categorizing photos, watching TV, etc. You can avoid having to rid your bedroom so often by providing a special place for everything and then returning everything to its place right after you use it. Organizing photographs can be done once or twice a year. Invite a family member to help and then make a party out of it! Watching television can be restricted to a certain amount of time or to certain programs. A housewife who became a “neurotically organized” career woman came up with the following tactics to deal with marginal concerns: “watching less TV, shopping by phone [online today], buying low-maintenance clothes and appliances, screening calls on the telephone answering machine [now via caller identification] and taking a more lax attitude toward housekeeping.”15 Many marginal matters simply are not that important and need not be done. Activities related to our lifetime goals are much more exciting and important!

My greatest time management struggle has been to coordinate the accomplishment of central concerns and essentials. My experience has been that, if I focus on the essentials, I never get to the central concerns. The “essentials list” just keeps growing and growing. My tendency is to misjudge secondary and marginal matters as essential. If I focus too much on central concerns, I find that important duties “fall through the slats” and problems are caused: bills aren’t paid on time, deadlines are not met, licenses and insurance policies expire, the car breaks down, and so on. What has worked for me is to block out a particular time of the day to take care of each. The “central concerns” time is sacred. The “essentials” time is limited so only the “squeakiest Circles” receive attention. If there are essentials which demand more time, if they are truly essential, they will keep me up until midnight doing them. Central concerns, however, will not necessarily keep me up late, especially if they are long-term goals with no particular deadline. This, of course, is the advantage of breaking long-term goals into short-term goals; assigning deadlines for each; and then making public commitments to meeting the target dates.

Exercise: Imagine a typical week in your life. List five activities which are related to your central concerns and five activities for each of the other categories: essentials, secondary matters, and marginal matters.

**2. GROUP RELATED ACTIVITIES**

Not everything that we must do has to be done immediately. Many things can be delayed so that activities which are similar in nature can be done at the same time. For instance, if you went to the supermarket every time you ran out of something, you would be wasting a lot of time just going to and coming from the store. Instead, you might place the needed item on a grocery list, manage to get along without it and then do all of your grocery shopping during one, weekly visit. On that same day you might do needed shopping at other stores that are near the supermarket.

Another example is email and social media. If you answered every message when it arrived and sent a message or letter every time you thought of someone to write to, the interruptions would not allow you to focus on the central concerns and essentials at hand. Instead, you might “disconnect” from incoming messages and schedule two or three times a day for shorter messaging and longer, weekend slots for correspondence that require deeper thought and longer replies. Another option is to create a file for this latter, more time-consuming correspondence and then, in order to limit the block of time set aside, prioritize the list. I have a friend who only reads and answers personal e-mail on Monday evenings. His most common contacts know this and adjust their correspondence to this schedule. Work-related messaging and calls are an ongoing debate. In my opinion, the best employers expect engagement only during work hours, except for emergency situations.

Exercise: Think of five groups of related activities. Write a category title for each group and list four or more specific activities that you would group together. To help you get started answer these questions. What activities could you group together to do on Saturday mornings? on Sundays? during lunch break? along the way somewhere? Which of these activities could be grouped together in these categories: repairs, cleaning; desk tasks; communication via social media, email, and/or phone calls?

**3. SCHEDULE RECURRING ACTIVITIES**

Sometimes people put off doing essential, recurring activities simply because they are inconvenient and a nuisance and they would rather be doing something else. A technique to alleviate this problem is to assign a regular day and time for these activities. In this way we don’t have to motivate ourselves each time the activity recurs. We simply follow our planned schedule. After a while, a habit is formed and the task is done with ease. Recurring activities can occur on a daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly basis. Some examples are: shining shoes; emptying waste baskets; shopping; washing the car; paying bills; filing income tax returns; handling correspondence; Bahá’í Feasts; Holy Days; firesides; reflection meetings; devotional gatherings; Huqúqu’lláh calculation date; birthdays; wedding anniversary; work-related dates; renewal dates for magazines, professional licenses, credit cards, vaccinations for family and pets, driver’s license, family passports, visas, car registration, and insurance policies; and maintenance routines for cars, audio-visual equipment, computers, and heating and air conditioning. It takes time to set up the reminders and to keep them up to date, but, in the long run, time is saved and trouble is avoided.

Exercise: Write down five of your recurring activities and when you should schedule them.

**4. DIVIDE BIG JOBS INTO WORKABLE STEPS**

Big jobs often seem overwhelming and initiating the task becomes extremely difficult. To overcome this feeling of powerlessness, a sequential list of the steps can be made which lead to the accomplishment of the big job. For example, if you need to write a report, the steps might be:

a. Delimit the topic.

b. Locate books and articles on the topic.

c. Read the books and articles and take notes.

d. Write an outline of your report.

e. Write the report.

f. Show the report to a friend or colleague for improvements.

g. Make changes.

h. Write the final draft.

i. Turn in the report.

Another example is yard work. There is no limit to the hours that could be devoted to lawn care and gardening. What I do is break the work up into half-hour tasks or mini-projects for each afternoon. The work is both relaxing and invigorating and the results gradually add up to well-cared for lawn, bushes, flower beds, etc.

Some big jobs can be done with others. It is often helpful to ask a friend for assistance with these tasks, to give the job a name and make a “party” out of it. You still may have to write out the steps but enlisting a friend’s help makes the task of self-motivation so much easier. Imagine the following example. Vicky wanted to change the color of her bedroom from pink to peach, but, when she thought of having to remove everything from the shelves and moving all the furniture, she lost her enthusiasm. Finally, she decided to try the above technique. Vicky named her project “The Pink to Peach Painting Party!” and invited a friend to help. They put on their favorite music, prepared a pitcher of iced tea, and finished the job in record time and in a super fun way!

Exercises: (1) Think of a big job. Write the sequential steps necessary to carry out the task. (2) List three big jobs which would be difficult to motivate yourself to do all alone but could be turned into a fun project with the help of a friend.

**5. USE A TIME TABLE**

To give yourself additional structure, assign deadlines for your project. This helps make the project and your commitment to it feel more real. It also helps prevent procrastination. In relation to the report-writing example above, working backwards from the date when the report is due, schedule a specific day and block of time for each step. The plan does not have to be perfect and inflexible in order to work.

If you have trouble with procrastination, a careful self-analysis is helpful. Some people have trouble at the beginning; with initiating an activity; like the man who said, “I always intended to join the Procrastinators Anonymous Association . . . but I keep putting it off.” However, once they get started all goes well. Other people have trouble with the middle part of the process. They get started well, but they lack perseverance. Still others have trouble at the end. They begin well, are persevering, but never quite bring things to closure. Details are always being added; revisions are always being made; the form has been filled out, signed, and sealed, but has been sitting on the desk for a week waiting to be mailed. And then there are those like me who have trouble with all three phases! The psychological causes of procrastination are well worth exploring. Psychologist Dru Scott16 explores how we sometimes use procrastination to avoid feelings of success and enjoyment, to avoid feeling guilty about not keeping busy, because of anxiety about not producing something perfect, and other reasons.

If you are a perfectionist, you might try this technique which has helped me immensely. (1) Based on the circumstances, decide what degree of excellence is needed. Some audiences and types of projects are more demanding than others. (2) Realize that most people are amazed with what a perfectionist considers to be only 80% perfection. (3) Shoot for 90% perfection. This allows you to relax on 10% of the details and yet still places you in the “excellence” range and 10% above most expectations. In this way the job is more likely to be completed--and on time. Alejandro Obregón, the late, internationally renowned painter from Cartagena, Colombia, in reference to his own passion for perfection, told a story about a famous French painter who was caught by a guard one night in the Louvre. He had some pencils and brushes and was touching up a drawing. The watchman was shocked and reprimandingly asked, “What do you think you are doing?” The artist turned and the watchman realized that it was the famous painter and that he was tampering with his own work of art. The artist responded, “I am touching up my drawing.” The watchmen embarrassingly responded, “But Monsieur, you cannot do that. It is prohibited.” The artist apologetically and pleadingly replied, “But it has flaws.”

Exercise: In order to help you get a feeling for this technique, take the big job that you broke down into steps and assign dates and times for each part.

**6. CONCENTRATE ON DOING ONE THING AT A TIME**

People always have many duties, responsibilities, tasks and wants simultaneously impinging upon their time. This is not a sign of trouble, but rather a sign of vitality and fullness of living. Anyone who has a creative mind can easily “cook up” more interesting and worthwhile things to do than there are hours in the day. It is natural for us to try to take on as much as possible; even to test our own strength and endurance. At times, however, having so many “irons in the fire” becomes very confusing and causes undue anxiety and stress. Multi-tasking, that is, trying to do or think about two or more things at once does not lead to the creation of a high-quality project or product. A report written while watching television or while worrying about a different project which is also due soon, will seldom be our best work. With practice we can learn to block out all thoughts except those which pertain to the chosen task at hand.

I have found an additional benefit of this technique. My wife and children can more easily put up with my weekend absences and hectic evenings because they know that I have blocked in time exclusively for them and that during that time they will have my full, undivided attention.

Exercise: Recall an experience when you were trying to do too many things or projects at once. How could you have arranged your affairs in order to concentrate on doing only one thing at a time?

**7. FINISH FULLY**

As mentioned above, people often start projects and fail to finish them. Basements, closets, and attics are filled with uncompleted projects. Even in little things this leads to a feeling of ineffectiveness and irritation in yourself and others. Have you ever felt perturbed when someone borrows a pen and doesn’t return it; when a family member leaves clothes or belongings around the house; or when your desk is filled with assignments that are only partially completed? Achieving closure on a task will make you feel good; increase your energy level; improve your concentration and mental outlook; and give you a healthy sense of accomplishment, personal satisfaction, and motivation. Even just checking off items on a “to do” list can be rewarding and, completing three tasks feels much better than leaving six halfway finished.

Seeing projects through to their end was one of the four qualities most admired by Bahá’u’lláh. A first-hand observer recounted, “The Blessed Beauty often remarked: ‘There are four qualities which I love to see manifested in people: first, enthusiasm and courage; second, a face wreathed in smiles and a radiant countenance; third, that they see all things with their own eyes and not through the eyes of others; fourth, the ability to carry a task, once begun, through to its end.’“17

Irán Furútan Muhájir relates how her husband, Hand of the Cause Dr. Muhájir, saw and admired this quality in the beloved Guardian:

His role model was Shoghi Effendi. He told me that the characteristic of the Guardian which he most desired to emulate was his determination in seeing his tasks through to the end. The Guardian never let obstacles deter him from his plans. He often spoke of the time when the Guardian was building the steps leading up to the Shrine of the Báb. A tree which he was unable to move was in the way, so the Guardian simply built the steps around the tree. Rahmat tried to follow that characteristic, and whenever obstacles arose he never abandoned his plans. Rather, he would try to remove the obstacles, or go round them.18

When I think of the feeling of elation engendered by finishing a task fully, I always recall the workshop of my Volkswagen mechanic in Columbus, Ohio. He operated his own business out of his home garage. It was immaculately clean and tidy. Every tool was grease-free and had a special place. I found out why one day when I took my car in for repairs on a Saturday morning. When I entered the shop, he was busy cleaning his tools. He told me to bring my car back on Monday. I commented that I thought he was losing a lot of money by being closed on what should be his busiest day. He told me that he couldn’t stand not to bring his week to a close by spending Saturday mornings cleaning every screwdriver and wrench that he had used during the week and putting every tool where it belonged; that he preferred to lose money than to lose the feeling he got from cleanliness, having everything in its place, and “finishing” his work week.

Exercise: List the projects that you presently have in only a partially completed state and choose the one that you will finish fully now.

1. **THE FOUR D’s: DUMP IT, DELEGATE IT, DELAY IT, OR DO IT NOW**

When confronted with any task, whether it be answering correspondence, shopping, cleaning, maintenance, etc., we can run it through “The Four D’s” test by asking ourselves: “Can I dump it? Does this really have to be done? Do I really have to answer this letter?” If this isn't possible then ask: “Can I delegate it? Would someone else enjoy doing this? Can I hire someone to do this? Should someone else be doing this task?” or, “Can I delay it? Does it have to be done right now? Can I group it with related activities to be done later?” Then, if the first three fail, carry out the fourth “D”: Do It *Now*. There is no better time than the present. If you find yourself procrastinating, the best technique is often just to go “cold turkey” and do the task immediately. Don’t wade into the water, just dive in head first. Frequently, just *making a beginning* breaks the ice of our frozen will power and the rest flows smoothly. And as we see the results of our initiative our momentum increases.

In the life of Dorothy Baker there were times, even after she had gained a more positive attitude about the availability of time, when she became spread too thin and felt depressed and overtired. Then her husband Frank would sit down with her, ask her to make a list of her activities and committees, then suggest that she drop the ones in which her presence was not vital. Usually she “came up with at least one which, on his recommendation, she would then drop.”19

Later, when her sphere of service was more international in character, when “the needed balance was missing in Dorothy’s life and she knew it,” she turned to the Guardian for advice regarding how “her fractioned energies should be concentrated.” The National Teaching Committee had asked her to “consider giving up one year of other teaching to concentrate totally on North America as many groups and assemblies seemed to need assistance.” Shoghi Effendi’s answer “begged her not to ‘over-tax your strength, but rather save it for your essential work on the NSA and in such important fields as Europe’.”20

Exercise: During this coming week try the “Four D’s” technique and then tell someone about your experience.

**USING THE FIVE CLASSIC ELEMENTS OF DESIGN** **TO MANAGE YOUR TIME**

The component elements of beauty were first discussed in the chapter on “Beauty.” If you cannot recall them, try remembering them by invoking the acronym “BOUCH.”

Balance: When you lose your Balance, it gives you an:

Order O

Unity U

Contrast C

Harmony H !!

Now you need to learn to apply them to the management of your time, the result of which will be a personalized, beautified lifestyle designed to meet the particular needs and desires of you and your loved ones.

Order offers a sense of predictability. Organizing your time gives you a feeling of connection between the past, the present and the future. It gives a sense of direction and movement to life. Arranging your schedule so that recurring activities occur at the same time gives an ordered pattern to your day, your week, your month and life in general. These recurring activities should represent all four Quadrants of the BLDH Circle, e.g., regular time for communing with God, for learning, for exercise, and for being with special people in your life.

Contrast introduces novelty (something new or different) and excitement into the order. It prevents order from turning into boredom and monotony. However, too much novelty will cause the loss of a sense of order and stability, thereby resulting in chaos and confusion. Some types of contrasting activities which need to be balanced are:

routine vs. creative activities

time in (productive) vs. time out (non‑productive) activities structured vs. unstructured activities

work vs. leisure activities

time alone vs. time with others

inner life activities vs. outer life activities

psychological activities vs. social activities

spiritual activities vs. physical activities

Everybody needs a certain amount of excitement and stimulation. Some people get them in unhealthy ways such as always showing up late in order to attract attention, running behind schedule to add a sense of thrill, or rushing to meet deadlines because they love the stimulating flow of adrenaline during the last-minute rush! This style of time management may be stimulating but it often results in tension and unnecessary inconvenience for others and for yourself. Therefore, take care to plan positive, stimulating activities such as dinners with friends, parties, vacations, cultural events, and sports.

The contrast of “time in” activities and “time out” activities is important. “Time in” activities are job or duty-related tasks which require tight scheduling and intense, mental concentration. “Time out” activities are more leisurely. During these times, looking at the watch every five minutes is not necessary. The mind can wander. The nerves can relax. These “non-productive”/meditative times (during which many great ideas are born and problems are solved) need to be programmed also. Otherwise, we may end up “stealing” them anyway and then feeling guilty about not being “on task.”

*Balance* is achieved by pairing contrasting activities in your schedule on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis. This will give you a sense of equilibrium and stability. During her first years in Lima, Ohio, Hand of the Cause Dorothy Baker “divided her time between family [three children], social life, community service and her now highly motivated study of the Bahá’í Faith and its history.”21 In later years, one of her favorite annual activities after the National Convention was to buy fresh farm produce on the way home from Wilmette and to get the whole family involved in canning fruits and making jam and desserts. She said that “she needed these activities to keep a balance in her life.”22

Apparently, there is no one formula for determining how to incorporate this aesthetic principle into our lives. What is right for one person will not work for another, but both may perceive their lives as being balanced.

Working hard all day at one’s job and resting in the evening. Isn’t this balance?

Working all day and night to finish a project on time and then sleeping the next day. Isn’t this balance

Working exhausting hours all week long and then collapsing on the weekend. Isn’t this balance?

Working arduously every day during the year and then taking a month’s vacation. Isn’t this balance?[[27]](#footnote-27)a

Working hard in this life and then taking a rest in the next life. Isn’t this balance?[[28]](#footnote-28)b

As was mentioned in the chapter on “Balance,” this principle is closely associated with moderation. It is also related to compromise--the giving in of both sides while still retaining something. I have referred to the balancing of principles previously. The need to harmonize principles is referred to by the Guardian:

The advice that Shoghi Effendi gave you regarding the division of your time between serving the Cause and attending to your other duties was also given to many other friends both by Bahá’u’lláh and the Master. It is a compromise between the two verses of the Aqdas, one making it incumbent upon every Bahá’í to serve the promotion of the Faith and the other that every soul should be occupied in some form of occupation that will benefit society. In one of His Tablets Bahá’u’lláh says that the highest form of detachment in this day is to be occupied with some profession and be self-supporting. A good Bahá’í, therefore, is the one who so arranges his life as to devote time both to his material needs and also to the service of the Cause.23

The principle of balance embraces a wide variety of life styles. Other important factors affecting our pace and time-management decisions, besides personality and upbringing, are our interpretation of the historical moment during which we are living and our decisions regarding our role in it. Time is indeed short. We do need to carry out quickly our part in bringing about the Lesser Peace and then, even to a greater extent, establishing the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh.

Still another factor is fearing, intuiting, or knowing that one’s life will be short or long. According to Hand of the Cause of God Zikrullah Khadem, the beloved Guardian knew when and where he would die.24 Martha Root developed cancer before she was forty years old and was forced to live the rest of her life as though any year could be her last on earth.25 Fortunately, she lived to be 79! Dr. Muhájir seems to have intuited that his life would be short, especially during his last years.26 Professor Daniel C. Jordan had the same intuition.27At the other end of the spectrum, Stanwood Cobb was told by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that “if he behaved himself,” he would live to be a hundred.28 He lived to be 102!

Beyond the personal need for balance, marriage offers a wider sphere for the expression of this component of beauty. Often, when we see a Bahá’í being superlatively active in the Faith, if we look closer, we will find a supportive spouse without whose collaboration the active Bahá’í life of the other would be impossible. This was certainly the case in the life of Dorothy Baker who was constantly encouraged and supported by, what I would consider, the “heroic” efforts of her husband Frank.29 This same, self-sacrificing support was given by Irán Furútan Muhájir to her husband the Hand of the Cause Rahmatu'lláh Muhájir. During his years of round-the-world travels, she bore long periods of separation, was continually active in serving the Faith, and raised their daughter nearly single-handedly--and did so willingly and approvingly.30 In my own marriage, my wife and I learned to take turns taking care of our four children and the household while the other participated in teaching trips or carried out university studies. This type of marital cooperation expresses a wider sense of balance the aim of which is always to support one’s spouse in the translation of her or his potentiality into “reality and action.” Both wings must be strong for this type of balanced collaboration to be successful. I have read about Bahá’í families in the Pacific islands who extend this principle even further: the couples take turns caring for the children while the other couple travel teaches. How beautiful! This is truly the principle of reciprocation in action.

This principle of balance or equilibrium, as applied to time management, has been captured in this poem which I have attempted to translate from Spanish. The author is anonymous.

I Dedicate Time

I dedicate time to thinking.

It is the source of power.

I dedicate time to laughing.

It is the music of the soul.

I dedicate time to reading.

It is the spring of wisdom.

I dedicate time to praying.

It is the greatest force on earth.

I dedicate time to loving and being loved.

It is a privilege granted by God.

I dedicate time to being friendly.

It is the road to happiness.

*Harmony* is attained when you establish a patterned use of time that is characterized by smooth‑flowingness and coordination with, and responsiveness to your needs and the needs of others. This can be achieved in several ways. You should consult and plan with other family members so that conflicts are avoided. For example, if Dad is planning to write an important paper at home, it would not be a good time for Sis to have a slumber party. You can also arrange activities so that various needs of several people are accomplished simultaneously. Dad might take the kids camping while Mom does some oil painting. This gives Dad a break from the office and time with the kids. It’s exciting for the children and gives them relief from the routines of home life. It also gives Mom a break from the office and some valuable time alone to express herself creatively. Another way to achieve a sense of harmony is by always doing central concerns and top priorities first. This gives you a sense of being in tune with your lifetime goals and your ideal self.

*Unity* conveys a sense of connectedness, collectiveness, belonging, and purpose. When all of your seemingly small, multitudinous activities contribute to an embracing whole as expressed in your central aims and ultimate purposes in life, you will feel a sense of unity. If, for example, your life is dedicated to knowing, loving, and serving God; and you can see these ends reflected in your activities and accomplishments, then your life is enhanced with meaning and a feeling of oneness. By continually linking activities with your central concerns and by always finishing fully you can nurture the mystic, blissful feeling that unity engenders.

Exercise: Using the BLDH Circle as a guide, write a list of specific, contrasting activities which could be paired together in order to give your day, week, month or year a sense of balance and variety.

**TIME MANAGEMTNT TOOLS**

I recommend using five, time management tools: (1) a personal calendar (physical or digital) for scheduled activities, (2) a list of unscheduled tasks (to be “woven” into the day), (3) a special place for planning, (4) a special time for daily planning, and (5) standard lists for certain events.

Use a *personal calendar* every day. By writing down your commitments you no longer have to rely solely on your memory. Instead of having to remember a dozen things you only have to remember to do one thing: look at your calendar periodically throughout the day. Having a calendar also helps to reinforce the habit of doing one thing at a time because it tells you from what time until what time you will be engaged in a particular activity. This will free you from tension and will allow you to be more tranquil, thereby enabling you to enjoy the present moment and to concentrate more fully on the task or leisure time that is before you because you know that every other commitment and source of worry has been assigned its own special time. Then, for example, when you go for a walk in the woods with your child, you can relax and take deep pleasure in the delicate fragrances of the flowers, the soft light filtering through the leaves, and the tender touch of the small hand clinging to yours . . . without being crushed by the burden of the thousand details and demands required by the raising up of a new World Order--for they too will receive their special attention at a special time.

Prepare a *list of unscheduled tasks* every day. Give each task a priority number. After you complete an item, cross it out. This promotes finishing fully and helps maintain momentum as you move through your day. The number of items should be realistic. Some people choose only three or four unscheduled activities to work on each day. Your action sheet can be written in or posted where it can easily be referred to. It is best to allow time between scheduled activities in order to allow time for unscheduled tasks from your list. An example of this is given below. The left column contains the scheduled activities and the right column is a prioritized list of unscheduled activities. The two columns are then woven together throughout the day. Can you see where during the day this person might fit in the unscheduled activities? If you have trouble arriving to appointments on time, you can also note the departure time on the calendar instead of only the arrival time. If you have trouble remembering everything that needs to be taken to a meeting, you can jot down the items as close to the appointment time as possible.

7:00 ‑ Breakfast with Juan Carlos 3. Read pp.220-230 of *The Dawn Breakers*

8:00 ‑ Write lab report 1. Calls: Mom, bank, Anita

9:00 ‑

10:00 ‑ Meeting with lab technician

11:00 ‑ Meeting with salesman 2. Hair cut

12:00 ‑ Lunch with Teresa 4. Buy biology book

1:00 ‑

2:00 ‑ Program upcoming experiments

3:00 ‑

4:00 ‑ Administrative meeting

5:00 ‑

6:00 ‑ Dinner with Sanchez Family

7:00 ‑

8:00 ‑

Use a *special place and time* at home for preparing your calendar and action sheet every day. It can be a desk, a counter or an armchair beside a table. Have available your electronic device (iPad, laptop, or smart phone) with a calendar app or a physical planner, self-stick notes (to increase visibility of the day’s “To Do list”), your favorite type of pen, the BLDH Circle and anything else that will stimulate you to plan creatively.

Exercise: Using a physical calendar or a calendar app, plan out a week of both scheduled activities and prioritized, unscheduled activities.

Use *standard lists* for recurring activities. Over the years we developed lists for standard grocery shopping, a list of things to take on trips to: the beach, a village (for teaching the Faith), the mountains; a list of responsibilities for family firesides (each person is in charge of some aspect); and others.

Here are some concluding notes of advice:

1) Understand that everyone has conflicting desires and demands and that there are often no perfect solutions.

2) Analyze what motivates you. Always plan something exciting to look forward to‑‑each day, week, month and year. Reward yourself when you complete difficult jobs.

3) If you find yourself procrastinating, reanalyze the situation and try a new approach, but don’t just give up.

4) Don’t be afraid to say “no” when you don’t really want to do something. Saying “yes” will often spread you too thin and take you away from central concerns such as teaching the Faith. At times, even Bahá’í activities need to be said “no” to. We need to whole-heartedly support Spiritual Assemblies and their committees, but we cannot expect them to know the full range of our commitments and the constraints on our time. Only *we* can set the limits. Of course, if a situation has come to a breaking point, we can always consult with our Assembly to draw upon their divine guidance in the establishing of priorities. If you have trouble saying “no,” I highly recommend a bestseller on assertiveness training: *When I Say No, I Feel Guilty*31by Manuel J. Smith, Ph.D.

In the next chapter we will explore the use of visualization as a technique for reinforcing goal-setting and time management.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What are the eight basic techniques for managing time, processes, and events? Give an example of each.
2. What are the five components of beauty and how does each relate to the management of time? (Include examples of each.)
3. What are the five recommended time management tools and how does each work?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will set aside twenty minutes per day to plan the next twenty-four hours.
* I will set aside a weekly time with my spouse for planning.
* I will review the important points of this chapter once per month until they are internalized.
* I will study the book *How to Put More Time in Your Life* by Dru Scott (New York: American Library, 1980).

CHAPTER 30: VISUALIZATION

Where there is no vision, the people perish . . . --Proverbs 29:18

**DEFINITION AND RELATION TO OTHER PROCESSES**

Visualization is a subject which is deep and extensive. This chapter, like all the chapters in this book, will only acquaint you with the pertinent information. Visualization, as defined in the BLDH program, is the conscious, purposeful use of the mind to regularly and repeatedly imagine or mentally rehearse a desired, future condition, activity, state of being, or goal. It is used during many of the BLDH Circle processes, especially those of the Psychological Quadrant and the inner sphere of the Spiritual Quadrant. Its use in the temporal sequence of the processes in the inner Psychological Quadrant, however, is to reinforce and reaffirm our goals, sub-goals and time management plan. (See Figure 30.1) Visualization is slightly different than psychological meditation and goal-setting. Meditation is used to explore possibilities. The result is the discovery of multiple meanings, perspectives, insights, solutions to problems, and alternatives. Goal-setting chooses one of the possibilities to act upon. Visualization takes place after a desired, future condition has been chosen. It is a way of practicing a planned activity in the spiritual/mental realm or imagining an end in the beginning. Meditation is passive and receptive. Visualization is more active, goal-directed, and concentrated. It is highly focused on a particular aim or outcome.

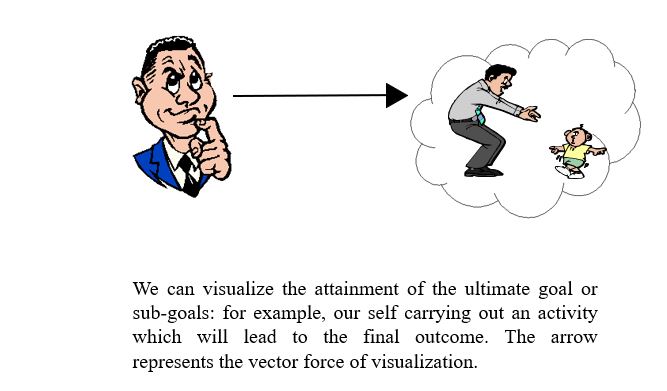


Figure 30. 1: Visualization as a Motivating Force

In creative visualization you use your imagination to create a clear image of something you wish to manifest. Then you continue to focus on the idea or picture regularly, giving it positive energy until it becomes objective reality . . . in other words, until you actually achieve what you have been visualizing.1 --Shakti Gawain, *Creative Visualization*

A. Richardson, author of *Mental Imagery*, in relation to the conditions necessary for visualization, states that “psychologists have found that visual images tend to be most stable and vivid when we are relaxed, open, and positive.”2 The Silva Method of mind control, through breathing exercises, teaches one to first relax the body and then the mind before beginning the visualization process. Visualization does not always come easily and naturally. According to Dr. Michael Samuels,

most people do not realize how little control they have over their own thoughts. This lack of control is readily demonstrated if a person tries to concentrate only on counting his breaths for a few minutes. Most people immediately find other thoughts going through their mind.3

However, through the regular practice of visualization and meditation we can strengthen our powers of concentration and single-mindedness.

**VISUALIZATION, TRANSFORMATION AND WILL**

Visualization is a key life process which is of prime concern for those who are seeking self-transformation.

If there are two important concepts that need to become part of everyday life in the 21st century, they are meditation and visualization. Meditation clears and concentrates the mind; visualization puts an image in it which can profoundly affect the life.

The last 2000 years reads like a history of the social suppression of visualization and therefore a denial of one of our most basic mental processes. For visualization is the way we think. Before words, images were. Visualization is the heart of the bio-computer. The human brain programs and self-programs through its images. Riding a bicycle, driving a car, learning to read, bake a cake, play golf--all skills are acquired through the image-making process. Visualization is the ultimate consciousness tool.4 --Don Gerrard, Editor of *Seeing with the Mind’s Eye*

For years I sought for a way to strengthen my will-power in order to “manfully struggle against the natural inertia” that weighed me down in my “effort to arise.”5 I found that the “seat” of the will is visualization. It is very much akin to meditation which was described by the Master as the faculty through which “man enters into the very Kingdom of God.”6 What I have learned is that, in order to increase my will power, self-discipline, and volition; in order to facilitate the carrying out of a difficult task, or the development of a new habit, it becomes easier for me if I first perform the action in the spiritual world, “the very Kingdom of God”; the realm of meditation, imagination, and the mind. The key, I discovered, lies in not forcing an action but rather in reinforcing and rehearsing it first on the inner plane by “seeing” myself with my “inner eye”7 arising and carrying out an action at a specific time and place. Then, when that time arrives, the action flows more easily and naturally.

In addition to facilitating action, visualization seems to operate on its own by activating other powers which bring the visualized end into visible reality.

A person who has always dreamed of living in the country may find, *through no conscious effort of his*, that such an opportunity arises. And that same person may find that many of the characteristics of his new environment seem to correspond to images he had held in the past.8 (emphasis added) --Dr. Michael Samuels, author of *Seeing with the Mind’s Eye*

How this happens still remains a mystery for science. As Bahá’ís, we know we can affect our bodies, minds, environment and the future through prayer. And, in one sense, visualization is part of the dynamics of prayer because each phrase used by the Central Figures evokes powerful images in our minds which, in turn, bring about effects. The BLDH program isolates and extends the process of visualization in order to use it more consciously as an important tool in the translation of ideas, “dreamt of possibilities” and thoughts into actuality. It enables us to “see” ourselves in a desired, future situation--a rewarding type of work, teaching the Faith to a large gathering, an ideal marital or family scenario, an idyllic vacation spot, and so on--*before* it actually happens in the outer world. The marvelous “plus power” of visualization is that the realization of the desired state of affairs does not always require a tremendous amount of effort and action. Sometimes the door just opens and “bingo” we’re doing what we had only “dreamed” of doing previously. This is the power of visualization. We become what we visualize. What we desire, we get. As was mentioned earlier in relation to psychological meditation, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is reported to have stated: “Whatsoever a man concentrate upon, he will draw to himself.”9 And if we cannot visualize ourselves doing something or becoming something, it is very unlikely that it will ever happen.

In situations in which tremendous striving to reach a goal is required, visualization serves to reinforce our “dreams.” It enables us to almost literally “taste” and “feel” with yearning anticipation the actualization of that longed-for end. The more intensely we visualize the end; the more we forget our surroundings; the more we truly “live” and believe in our ideal image; the greater will be the effect. Bahá’u’lláh refers to the relationship of safety, silence, visualizing ends, and detachment: “The essence of true safety is to observe silence, to look at the end of things and to renounce the world.”10 The Master confirms the need for and benefits of visualizing desired results:

Do ye not look upon the beginning of the affairs; attach your hearts to the ends and results . . .. When one considereth the issue and the end, exhaustless joy and happiness will dawn.11

At the outset of every endeavor, it incumbent to look at the end of it.12

A recognized authority on visualization, Dr. Michael Samuels describes the dynamic relationship between concentration and its effects in the world of being.

When a person consciously visualizes he gains the ability to hold his mind on one object, to concentrate. This “one-pointedness of mind” is a state that has special properties: alertness, clarity of thought, identification with the object, and a feeling of participation in the visualization. . ..

This purity of vision, this one-pointedness of mind, is associated with tremendous energy surrounding both the visualizer and the image, and the unity of the two. Such energy cannot help but affect the world around it. Each image a person chooses to concentrate upon has a specific effect that is inseparable from the pure nature of the object-image. These specific effects of the image will affect a person’s body, his state of mind and his environment.13

A Buddha-inspired inner voice once spoke to Nikos Kazantzakis in these words, “The world as you crave it, where no one will suffer from hunger, cold, or injustice, does not exist and never will exist.” His heart then answered from deep within:

Though it does not exist, it shall exist because I want it to. I desire it, want it at every beat of my heart. I believe in a world which does not exist, but by believing in it, I create it. We call “nonexistent” whatever we have not desired with sufficient strength.14

Shocked by his own response he reflected on the terrible duty of being in charge of the transformation of the world:

I was terrified. For the first time I saw how creative man’s intervention is, and how great his responsibility. We are to blame if reality does not take the form we desire . . .. Desire it, imbue it with your blood, your sweat, your tears, and it will take on a body. Reality is nothing more than the chimera subjected to our desire and our suffering.15

This is the spiritual power underlying visualization. We must “see” our goals as already accomplished, desire them, have faith in them, and be determined to take the steps necessary for their realization. Dr. Muhájir, inspired by the beloved Guardian’s Ten-Year World Crusade, envisioned the spiritual conquest of the planet and immediately put the necessary processes into motion for its accomplishment. The vision expressed in the Crusade message of the Guardian continued to inspire him throughout his life.

Decisions attract resources, not the other way around. Plan how to teach and deepen 200,000 people. Conceive the formula, help will come. Visualize them. Without vision you will go nowhere. We need to have a large renewal of mass conversion. I believe that every person is receptive and the ways are easy. A lot of prayer, a lot of literature and a lot of person-to-person teaching--and the radio.16--Dr. Muhájir

Each of us must “see” ourselves carrying out new habits--dawn prayers, family prayers, neighborhood devotional meetings, person-to-person teaching, etc. We must “see” our communities growing by “leaps and troops”; the entire town or city becoming Bahá’í. Then we must ask ourselves, “Can I visualize the stages necessary for this to happen? Can I visualize the first step of the first stage? Can I see myself carrying out the first step?” If not, we are delaying the birth of the new World Order. If we can, then we need to set a time in our calendar for a beginning, gather the necessary materials, and arise to serve.

Visualization is the “seat” of the will, the source of will-power. Like the mighty river which has its humble beginnings in a quiet, mountain spring, so does the mighty will of man have its beginnings in the silence of prayer, meditation and visualization.

How often have I felt like I was struggling to force open the mighty castle gate of a new accomplishment and only after sitting back, tired and exhausted, did I realize that all along I had the key of success in my pocket. With a small twist of visualization, the gate opened with ease. I still had to push the gate with all of my might but at least it had been unlocked.

**VISUALIZATION AS AN AMORAL PROCESS**

It is wise to also keep in mind that visualization is an “amoral” power. It can be used for both good and evil. In the area of human sexuality, for instance, we know that the Bahá’í teachings recognize the legitimacy of the sex impulse, but provide for its legitimate expression only through the institution of marriage. Because visualization precedes action, if we want to stimulate or control our sexual behavior, we must first control our visualizations. They can help us or harm us, but we cannot avoid them. Robert Chartham, a British researcher and author on sexual activity, reflecting on the results of his investigations, describes sexual imagination as one of the most important sexual attributes a person can have.

The great majority of people make love more frequently in response to the promptings of their ‘voluntary’ sex-drive than to their ‘involuntary’ sex-drive. That is to say, they deliberately turned on to, or allowed themselves to be turned on by psychological stimuli more often than they were turned on by physiological stimuli. They put their sexual imaginations to work in order to have a sexual experience rather than wait for the chemicals in their bodies to regulate their sexual activity.17

What to do about undesirable thoughts was discussed in the chapter on psychological meditation. Because visualization is simply “purposively applied meditation” the same techniques can be used. Dr. Samuels emphasizes the importance of becoming conscious of our harmful visualizations and dealing with them.

The important thing with negative visualizations is to bring them to light, examine them in a detached, objective way, and then make a positive commitment to change them. Unrecognized negative visualizations counteract the effects of a positive visualization that people consciously hold in their mind. For that reason, it is important to deal with negative visualizations as well as to program positive ones.18

As I mentioned earlier, one of the best ways to stimulate positive visualizations is to surround ourselves with books, pamphlets, wall-hangings and music which contain the Word of God.

**VISUALIZATION APPLIED TO PHYSICAL HEALTH**

How visualization operates has increasingly become the subject of scientific study in fields such as brain research, sports, and health.19 Studies have shown, for example, that skeletal muscles, which are under voluntary or conscious control, show small but measurable amounts of contraction even when a person is only imagining that he or she is running.20 The power of visualization also operates via the autonomic nervous system which operates independently from our conscious awareness.

When a person holds a strong fearful image in his mind’s eye, his body responds . . . with a feeling of “butterflies in the stomach,” a quickened pulse, elevated blood pressure, sweating, goosebumps, and dryness of the mouth. Likewise, when a person holds a strong relaxing image in his mind, his body responds with a lowered heart rate, decreased blood pressure, and, obviously, all his muscles tend to relax.21

Exercise: Sit in a relaxed position. Close your eyes. Imagine yourself going into your kitchen, opening the refrigerator, taking out some lemons, cutting the lemons, squeezing them, and preparing a pitcher of delicious lemonade. Now open your eyes and reflect. Did you feel your mouth salivating? If so, consider the question, “Where are the lemons?” They don’t exist and yet your body responded as if as though they were real. This is only a small demonstration of the power of the mind over the body; the power of thought and visualization.

This power can be used for promoting health simply by seeing yourself in a radiant state of well-being or by focusing your visualizations on particular physical needs such as:

erasing [killing] bacteria or viruses, building new cells to replace damaged ones, making rough areas smooth, making hot areas cool, making sore areas comfortable, making tense areas relax, draining swollen areas, releasing pressure from tight areas, bringing blood to areas that need nutriment and cleansing, making dry areas moist (or moist areas dry), bringing energy to areas that seem tired.22

Stanwood Cobb, a renowned Bahá’í author and educator, told me once that, when ill, he would imagine beams of warm light shining from above on the area of the body that needed increased circulation for healing. Dr. Carl Simonton of Fort Worth, Texas, a radiologist specializing in cancer treatment, has had some success with visualization. He asks his patients, among other things, to “visualize the army of white blood cells coming in, swarming over the cancer, and carrying off the malignant cells which have been weakened or killed by the barrage of high energy particles of radiation therapy. . ..”23

For those of us who need to continually watch our weight, here is an example of a visualization exercise used by T.W. Simeons, an Italian physician specializing in weight control:

See yourself eating less at meal times. You are taking smaller bits of food and are chewing very slowly . . .. See yourself eating and enjoying only the foods that are good for you . . .. See yourself refusing dessert and having coffee. Smell the coffee . . .. Feel relaxed and soothed . . .. Visualize yourself leaving the table with a comfortable feeling. Visualize yourself standing tall and feeling responsible and successful in your own ability to properly handle your food intake.24

In addition to promoting physical health, visualization can be used, for example, to imagine our ideal self, an improved relationship with a particular person with whom we are presently in conflict, job or career scenarios, creativity, travel, or any other goal in its accomplished condition. Visualization can also be used to mentally rehearse future actions such as a musical performance or a public speech.

**VISUALIZATION APPLIED TO PRAYER**

Shoghi Effendi, through his secretary, explained how visualization can be used in the development of our devotional life.

If you find you need to visualize someone when you pray, think of the Master. Through Him you can address Bahá’u’lláh. Gradually try to think of the qualities of the Manifestation, and in that way a mental form will fade out, for after all, the body is not the thing, His Spirit is there and is the essential, everlasting element.25

**ARRANGING ONE’s PERSONAL ENVIRONMENT TO ENHANCE VISUALIZATION**

A supplementary technique which can help stimulate positive visualizations is to create or find pictures, photos or drawings which symbolize to us an ideal, a desired goal, or a long‑dreamed‑of attainment. Music can also stimulate desired feelings such as patience, perseverance, tranquility, dynamic action, etc. Photos or pictures of people who inspire you, heroes, heroines, and role models can be hung on walls. Jewelry with the Greatest Name can help remind us to abide by our Bahá’í ideals and to not commit errors during moments of weakness. Some people hang up pictures of a desired situation to get a clearer image for their visualization: a slender “you” to encourage dieting, a large Bahá’í gathering for lonely pioneers trying to build a community, a student’s academic honor roll certificate to encourage continued hard work, and so on. Jack Canfield, the author of the bestseller *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, told one of my professors that, in order to visualize success, his team enlarged the “New York Times Best Sellers” list to poster size, cut out the #1 book title and replaced it with “Chicken Soup for the Soul.” Each day they would visualize this future possibility open entering the office.

One of the easiest images for people to remember is their childhood bedroom.26 To take advantage of this we should place in children’s rooms from their earliest years and as they grow up items such as: the Greatest Name, a photo of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and other members of the Holy Family, Bahá’í posters, pictures showing the oneness of humankind, the BLDH Circle, etc. Shoghi Effendi, according to Dr. Muhájir, said that “all the youth should have a map of the world in their room, and ask themselves what they can do for a part of the world.”27

My son, Jamál, had always dreamed of pioneering to Africa. For several years he had on his bedroom wall a poster showing a black and white boy walking down a path away from the viewer with their arms placed around one another’s shoulders. Years later, after graduating from high school, he planned to make his pilgrimage and to continue at the World Centre for a year of service as a gardener. His heart was broken when he learned that he did not meet the minimum age requirement. Mysteriously, however, the doors opened for him to give one and a half years of service in Nigeria and neighboring countries. He never imagined that Bahá’u’lláh would help him to fulfill his dream so soon!

Creating visions of praiseworthy possibilities and ideals--this is one of the most important purposes and contributions of artists. We should surround ourselves with music and art which imbue us with noble aspirations of what we and the world might become.

**VERBALIZATION**

As a complement to visualization a process called verbalization can be used. The words (which are often symbols of visual images) stimulate us to visualize a desirable future state. For instance, when we are ill, we can say to ourselves, “I can feel the soothing, healing effects of my medicine and my prayers.” Each day we might say to ourselves: “This day, with the help of my faithful Lord, will be full of accomplishments!”; “Bahá’u’lláh is sending me someone to teach. I must be ready!”; “Teaching the Faith is easy!”;28 or, “Showing my love to my wife and children is a delight!” Favorite quotations from the Bahá’í writings or famous authors can also be used as short verbalizations. Writing messages, reminders or quotations and placing them in strategic places where we will be certain to read them can be very helpful. Reading uplifting literature and poetry can stimulate the visualization of positive goals in our own lives. Writing can do the same whether it be in the form of a journal, poetry or a play.

We must also beware of negative thoughts and verbalizations. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá counsels us to:

Put away every thought and doubtful mentioning and keep thy thoughts entirely on that which uplifts man to the heaven of the gift of God and that which causes every bird that belongs to the Kingdom to soar unto the incomparable realms, the centre of everlasting grandeur in this world.29

In conjunction with verbalization and visualization it is important to make reference to dreams as aides to self‑actualization. Often solutions to problems of all kinds come to us in symbolic, visual form through our dreams. Before going to bed we can tell ourselves to dream about a particular problem and then visualize ourselves waking up to write down the content of the dream. This will be discussed further in the chapter on “rest.”

Exercise: Use one of the visualization or verbalization techniques above and write about your experience. How did you use the technique? What was your intention? What were the results?

Thus far in this section we have discussed the processes of (1) entertaining possibilities (psychological meditation), (2) choosing an alternative (goal-setting), (3) designing a time frame for a plan of action (time management), and (4) regularly imagining the desired outcome (visualization). Now it is time to move into the realm of action. As a transition to this theme I would like to close with a passage from *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* by Henry David Thoreau.

I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty, nor weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.30

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What is the BLDH definition of visualization? How is visualization different from psychological meditation and goal-setting in the BLDH program?
2. How do you or might you use visualization to improve your spiritual well-being? Your social life? Your physical health or material prosperity?
3. What might happen if you regularly visualize a desire that, in your heart of hearts, you really would not want to be materialized?
4. How does verbalization complement visualization?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* Each morning and evening I will take time to visualize or mentally rehearse the accomplishment of my most important goals.
* I will memorize an uplifting quotation and repeat it aloud to myself during my free moments during the day.
* I will study the book *Creative Visualization* by Shakti Gawain (Mill Valley, Calif.: Whatever Publishers, 1978).
* I will take the first two courses of the Silva Method (www.silvamethod.com; Silva International, Inc., P.O. Box 2249, Laredo, TX, 78044-2249).

CHAPTER 31: ACTION

It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

“Action” is not one of the processes on the BLDH Circle because it has been differentiated into the various realms of action: teaching, work, service, communication, etc. In fact, each one of the thirty-six processes is a field of action. If, for example, we do not pray enough, then we need to arise to engage more frequently in this devotional activity. In spite of the action-oriented nature of the BLDH Circle, I think that it is important to discuss separately the importance and impact of our actions. The beloved Master tells us that

the wrong in the world continues to exist just because people talk only of their ideals, and do not strive to put them into practice. If actions took the place of words, the world’s misery would very soon be changed into comfort . . .. Some men and women glory in their exalted thoughts, but if these thoughts never reach the plane of action they remain useless . . . 2

In the previous discussion of the “Dynamics of Prayer” you will recall how Shoghi Effendi, after describing the steps of prayer, meditation, arriving at a decision, having determination, activating faith and confidence, exhorted us to “ACT. Act as though it had all been answered. Then act with tireless, ceaseless energy. . .. Greater than the way it [a prayer] is uttered is the spirit in which it is carried out.”3 “It is our duty and privilege,” the Guardian further counsels us, “to translate the love and devotion we have for our beloved Cause into deeds and actions that will be conducive to the highest good of mankind.”4

Each day we need to remember that our actions have an impact on two levels. On one level we know that the results of our actions will help bring into being the new World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, especially actions in the teaching field. This is clear and evident. During His days in Bagdad, when a person accepted the Faith, Bahá’u’lláh commented, “The Kingdom is being built.”5

On another level, however, we need to reflect on the effect that our actions have on the spiritual realm, in the Abhá Kingdom, on its denizens and on the Supreme Concourse. If we do something that will bring joy to the heart of the Blessed Beauty, His happiness and love will flow back into this world in myriad ways.

All praise and thanksgiving be unto the Blessed Beauty, for calling into action the armies of His Abhá Beauty Kingdom, and sending forth to us His never-interrupted aid, dependable as the rising stars.6 --’Abdu’l-Bahá

Alfred North Whitehead has described beautifully this principle of reciprocity.

What is done in the world is transformed into a reality in heaven, and the reality in heaven passes back into the world. By reason of this reciprocal relation, the love in the world passes into the love in heaven, and floods back again into the world. In this sense, God is the great companion--the fellow-sufferer who understands . . .”7

He then calls us to the profound realization that our “zest for existence” should “be refreshed by the ever-present, unfading importance of our immediate actions, which perish and yet live for evermore.”8

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. Why is “action” not one of the processes on the BLDH Circle?
2. What are two types or levels of outcomes resulting from benevolent actions?
3. How do you think action operates as a magnet drawing the confirmations from above, i.e., from the divine world?

CHAPTER 32: REFLECTION

One hour’s reflection is preferable to seventy years of pious worship.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

**DEFINITION AND RELATION TO OTHER PROCESSES**

Reflection, in terms of the BLDH program, is the meditative faculty turned primarily towards the past and secondarily towards the future, like a mirror which can be used to look behind you to see from where you have come and to look around corners of buildings to where you have not yet been. Reflection is the mental consideration and evaluation of past actions in reference to ideals, laws, principles, aims, and goals. Reflection should result in the taking of decisions which will decrease the disparity between our present actions or spiritual state and our chosen goals and purposes.

Return where you have failed, leave where you have succeeded.2 --Nikos Kazantzakis

The reflective process entails the examination of both our conscious life (conscious thoughts, words, and actions) and our unconscious life (reveries and dreams, for example); for the richer is our understanding of the unconscious, the richer will be the meaning and effectiveness of our conscious life. Reflection is the “calling of ourselves to account each day.” A useful analogy is that of a mirror which can be used to see behind us; to look back to where we have been; to see the past. (See Figure 32.1)

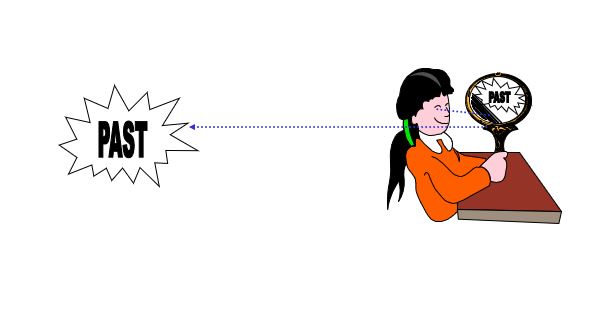


Figure 32. 1: Faculty of Reflection Used as a Mirror to Evaluation One’s Past Actions

Also, just as the merchant tallies his accounts each day to see whether he has earned or lost money, so must we call to a reckoning our thoughts, attitudes, words and deeds. Bahá’u’lláh counsels us to engage in reflection on a daily basis.

O Son of Being! Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds.3

In His Tablet to Sultán ‘Abdu’l-‘Azíz, Bahá’u’lláh goes so far as to recommend that reflection be engaged in during “every moment”:

Set before thine eyes God’s unerring Balance and, as one standing in His Presence, weigh in that Balance thine actions every day, every moment of thy life. Bring thyself to account ere thou art summoned to a reckoning . . .”4

To become aware of our thoughts, dreams, and actions and to judge them is a distinctive feature of human nature. Carl G. Jung states, “by virtue of his reflective faculties, man is raised out of the animal world, and by his mind he demonstrates that nature has put a high premium precisely upon the development of consciousness.”5 Alfred North Whitehead expressed this idea in these words: “Civilized order survives on its merits, and is transformed by its power of recognizing its imperfections.”6

The self-transformation process requires reflection on questions such as, “What can I learn about myself from my actions, failures, accomplishments, thoughts, and dreams?” and “What are these telling me about myself that I did not know before?” For example, Dr. Muhájir, through the process of reflection, discovered that not only were others a test for him, but that he was a test for others. Then, when he read a passage from the Writings of the Báb saying that everything is a test for everything else, he realized that he was also a test *to himself.* After gaining this insight he sometimes would repeat a certain verse from the Writings of the Báb for two hours and beg God to protect him from tests.7 Applying the faculty of reflection to race relations, Dr. Muhájir recommended that “every individual should review his own set of prejudices and gradually eliminate them.”8 This may entail reflecting on the entire course of our life, searching for an understanding of the sources of our prejudices and faults, yet moving beyond these reflections into the realm of action aimed at self-transformation.

Bahá’u’lláh tells us that “for everything there is a sign.”9 During the reflective process we must look for “signs” of health or illness in our behavior: spiritual, psychological, social, or physical. We must become experts at reading the “signs” of our thoughts and actions. For example, if, via reflection, we find that we have stopped praying, giving to the Fund, communicating with our loved ones, or teaching the Faith, we can be certain that some aspect of our health is in danger.

**REFLECTION, JOY, AND SORROW**

There is a Persian saying which states that joy and sorrow embrace one another like lovers. This occurs especially during reflection. We feel elation when we have pleased Bahá’u’lláh by making progress no matter how small it may be.

Let each morn be better than its eve and each morrow richer than its yesterday.10 --Bahá’u’lláh

Likewise, it is during reflection that we are most susceptible to feelings of sorrow and remorse. It is during this time, when we “look back” over the day, the week, the year, our entire life, that we are most likely to acknowledge our shortcomings and faults, and, if we feel truly repentant, to beg God for forgiveness.

When the sinner findeth himself wholly detached and freed from all save God, he should beg forgiveness and pardon from Him.11 --Bahá’u’lláh

The importance of this aspect of reflection--the feeling of shame and the desire for forgiveness--in the transformational process cannot be over-emphasized. It is, perhaps, one of the most difficult processes, for we must face not only our sins of “commission,” but also those of “omission” which leads to that tragic feeling to which human consciousness condemns us: our stark realization of “what could have been, if only I would have . . ..” We must realize that, as Bahá’u’lláh tells us, “mortal man is prone to error, and is ignorant of the mysteries that lie enfolded within him;”12

We spin vast works in our proud minds, and with great toil

push up our muddy bodies to reach the godly peaks,

then flash! a moment’s pleasure, and we’re once more widowed!13

--from *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*, by Nikos Kazantzakis

Nevertheless, we can learn from our errors and become “the breeze that stirreth at the break of day, the soft-flowing waters upon which must depend the very life of all men.”14 It is our nature to have to rely on the mercy and grace of God in order to face each new day, but we must do this without imposing on His mercy.15 And, as with all things, moderation is needed.

Lament not in your hours of trial, neither rejoice therein; seek ye the Middle Way which is the remembrance of Me in your afflictions and reflection over that which may befall you in future.16 Thus informeth you He Who is the Omniscient, He Who is aware.17 --Bahá’u’lláh

“Forget the past, don’t brood over it, it paralyzes us,”18 were the words of the beloved Guardian to a pilgrim. Fully aware that “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step,” we must be patient with our own selves and be happy with even “single steps” of advancement. Shoghi Effendi, through his secretary, tells us that “we must not only be patient with others, infinitely patient! but also with our own poor selves, remembering that even the Prophets of God sometimes got tired and cried out in despair!”19

During reflection our disappointments come to the surface: our own lack of spirituality and that of others; the disunity in our marriage, family or community; acts of injustice, and so on. Bahíyyih Khánum described the lamentations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and how He handled His own sorrows:

In the dark of the night, out of the depths of His bosom, could be heard His burning sighs, and when the day broke, the wondrous music of His prayers would rise up to the denizens of the realm on high.

That Prisoner, grievously wronged, would hide His pain, and keep His wounds from view. In the depths of calamity He would smile, and even when enduring the direst of afflictions He would comfort the hearts. Although He was hemmed about with disasters, and living at the whirlwind’s core of grief, He would still proclaim the Cause of God, and protect the Holy Faith . . . 20

Although His grieving was not caused by his own shortcomings, it does, nevertheless, increase our feelings of empathy to know that the Master, our Exemplar, also knew tremendous hardship. His life tells us about the expression of and the handling of trials and tribulations. Marzieh Gail relates the following, deeply moving experience of her mother while she was on pilgrimage:

Once in the depths of the night, Florence was awakened by abysmal groaning. She listened. The sound was as if it came from one freely abandoning himself to a supposedly unheard sorrow.

“Never had I listened to such suffering, such grief. What should I do? Should I awaken Khan? Should I send for help?”

Then to her astonishment she recognized the voice of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. She asked herself: “What superhuman, not-to-be-borne grief was afflicting His radiant spirit? Who had hurt Him? What were the always-active enemies of the Faith conspiring still further to do?”

He went on sorrowing and grieving, and the wall between their room and His seemed very thin.

“It came to me, that awed as I was by such massive grief, perhaps I could understand it even so: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s tender heart, lacerated and bowed under, was bearing all the suffering and sorrows, the sins and disobedience of all humankind.”

After a while the sounds quieted, and she slept.21

During his days at Balliol College, Oxford, Shoghi Effendi wrote to a friend, “Do you believe me when I say that I, the grandson of the Master, have been victim of painful experiences, sometimes of bitter disappointments, and always of constant anxieties--all justified--for my immediate work and future?”22

‘Abdu’l-Bahá counsels us regarding how to deal with feelings of disappointment and remorse, relating them to patience, gratitude and spiritual happiness:

A thankful person is thankful under all circumstances. A complaining soul complains even if he lives in paradise.23

The tests of God are surrounding you from all directions and many afflictions have occurred; but thanks be to God that you and your honorable husband are patient, thankful and constant. . .. Anybody can be happy in the state of comfort, ease, health, success, pleasure and joy, but if one will be happy and contented in the time of trouble, hardship and prevailing disease, it is the proof of nobility.24

Through suffering he will attain to an eternal happiness which nothing can take from him . . .. To attain eternal happiness one must suffer.25

**REFLECTION AND EVIL**

Reflection and self-appraisal are difficult and painful, yet they are healthy and necessary in order for us to keep in touch with our true nature: our becoming closer with each passing day to the ideals exemplified by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Failing to engage in this process we follow the path of least pain, of least resistance, and of the greatest physical pleasure. We are dominated by our lower, animal nature; our ego. As Bahá’ís, we do not believe in the positive existence of evil.

In creation there is no evil.26 --’Abdu’l-Bahá

We do, however, accept that there are evil thoughts, knowledge and actions which are caused by our being dominated at times by our lower, materialistic, egotistical self.

Know verily that Knowledge is of two kinds; Divine and Satanic. The one welleth out from the fountain of divine inspiration; the other is but a reflection of vain and obscure thoughts. The source of the former is God Himself; the motive force of the latter the whisperings of selfish desire.27

--Bahá’u’lláh

In an enlightening examination of the phenomena of human evil and how to heal it, psychiatrist M. Scott Peck goes so far as to say that a key characteristic of evil people is that they avoid self-reflection:

Since they will do almost anything to avoid the particular pain that comes from self-examination, under ordinary circumstances the evil are the last people who would ever come to psychotherapy. The evil hate the light--the light of goodness that shows them up, the light of scrutiny that exposes them, the light of truth that penetrates their deception.28

Therefore, we must “gird up our loins” and regularly engage in this often-painful process of reflection; trusting that through it the light of God’s knowledge and love will be shed on our lives.

**IMPLEMENTING THE PROCESS OF REFLECTION**

During my working years, my favorite time for reflecting on my thoughts, my actions and the status of my goal attainment is just before retiring to bed. Now that I am retired from work, my favorite time is the first thing after prayers and reciting the Holy Word each morning when I reflect on the previous day and make plans for the current day.

My prayer is the report of a soldier to his general: This is what I did today, this is how I fought to save the entire battle in my own sector, these are the obstacles I found, this is how I plan to fight tomorrow.29 --Nikos Kazantzakis

I have formalized this process by devising a record-keeping system for tracking daily progress. Not everyone may wish to use such a highly structured method, but, in my case, I am always in such desperate need of self-transformation, I need a very concrete and visible tool.

The task of perfecting our own life and character is one that requires all our attention, our will power and energy.30 --Shoghi Effendi, through his secretary

There are many ways of keeping track of the goal-attainment process. This is only one. What follows is a brief description of how the system operates.

1. Purchase an inexpensive notebook of graph paper.

2. Write your daily goals in a column along the left-hand side. (Preferably in pencil so that they can be modified from month to month when necessary.)

3. Write the name of the month at the top of the right-handpage and write the number of the day at the top of each column, i.e, 1 through 28, 29, 30, or 31 depending on the month.

4. At the end of each day evaluate yourself on each goal. (I simply give one point for progress and a zero for lack of fulfillment or improvement.)

5. Add up the points. Write the total over the number possible and give yourself a rating: a percentage; a letter grade; a rating of excellent, good, so-so, or poor; a happy or sad face; or some other such qualifier.

Persevere and add up your accomplishments, rather than . . . dwell on the dark side of things.31

--Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

6. Analyze your successes and failures jotting down in the empty space or in a journal any comments or verbalizations which might help you for the following day; for example, “A great day,” “Go to bed earlier,” “Join exercise group,” or “Eat more vegetables and less pastry.”

7. The following month just fold back or cut the columns that cover the list of goals so that they need not be recopied each month.

For stubborn behavior or thought patterns that do not give in easily to self-transformation; in addition to the application of the processes on the Circle such as prayer, deepening, goal-setting, visualization, etc.; try supplementary methods such as contingency management and contracting (giving or withholding rewards; i.e., “If I do this, I will allow myself to do that, and, if I don’t do it, I will not reward myself.”) or stimulus control (arranging the physical and social environments to include or exclude particular stimuli or “triggers” of certain behaviors).

One technique is reporting to a close friend or family member. An area for improvement is chosen and regular or even daily reports are given or sent to the person. For example, for dieting, the nutritional program rules are laid out and then a list of absolutely everything that was eaten during the day is given or sent to the support person. A rating is made and entered on a bar graph. Discussions revolve around how to keep the bars as high as possible. This technique capitalizes on the principle that guilt and shame are stronger than gluttony! It truly takes the wind out of temptation.

For avoiding Internet pornography there is a website/program that works on this same principle called Covenant Eyes (www.covenanteyes.com). A support person is chosen. The software analyzes all websites visited and rates them for degree of pornography. A report is sent to the support person. Filter programs such as Integrity Online (www.integrity.com) can be used as an alternative or as a supplement, but the “guilt and shame” principle undergirding Covenant Eyes renders it even more effective than filters.

If necessary, professional help should be sought. Seeking such help is recommended by Bahá’u’lláh and is one of the first signs of being on the road to health and well-being.

For reflecting on long-range goals, I carry with me a written list that I review whenever I have a spare moment such as during a bus ride or while waiting for an appointment. Other people set aside a regular block of time every month for serious reflection on long-term aims, central concerns, and even their “list of worries.”

The BLDH Circle itself is a tool for reflection that can be reviewed regularly to check for progress in each area. As mentioned above, it can serve as a mirror that focuses our attention on our past actions in each category. As we gaze into the Circle, we want to see the attributes of God reflected in all aspects of our lives.

The most important thing is to polish the mirrors of hearts in order that they may become illumined and receptive of the divine light.32 --’Abdu’l-Bahá

**THE FLOW OF SELF-TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESSES**

Although there is no definite order for applying the processes on the BLDH Circle to the task of self-transformation, it is helpful to perceive it as a flowing sequence composed of distinguishable yet interconnecting phases. For example, self-transformation can begin with deepening and meditation on the Word of God. It is here that we are inspired with new aims and possibilities. It is here that we become aware of the capacities with which our loving Creator has endowed us. This process can then be supported, when necessary, by investigation of and learning about scientific research that can support us in our transformational endeavor.[[29]](#footnote-29)a We can then pray for guidance and assistance; a process which often flows naturally into meditating on alternative courses of action. After this we set goals, create a time framework, visualize regularly a state of goal-attainment, launch ourselves into the field of action, reflect on the outcomes, and, finally, revise, if necessary, any aspect of the above phases of the transformation process. (See Figure 32.2)

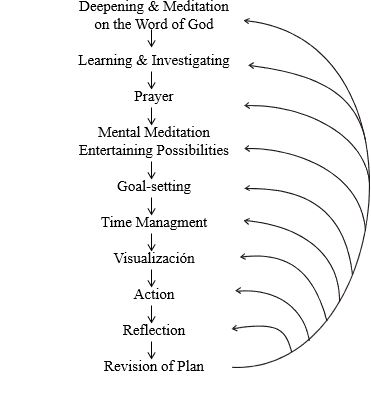


Figure 32. 2: The Physical Flow of Spiritual, Psychological, and Physical Processes

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION REGARDING SELF-TRANSFORMATION**

The following questions are related to the flow of phases delineated above. Although several of them were stated as principles in the chapter on goal-setting,33 they are of such paramount importance that they are repeated here.

1. Did I search in the Writings for guidance regarding the specific aspect of myself that I want or need to transform?

2. Did I look for professional research that would help me with a particular self-transformation project?

3. Did I read about the projects of others for achieving similar goals of self-transformation?

4. Did I search for role models?

5. Did I pray for guidance and help?

6. Did I make a commitment to the Blessed Beauty that I would make an all-out effort to change?

7. Did I consider a wide enough range of alternative courses of action to solve my problem or to bring into objective reality a particular talent or ability?

8. Do I have the skills necessary to attain the chosen goal?

9. Did I limit the number of goals on which I am actively concentrating?

10. Did I choose one of my least difficult goals for the first project?

11. Did I choose a goal in my power to control and which does not depend on changes in others?

12. Did I set my goal only slightly above my present level?

13. Did I write my goal, if possible, in measurable, observable terms?

14. Did I ask someone to help me design a particularly difficult project?

15. Did I rearrange the physical environment to help me reach my goal (e.g., including stimuli such as an image of “my goal attained” and excluding stimuli by turning off my Smart Phone while I am focused on a project)?

16. Did I rearrange my social environment to help me reach my goal, (e.g., cutting off certain negative friendships and building others with more spiritually-minded people)?

17. Did I rearrange my spiritual and psychological environments to help me reach my goal, (e.g., spending more time communing with God or planning a fascinating reward to look forward to)?

18. Did I allow sufficient time to achieve the goal?

19. Did I stick to my time frame for initiating, carrying out, and concluding the activity?

20. Did I regularly visualize myself carrying out the goal-oriented activities and did I visualize myself in a happy state of goal-attainment?

21. Did I ask some special friends to reward me for my small improvements?

22. Did I try out my new skill for the first time around supportive people and at a time when I am most likely to succeed?

23. Did I record my behavior daily and accurately?

24. For goals that are not intrinsically rewarding, did I give myself an extrinsic reward of sufficient significance and on a frequent enough basis?

25. Did I carry out the negative consequences of not reaching my daily goals, i.e., not giving myself the reward?

26. What did I learn about myself?

27. If necessary, did I revise my self-transformation plan based on the results of my reflection?

Engaging daily in the processes described in this inner, Psychological Quadrant is not easy. It requires daily effort and vigilance. At times it can become so tiring and frustrating that a moratorium on self-transformation may need to be declared. During this period of rest, we can immerse ourselves in prayer, deepening, and spiritual meditation. And, as we pause, we can look back and see from where we have come; to see how much progress we have made. While bent over our daily tasks of self-improvement; with our typical pattern of “two steps forward, one step backward, two steps forward, . . .” we can easily fail to sense much progress. It is only by pausing from time to time to take in the longer, more comprehensive panorama of our lives that we can perceive the general trend of forwardness, upwardness, and slow but steady accomplishment. Having caught our breath, we can then strike out again on the road of self-improvement.

We will now examine the outer Psychological Quadrant and its three key processes—learning, vocational development, and creativity.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. Why is reflection sometimes so difficult?
2. How can we help assure that the process of reflection is always a positive experience rather than just a “guilt trip”?
3. Are there special daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly times that can be set aside for personal reflection?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will call myself to account each night before retiring.
* Each day I will use a checklist to keep track of my progress towards my goals.
* Each day I will use a journal to write and reflect on my progress towards my goals.

# SECTION IV, PART 2: THE OUTER PSYCHOLOGICAL QUADRANT

In relation to physical activities, the processes in the Psychological Quadrant are inner in nature, but, in relation to one another, we can make a conceptual distinction between them. The inner quadrant processes--meditation, goal-setting, time-management, visualization, and reflection--are, generally speaking, interactions with one’s self. The outer quadrant processes--learning, vocational development and creativity--involve more interactions with others. For example, when we read, we are actually listening to someone else speak, whereas during meditation we are listening to our own thoughts. Learning and vocational development often require interacting with a teacher and fellow students. Creativity begins on the inner plane of imagination and ideas and is closely allied with meditation--the entertainment of possibilities. But then the idea is brought into the outer world of action and doing. Creativity is expressive by nature. It is not content to remain on the inner plane of the mind. Also, creating something is usually done as a service for the enjoyment and benefit of others.

The three outer psychological processes--learning, vocational development and creativity--are organized somewhat chronologically and they are correlated with a counsel given by the Guardian. When youth would write to Shoghi Effendi asking him which career or field of study to pursue, he would usually refrain from giving them specific advice but would advise them to “learn something about everything and everything about something.”1 Generally speaking, “learning something about everything” corresponds with the first phase of education during which our studies are broad and general. “Learning everything about something” corresponds with the second phase during which we become specialized in a particular craft, service, professional field, or vocation. (Of course, we can also grow simultaneously in both breadth and depth throughout all of the stages of life.) In the BLDH program “learning” corresponds to the acquisition of general knowledge–“learn something about everything” and “vocational development” corresponds to the acquisition of specialized knowledge–“learn everything about something.” After we have learned the techniques of a specialized field from our teachers, we can then become creative with our acquired skills.

Achieving the balance between acquiring general and specialized knowledge is most challenging and yet it has been recognized by Alfred North Whitehead as an essential characteristic of a healthy civilization:

Any knowledge of the finite always involves a reference to the infinitude. The specialization which is necessary for the development of civilized thought had in the last century a most unfortunate effect on the philosophic outlook of learned people, and thence on the development of institutions for the promotion of learning. The various departments of universities emphasized their independence of each other. Also a university gained reputation in proportion to its expansion in terms of such subdivision.

As science grew, minds shrank in width of comprehension . . ..

If civilization is to survive, the expansion of understanding is a prime necessity.2

In *Science and the Modern World* Whitehead addresses the “problem of the balance of the general and specialist education.” He presents no ideal solution but insists that “balance” must be pursued:

Wisdom is the fruit of balanced development. It is this balanced growth of individuality which it should be the aim of education to secure. The most useful discoveries for the immediate future would concern the furtherance of this aim without detriment to the necessary intellectual professionalism.3

In the next chapter on “learning” we will explore more fully the need for a balanced acquisition of knowledge and skills.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What is the difference between the outer and the inner processes found in the Psychological Quadrant of the BLDH Circle?
2. What is the difference between learning and vocational development according to the BLDH program?

CHAPTER 33: LEARNING

Knowledge is one of the wondrous gifts of God. It is incumbent upon everyone to acquire it.1

--Bahá’u’lláh

The first attribute of perfection is learning and the cultural attainments of the mind.2

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

There are certain pillars which have been established as the unshakeable supports of the Faith of God. The mightiest of these is learning and the use of the mind, the expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God.3

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

**DEFINITION, PURPOSE, AND RELATION OF LEARNING TO OTHER PROCESSES**

In the BLDH program “learning” signifies “knowing something about everything.” It challenges us to be broad-minded and conversant in the various fields of human endeavor.

I most urgently request the friends of God to make every effort, as much as lieth within their competence . . .. The harder they strive to widen the scope of their knowledge, the better and more gratifying will be the result. Let the loved ones of God, whether young or old, whether male or female, each according to his capabilities, bestir themselves and spare no efforts to acquire the various current branches of knowledge, both spiritual and secular, and of the arts.

If they do thus, they will flood the world with the Manifest Light, and change this dusty earth into gardens of the Realm of Glory.4 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Open your mind’s eye, see your great and present need. Rise up and struggle, seek education, seek enlightenment.5

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Shoghi Effendi himself, during his university years, before he even knew that He would be the Guardian, faced the onerous challenge of acquiring a broad and comprehensive knowledge-base:

My field of study is so *vast*, I have to acquire, master, and digest so many facts, courses, and books--all essential, all indispensable to my future career in the Cause. The very extent of this immense field is enough to discourage, excite, and overwhelm such a young and inexperienced beginner as myself. Think of the vast field of Economics; of social conditions and problems; of the various religions of the past, their histories and their principles and their force; the acquisition of a sound and literary ability in English to be served for translation purposes; the mastery of public speaking so essential to me, all these and a dozen more--all to be sought, acquired, and digested!

Prayer, faith, perseverance and effort will alone do it.6

Later, as the Guardian, he, through his secretary, counselled the friends to maintain a balance of breadth and depth:

What he wants the Bahá’ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá’í teachings more deeply. . .. We believe in balance in all things; we believe in moderation in all things.7

This striving for balance in learning can be seen in the life of Hand of the Cause of God Zikrullah Khadem. His wife Javidukht relates:

Mr. Khadem set very high standards and believed that the spiritual education of the children must be balanced by excellent academic education. He quoted the beloved Guardian, who told him while he was on pilgrimage that there must be moderation in every area of life. He felt that the Guardian emphasized this so much because, “I wasn't moderate, and he wanted to educate me.”8

The International Teaching Centre, quoting a memorandum from the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, expounds further upon the need for a balanced approach to learning and development, especially amongst the youth:

Spiritual and academic development need not be antagonistic but may well reinforce each other . . .. Excellence in character and in study, undertaken as part of fulfilling one’s purpose in life, both need to be addressed . . ..

The Writings indicate that the fundamental purpose for developing one’s talents is to serve humanity and the Cause of God. The encouragement of youth to achieve academic excellence needs to be considered within the context of the purpose in life for a believer and the needs of the growing Bahá’í community. To focus only on one aspect of the Teachings serves to give undue emphasis on this aspect and hence creates a problematic situation . . .. Clearly what is required in encouraging youth is balance.9

We need to continue to learn throughout our lives. Learning should not end when we leave school or obtain a degree. The concept of “life-long learning” was advocated by the Master:

Study the sciences, acquire more and more knowledge. Assuredly one may learn to the end of one’s life! Use your knowledge always for the benefit of others.10 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

One of the purposes of learning, as has already been mentioned in the above quotations, is to enable us to better serve humankind. Bahá’u’lláh states that “such arts and sciences . . . as are productive of good results, and bring forth their fruit, and are conducive to the well-being and tranquility of men have been, and will remain, acceptable before God.”11

Another purpose of learning is to increase our knowledge of God via either of His two books; the Book of Revelation or the “book of creation.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Both are pathways for augmenting our understanding of our Creator.

The Book of God is wide open, and His Word is summoning mankind unto Him.12 --Bahá’u’lláh

Know thou that every created thing is a sign of the revelation of God.13 --Bahá’u’lláh

The sciences of this world are droplets of reality; if then they lead not to reality, what fruit can come of illusion? By the one true God! If learning be not a means of access to Him, the Most Manifest, it is nothing but evident loss.14 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

It is important for us to understand that God is not only the end of all knowledge and learning, He is also their source.

The source of all learning is the knowledge of God, exalted be His Glory, and this cannot be attained save through the knowledge of His Divine Manifestation.15 --Bahá’u’lláh

All the wondrous works ye behold in this world have been manifested through the operation of His supreme and exalted Will, His wondrous and inflexible purpose.16 --Bahá’u’lláh

As we gain knowledge, we must always compare it with the Bahá’í teachings. Science is in its infancy. The Revelation is our standard of reference. If a scientific statement contradicts the Writings, we must abide by the Writings. If the finding or statement supports the teachings, it will bring honor and glory to the author or investigator.

Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring balance established amongst men.17 --Bahá’u’lláh

Learning about and studying the Bahá’í teachings, or carrying out scholarly research on the Faith, in the BLDH program, are not to be equated with the process of deepening. In his article “Scholarship and the Bahá’í Community” Moojan Momen observes that scholarship is more analytical in its approach while deepening is more meditative.18 Therefore, if we are involved in a Bahá’í study class or Bahá’í scholarship, we must also find time for deepening.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. How can learning enhance the self-transformation process?
2. Why is it good to know something about everything?
3. How can we go about learning or knowing something about everything?
4. Can you remember and/or tell about people you knew/know who were/are life-long learners?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will learn about the following topics:
* I will learn the following skills:
* I will read broadly by studying the following books:
* I will take the following courses:
* I will take the following trips or tours:
* I will visit the following museums:
* I will interview the following experts:
* I will study the compilation *Scholarship: Extracts from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and from the letters of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice*, (Mona Vale, Australia: Bahá’í Publications Australia, 1995).
* I will read *Peak Learning: A Master Course in Learning How to Learn* by Ronald Gross (the person who coined the term “life-long learning”), (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1991).

CHAPTER 34: VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

It is incumbent on every one to engage in crafts and professions.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

**DEFINITION AND RELATION OF VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO OTHER PROCESSES**

Vocational development in the BLDH program concerns “knowing everything about something;” learning and growing in a specialized livelihood, occupation, trade, craft, or profession. The word “vocation” comes from the Latin *vocatio* meaning “a calling.” A “calling” is an inner voice, an intuitive attraction to a particular type of work.

The best of men are they that earn a livelihood by their calling.2 --Bahá’u’lláh

True reliance is for the servant to pursue his profession and calling in this world . . .3 --Bahá’u’lláh

In the BLDH program “vocational development” is closely related to but different from “work.” “Work” is the carrying out of a particular livelihood; “vocational development” is specializing and growing in that livelihood. We can never be content with just having a job. The beloved Master exhorts us to continually become more proficient, to gain greater expertise, and to keep ourselves at the forefront in our chosen field of endeavor.

Attaining perfection in one’s profession in this merciful period is considered to be worship of God.4

Thou must endeavor greatly so that thou mayest become unique in thy profession and famous in those parts, because attaining perfection in one’s profession in this merciful period is considered to be worship of God.5

The more a man struggles, the more trials he bears in learning a profession or craft, the more skillful and adept he becomes. One whose days are leisurely and inactive never becomes proficient in anything. (pilgrim’s notes)6

**FINDING TIME FOR VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Finding time to invest in the furtherance of one’s own professional training is not easy. Investigator and author Daniel L. Duke found that “finding time to tackle new goals, for example, was a universal problem. Many [of the professional participants in the study] agreed that the demands of one’s job or personal life can be so great as to preclude professional growth.”7 Just maintaining the status quo is often challenging enough.

A good place to start, however, is learning about and applying the techniques of time management. (See Chapter 29)

**BALANCING SELF-CONFIDENCE AND HUMILITY**

One of the greatest challenges of vocational development is to balance the self-confidence required to become “famous,” “unique,” and “proficient” with a deep sense of humility.

Humility exalteth man to the heaven of glory and power, whilst pride abaseth him to the depths of wretchedness and degradation.8 --Bahá’u’lláh

According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the key seems to lie in the ability to consider “attaining perfection” as a humble act in one’s worship of God.

And whilst thou art occupied with thy profession, thou canst remember the True One.9

At the time when thou art working for such a scientific attainment, thou must be controlled by the attraction of the love of thy Glorious Lord and mindful of mentioning His splendid Name.10

If a man engages with all his power in the acquisition of a science or in the perfection of an art, it is as if he has been worshiping God in the churches and temples.11

On the “building self-confidence” side of the delicate balance, I would like to share with the reader two very stimulating and helpful lists regarding professional growth which were given to me by my former professor, Dr. Anne C. Boe, president of Career Networks. Both of them deal with a concept termed “networking” which may not be familiar to everyone. Networking is a system for promoting one’s own professional advancement and growth by increasing the number and quality of connections that one has with people in his or her professional field.

**IS YOUR NET-WORKING?**

Keys to Successful Networking:

- Make yourself visible.

- Exhibit enthusiasm for your product and yourself.

- Offer to do voluntary presentations.

- Present a positive, confident, enthusiastic attitude.

- Be honest about yourself.

- Let others know why they need your talents.

- Attend professional conferences for exposure.

- Work at the 150 percent level.

- Be articulate.

- Develop the technical knowledge and experience for your field.

- Capitalize on your strengths.

- Share your business cards.

- Have a commitment attitude.

- Believe in the total you.

- Write and publish an article.

- Share your knowledge at all times.

- Give without expectation.

- Attend important meetings.

- Develop a portfolio.

- Use “we” rather than “I.”

- Talk positively.

- Publicize yourself through professional brochures, newsletters, etc.

- Know your weaknesses.

- Present a professional image.

- Find out what’s in it for them and tell them.

- Develop supportive, listening behaviors.

- Have fun and enjoy yourself.

- Be persistent.

- Decide to be a winner.

**STEPS FOR MAXIMIZING YOUR CAREER POTENTIAL**

1. Learn to take risks. Ask yourself, “What would happen if I do not . . .?” or “Where will I be in 2, 5, 10 years if I choose to . . .?”
2. Network with people every day. Attend professional organization meetings so others know who you are and what you can do. Take an active role in organizations.
3. Be willing to invest in yourself. Attend workshops and/or classes in your career area. Take a successful person to lunch once a month and interview them for information. Learn how they became successful.
4. Keep informed of the latest developments in your field. Read and/or subscribe to journals, articles, and book lists.
5. Always keep your résumé up-to-date. You never know when you will want to send or give it to someone. Have your résumé professionally typed. Keep a couple of hard copies on hand.
6. Keep a “me” file in your desk drawer. This will become your portfolio for your next job search.
7. Develop a career alternatives file. Save news and journal articles, people’s names, and other interesting material.
8. Develop all your career talents. Do not cut yourself off from other career opportunities no matter how fantastic your present job is. Also work to develop enjoyable hobbies.
9. Express your goals to other people. You will be known more by your actions than by your words. By sharing your goals, you validate your career planning.
10. Surround yourself with positive people. These are people who provide mutuality and want you to reach your full career-human potential. Such people also provide unconditional acceptance.
11. Develop a “GO FOR IT” attitude!12

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. How can we know what our “calling” is?
2. Why do you think that, for a Bahá’í, it is not sufficient to just get a job and keep it?
3. How can vocational development be worked into a busy person’s schedule?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will enroll in the following development programs for my craft or profession:
* I will subscribe to and read the following journals related to my craft or profession:
* I will join the following organization(s) related to my craft or profession:
* I will meet the following experts in my field:
* I will read the following books in my field:
* I will read the book *Reawakening the Spirit in Work* by Jack Hawley (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).

CHAPTER 35: CREATIVITY

Great and blessed is this Day--the Day in which all that lay latent in man hath been and will be made manifest.1 --Bahá´u´lláh

Creativity has been included in the BLDH program for two reasons. Firstly, it is one of the most basic processes in our lives and in creation itself. Secondly, by reflecting on the status of our creativity, we can keep ourselves from falling into overly-habitual ways of perceiving, thinking, feeling, and acting; and we can spark our own creative imaginations, thereby adding new zest, freshness, and beauty to all of our life processes.

**WHAT IS CREATIVITY?**

Creativity has many meanings and applications extending from the most general and abstract to the most specific and practical. It is one of the attributes of God. The Báb explains that God is continually engaged in the creative process. He did not simply create the universe at a given point in time and then step back to allow it to operate on its own like some sort of machine. The Creator has always been creating in the past and will continue to do so in the future:

The process of His creation hath had no beginning and can have no end, otherwise it would necessitate the cessation of His celestial grace.2

The broadest definition of this process that I have found is that of Alfred North Whitehead who states that “creativity is the actualization of potentiality.”3 This is the essence of the attribute that we share with God--the ability to take something that only exists in the invisible world of ideas and potential and translate it to the visible world; in other words, the power of transformation. In the case of human beings, the new creation takes the form of words, deeds, movements, inventions, works of art, etc.

Whitehead further states that “no entity can be divorced from the notion of creativity.”4 Everything is changing, leaving behind what it was and becoming something new and different--no matter how slight that newness may be and no matter how many other millions of beings have produced the same creative act. In the case of human beings, for example, a child who learns to mark with a crayon or walk for the first time is being creative and feels the excitement of the creative act, even though millions of other children have already learned to draw and to walk. Therefore, creativity is not just artwork that is different from the norm. Creativity is bubbling up all around us at every moment--in nature, in the affairs of the peoples and nations of the world, and in the life of every person. In the realm of human endeavor, in order for there to be a great surge forward, creativity stands in need of continual recognition, applause, and encouragement.

Creativity in an atom may consist of an electron choosing a new path around the nucleus, an event which is beyond our unaided sense perception. Otherwise, the life of an electron is quite routine and unwavering in its pattern. In human life, however, our routines, habits, and patterned ways of thinking and doing need to be balanced with creativity. David Bohm, a renowned theoretical physicist, in a discussion of “proposals” regarding the nature of reality and its various manifestations such as orchestras, running, electrons, human life, etc., refers to this needed balance between pattern and departure from pattern; the need for repetition and for creativity:

There is a tendency to move to a harmony . . . harmony is movement. But the question really is deeper than that because it’s a question of whether movement is repetitive or creative. And harmony requires creativity, but that requires some disharmony.

You see, if you take a musical composition, harmony is the harmony of movement, and movement of various themes which have tension between them.

. . . if any pattern of movement is established and starts to become repetitive, then that is a kind of disharmony. At least in certain areas it may be disharmonious; it’s part of the harmony of the universe that the pattern of the electrons is repetitive; but it’s not part of the harmony of human beings to continually repeat a pattern.5

This departure from a pattern into newness; the incorporation of fresh ways of doing anything is what Whitehead calls “novelty.” He says that “‘creativity’ is the principle of novelty,” that “‘creativity’ introduces novelty,”6 and that “‘becoming’ is a creative advance into novelty.”7

Walter D. Leopold describes the schemes of thought of A. N. Whitehead and Henri Matisse in which creativity is defined as a two-phase process: (1) “the constant absorbing and experiencing of new and stimulating material and” (2) “the expression of it in a continuously changing, more perfected, and personal fashion.”8 In simpler terms we might say that creativity means putting things together in new ways.

The implications of this approach to creativity for Bahá’í life will be discussed later.

**CONNECTION BETWEEN CREATIVITY AND THE PROCESSES OF THE INNER SPIRITUAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL QUADRANTS**

For a spiritually-oriented person creativity can begin at an inspirational level, springing from our contact with the Word of God through prayer, meditation and deepening. Bahá’u’lláh speaks of this creative power:

Such arts and material means as are now manifest have been achieved by virtue of His knowledge and wisdom which have been revealed in Epistles and Tablets through His Most Exalted Pen--a Pen out of whose treasury pearls of wisdom and utterance and the arts and crafts of the world are brought to light.9

As ideas come bubbling up to the level of consciousness, the mind begins to work on them. Bahá’u’lláh describes reflection, which is akin to psychological meditation, visualization, and imagination, as a rich mine; a source of creative works which should be placed at the service of humanity:

O people of Bahá! The source of crafts, sciences and arts is the power of reflection. Make ye every effort that out of this ideal mine there may gleam forth such pearls of wisdom and utterance as will promote the well-being and harmony of all the kindreds of the earth.10

Compatible with this approach is a view of creativity as a process which spans both the outer and inner realms; both the conscious and the unconscious mind, as set forth by Dr. Graham Wallis in *The Art of Thought*. He sees creativity as a four-stage process:

(1) Preparation: the gathering of information and ideas

(2) Incubation: allowing the unconscious to work on the solution (This is unconscious meditation. It occurs when the mind is not concentrated on the problem or idea, during periods of free association, rest, leisure, and even during our dreams [See chapter 40 regarding dreams].)

(3) Illumination: the solution comes spontaneously and joyously (the “Eureka!” and “Ahá!” moments of life)

(4) Verification: trying out the idea and revising it if necessary11

(This journey of the creative effort from the inner realm of spirit, through the processes of the mind and on to the field of action parallels the dynamic flow of processes diagramed in Figure IV.1.2.)

**APPLYING CREATIVITY TO ALL ASPECTS OF LIFE**

Reflecting this attribute of God--creativity--in our personal life contributes to the manifestation of His Kingdom on Earth; it becomes a form of worship and a means for carrying forward an ever-advancing civilization.

As we meditate on creativity in relation to the other processes on the Circle, we need to ask ourselves how we can bring freshness, newness, and novelty into each area: the Nineteen Day Feasts, family meals, home decoration, firesides, ways of communicating with others, our teaching methods, our work, our self-expression through the arts, and many others. Even something as mundane as the dinner table can be creatively beautified without major expense. The dining room of the Master, for example, was simply decorated yet its enchantment left a lasting impression on the mind of a pilgrim who wrote:

Honoring Hají Khurásání, one night dinner was served in the large dining room at a long table covered with a snow-white cloth over which white petals of Indian jasmine were profusely scattered. In one corner of the room tall potted plants and flowering vines were banked, making the effect of a conservatory.12

**CREATIVITY AND THE ARTS**

Thinking creatively to improve any and all aspects of our daily life can be further enhanced by the creative arts--either producing them or enjoying the creations of others. I think that it would be marvelous if every boy and girl could graduate from school with competence in a repertoire of dances, at least one visual art, at least one musical instrument, singing, and some experience in the performing arts. It would make this world such a happier place.[[31]](#footnote-31)

In general, the noblest function of the arts is to set forth ideals which lure us forward in the process of transforming ourselves and the world. Much could be said about how each one of the arts can enhance the self-transformation process. A brief discussion of music will suffice for illustrative purposes. Using the BLDH Circle as an analytical tool, we can see how music can be used for spiritual, social, psychological, and physical purposes.

In the spiritual realm music can draw us closer to God and increase our spirituality.

We have made music a ladder by which souls may ascend to the realm on high.13 --Bahá’u’lláh

Music is one of the important arts. It has a great effect upon the human spirit . . . music is a material affair, yet its tremendous effect is spiritual, and its greatest attachment is to the realm of the spirit.14

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Mary Priestly, a music therapist, states:

Music faces us with the realization that there are two worlds: the inner and the outer. The inner is often incommunicable, a spiritual world which is difficult to enter from the outer world where we normally speak to one another. Music is a bridge for us by which we can reach this inner world.15

An African approach to music is similar. Yaya Diallo, in *The Healing Drum*, writes:

The Minianka understand music as a bridge between the visible and invisible realms. The human voice and musical sounds produced on instruments arise from intentions in the invisible human interior and penetrate to the invisible interior of listeners as well as to the surrounding invisible realm of spirits and ancestors.[[32]](#footnote-32)a Music thus can be a potent force for maintaining or restoring human harmony with the cosmos. This is its ultimate purpose in Minianka culture.16

In the social realm music can heighten a targeted emotion and it can be used to unify people around a common goal. In relation to emotions, the Master states:

Whatever is in the heart of man, melody moves and awakens. If a heart full of good feelings and a pure voice are joined together, a great effect is produced. For instance, if there be love in the heart, through melody, it will increase until its intensity can scarcely be borne; but if bad thoughts are in the heart such as hatred, it will increase and multiply. For instance, the music used in war awakens the desire for bloodshed. The meaning is that melody causes whatever feeling is in the heart to increase.

Some feelings occur accidentally and some have a foundation. For example: some people are naturally kind, but they may be accidentally upset by a wave of anger. But if they hear music, the true nature will reassert itself. Music really awakens the real, natural nature, the initial essence.17

In regards to the social function of music, Alanna Robertson, in her article “Music: Its Influence on the Spirit” states:

Inherent in music are qualities which make it conducive to bringing souls together . . . music is in a very real sense a common language of all the peoples of the earth . . .

In order for a group to perform music they must unite. . .18

According to Yaya Diallo,

In the Minianka view and practice of music, harmony is the central concept--the fitting combination and pleasing interaction of parts in a whole . . . The entire Minianka village social structure and culture seek to sustain the lives of the people in harmony with one another, the Creator, the ancestors, the spirits of the bush, and nature. Kle-kolo, the path of the Creator, is the path of harmony. Weaknesses of human character, such as envy, jealousy, and hatred, are sources of disharmony . . .. 19

In the mental/intellectual sphere of life, music can enhance learning and memory, increase sensori-motor competence, facilitate the transmission of abstract concepts, and create positive feelings toward what is being studied.

Music can also be used to promote physical healing. In the African Minianka villages of Fienso and Zangasso, for instance,

the musicians were healers, the healers musicians. The word musician itself implies the role of healer. From the Minianka perspective, it is inconceivable that the responsibilities for making music and restoring health should be separate, as they are in the West.20

Personally, I like to surround myself with music: in the car, the bathroom, bedroom, office and family room. I use it to inspire myself: when I feel sad; in the morning to get myself moving; and when I need to motivate myself to carry out a mundane task such as cooking, cleaning, painting a room, etc. When I can’t sleep at night, sometimes soothing music will act as a sedative. Music was always a part of our family nights, Nineteen Day Feasts, Holy Day observances, and firesides. It is an excellent companion which can buoy us up even in the most bleak and bitter of times.

A worthwhile exercise is to examine the BLDH Circle processes to see where we can integrate music and other creative arts such as the visual arts, poetry and drama in order to increase their quality and beauty.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What is the BLDH definition of “creativity”?
2. What are some common causes for a lack of creativity in our lives? How can these be counteracted and a spirit of creativity restored?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will regularly use the BLDH Circle to check my life for creativity with the purpose of keeping all processes fresh and lively; as sources of joy and delight instead of drudgery and boredom.
* I will keep a notebook for jotting down creative ideas which can be worked on later: ideas for teaching, for songs, for a drama, or a design.
* I will set aside time for creative endeavors--daily, weekly, or during vacation time.

# SECTION V: THE PHYSICAL QUADRANT

Whoso hath loved Thee, can never feel attached to his own self, except for the purpose of furthering Thy Cause.1

--Bahá’u’lláh

**THE PURPOSE OF CARING FOR OUR PHYSICAL WELL-BEING**

The “self” referred to by Bahá’u’lláh in the above quotation applies especially to the “physical self” --the physical body and the physical resources in the environment which belong to the self. These are our means and instruments for serving the Cause and, as an extension of this purpose, for serving humanity:

Looking after one’s health is done with two intentions. Man may take good care of his body for the purpose of satisfying his personal wishes. Or, he may look after his health with the good intention of serving humanity and of living long enough to perform his duty toward mankind. The latter is most commendable.2 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

This same purpose is confirmed by the Guardian (through his secretary):

You should always bear in mind Bahá’u’lláh’s counsel that we should take the utmost care of our health, surely not because it is an end in itself, but as a necessary means of serving His Cause.3

**THE PHYSICAL-SPIRITUAL CONNECTION**

As we explore the various aspects of physical well-being a recurring theme will be the intimate connection between the physical world and the spiritual world; between the body and the soul; between the physical self and the social, psychological, and spiritual Self. The Báb describes the spirit as an “inner temple” which is on the “throne” of the physical body. The connection is so intimate that the spirit can feel and is aware of the state of the body:

As this physical frame is the throne of the inner temple, whatever occurs to the former is felt by the latter. In reality that which takes delight in joy or is saddened by pain is the inner temple of the body, not the body itself. Since this physical body is the throne whereon the inner temple is established, God hath ordained that the body be preserved to the extent possible, so that nothing that causeth repugnance may be experienced. The inner temple beholdeth its physical frame, which is its throne. Thus, if the latter is accorded respect, it is as if the former is the recipient. The converse is likewise true.4

That which “causeth repugnance” could include uncleanliness; disease; obesity; or addiction to alcohol, sugar, drugs, or anything else. The purpose of physical health then is to “preserve” the body so that the spirit will not “experience” any of these disagreeable conditions.

The connection between spiritual and physical well-being extends beyond the body to the physical environment around us. In the following passage from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, He emphasizes the spiritual impact made by physical beauty and its attributes:

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 motion, a well-written book, pleasing garments--in fact, all things that have in themselves grace or beauty are pleasing to the heart and spirit . . .5

The attention that the Guardian gave to the connection between what we perceive through the physical senses and our emotions and spirit was captured by Professor Alaine Locke of Howard University in Washington who described a walk that he took with Shoghi Effendi through the gardens surrounding the Shrine of the Báb:

Shoghi Effendi is a master of detail as well as of principle, of executive foresight as well as of projective vision. But I have never heard details so redeemed of their natural triviality as when talking to him of the plans for the beautifying and laying out of the terraces and gardens. They were important because they all were meant to dramatize the emotion of the place and quicken the soul even through the senses.6

Nikos Kazantzakis expressed his intuitive understanding of this body/soul connection in his characteristic, down-to-earth way:

I love the body. The flesh seems holy to me, it too is from God. And don’t become angry if I tell you something else: the flesh has a glimmer from the soul, and the soul has a fleshly fuzz. They live together in harmonious balance like two young girls who are good friends and neighbors.7

**PRIORITIES**

Our spiritual well-being depends greatly on and is profoundly influenced by our physical well-being. According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá both material and spiritual advancement need their due “proportion” of our attention, but in the final analysis the life of the body is temporary and the soul is eternal, therefore the spiritual side of life is of higher priority.

The body of man is accidental; it is of no importance. The time of its disintegration will inevitably come. But the spirit of man is essential and therefore eternal. It is a divine bounty. It is the effulgence of the Sun of Reality and therefore of greater importance than the physical body.8

Shoghi Effendi, in an inspiring passage, describes how the true servants of the Cause give far more importance to spiritual goals than to material well-being and comfort:

Of such men and women it may be truly said that to them ‘every foreign land is a fatherland, and every fatherland a foreign land’. For their citizenship . . . is in the Kingdom of Bahá’u’lláh. Though willing to share to the utmost the temporal benefits and the fleeting joys which this earthly life can confer, though eager to participate in whatever activity that conduces to the richness, the happiness and peace of that life, they can at no time forget that it constitutes no more than a transient, a very brief stage of their existence, that they who live it are but pilgrims and wayfarers whose goal is the Celestial City, and whose home [is] the Country of never-failing joy and brightness.9

**CONTROLLING THE BODY AND THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

The following is one of my favorite images used by Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary) and expanded upon by Amatu’l Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum:

It--the body--is like a horse which carries the personality and spirit, and as such should be well cared for so it can do its work! 10 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

The soul is the horseman, the body the horse. Unless the rider is skilled and can master his steed and move as one with it, he either continually struggles with it or is run away with by it. Most of us are clinging like grim death to our runaway selves these days; we know nothing about horses, we are solely occupied in not falling off and in not, if possible, having others notice our predicament--we are not trained riders at all; we need a good stiff course in equestrianism!11

--Rúhíyyih Rabbani

If we relate this analogy to the BLDH Circle, we see that the “horses” which we have trouble controlling are the physical passions for food, sex, and physical prowess in exercising power over others. The soul and its spiritual and mental powers should be the rider. If we allow the star in the center of the Circle to represent the soul, we can see the legs of the soul straddling the horse of the Physical Quadrant. Carrying the relationship still further, the BLDH program is an attempt to create “a good stiff course” in spiritual “equestrianism.”

Besides controlling our physical body, we also need to control, as much as we possibly can, the stimuli from the physical environment which surrounds us; for example: controlling noise; controlling the quantity and the content of Internet and television viewing; purchasing only healthy food; decorating our home with beautiful plants and inspirational works of art; hanging the Greatest Name in a special place; displaying the photo of the Master in key locations; placing the BLDH Circle where it can be re-viewed regularly; setting out prayer books and spiritual literature within easy, everyday reach; and filling the air with uplifting music. If we do a good job of doing this, it will greatly facilitate the control of the self.

**HABITS**

When I meditate on the importance of establishing healthy physical routines and habits in areas such as cleanliness, eating, physical fitness, and home maintenance, I am reminded of a famous quotation of Alfred North Whitehead:

Civilization advances by extending the number of important operations which we can perform without thinking about them.12

When we apply this principle to our personal life, we see that once a routine is established, we don’t have to think about it or force ourselves to do it. For example, at a certain time each day, we may go for a brisk walk. While we are engaged in the exercise, we can meditate or think about other, more important things. Before we know it, our exercise time is over. The health-building routine was carried out automatically. This same dynamic can be applied to all areas of healthy living until we naturally do “the Bahá’í thing”; the best thing: making the right moral choice, choosing the healthiest food, turning to God through prayer on a daily basis, hugging our children when we see them after a long hard day, sticking to our family budget, etc. As these habits are put into place in our character, we are enabled to give more attention to the cutting edge of our individual development and the establishment of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. We thus become more and more effective and competent as instruments in His hands; instruments which will not break and crumble like wet chalk with the slightest pressure of trials and tribulations.

**THE ORGANIZATION OF THE PHYSICAL QUADRANT**

The Inner Physical Quadrant concerns those processes which contribute to the physical health of the individual: hygiene, nutrition, exercise, leisure, and rest. The Outer Physical Quadrant deals with those processes which are more external in nature: care of property (our outer physical environment), work (the way we earn material resources for our sustenance), and budget (the way we manage and plan for the use of our income).

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. Why is spiritual health ultimately more important than physical health?
2. Why should physical health not be neglected?
3. Can physical things affect the spirit? Explain.
4. As Bahá’ís, is it permissible for us to partake of the physical pleasures of life? Explain.

**SAMPLE GOALS FOR THE PHYSICAL QUADRANT AS A WHOLE**

* I will reflect on how I distribute my time between the Physical Quadrant processes and the other quadrants of the BLDH Circle.
* I w ill read the compilation from the Bahá’í writings on health and healing titled *The Throne of the Inner Temple* (comp. Elias Zohoori [Kingston, Jamaica: University Printery and School of Printing, University of the West Indies, 1985]).
* I will read *Atomic Habits—Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones* by James Clear (New York, NY: Avery, 2018).

# SECTION V, PART 1: THE INNER PHYSICAL QUADRANT

If the health and well-being of the body be expended in the path of the Kingdom, this is very acceptable and praiseworthy, and if it be expended to the benefit of the human world in general--even though it be to their material (or bodily) benefit--and be a means of doing good, that is also acceptable. But if the health and welfare of man be spent in sensual desires, in a life on the animal plane, and in devilish pursuits--then disease were better than such health; nay, death itself were preferable to such a life. If thou art desirous of health, wish thou health for serving the Kingdom. I hope that thou mayest attain perfect insight, inflexible resolution, complete health, and spiritual and physical strength in order that thou mayest drink from the fountain of eternal life and be assisted by the spirit of divine confirmation.1 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

The processes of the Inner Physical Quadrant revolve around the promotion of personal physical health, the purpose of which, as explained by the Master, is to be better able to serve the Cause and humanity. Khalil A. Khavari, Ph.D. and Sue Williston Khavari, M.A. give excellent advice regarding the importance of this set of processes:

Many people anticipate old age from the financial point of view by saving money and enrolling in pension plans. Other than that, people have a tendency to put growing old out of their minds and just drift into it. Here again, however, the most constructive way of dealing with the situation is to prepare for it in advance. Even if you are now only in your late twenties or early thirties, you have reached a vantage point from which you can begin to see beyond your youth. This is the time to get your physical well-being in order, if you have not done so already. Regular exercise, a well balanced diet, healthy stress management, good dental care--these are things that you probably know all about and plan to do “some day.” That day is here. It is necessary to establish desirable habits while the resilience of youth is still with you. In other words, you have to invest in your body from now on because the credit of youth will eventually run out.2

The chapters in the Inner Physical Quadrant do not have a fixed order. I tried to organize them in a somewhat logical, chronological sequence in order to facilitate memory: hygiene, nutrition, exercise, leisure, and rest. In a hypothetical person’s life, he or she may begin the day by taking care of his/her hygienic needs, then have a nutritious breakfast before leaving for work or school. In the afternoon an exercise routine can be scheduled followed by some combination of lighter tasks or study and leisure-time activity and then a good night’s rest. The order of the activities will change, of course, according to the needs of each person.

**QUESTION FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, it is acceptable to expend one’s health for what purposes? For what ends is it not acceptable?
2. Why should even young people be concerned about their health?

CHAPTER 36: HYGIENE

The word “hygiene” comes from the Greek word *hygieinós* which means “healthful.” According to Webster hygiene means “(1) the application of scientific knowledge to the preservation of health and prevention of the spread of disease. (2) a condition or practice conducive to the preservation of health, as cleanliness.”1 In this chapter the two significances of hygiene will be explored: the broader meaning--physical health, and the narrower meaning--physical cleanliness.

**THE MANIFOLD NATURE OF HEALTH**

To view health as only biological well-being or the absence of disease is very limited. It is, however, the basic approach to medicine in the West: find the physical cause of illness and remove it. A more wholistic approach is advocated in the teachings of the Faith. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speaks of “spiritual healing” and “material healing”;2 and spiritual and physical health: “I hope thou wilt become as a rising light and obtain spiritual health--and spiritual health is conducive to physical health.”3

Spiritual health can be brought about through several means. The most fundamental is the acceptance of God’s Messenger for this day. Accepting Bahá’u’lláh gives us purpose and meaning to our lives by connecting us to God and His Divine Plan. “Meaninglessness,” according to C.G. Jung, “inhibits fullness of life and is therefore equivalent to disease.”4 Other ingredients of spiritual health include: firmness in the Covenant, following the laws and admonitions of Bahá’u’lláh (especially the processes discussed in the Spiritual Quadrant), and drawing upon the power of the Holy Spirit on a daily basis through prayer and service.

Physical health can be brought about by establishing the proper balance of nutrients in the body and avoiding the intake of toxins.

The teachings also refer to emotional and mental well-being, health, and healing. Dr. J. E. Esslemont presents this aspect of health in *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era*:

Powerful effects result from the patient’s own mental states, and “suggestion” may play an important part in determining these states. Fear, anger, worry, et cetera, are very prejudicial to health, while hope, love, joy, et cetera, are correspondingly beneficial.5

He then goes on to quote Bahá’u’lláh:

Verily the most necessary thing is contentment under all circumstances; by this one is preserved from morbid conditions and from lassitude. Yield not to grief and sorrow: they cause the greatest misery. Jealousy consumeth the body and anger doth burn the liver: avoid these two as you would a lion.6

Along these same lines ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that “joy gives us wings. In times of joy our strength is more vital, our intellect keener. . .. But when sadness visits us, our strength leaves us.”7 He also explains that a form of mental healing can result “from the entire concentration of the mind of a strong person upon a sick person. . .”8

The BLDH Circle captures this wholistic approach to health in a visual way. It views health as being four-fold: spiritual health, mental health, social health, and physical health. The World Health Organization’s shift towards this more wholistic approach can be seen in their definition of health as “the state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”9

Dr. Ethel G. Martens, in her discussion of a Bahá’í approach to international health, states, “The prophets through the ages have offered guidance for four dimensions of well-being--physical, psychological, social, and spiritual. If we had followed their advice, we would not be faced with some of today’s tremendous health problems.”10 These four types of health, in my understanding, are hierarchically “nested.” (See Figure 36.1) That is, the more highly evolved, comprehensive, and “upper” types of health have a greater directing and controlling force over the “lower” forms of health. Hence, physical illness need not be the major force which controls and determines the state of our spiritual health. But our spiritual state can greatly enhance our physical health.

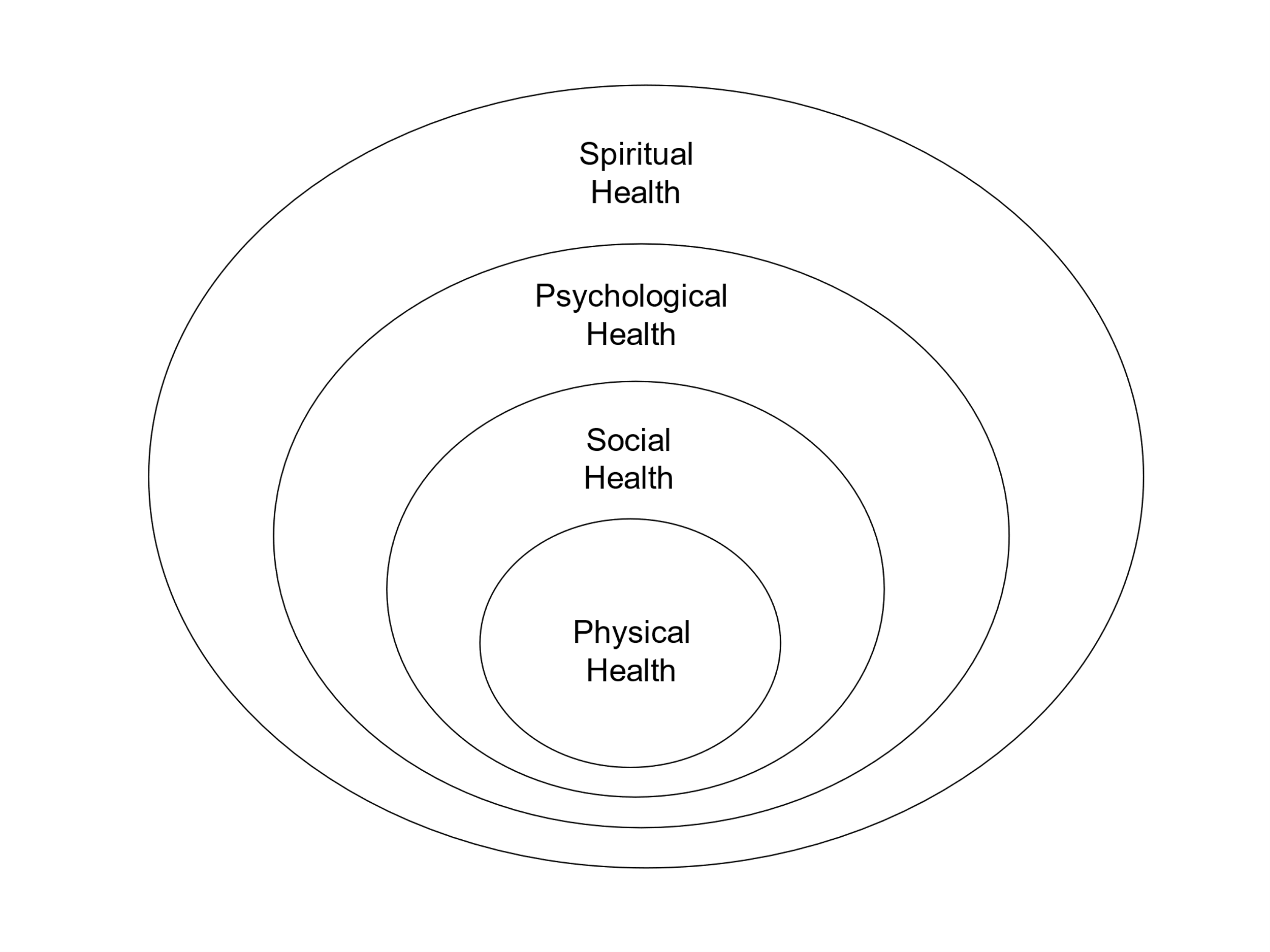


Figure 36. 1: The Hierarchical Relationship of the Four Classes of Health

The Master emphasizes the superiority and power of spiritual health:

When I speak of health, I refer to spiritual health. The health of the body is impermanent. However carefully one seeks to preserve it, he will inevitably some time become ill--his body broken. But spiritual health passeth not away; it is attained when the spirit of man is delivered from the conditions of this darkened world, and becomes enveloped and permeated by divine qualities.11

Physical health is of no importance. The importance is in the spiritual health, which has a lasting effect and

ecstacy. The more you think of the body the worst it becomes. Therefore, it is better not to pay so much

attention to it . . .12

My spiritual health is always perfect. I enjoy an eternal health of the spirit. I hope all of the people of the world will win this celestial gift. Pray that the spiritual health of mankind may be improved daily, for there are many doctors who attend to the physical ailments of the people, but there are very few divine physicians. . .. Although physical diseases cause man to suffer temporarily, yet they do not touch his spirit.13

And if thou art looking for the divine remedy which will cure the spirit of man of all diseases and make him obtain the health of the Divine Kingdom, know that it is the precepts and teachings of God. Take the greatest care of them.14

Just as the spirit shows its greater power by inspiring the mind, stimulating the emotions, and influencing the health of the body, so does the mind overpower the emotions and impact the biological functioning of the body. Bahá’u’lláh admonishes us to control our emotions when he exhorts us: “Yield not to grief and sorrow;”15 and “Refuse the dictates of your evil passions and corrupt desires.”16

The emotions, in turn, affect our physical health but they, like our physical condition, need not be allowed to control our mental and spiritual health.

You must live in the utmost happiness. If any trouble or vicissitude comes into your lives, if your heart is depressed on account of health, livelihood, or vocation, let not these things affect you. They should not cause unhappiness, for Bahá’u’lláh has brought you divine happiness. He has prepared heavenly food for you. He has destined eternal bounty for you. . .17 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Of course, the relationships amongst these four types of health are not one of unidirectional, cause and effect. It is a two-way street. Our biological status can also affect our mind and our spirit.

Between material things and spiritual things there is a connection. The more healthful his body the greater will be the power of the spirit of man; the power of the intellect, the power of the memory, the power of reflection will then be greater.18 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

In fact, the field of nutritional psychology deals with supplementing traditional means of curing mental illnesses and addictions by compensating for a lack of certain elements in the body through the improvement of nutritional intake.19

This analysis of the manifold, hierarchical nature of health, parallels the extended analysis that was made of human nature in Chapter 1 on “Wholeness.” (See Figure 1.1) Hence, we can view health on a multitude of levels as briefly presented in the following chart below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **HIERARCHICAL LEVEL** | **PREVENTATIVE AND REMEDIAL ACTIVITIES** |
| Spiritual Health | Deepening belief system, fasting, prayer, meditation, teaching, service, etc. |
| Social Health | Communication, consultation, justice, cooperation, love, belonging, etc. |
| Psychological Health (emotional, mental, cognitive) | Dealing with feelings, learning, planning, visualizing, managing time, creativity, reflection, etc. |
| Health of Our “Animal” (Organic) Powers | Care of sense organs (eyes, ears, etc.), psychomotor & perceptual development |
| Health of Our “Botanical” Powers | Proper nutrition & hormone functioning to enhance growth & reproduction; proper types and amounts of bacteria in the large intestines; etc. |
| Health of Organs and Systems | Aerobic exercise for respiratory & cardio-vascular systems; rest for nervous system |
| Health of Tissues | Conditioning, stretching, and yoga exercises for muscle and organ tissues; bathing and massage for skin tissue |
| Cellular Health | Proper nutrition for rebuilding cells; clean water for proper removal of toxins |
| Genetic Health | Proper diet for healthy formation of RNA & DNA to enhance cell division, cell reproduction, and growth |
| Chemical/Mineral (Inorganic) Health | Proper intake of minerals, vitamins, and water; avoidance of intake of toxins |
| Sub-atomic Health | Adequate amount of natural light; proper ion balance in the air; minimum, noisy sound vibrations; proper flow of energy throughout the body; avoidance of electro-magnetic fields and radiation |

Returning to the BLDH Circle concept, we can see why the term “medicine” is so appropriate. The BLDH program provides eight to ten processes for establishing, maintaining, and recovering health in each of the four quadrants of the Circle. Health is not viewed as a static state of existence. It is a complex process which can be improved by improving any and all of the thirty-six key, life processes identified by the BLDH program.

Dr. Pattabi Raman, medicinal chemist, nutritionist and educator, makes a recommendation to physicians which would enable them to see the rich inter-relationships amongst the key life processes in Inner Physical Quadrant of the BLDH Circle and with other categories of health—spiritual, psychological, and social:

Physicians must renew their dedication to the codes of their own profession and incorporate a concern for practically every aspect of human development in their professional and personal lives.20

Although I am not a physician, I have been a patient many times. Because the medical field is not in agreement regarding the best approach to health and healing, the lay person is forced to make an initial, front-line diagnosis and then choose the type of medicine or doctor that he or she believes to be the best within the constraints of availability and affordability: traditional Western medicine or alternative systems such as naturopathic medicine, homeopathy, chiropractic, acupuncture, bio-energetics, kinesthesiology, herbal medicine, deep massage, nutrition, and psychotherapy, just to name a few. The BLDH Circle can be used as a “first-line” tool for self-diagnosis. It can enable the user to find imbalances before they turn into critical situations and actual physical illness. This is true, preventative medicine--the making of minor adjustments before major problems occur.

After making an initial diagnosis based on an analysis of the Circle, the individual has to decide whether or not the situation merits a consultation with a specialist--either through reliable books or websites, or in person. Nearly every process on the Circle has its specialist. If we are suffering from spiritual illness, we can turn to the Bahá’í counselors, auxiliary board members and their assistants, and the Spiritual Assemblies, and, in severe cases, to the Universal House of Justice itself. If we are suffering from emotional or mental illness, we can consult psychologists and psychiatrists. If the problem is more social in nature, we can use the services of marriage counselors and family therapists. Of course, in the case of physical illness, Bahá’u’lláh tells us to consult “competent physicians.”21

Based on my own experience with physicians, I believe that general physicians or family doctors are needed who know much more than the average person about all of the thirty-six BLDH processes and their inter-relationships. If necessary, they would refer patients to the appropriate specialist. A wholistic clinic then, would have integrative generalists and medium-level specialists who, in turn, have access to highly specialized health professionals throughout the city, country, and world.

As a patient, I think it would be very helpful to have the BLDH Circle, or some similar chart, displayed in every physician’s waiting room. This would help remind the patients of their wholeness and that the causes of their symptoms could be in any one or more of the four quadrants. It would stimulate them to reflect on the interconnectedness of the various aspects of their lives and could help them to help the doctor with his formal diagnosis.

**CLEANLINESS**

The writings of the Faith place great emphasis on the importance of physical cleanliness and relate it closely to spiritual purity--both as a sign of it and as an influential factor in its attainment. The Báb refers to the relationship between inner and outer purity:

God loveth those who are pure. Naught in the Bayán and in the sight of God is more loved than purity and immaculate cleanliness . . .

God desireth not to see, in the Dispensation of the Bayán, any soul deprived of joy and radiance. He indeed desireth that under all conditions, all may be adorned with such purity, both inwardly and outwardly, that no repugnance may be caused even to themselves, how much less unto others.22

In Bahá’u’lláh’s *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* there are several passages which refer to the importance of cleanliness and beyond this to “refinement,” for example:

Cleave ye unto the cord of refinement with such tenacity as to allow no trace of dirt to be seen upon your garments. Such is the injunction of One Who is sanctified above all refinement. Whoso falleth short of this standard with good reason shall incur no blame. God, verily, is the Forgiving, the Merciful. Wash ye every soiled thing with water . . .. Be ye, the very essence of cleanliness amongst mankind. This, truly, is what your Lord, the Incomparable, the All-Wise, desireth for you.23

The Universal House of Justice explains that “refinement” can be associated with “a wide range of meanings with both spiritual and physical implications, such as elegance, gracefulness, cleanliness, civility, politeness, gentleness, delicacy and graciousness, as well as being subtle, refined, sanctified and pure.”24 Here again we see the close integration of the physical and the spiritual and their reciprocal causal interaction. The Universal House of Justice points this out in the Writings of the Master:

‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to the effect of “purity and holiness, cleanliness and refinement” on the exaltation of “the human condition” and “the development of man’s inner reality”. He states: “The fact of having a pure and spotless body exercises an influence upon the spirit of man.”25

An example of this “refinement” was Hand of the Cause Dorothy Baker. She “was always systematic and thorough in her personal cleanliness;” “always an elegant creature” when before the public eye. Margaret Kunz Ruhe related that Dorothy told her “that we, as Bahá’ís, dress for Bahá’u’lláh so we must put our best foot forward and must look elegant when the occasion requires elegance.” However, “when she wasn't in the public eye she was relaxed about the style of her clothes, favoring old, comfortable stand-byes.”26

When we apply the teachings on cleanliness, purity, and refinement to our personal hygiene, we find that several routines need to be established both for our children and for ourselves. In the *Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* several specific exhortations are outlined:

1. To wash one’s feet
2. To perfume one’s self
3. To bathe in clean water
4. To cut one’s nails
5. To wash soiled things in clean water
6. To be stainless in one’s dress
7. To renew the furnishings of one’s house

In my family we integrated these into routines and augmented them with requirements for the tropics where fungus, bacteria, and microorganisms flourish:

- showering once a day (sometime 2 or 3),

- brushing and flossing teeth,

- having a dental hygienist clean teeth and check for cavities

each semester,

- cutting finger and toe nails,

- cleaning ears,

- using deodorant and cologne,

- using antifungal powder daily and cream weekly,

- shining shoes,

- cleaning clothes and house,

- using filtered water,

- cleaning water tanks every six months,

- taking an amoeba and worm treatment each year,

- eating additive-free food whenever possible, and others.

Hygiene also implies the avoidance of consuming habit-forming substances which act on the body as a toxin:

Experience hath shown how greatly the renouncing of smoking, of intoxicating drink, and of opium, conduceth to health and vigour, to the expansion and keenness of the mind and to bodily strength.27 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

One way to rid the body of toxins is via fasting. The Bahá’í fast is a “dry fast.” That is, neither food or liquids are consumed. Its purpose is primarily spiritual. However, research has shown that there are also physical benefits of “wet fasts” which include certain liquids but no food. Decades ago, this type of fasting was referred to as “a cleanse.”28

Even when choosing an apartment or house it is important to take hygiene into account. Besides checking on the quality of the water, we should also check for sources of noise pollution and air pollution such as being downwind from a chemical factory, and for nearby cellphone towers.29 In a Swiss survey “the noise of cars and airplanes was the most frequently named cause of regularly occurring sleep disturbances.”30 Before buying a home check for noise at different times of night and day. Don’t visit a home only during non-rush-hour or weekends. Also, check municipal street development plans because changing two-way to one-way streets, connecting previously unconnected streets, or the building of nearby highways will increase the noise level and possibly impact real estate values.

**DISEASE AND ILLNESS**

A definition of illness and disease which is in harmony with this program is given by Dr. M. Scott Peck in *People of the Lie*: “[Disease and illness are] any defect in the structure of our bodies or our personalities that prevents us from fulfilling our potential as human beings.”31

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in the following quotation, explains that there are two types of disease--material and spiritual--which correspond to the two main aspects of human nature. Then He goes on to associate emotional/nervous system illnesses with mankind’s spiritual nature:

Disease is of two kinds, material and spiritual. For instance, a cut on the hand--if you pray for the cut to be healed, and do not stop its bleeding, you will not do much good; this needs a material remedy.

Sometimes, if the nervous system is paralyzed through fear, a spiritual remedy is necessary. Madness, incurable otherwise, can be cured through prayers. It often happens that sorrow makes one IL That illness can be cured by spiritual means.32

The Guardian affirms the fact that spiritual health is superior to physical health. The power of the spirit can keep us going during intense cycles of work, service, and teaching in spite of infirmities. However, it cannot sustain us indefinitely. At some point a period of rest and recuperation is needed.

The power of the Faith is such that it can sustain us on a much higher level in spite of whatever our ailments might be, than other people who are denied it. This however does not mean that we should ignore medical opinion and treatment.33

Mr. M. B. Irání noted this phenomenon in Dorothy Baker during her travels in India:

During the whole trip she was feeling sick and running a temperature but at the time of speaking and teaching the Faith she would become all right . . .

She was eating very little food only once a day. She liked tea and coffee and a little toast and butter. She was feeling weakness and when all alone would break down, even running a temperature. She had no strength to say her prayers sitting which she would say lying down in bed. But while talking on the Cause and Teaching she would become a lioness. Her great spirit was felt when she was talking on the Cause--at the time of teaching there was no fatigue or fever.34

At times illness gets to the point when we cannot continue with service and teaching. My general rule is, “When I am well, my body listens to me, but, when I am seriously ill, I listen to my body.” At times the Inner Physical Quadrant demands all of our attention. Shoghi Effendi emphasized this point with Marzieh Gail and her first husband, Howard Carpenter, when he became ill in Iran:

The Guardian was always exceptionally kind and thoughtful when disaster had struck an individual. He arranged for Howard Carpenter to be taken by ambulance to Bahjí as well as the Mount Carmel Shrine when he returned paralyzed from Iran on his second pilgrimage. He told me not to dissipate my efforts, but to think only of Howard’s recovery. He told Howard his primary consideration was to recover, and everything else, even teaching the Cause, was secondary. He said he would do the praying and Howard must make the effort to get well.35

And when it seems like illness has gotten us down, let us recall the words of the Master so that we will ever more intensely turn our hearts to the spiritual world:

Thy prevailing diseases are not on account of sins, but they are to make thee despise this world and know that there is no rest and composure in the temporal life.36

**HEALING**

From a wholistic, BLDH approach, healing can be defined as “freeing a person from that which has a harmful effect on their physical, social, psychological, or spiritual well-being.” The “freeing” can range from viruses to drug addiction, from bacteria to stress, from a tumor to persons who are bad influences, from a broken bone to the removal of ignorance.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá views spiritual healing as the source of all healing:

There is but one power which heals--that is God. The state or condition through which the healing takes place is the confidence of the heart. By some this state is reached through pills, powders, and physicians. By others through hygiene, fasting, and prayer. By others through direct perception.37

The African Minianka tribe uses herbs to cure physical illness and the “direct perception” of music for spiritual disorders. Their approach is very wholistic:

This is our first principle in approaching illness: there is always a cause, whether from an invisible force, a person with hostile intentions, or from a biological imbalance. If the disorder is biological, we treat it with plants. If it is spiritual, we use music. Often we combine the two. They are complementary. We work on two levels, the visible and the invisible.

Our second principle is that whenever an individual becomes *sikiere-folo* (ill, unpredictable, bizarre behavior) in society, the society itself is also disturbed. Two parties are ailing, the one recognized as a patient and the social group that has contributed to the loss of his or her senses. . ..

Whatever the case of imbalance may be, the villagers do not reject the individual or say that he or she alone has a problem. The community has a problem. Any one of its members is affected by the whole and, in turn, affects the whole.38

To summarize, healing, based on the BLDH Circle, would involve the application of a four-pronged approach:

1. spiritual resources such as prayer and meditation
2. psychological resources such as visualization and verbalization
3. emotional/social resources such as visits from friends
4. physical resources such as medications, rest and nutrition

Such a wholistic approach to healing requires much more than changing to a different physician. It necessitates a whole new lifestyle. Summarizing the analyses of historical data, expert opinion, and epidemiologic research, Dr. Edward E. Bartlett of Birmingham, Alabama, arrived at the following conclusion:

Lifestyle is the most important determinant of a person’s health. Although medical services are essential in providing palliative relief, their significance in influencing overall health status is circumscribed.39

Dr. Hossain B. Danesh, in his article “Spiritual Dimensions of Health Sciences,” supports this conclusion:

Medical research shows that these qualities of calmness, freedom from anxiety and a moderate lifestyle are extremely important aspects of the prevention of serious illnesses, such as cardiovascular problems, cancer and a host of other diseases of enormous severity.40

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What is meant by the “manifold nature of health”?
2. According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, what is the “divine remedy” that will “cure the spirit of man of all diseases”?
3. What are some of the “health specialists” upon whose services we may call for each of the quadrants of the BLDH Circle?
4. According to the Master, what is the ultimate purpose of disease?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will guide my children and myself to establish routines of good hygiene.
* I will read or obtain for reference:
  + Phyllis A. Balch, *Prescription for Nutritional Healing*, 5th 2010 or latest edition,
  + Kim Lam, *The Holistic Health Handbook: Healing Remedies for Common Ailments*, 2020 or latest edition,
  + Sally Fallon Morell and Thomas S. Cowan, *The Nourishing Traditions of Baby & Child Care*, 2013 or latest edition,
  + Paul Pitchford, *Healing with Whole Foods: Asian Traditions and Modern Medicine*, 3rd 2002 or latest edition,
  + Online resources such as webmd.com and doctoryourself.com,
  + David Werner, Carol Thumann, Jane Maxwell, *Where There Is No Doctor: A Village Health Care Handbook*, revised 2017 or latest edition, and/or
  + *Physicians' Desk Reference*, 71st 2017, or, a newer edition or an older, more affordable edition.

CHAPTER 37: NUTRITION

For purity, immaculacy, refinement, and the preservation of health, they [the people of God] shall be leaders in the vanguard of those who know. 1 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

**THE PURPOSE OF GOOD NUTRITION**

Eating, especially in good company, should be thoroughly enjoyed but not be allowed to become an end in itself. The ultimate purpose of eating, like sleeping and exercise, is to serve God with more vigor and vitality.

A man is not fit to do service for God with brain or body if he is weakened by lack of food.2 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

The mirror-like correspondence between energy intake via food and energy output via service is shown in Figure 37.1. The quality of the former determines the quality of the latter. “Energy systems,” says Dr. Edward A. Taub, President of the Foundation for Health Awareness, “function optimally with efficient fuel. Healthy, dynamic cellular equilibrium is maintained by energy intake that is equivalent to energy output.”3

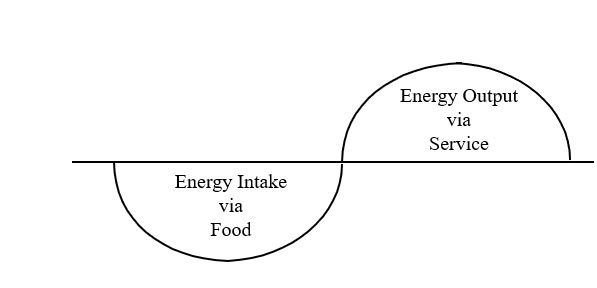


Figure 37. 1: Energy Intake and Energy Output

**THE PROBLEM**

In terms of the entire BLDH program, the problem, simply stated, is that we do not yet know how to live a Bahá’í life.

I bear witness at this moment, O my God!, to my impotence and to Thy sovereignty, to my weakness and to Thy power. I do not know what benefiteth me or what harmeth me; Thou verily art the Omniscient, the All-wise.4 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

In terms of nutrition, the problem is that we do not know *wha*t to eat or *how* to eat properly. This lack of nutritional knowledge has resulted in heart disease being the primary cause of mortality in the United States.5 According to Dr. Rodolfo Vega Llamas, Chief of Cardiology at the Metropolitan Hospital in Barranquilla, Colombia, the principal causes of heart disease are: the presence in the diet of fats from animal flesh and animal products, physical inactivity, and smoking.6 The BLDH program addresses all of these problems.

**THE NEED FOR BALANCE IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE BODY**

The Bahá’í approach to nutrition begins with an understanding that the constituent elements of the body need to be present in certain proportions. If the proportion is out of balance, illness results. This concept is the physical, microcosmic application of the general principles which guide the BLDH program: equilibrium, harmony, proportion, balance, etc. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains this fundamental principle of health and nutrition:

The outer, physical causal factor in disease . . . is a disturbance in the balance, the proportionate equilibrium of all those elements of which the human body is composed. To illustrate: the body of man is a compound of many constituent substances, each component being present in a prescribed amount, contributing to the essential equilibrium of the whole. So long as these constituents remain in their due proportion, according to the natural balance of the whole--that is, no component suffereth a change in its natural proportional degree and balance, no component being either augmented or decreased--there will be no physical cause for the incursion of disease.7

**THE NEED TO MOVE TOWARDS VEGETARIANISM AND THEN TO VEGANISM**

According to today’s denotations, the main difference between a vegetarian and a vegan is that the former consumes eggs and dairy products and the latter does not. As indicated below, the Bahá’í writings recommend, whenever possible, to eat only “that which grows out of the ground,” that is, to eat a vegan diet.

The next set of principles that we need to understand, as expounded by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is that all of the elements needed to maintain a healthy body can be obtained from fruits, grains, legumes and vegetables; that human beings were created to be vegetarians; that veganism will *gradually* become the diet of humanity and the means for healing; but, that, for now, we are not obliged to be vegetarians or vegans, nor are we forbidden to reap their benefits.

All the elements that are combined in man, exist also in vegetables; therefore if one of the constituents which compose the body of man diminishes, and he partakes of foods in which there is much of that diminished constituent, then the equilibrium will be established, and a cure will be obtained. . ..

It is therefore evident that it is possible to cure by foods, aliments, and fruits; but as to-day the science of medicine is imperfect, this fact is not yet fully grasped. When the science of medicine reaches perfection, treatment will be given by foods, aliments, fragrant fruits, and vegetables, and by various waters, hot and cold in temperature.8 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Fruit and grains [will be the food of the future]. The time will come when meat will no longer be eaten. Medical science is only in its infancy, yet it has shown that our natural diet is that which grows out of the ground. The people will gradually develop up to the condition of this natural food.9

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

As humanity progresses, meat will be used less and less, for the teeth of man are not carnivorous. . .. When mankind is more fully developed the eating of meat will gradually cease.10 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

It is certain . . . that if a man can live on a purely vegetarian diet and thus avoid killing animals, it would be much preferable.11 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

In a seldom-published Tablet of Bahá’u’lláh, He sets forth the following principles regarding diet, eating, medical treatment, searching for the cause rather than only the treatment of disease and other related topics.

O God! The Supreme Knower! The Ancient Tongue speaks that which will satisfy the wise in the absence of doctors.

O People, do not eat except when you are hungry. Do not drink after you have retired to sleep.

Exercise is good when the stomach is empty; it strengthens the muscles. When the stomach is full it is very harmful.

Do not neglect medical treatment, when it is necessary, but leave it off when the body is in good condition.

Do not take nourishment except when (the process of) digestion is completed. Do not swallow until you have thoroughly masticated your food.

Treat disease first of all through diet, and refrain from medicine. If you can find what you need for healing in a single herb do not use a compound medicine. Leave off medicine when the health is good, and use it in case of necessity.

If two diametrically opposite foods are put on the table do not mix them. Be content with one of them. Take first the liquid food before partaking of solid food. The taking of food before that which you have already eaten is digested is dangerous. . ..

When you have eaten walk a little that the food may settle.

That which is difficult to masticate is forbidden by the wise. Thus the Supreme Pen commands you.

A light meal in the morning is as a light to the body.

Avoid all harmful habits: they cause unhappiness in the world.

Search for the causes of disease. This saying is the conclusion of this utterance.12

Due to the competition of curriculum time in universities’ schools of medicine, sufficient nutrition education for medical students is lacking. A 2018, international, English-language, bibliographic research study regarding the education of medical students concluded: “Despite the centrality of nutrition to healthy lifestyle, medical students are not supported to provide high-quality, effective nutrition care.”13 According to a science advisory board to the American Heart Association, as of 2018, although some universities had made great strides forward, there was “ongoing evidence of large and persistent gaps in medical nutrition education and training in the United States.”14 Since 1985 the National Academy of Sciences has recommended a minimum of 25 hours of nutrition courses for medical students. However, as of 2018, the national average was 19 hours and nutritional knowledge did not appear on students’ examinations to become practicing physicians; nor was it required for board certification.15

During the last two to three years of my university studies at the Ohio State University, from 1970 to 1973, I practiced vegetarianism. It was a “hippie” thing to do at that time. Later, when I went homefront pioneering to Indiana and then international pioneering to Honduras, I returned to my omnivore diet because of social acceptability, the need to emphasize unity and harmony, and the statement in the Writings that vegetarianism was for the future. In 2014, due to heart disease, obesity, and the lack of sufficient exercise, I had a heart attack, and had to have a stint placed in my heart which, due to the blockage of oxygen to the tissues, lost one third of its pumping capacity. During my five days in intensive care, I was forced to acknowledge that I should have been a vegan at home and consumed animal products only minimally during social occasions outside of my home and when we invited guests to dinner. This crisis forced me to begin again my struggle towards vegetarianism and then to complete veganism which I finally achieved in 2019. In my search for professional guidance, I found abundant research confirming the health benefits of a vegan diet and I paid scant attention to research (often funded by the meat and dairy[[33]](#footnote-33) industries) which was not in agreement with the Bahá’í writings on health and healing.

Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men. In this most perfect Balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed. . .16 --Bahá’u’lláh

In 1977 the Universal House of Justice cautioned the friends about selecting any particular approach to diet and health.

No specific school of nutrition or medicine has been associated with the Bahá’í teachings. What we have are certain guidelines, indications and principles which will be carefully studied by experts and will, in the years ahead, undoubtedly prove to be invaluable sources of guidance and inspiration in the development of these medical sciences. Moreover, in this connection the Guardian’s secretary has stated on his behalf that “It is premature to try and elaborate on the few general references to health and medicine made in our Holy Scriptures.” The believers must guard against seizing upon any particular text which may appeal to them and which they may only partially or even incorrectly understand. . ..17

Now, more than four decades later, as I stated previously, there is much more research supporting the Bahá’í guidelines and how to put them into practice. Also, the Guardian encouraged “Bahá’í scholars” to “correlate its [the Cause’s] beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world.”18 And in reference to alternative healing methods, Shoghi Effendi stated that one is “free to investigate new things, and use them if they prove of real value and no harm.”19

The list of beneficial outcomes of my vegan diet is too long to list, but it includes a return to normal blood pressure and cholesterol levels; greatly reduced arthritic pain; the elimination of constipation and acid indigestion; and significant, desperately needed weight loss[[34]](#footnote-34). What helped me along the way was the numerous documentaries regarding the advantages of veganism, for example, “The Game Changers” and “What the Health.” And although the science of nutrition is still in its infancy and there is much disagreement amongst the experts about what constitutes a proper vegan diet, there is now research that shows that vegans live the longest, vegetarians live less longer than the vegans, and that omnivores, whose diet includes the consumption of various types of animal protein in their diet, have the shortest life span of the three.20

Hence, we know that we are encouraged to move toward a vegan diet, if we are able and willing to do so, and that, although specifics are still lacking in the field of nutrition and medicine, we are allowed to experiment with ourselves to find out which foods are beneficial and which are detrimental to our health, as long as no harm is done. For example, regarding what Bahá’u’lláh refers to as “two diametrically opposite foods,” there is little formal research on food combining, but there are experience-based guidelines in the Hays Diet which recommends not combining, for example, protein-rich foods such as beef with carbohydrate-rich foods such as potatoes.21 And, to further refine which plant foods are most beneficial and which are detrimental, I recommend experimenting with the recommendations found in *Eat Right for Your Type: 4 Blood Types, 4 Diets* by Dr. Peter J. D’Adamo.

Additionally, there are two other reasons for us to become as vegan as possible—to increase our kindness to animals and to help reduce the negative climate changes. In the *The Kitáb-Íqán,* the second most important book in the Bahá’í Revelation, Bahá’u’lláh admonishes us to “show kindness to animals.”22 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá movingly elaborates on this exhortation in the following words.

[I]t is not only their fellow human beings that the beloved of God must treat with mercy and compassion, rather must they show forth the utmost loving-kindness to every living creature. For in all physical respects, and where the animal spirit is concerned, the selfsame feelings are shared by animal and man. Man hath not grasped this truth, however, and he believeth that physical sensations are confined to human beings, wherefore is he unjust to the animals, and cruel. And yet in truth, what difference is there when it cometh to physical sensations? The feelings are one and the same, whether ye inflict pain on man or on beast. There is no difference here whatever. And indeed ye do worse to harm an animal, for man hath a language, he can lodge a complaint, he can cry out and moan; if injured he can have recourse to the authorities and these will protect him from his aggressor. But the hapless beast is mute, able neither to express its hurt nor take its case to the authorities ... Therefore it is essential that ye show forth the utmost consideration to the animal, and that ye be even kinder to him than to your fellow man. Train your children from their earliest days to be infinitely tender and loving to animals. If an animal be sick, let them try to heal it, if it be hungry, let them feed it, if thirsty, let them quench its thirst, if weary, let them see that it rests.23

Besides unnecessarily killing animals, the production of animal protein contributes more to the negative results of climate change than do all of the world’s transportation systems added together due to the increasing requirements of land and water both for the animals and for the crops needed to feed them.24

Among the many documentaries that have helped me to become more sensitive to the suffering of animals, the environmental impact of eating them, and, the health benefits of becoming more vegan are: “Cowspiracy,” “H.O.P.E.,” “Forks over Knives,” and “Dominion.”

**CONNECTIONS BETWEEN NUTRITION AND OTHER ASPECTS OF THE BLDH PROGRAM**

As a final note, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of nutrition and its role in life, its relation to other aspects of the BLDH Circle needs to be mentioned.

According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, spiritual “diseases” such as “sin,” “waywardness,” “passions,” and “vile and ignoble acts” lead us away from a “natural way of life” of “simple foods” and into a life of eating complex, miscombined foods, which, in turn, leads to physical diseases:

Thou hast indeed examined with great care the reasons for the incursion of disease into the human body. It is certainly the case that sins are a potent cause of physical ailments. If humankind were free from the defilements of sin and waywardness, and lived according to a natural, inborn equilibrium, without following wherever their passions led, it is undeniable that diseases would no longer take the ascendant, nor diversify with such intensity.

But man has perversely continued to serve his lustful appetites, and he would not content himself with simple foods. Rather, he prepared for himself food that was compounded of many ingredients, of substances differing one from the other. With this, and with the perpetrating of vile and ignoble acts, his attention was engrossed, and he abandoned the temperance and moderation of a natural way of life. The result was the engendering of diseases both violent and diverse. 25

In relation to emotions the Master said:

When a man partakes of food it reinforces whatever mood or state of mind or condition he happens to be in at the time. If, for example, he is filled with love, eating increases his love. And on the contrary, if he is angry, the food intensifies his anger. Thus it is necessary that man should dwell only on the love of God. Then if he eats a little more food than may seem customary, no harm is done. But if he lacks the love of God, whether he eats little or much is all the same.26

This phenomenon also has social implications when people eat together as a group. For the Nineteen Day Feast, for example, we should assure that there is a mood of unity, spirituality, and love so that these feelings will be reinforced during the social/material portion of the Feast.

Nutrition is also closely connected with creativity and the production of beauty. For example, people who have improved their nutrition have reported having consequential improvements in the beauty of their skin and body.27 Also, beauty can be created via the aesthetic preparation, decoration, and display of food dishes. The social occasion of dining together also serves as an integrating force for other areas of beauty--tasteful clothing worn at meal time, relaxing background music perhaps, simple yet pleasing place settings and a center piece, a clean and pleasant dining area, polite manners (including turning off mobile phones), positive thoughts, and encouraging words--all can be combined to create a beautiful occasion.

**THE CHALLENGE**

Breaking old eating habits is difficult. I think that there are two barriers that keep us from moving in the direction indicated in the Writings. One is the emotional attachment to traditional “comfort foods.” I think we feel closer, and rightly so, to our parents and family when we eat their favorite foods. It stimulates a feeling of warm togetherness and nostalgia. Somehow, we need to learn how to first, reduce our consumption of animal products, both meat and dairy, with the help, perhaps, of transitional, processed, vegan substitutes for meat, cheese, and eggs, and then, to eat mostly whole vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts, and fruits.

The other barrier is the mass media which stimulate our craving of unhealthy foods. But if we buy more plant-based foods, the increasing demand will motivate restaurants, especially fast-food chains (that are currently increasing the inclusion of plant-based meat substitutes on their menus) and their suppliers to provide and advertise healthier foods, thereby diminishing the resistance of animal product consumers.

As Bahá’ís we have added sources of motivation to help us improve our diets. In review, first of all, we know in which direction God wants us to head. Secondly, our Prophet-Martyr and the Master challenge us to be in the forefront of health improvement--not followers of the leaders of current trends and fashions. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in the opening passage of this chapter, exhorts us, as regards “the preservation of health,” to “be leaders in the vanguard of those who know.” And He reminds us that “The Báb hath said that the people of Bahá must develop the science of medicine to such a high degree that they will heal illnesses by means of foods.”28

Those of us who are grandparents, parents or parents-to-be have still another motive force which can move us ahead: our children, our grandchildren and their children. The new nutritional habits which we adopt will, to a great extent, be our contribution to the upcoming generations which, hopefully, will each make its own improvements. Once children’s eating habits are set, it is increasingly difficult to change them. Therefore, the best phase during the life cycle for improving nutrition (and for old, unhealthy ways to be sacrificed) is when couples are engaged to be married or are newly married and before the first child is born. This is the time in the life of an adult and a parent to make the greatest effort to establish the healthiest lifestyle possible. Not only in nutrition and exercise (which will be discussed in the next chapter) but, also, in all psychological, social and spiritual routines, habits, and patterns which need to be as excellent as possible and firmly put into place.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. According to the Bahá’í writings:
   1. What is the ultimate purpose of eating better?
   2. What are the non-physical causes for the incursion and diversification of disease?
   3. What is the main physical causal factor in disease?
   4. What will the food and remedies of the future be?
2. When is the best time in the life cycle to change nutritional and other habits and customs?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will evaluate my diet and set objectives based on Bahá’í principles for and current research on nutrition, health, and healing.
* I will study the books and documentaries recommended in this chapter or others that are in harmony with the Bahá’í teachings on diet, health, and medicine.
* I will learn new, vegetarian and/or vegan recipes.
* I will investigate websites such as: foodrevolution.org, onegreenplanet.org, vegansociety.org, and plantbasednews.org.

CHAPTER 38: EXERCISE

Exercise is good when the stomach is empty; it strengthens the muscles. When the stomach is full it is harmful . . .1 --Bahá’u’lláh

Waste of time is not acceptable in the Cause of God, but recreation which may improve the bodily powers, as exercise, is desirable.2 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

**THE PURPOSES OF EXERCISE**

So often today the media, diet programs, beauty contests, and physical fitness enterprises promote the goal of forming a body which is beautifully sculpted, harmonious, and sexually attractive as an end in itself. Nikos Kazantzakis explains how the Greeks had a more service-oriented perspective:

Olympia became ever-increasingly the great workshop where the various Greek stocks forged their bronze bodies.

They did not do this simply to make these bodies beautiful. The Greeks never served art for its own sake. Beauty always had a purpose: to be of service to life. The ancients wanted their bodies strong and beautiful so that these bodies might be receptacles for balanced, healthy minds. And beyond this--the supreme purpose--so that they might defend the “polis” [city-state].

For the Greeks, gymnastics was a required preparation for each citizen’s life as a member of society. The perfect citizen was the man who by frequenting the gymnasium and palaestra was able to develop a body both strong and harmonious, in other words beautiful, and have this body ready to defend the Race.3

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in a conversation with Dr. Percy Grant, made reference to the Greeks and their need to maintain optimum physical conditions for the purposes of warfare. He then added:

We do not deprecate physical development, for the sound mind should work through a sound body, but We think that the people of the West are too much concerned with mere physical development. They forget the need of spiritual development . . ..

Man thinks too much of perfecting the body, but of what use is it to him without the perfecting of the spirit? No matter how much he develops his muscles and sinews he will never become as strong as the ox, as brave as the lion or as big as the elephant! . . .. But man is distinguished from the beast by his spiritual gifts and these he should develop with the other, *both together*. There should be the perfect balance, the spiritual *and* the physical. A man whose ideal side only is developed is also imperfect.4

In the Bahá’í way of life the Greek purposes for physical development are expanded to include service to and defense of the entire human race--through our bringing them the Message of God for this Day and through our vocation.

As I mentioned before, I remember how sorry I was at having neglected to exercise and get myself in shape before making a vacation-time teaching trip along the north coast of Honduras. In order to reach a village where a deepening institute was planned, we had to walk over forty kilometers along the beach, forging rivers and walking mostly barefoot after unwisely getting our boots wet. I arrived, lagging way behind the others, with swollen ankles and large blood blisters on the bottoms of my feet. The local friends had a good laugh but were also very sympathetic. After spending the week in the village teaching, deepening, and healing, we were given a ride on a rice-hauling boat back up the coast. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá longed to make journeys like this. In *The Tablets of the Divine Plan* He asked us to do this in His name:

O that I could travel, even though on foot and in the utmost poverty, to these regions, and, raising the call of ‘Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá’ in cities, villages, mountains, deserts, and oceans, promote the Divine teachings! This, alas, I cannot do. How intensely I deplore it! Please God, ye may achieve it.5

I think that if we exercised for no other reason than to be strong enough to fulfil this wish of the Master, it would be sufficient. The Universal House of Justice reminds us that there are vast regions of the planet where the Message of Bahá’u’lláh has not yet been heard. We must emblazon His Name throughout all lands no matter how remote they may be. This takes strength, health, and energy, and these can be obtained by engaging in a regular fitness routine.

Of course, not everyone can make arduous journeys but we all need energy to perform better whatever we are doing. The ironic thing about exercise is that you have to expend energy to perform it but what you get in return is more energy, not less, and much more. You also feel better, live longer, and think more clearly. William F. Allman, in his article, “The Mental Edge: The Brain Is the Key to Peak Performance, in Sports and Life,” states:

While training the mind can help Olympic athletes get the most out of their bodies, for ordinary people the real value of the brain/body connection may lie in what physical training can do for the mind. After all, observes Dustman [Robert Dustman, brain researcher at the University of Utah], for millions of years the human species lived an athletically rigorous life of hunting and gathering food. It is only very recently that humans have adopted the life of couch-potato suburbanites. “We have a Stone Age psychology that is trying to adapt to a modern way of life,” he says. “So it may be that for your brain to function at its best, your body has to exercise.” I smile a lot at that concept, because it makes so much sense.6

**SOME EXAMPLES TO FOLLOW**

Bahá’u’lláh, in His youth, liked to roam “the woods” and delighted “in the beauties of the countryside.”7 In Baghdád the Blessed Beauty enjoyed walking to a “little garden, which was about half an hour’s walk from the city.”8

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, during the Baghdád years, became proficient in horseback riding (practically His only diversion).9 In His later years, during His travels in North America, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would take His daily exercise by walking in the parks.10

While at Brooklands aviation grounds near London, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá noticed two of the airmen who were wrestling on the grounds, and when they stopped, he went to them clapping his hands and crying in English, ‘Bravo! Bravo! That is good exercise’.”11

Shoghi Effendi enjoyed hiking,12 mountain climbing, bicycling,13 site-seeing in Europe and England, and tennis.14

Dr. Muhajir, before he went pioneering, jogged and lifted weights.15

As a travel teacher,

En route between colleges, Dorothy [Baker] would sometimes put a can of soup next to the radiator to warm, then stop by the side of the road to eat her fast, inexpensive lunch. When time allowed she would take advantage of a municipal golf course. Using the adjustable-head club Frank gave her, she would play a few holes until she felt, as she put it, ‘stretched out’ and could go on, refreshed.16

**TYPES OF EXERCISE**

The particular form of exercise is not important. What is needed are exercises which will strengthen the various systems of the body.17 It has been found that aerobic exercise is best for the heart, vascular (circulatory), and respiratory system. Bouncing[[35]](#footnote-35) of any kind strengthens the walls of veins, arteries, organs, and cells and helps to drain the lymphatic system. Conditioning exercises are needed for strengthening muscles which, in turn, help us to keep a proper posture--a necessity for avoiding spinal and muscular problems. The following is a brief outline of possibilities:

* for cardiovascular pulmonary conditioning (heart, circulation, lungs):
  + sports such as soccer, racquetball, tennis, basketball, cross country running, and others which involve
  + continuous running. (The goal here is to increase the tempo of the heartbeat and to keep it increased for
  + at least 20 minutes.)
  + jogging
  + brisk walking
  + jumping on a small trampoline
  + rhythmic aerobics of all kinds
  + deep breathing exercises
* for muscle-building or figure-contouring and posture enhancement:
  + swimming
  + calisthenics such as sit-ups and push-ups
  + isometrics
  + weight-lifting
  + Hatha Yoga
  + stretching exercises
  + dancing
  + massage

My own exercise routine consists of a combination of stretching, Hatha Yoga positions, calisthenics, weight-lifting, rebounding, yard work, and one-hour+ walks, especially wherever I can find hills. By setting the goal of working out every day that my schedule permits, I usually end up being able to exercise 3-5 times per week. When I go more than two consecutive days without physical activity I begin to “crave” exercise.

The important thing is to create an exercise program that you enjoy and which at least strengthens the heart, such as brisk walking or swimming. I am a strong advocate of “life-time sports.” I think that young people need to learn a sport which they are good at, which they thoroughly enjoy, and which they can participate in even when they are into their third age—the golden years. Otherwise, exercising becomes such a bore that it is neglected.

I have always played team sports and have found that belonging to a group which exercises or plays a sport together adds a benevolent element of peer pressure. Sometimes it forces you to get up and moving even when you don’t feel like it because you don’t want to let the others down. And it gives you something to get in shape for. Team sports also provide an excellent social environment for making friends and finding contacts for teaching the Faith.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. From a Bahá’í point of view, what is the purpose of exercise?
2. What role models do you want to emulate?
3. What types of exercise do you enjoy?
4. If you don’t exercise at all or don’t exercise regularly, what BLDH processes would you need to include in a plan to get started and/or to keep at it?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will design and implement an enjoyable, personal fitness program.
* I will read a book about exercise, for example, *The No Sweat Exercise Plan: Lose Weight, Get Healthy, and Live Longer* by Harvey B. Simon, M.D. Associate Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, (New York City, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2006)
* I will check out exercise programs available in my community or online: yoga, Tai Chi, Pilates, Zumba, weight-lifting, swimming pools, public golf courses and tennis courts, etc. (I have lower back problems. Tony Little, a physical fitness trainer, after he broke his back in a car accident, for people with lumbar problems, he designed a special, well-rounded, exercise routine that requires little equipment. I have used it for many years. (See: [www.tonylittle.com](http://www.tonylittle.com) [as accessed on June 11, 2020]).

CHAPTER 39: LEISURE

When asked whether Bahá’u’lláh’s prohibition of gambling applies to games of every description ‘Abdu’l-Bahá replied:

No, some games are innocent, and if pursued for pastime there is no harm. But there is danger that pastime may degenerate into waste of time. Waste of time is not acceptable in the cause of God. But recreation which may improve the bodily powers, as exercise, is desirable.1

In this answer ‘Abdu’l-Bahá expresses at least three principles of the BLDH program which will be discussed further in this chapter: the need to *balance* work time with leisure time (pastime), the need for *moderation*

--not going to extremes, and the time management technique of i*ntegrating* leisure activities with other spiritual, social, psychological, or, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recommended above, physical purposes.

**WHAT IS LEISURE TIME?**

The word “leisure” has its origins in the Old French term “leisir” meaning “permission” and in the Latin term *licere* meaning “to be permitted.” It is defined as “freedom afforded by exemption from occupation or business; time free from employment” and “time free from engagement; hence, convenience, ease.”2 In the BLDH program leisure time corresponds to the time management concept of “time out.” “Time in” is engaged, highly concentrated, carefully programmed, productive, work time. “Time out” is disengaged, personal-choice time. “Time in” often entails doing “what you *have* to do or need to do.” “Time out” usually offers us an opportunity to do “what you *wan*t to do.” We need to arrange our affairs to include both types. (See Chapter 29 on Time Management for a further explanation.)

**THE PURPOSES OF LEISURE**

The purposes of leisure are many but they all revolve around the idea of restoring spent energy--spiritual energy, emotional energy, mental energy, or physical energy. Leisure is a form of rest and relaxation (to be discussed further in the next chapter). Leisure activities are innumerable. They may be fun, exciting, entertaining, informative, competitive or cooperative, or even philanthropic. Their emphasis may be spiritual, social, psychological, or physical in nature. The common element in all of them is that after completing the leisure time activity we feel restored, centered, and balanced--ready to engage in a “time in” activity.

Leisure time does not mean “idle” time. The activity can be productive and achieve other purposes. Many of the examples of exercise mentioned in the previous chapter were also leisure time activities: hiking, biking, tennis, walking, etc. While in the United States, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would take time off from his interviews and public engagements to take leisurely walks. He would often do this in the company of the friends and use the time to build a closer relationship with them and to deepen them in the Faith.3 Mother Beecher advised Dorothy Baker to use her leisure time activities for a more noble purpose--to draw closer to other people, thereby avoiding the impropriety of giving too much importance to the activity itself:

You must mingle with the people of the world, enter into its joys, and work, and interests--but darling, always shine from within . . .. When you enter the realm of the world’s pleasures, do it for the sake of getting closer to humanity, and then you will not be consumed by them.4

Leisure activities, in combination with other BLDH processes, play an important role in stress management. Through them, all systems--nervous, cardiovascular, and muscular--find relaxation and the lessening of tension. Other BLDH processes which can be mobilized to create a wholistic, personalized, stress-management program include communication / consultation, prayer, meditation, visualization, creativity, rest, and exercise.

**HUMOR AND LAUGHTER**

One of the easiest-to-come-by, least expensive, and most rejuvenating forms of leisure is laughter, joy, and joke-telling. God Himself is a “Humorist.”5 Howard Colby Ives relates the following story of the Master:

He [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] said . . ., It is good to laugh. Laughter is a spiritual relaxation. When they were in prison, He said, and under the utmost deprivation and difficulties, each of them at the close of the day would relate the most ludicrous event which had happened. Sometimes it was a little difficult to find one but always they would laugh until tears would roll down their cheeks. Happiness, He said, is never dependent upon material surroundings, otherwise how sad those years would have been. As it was they were always in the utmost state of joy and happiness.6

Shouldn't this be a daily habit at our family dinner table and a monthly habit at our Nineteen Day Feasts? Even our assembly and committee meetings need some relaxing moments of comic relief. Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi were all known for their keen sense of wit and humor.

In the following statements of the Master, He shows the connection between joy and laughter and all aspects of our well-being--spiritual, social, psychological, and even physical.

Joy gives us wings. In times of joy our strength is more vital, our intellect keener. . . But when sadness visits us our strength leaves us.7

Laugh and talk, don’t lament and talk. Laugh and speak.

Laughter is caused by the slackening or relaxation of the nerves. It is an ideal condition and not physical. Laughter is the visible effect of an invisible cause. For example, happiness and misery are super-sensuous phenomena. One cannot hear them with his ears or touch them with his hands. Happiness is a spiritual state. . .

This is the day of happiness. In no time of any manifestation was there the cause for happiness as now. A happy state brings special blessings. When the mind is depressed, the blessings are not received,8

K.R. Pelletier in *Mind as Healer, Mind as Slayer* suggests that 50-80% of all illness is stress-related: peptic ulcer, mucous bronchial asthma, arthritis, hypertension, hyperthyroidism, amenorrhea, enuresis, paroxysmal atrial tachycardia, migraine headaches, many psychological disorders and others.9 Published programs for stress management often include humor along with “meditation, prayer, exercise, cognitive restructuring, environmental restructuring, assertiveness training, and deep breathing.”10

**HOBBIES**

Hobbies are a common leisure time activity. When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was asked by Madame Canavarro what he was most fond of as a child, He replied:

I cared more for hearing the tablets of the Báb recited than anything else. I used to commit them to memory and repeat them. This was the greatest pleasure I knew in my childhood--my play and amusement. I was not fond of study, nor did I care for books.11

When He was asked if, as a young man, He sought amusement like others His age, the Master said:

At Baghdad I rode on horseback; and at one time I had an idea that I would like to hunt. So on a certain occasion I joined a party of hunters and went with them to the chase. But when I saw them killing birds and animals, I thought that this could not be right. Then it occurred to me that better than hunting for animals, to kill them, was hunting for the souls of men to bring them to God. I then resolved that I would be a hunter of this sort. This was my first and last experience in the chase.

This is all I want to tell you of myself. I am only a seeker of the souls of men, to guide them to God.12

At a Bahá’í youth conference in India each participant was asked to state his or her hobby. One youth stood up and explained that his favorite pastime was teaching the Faith.13 Isn't this the most praiseworthy way to spend our free time?

Other hobbies include cooking (the Master liked to cook14), stamp collecting (the Guardian would send stamps to his friends),15 sports, reading (Shoghi Effendi nearly always had near him a copy of Gibbon’s *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*16), building model airplanes, electronics, computer games, gardening, sewing, and so on.

**VACATIONS**

Having a vacation means getting a big chunk of “time out.” For me a real vacation is when I can truly throw “time” out the window by totally disregarding all watches and clocks. I find that the best counter-balance to a vigorous use of time management techniques is to totally disregard time for a while. (This is when I really take out my vengeance on the all-powerful clock, tight schedules, and endless deadlines.) My real vacations, that is, when I can get away to the mountains or beach[[36]](#footnote-36) with family or alone[[37]](#footnote-37), have the following characteristics:

* totally disregarding old routines which are guided by clock time;
* establishing routines which are guided, instead, by spiritual yearnings, biological needs, and the amount of darkness or light;
* sleeping until noon or arising at dawn depending on how I feel;
* praying all day until sunset if my heart so desires;
* taking long walks or hikes with no particular time for leaving or returning;
* engaging in spontaneous conversation on any topic that happens along;
* reading until my heart tells me to stop instead of the clock or the demand of the next engagement;
* letting my mind go blank; not forcing it on to any one particular subject;
* listening closely to nature, to various parts of my body, my breath, my heart, my thoughts, and my spirit;
* allowing all this to inspire me;
* becoming refreshed by doing “nothing” in particular;
* in sum, following my whims in regards to what to do, where to go, when to go, what to think about, what to talk about, etc.
* and finally, heading back into normal activities with new energy, new ideas, and a new will to engage in the transformation of my self and the world.

I was not surprised with one of the findings of a German institute of behavioral physiology which was studying the living patterns of those who were enclosed in a sound, clock and sunlight proof apartment for several weeks: most of the participants *enjoyed* the experience. What is not known is whether the pleasure came from the freedom to choose activities or from the body being allowed to follow its own natural, biological cycles and rhythms.17

**SIGHT-SEEING**

Another past time is sight-seeing. As I mentioned early, Shoghi Effendi loved to travel about Europe and England in his younger years visiting museums, parks, formal gardens, seaside resorts, and admiring the architecture. Many of his ideas for the World Centre gardens and monuments came from these site-seeing trips.18

Dorothy Baker tells how even short sight-seeing trips were a source of refreshment for her:

. . . for little trips just make me over, and we will ‘do’ a few towns, and land in Buffalo for the August horse

races . . .19

**THE ARTS**

A rich source of ways to spend leisure time is the arts--literature, music, the visual arts, dance, the performing arts, etc. But as we partake of them, we need to remember their highest purpose. Over and above the legitimate ends of entertainment, relaxation, humor, and amusement, the arts should inspire. Their most noble function is to hold up to us views of ideal states, potentialities, scenarios of what we can become, new feelings, new actions, new thoughts--as individuals and as social beings. In short, the arts have the potential of serving as the “lure” which draws us forward through the suffering and trials of self-transformation--the growing into God’s image which is none other than the underlying purpose of the universe.

Roger White, in his article “Poetry and Self-Transformation,” reminds us of “the almost universally forgotten use of poetry and the other arts to hold up to us a mirror of our own spiritual and human potential, to strengthen our will to aspire and to transform our vision of ourselves.” He then refers to this lofty principle in these thought-provoking words: “The true work of art . . . addresses humanity saying: You must change your life.”20

According to Marzieh Gail, “The Guardian said art must inspire, that the artist’s personal satisfaction is not enough.”21

Hence, the quality of the arts with which we entertain ourselves is of utmost importance. We always need to be asking ourselves: Will this draw me closer to God or away from God? Will this help me to improve myself? Will this inspire me to do good? Of course, this doesn’t mean that we need to become puritanical. Even a good comedy can both bring us joy *and* help us to become aware of our human frailties in a light-hearted way.

But, when we are faced with what the Guardian refers to as “the prostitution of art and of literature,” we must reject it by turning away.

Guard your eyes against that which is not seemly.22 --Bahá’u’lláh

As was mentioned in Chapter 27 on Meditation for Psychological Purposes, both the Master and Shoghi Effendi had the courage to walk out on movies and plays which they considered to be inappropriate.

In the following exhortation of Bahá’u’lláh, even though it refers only to music, we can see the true potential of all of the arts:

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.23

A standard to be applied to all diversion is the call of the Guardian for:

a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, . . . the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocation

. . .. the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pursuits.24

He then balances this standard with a cautionary clarification about not going to far in the other direction:

It must be remembered, however, that the maintenance of such a high standard of moral conduct is not to be associated or confused with any form of asceticism, or of excessive and bigoted puritanism. The standard inculcated by Bahá’u’lláh, seeks, under no circumstances, to deny any one the legitimate right and privilege to derive the fullest advantage and benefit from the manifold joys, beauties, and pleasures with which the world has been so plentifully enriched by an All-Loving Creator.25

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. In the BLDH program:
   1. What are the purposes of leisure time activities?
   2. What are the purposes of the arts?
2. What are some of your favorite leisure time activities? What are some new, leisure time activities that you would like to try?
3. What do we need to be wary of as regards leisure time activities?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will carry out the following, wholesome, home entertainment activities alone or with my family:
* I will accompany my family and/or friends on the following weekend excursions and vacations:

CHAPTER 40: REST, SLEEP AND DREAMS

**REST**

Although rest, sleep, and dreams are discussed separately in this chapter. However, it should be kept in mind that, in the BLDH program, sleep is considered a sub-process of rest and dreams are a sub-process of sleep. Therefore, when we meditate on the Circle and reflect on the state of our “rest life,” the examination should cover the entire twenty-four-hour cycle, including our “dream life.”

**The Various Meanings of Rest**

Rest is a very relative term depending on the particular situation. Its various forms cover a wide range of activities such as: sleep, naps, dosing off, meditative states, reveries, day-dreaming, dreams (in a restorative sense), time out, being “lazy,” doing “nothing,” vacations, convalescence, retirement (in relation to career work), and others.

In terms of the BLDH program, we need spiritual rest, emotional rest, mental rest, and physical rest. Many of the Bahá’í teachings can be more clearly understood when this differentiation is made. For example, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá once told Lua Getsinger, “Sometimes material rest can deprive us of spiritual rest.”1 Spiritual rest in this case being the “tranquility of soul” received when one is engaged in serving and teaching the Cause of God. Once, when some of the pilgrims expressed the hope to the Master that He was feeling more rested, He replied, “no, he was not rested, but that did not matter. And His expression implied that physical weariness was a matter of small concern.”2 On another occasion He said, “Troubles are a rest for me.”3 “Where there is love,” He would say, “effort is a rest.”4

From a mental and emotional point of view we might also view rest as being a relief from routine. Rúhíyyih Khánum sees such a change of pattern as being an important form of rest:

Very, very seldom does medicine or psychiatry prescribe for a person that he do nothing; they say you need a ‘change’, in other words do something different from what you usually do.[[38]](#footnote-38)a Indeed rest has been brilliantly defined as a change of occupation.5

From this perspective, nearly any activity in any of the categories of the BLDH Circle could be considered restful depending on the circumstances: exercise, prayer, hobbies, conversation with a friend, creativity, teaching, etc.

From a physical point of view, rest is the needed recuperation of biological strength, or, convalescence. In a letter from Shoghi Effendi to a friend we learn that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá prescribed absolute rest for him after he had overworked himself and broken his health. From a sanatorium outside of Paris he wrote:

Dearest ‘Alí!

I have not forgotten you, but do you know and realize what crisis I have passed and into what state of health I have fallen! For a month I have stayed and am still staying in this “maison de convalescence” away from Paris and its clamor in bed until noon, receiving . . . treatment and following Master’s instructions not to open a book during my stay in this place.6

Nearly two months later, shortly before he left to England for his studies at Balliol College, Oxford, he wrote that he had “almost recovered.”

Twenty-seven years later, as the Guardian, he gave this same type of prescription to one of the believers.

He [Shoghi Effendi] is delighted to hear you are now fully recovered and again active in your important work for the Cause. However, you should not neglect your health . . .. You should certainly safeguard your nerves, and force yourself to take time, and not only for prayer and meditation, but for real rest and relaxation . . ..7

**Cycles of Rest and Activity**

From a biological point of view, rest is characterized by cyclical, rhythmic states of rest and activity, of sleep and wakefulness. These have been observed in all levels of animated life: one-celled animals, plants, higher animals and humans. In human beings these cycles are accompanied by rhythmic body temperature and hormonal changes.8

The day to day patterns of sleep and wakefulness, and their variations will be presented later in a discussion of sleep. But in relation to very short cycles of rest such as naps or “siestas” and longer cycles of rest consisting of weeks, months, and years, there appears to be no hard and fast rule stipulated in the Faith. In the Judeo-Christian culture six days of work and one day of rest is the norm. The first American Bahá’í to be called to Haifa after the second World War wrote, “For the Bahá’ís working at the International Center, during this period at least, there was no special day of rest. It was then that one learned that each moment belonged to the Faith . . ..”9 In most countries the work day is confined to eight-hour periods with lunch and rest breaks. Two weeks or more are often given for vacations. Shoghi Effendi, following the example of the Master, would often work for twelve to sixteen hours at a time without a break.10 It seems that we are being given the responsibility to know ourselves and to sacrifice as much rest as we can in order to serve the Faith without jeopardizing our health, our general well-being or our job.

The cycles of rest are both great and small. There are daily periods of rest and long periods of deeper rest lasting days, weeks or months following or preceding periods of intense activity. There are times when “the iron is hot” and we must strike in order to capture the moment. Opportunities arise, demands are made, emergencies occur which force us to sacrifice a more hygienically advisable amount of rest.

He [Dr. Muhajir] got the friends together in one of the Bahá’í homes, divided them into groups and sent them out to teach. He joined one of the groups, and that day many Samoans heard about the Faith for the first time, and were invited to a fireside in the evening. Those friends who had looked forward to a rest during the holiday felt compelled to go teaching instead.11

While in New York, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was suffering from exhaustion and a high temperature. When the friends asked if He couldn't forego addressing a peace conference He replied, “I work by the confirmations of the Holy Spirit. I do not work by hygienic laws. If I did, I would get nothing done.” After the meeting the Master shook hands with everyone in the large audience.12

To compensate for this tremendous output of energy ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would take short but deep “cat naps.” Once, a believer, walking between ‘Akká and Haifa noticed in the distance something white on the shore, when he came upon the object he discovered that it was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asleep on the beach.13 In New York, when He was given a car caravan tour of the city, He put His arm around John Bosch’s waist, dropped His head on his left shoulder, and with a deep sigh fell asleep.14

Mahatma Gandhi showed a similar ability to take deep “mini-rests”:

According to Mrs. Polak, it was during this period of convalescence [1908, in South Africa after being beaten] that Gandhi developed the power which he afterwards retained, of being able to fall asleep while at work just where he sat, and after a very few moments to awaken refreshed and without any break in his continuity of thought. I have sat in the room while he has been dictating to his secretary, who had come up from the office for this purpose, and quite suddenly the voice ceased and the eyes closed. The secretary and I would sit still, then equally suddenly Mr. Gandhi’s eyes would open again and the voice would continue dictating from the very point where it had stopped. I never remember his asking, “Where was I? or What was I saying.”15

The Silva Method of mind control, mentioned in chapter 27 on meditation for psychological purposes, teaches a method for quick, deep resting which is very easy to use and quite effective.

The Spanish painter, Salvador Dali invented his own system. I have tried variations of this and have found it to be very useful:

He [Dali] would sit in an armchair with a pewter plate on the floor next to him, holding a spoon between his thumb and index finger. He would lean back and relax, but as soon as he nodded off, the spoon would fall on the plate and wake him up. The sleep he enjoyed in this instant between falling asleep and awakening was said to have been so refreshing that Dali could go back to work feeling rested and energetic. . .16

Of longer duration are naps or “siestas.” Genevieve Coy tells how these formed part of the routine of the pilgrims in the days of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

At lunch, Rúhí Effendi brought word that we were to go up to the Tomb at about four in the afternoon, to see the Master! After lunch we all went and rested for an hour and a half. That is part of the day’s program always. At three o'clock came tea, another invariable occurrence.17

In *Secrets of Sleep* Alexander Borbély, Director of the Sleep Laboratory of the Institute of Pharmacology at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, examines the phenomena of the “siesta.” He observed that young children and the elderly tend to sleep during the day regardless of whether they live in a temperate or tropical climate.18 In the hot climates of Mediterranean countries, Central America, and South America, the “siesta” permits people to avoid the greatest heat of the day, to spend this time sleeping, to return refreshed to work, and to enjoy the pleasant, cooler hours of the evening and night.19 In Athens a study showed that 42% of people polled take a “siesta” an average of three days per week for one hour. The habit is on the decline, however.20 In China the “siesta” is widely observed. Factory and office workers regularly lie down for naps after lunch breaks.21 Having lived in hot, tropical, coastal climates for more than twenty years, we learned the wisdom of the adage, “Only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the mid-day sun.” The tropical heat and humidity are enervating and debilitating.

In the life of the Master we see that the length of His rest cycles responded to the circumstances. During the overland journey from Baghdád to Constantinople, after foraging for food around the clock during various days, He slept for two days and nights.22 When He was released from prison we find that He needed nearly a year of rest to recover from the rigors of imprisonment and to prepare Himself for His journeys to the West:

When He [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] sailed for Europe in September, 1910, he was sixty-six, and after forty years of exile, captivity and persecution, so frail in health that He had to break His voyage for a month’s rest in Port Said. Then he set out again, but had only reached Alexandria when He had to abandon the journey. It was nearly a year after He left the Holy Land before, on August 11, 1911, He boarded the S.S. “Corsica,” bound for Marseilles. By December he was back in Egypt, where He spent over four months recuperating after strenuous teaching work in London and Paris.23

In 1920, the next to the last year of His life, Rúhí Effendi explained to a newly arrived pilgrim that “the Master was staying on the mountain for a few days, to rest from the many demands made on his time when he is in his house in the town.”24

Írán Muhájir describes her deep need for rest after twenty years of pioneering, but also resigns herself to the wishes of the Universal House of Justice to complete first a cycle of service which would end with the completion of the Nine-Year Plan:

The year 1973 proved to be a turning point in our lives as pioneers. By this time we had been based in India for five years. Rahmat’s long absences had made me responsible for most aspects of our personal lives, and the burden of work which had fallen on my shoulders during the Nine Year Plan [especially the management of the Indian Publishing Trust] had become so great that I was physically and emotionally exhausted. I desperately needed some respite from our long years of pioneering [1953-73], but at the instruction of the Universal House of Justice, we stayed in India till the conclusion of the Nine Year Plan in 1973, then finally decided to move to Europe.25

These cycles of rest which follow and precede periods of intense activity can be seen on a grander scale in the lives of the Manifestations. David Hoffman, in *Bahá’u’lláh, The Prince of Peace*, observes:

Bahá’u’lláh’s retirement to the remote uplands of Kurdistán recalls similar occasions in the lives of the Manifestations of God. The stay of Moses in the desert of Paran, the years of meditation of Gautama Buddha, the forty days and nights of Jesus in the wilderness, the retreats of Muhammed to the caves of Mount Hira are all regarded as periods of preparation for their world-shaking tasks. 26

In general, we can see that we need periods of rest of varying length for recuperation of energy, rejuvenation, incubation of new ideas, mental preparation, storing up of physical and spiritual powers, and to gain momentum before launching ourselves again into the glorious work of building our Father’s Kingdom. When we know ahead of time that an intense period of work and service is approaching, such as a long teaching trip, we can prepare for it by getting adequate rest, thereby entering upon the project with good health, enthusiasm, and high energy; ready to set the friends and the seekers on fire with the love of God. To accomplish this, the flame must not only be glowing bright through intense prayer, meditation, and deepening; but the “lamp” which houses that flame must also be pure and clean--free from infirmity and fatigue.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in His loving concern for the believers, would always prescribe physical rest when it was needed, but He would also continually warn the friends not to sacrifice spiritual rest for physical rest and remind them that rest is not our goal but rather the means for attaining a more urgent end--teaching the Faith:

Rest thou not for a moment, seek thou to draw no easeful breath.27

Indulge not your bodies with rest. . ..28

As a returning thanks [for receiving the light of truth and eternal blessings]. . . rest ye not for a moment, sit ye not silent, carry to men’s ears the glad tidings of the Kingdom, spread far and wide the Word of God.29

It behooveth them not to rest for a moment, neither to seek repose. They must disperse themselves in every land, pass by every clime, and travel throughout all regions. Bestirred, without rest, and steadfast to the end, they must raise in every land the triumphal cry ‘Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá!’30

**SLEEP**

Sleep appears to be a particular type of rest found only in higher animals. It can be scientifically studied by measuring brain waves via an electro encephalogram (EEG); eye movements via an electrooculogram (EOG); and muscle tension via an electromyogram (EMG).31

**How Much Sleep Is Needed?**

Regarding the amount of sleep needed, Alexander Borbély reports a study based on a poll of more than 800,000 Americans over the age of 30. 42% said that they slept between 8 and 9 hours and about 33% said they slept between 7 and 8 hours. The other categories and approximate percentages were: 6-7 hrs: 12%; 9-10 hrs: 7%; 5-6 hrs: 3%; 10-11 hrs: 2%; 4-5 hrs:%; less than 4 hrs:.1%32

Recordings of rest/activity behavior confirm that many people sleep longer on weekends and holidays. Reports of test results lend support to the assumption that our normal amount of sleep (in the West) lies below the ideal.33 Shiyi Liu, a Chinese specialist on sleep research from the Academy of Sciences in Shanghai, during a stay in Europe, commented to Barbély, “People in the West get too little sleep.”34 Discotheques, television, movies, videos, parties, night life--all combine to take us away from the wisdom of Benjamin Franklin: “Early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.” “An early bedtime,” says Barbély, “becomes an act of renunciation.”35 This view, of course, needs to be balanced with other research results which indicate that there are natural “late-nighters” and natural “early risers.”

How much sleep did the Master need? According to Howard Colby Ives36 and Myron H. Phelps,37 He slept for only three to four hours. According to Mírzá Lutfu'lláh, as reported by Genevieve Coy, at the age of seventy-five, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was sleeping only four to six hours, and even this was divided into two periods:

The Master works with no thought of physical fatigue. He works all day long, interviewing callers, etc. He goes to bed possibly by 9:00 or 9:30, but often he is up again at midnight, chanting and praying. Then he may correct Tablets for a while, and then sleep two or three hours more, and at perhaps 6:00 A.M. he rises for the day’s work! Apparently, he averages not more than four to six hours of sleep a night! So his whole life is given to the service of mankind.38

This pattern is corroborated by Shoghi Effendi who in 1919 wrote: “The Beloved Master, is indeed in the best of health, physically strong, ever active . . . often waking up at mid-night for meditation and prayer.”39

How did the Master do it? As stated previously, He Himself said that He drew on the power of the Holy Spirit. On the biological side of this phenomenon, studies show that short sleepers spend more time in deep sleep than do long sleepers.40 Deep sleep occurs soon after falling asleep and seems to be essential for obtaining the “recuperative” qualities of sleep.41

The lowest mortality rates, however, are among people who sleep between seven and eight hours per night. The mortality rate increases progressively with shorter or longer sleep. The rule of moderation seems to have appeared again: “Too much or too little sleep is bad for you.”42

How much sleep did the Guardian need?

Regarding your question: there are very few people who can get along without eight hours sleep. If you are not one of those, you should protect your health by sleeping enough. The Guardian himself finds that it impairs his work capacity if he does not try and get a minimum of seven or eight hours.43

How much sleep is “enough”? A handy rule of thumb is given by Gayle Delaney, President of the Association for the Study of Dreams, who states, “Take as much sleep as you need to awaken refreshed before your alarm sounds.”44 The sign that I watch for is the clarity with which I say my Long Obligatory Prayer each morning. Because the words and routines never change, differences from one day to the next are “telltale.” When my words are slurred, for example, or when I lose track of where I am at in the prayer, I know that I didn’t get enough sleep.

Each person has different needs. Dr. Muhájir needed only four to five hours of sleep:

Rahmat usually went to bed at one a.m., and was up before anyone else, at five-thirty. Friends remember him chanting prayers for the progress of the Faith first thing in the morning.45

Thomas Edison slept only four to six hours per night, but Einstein, who said that he discovered some crucial parts of his theory of relativity through his dreams, needed ten hours of sleep. Napoleon went to bed between ten and eleven o'clock, awoke at two a.m., worked until five a.m., and then returned to bed until seven a.m. Churchill didn’t go to bed until three or four a.m. He arose at eight a.m. to begin work and then took a two-hour afternoon “siesta.”46

**Sleep Reduction**

If you are interested in reducing the amount of sleep that you need, there is good news. Research has shown that sleep can be reduced gradually and permanently from eight to six and a half hours without negative effects47 “On the contrary,” reports another author, “those who do so and make good use of the extra time in the morning or evening tend to feel better and have improved morale.”48 On the other hand, there is research showing that millions of Americans are sleep-deprived and that this reduces their productivity, the safety of society (17% of Americans report having dozed off at the Circle), and their immune response.49 Observing our own behavior under various conditions and after varying amounts of sleep, appears to be the best approach when deciding whether or not we can reduce the amount of sleep that we allow ourselves.

**What Do You Do When You Can’t Fall Asleep at Night?**

‘Abdu’l-Bahá would say prayers:

Often at night I do not sleep, and the thoughts of this world weigh heavily on my mind. I toss uneasily in my bed. Then in the darkness of the night I get up and pray--converse with God. It is most sweet and uplifting.50

Other techniques include: avoiding blue light from electronic device screens at least an hour before bed,51 stretching and yawning, repeating the Greatest Name over and over, listening to a tape recording of passages from the writings, reading, listening to soothing music, obtaining autogenic training such as the Silva Method of mind control, and, in chronic cases, psychotherapy and doctor-prescribed drug therapy.52

**Concluding Remarks on Sleep**

In conclusion, we can say that in order to judge our sleep habits we must first “know ourselves” before making any desired changes. In my own case, I have learned that I can function on six hours of sleep. Less than this I am not on my cutting edge of attentiveness and mental efficiency. I also know that usually eight hours of sleep is enough for me to recuperate any lost sleep or special tiredness. More than this I am on the edge of imitating the sloth. At times I have had to pray to be detached from sleep in order to carry out special projects which demanded more of my waking hours.

As we engage in self-evaluation of and reflection on our sleep patterns, we should always be guided by the counsels of the Master:

If a man sleep, it should not be for pleasure, but to rest the body in order to do better, to speak better, to explain more beautifully, to serve the servants of God and to prove the truths.53

A teacher should sleep at night with the thought that the next day he may be refreshed in order to do his duty more fully in relation to teaching his pupils.54

**DREAMS**

Because of the incredibly rich potential of dreams to enhance the self-transformation process it becomes essential that they be discussed as a unique feature of the sleep process.

**Some Historical Insights**

Dreams and dream interpretation have been a common trait of all societies, primitive and civilized, throughout ancient, Biblical, and modern history.55 I believe that it is important to understand the importance given to dreams in former times, their demise in more recent times, and their current resurgence as experiences of significance in our daily lives.

The Mapuchi Indians of Chile share their dreams on a daily basis within the family circle, especially when there is physical and emotional stress. They view dreams as voyages of the soul.56

Amongst the North American Yuman tribes of the Gila River, dreams were the most common topic of conversation and the most significant aspect of their daily life.57

Yaya Diallo of the Minianka tribe of Africa describes the role of dreams in his culture and his personal life:

While growing up in Fienso, I always knew that dreams were an important source of learning and that some people learned much through them. Our healers are often guided in the use of plants through their dreams.

In my own life, music has come to me in dreams since my boyhood. Often I dream I am playing in a traditional Minianka orchestra. When I awake from sleep, I try to remember the rhythms I was playing in the dream. My practice of music has been much enriched in this way.58

The people called “Senoi,” composed of the Temiar and the Semai tribes of the Malay peninsula were another culture (now no longer functioning) which gave great importance to dreams. Their story is of interest because it shows the potential of creating a personal/family lifestyle and a future world civilization in which dreams are given their proper place. Alexander Borbély writes:

The Senoi were a peaceful people who still existed in the remote jungles of Malaysia at the beginning of this century. [the 20th century] They attached great importance to dreams, since they regarded them as a mirror not only of existing currents in their lives but also of feelings just beginning to develop. If someone dreamed about quarreling with his best friend, this was interpreted to mean an unconscious conflict, even if no sign of it could yet be seen in daily life. The appropriate reaction to such a dream was to discuss its contents within the dreamer’s own family, and also with the friend in question; the dreamer then gave this friend a present, in order to remove the unconscious clouding of the relationship. In such a situation the dreamer would strive to follow his first dream with a lucid one [i.e., the dreamer is conscious that s/he is dreaming during the dream], in which he could meet the dream image of his friend and assure him of his friendship. The Senoi taught their children to treat threatening dream images as problematical parts of their own selves; they encouraged the children to have the nightmare again, either to conquer the threatening figure, to make friends with it, or--a third possibility--to be conquered by it and to end the conflict in this way. The ethnologist Stewart describes the Senoi as a thoroughly civilized people, who managed, to a great extent, to live without mental illnesses and warlike conflicts. Unfortunately, the culture of the Senoi disappeared almost completely in the upheavals of the Second World War.59

It is also known that the tribal Shamans of the Senoi worked with the tribe’s dreams. Later investigators, however, questioned the validity of the utopian qualities of the culture as described by Stewart.60

In his article “Historical Perspectives: From Aristotle to Calvin Hall,” Wilse B. Webb traces the history of dreams in Western culture:

Christian writers originally agreed with the ancient Greeks and Romans that dreams were of divine origin. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage in 250 A.D., asserted that the very councils of the church were guided by God through dreams and visions. St. Augustine described dreams of the dead as “gifts” from God. “Dreams, more than any other thing, entice us toward hope,” wrote Cynesius of Cyrene, a fifth-century bishop of Ptolemais.

In a book relating dreams and theology, Morton T. Kelsey, after a lengthy review of dreams in the Bible, cites the extensive writings of the early Christian church founders. However, in preparing a Latin translation of the Bible during the fifth century, St. Jerome consistently mistranslated a Hebrew word in order to include prohibitions against dreamwork [dream interpretation] in the sacred text. As a result, *dreams were categorized with witchcraft for more than a thousand years*. [emphasis added] Kelsey notes that the present absence of theological considerations about dreams is a relatively recent development . . ..

By the dawning of the twentieth century, the dream had lost its potency as a popular force for mediating between human and divine realms. Theologians no longer regarded dreams as bona-fide revelations, philosophers were concerned primarily with their metaphysical implications . . .. There is little evidence that leaders of society sought guidance from their dreams. In poetry, the dream was more typically a literary device . . .

Freud’s contribution [at the turn of this century] was to place the dream squarely within the scientific domain . . ..61

C.G. Jung, himself a giant in cross-cultural dream investigation, although he disagreed fundamentally with Freud’s understanding of reality, nevertheless praised Freud’s historical, pioneering contribution:

The impetus which he gave to our civilization sprang from his discovery of an avenue to the unconscious. By evaluating dreams as the most important source of information concerning the unconscious process, he gave back to mankind a tool that had seemed irretrievably lost.62

During the last several decades there has emerged a popular, grassroots dreamwork movement throughout America and in other Western countries as well. Paralleling this upsurge there has been a flowering of scientific research on the nature of consciousness. Underlying this new interest appears to be the paradigm shift towards a more unified view of reality which takes into account subjective, non-actual phenomena.63

**The 24-hour Brain and Spirit**

Dr. J. Allan Hobson, Director of the Laboratory of Neurophysiology at the Massachusetts Mental Health Center, says:

The brain never stops working. Even in the deepest stages of sleep--when our conscious minds may slow down, or even appear to stop functioning altogether--brain activity is only slightly decreased compared to the most alert waking. And when we enter the rapid eye movement (REM) stage of sleep and we dream--brain activity is as high as when we are startled during waking . . .. some form of information processing may well be going on in our brains twenty-four hours a day.64

This brain activity may be the physical reflection of the activity of the spirit. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states: “In the time of sleep . . . the spirit lives and subsists. Nay, its penetration is increased, its flight is higher, and its intelligence is greater.”65

**Everyone Dreams**

Everyone dreams several times during the night--usually four to five times every ninety minutes.66 Contrary to a common belief that we dream only during REM sleep, we dream while falling asleep, during non-REM sleep and while awakening. Indications even exist that daydreams and nighttime dreaming are similar in character and content.67 What everyone does not do is recall their dreams. (This will be discussed later.)

**What Does Bahá’u’lláh Say about Dreams?**

In His *Seven Valleys* Bahá’u’lláh says that dreams are part of God’s creation and contain secrets, wisdoms, and other worlds. Through them the dreamer can travel forward in time to witness events which will occur in the future. He states that God has placed the dream in human nature as a mighty, logical proof of the life beyond:

Indeed, O brother, if we ponder each created thing, we shall witness a myriad consummate wisdoms and learn a myriad new and wondrous truths. One of the created phenomena is the dream. Behold how many secrets have been deposited therein, how many wisdoms treasured up, how many worlds concealed. Observe how thou art asleep in a dwelling, and its doors are shut; on a sudden thou findest thyself in a far-off city, which thou enterest without moving thy feet or wearying thy body. Without taxing thine eyes, thou seest; without troubling thine ears, thou hearest; without a tongue, thou speakest. And perchance when ten years have passed, thou wilt witness in this temporal world the very things thou hast dreamt tonight.

Now there are many wisdoms to ponder in the dream, which none but the people of this valley can comprehend in their reality. First, what is this world where without eye or ear or hand or tongue one can put all these to use? Second, how is it that in the outer world thou seest today the effect of a dream which thou didst witness in the world of sleep some ten years past? Consider the difference between these two worlds, and the mysteries they conceal, that, attended by divine confirmations, thou mayest attain unto heavenly discoveries and enter the realms of holiness.

God, the Most High, hath placed these signs in men so that veiled minds might not deny the mysteries of the life beyond, nor belittle that which hath been promised them. For some hold fast to reason and deny whatever reason comprehendeth not, and yet feeble minds can never grasp the reality of the stages that we have related: The universal divine Intellect alone can comprehend them.68

In a similar passage, Bahá’u’lláh, explains that the worlds of God are “countless in number” and “infinite in range;” and that God’s creation contains “creatures apart from these creatures.” He offers the dream as an example of one of these worlds. He says that the “world” of dreams has “neither beginning nor end.” He then explains that it is equally true to perceive this world as “within thy proper self” or that the “spirit” detaches itself from “earthly attachment” and travels to the “realm” of dreams:

It would be true if thou wert to contend that this same world is, as decreed by the All-Glorious and Almighty God, within thy proper self and is wrapped up within thee. It would be equally true to maintain that thy spirit, having transcended the limitations of sleep and having stripped itself of all earthly attachments, hath, by the act of God, been made to traverse a realm which lieth hidden in the innermost reality of this world.69

There are at least two prayers of Bahá’u’lláh which deal with our personal dreams. One, an evening prayer, helps to condition the quality of our dreams. The other, a morning prayer, encourages us to recall our dreams.

The evening prayer begs Bahá’u’lláh to protect what might be termed our dream eyes from “beholding aught beside” Him. It then asks Him to “strengthen” our dream eyes to see Him, i.e., “the Horizon of Thy Revelation.”70

In the morning prayer Bahá’u’lláh reminds us of the purpose of dreams and the importance of remembering them. The prayer begs God to make dreams the basis for our knowing His love for us and the best means for God to show us His grace and loving kindness:

I beseech Thee, by the potency of Thy will and the compelling power of Thy purpose, to make of what Thou didst reveal unto me in my sleep the surest foundation for the mansions of Thy love that are within the hearts of Thy love ones, and the best instrument for the revelation of the tokens of Thy grace and Thy loving-kindness.71

**What Does ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Say about Dreams?**

The Master expounds further upon the ability of the spirit to “travel” to other places via the realm of dreams:

With the inner sight and the mental eye, it [the spirit] sees America [from a different continent], and it can perceive that which is there, and discover the conditions of things and organize affairs.72

Man sees in the world of dreams. He travels in the East; he travels in the West; although his body is stationary, his body is here. It is that reality in him which makes the journey while the body sleeps. There is no doubt that a reality exists other than the outward, physical reality. . .. The body goes to sleep, becomes as one dead; but that reality is moving about, comprehending things, expressing them and is even conscious of itself.

The other and inner reality is called the heavenly body, the ethereal form which corresponds to this body. This is the conscious reality which discovers the inner meaning of things, for the outer body of man does not discover anything. The inner ethereal reality grasps the mysteries of existence, discovers scientific truths and indicates their technical application.73

In one of His Tablets ‘Abdu’l-Bahá indicates that if the dreamer possesses purity of heart and detachment from material things then discoveries can be made and detailed communications received. He doesn’t limit this, however, to only the medium of dreams:

When man’s soul is rarified and cleansed, spiritual links are established, and from these bonds sensations felt by the heart are produced. The human heart resembleth a mirror. When this is purified human hearts are attuned and reflect one another, and thus spiritual emotions are generated. This is like the world of dreams when man is detached from things which are tangible and experienceth those of the spirit. What amazing laws operate, and what remarkable discoveries are made! And it may even be that detailed communications are registered. . .74

Although it is in the class of “pilgrim’s notes,” Juliet Thompson relates an interesting incident about the dream she recounted to the Master. The incident shows how much importance that He attached to dreams and the recording of them, and shows how little importance Westerners attach to dreams. It also relates ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s very useful classification scheme for dreams:

I mentioned my dream about the crypt and asked if I might tell it to Him, but it sounded so awfully queer as I told it that Laura, Hippolyte, and I began to laugh; and the Master’s own face twitched a little, I thought. However He said: “You must not laugh at this dream,” and asked me to go on telling it. . ..

“You must write down that dream, Juliet,” He said.

“I have written it, my Lord.”

“Ah, Khaylí khúb!” (Very good!)

Then, He said something to Hippolyte, laughing, and with those vivid gestures of His, continued to talk for some time. What He said I couldn’t catch--I know such a tiny bit of Persian--but Hippolyte told me afterward, rather reluctantly! that the Master was speaking about dreams. He had laughed at Hippolyte because he did not believe in them and had explained that there were three kinds of dreams: dreams that come from some bodily disorder, symbolic dreams, and those in which future events are clearly foretold. When the soul is in a state of perfect purity it is able, He said, to receive a direct revelation from God. Otherwise, it sees in symbols.75

**What Does the Guardian Say about Dreams?**

Shoghi Effendi emphasizes the need for moderation--not attaching too little significance to dreams nor too much; the importance of purity of heart in order to receive guidance through dreams; and the need to always use the Writings as a means for judging the wisdom of a dream:

That truth is often imported through dreams no one who is familiar with history, especially religious history, can doubt. At the same time dreams and vision are always coloured and influenced more or less by the mind of the dreamer and we must beware of attaching too much importance to them. The purer and more free from prejudice and desire our hearts and minds become, the more likely is it that our dreams will convey reliable truth, but if we have strong prejudices, personal likings and aversions, bad feelings or evil motives, these will warp and distort any inspirational impression that comes to us . . .. In many cases dreams have been the means of bringing people to the truth or of confirming them in the Faith. We must strive to become pure in heart and ‘free from all save God’. Then our dreams as well as our waking thoughts will become pure and true. We should test impressions we get through dreams, visions or inspirations, by comparing them with the revealed Word and seeing whether they are in full harmony therewith.76 --Shoghi Effendi, through his secretary

**Dreams in the History of the Faith**

To relate and analyze the important dreams in the history of the Faith is beyond the scope of our theme of self-transformation. The interested reader is referred to the compilation *A Wondrous World: Dreams and Visions*.77 I will mention only a few in order to stimulate your further investigation of this fascinating topic.

*The Dawn Breakers* is replete with significant dreams. It was through dreams that several of the Letters of the Living recognized the Báb.

The dreams of Bahá’u’lláh during His childhood regarding the fish who were following Him and the birds who were attacking Him but unable to harm Him, are well known.78 The ability of Bahá’u’lláh to send dreams is also fascinating. In one case He showed a believer where a hidden treasure was. The next day he went there and found it.79

‘Abdu’l-Bahá often told others His dreams. The ones that most impressed me were His dreams which foreshadowed the failure of the Committee of Investigation to accomplish its evil ends and the dream which foreshadowed His passing. In His *Memorials to the Faithful* the Master recounts in great detail his dream of Hand of the Cause of God Mullá ‘Ali-Akbar.80

In *The Priceless Pearl* we can find examples of Shoghi Effendi’s childhood dreams and one of his dreams as the Guardian.81 There is an interesting note from the Master to Shoghi Effendi regarding the latter’s dream of The Báb. It reminds us of the bounty of having dreams of the Central Figures and the Guardian:

Rest assured that to have attained the presence of His Holiness the Exalted One, may my soul be a sacrifice to Him, is a proof of receiving the grace of God and obtaining His most great bounty and supreme favour.82

In her biography of the life of Dr. Muhájir, Írán Furútan Muhájir relates no less than eighteen of His dreams.83 It is a rich source for examining the life of a soul who was in close contact with the spiritual world through various means, one of which was dreams. Dr. Muhájir regularly dreamed of the Central Figures and Shoghi Effendi. In one dream he received teaching instructions from the Master which he followed through on immediately and with great success. The fact that we have a record of these dreams shows that Dr. Muhájir valued dreams and that he felt it was worthwhile to discuss them with others.

**A Sampling of Significant Dreams from Modern History**

Since the reader may not have as much access to the history of modern dreams of famous people, I thought I would cite a few stimulating examples. It is interesting to note that images in dreams can be symbolic or, like many of the following, they can be realistic.

Harriet Tubman claimed that her dreams helped her to locate the routes for the “underground railroad” that rescued hundreds of slaves in the years before the Civil War. Jack Nicklaus discovered a golf swing in a dream that brought him out of a slump. Elizabeth Rausher, a physicist, solved difficult equations in a dream and later published the results. Leo Katz, a visionary artist, creates paintings which originally took form in dreams.84

The naturalist Louis Agassiz dreamed about how he should break open a certain stone to obtain a fossil. Upon awakening, Agassiz located a chisel, followed the directions, and discovered a perfect specimen. Sir Frederick Grant Banting discovered a procedure for the mass production of insulin in a dream. . .85

After three days and nights of working on his periodic table without sleep, Mendeleyev fell asleep and later said, “In my dream, I saw the Chart where all the elements are placed as they should be. I woke up and immediately wrote it all down on a piece of paper. Eventually there was only one place which needed to be corrected.”86

**The Types of Dreams**

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as cited above, referred to three types of dreams: those that are meaningless, those that are symbolic, and those which show the future. In this latter category we might include the “realistic” dreams which show an action which the dreamer can carry out when he or she awakes.

Dream specialists have further categorized dreams in various ways. Here are some of them:

*Emphasis dreams* serve to bring to our attention conflicts, feelings, or insights that are neither new nor unfamiliar but that we have failed to appreciate fully. . ..

*Reconceptualization dreams* help the dreamer to reconceptualize “a known issue in a more useful and meaningful way.”87. . ..

*Confrontation dreams* bring dreamers face-to-face with realities [positive or negative] they have been unwilling to admit. . ..

*Discovery dreams* present dreamers with an entirely new perspective on themselves or on some aspect of their lives. . ..

*Integrative dreams* show the dreamer acting in ways that suggest a greater or lesser degree of incorporation of recently gained insight. . ..

*Solution dreams* present the dreamer with fairly direct solutions.88

What is missing from this scheme is the category emphasized by Bahá’u’lláh: dreams which reveal the future. Another author discusses this type as a sub-category of “psychic” or “anomalous” dreams (because of their puzzling nature). In these dreams the dreamer can obtain information about (1) another person’s mental processes (telepathy), (2) the physical environment (clairvoyance), or (3) a future event (precognition).89 There is very little research on the latter dream category. Nevertheless, Stanley Krippner, renowned dream researcher, states that “some dreams about future events [cannot] be casually attributed to coincidence, previous information, or faulty dream recall.” He considers this type of dream to be on the frontier of dreamwork.90

Another broad type of dreaming which has many sub-types is called “shared dreaming” which is sort of a social level of dreaming in which people dream together in many different ways.91

Very similar to the “confrontational dream” mentioned above is the traumatic type of dream. According to Robert C. Smith, professor of internal medicine and psychiatry, these dreams can serve as a growth-promoting warning signal for underlying psychological and sometimes biological dysfunctions.92

Dream specialist, Gayle Delaney, refers to “repeating dreams.” She recounts how for years she had dreams of ice skating--a sport which she had formerly loved but abandoned. She finally decided to listen to her dream. She returned to ice-skating as a source of “courage, discipline, enthusiasm, and a passionate love for the sense and expression of beauty.”93 After she returned to skating the dream was no longer repeated. I had a very similar experience with basketball.

Still another type of dream is called “the lucid dream.” The lucid dreamer is aware that he or she is dreaming during the dream. In my opinion, just being able to recall dreams represents a higher state of consciousness than that possessed by the typical person in Western culture. Lucid dreaming represents an even higher state of consciousness. In 1984 Alexander Borbély stated that lucid dreams were frequently reported but it was not yet possible to confirm them scientifically.94 Less than six years later investigators “discovered that lucid dreamers could communicate with the outside world by moving their eyes in a predetermined pattern while in the middle of a lucid dream, and thus a new frontier was crossed.”95

Still higher levels of consciousness of lucid dreamers involve the ability to converse with the characters in the dream; the ability to program or “incubate” dreams for a particular purpose--usually problem-solving; the ability to decide how to handle the next episode of a serial or recurring dream; and, at an even more evolved level of development, to interpret the dream while it is being dreamed.96

**The Purposes of Dreams**

The purposes which I list below come from dream specialists. In terms of the BLDH program the over-arching purpose of all dreams is to help us to transform ourselves and the world in positive directions. Alfred Adler held that dreams serve “to reinforce the dreamer’s emotional power, motivating them to use that power in attaining goals.”97 Other experts say that dreams can:

* “help the dreamer to adapt to changes in life and to recognize, assess, and solve personal and professional problems”;98
* “enhance our awareness of what we are like, why we are the way we are, and what we might want to change;”99
* help us to work through “the dynamics of loving and working with others--a very important part of our spiritual reality;”100
* “help us think and feel differently about past experiences. Old feelings and ways of thinking can keep us from developing”101
* carry out “a function of regulating, balancing, integrating, healing, or adapting some aspects of the psyche;”102
* serve as a medium for receiving messages from others;103
* assist us in problem-solving;104
* provide information about one’s personality and facilitate personality changes;105
* anticipate one’s imminent phases of development106 (C.G. Jung said that dreams are “always just ahead of ourselves”);107
* provide information about the dreamer’s inner potentials and capacities, indicating the type of individual the dreamer can become;108
* identify latent talents and possibilities;109
* identify hang-ups, “unconscious impulses,” negative habits of thinking, doing, intending and feeling which are blocking the release of the dreamer’s potentialities;110
* serve as a trial run for rehearsing potentialities before carrying the action into waking life.111
* “become the impetus[[39]](#footnote-39)a for human activities;”112and
* help us professionally in the realms of “program designs, management innovations, interpersonal conflicts at work, and product development.”113

**Programming and Recalling Dreams**

All of this may sound exciting, but unless we can recall our dreams their potential usefulness is cut off. Gayle Delaney, Co-director of the Delaney & Flowers Center for the Study of Dreams, gives some helpful advice for remembering dreams and for “incubating” special-purpose dreams:

- “Taking a nap in the afternoon helps some people to remember very vivid dreams, so keep your notebook with you whenever you have the luxury to sleep midday. Some people never recall dreams from their nap periods, but say that their morning recall is much clearer and more copious when they nap regularly.”114

- Go to bed early enough in order obtain as much sleep as you need to be able to wake up refreshed before the alarm goes off.115

- Before retiring, in a dream notebook, write down the major events of the day and the associated feelings. This will help in finding points of connection and meaning after dream recall the following day.

* For dream programming (incubation): write a few lines regarding the nature of the inquiry and summarize it in a single phrase or question. This could be as simple as, “I want to remember my dreams in the morning” or, “What shall I do about ...?”
* Repeat the phrase or question as you fall asleep. Expect to be able to recall your dream. Record whatever is on your mind when you awake in the middle of the night or in the morning.116

I personally find that I am only able to do this intentional kind of dream recall on weekends and holidays when I can take a few extra minutes to lie in bed remembering the “events of the night.” Otherwise, my dream recall is only sporadic. Often, I could not recall a dream until my wife said something which triggered my memory. By sharing our dreams, we also discovered that we had “shared dreams” of marvelous significance.

**Interpreting Dreams**

After we learn to recall dreams, the next challenge is to interpret them. Gayle Delaney states:

We speak to ourselves honestly and sometimes urgently while dreaming, and it is only our lack of education in this metaphorical language that keeps us from being able to make full use of the insights and creative ideas dreams present us every single night. . ..

If we fail to learn the language of our dreams, we cut ourselves off from a good part of our mind’s potential and sometimes walk into unfortunate situations that we might have avoided.117

To interpret symbolic dreams, there are two approaches that can be used in combination one with the other. One is to consult traditional meanings of common, cross-cultural, universal archetypes that appear in dreams: being chased, falling, flying, death, water, a baby, finding a treasure, having sex, going on a journey, etc.118 This can be combined with a personal interpretation of the dream by asking what the image represents in our own life or personality; what feelings and ideas do we associate with it; and then apply this to our present circumstances. A dog in a dream, for example, for a person that has had positive experiences with dogs, may symbolize companionship, loyalty and love. For another person who had a frightening experience with dogs, the same image may represent fear, anxiety, or caution. Hence, there may be both universal and personal meanings for symbolic dreams. At times I have found the process to be very puzzling while at other times it has been embarrassingly obvious!

One of the fundamental principles of Delaney’s approach is this: “The dreamer, on awakening, has all the information she needs to understand the dream although some may be out of her immediate awareness.”119

In other words, no formal course on dream interpretation is needed, nor is a psychoanalyst necessary. God has given us the gift of dreams. Surely, He has also given us the capacity to recall them and interpret them. What I have found helpful is to tell my dreams to others. Not for them to interpret them, but to help me remember the details of the dream and for them to ask key questions which will help me to reflect on the meaning of the dream. Of course, the more you read about dreamwork the better off you'll be and having a professional guide would certainly be a bonus.

**From Dreams to Action**

Dreams are not toys to be explored, taken apart and then left by the wayside. If they do not have an impact on the process of self-transformation or the improvement of civilization then we are wasting our time. The purpose of dreamwork, according to Louis M. Savary, expert on the Judeo-Christian dreamwork tradition, is “spiritual growth . . . to tap into the deepest resources of yourself in order to bring up hidden potentials and integrate them into your waking life, that is, bring them into consciousness.”120

After we have learned to recall our dreams, we need to use the BLDH processes to move the results into action:

* Through reflection and deepening we need to judge our interpretation of the dream to see if it is in harmony with the Teachings;
* Communication and consultation with family members and close friends can help us with the recall and interpretation process.
* We can pray for assistance if we are having trouble remembering our dreams and we can pray for guidance if we are having trouble interpreting them.
* We can meditate on their meaning and meditate on alternative ways of utilizing the new insights. (At this point the benefit of a dream may be accomplished. We may be healed emotionally or spiritually. We may have gained a new understanding of our personality which does not require a specific next action.)
* Some dreams require that we then set specific goals with specific time frames, visualize a state of goal-attainment, and then act with the assurance that the original dream was given to us to improve our performance in the realm of action. It may be a new teaching scheme or a new way of interacting with a certain individual.

**Concluding Remarks on Dreams**

No doubt, when humanity finally accepts Bahá’u’lláh and investigates the Teachings on dreams, the field of dreamwork will take a great leap forward both scientifically and in the day-to-day lives of each person on the planet.

Dreamwork, like vegetarianism or veganism, has not been mandated by Bahá’u’lláh, yet its potential for enhancing human happiness was anticipated by Him. Like prayer; recalling, writing down, interpreting, and applying the insights of dreams appears to be a “safe path” into the world of the spirit from which we can reap a bountiful harvest for creating a richer life and a better world.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND DISCUSSION**

1. According to this chapter:
   1. What is the main purpose of rest and sleep?
   2. What are some of the purposes of dreams?
2. What are your needs for rest and sleep? Are you meeting your needs?
3. Do you recall your dreams? What interesting experiences have you or someone you know had with dreams?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will obtain enough rest and sleep--not too little and not too much.
* I will plan cycles of rest on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis; taking “time out” and vacations when necessary in order to serve better.
* I will try to recall, write down, and evaluate my dreams, and apply their insights to my life.
* I will read: *A Wondrous World: Dreams and Visions* compiled by Elias Zohoori (Jamaica: NSA of Jamaica, 1992).
* I will read: *Breakthrough Dreaming: How to Tap the Power of Your 24-Hour Mind* by Gayle Delaney (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1991)

# SECTION V, PART 2: THE OUTER PHYSICAL QUADRANT

In contrast to the Inner Physical Quadrant which focuses on the physical self, the Outer Physical Quadrant examines the material extensions of the self: the physical environment, earning a living, and managing financial resources.

The processes are arranged in somewhat of a chronological sequence. “Care of Property” deals with the maintenance of physical possessions which have been gradually acquired in the *past* up to the present moment. At one point many of our possessions were only ideas, plans, and goals. They came into being through hard work and financial saving. Therefore, they deserve to be taken care of in order to protect the past investment of time, energy, and monetary resources.

“Work” represents our endeavor during the *present* to earn the material means for maintaining our past acquisitions and for providing for our present and future needs.

The “Budget” process is a tool for planning for the *future*: the next month, the current and coming year, and for more distant needs such as college education, pilgrimage, and retirement.

**QUESTION FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What is the logic underlying the ordering of the three, outer, physical processes of BLDH?

CHAPTER 41: CARE OF PROPERTY

Say: Rejoice not in the things ye possess; tonight they are yours, tomorrow others will possess them.1

--Bahá’u’lláh

The BLDH program takes a broad, wholistic view of the concept of property. There are three categories of property which need to constantly concern us: personal property, Bahá’í property, and public property which includes everything from the street we live on to the planet we inhabit.

Such a comprehensive sphere of responsibility has its parallel in Bahá’u’lláh’s establishment of the Houses of Justice in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. He places the members in the presence of God and then lays upon their shoulders the responsibility for the well-being of the entire human race and perhaps all living creatures:

The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established wherein shall gather counsellors to the number of Bahá . . .. They should consider themselves as entering the Court of the presence of God, the Exalted, the Most High, and as beholding Him Who is the Unseen. It behoveth them to be the trusted ones of the Merciful among men and to regard themselves as the guardians appointed of God for all that dwell on earth.2

Such an approach gets us away from any selfish, ego-centric, provincial, or even patriotic limitations. It is the embodiment of the principle “local action with a global perspective.” In Figure 41.1 this expansive concept of property responsibility is shown through hierarchically nested concentric circles.

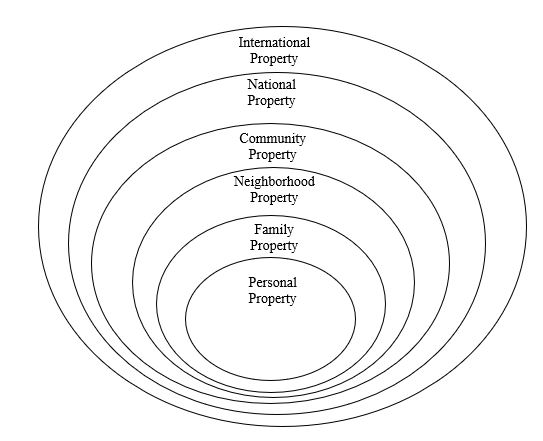


Figure 41. 1: Spheres of Responsibility for Personal and Communal Property

The inner levels make their contribution to the well-being and beauty of the whole. And the outer levels have an impact on the status of the inner levels. As with the Bahá’í funds and social well-being, so with physical property: “the benefit of the part is best achieved through the welfare of the whole.”3 Some examples of the components of each level follow.

* Personal property: clothing, technological devices, jewelry, tools, and other belongings; records of payment of

Huqúqu’lláh, will and testament, etc.

* Family property: house, garden, flowers, pets, car, electrical appliances, electrical system, water system, the air,[[40]](#footnote-40)a sports equipment, games, photo albums, receipts of purchase, written guarantees, etc.
* Neighborhood property: sidewalk, nearby streets and parks, the air, etc.
* Community property: streets, parks, public bathrooms, stores,[[41]](#footnote-41)b shopping centers, museums, theaters, market places, electrical power, water purification and sewage treatment plants, water fronts, beaches, etc.
* National property: national parks, fauna and flora, national monuments, mineral resources, rivers, lakes, marshes, seashores, etc.
* International property: regional and global ecological systems, regional forests and jungles, the oceans, all fauna and flora, the air, the ozone layer, etc.[[42]](#footnote-42)c

**BAHÁ’Í PROPERTIES**

This same scheme applies to the spheres of our responsibility for Bahá’í properties. We should contribute time, energy, materials, and/or funds to the maintenance and improvement of not only our local Bahá’í center but also to regional institutes and schools, our national center, the House of Worship nearest to us, and the properties of the World Centre. (See Figure 41.2)

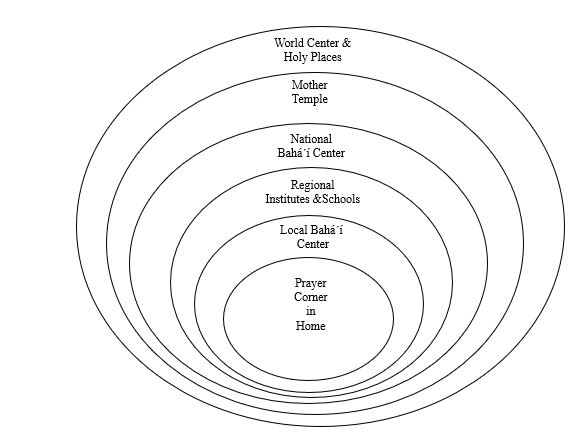


Figure 41. 2: Spheres of Responsibility for Bahá´í Properties

**PUBLIC PROPERTY**

In order to avoid the phenomena of “private splendor, public squalor” a sense of civic duty extending from local to world citizenship needs to be promoted. A graduated, just tax system needs to be in place to provide communal resources. But individual, family and local community efforts are also needed. Examples of valuable activities include:

* turning off electrical appliances and lights when they are not being used,
* conserving water, e.g., turn off the water while brushing one’s teeth and while soaping down in the shower,
* cleaning the street in front of our house,
* planting flowers in a local park,
* refraining from littering,
* recycling, reusing, and/or repurposing used materials,
* using our own shopping bags rather than stores’ plastic or paper bags,
* keeping our car well-tuned and its exhaust system well-maintained,
* cleaning refuse from a local stream, and many other public places, and
* eating a vegan diet.

**PERSONAL PROPERTY**

Bahá’u’lláh, in His Book of laws, encourages us to give attention to our material possessions:

Ye have been enjoined to renew the furnishings of your homes after the passing of each nineteen years . . . He, verily, is desirous of refinement, both for you yourselves and for all that ye possess . . .4

There is great truth in the saying, “We shape our environment and then it shapes us.” If we invest our property and surroundings with the qualities of cleanliness, “smooth-functioningness,” and beauty, they will contribute to our lives a sense of pleasure, of being in harmony with the world, and of security. In the words of the Master:

It is natural for the heart and spirit to take pleasure and enjoyment in all things that show symmetry, harmony and perfection. For instance: a beautiful house, a well designed garden, a symmetrical line, a graceful motion, a well written book, pleasing garments--in fact, all things that have in themselves grace or beauty are pleasing to the heart and spirit. . ..5

If we take care of our property, it will take care of us. When a window was broken in the Master’s house, He immediately had it repaired.6 If we pay attention to safety--child-proofing our home, repairing broken steps, driving with caution, using seatbelts, etc.--then we will be kept safe.

**CHOOSING A HOME**

There are several qualities which need to be kept in mind when choosing a home. If you are pioneering, the question of renting versus purchasing a home is important. On the one hand, selling a house when you are moving to a new post is a tremendous problem. We have had to do this three times. Each time it became a terrible test. On the other hand, owning a home gives the local population more confidence to invest time in making friends with you. When we arrived in Colombia we rented. (I had sworn that I would never again own another home.) Then, when my contract expired and we decided to find another job in the same city and purchase a home, we suddenly had new friendships flowering.

Frank Baker, the husband of Hand of the Cause Dorothy Baker, used this same approach when pioneering to the West Indies:

I wouldn't be surprised if we get a home in Grenada some of these days, most likely not this year however but I feel we will get a lot further along there if we look like permanent fixtures than we would if people got the idea we were only there as temporary residents.7

Another factor is size. A house should be big enough to have firesides and to meet the needs of the family, yet small enough to keep clean and well-maintained without a major investment of time and money. I learned a valuable lesson from my Indian neighbors Krishna and Jayá when I lived in Columbus, Ohio. We each rented one floor of an old two-story house. One day I asked Jayá how she liked the apartment. She replied, “Everything works fine--the lights, the water, the windows--but it is too big. In India my house was very small but I *enjoyed* cleaning it and taking care of it. But this apartment is so big that cleaning has become a big job and I no longer look forward to it.” I had never before heard of someone complaining of “bigness,” only “smallness.” And Jayá was taking care of less than half of a house! But as life rolled on, I often understood the wisdom of her statement.

A closely related concern is repair and maintenance. We have learned the wisdom of viewing a house as a living thing which is susceptible to disease and chronic problems. Before purchasing a home, have a builder look it over for structural and systems problems. Experience has shown us that there are few, if any trouble-free houses in this world. Also, some homes require more maintenance than others. A brick, aluminum-sided, or stone house, for example, requires less painting than wood or cement.

A final note on houses: an oft-overlooked factor is flooding. It is best to check government offices for flood maps or consult with long-time residents of the neighborhood.

**TIME MANAGEMENT IN RELATION TO PROPERTY CARE**

I have learned that there is no end to what needs to be fixed, improved, remodeled, or repainted in a home and a car. Now I know why so many of the retired men I know keep themselves busy for years just “puttering around the house.” Of course, major jobs require major investments of time and money, but the regular upkeep can be programmed. Personally, I like to set aside Saturday mornings for this. My material possessions receive three to four hours of my time per week. What doesn’t get done in this time has to wait until next week. The list of special projects is prioritized on a “squeaky Circle” basis. It is also useful to keep a list of recurring maintenance requirements for cars, computers, and other equipment and appliances. The old “stitch in time saves nine” adage is an excellent principle for time management.

**DETACHMENT FROM MATERIAL POSSESSIONS**

The passage from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh at the beginning of this chapter emphasizes the evanescent character of all that exists on this earthly plane. Our possessions should serve us and not vice versa. The Writings make it clear that one of the major lessons to be learned in this life is to be detached from material wealth while at the same time appreciating its use as the means for bringing progress, health, and beauty into this world:

Detachment consists in refraining from letting our possessions possess us. A prosperous merchant who is not attached to his business knows detachment. A banker whose occupation does not prevent him from serving humanity is detached. A poor man can be attached to a small thing. . .. There are many rich people who are detached, and many poor who are not.8 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Attachments are like ropes which drag us to the earth when we try to fly. To be detached is to be free, is to be flying in a new ether, is to be light, is to be joyous--and a Bahá’í should be joyous. He should attain to such a station of joy that the world will inquire as to his secret. If he be entirely detached and emptied of self he will be enabled to start in a cold heart a great fire.9 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What are the purposes of property from a Bahá’í point of view?
2. Does “care of property” refer to only personal property? Explain.
3. Are all wealthy people attached to worldly possessions and all poor people detached from them? Explain. Give examples.
4. Is a person who does not maintain his home showing that s/he is detached from the material world? What does it mean to be detached from material things?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will set up a prioritized, maintenance and repair schedule for my personal possessions.
* I will initiate or collaborate with neighborhood improvement projects.
* I will refrain from littering.
* I will participate in recycling programs.
* I will volunteer to help clean the grounds of the Bahá’í institute or school nearest to me.
* I will contribute to the maintenance fund of the nearest House of Worship.
* I will support the maintenance of the Bahá’í properties at the World Centre by making regular contributions to the World Centre Endowment Fund.
* I will become a vegan in order to reduce the detrimental impact on the climate caused by unnecessary animal husbandry.

CHAPTER 42: WORK

It is enjoined upon every one of you to engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like. We have graciously exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship to God, the True One. Ponder ye in your hearts the grace and the blessings of God and render thanks unto Him at eventide and at dawn. Waste not your time in idleness and sloth. Occupy yourselves with that which profiteth yourselves and others. Thus hath it been decreed in this Tablet from whose horizon the day-star of wisdom and utterance shineth resplendent.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

**THE PURPOSES OF WORK**

The purpose of work, according to our Teachings, is at least four-fold: to worship God, to serve humanity, to obtain material resources, and to attain a sense of fulfillment and joy. From the holistic, inter-connective perspective of the BLDH Circle, work enables us to develop competencies that are spiritual, corporal, financial, social, and intellectual in nature.

In the Passage above, Bahá’u’lláh bestows a great bounty on humankind, liberating us from the drudgery of toil and labor by elevating work to the station of worship. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states further, “In the Bahá’í Cause arts, sciences and all crafts are (counted as) worship . . .. Briefly, all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship . . .”2

In regards to work as service the Master states:

All humanity must obtain a livelihood by sweat of the brow and bodily exertion; at the same time seeking to lift the burden of others, striving to be the source of comfort to souls and facilitating the means of living. This in itself is devotion to God. Bahá’u’lláh has thereby encouraged action and stimulated service . . .3

‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself provided service to humanity through a particular job. He said that His profession was “mat-making.”4

In relation to work as a means of obtaining wealth--which is not to be hoarded in a miserly way but managed wisely and spent for the love of God--Bahá’u’lláh says:

O My Servant! Ye are the trees of My garden; ye must give forth goodly and wondrous fruits, that ye yourselves and others may profit therefrom. Thus it is incumbent on every one to engage in crafts and professions, for therein lies the secret of wealth, O men of understanding! For results depend upon means, and the grace of God shall be all-sufficient unto you. Trees that yield no fruit have been and will ever be for the fire.5

O My Servant! The best of men are they that earn a livelihood by their calling and spend upon themselves and upon their kindred for the love of God, the Lord of all worlds.6

The Master Himself, at one point in His life, engaged in trade in order to build a bath for His Father.7

But beyond serving religious, humanitarian, or economic ends, work should also be a source of deep, personal satisfaction and happiness. Alfred North Whitehead states that “work should be transformed with intellectual and moral vision and thereby turned into a joy, triumphing over its weariness and pain.”8 Rúhíyyih Khánum in *Prescription for Living* gives the following, very stimulating advice:

There is probably no creature alive so profoundly restless by nature as man . . ..

This marvelous capacity we have to do, to produce, is at once the spring of our health and, to a great extent, our happiness in life. Nothing can convey so solid a feeling of satisfaction in this world as something we have accomplished. A job well done, be it making a pie or writing a book or building a bridge, can produce a degree of contentment, a sense of buoyancy and fulfillment, that practically nothing else can.9

**CHOOSING A VOCATION**

Deciding how to serve humanity is an extremely important decision. Making a wrong choice will cause problems which can last for years--sometimes a life time. Time and energy spent on making the right choice is well worth it. There are three guidelines which I recommend to young people who are exploring career choices: (1) know yourself, (2) know the needs of society, (3) know the characteristics of the fields you are considering.

Knowing your self involves the identification of your particular needs and wants, your personality type, your talents, and your calling. It requires becoming cognizant of your strengths and your weaknesses; what you like to do and what you do *not* like to do. Taking formal personality and career aptitude tests can be very helpful. Dr. Robert Kim-Farley, in his excellent article “Education and Training for Future Service to Mankind,” points out three general areas to consider: (1) income--knowing what kind of lifestyle you want (within the constraints of moderation), (2) living environment--knowing whether you prefer rural or urban areas, tropical or temperate climate, etc., (3) spare time--knowing whether you want to have an intensely involving career or one that allows you ample time for serving the Faith and pursuing other interests.10 Consulting with parents, teachers, and fellow Bahá’ís who have “seen you in action” can provide another means for gaining valuable insights by helping you to identify your potentialities and talents which could be further developed and polished.

Regarding the needs of society Bahá’u’lláh states, “Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recommends “the study of those arts and sciences of which society stands in dire need.”11 “Relate thou the Teachings of the Abhá Beauty to the urgent needs of this present day,” is His counsel to each individual believer, “and thou wilt see that they provide an instant remedy for the ailing body of the world.”12 Learning about the needs of the world can be accomplished in several ways: through deepening, through study, and especially by travel teaching and giving a year or two of youth service in diverse places--remote jungles, rural areas, urban areas different from your own, indigenous areas, foreign cultures, etc. This will help you to learn how other people live; to see life from other people’s point of view; and to become familiar with the human needs that are special for a certain people and those that are common to all peoples. It will also assure that you become knowledgeable about the real world beyond the confines of schools and textbooks.

In relation to social needs, there are two other phenomena to keep in mind. One is that many of the world’s problems are so complex that the solutions are requiring much more interaction between experts in diverse fields. For example, to diminish the negative environmental impact of a new highway requires knowledge of both engineering and biology. Professionals who have dual majors or more than one degree, each in a different but related field will be in increasing demand. The other phenomenon is the rate of change. Fields are developing and intermixing so quickly that new categories of professions are continually appearing. For example, the application of robotics and computer engineering to the creation of communication and mobility devices for the handicapped, to manufacturing, and to transportation is incredibly exciting.

Investigating the particular characteristics of possible careers is also important: the length and cost of required study, the available market for the skills of the career, the work hours of a professional in the field, the current salary range, the personal rewards of the career and its drawbacks, etc. Another set of valuable questions for investigation, based on parameters outlined by Dr. Kim-Farley, asks: Is the work:

* manual or intellectual (or a combination of both)?
* concrete (working with things and people) or abstract (working with ideas, words, or numbers)?
* technological or social in nature?
* in the private or public sector?
* local, regional, national, or international in its sphere of operation?
* authoritarian (involving the pressures of decision-making) or advisory/consultative in nature?
* interruptible (easy to switch to another career) or non-interruptible (involving long-term, permanent commitment such as buying a farm and machinery, or building a factory and equipping it)?
* flexible (easily integrated with other professions) or rigid (having a single, pre-determined track for professional growth--a frequent characteristic of large companies and civil service jobs)?
* routine (assignments are consistent in nature) or non-routine (having a lot of variety in assignments)?13

**CHANGING PROFESSIONS**

If you are not happy with your work, the reasons need to be examined by reflecting on questions such as: Are my expectations too high? Is it the work environment (physical and/or social) that is bothering me or the work itself? Do I need to change to another job or do I need to change to a different career? Whatever new horizons you may be looking at, the recommendations given in Chapter 34 on vocational development may be of use to you.

**THE BALANCE OF WORK AND SERVICE TO THE FAITH**

Although this topic was discussed from the viewpoints of goal-setting and service, another angle needs to be considered. The basic principle of balance is reflected in the advice of the Master given to a physician who wanted to give up his medical work to serve the Faith full-time: “Thou shouldst continue thy profession and at the same time try to serve the Kingdom of God.”14

The problem that I have encountered in my own life with trying to balance my time between these two areas is that I end up giving mostly only my “tired moments”15 to the Faith. To me this has been a source of great frustration and trial. According to the Guardian (through his secretary):

In one of His Tablets Bahá’u’lláh says that the highest form of detachment in this day is to be occupied with some profession and be self-supporting. A good Bahá’í, therefore, is the one who so arranges his life as to devote time both to his material needs and also to the service of the Cause. Indeed Bahá’u’lláh has stated that one of the signs of detachment is to engage in a profession.16

There are a few alternatives however: (1) offer your professional services to the Faith on a full-time basis at least for a few years, (2) transform your profession and place of work so that it will more fully reflect the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, or (3) initiate your own private endeavor and base it on the Teachings.

Because of the financial limitations of the Faith at the present moment, there are few Bahá’ís who are able to give full-time, professional, remunerated service to the Faith. Even when it is given, the period of time is usually limited. There are no careers in the Faith. There are only careers which the Faith needs from time to time such as architects, engineers, administrators, communications experts, secretaries, educators, etc.

In a letter to a National Spiritual Assembly, the Guardian spoke of the “major task” of consolidating the Bahá’í administrative institutions, but he also referred to the need for a “minor undertaking” the purpose of which should be to “imbue with the spirit of power and strength such movements as in their restricted scope are endeavoring to achieve what is near and dear to the heart of every true Bahá’í.”17 This advice, in my opinion, could also apply to institutions, organizations, companies, businesses, schools, hospitals and others. Wherever we work we can bring the Bahá’í spirit to bear on its affairs, on its *esprit de corps*, and on many other of its processes.

Another alternative is to become involved in or initiate a social-economic project which is inspired by and based on Bahá’í principles: schools, medical centers, cooperatives, agricultural projects, community development, natural resource conservation, promotion of small businesses, etc. In the same letter cited above, Shoghi Effendi states: “It would even appear at times to be advisable and helpful as a supplement to their work for the Bahá’ís to initiate any undertaking, not specifically designated as Bahá’í, provided they have ascertained that such an undertaking would constitute the best way of approach to those whose minds and hearts are as yet unprepared for a full acceptance of the claim of Bahá’u’lláh.”18

If none of these are possible, then we must be content with the will of God, happy that our devoted work is considered by Him as worship, and delighted that we have the opportunity to teach our glorious Faith to our fellow colleagues through our deeds and words.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What is the fourfold purpose of work according to the Bahá’í teachings?
2. How are all four quadrants of the BLDH Circle related to work?
3. What are the three main factors that should be taken into account when choosing or changing one’s work?
4. How would you or how do you balance work with service to the Faith?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

**Pre-career:**

* I will investigate the possibilities of taking a personality and a career aptitude test.
* I will study the Writings and the opinion of experts (especially Bahá’ís who are renowned in their field) to learn about the most urgent needs of society.
* I will travel to get to know the needs of the people first hand and to meet other professionals before I choose a career.

**Mid-career:**

* I will set specific goals in order to “imbue with the spirit of power and strength” of the Faith my profession and my place of work: writing and publishing articles, initiating new procedures, introducing the Bahá’í approach to consultation, providing an example of work performed with joy and gladness, etc.
* I will evaluate my degree of contentment with my present work.
* I will initiate and maintain a network of contacts within my field and in other fields in which I am interested.
* I will read:
  + the chapter on work in Rúhíyyih Rabbani’s book *Prescription for Living*.
  + *Finding a Job You Can Love* by Ralph T. Mattson and Arthur F. Miller, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1982)
  + *Reawakening the Spirit in Work* by Jack Hawley (New York, NY: Fireside, Simon & Schuster, 1993)
  + *Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet* by Howard Gardner, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and William Damon (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001)

CHAPTER 43: BUDGET

Trust in God and engage in your work and practice economy; the confirmations of God shall descend and you will be enabled to pay off your debts. Be ye occupied always with the mention of Bahá’u’lláh and seek ye no other hope and desire save Him.1 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

**THE PURPOSES OF A BUDGET**

The over-arching purposes of a budget in the Bahá’í way of life are at once spiritual, humanitarian, and material. Wealth is not condemned in the teachings and is viewed as a natural consequence of obtaining expertise in crafts and professions:

The first Taráz and the first effulgence which hath dawned from the horizon of the Mother Book is that man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty. Having attained the stage of fulfilment and reached his maturity, man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy in the estimation of men of wisdom, and especially in the eyes of servants who dedicate themselves to the education of the world and to the edification of its peoples.2 --Bahá’u’lláh

O my servant! The best of men are they that earn a livelihood by their calling and spend upon themselves and upon their kindred for the love of God, the Lord of all worlds.3 -- Bahá’u’lláh

Creating enough wealth to live comfortably and to be financially independent upon retirement are the legitimate, practical purposes of a budget. However, creating riches as a central purpose of one’s life is considered by Bahá’u’lláh to be ultimately pointless because everyone eventually passes on--empty-handed--into the next world:

O Son of Man! Should prosperity befall thee, rejoice not, and should abasement come upon thee, grieve not, for both shall pass away and be no more.4 --Bahá’u’lláh

Bahá’u’lláh also warns that wealth, unless the believer remains detached from it, can become a great test and barrier between the believer and God:

O son of being! Busy not thyself with this world, for with fire We test the gold, and with gold We test Our servants.5

O ye that pride yourselves on mortal riches! Know ye in truth that wealth is a mighty barrier between the seeker and his desire, the lover and his beloved. The rich, but for a few, shall in no wise attain the court of His presence nor enter the city of content and resignation. Well is it then with him, who, being rich, is not hindered by his riches from the eternal kingdom, nor deprived by them of imperishable dominion. By the Most Great Name! The splendor of such a wealthy man shall illuminate the dwellers of heaven even as the sun enlightens the people of the earth!6

Dr. Muhájir continually reminded the friends of the “futility of striving for material gain.”7 He often cited the beloved Guardian’s message to the Bahá’ís of America in which he challenges them to detach themselves from their material possessions:

It is therefore imperative for the individual . . . believer, and particularly the affluent, the independent, the comfort-loving, and those obsessed by material pursuits; to step forward, and dedicate their resources, their time, and their very lives to a Cause of such transcendence that no human eye can even dimly perceive its glory.8

A budget helps us keep tabs on our income, our short and long-term financial commitments, and our spending. A budget is a guide and an estimate only. Because it is future-oriented, and because no one can predict the exact nature of the future, there is no perfect budget. Adjustments often need to be made in order to adapt to changing conditions. Nevertheless, a budget is a valuable instrument for not only the management of resources as they flow through our hands on a monthly basis, but also for achieving long-range goals. If a budget is made and strictly and sacrificially adhered to, then even the most lofty goals can be reached. But if a budget is continually abused, then the money seems to evaporate into thin air. Goal accomplishment then becomes frustrated and the process of financial goal-setting can cease all together.

The steps for creating a budget are very simple: (1) calculate your income, (2) using the categories under the long, medium, and short-term purposes given below, select the ones that apply to you and add any others that are needed, (3) calculate past expenses and, based on these, estimate future expenses for each category, (4) try to cut medium-term and short-term expenses by 5-10%, and (5) stick as closely as possible to your budget.

Long-term purposes (monthly outlays with possible exception of Huqúqu’lláh): Huqúqu’lláh payments, Bahá’í funds, retirement, college fund for each child, and continuing education fund for each parent.

Medium-term purposes (non-monthly expenses but monthly outlays): (1) emergency fund for unexpected purposes such as job loss (equivalent of 3-8 months of net income recommended), (2) fund for expected but non-monthly purposes such as[[43]](#footnote-43)a (alphabetical order): Bahá’í literature; car repairs; clothing; gifts (anniversaries, birthdays, etc.); home care; insurance (car, home/fire, and life); subscriptions; major purchases; medical expenses; memberships and professional fees; pets; photos; pilgrimage; postage; savings for special purposes; school supplies; school tuition; taxes--car, income, property: and vacations.

Short-term, monthly expenses (in alphabetical order): allowances for each person in the family; Internet services; child-care; electricity; entertainment; gas; gasoline; groceries; haircuts and beauty parlor; house cleaning service; house payment (or rent); lawn-care; miscellaneous, unforeseen expenses (about 5% of budget); newspaper; school lunches; school transportation; phone; and water.

Children also need to be taught to divide their allowance into at least three general categories: savings, the Fund, and spending. To avoid easy access, savings should be placed in a bank account. Children can be taught to save for short-term goals such as purchasing a guitar and for long-term goals such as paying for their own expenses during a year or two of service to the Bahá’í community between high school and college.

For beginners and for tight economic circumstances, I recommend a simple technique. I have found it to be very helpful to use marked envelopes for the categories that require regular, out-of-pocket payments. The other monies are deposited in a bank or money market fund or invested for later use. By separating funds into labeled, “sacred” envelopes, the money is there when it is time to pay each bIL Without this system it becomes too easy to “dip” our hands into the general fund.

Another technique is to place your money in various categories of “accessibility.” The more accessible money is, the more likely it will be spent. The more inaccessible it is, the less likely it will be spent. That is, the more “out of sight” it is, the more “out of mind” it will be. Here are some ideas ranging from greatest to least accessibility.

* Cash in wallet for: gasoline, essential purchases, and spending portion of allowance.
* Cash on file in marked envelopes for: utility bills, service bills, and petty cash fund.
* Checking account for:monthly car and house maintenance, monthly rent or house payment, and other large monthly payments.
* Money market or savings account or short-term certificates of deposit for:yearly insurance payments, yearly tax payments, yearly vacations, and major car and house improvements.
* Long-term savings systems such as mutual funds, high-yield certificates of deposits, bonds, stocks, and other investments for:pilgrimage, each child’s Year of Service Fund (preferably a joint endeavor amongst the child, the parents, and gifts from family members), each child’s university studies fund, each parent’s continuing education fund, and investment/ retirement plan.
* Payments to Huqúqu’lláh and donations to Bahá’í funds for**:** achieving nearness to God and eternal happiness (not to mention the promised enhancement of material well-being discussed earlier in the chapters dedicated to these institutions). Whatever we invest in the Abhá Kingdom, neither we nor anyone else can touch. This is the ultimate and the safest retirement plan! According to the Báb the reward for what we sacrifice in this world will always be there waiting for us: “O peoples of the world! Whatsoever ye have offered up in the way of the One True God, ye shall indeed find preserved by God, the Preserver, intact at God’s Holy Gate.”9

**ECONOMIZING**

Economy is the foundation of human prosperity. The spend-thrift is always in trouble. Prodigality on the part of any person is an unpardonable sin. We must never live on others like a parasitic plant . . . It is more kingly to be satisfied with a crust of stale bread than to enjoy a sumptuous dinner of many courses, the money for which comes out of the pockets of others.10 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

I was very fortunate to have fallen under the tutelage of Knight of Bahá’u’lláh Olivia Kelsey during two of my “lean” university years. She had been forced, due to asthma, to return from her pioneering post in Monaco at the end of the World Crusade. I met her in 1971, eight years after she had returned. She was living alone in a second-floor apartment just a few blocks from me. She was in her eighty’s, supporting herself by baby-sitting. Olivia gave me lessons on what she called “how to live on a shoe-string.” She said that if you want to avoid spending money, simply *don’t go into stores*. For her, stores were to be avoided, a necessary evil at the best. She taught me that if you must go to a store, first make a list of the items you need, then *stick to the list*. When you enter the store, head straight for the needed items, then directly to the cashier and *out the door* without even looking back! Olivia was a very elegant lady who stood very straight and tall, a Shakespearean actress on the New York stage in her day. I recall how once, when she was given some second-hand drapery material, she turned it into a beautiful dress. Another time, one of her patrons gave her a collection of out-moded hats. Olivia wore them with great elegance and didn’t even think twice about their being used. Every once in a while, she would surprise me. “Keith,” she would say in perfect delight, “look at this two-hundred-dollar check that I am sending off to National!” She had somehow saved money from her meager baby-sitting jobs--a special donation that was over and above her regular contribution! She took great joy in giving to the Fund. I think more than anything this was because she knew how much it would please the heart of her beloved Guardian. I never sensed at all that she was sharing the secret of her contribution out of pride. She was trying to teach me what wonderful things can be accomplished with thrift.

Being content with little is a blessed virtue. The Master once remarked that, “The people of the East . . . were content with less than the people here [in the U.S.], so their hours of work were shorter.” He also referred to “the absence of suicide in the Orient.”11 And the homespun wisdom of Henry David Thoreau tells us, “He that does not eat need not work.”12 Being happy with little can enhance our generosity during days of prosperity and can take the sting out of the pain when they are gone.

**WEALTH VERSUS POVERTY: A QUESTION OF RELATIVITY**

There is always someone ahead of us and there is always someone behind us in all affairs such as knowledge, patience, wisdom, and wealth. It is healthy, I believe, to have contact with people from all economic classes. Just as mountains reflect the grandeur and strength of God, and kings with their majesty are His shadow on earth, so does wealth that is greater than our own remind us of our smallness, our humility, and the vast riches of God.

Being with those who are materially poorer than ourselves helps us to realize how prosperous we are and stimulates a need in us to give to those who have less. It helps us to realize how thankful we should be for what we do have and to be content with less. When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá saw in London the extremely wealthy and the hungry masses living side by side it made Him exceedingly sad, and He remarked,

The time will come in the near future when humanity will become so much more sensitive than at present that the man of great wealth will not enjoy his luxury, in comparison with the deplorable poverty about him. He will be forced, for his own happiness, to expend his wealth to procure better conditions for the community in which he lives.13

The fluctuation between wealth and poverty is so circumstantial that our happiness should in no way depend on our economic condition. Bahá’u’lláh continually reminds us of the changes and chances of this world:

O Son of My Handmaid! Be not troubled in poverty nor confident in riches, for poverty is followed by riches, and riches are followed by poverty.14

In relation to the creation of wealth, there are five age-old principles identified by George Clason in his classic book *The Richest Man in Babylon* which, when applied and combined with paying Huqúqu’lláh and giving sacrificially to the Bahá’í Fund, will help assure financial security throughout your life and financial independence upon retirement:

1. Economize and be thrifty, searching always for ways to cut expenses.
2. Set aside at least 10% or more of what you earn to (1st) create an easily-accessible emergency fund sufficient to support you and your family for 3-8 months without having any income and (2nd) for saving in medium to long-term investments.
3. Invest in your own education in order to increase your income.
4. Own your own home rather than rent. (This is one instance when borrowing money and going into debt is justifiable in the long run.)
5. Make wise investments based on experienced, professional advice from experts.

In relation to priorities, because I have seen pioneers become dependent on the Fund when in crisis or upon reaching retirement age, I agree with the author of *Created Rich*, Patrick Barkley, that we should “pay ourselves first” at least ten percent of our income before giving to the Fund. That is, we should not give to the Fund at the expense of making a regular contribution to our retirement fund. Of course, if our employer does this, the effort required of us is much less. In a sense, by applying this principle, we are still giving to the Fund because we are providing for our future financial independence from the Fund when we can no longer work and must depend on our investments to produce funds to cover our expenses.

And if all our budgetary efforts fail due to unforeseen calamities and we are cast into poverty, let us gain assurance and hope from the Words of the Blessed Beauty:

O Son of Being! If poverty overtake thee, be not sad; for in time the Lord of wealth shall visit thee. Fear not abasement, for glory shall one day rest on thee.15

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. Are family budgets really necessary? Why or why not?
2. What are the legitimate purposes and advantages of wealth?
3. What are the dangers of wealth?
4. What spiritual forces and principles can be capitalized on to improve our financial situation?
5. What are the five practical methods that we can utilize to increase our wealth?
6. Is “paying ourselves first” before giving to the Fund a selfish concept? Why or why not?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will make a personal or family budget that includes short, medium, and long-range financial goals and live within it.
* I will read:
  + *Created Rich: How Spiritual Attitudes and Material Means Work Together to Achieve Prosperity* by Patrick Barker(Naturegraph, 1995).
  + *The Richest Man in Babylon* by George S. Clason (Perigee Books, 1984).
  + *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill (Random House, 1990).

# SECTION VI: THE SOCIAL QUADRANT

Nothing is too much trouble when one loves.1 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

**THE CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION OF THE SOCIAL QUADRANT**

The Social Quadrant focuses on relationships, especially human relationships, and the role of communication as the key overarching process. The other quadrants each have different emphases. The Spiritual Quadrant focuses on our relationship with God, Bahá’u’lláh and the Covenant. The Physical Quadrant focuses on our relationship with the material world around us and within us. The Psychological Quadrant focuses on intellectual processes which can be used to enrich relationships and enhance development in all three aspects: physical, human, and divine.

The Social Quadrant is the quadrant of love. For this reason, the heart2 and the color red have been chosen as its symbols. The emphasis is on the expression of love in all of our relationships with humans, animals, plants and nature, in general. In everyday life, the love of the Social Quadrant overflows and spills into all of the other quadrants and processes, for example, showing love for God, the Faith, learning, our bodies, our homes, our work, and so on.

Love is the greatest law in this vast universe of God! Love is the one law which causeth and controlleth order among the existing atoms! Love is the universal magnetic power between the planets and stars shining in the lofty firmament! Love is the cause of unfoldment to a searching mind, of the secrets deposited in the universe by the Infinite!3 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

It is therefore evident that in the world of humanity the greatest king and sovereign is love. If love were extinguished, the power of attraction dispelled, the affinity of human hearts destroyed, the phenomena of human life would disappear.4 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

The ability of love to attract, to integrate even extreme opposites is a power which is weak in the intellect. The human heart is more of a specialist in synthesis. The human mind is stronger in analysis and classification--the ability to break things into clearly labeled parts. When a stranger walks into a party, he or she is immediately analyzed--judged--to be from a certain social class, a certain part of town, having a certain level of education, a certain degree of physical beauty, etc. But it is the human heart which is capable of seeing beyond all of these differences and beholding in everyone a creature of God who has been sent by Him to touch our life in a special way in order to teach us some lesson about the art of living. As the Master once advised us to say to ourselves when meeting a stranger:

“Yonder is coming to me a letter sent me by God.” The outside of the envelope may be dirty, and torn and broken, but if we could open the envelope of the life that comes before us and look within the envelope and learn to read the writing, we would find in every human soul which crosses our threshold or which is yonder over the man-made national border, a message from God, and if we could understand the message it would be God's benediction to us.5

And in the words of Rúhíyyih Khánum: “Love, being essentially a divine force, bends; it leaps like a spark the gaps between people’s thoughts and conflicting desires, between perhaps widely different temperaments.”6

The Social Quadrant of the BLDH Circle is limited in its ability to show all of the love-colored relationships which are part of our emotional life, but it does illumine well the hierarchical nature of our social environment. The themes, with, perhaps, the exception of “nature “(for example, pets), have been arranged in order from the smallest to the largest social spheres; from greater to lesser degrees of intimacy: self, nature, spouse,[[44]](#footnote-44)a children,[[45]](#footnote-45)b family, friends, Bahá’í community, work community,[[46]](#footnote-46)c and society. Figure VI.1 shows this relationship more clearly than does the BLDH Circle.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá used a similar scheme in His discussion of how the principles underlying a family are the same as those underlying the “family of nations”:

Compare the nations of the world to the members of a family. A family is a nation in miniature. Simply enlarge the circle of the household, and you have the nation. Enlarge the circle of nations, and you have all humanity.7

He went on to equate a person’s expanding circle of concern with the movement from self-centeredness to perfection:

Every imperfect soul is self-centred and thinketh only of his own good. But as his thoughts expand a little he will begin to think of the welfare and comfort of his family. If his ideas still more widen, his concern will be the felicity of his fellow citizens; and if still they widen, he will be thinking of the glory of his land and of his race. But when ideas and views reach the utmost degree of expansion and attain the stage of perfection, then will he be interested in the exaltation of humankind. He will then be the well-wisher of all men and the seeker of the weal and prosperity of all lands. This is indicative of perfection.8

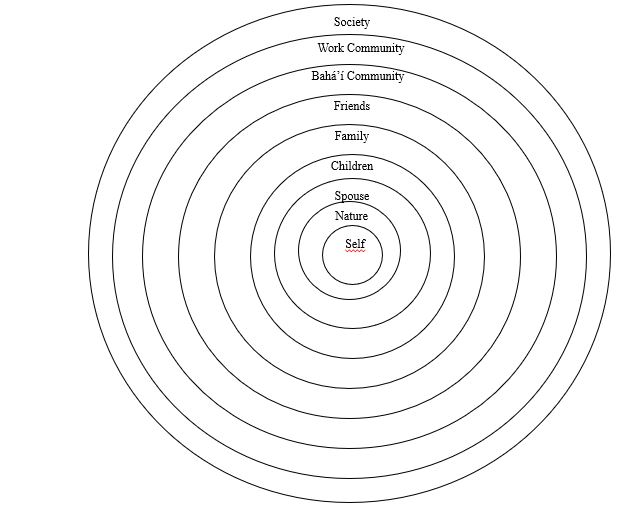


Figure VI. 1: The “Nested” Relationships Underlying the Social Quadrant

The purpose of Figure VI.1 is to show the seamless interconnection of levels of society. It is a single composition composed of other smaller compositions; a single entity comprised of other entities. At one level the Latin American culture has grasped this idea better than the North American culture. In the U.S. we greet people by asking, “How are you?” whereas, in the countries where I have lived in Latin America, the polite way to begin a conversation is, “How are you? How is your family?” The Latin people would never think of leaving out the family and they have a natural understanding that no one is alone in the world. We form a part of a family and we certainly cannot be feeling happy and well if someone in our family is depressed or IL ‘Abdu’l-Bahá extends this concept of interconnectedness to the entire creation.

It is obvious that all created things are connected one to another by a linkage complete and perfect, even, for example, as are the members of the human body. Note how all the members of the human body are connected one to another. In the same way, all the members of this endless universe are linked one to another.9

The line which divides the Inner Quadrant from the Outer Quadrant on the Circle, like the lines in Figure VI.1, is purely conceptual. In reality the degree of overlap is much greater. What it does divide, in theory, is the intimate, household, family life from the exterior, social, public life. (See Figure 3.2) In real life the relation of parts to wholes, inner life to outer life, is relative. For example, compared to the inner life of the self, our marriage life is part of our outer life. But, in comparison to the outer circle of the family, our marital relationship is more inner and intimate.

Another limitation of the diagram of the Social Quadrant is its confinement to the present time in the physical world. We need to extend the circle of our important, human relations into the past and into the future. We must feel the benevolent pressure of those who have gone before us, who continue to live and inspire us from the spiritual realms above, and who are waiting expectantly for us to accomplish great deeds and to carry forward the work of building a divine civilization: the Prophets of old; Bahá’u’lláh and His Holy Family; the Báb and the Dawn-Breakers; our parents, grandparents, and ancestors; the Supreme Concourse; our heroes and heroines in all fields of human endeavor--technological, scientific, social, political, and spiritual; and others. The future, yet unborn generations also call out to us, begging us to build for them, a better world, with a welcoming, loving family that celebrates the Revelation of the Abhá Beauty. Thus, the concept of the oneness of humankind takes on new dimensions which are not limited by space or time; and new feelings of belonging to a cosmic family stretching out lovingly to all ends of eternity.

The cry is not yours. It is not you talking, but innumerable ancestors talking with your mouth. It is not you who desire, but innumerable generations of descendants longing with your heart. . ..

Future generations do not move far from you in an uncertain time. They live, desire, and act in your loins and your heart. . ..

The race of men from which you come is the huge body of the past, the present, and the future. . ..

“Do not die that we may not die,” the dead cry out within you. . .. “We had not time to turn our thoughts into deeds; turn them into deeds! We had no time to grasp and to crystallize the face of our hope; make it firm!”

“Finish our work! Finish our work! All day and all night we come and go through your body, and we cry out. . ..”

Your first duty, in completing your service to your race, is to feel within you all your ancestors. Your second duty is to throw light on their onrush and continue their work. Your third duty is to pass on to your son the great mandate to surpass you.10 --Nikos Kazantzakis

The Social Quadrant of the BLDH Circle helps us to meditate on, and to not lose track of the complex web of vital relationships in our lives. Our reflections should revolve around the question, “Are our various social relations manifesting the following qualities?”

* loving others and allowing them to love us
* giving and accepting what is given
* sharing
* mutual appreciation and respect
* encouraging others and being thankful for encouragement received
* helping and appreciating help given
* caring and being cared for
* trust and loyalty
* fellowship
* within a marriage:
  + desiring and making oneself desirable
  + intimacy
* sense of belonging: to your spouse, your family, your Bahá’í community, your city, your nation, your culture, the community of the Most Great Name, the family of humankind, the world of nature, and the cosmos11

Having healthy relationships is very important. As was noted in the chapter on nutrition, they have an impact on physical health and are, at the same time, affected by various physical and biological conditions. Dr. Pattabi Raman, a nutritionist and educator, extends ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s principle of maintaining a balance of nutrients in the body to the psychological/ emotional realm: “Often ‘psychological malnutrition’ is due to an imbalance in the ‘psychological nutrients,’ e.g. acceptance, affection, approval, attention, protection, control, and guidance.” 12

In African tribal society, according to Yaya Diallo, relationships are a first-level point of diagnosis when a person is not well mentally: “When an individual becomes disturbed, the Minianka look to disturbed relationships as the cause, since psychological imbalance is seen as a symptom of social imbalance and possible disharmony with the invisible world.” 13

Dr. Magdalene Carney, in her program for developing affective competence,14 offers an easy-to-use system which I have found very helpful for getting in touch with my emotions (and those of others), and then dealing with them:

Evaluative Processes:

- Reflection: How do I feel? What am I feeling?

- Interpretation: Why do I feel this way? What circumstances have caused this feeling?

- Appraisal: Is my feeling justified? What should I do with my feeling?

Regulative Processes[[47]](#footnote-47) (based on the results of appraisal):

- Facilitation: Should I express my emotion in some way? (Examples: facilitating [showing], depending on the

circumstances, awe, appreciation, courage, gladness, happiness, gratitude, hope, humor, joy, love, modesty, reverence,

trust, and wonder)

- Inhibition: Should I prevent the expression of my feeling? (Examples: inhibiting arrogance, destructive impulses, envy,

jealousy, and rage)

- Coping: (When there is not a whole lot that can done about the situation) Should I accept this feeling and do my best

to keep going? (Examples: coping with loss (especially the death of a loved one), despondency, grief, disappointment,

hatred, and prejudice)

- Managing: Should I channel the expression of my feeling into the best possible pathway? (Examples: managing anger

(especially justified anger), anxiety, cowardice, and fear)

Empathic Processes (which apply more to the social realm):

- Imitation: Identifying role models, heroes and heroines upon whose life I can pattern my actions.

- Identification: Finding leaders and exemplars, the thoughts and feelings of whom are strongly shared by me.

- Reciprocation: A mutual return of a demonstration of affect.[[48]](#footnote-48)

This scheme is not only useful for one’s own self-development but also for helping children. For example, when reading a book to a child, the emotions can be explored: How do you think Mickey Mouse felt in such and such a situation? Why did he feel that way? What did he do with his feeling? Did he handle his feelings in the best way? Have *you* ever felt like that? When? (Under what circumstances?) What did you do with your feeling? Can you think of another way of handling that kind of a feeling? and so on. This simple type of conversation can help kids in two ways. First, they become more aware of and able to identify and name the many different kinds of feelings they have, and, second, it helps them to develop alternative strategies for dealing with the emotions when they arise the next time.

**COMMUNICATION**

Although there are nine different topics in the Social Quadrant, communication has been identified as the single, most comprehensive, and most vital process which underlies them all:

* communication with the Self
* communication (communion) with nature
* communication with your spouse
* communication with your children
* family communication
* communication with your friends
* communication with the Bahá’í community and its institutions
* communication with your employees, colleagues, and superiors
* communication with an ever-growing circle of new acquaintances and friends

Communication is defined in the broadest sense possible. It means the expression of the Self in any way--body language, cultural gestures such as gift-giving, spoken words, written messages, and others. Except for mental telepathy and silent prayer, communication usually requires some type of muscular movement. It was chosen as a key process[[49]](#footnote-49) because it is the “means” of expressing emotions and thoughts; and because communication takes time. Love and friendliness do not take time. They are qualities. It is their expression which takes time. This time-based approach gives us a tool, a lever, for helping us to manage our social life: Do I spend time in high-quality communication with my Self, my spouse, my children, etc.? ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us, “The heart is like a box, and language is the key.”15 Don’t we want to unlock the hearts of our loved ones? By examining our calendar and how we spend our time, we can find out how much importance we are giving to this vital process. It doesn’t guarantee that the communication will be high quality, but the first step is to create a “space” in our lives for communication. Then we can work forever on perfecting its quality.

According to Bahá’í psychotherapist, Erik Blumenthal:

True communication is the basis for negotiation and cooperation, for achieving complete unity, and is thus one of the highest and most spiritual forms of human interaction. Together with faith it is perhaps the most important method of improving a relationship. . ..16

In the view of authors Ashley Montagu and Floyd Matson:

“Human communication,” as the saying goes, “is a clash of symbols.” It covers a multitude of signs. But it is more than media and messages, information and persuasion; it also meets a deeper need and serves a higher purpose. Whether clear or garbled, tumultuous or silent, deliberate or fatally inadvertent, communication is the ground of meeting and the foundation of community. It is, in short, the essential human connection.17

Communication can be broken down into two general categories--verbal and non-verbal--each with its respective sub-categories:

1. Verbal Communication**:** talking, consultation, prayer, singing, writing, mathematics (in the sense that it can be verbalized), and others.
2. Non-verbal Communication:meditation (and sometimes prayer), non-verbal vocalization (sighs, grunts, etc.), posture, gestures, facial expressions, body language in general,18 touching, sex between marital partners, the arts--music, visual and plastic arts, dance, dramatic arts, and other non-verbal symbols.

You may be wondering why sex appears in the Social Quadrant rather than in the Physical Quadrant. Everything is manifold in nature. For example, dining together has both a nutritional and social aspect. The Nineteen Day Feast provides both spiritual and material food. Although sex is a physical act, I have placed its discussion here because I consider it to be primarily, though not exclusively, a communicative act on a very intimate level with the person whom you most cherish in the whole world. There are many different viewpoints regarding the role of sex. One which I found to be in harmony with the BLDH program is that of Dr. Agnes Ghaznavi, a specialist in psychiatry and psychotherapy and a Bahá’í Counselor:

What can we learn from contemporary sexologists to confirm the Bahá’í view of sexual life or sexuality? Sex is a way of communicating. . ..

My own experience in this field is that it is a wonderful way to learn things, to learn to use our bodies and to appreciate the value of our bodies. We live in a very verbal society that does not know any other way of communication. Through a healthy sexual relationship, we learn to touch, to accept ourselves and our partners to a greater extent. It gives us a unique bond which helps us to master life’s tasks with more joy and calmness. It makes us more creative. . ..

Many sexual disorders, 80 to 95% of them, are based on unhealthy emotional, mental, and spiritual conditions. Therefore their treatment, cure, and healing should come from mental, spiritual, and emotional sources, and not from physical sources. So, if we want to simplify, we can say that human sexuality, to a large extent, is a mental, emotional, and spiritual phenomenon. It only uses the body as a basis.19

Communication of all kinds is needed in all quadrants of the Circle--using the arts to teach the faith, singing songs at a Feast, purchasing material for home maintenance, making a presentation for a professional development course, and so on. But, standing head and shoulders above all types of communication is “consultation.” It is one of the unique contributions of the Bahá’í Faith to the field of communication. Bahá’u’lláh describes it as “one of two luminaries”[[50]](#footnote-50)a of the “heaven of divine wisdom,” “the lamp of guidance,” “the bestower of understanding,” “the shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth,” and a “source of good and well-being.”3

‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to consultation as “one of the most potent instruments conducive to the tranquility and felicity of the people,” “one of the explicit ordinances of the Lord of mankind,” and “one of the most fundamental elements of the divine edifice.” He counsels the friends: “Settle all things, both great and small, by consultation. Without prior consultation, take no important step in your own personal affairs.”21 In other Tablets, as a foundation for true consultation, the Master lays down seven prime requisites:

1. “purity of motive,”

2. “radiance of spirit,”

3. “detachment from all else save God,”

4. “attraction to His Divine Fragrances,”

5. “humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones,”

6. “patience and long-suffering in difficulties,” and

7. “servitude to His exalted Threshold;”22

two conditions:

1. “absolute love and harmony” amongst those who are consulting, who should be “wholly free from estrangement,” and should “manifest in themselves the Unity of God;”

2. consulting members of a group should “turn their faces to the Kingdom on High” and “ask aid from the Realm of Glory;”

and five procedures:

1. “devotion,”

2. “courtesy,”

3. “dignity,”

4. “care,” and

5. “moderation” in the expression of their views.23

And, for the decision-making process, He stipulates five elements:

1. “search out the truth,”

2. “with all freedom express . . . [one’s] own thoughts,”

3. “with moderation set forth the truth,”

4. “should differences of opinion arise majority of voices must prevail,”

5. “all must obey and submit to the majority.”25

This all-important communication technique can be used in all aspects of the BLDH program. Therefore, consultation, described by the Universal House of Justice as that “difficult but highly rewarding art”25 is a worthwhile object of study which can greatly enhance the self-transformation process.

Something I have learned from my experiences with Native Americans in Honduras, California, and Colombia, is the art of listening during consultation. I have found consultations amongst Native Americans to be very different from many consultations I have had with “civilized” Westerners--Bahá’ís and non-Bahá’ís. I have come to realize that we (peoples of Western civilization) have a tendency to (1) talk too much, (2) talk too loudly (mistakenly thinking that by increasing the volume we will increase the other person’s understanding and acceptance of our ideas), (3) think that we know what the other person is trying to say even before he or she has said it, (4) think that our own opinions are superior and more insightful, (5) try to convince others that our ideas are the best instead of trying to “uncover” a hidden truth, (6) rush our decisions, and (7) interrupt others before they have completed an exposition which results in no one listening to anyone. The Native Americans, I have found, (these are generalizations which have exceptions) talk more quietly and more slowly. They seem to choose their thoughts and words with greater care. After someone has spoken there is often an interlude of silence before the next person expresses themselves. At first this bothered me. I felt uncomfortable with the silence. I asked myself, “What’s going on here? Why are they taking so long? Is the problem not clear? Are they incapable of understanding these ideas? Are they slow thinkers?” Counselor Lauretta King helped me to understand that the interludes of time were for two things: (1) to think carefully about what the person just said, and, (2) to formulate how they would now express their response. In my opinion, this approach gives greater importance to the value and power of words, the value of thinking and meditating, and the value of the person speaking. I think that we “Occidentals” need to learn to feel more comfortable with silence in the presence of others. It is not necessary for someone to be speaking every second. By learning this we can take advantage of this more wholesome, Native American approach to consultation. (See Figure VI.2)

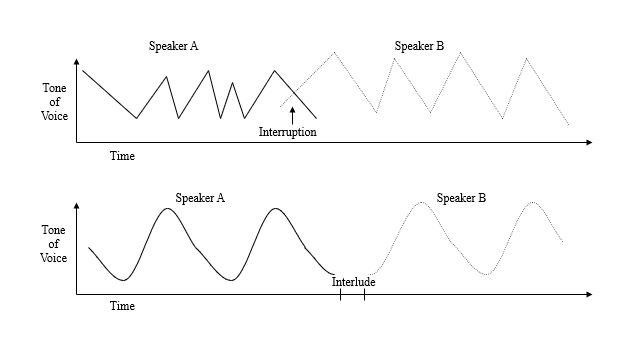


Figure VI. 2: Occidental Vs. Native American Patterns of Consultation

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What is the hierarchical, organizing principle underlying the sub-topics of the social quadrant?
2. What is the single, all-important process for all components of the social quadrant?
3. What is the single, all-important emotion, the increase of which augments all aspects of health at all social levels? How can this emotion be increased?
4. What two classes of not-on-earth beings are important but are not included in the social quadrant? Why are they important? How do they affect our decisions?
5. What key questions can we use to evaluate and regulate our emotions?
6. What are some verbal means of communication? Some non-verbal means? Why is sex included in this quadrant and not in the Physical Quadrant?
7. According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, what are successful consultation’s:
   1. Seven prime requisites?
   2. Two conditions?
   3. Five procedures?
   4. Five elements for decision-making?
8. How does the “Occidental” approach to deliberation compare to the Native American Indian approach? Which is more in harmony with the Bahá’í teachings on consultation?
9. Why is communication so important in a family and a community? What are some of the common obstacles to good communication? How might they be overcome?

**SAMPLE GOALS FOR ENHANCING SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION**

* I will improve my social health and communication skills by studying:
  + *A General Theory of Love* by Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon (New York: Vintage, 2001),
  + *Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman (New York: Bantam Books, 1995),
  + *Consultation: A Universal Lamp of Guidance* by John E. Kolstoe (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1985),
  + *The Heaven of Divine Wisdom*, selected readings on consultation from the works ofBahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and The Universal House of Justice, (Oakham, England: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978),
  + *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File* compiled by Helen Hornby (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 3nd rev. ed., 1988), 176-80 (on consultation),
  + *To Understand and Be Understood: A Practical Guide to Successful Relationships* by Erik Blumenthal (London: Oneworld Publications, Ltd., 1987),
  + *Loving Each Other* by Leo F. Buscaglia (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), and/or
  + *I Say No, I Feel Guilty* by Manuel J. Smith (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1975)--recommended by Dr. Muhájir.

# SECTION VI, PART 1: THE INNER SOCIAL QUADRANT

The Inner Social Quadrant concerns the inner circle of our relationships with ourselves and our family. When we apply the wholistic scheme of the BLDH Circle to the Inner Social Quadrant, we see that there are four areas for giving support to our wife, our children, and our self (not to mention our pets); and often, beyond the family circle, to our friends, acquaintances, and our natural surroundings:

* spiritual support
  + having faith in our self and in others
  + believing in what one’s self and others can become
  + praying for self and others
* physical support
  + appropriate touching
  + having eye-to-eye communication
  + spending time together alone
  + providing financial support
* mental/intellectual support
  + listening attentively
  + showing sympathetic understanding
  + offering oneself as a sounding board for thinking out loud
  + consultation
  + supporting educational endeavors
* emotional support
  + showing love and empathy
  + making sacrifices for one another
  + between spouses: yielding to the preferences of one another

We shall now examine our relationship with the Self.

CHAPTER 44: THE SELF

O My Servant! Could ye apprehend with what wonders of My munificence and bounty I have willed to entrust your souls, ye would, of a truth, rid yourselves of attachment to all created things, and would gain a true knowledge of your own selves--a knowledge which is the same as the comprehension of Mine own Being.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

**THE PROBLEM**

In his perspicacious book, *The Way to Inner Freedom*, much of which is dedicated to learning how to live better with ourselves, Bahá’í psychotherapist Erik Blumenthal states the problem succinctly:

Nowadays even getting along with oneself is not something to be taken for granted but amounts to a real undertaking. No one has a natural gift in this area, and certainly there are few people these days who can say they live in peace with themselves. Somehow we are always in conflict, which manifests itself in an endless variety of symptoms, from unhappiness to insomnia, from nervousness to anxiety, from fatigue to tension, from social awkwardness to lack of willpower, from indecisiveness to guilt.2

**THE SOLUTION**

The escape from this conflict is a major objective of the BLDH program. Drugs, alcohol, licentiousness, hedonism, and suicide offer false solutions. The alternative offered in the Writings sounds, at first, impossible, yet, there is no other way. It is the age-old Path of self-renunciation which needs to be rediscovered, thoroughly explored, carefully mapped out, and worn wide and deep with our footsteps.

Deliver your souls, O people, from the bondage of self, and purify them from all attachment to anything besides Me.3 --Bahá’u’lláh

When one is released from the prison of self, that is indeed freedom! For self is the greatest prison.4

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Whosoever is occupied with himself is wandering in the desert of heedlessness and regret. The “Master Key” to self-mastery is self-forgetting. The road to the palace of life is through the path of renunciation.5 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

In order to achieve this freedom and self-mastery, we must first understand what the self is.

**THE NATURE OF THE SELF**

The Bahá’í writings speak of the dual nature of the self. Bahá’u’lláh refers to freeing the Self[[51]](#footnote-51)a from the self, i.e., delivering the “Soul” from the carnal, worldly desires of the animalistic aspect of our nature.

Free thyself from the fetters of this world, and loose thy Soul from the prison of self.6 --Bahá’u’lláh

The Guardian (through his secretary) refers to the “true self,” “spirit,” or “soul” and the “lower nature” or “ego.”

Regarding the questions you asked: Self has really two meanings, or is used in two senses, in the Bahá’í writings; one is self, the identity of the individual created by God. This is the self mentioned in such passages as “he hath known God who hath known himself, etc.” The other self is the ego, the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature that can develop into a monster of selfishness, brutality, lust and so on. It is this self we must struggle against, or this side of our natures, in order to strengthen and free the spirit within us and help it to attain perfection.

Self-sacrifice means to subordinate this lower nature and its desires to the more godly and noble side of ourselves. Ultimately, in its highest sense, self-sacrifice means to give our will and our all to God to do with as He pleases. Then He purifies and glorifies our true self until it becomes a shining and wonderful reality.7 (emphases added)

The ego can and should be ever-increasingly subordinated to the enlightened *soul* of man.8 (emphasis added)

“To attain perfection,” in the above passage, refers to the acquisition of virtues. For example, if you are impatient and then learn patience, you have acquired a perfection. But there is no limit to perfecting patience. You can always become “more patient.” In other words, we must always continue to perfect our perfections (virtues) because the only Beings Who are truly perfect are the Manifestations and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

The only people who are truly free of the ‘dross of self’ are the Prophets, for to be free of one’s ego is a hall-mark of perfection. We humans are never going to become perfect, for perfection belongs to a realm we are not destined to enter. However, we must constantly mount higher, seek to be more perfect.”9 -- Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

Perfection is a relative matter. The nearer you are to it, the further you are from imperfection:

The nearer you are to the light,

the further you are from the darkness;

the nearer you are to heaven,

the further you are from the earth;

the nearer you are to God,

the further you are from the world.10

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

In *The Hidden Words*, Bahá’u’lláh, in my understanding, is referring to our dual nature when He likens the true Self to a sword and the lower self to the darkness of its scabbard.

O Son of Man! Thou art even as a finely tempered sword concealed in the darkness of its sheath and its value hidden from the artificer’s knowledge. Wherefore come forth from the sheath of self and desire that thy worth may be made resplendent and manifest unto all the world.11

I have often meditated on this Hidden Word and wondered exactly who is “the artificer.” On the one hand, the term is not capitalized, so, it could refer to the higher Self which conquers the lower self through hard work and sweat, putting the self into the fire of tests in the fields of service and teaching, continually pounding the self into an elegant and highly effective form; creating a soldier who will not break when faced with tribulations and difficulties. Or is the artificer God? But how could anything be hidden from His knowledge? Yet, who is capable of achieving such a feat alone? Or perhaps the artificer is both ourselves and God working as joint companions at the forge. Perhaps even God takes delight in seeing us transform “satanic strength” into “heavenly power”12 with the hammer of His Word.

Greek philosopher and writer Nikos Kazantzakis sheds a fascinating light on this image and the dual nature of man:

The human being is a centaur; his equine hoofs are planted in the ground, but his body from breast to head is worked on and tormented by the merciless Cry. He has been fighting, again for thousands of eons, to draw himself, like a sword, out of his animalistic scabbard. He is also fighting--this is his new struggle--to draw himself out of his human scabbard. Man calls in despair, “Where can I go? I have reached the pinnacle, beyond is the abyss.” And the Cry answers, “I am beyond. Stand up!”13

Bahá’u’lláh, in *The Four Valleys*, describes the higher Self and assures us that if we seek God diligently, we can achieve a station or “plane” in which the self is finally freed from conflict:

If the wayfarers be among them that seek after THE SANCTUARY OF THE DESIRED ONE, this plane pertaineth to the self—but the self which is intended is “the Self of God that pervadeth all His laws”.

In this station the self is not rejected but beloved; it is regarded with favour and is not to be shunned. Although at the beginning this plane is the realm of conflict, yet it endeth in the ascent to the throne of glory. . ..

This is the plane of the soul that is pleasing unto God. This is the plane of the soul that is pleasing unto God, whereof He saith: “Enter thou among My servants, and enter thou My Paradise.”14

According to C. G. Jung, “. . . the self is our life’s goal, for it is the completest expression of that fateful combination we call individuality . . .”15 The BLDH Circle portrays a composite, higher Self; a Self-Ideal. It focuses our attention on our life goal--union with God through Bahá’u’lláh--while at the same time indicating the means--the setting of and the accomplishment of sub-goals in all of the other aspects of the self.

Now that we have explored the meaning of “self,” what is needed is to realize the importance of continually growing in the knowledge of our true Self, and, to a lesser extent, increase our knowledge of the lower self.

**THE IMPORTANCE AND NATURE OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE**

Because we were created in the image of God; because, according to Bahá’u’lláh, in us “are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed,”16 getting to know our Self becomes a viable means for attaining one of the main purposes of human life--knowing God.

“We will surely show them Our signs in the world and within themselves. . .. And also in your own selves: will ye not, then, behold the signs of God? . . .. He hath known God who hath known himself.”17 --Bahá’u’lláh

According to Jung, “Attainment of consciousness is culture in the broadest sense, and self-knowledge is therefore the heart and essence of this process.”18 It is the function of the BLDH Circle to serve as a tool for heightening our consciousness of the self, thereby rendering it more accessible for transformation.

In the following passage Bahá’u’lláh does at least two things: He bestows on self-knowledge a special station and He indicates that the way to gain this knowledge is by extolling and worshiping God.

Whatever duty Thou hast prescribed unto Thy servants of extolling to the utmost Thy majesty and glory is but a token of Thy grace unto them, that they may be enabled to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of knowledge of their own selves.19

This pathway to self-knowledge runs somewhat contrary to popular methods such as psychological testing and self- contemplation, but the Guardian (through his secretary) reassures us of its efficacy:

The more we search for ourselves, the less likely we are to find ourselves; and the more we search for God, and to serve our fellow-men, the more profoundly will we become acquainted with ourselves, and the more inwardly assured. This is one of the great spiritual laws of life.20

In the following passage Bahá’u’lláh seems to be indicating that we need to know both sides of our nature and to become aware of the circumstances under which one or the other dominates.

The first Taráz and the first effulgence which hath dawned from the horizon of the Mother Book is that man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty.21

When the lower self dominates our decision-making, the soul later regrets our poor decision. According to Adib Taherzadeh, in a Tablet to Ibn-i-Asdaq, Bahá’u’lláh, in reference to the enemies of the Cause, “declares that in reality their inner beings deride their own selves for their foolish deeds.”22 When the higher Self dominates our being we have entered, according to our Teachings, the realm of sainthood--a goal to be sought by all of the followers of the Blessed Beauty:

We call people “saints” who have achieved the highest degree of mastery over their ego.23

--Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

The goal of self-knowledge can never be fully attained for, how is it possible to thoroughly know the Creator Whose attributes are reflected in us? There are always mysteries to be discovered.

This consciousness of self in man is a gradual process, and does not start at a definite point. It grows in him in this world and continues to do so in the future spiritual world.24

--Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

**THE MEANING AND ACHIEVEMENT OF SELF-MASTERY**

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has clarified for us the significance of His term “self-forgetting” as the “Master Key” to “self-mastery:”

With reference to what is meant by an individual becoming entirely forgetful of self: the intent is that he should rise up and sacrifice himself in the true sense, that is, he should obliterate the promptings of the human condition, and rid himself of such characteristics as are worthy of blame[[52]](#footnote-52)a and constitute the gloomy darkness of this life on earth--not that he should allow his physical health to deteriorate and his body become infirm.25

In order to “obliterate the promptings of the human condition,” Bahá’u’lláh counsels us to (1) refuse the dictates of the lower self, (2) follow Him, (3) fear God, and (4) live according to His Teachings:

We, verily, have commanded you to refuse the dictates of your evil passions and corrupt desires, and not to transgress the bounds which the Pen of the Most High hath fixed, for these are the breath of life unto all created things.26

O People of the world! Follow not the promptings of the self, for it summoneth insistently to wickedness and lust; follow, rather, Him Who is the Possessor of all created things, Who biddeth you to show forth piety, and manifest the fear of God.27

Through the Teachings of this Day Star of Truth every man will advance and develop until he attaineth the station at which he can manifest all the potential forces with which his inmost true self hath been endowed. It is for this very purpose that in every age and dispensation the Prophets of God and His chosen Ones have appeared amongst men, and have evinced such power as is born of God and such might as only the Eternal can reveal.28

Achieving self-mastery, the Guardian tells us, requires “daily vigilance in the control of one’s carnal desires and corrupt inclinations.”29 We cannot take a day off. If we do, we may slip backwards.

Life is a constant struggle, not only against forces around us, but above all against our own ‘ego’. We can never afford to rest on our oars, for if we do, we soon see ourselves carried down stream again. Many of those who drift away from the Cause do so for the reason that they had ceased to go on developing. They became complacent, or indifferent, and consequently ceased to draw the spiritual strength and vitality from the Cause which they should have.30

‘Abdu’l-Bahá once asked Howard Colby Ives if he was “interested in renunciation.”31 If our own answer to this question is “yes,” we need only take the hand of the Master and let Him lead the way--step by step.

I shall master my body, master my soul, prune away all the minor branches that drain off the strength of the crown; I shall remain nothing but crown, and shall rise. Before me I have a great Striver. I shall follow Him. He is climbing a terrible ascent; I shall climb it with Him.32 --Nikos Kazantzakis

And when we stumble and fall flat on our face in this upward trek to the heights of detachment and self-mastery, we must learn to be patient with ourselves:

We must be patient with others, infinitely patient! But also with our own poor selves, remembering that even the Prophets of God sometimes got tired and cried out in despair!33 --Shoghi Effendi

And as we pick ourselves up out of the mud of our errors and sins, we must know that we can count on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sympathy, support, and loving counsel:

Pray that your hearts may be cut from yourselves and from the world, that you may be confirmed by the Holy Spirit and filled with the fire of the love of God.

. . . look at Me, follow Me, 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. . ..

. . . I am with you always, whether living or dead, I am with you to the end. As ye have faith so shall your powers and blessings be. This is the balance--this is the balance--this is the balance.34

A technique for handling frustration and despair is to make a list of accomplishments. This was briefly mentioned in Chapter 15. It is a list of victories over the self and services to the Cause which we have accomplished with the power of Divine Assistance. Updating and reviewing it from time to time is not an ego trip. It is a way to confirm that in the past we have served as an instrument in the Hand of God. It is a way of saying to yourself, “Well, if I have been successful in the past, I am certain that, in spite of my present obstacles, in spite of my downfalls, God will continue to confirm my humble efforts in future.” It is a way of taking a look at your old self and comparing it with your present self to appreciate how far you have come along the path of renunciation and to visualize your future self--what you would like to become.

When feeling despair the Guardian advises us:

*Add up your accomplishments*, rather than to dwell on the dark side of things. Everyone’s life has both a dark and bright side. The Master said: Turn your back to the darkness and your face to me.35 (emphasis added)

Shoghi Effendi tells us that we should feel “fortified by the consciousness of . . . past victories . . .”36 Making a list is simply a technique for heightening the level of consciousness.

And when, God-willing, we finally arrive in the Abhá Kingdom, we can follow the advice of the old Cretan peasant who said: “When you appear before the heavenly gates and they fail to open, do not take hold of the knocker to knock. Unhitch the musket from your shoulder and fire.” When asked if he really thought that such an action could frighten God into opening the gate, the peasant replied, “No, lad, He won’t be frightened. But He’ll open them because He’ll realize you are returning from battle.”37

**THE IMPORTANCE OF SPENDING TIME ALONE**

Religion is what the individual does with his solitariness.38 --Alfred North Whitehead

Finding time to be by yourself, as conceived in the BLDH program, is not for selfish reasons. The purpose of being alone is to commune with the higher Self, to seek its counsel and wisdom, and to formulate with it, strategies for conquering the self and for converting humanity to the Faith.

Whoso hath loved Thee, can never feel attached to his own self, except for the purpose of furthering Thy Cause . . .”39 --Bahá’u’lláh

We need to find time to ask ourselves such questions as: “Under what conditions am I led into errors of immoderation such as overspending, oversleeping, overeating, overstimulation in relation to the opposite sex, backbiting, etc.? How can I prevent these patterns from repeating themselves? How can I form new habits which will contribute to the teaching work and the building of Bahá’u’lláh’s New World Order; habits which will lead to loftiness, glory, and true wealth?”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes this type of “communion with the Self”:

In speaking, man says, “I saw,” “I spoke,” “I want.” Who is this ‘I’? It is obvious that this ‘I’ is different from this body. . .. [It is] an ego[[53]](#footnote-53)a with which man enters into consultation and whose opinion man seeks.

. . . he consults his inner reality . . . which expresses to him [its opinion] . . . he defers to that reality and changes his original intention.40

According to Bahá’u’lláh, “Living in seclusion or practicing asceticism is not acceptable in the presence of God.”41 But it is acceptable to engage in personal retreats of varying lengths of time. Being alone allows us to build up spiritual and mental strength before launching ourselves into the field of action and service, which, in turn, exhausts our energies. Then, the realm of aloneness, contemplation, and rest beckons again. One calls upon the other. Each enriches the other. (See Figure 44.1)

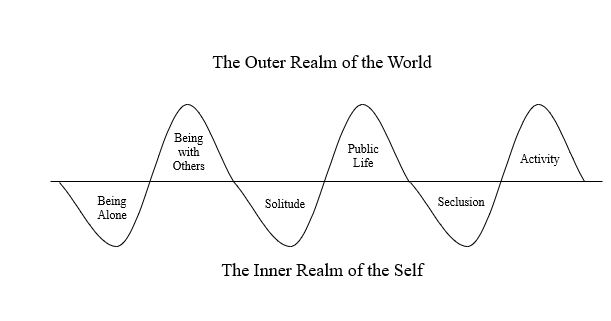


Figure 44. 1 : The Need to Be Alone and with Others

In former times people went to extremes. There were those who cut themselves off from society living in caves or monasteries and those who forsook marriage to become monks, priests, and nuns in the hope of finding a more noble path to God. At the other end of the spectrum were the “men (and women) of the world . . . of action” who, at most, paid only lip service to the life of spirituality, prayer, and meditation. Bahá’u’lláh has now united these two forms of life and has counseled us to organize our affairs in such a way as to include them both. And, although the law of marriage is not obligatory,42 He has re-established it as a viable pathway to God; a new type of monastery which He describes as “a fortress for well-being and salvation.”43

Bahá’u’lláh, before the public declaration and launching of His Mission, for various reasons, retreated to the mountains of Kurdistán for two years. He tells of his hardship and grief but also of the felicity of being by Himself:

Our soul was wrapt in blissful joy, and Our whole being evinced an ineffable gladness. For in Our solitude We were unaware of the harm or benefit, the health or ailment, of any soul. Alone, We communed with Our spirit, oblivious of the world and all that is therein.44

‘Abdu’l-Bahá would retreat at times to the upper story of a building west of the lower cave of Elijah on Mount Carmel:

Following Bahá’u’lláh’s passing in May 1892, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá came that summer to Haifa, living in the upper apartment of the western building near the cave mouth. There, in sorrow at the machinations of the Covenant-breakers and in relative isolation at this cool spot by the sea, the Master spent one month. Again in 1893 He sojourned at this same spot, as Bahá’í visitors signing the Carmelite Monastery registry recorded, and He stayed there in subsequent years.45

While traveling in the West He also sought time to be alone:

Those who have been with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá notice how, often, after speaking earnestly with people, he will suddenly turn and walk away to be alone. At such times no one follows him.46

Shoghi Effendi, especially during the early years of the Guardianship (1921-1937,) would spend summers in the Swiss Alps. Bahíyyih Khánum writes: “. . . he has sought the necessary quiet in which to meditate upon the vast task ahead of him, and it is to accomplish this that he has temporarily left these regions.”47 In his correspondence to a friend Shoghi Effendi tells him that he received his letter “on my way to the Bernese Oberland which has become my second home. In the fastnesses and recess of its alluring mountains I shall try to forget the atrocious vexations which have afflicted me for so long . . .”48 In her biography of her husband Rúhíyyih Khánum comments:

In the early years after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s passing, although Shoghi Effendi often travelled about Europe with the restless interest of not only a young man but a man haunted by the ever-present, towering giants of his work and his responsibility, he returned again and again to those wild, high mountains and their lofty solitude. . ..49

[From Interlaken] He would take a train to the foot of some mountain or pass and begin his excursion, walking often ten to sixteen hours, usually alone, but sometimes accompanied by whichever young relative was with him; they could seldom stand the pace and after a few days would start making their excuses. . .. He had a deep love of scenery and I believe these restless, exhausting hour after hour marches healed to some extent the wounds left so deep in his heart by the passing of the Master.50

Nikos Kazantzakis, talking about his love for being alone, remarked:

I have a passionate love for solitude and silence; I can gaze for hours at a fire or the sea without feeling any need for additional companionship. These two have always been my most faithful, most beloved comrades . . .51

In my own life, up until a few years ago, I was always surrounded by people. Then, one summer, with most of the family away, I decided to go alone to a small, seaside hotel beside a national park. I would walk along paths through oceanside cliffs spending time at different promontories and isolated beaches wrapped in thought and meditation on the Word of God and the events in the lives of the Central Figures and the beloved Guardian. I haven't been able to get away by myself every year, but, when I have, it has been a very restorative experience. My two favorite places are the mountains of the Sierra Nevada and the Caribbean seashore and islands. I come back renewed in mind, body, and spirit, with a refreshed vision of the course I will set for the future. And, on a smaller scale, I cherish mini-vacations--just being by myself in thought, even if there are others around--walking, sitting by a pool, at the barber shop, shooting baskets, riding in a bus, or just lying in bed.

Bahá’u’lláh counsels us to seek silence in order to contemplate the future and to engage in the battle of renunciation: “The essence of true safety is to observe silence, to look at the end of things and to renounce the world.”52 Spending time doing nothing “outwardly” is difficult for us Westerners. Yaya Diallo, after moving from his African tribal community to Canada, describes his frustration with this aspect of Occidental culture:

To keep silent is to cultivate one’s interior dimension. The Minianka learn how to sit quietly . . ..

The Minianka affirm the value of being silent and do not feel an obligation to say everything or to make conversation needlessly. It is disconcerting to be in the company of Westerners who do not know how to appreciate being quietly in someone else’s presence. It was a shock to me when I first came to Canada to find that whenever I simply wished to rest quietly within myself, I was hounded with questions. Questions like, “Hey, what are you thinking about?” interrupt moments of profound self-recollection. “Is something the matter?” may be a question that rudely misconstrues an unproblematical dwelling within one’s inner being.

A person who talks too much in Minianka society is not taken seriously and may not even be listened to after awhile. In fact, this habit of externalizing too much in words can unbalance a person and bring on sickness. . .. The proper balance between well-chosen words and silence is an important factor in an individual’s health.53

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. In the Bahá’í writings, what is the difference between the Self and the self? Which is the “true self”? Why?
2. According to the Master, what is the key to Self-Mastery?
3. From the Bahá’í perspective, what is the definition of a saint?
4. How is it possible that by increasing our knowledge of our Self we can increase our knowledge of God?
5. How can it be that by extolling and worshipping God we can gain knowledge of ourselves?
6. According to the Guardian, many of those who drift away from the Faith do so due to what cause?
7. How can ‘Abdu’l-Bahá help us in our efforts to conquer our lower self?
8. How can the calling to mind our accomplishments and victories play an important role in self-transformation?
9. What are the positive purposes and outcomes of making time to be alone?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will schedule time in order to be alone for prayer, contemplation and reflection.
* I will learn to “measure” my words and to enjoy the value of silence.
* I will “add up my accomplishments,” that is, my spiritual conquests over self and my services to the Cause and humanity, by making a list titled “Evidences of Divine Assistance in My Life” in order to strengthen my faith in the power of God, heighten my self-confidence, and increase my ability to engage in fruitful activity.
* I will update my curriculum vitae.
* I will read:
  + *The Way to Inner Freedom* by Erik Blumenthal (London: Oneworld Publications, Ltd., 1988) and/or
  + *Fire & Gold: Benefitting from Life’s Tests* compiled by Brian Kurzius, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995).
* I will utilize the personality analysis program *Please Understand Me* by David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates (Del Mar, Calif.: Prometheus Nemesis, 1998) in order to get to know better myself and those who are close to me.

CHAPTER 45: NATURE

Mere communion with nature, mere contact with the free air, exercise a soothing yet comforting and strengthening influence on the wearied mind, calm the storm of passion, and soften the heart when shaken by sorrow to its inmost depths.1 --Alexander von Humboldt

You may be wondering why nature is included in the Social Quadrant rather than in the Physical Quadrant. The purpose is to emphasize that all things in nature form part of our “community of beings.” The hierarchical nature of reality justifies this inclusion of the mineral, plant, and animal kingdoms as members of our “society.” (See Figure 1.1) The highly diverse yet single, key life process for the Social Quadrant is “communication.” And although we do not communicate verbally with nature, we do “commune with nature” in a way that transcends words. The mineral kingdom includes rivers, oceans, and mountains. The plant kingdom includes gardens, flowering meadows, and forests. The animal kingdom includes pets[[54]](#footnote-54) and animals in the wild. Who does not enjoy “communing” with these creatures; these creations of the Creator?

The importance of communing with nature was brought home to me by a native American Indian classmate from Canada. We were studying summers at a university in the semi-desert climate of southern California. One day during class tears began rolling down her face. I asked her what was wrong. She told me that she missed being every day in the green forest near where she lived and the wild animals there. This shifted my entire paradigm of Mother Nature from simply being a source of food and fun to a member of my family that both cared for me and needed my care.

Bahá’u’lláh said that the country is the world of the soul and the city is the world of bodies.2 He also states that the Creator has two books--the Book of Revelation3 and the book of creation.4 Through nature we can perceive God’s Will, His Providence, and His attributes.

Nature is God’s Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world. . .. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise.5 --Bahá’u’lláh

During the first part of my life, I took Mother Nature for granted--her curative powers; her ability to sooth, to refresh, to entertain, to inspire, to draw one nigh unto the Creator. My family had always taken vacations to the lake regions of Michigan and Indiana. My father, a farm boy forced to work at a desk job for a petroleum company in the city after being crippled in the Battle of the Bulge during World War II, would always head for the wilderness during vacation time and weekends. Hunting for everything from pheasants to mushrooms, rabbits to hickory nuts and wild raspberries; fishing for perch and bass; archery; sailing; water skiing; and swimming--these were the pastimes that I grew up with.

I never lost close access to the country until one day, when we were living in a city in Honduras, a minor disaster struck. Our car engine caught on fire and suffered severe damage due to a faulty overhaul. We couldn’t afford to repair it again, so we spent the next four years without a vehicle. With four small children, our ability to escape from the city was severely hampered and we regretted not being able to enjoy more the beautiful countryside, rivers, and coasts of Honduras. For this reason, when we moved to Barranquilla, Colombia, we purchased an old, four-Circle drive Nissan Patrol so that we could get far off the beaten path and into nature. Living on the beautiful Caribbean coast and near to the highest oceanside mountain range in the world, the Sierra Nevada, I was often reminded of the words of Bahá’u’lláh:

By Thy glory! Every time I lift up mine eyes unto heaven, I call to mind Thy highness and Thy loftiness, and Thine incomparable glory and greatness; and every time I turn my gaze to Thine earth, I am made to recognize the evidences of Thy power and the tokens of Thy bounty. And when I behold the sea, I find that it speaketh to me of Thy majesty, and of the potency of Thy might, and of Thy sovereignty and Thy grandeur. And at whatever time I contemplate the mountains, I am led to discover the ensigns of Thy victory and the standards of Thine omnipotence.

I swear my Thy might, O Thou in Whose grasp are the reins of all mankind, and the destinies of the nations! I am so inflamed by my love for Thee, and so inebriated with the wine of Thy oneness, that I can hear from the whisper of the winds the sound of Thy glorification and praise, and can recognize in the murmur of the waters the voice that proclaimeth Thy virtues and Thine attributes, and can apprehend from the rustling of the leaves the mysteries that have been irrevocably ordained by Thee in Thy realm.63

The nineteenth Psalm echoes this same feeling of reverence and awe:

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork . . . there is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.7

By contemplating nature, we can learn the lessons of nature. A Buddhist monk once, contemplating a leaf, suddenly saw in it the universal principle of reciprocation and gained a deeper appreciation of the organization of the universe. He saw that the leaf was created by the mother tree and dependent on her for water and minerals. At the same time, the leaf was the mother of the tree, producing food and giving the tree nourishment.8

In the emotional realm, Nikos Kazantzakis tells of the impact of nature on him:

Of all the sights my soul has enjoyed, the dance and the star-filled heavens have always stood supreme. Never have wine, women, or even ideas thrown me so completely into a ferment--body, mind, and soul--as have these two.9

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. Why is “Nature” included in the Social Quadrant?
2. How do we “communicate” with nature?
3. What attributes of God can we learn about through communion with nature?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will include spending time in nature in my plans, calendar of activities, and/or schedule.
* I will learn to be quiet in nature, to “listen” to the “messages” of nature.
* I will take concrete measures to care for nature, for example, planting trees, cleaning up trash in a park, or contributing to the World Wildlife Fund which focuses on wilderness preservation.

CHAPTER 46: SPOUSE

Truly, the Lord loveth union and harmony . . .. Live ye one with another, O people, in radiance and joy. By My life! All that are on earth shall pass away, while good deeds alone shall endure; to the truth of My words God doth Himself bear witness.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

When we meditate on the BLDH Circle and our gaze settles on “spouse,” we can ask ourselves: “How is my relationship with my companion? Are we communicating well with one another? Are we helping or hindering one another in the self-transformation process?” At this moment our marriage becomes our focus of attention and all four quadrants and the Center of the Circle come to bear on the improvement of its quality and the renewal of its purposes. The Master indicates this in His explanation regarding the meaning of Bahá’í marriage which touches on all four aspects of the BLDH Circle:

Bahá’í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart . . .. Their purpose must be this: to become loving companions and comrades and at one with each other for time and eternity . . ..

The true marriage of Bahá’ís is this, that husband and wife should be united both physically and spiritually, that they may ever improve the spiritual life of each other, and may enjoy everlasting unity throughout all the worlds of God.2 (emphases added)

The marital union covers spiritual, physical, psychological, and social aspects. Therefore, we must nurture and encourage one another in all thirty-six key life processes contained in the four quadrants. Ultimately, we are responsible for only our own life, but not exclusively. That is why deciding to marry is such a serious affair. After the wedding your responsibilities have doubled from thirty-six to seventy-two areas of constant concern! Of course, on the positive side, you now have someone else to help you throughout all eternity with your own process of transformation.

**USING THE BLDH CIRCLE TO HELP CHOOSE A MARRIAGE PARTNER**

Each person must decide whether to marry or not. But, in order to fulfil one’s purpose in life, it is not obligatory.

Of course, under normal circumstances, every person should consider it his moral duty to marry. And this is what Bahá’u’lláh has encouraged the believers to do. But marriage is by no means an obligation. In the last resort it is for the individual to decide whether he wishes to lead a family life or live in a state of celibacy.3 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

If the decision is to find a marriage partner, the Master counsels us to begin by getting to know one another’s character:

Each must . . . exercise the utmost care to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the other, that the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever.4

To use the BLDH Circle for character analysis you need only observe how the other person spends his or her time and money in each of the 36 areas. This will give you a clear picture of what he or she values in life. Of course, participating with the person in activities in as many of the different areas as possible is even more important. Then you can observe behaviors such as planning ability, performance under stress, communication ability, and level of devotion. This is far better than the typical dating experience in the West in which only leisure time activities are shared and each person is able to put on a pleasant “mask” for the duration of the date. Bahá’í youth groups, conferences, teaching campaigns, institutes, summer schools, and youth year-of-service programs provide excellent opportunities for young people to get to know one another’s character.

**COMMUNICATION**

The Universal House of Justice, in a statement regarding the relationship between husband and wife, counsels us to consider all of the teachings on this subject in the light of the general principle of equality between the sexes, emphasizes the need for consultation, and says that “the husband and wife should defer to the wishes” of each other.5 Again, communication becomes vitally important. First, we need to learn the art of consultation in order to find out what the wishes of one another are. In their article, “Marriage: The Eternal Principal,” Ruth and Helgi Eyford state:

The basis of most modern marriage counseling lies in the improvement of communication between partners, that is, improvement in understanding the motives, needs and wants in a marriage situation.6

Secondly, we need to also learn the art of “deferring” to one another’s wishes. Certainly compromise--each partner sacrificing something while receiving some benefit--forms part of this yielding to one another. Manuel J. Smith in his bestseller, *When I Say No, I Feel Guilty*, says:

In those effective, equal marriages that you know of, you will see both partners collectively work, and expect to rework, the compromise structure they require through frequent communication with each other of what they want and are capable of giving to one another.7

But beyond this is the ability to “prefer” the well-being of your partner before your own. “Beware lest ye prefer yourselves above your neighbor,”8 is the admonition of Bahá’u’lláh. How can we not apply this principle to someone as dear to us as our spouse?a[[55]](#footnote-55)

Good advice regarding the intricacies of successful, intimate communication and need-fulfillment is given by Khalil A. Khavari in his excellent article, “Marriage and the Nuclear Family: A Bahá’í Perspective”:

The couple should . . . confide in each other, share their thoughts, and never feel compelled to keep secrets from one another. Their relationship should be not only of a man and a wife, but also two true friends.

At the same time, this intimacy must be based so far as possible on the sharing of beautiful thoughts and pleasant experiences . . .

Certainly, there are times when one is fully justified to share unpleasant news or concern with one’s most intimate friend. By all means, one should feel free to do so. However, the relationship should not degenerate into a “common dump” in which one partner, as soon as he thinks of something unpleasant, “dumps” the contents on the other. So far as possible, the individual partner should find healthy ways of solving his own problems, and only those problems which are either not amenable to individual solution or which directly concern the spouse are brought up for mutual consideration.9

I would add to this that when problems do need to be brought up for discussion, that a much more positive atmosphere is created when the problem is stated in terms of a possible solution (rather than only a complaint) the execution of which does not necessarily fall on the shoulders of the other person. For example, instead of saying, “Such and such is not happening the way it should,” try saying, “I think that such and such needs to be done in order to solve such and such problem.” The point of focus becomes the solution rather than the problem. But not all problems can be solved, therefore, unless there is some idea of what can be done, it often only increases frustration by discussing the problem at all.

One of the best and most straight forward set of guidelines I have found for improving communication is that of Leo F. Buscaglia in his heart-opening, heart-developing bestseller, *Loving Each Other*. He expands upon a theme stressed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá--that love must be expressed not only in words, but also in action. He gives several ways to improve our communications with the significant “others” in our life. They can be used with any family member and most all of them apply in some way to human relations in general. They may not be easy to implement, but with experimentation, practice, and continual review of these “Ten Commandments for Improving Communication” changes can be made and differences will be immediately felt.

1. Tell me often that you love me through your talk, your actions and your gestures. Don’t assume that I know it. I may show signs of embarrassment and even deny that I need it--but don’t believe it, do it anyway.
2. Compliment me often for jobs well done and don’t downgrade but reassure me when I fail. Don’t take the many things I do for you for granted. Positive reinforcement and appreciation work toward making sure I repeat them.
3. Let me know when you feel low or lonely or misunderstood. It will make me stronger to know I have the power to comfort you. Feelings, unverbalized, can be destructive. Remember, though I love you, I still can’t always read your mind.
4. Express joyous thoughts and feelings. They bring vitality to our relationship. It’s wonderful to celebrate nonbirthdays, personal Valentine’s days; give gifts of love without reason; and hear you verbalize your happiness.
5. When you respond to me so I feel special, it will make up for all those who, during the day, have passed me up without seeing me.
6. Don’t invalidate my being by telling me that what I see or feel is insignificant or not real. If I see and feel it--for me--it’s my experience and therefore important and real!
7. Listen to me without judgement or preconception. Being heard, like being seen, is vital. If you truly see me and hear me as I am at the moment, it is a continued affirmation of my being as we help each other to change.
8. Touch me. Hold me. Hug me. My physical self is revitalized by loving, nonverbal communication.
9. Respect my silences. Alternatives for my problems, creativity, and my spiritual needs are most often realized in moments of quiet.
10. Let others know you value me. Public affirmation of our love makes me feel special and proud. It is good to share the joy of our relationship with others.10

In the introduction to the Social Quadrant an explanation was given as to why the sexual aspect of marriage was being discussed as primarily a means of communication rather than a biological act to be discussed in the Physical Quadrant. Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary) explained that “the physical aspect of the marital union” is important but that it should be subordinated to “the moral and spiritual purposes and functions.”11 Like all aspects of marriage, a balanced approach is needed. It would be wrong to give the sexual relationship too little importance and wrong to give it too much importance. Regarding its potential, vital role in a marital relationship, a clinical researcher in human sexual functioning notes:

One of the closest and most meaningful ways we can communicate is the sharing of a sexual experience with someone we care for. Many experiences you share with this person and others you are close to are equally important to your well-being, to your feeling good about yourself, but sexual communication as an act of love is special. While sex is only one link in the chain of communicating with your mate . . ., it is different from the other links. Its disruption is not only a loss in itself but can complicate the mutual working out of problems that have nothing to do with sex. If close sexual activity is often disrupted or falters because of pressure from external problems or because of difficulties with the sexual act itself, a unique, private way of communicating with your mate may be lost.12

On the other hand, we must not become dependent on and overly attached to the sexual relationship. It can contribute a great deal to a marriage, but it is not the most essential feature of the marital bond. If couples have a strong spiritual and emotional foundation in their marriage, they can sustain the absence of sexual activity for indefinite periods of time. The reasons may be various: illness, disease, accidents, child birth, business trips, teaching trips, or even death. The most important factor is love. And being a spiritual force, it is not dependent on physical proximity; it is only *enhanced* by physical proximity.

I would not recommend that newlyweds begin their marriage with long periods of separation, but later, after the foundation has been built, physical separation becomes not only more tolerable but it can actually have some benefits. Dr. Muhájir was continually traveling for months at a time during a period of twenty years, yet his family and marriage bonds were very deep and intense. I think that the constant travel inherent in an active Bahá’í life helps us to maintain a healthy, balanced outlook on our sexual life: when we are with our spouse our life is enriched and, when he or she is away, we learn to be detached from his or her physical presence and to have an independent life of service of our own.a[[56]](#footnote-56)

With a strong spiritual and emotional foundation, it is not only more possible to cope with the physical absence of one’s spouse d*uring* a marriage, but also at the *beginning* of a marriage. It allows the newlyweds to initiate their marital relationship in a much more gradual and sensitive way. The Western “honey moon” tradition dictates that a husband and wife have sexual intercourse on the first night of their marriage.[[57]](#footnote-57) I was delighted to read an exemplary story about a Bahá’í couple told by Dr. Agnes Ghaznavi during a panel discussion on sexuality:

[The wife] had come from a Persian background and her husband from a Western background, but both were from Bahá’í families. They both had adhered to the instruction for sexuality, that is, they had practiced chastity until they were married. She said that this was a very wonderful experience, because both of them were afraid and admitted to being afraid of having to follow the practice of having sexual intercourse on the day of the wedding. They both agreed that they would not do this. They would first get to know each other. They got to know each other with body language and speaking to each other and being gentle, touching and loving. When they felt they were ready, they did have sexual intercourse.13

This approach, to me, is very natural and pleasant, and is the logical reward of following the law of chastity.

**ROUTINES**

One of the challenges facing Bahá’í couples is to break away from traditional ways of dividing up the routine duties of the household. One of the benefits of having economic difficulties and women being obliged, or, rather, freed to enter the work force is that it is forcing us men out of our age-old roles. As the exclusive child bearer, the wife has to perform certain biological functions such as breast-feeding that the husband cannot do. Beyond this, when the principle of equality of men and women is applied, pretty much all functions, jobs, and responsibilities are up for grabs. Clinical psychologist and marital therapist, Kerry J. Mothersill, during a Bahá’í conference, described this situation:

In most cases, these men and women consciously accept the new patterns, but some of the expectations derived from early socialization according to traditional family norms still remain to create ambivalence about their roles. Unless these ambivalences are resolved through good communication, conflict and rejection can lead to divorce. Repeatedly, women reject marriage as these ambivalences have not been resolved, and men suddenly realize the importance of their wives and families after a separation has occurred.14

In my own case, I was given this “separation” experience, as mentioned before, due to travel for the Faith and for professional development. I have also enjoyed the benevolent conditions, still prevalent in most third world countries, of having a maid to do the cooking, washing, and cleaning. (This is one advantage of pioneering to a third world country: it is often the last refuge for us men who are reluctant to take on a new division of labor!) Nevertheless, it was good for me to learn to manage an entire household and to be both dad and mom to the kids. (I think that my children and I are much closer because of it--the natural consequence of going through trials and tribulations and loneliness together.) But the writing is on the wall. Men are going to have to learn to pitch in with *everything*: ironing, cooking, washing, cleaning, child care, shopping, basic sewing, etc. We need to be effective at these tasks, feel comfortable with them, and, above all, *enjoy* them. One of my own greatest prides was being able to change a cloth diaper in pitch dark without sticking the baby with the pin. I also felt very “motherly” and privileged when Aaron, our youngest child, decided for some reason that he preferred only his father to rock him to sleep.

No doubt society will have to re-educate males in the mothering functions and the females in areas such as car and home maintenance, finances, and legal matters. Each upcoming generation should feel fewer hang-ups about performing *any* kind of service for others. The re-orientation needs to begin from an early age. In my junior high school, I took sewing and cooking classes from which I still benefit and the girls took metal and wood working classes. In public schools today, such classes are not even offered as electives. In a private school that I directed in Honduras, we organized Friday cooking classes for preschoolers that were eagerly anticipated by both boys and girls. Surely this is one of the reasons why ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said that boys and girls should have the same curriculum. This same principle needs to be applied in the home by providing opportunities and role models for males and females to engage in all household services. Another arena for promoting the change is Bahá’í activities such as teaching campaigns, institutes, and vacation schools. In Colombia, all of the cleaning, cooking, and washing tasks are shared by everyone and it is a good opportunity for the more liberated Bahá’í men to model new behaviors for the more conservative participants.

Another category of routines is that of “doing things together.” Rúhíyyih Khánum sees this as an added dimension of marriage:

To the influence of love in marriage is gradually added another powerful catalyst: habit. The common home, the daily association, produces a common framework, and habit, one of the most powerful forces in life, begins to knit husband and wife together. It acts as a wonderful stabilizer; if love is allowed to fail, habit itself may be strong enough to preserve the union.15

What are some specific habits which can help keep a marriage together? Some examples are: praying together, hugging one another, deepening together, touching one another, teaching together, cooking and dining together, playing music and singing together, walking together, playing games together, watching and discussing movies together, sharing jokes and laughing together, planning together, consulting together before turning out the lights each night, saying thankful and encouraging words to each other, giving kisses to one another, and getting away together at least once a year.

After experiencing communication problems, especially with raising four small children while being very active in the Faith and our professions, my wife and I decided to set aside one night a week to go out alone. This was a permanent part of our lifestyle for years and I highly recommend it to others. It doesn’t have to be an expensive night out. Many times, when our income was minimal, we used to walk to a corner diner for a soft drink and french fries. It is a time when you can breathe easy and relax, forget about the thousand and one problems engulfing you, say words of appreciation to one another, tell stories of funny happenings during the past week, plan for the following week, discuss the welfare of each of the children, and calmly consult about problems which need to be solved. Having a regular night out works well with the children also because it is never a surprise to them and they know that they will receive their special time alone also.

If a problem is particularly conflictive in nature, unless it is an emergency, it is best not to discuss it in the “heat of the moment” when tension is high and the potential for an argument is great, especially in the presence of the children. If the problem can be placed on the “back burner” until after the children have gone to sleep--when the nerves are not so tense, it is better. And many times, by the time that time rolls around, the problem has either resolved itself, or, we no longer see it as such an urgent affair.

Without these private times together away from the children, problems and concerns can build up till they reach a point of explosion. Private, loving, frank conversations can serve as a valve to regularly release any built-up pressure and to smooth out any misunderstandings.

Another habit that I highly recommend is getting away together for at least one weekend each year. A romantic “honeymoon” atmosphere can be recreated, and a mental mountain can be climbed from which a far-stretching perspective can be gained in order to look back over the joys of the years spent together and to look out over the years that stretch ahead and make exciting plans together for the future in all areas of life.

During one of our “get aways” (from our work and children), my wife and I wrote down how we had spent summer vacations each year since we had been married. It was a crazy thing to do but a lot of fun. It helped us to recall many of the good times we had spent together or with our family and friends, and served as an intriguing document of family history that I am sure our kids will enjoy reading someday. We also read together the “Marriage Talk” of the Master. This had been read during our wedding so it was particularly meaningful to us. (It contains so many pearls of wisdom that I decided to include it for you in the appendices.) Another very effective “retreat” activity is to review and update the “More Of & Less Of” list which was recommended in the chapter titled “Goal-Setting.”

**DIVORCE**

Juliet Thompson, in her diary, reports ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s brief yet succinct reply to a visitor’s question regarding the Bahá’í approach to divorce.

“Bahá’u’lláh,” --the Master smiled—“says that in this world there is nothing more absurd than divorce. If one has accepted another and is a good Bahá’í he never likes to believe in divorce. But if there be a case of difference between husband and wife, where it is entirely impossible to recreate their love, where it is not possible for them to live any longer with one another, then both should go to the House of Justice and together, in perfect agreement, lay their case before it. And after this they should still wait a year, living apart but not permanently divorced, and their friends should give them good advice meanwhile. If, after one year, there is no possibility of becoming reunited, and no one is able to influence them, then this is the *natural* divorce.

But between the real Bahá’ís there is no divorce. No one has ever heard of divorce between real Bahá’ís. The Bahá’í husband and wife will not allow affairs to reach such a condition.”16

During her closing talk at the 7th International Bahá’í Convention Rúhíyyih Khánum focused on the need to combat three social problems: the worship of money, the over-emphasis on sex, and divorce. In regards to the latter she told a story which points out the need for perseverance, fortitude, and radiant acquiescence when we are exacerbated with our spouse. (This same story is told by Marzieh Gail in *Summon Up Remembrance* from which this version was taken.)

[There was] a Christian woman named Lydia who came to visit the Holy family regularly. Time and again she would complain about her husband. One day ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said to her, “Lydia, Lydia, can’t you put up with this one man? I have to put up with the whole human race.”17

Along these same lines Marzieh Gail relates an experience from her pilgrimage in the time of the Guardian:

One day at table, on translating the two marriage verses, he said “‘Abide by the will of God’ was closer than ‘content with the will of God.’” Then he looked at me, smiled broadly, and said, “Perhaps we should translate it, ‘resigned to’ . . .”18

Shoghi Effendi, through his secretary, pointed out that the situation of pioneers is special:

He has been very sorry to hear that your marriage seems to have failed utterly. I need not tell you as a Bahá’í that every effort should be made by any Bahá’í to salvage their marriage for the sake of God, rather than for their own sake. In the case of pioneers, it is even more important, because they are before the public eye. However, in such matters it is neither befitting nor right that the Guardian should bring pressure on individuals. He can only appeal to you… to try again; but if you cannot rise to this test, that is naturally a personal matter.19

In addition to winning the good pleasure of God, maintaining a marriage in spite of serious difficulties has an added benefit–sharing memories of life events. Those who divorce after years of marriage suddenly find that they have lost someone who can call to remembrance many of the significant occasions and experiences that affected their lives. It’s like losing a precious family photo album, but on a grand scale.

Manuel J. Smith, in his book on assertiveness training, identifies some of the common sources of marital conflict:

. . . manipulation of each other’s styles such as dressing habits, neatness, not being on time, balancing the checkbook without any error, paying the bills promptly, social flirting, division of household labor, responsibility for children. . .

. . . getting a job, use of leisure time, . . . use of family money, buying a new home, etc., the list is endless.20

For an extension of this list and some invaluable insights, I highly recommend the book *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women* by Dr. James Dobson.

Professor Daniel C. Jordan once commented to me that, in his work with couples having marital problems, one of the most common symptoms was a complete lack of simple courtesy. They treated complete strangers more politely than they did one another. So, in order to rebuild a relationship, one of the first things he would have them do is to begin saying “please” and “thank you” to one another and to observe the common cultural courtesies such as men opening the door for ladies.

Of course, in extreme cases, when there are irreconcilable feelings of “aversion,” “antipathy,” “resentment,” or “estrangement” divorce is an alternative and that is why Bahá’u’lláh permitted it.21 And if divorce becomes necessary, we have this counsel from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

If divorce taketh place, the spiritual love and affection between you should increase, and ye should become like a brother and sister.22

But the best approach, in my opinion, is one of prevention. You receive from a relationship what you invest in it. Several years ago, after reflecting on Leo Buscaglia’s *Loving Each Other*, I jotted down what I considered to be some of the features of a loving relationship (with a corresponding definition23). If both partners make an effort to follow these features more fully with each passing year, no doubt, the relationship will deepen and grow.

**THE FEATURES OF A LOVING RELATIONSHIP**

- Placing the other’s wishes, feelings, needs, and preferences before one’s own.

- Continually, spontaneously, and regularly showing acts of kindness (a cup of tea, flowers, notes, hugs, time together, etc.).

- Showing acts of courtesy and politeness: “You first,” “please,” not interrupting unnecessarily.

- Praying and deepening together.

- Consulting lovingly with one another.

- Sharing the same general goals in life.

- Taking time to talk deeply with one another.

- Making love only when conditions are as best as possible:

- after spending quality time together,

- when both are rested and feeling well,

- when there is complete privacy and peace in the house.

- Being mature enough to encourage one’s partner to work on a weakness.

**DO-IT-YOURSELF MARITAL REPAIRS**

In the quotation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá cited at the beginning of this chapter, He counseled couples to “improve the spiritual life of each other.” This is not easy to do, but, otherwise, we are not taking advantage of the potential transforming power of the institution of marriage.

A simple, straight-forward technique which I recommend is, during quiet time together, take the BLDH Circle or one of the lists above regarding communication or loving relationships, place it in front of your spouse, and simply ask, “In what aspect do you think I need to improve?” This simple question will unleash a flood of power from the marital bond, for where else, I ask you, could we find such a loving, completely accepting, supportive relationship designed to transform our potentialities into reality and action? When you do this, you should not expect your spouse to reciprocate. Perhaps she or he is not yet ready, or, perhaps s/he wants to see how sincere you are first. We also need to be ready to invest energy in changing ourselves. During some periods of our life, we are too swamped with a multitude of responsibilities to take on a self-transformation project. That is why a good time to have such a conversation is when you have escaped for a weekend and there is a leisurely amount of time available for meditation and sensitive, intimate communication.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the potential that marriage offers for creating the single, most profound, and most enriching human relationship in life. As long as the lines of communication are kept open, as long as we allow our spouse to travel, to study, to develop personal interests, then there will be no possibility of exhausting the mysteries to be discovered in our mate, in ourselves, and in our relationship. We enfold within us the entire universe—all of the kingdoms of creation and, above all, all of the names and attributes of God. By increasing our knowledge and awe of one another, we increase our knowledge and awe of our loving Creator. Hence, marriage becomes an eternal journey of depth--discovering and rediscovering one another: new talents, new strengths, and new insights; growing in new directions and then contributing that fresh newness to our “fortress for well-being and salvation.”

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. According to the Bahá’í point of view, what are the main purposes of marriage?
2. What should be kept in mind before marriage?
3. Discuss three ways for maintaining a healthy marriage.
4. What are the legitimate causes for divorce?
5. What should happen during the year of patience to prevent divorce?
6. What are the benefits of maintaining a marriage in spite of great difficulties?

**SAMPLE GOALS FOR IMPROVING MARITAL RELATIONS**

* I will strive daily to create an exemplary marriage.
* I will find a regular time to be alone with my spouse for expressing appreciation and for loving consultation.
* I will try to get away to be alone with my spouse for at least one weekend each year.
* I will make a list of the reasons why I am proud to have my chosen partner as my companion throughout eternity and share it with her or him.
* I will read:
  + The sections “Laws of Marriage” and “Divorce” by The Universal House of Justice in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, Helen Hornby, Ed., (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1994), 369-403,
  + *Sexuality, Relationships and Spiritual Growth* by Agnes Ghaznavi (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995),
  + *Prescription for Living*, Rúhíyyih Rabbani Chapter IV “Love and Marriage,” (Oxford: George Ronald, 1978),
  + *Love’s Hidden Symmetry: What Makes Love Work in Relationships* by Bert Hellinger (Phoenix, AZ: Zeig, Tucker & Co., 1998),
  + *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate* by Gary Chapman (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2004),
  + *Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples* by Harville Hendrix (New York: Owl Books, 2001), and/or
  + *Men are from Mars, Women Are from Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in Your Relationships*, John Gray (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

CHAPTER 47: CHILDREN

Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants. This is My bidding unto you; hold fast to it as an assistance to yourselves.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

**THE DECISION TO BEGIN A FAMILY**

Bringing children into the world[[58]](#footnote-58)a and educating them in the Bahá’í way of life requires every ounce of our energy and a tremendous amount of patience and perseverance, not to mention the expense involved. In terms of the BLDH Circle, for each child that arrives we become responsible for paying regular attention to 36 basic life processes. This responsibility, in many respects, is far greater than marriage because a child is so totally helpless and dependent. With a family of four children, for example, we need to be concerned about developing 144 processes. It sounds like quite a juggling act and is perhaps over exaggerated but, in my own case, every time I failed in this duty, the consequences come right back in my face. Every time I saw a weakness in one of my children, I asked, “Now where did s/he pick up that bad habit?” or, I remarked, “Do you mean to tell me that this child has not yet learned to . . .” It only took a moment of reflection for me to realize that my children are a reflection of my own efforts as a parent or the lack thereof. Each child needs to learn to manage money with thrift and honesty, to brush her teeth, to put things away where they belong, to say prayers on her own, to love the Nineteen Day Feast, to be able to consult, to set goals, and on and on--truly a Herculean task. Little wonder that when a child graduates or gets married and starts her career, mom and dad feel such great pride, fulfillment, joy, and, also, a sense of relief.

In my own case, I am always so embarrassed when I noticed that my children had picked up my bad habits. Then I remonstrated, “Why didn’t they pick up only the good ones?” Professor Daniel Jordan calmed me down on this concern once by explaining that it is natural for young parents to dream about raising a perfect child. But, in order to do this, they are assuming that the child is surrounded by perfection: perfect parents, perfect teachers, perfect friends, a perfect society, etc. The expectation becomes too unrealistic. So, what shall we do? Shall we not even try? No, we must do our best and guide ourselves by the Writings and the research on parenting as best we can. There are many rewards in the path of child-rearing which make it all worthwhile.

Among the greatest of all services that can possibly be rendered by man to Almighty God is the education and training of children, young plants of the Abhá Paradise.2 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Florence Khan tells the story of how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá held her little cousin on His lap. When her aunt remarked that she feared that her son was too heavy, the Master responded, “Love makes the burden light.”3 In so many ways this comment sums up the essence of parenthood.

Concerning the timing of starting a family, I advise young people to marry young, as recommended by the Guardian4, but to postpone having children until certain conditions are in place. A couple needs to build a “nest” before the arrival of the first born. The BLDH Circle can symbolize this nest. In the social and spiritual quadrants the couple needs time to get to know one another and to establish a harmonious relationship. In the intellectual aspect I recommend that both partners (or at least the husband) complete their basic education before beginning child-rearing. This, in turn, will help materially by providing a firm financial foundation for the family. A married couple going through college together has many advantages. They can support each other emotionally, spiritually, and economically by sharing living expenses. (Parents may also be in a position to help the couple financially in the beginning.) And it will be easier for them to concentrate on their studies because they won’t have to spend time and emotional energy seeking a mate.

**ROUTINES**

Bring them [the children] up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship.5 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Children feel a sense of security when there is an established order and a fairly stable set of routines: morning routines, prayer routines, coming home from school routines, dining routines, cleaning routines, evening routines, going to bed routines, duty routines, weekend routines, holiday routines, and so on.

From an early age, children have a natural inclination to imitate the mother and the father in the carrying out of the household chores. They need to be given the opportunity to collaborate and to be continually encouraged in this. When they reach a reasonable age, they should then be given definite responsibilities.

A simple device to help organize the sharing of duties is called a Duty Circle. To make one, just cut out two concentric circles from tag board. On the outer circle write the duties and on the inner circle write the names of the children (including parents would be the best option). The number of names and sets of duties should match. Use a spreadable fastener in the center to serve as an axis for the Circles. (See Figure 47.1 below) The Circle is kept in a visible place and each week the inner Circle is rotated so that everyone has a chance to help with everything. Duties will vary from one culture to another but could include responsibilities for cleaning, taking care of plants and animals, and helping with the cooking and washing.

Modeling for children the routine chores and activities that we want to become habitual is of utmost importance--both material and spiritual routines. The example set by Dr. Muhájir and his wife Írán in regards to the routines of memorization of verses from the Writings and prayer is instructive. Dr. Muhájir would write on small cards prayers and Hidden Words for his daughter Gisu. Then he would repeat them with her. In this way she learned the long Obligatory Prayer, one verse at a time, long before she turned fifteen.

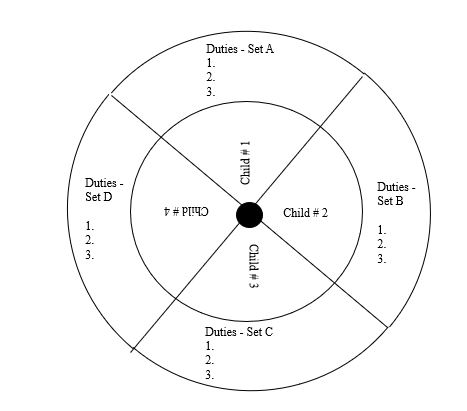


Figure 47. 1: Duty Circle

Rahmat would always say his own obligatory prayers where Gisu could hear him. He did not mind her talking to him and sitting on his lap. He said that she should realize that her parents performed the same prayers that she was asked to memorize. He would then go to a private room and repeat his prayers. When he was at home we always had sessions of family prayers when Gisu sat with us, said her prayers and listened to her father chanting. Gisu and I continued these sessions until he was back with us. Gradually, prayers became a part of Gisu’s life which has remained with her.6

**DISCIPLINE**

The crux of the problem of trying to form the character of a child was stated succinctly by Dr. M. Scott Peck, in his bestseller *People of the Lie*:

The path of love is a dynamic balance of opposites, a painful creative tension of uncertainties, a difficult tightrope between extreme but easier courses of action. Consider the raising of a child. To reject all its misbehavior is unloving. To tolerate all its misbehavior is unloving. We must somehow be both tolerant and intolerant, accepting and demanding, strict and flexible. An almost godlike compassion is required.7

A newly hired maid once asked me, “How do you do it? You don’t yell or hit your children, yet they obey you.” Reflecting on this question and this comment, I can only say that I am amazed at how magically the Bahá’í teachings operate. I had not realized how natural the Bahá’í approach had become and I am so grateful to Bahá’u’lláh that our young children had become a means for attracting others to the Bahá’í way of life. For example, when the physical education teacher at our school decided to join the Faith, I asked him what had attracted him to the Cause. He said that he wanted to have children as exemplary as ours. I was flabbergasted and flattered all at the same time. The key to our success, as partial as I know it is, was identified by Habíb Rezvani whose family is renowned for their outstanding services to the Faith in Colombia. During a winter school in Cartagena, I asked him how he and his wife Simín had managed to raise such dedicated children. His answer was simple yet profound: “Everything that we did revolved around teaching them to love Bahá’u’lláh.” This “love for the Blessed Beauty” then is the foundation of any home discipline program. It is the Center of our lives from which all blessings and all virtues flow.

The Guardian (through his secretary) tells us that “love and kindness have far greater influence than punishment upon the improvement of human character.”8 And when punishment is required, it needs to be administered with the clear message that it is being given out of love; that the child chose to misbehave and therefore it is the duty of the mother or father to apply a fair punishment as a natural and logical consequence. The punishment also needs to be administered and discussed when you are calm. If we look at the BLDH Circle as a model, when we are angry with someone, we are off balance on the social side of being and the psychological side cannot function properly. A more scientific description of this is given by behavior therapist Manuel J. Smith:

When you become angry or afraid, your primitive lower brain centers shut down much of the operation of your new human brain [the outer, more cognitive/verbal layers of the cortex]. The blood supply is automatically rerouted away from your brain and gut to your skeletal muscles to prepare them for physical action. Your human problem-solving brain is inhibited from processing information. When you get angry or afraid, you just don’t think clearly or efficiently. You make mistakes. To an angry or frightened man, two plus two no longer adds up to four.9

Therefore, time is needed to become centered so that there is a balance between the social-emotional and the psychological-rational faculties. To accomplish this, Khalil A. Khavari and Sue Williston Khavari, in their superb book *Creating a Successful Family*, observe that

some parents walk into another room for a moment [I recommend that this be done without slamming doors] to regain self-control, others will mentally count to ten (or whatever number it takes) in order to calm down. Watching a parent struggle to maintain a calm and rational demeanour teaches a child a great deal.10

**SHOWING LOVE**

One of the most helpful programs that I have found that explains to parents how *children* perceive whether or not they are loved is *How to Really Love Your Child* by Dr. Ross Campbell. Three of his techniques, which address how children know that they are loved and how their emotional needs are provided for, I used regularly as a parent and I have often included them in workshops for parents:

- Giving eye contact while communicating

- Giving appropriate physical contact

- Giving one-on-one focused attention.

Parents like them because they are easy to remember and they see immediate results. Briefly, Dr. Campbell uses the metaphor of an emotional tank to represent the level of a child’s feeling loved, wanted, recognized, and appreciated. When it is low the child tends to misbehave. When it is full the child gets along well with everyone. To fill the tank, there are only three methods--the ones listed above.

For my wife and me, the term “emotional tank” became part of our household vocabulary. When one of the kids was having trouble at school or with his or her siblings, the first thing we asked ourselves was, “How is his/her emotional tank?” And as part of the solution we tried to give the child more attention by (1) spending time alone together, (2) giving eye contact while talking, and (3) touching the child in a way that he or she liked. Believe me, this works like magic.

When our children were younger, before my wife and I would leave to go out for an evening alone, we would try to prevent misbehavior by consciously “filling the kids’ tanks” before we left: reading a book together, having a little chat, playing a game, wrestling on the floor or whatever seemed appropriate. When we did this, the report when we returned was most always positive.

When my kids were toddlers and were playing at a Bahá’í gathering or a party, they would suddenly come and sit on my lap. I was delighted, of course, but then they would just as suddenly climb down and run off to play again. I could never fully comprehend this behavior until I studied this program. Then I understood that they were coming in for a “fill-up” and that, for some reason, they needed some assurance and cuddling. It also helped me to not feel so bad when they “abandoned” my lap and arms. I had given them as much as they needed and they were ready to “explore the world” again.

We have given physical contact in different ways. My son Manuel has always loved to receive and give foot rubs, shoulder rubs, and back rubs. He was always the sought-after masseur of the family. Once, when I was sitting beside my son Aaron in bed, getting settled in to read him a story, I asked him if he was ready. He replied, “No, you haven't put your arm around me yet.” I began to wonder which was more important for him, the story or the physical coziness. My daughter Jayá was always delighted to go through the “spaghetti grinder”: down through the legs of my lap head first, being tickled all the way onto the floor--again and again she would come back for more. My son Jamál enjoyed walking hand-in-hand with me. Sad was the day when his social consciousness kicked in and he no longer sought out my hand in public. And all four enjoyed just good old “romping around with Dad” in any shape or form.

As the years rolled by, I saw the same “emotional tank” concept happening in different ways. The intervals between hugs and cuddles became ever greater but the principle remained the same--kids of all ages (including grown up kids) need to have their emotional tanks filled from time to time. Even when the kids are older and away from home, a letter, a card, or a phone call can help keep the emotional tank from becoming too empty.

In support of giving a child focused attention, the Khavaris state:

From the earliest days, both mother and father should spend time with each child alone, during talk-time, doing chores, or being together at any time that is suitable, even if only for a few minutes every day. The assurance of a special place in the affections of both parents will dispel many insecurities and anxieties that can affect friendships between siblings. Far from spoiling them with this attention, you will give them the gift of being capable of loving others because they themselves feel deeply loved. This assurance of worth will instill in them a spirit of optimism that will help them in subduing their selfish tendencies.11

**THE CHILD’s HOUR**

When the children are ready for bed, let the mother read or sing them the Odes of the Blessed Beauty, so that from their earliest years they will be educated by these verses of guidance.12 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Providing children with the attention and the spiritual education that they need may be viewed as having two approaches: informal and formal. Informally we should always be there to have simple, tender conversations and recite prayers at any odd moments whether it be at home, in the car, or walking. The content of the discussion or the verses may not be remembered and the event may not be recalled, but what will remain is the feeling of love, warmth, and togetherness.

Because of our busy schedules we also had to program formal time together. When our children were younger, they were always “tucked in” at night with songs, prayers, chit-chat, hugs, and kisses. As the kids would become more aware of words it was always funny trying to explain the meaning of “tuck in.” Being from Ohio, but living in the tropics, gave us a vocabulary problem. In the tropics the heat is so terrible you would never dream of actually tucking someone in. But being tucked in on a cold, winter Ohio night is the coziest thing imaginable. Anyway, it’s the feeling that counts, so we continued from time to time to “tuck” our kids into bed in the tropical, Bahá’í way.

Another favorite time that I grew to cherish was my one evening per week with one of our children. I simply asked, “This is your evening with Dad, so tell me, ‘What would you like to do?’” The activity is not important. What counts are the eye contact, the touching, and the undivided attention which tells the child, “You are the prince or princess of my life. You are unimaginably dear to my heart.” What we did together changed from one child to the next and from one age to another. Some examples include: reading a story, playing a board game, playing cards, swimming, bowling, shooting pool, going to a movie, window shopping, or just having fun. When my son Jamál was a baby, I loved to put him in a backpack and go for a “singing walk” through a nearby woods.

And for adolescents it’s often sufficient to just go out for an ice cream sundae and listen to them talk about their problems and experiences at school and with their friends. It is a time for doing a lot of listening. Indirectly, and sometimes directly, I used the BLDH Circle to guide some key conversational questions:

Spiritual: How is your prayer life going?

What plans do the Bahá’í youth have?

Physical: How is your health?

Psychological: How are your studies going?

Social: How are you getting along with your friends?

A fascinating feature to observe in a maturing adolescent is the gradual (and sometimes sudden) awakening to their own complexity. They seem to say:

Gee! I have an intense yearning for God, a drive to excel in my studies; I have an active sex impulse; I enjoy sports and music and dancing; I need affection from my family; I have to begin to watch my diet (because of pimples) . . . Wow! I'm all these things! How complicated I am! Now how in the world am I going to be able to manage and coordinate this multitude of “selves”?

Spending this special time together and using the BLDH Circle as an integrative model of the self can help adolescents to better understand themselves, to set reasonable goals, and to make a successful passage into adulthood.

**WHEN MOM OR DAD IS AWAY**

When parents go away for travel teaching, service to the Faith, or professional development, the children cannot always go along. In order for this not to become a negative experience, great care should be taken. Again, the central focus should be our love for Bahá’u’lláh. The children should be told through our words and our attitudes, that, if mommy is away, it is because she is serving Bahá’u’lláh or because she is becoming better prepared in her profession to help build Bahá’u’lláh’s new World Order: “To do this Mommy is sacrificing time with us and we are sharing in this sacrifice. By making sacrifices we will become closer to the heart of Bahá’u’lláh.” In this way the children will become strong Bahá’ís and will follow their parents’ example of traveling to serve the Cause or to further their education. If even a single negative statement is made--such as, “Why did your father have to go away and leave us again?” --the children will also feel resentment towards the absent parent and towards the Faith which took him or her away from home. It takes a great deal of spiritual maturity and fortitude to manifest radiant acquiescence when one’s spouse is absent for an extended period of time.

On the surface it may seem like the absence of a parent for several weeks or even months at a time runs contrary to the principles of balance, harmony, and unity in a family. But sometimes, on a deeper level, we have found that we have to tolerate a temporary imbalance in order to achieve a higher harmony. The world is in such a terrible state of disequilibrium that souls are needed who will cast their entire weight into the scales of destiny in order make a difference. This higher call has been responded to by the martyrs, pioneers, travel teachers, and administrators who work evenings and weekends in promotion of the Cause. The only way I have found to compensate for this imbalance in the family caused by these long absences, is to heighten the intensity of the joy of togetherness when everyone is in the family nest.

**ACHIEVING THE BALANCE**

Our daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly patterns of service operate within larger cycles of life. (See Figure 3.6) When children are younger, they need a great deal of attention from at least one parent. When they become older, they can become more independent. Javidukht Khadem, our Auxiliary Board Member when we lived in Ohio, once told us that we shouldn't think that she had always been traveling and serving the Cause as she was at that time; that, during the formative years of her five children, she made them the center of her attention.

During Dorothy Baker’s early family life in Buffalo, New York, her “Bahá’í life consisted mostly of reading the writings on her own. The responsibility and safety of the family took her hours and years and demanded, she felt, all of her love. Consequently, she was not too active in the small Buffalo Bahá’í community.”13

Madeline Hellaby, in *Education in the Bahá’í Family*, sets this same priority:

Of all the people we meet, our own children are the most likely to become Bahá’ís and it would be tragic if we were spending so much time ‘working for the Faith’ that we neglected those who are under our very nose.14

When Dorothy Baker’s children were older, she was elected to the National Spiritual Assembly and was later appointed Hand of the Cause of God. Louise B. Matthias quotes Dorothy Baker on how she tried to achieve a larger balance which included both her children and the Cause:

There is nothing I would love more than to give every minute of my life and all of my attention, all of my acts to teaching work . . . but then I would become a very unbalanced person and I would not be able to give a true picture of the Bahá’í Faith. I have always to see to it that I have three facets to my life--my Bahá’í work, my family, and recreation.15

Her granddaughter, Dorothy Freeman, further states:

Travel, talks--hundreds during the early 40s, even beyond those given at colleges--counseling the Bahá’ís and near-believers; these were the activities Dorothy gave herself to, but her family members were never forgotten, nor did they receive less than a full measure of her love, though her time was limited.16

. . . balance between family and the outside world, between spiritual concepts and practical realities, was an integral part of who Dorothy was.17

When Dorothy Baker’s son Bill was ill in bed for seven months, she rearranged her affairs in order to be his chief succorer and supporter:

It is true that Mother was away much and for many years, but when I was sick, the moments with people that I remember most clearly were with Mother. She came in and prayed daily when she was home . . .. She had healing prayers for me and we talked about the Writings. She gave me a bed bath every day.18

**SOME FAVORITE REFLECTIONS ON “BIRDS LEAVING THE NEST”**

Whether you are approaching, beginning, or winding down parenthood, it is worthwhile to meditate on this principle: that the success of our children is a reflection of our sacrifices. Some Honduran friends of ours told us about an important and difficult decision they made once. The husband was an officer in the army and the wife was an educator. One day he came home and announced that he had received a significant raise. He said that he was delighted that the family could finally eat better food. The wife lovingly posed the question, “Why don’t we continue with our same humble fare and invest the money in better schooling for the children?” Through consultation they agreed to this and never regretted the sacrifice.

This universal principle of correspondence between the heights of achievement and the depths of sacrifice is expressed beautifully by the “Prophet” of Khalil Gibran in his address to parents:

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.

The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.

Let your bending in the archer’s hand be for gladness;

For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves the bow that is stable.19

As adolescents approach the threshold of departure from the bosom of the family, they feel both fear and impatience. When the moment comes to bid them farewell, we need to see them as standing on our shoulders. The taller we have stood the higher will they reach. The taller they stand; the loftier will be the heights of achievement of each succeeding generation.

Oh, lad, I feel your pain and love your sharp impatience,

hold back your wrath: all things shall come, all in their turn.

I've done my duty as a son, surpassed my father,

now in your turn surpass me both in brain and spear,

a difficult task, but if you can’t, our race must perish,

and then our turn shall come to fall prey to the mob.20

--Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*

During the writing of the second draft of this chapter, my four children, Jamál, Jayá, Manuel, and Aaron[[59]](#footnote-59) left home, gave their year or more of service to the Faith in various countries and cultures different from the one in which they grew up and engaged in their college studies and professions. And now two of them have their own families. Over the years I continually returned to the inspiring prayers and meditations of Hand of the Cause of God George Townshend. One of my favorites, especially at the time when a child would “leave the nest,” follows:

Good-bye, my baby boy, good-bye; you are gone from us for ever!

What love did you bring with you into the world!

What love did you stir and quicken in your father’s heart.

With what love have I watched you, played with you, tended you in all conditions, at all hours, by day and by night; and who was happier than I!

How many scenes made beautiful by love, and filled with joy unroll before my eyes. Again I see our child of longing, the first born in his first sleep: the young adventurer voyaging from chair to chair: the blue-clad boy among the buttercups seeking to make playmates of the eluding lambs . . . But all this is past. You are gone from us, my baby-boy, and have no being now save in the close warm strong embrace of your mother’s memory and mine.

So must it be.

The bud perishes that the blossom may shed its fragrance, and babyhood yields its place to the larger life of the boy.

And have not you, my little newcomer, my little four-year-old-son, have not you all that the baby who brought you to me had--and how much more. What was all that baby-sweetness of yours which is now gone by save the light you cast before you on your way to me! You too, in your turn, will pass away from me, and the years will ever bring to you change upon change. Deepening happiness awaits you. You will pass from knowledge to knowledge, from strength to strength. And through all the years, you and I, please God, will be the closer friends and comrades because we have loved each other so dearly in the baby-days gone by.21

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. According to the Bahá’í teachings, is it obligatory to marry? To procreate or adopt children?
2. What are some of the purposes for bringing children into the world?
3. When one is married, what needs to be done preferably before children are born? That is, using the Circle as a guide, how should the “nest” be prepared?
4. What are the advantages of establishing routines in the lives of children and families? What are some examples from each quadrant of the Circle?
5. In relation to discipline, what kinds of limits need to be set and enforced? Can you give examples of the Guardian’s statement that “love and kindness have far greater influence than punishment on the improvement of behavior”?
6. According to Dr. Ross Campbell, what are the three ways that children understand that you love them?
7. Why is it important to find time alone with not only your God, your Self, and your spouse, but also with each of your children?
8. What are some of the sacrifices required for child-rearing? What are some of the benefits?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* Before having children, I will work with my spouse to prepare our “nest” in the following ways:
* I will find time to spend with each of my children alone on a regular basis.
* I will arrange for my children to take turns joining me in prayer, service activities, and teaching trips.
* In my relationships with my children, I will show more patience, tolerance, and sympathetic understanding.
* I will compliment my children more and criticize less.
* I will read:
  + *Mothers, Fathers, and Children: Practical Advice to Parents* by ʻAlí-Akbar Furútan, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1980), and/or
  + *When We Grow Up* by Bahíyyih Nakhjavání (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1979)

CHAPTER 48: FAMILY

Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world. Their concerns are in order, they enjoy comfort and tranquility, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but addeth to its stature and its lasting honour, as day succeedeth day.1

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Thus far we have examined the wholes which form the parts of a family: the self, the matrimony, and the children. This chapter will now consider the family as a greater whole, and as a basic, fundamental building block of society.

In order to achieve the degree of family unity extolled by the Master in the opening passage several feelings, attitudes, processes, and shared ideals need to be in place. Based on our love for Bahá’u’lláh, we must visualize the ideal family and home life that we want to create. The teachings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá guide this vision:

My home is the home of peace.

My home is the home of joy and delight.

My home is the home of laughter and exultation.

Whoever enters through the portals of this home

must go out with gladsome heart.2

Thy house is my house. Therefore, it must become adorned with the lights of the Kingdom.3

Suffer thy home to become a nest for the dove of the Holy Spirit . . .4

To bring such a lofty vision into reality requires a great deal of concerted effort on the part of each member of the family, especially in these times when the society around us is disintegrating so rapidly. Agnes Ghaznavi, author of *The Family Repairs and Maintenance Manual* states:

The family adapted to change and evolution, implying growth for the individual and enrichment of family life, needs a vision of flexibility, balance and diversity, and also the acceptance of a certain amount of bearable tension, of suffering during periods of transition and change.5

In order to provide for this continual adjustment and readjustment to the varying needs of the family and its members, in my family, we found that certain recurring, family activities needed to be planned: prayers, consultation, establishing ground rules, eating dinner together, leisure activities, and outings.

**FAMILY PRAYER**

The importance of establishing a pleasant routine of praying together and reading the verses of God in the morning and in the evening was discussed in the chapter on prayer. Family prayer is the source of family unity and feelings of love, humbleness, kindness, tenderness, and sympathy which are so necessary for the smooth functioning of a home. Prayer, says the Master, is the means of transforming a home into a spiritual paradise:

Verily, I pray God to make thy home a center for the radiation of light and the glowing of His love in the hearts of His people. Know that in every home where God is praised and prayed to, and His Kingdom proclaimed, that home is a garden of God and a paradise of His happiness.6

The desire to fulfil this wish of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá should be in the heart of each family member. Hand of the Cause George Townshend expresses this deep desire to make a Bahá’í home His home:

Fill Thou, O God, our home with harmony and happiness, with laughter and delight, with radiant kindliness and overflowing joy, that in the union of our hearts Thy love may find a lodging place, and Thou Thyself mayst make this home of ours Thine Own!7

**FAMILY CONSULTATION**

The process of regular family consultation serves as the great facilitator of adaptation, flexibility, and change; as the great navigator amongst the rocks of differing opinions, needs, and wants. We found four special times that lend themselves to frank and loving consultation: after prayers together in the morning, in the car on the way to anywhere, during the dinner hour, and during our weekly “family night.” Of course, emergency “pow-wows” were also called at the drop of a hat when the need arose.

The need to develop this communication skill is emphasized by Kerry J. Mothersill in her article, “Marriage Breakdown in North America:”

As the family has become isolated from its purposes and from the support networks of extended family and community, the skills of effective communicators and problem solvers are needed to develop an ability to cope with the increased stresses of life.8

‘Abdu’l-Bahá extols “peace makers” who use consultation properly:

Blessed are they who are the means of making unity among the friends, and pity on those who in the right or wrong who are the cause of discord.9

The Universal House of Justice views consultation as an ideal tool for conflict resolution:

Family consultation implying full and frank discussion, and animated by awareness of the need for moderation and balance, can be the panacea for domestic conflict.10

They further state:

The atmosphere within a Bahá’í Family as within the community as a whole should express “the keynote of the Cause of God” which, the beloved Guardian has stated, “is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation.”11

This requires that neither parent should dominate the decision-making process. Of course, not every affair is subject to family consultation because some decisions, such as major budgetary considerations, are the exclusive prerogative of the parents.

**FAMILY GROUND RULES**

As the children grow in understanding and consultative ability, the following counsels of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá need to repeatedly become the subject of family discussion:

According to the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, the family being a human unit must be educated according to the rules of sanctity. All the virtues must be taught the family. The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother, none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father likewise has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each the comfort of all; the honour of one the honour of all.12

These statements of the Master are necessarily very general, but each family needs to take further steps to apply them to their particular circumstances. We took His guidance regarding “rules of sanctity” rather literally and developed a helpful technique: the establishment of a set of ground rules which spell out the “prerogatives” and “obligations” of each family member and stipulate in what ways the “integrity of the family bond” will be upheld. In the beginning the children will learn these indirectly by “osmosis.” Later they need to be discussed more explicitly. In this way the home becomes the first place where children learn to respect “laws” and to understand their value. The following are five, easy-to-remember, general ground rules with some practical applications of each.

1. We respect others by showing fairness, kindness and courtesy.
   1. We enter someone’s bedroom only after knocking and/or with their permission.
   2. Visitors are warmly welcomed at the door, offered something to drink, and conversed with kindly until they choose to leave or until another family member takes over the conversation.
   3. Visitors who have already entered the home are warmly greeted.
   4. The phone (if you have a land line) is answered politely and messages are taken.[[60]](#footnote-60)
   5. We greet one another each morning.
   6. We use courtesy words such as “please” and “thank you.”
   7. Food, especially dessert, is shared equally.[[61]](#footnote-61)
2. We do not interrupt unnecessarily:
   1. when two people are talking;
   2. when someone is talking on the phone;
   3. when someone is sleeping;
   4. when someone is working or studying;
   5. (if it is necessary to interrupt, we do so politely).
3. We respect the integrity of the family.
   1. We arrive to family prayers on time.
   2. We come immediately when called for dinner.
   3. We come neatly dressed and groomed to the dinner table.
   4. We observe table manners.
   5. We ask to be excused from the dinner table.
   6. We never plan other engagements during “family night.”
   7. Family outings and vacations are given priority on the social calendar.
   8. Everyone carries out his/her duties without being reminded.
   9. We “celebrate” (in addition to birthdays) one another’s accomplishments: winning awards, making good grades, making the honor roll, presenting a good talk on the Faith, grasping an opportunity to teach the Faith, etc.
   10. We encourage one another when we’re feeling down due to failure, disappointment, illness, etc.
4. We respect property.
   1. No one borrows anything without asking first.
   2. All borrowed items are returned to the owner immediately after use.
   3. All periodicals and mail are given unopened to the person to whom they are addressed.
   4. Only “designated” foods and drinks may be eaten between meals.
   5. After making a purchase, we return all of the change to mother or father without being asked.[[62]](#footnote-62)
5. We “recycle” the environment.
   1. We put things away where they belong after we use them or when we see something out of place.
   2. We clean up any mess that we make.
   3. We are “switch flickers,” i.e., we turn off fans, lights, radios and any other electrical apparatuses when we leave a room.

As you can see, it is possible to generate many detailed rules--even more than those delineated above. For this reason, it is wise to stress the five general rules which cover a wide variety of particular applications. This list of ground rules can be discussed, modified, and shortened. The more explicit they are and the more carefully they are lovingly reinforced, the more smoothly and happily will the household run. Kids need to become aware that this is so in order to appreciate the vital role that rules play in any social organization.

**FAMILY DINNER TIME**

Because not all of our family members ate breakfast (and those who did were seldom ready to eat at the same time) and because we ate lunch at school and work, the family dinner time was “sacred.” This is the time when we could count on being together, when we could listen to a passage from the Writings, talk about the events of the day, joke with one another, encourage one another, discuss plans, and simply enjoy one another’s company. To accomplish this, we had several rules. Dinner was always served at the same time. Everyone was expected to be there unless there was a legitimate excuse. In order to avoid interruptions, someone was in charge of taking the phone off the hook before the meal and replacing it after the meal. (Nowadays the equivalent rule would be, “Everyone turns off her or his mobile phone.”) And, of course, the other rules which were outlined above.

**FAMILY NIGHTS**

Oh! How we must appreciate and delight in our children while we have them! Truly, they are only “on loan” to us from God. In our family we got together in two ways: spontaneously and on a planned basis.

When the children were little, on weekends, they would come sneaking into bed with Mommy and Daddy in the early morning.[[63]](#footnote-63) (Welcoming them was the only way of getting a few minutes more of rest.) At other times they would “pile into bed” for a romping session. Somehow our bed became the traditional, informal, rendezvous point. Even later on, when the older kids grew into adolescents, bodies would be flopped every which way until somehow everyone fit--laughing, tickling, telling funny stories, or eating some “sweet” that Daddy had just brought back with him from a trip.

Early in our family life, we instituted a tradition which stuck: every Friday night we gathered as a family to pray, to consult (only if necessary), and to do some fun activity together. The children looked forward to it; helped plan it; reminded us about it; and held it “sacred.” When someone wanted me to plan or attend a meeting on that night, I simply told them that I had “a former engagement.” If I told them that my “appointment” was to pop corn and play “Win, Loose, or Draw” with my children, they might have been offended by my priorities.

Some advance planning is involved, but not too much. The range of possible activities is so wide that it boggles the mind. The only limitation, due to the wide range of ages and interests, is finding something that everyone likes. At one point, in order to be fair, we had to write down everyone’s favorite activities and then rotate through the list each Friday. Some possibilities were listed in the previous chapter for “the child’s hour.” (See also the books of activity ideas recommended at the end of this chapter.) Other activities range from something as simple as popping corn and watching a video movie together to one of our favorite inventions called, “The ‘Thank You’ Game.” In this game a bowl of peanut M & M’s or some other bite-sized candy is placed in the middle of the table. Each person takes a turn filling in the statement, “I am thankful for . . .” after which he or she may eat a candy. This continues for about three or four rounds and serves as an introduction to the evening. We have found that it brought out the deepest feelings of each of us and gave the evening a special, warm, “glow.” An alternative would be to precede the “thank you” game with the phrase, “What worries me most is . . .” This would put you in touch with another category of your children’s feelings. Still another interesting phrase is, “I am looking forward to the day when . . .” This will let you know about your children’s hopes and dreams.

**FAMILY OUTINGS AND VACATIONS**

During many years we enjoyed having family outings to the beach, to the mountains, to parks, to go hiking, to explore the rivers in the coastal areas where we lived, etc. We tried to plan a one-day outing each month and a multi-day vacation each year. Traveling together and having new experiences together enriched our lives (and our family photo album!). Plus, getting away from the city and into nature was always refreshing and relaxing. We found, however, that with busy Bahá’í and professional calendars that we needed to schedule these well in advance.[[64]](#footnote-64)

**WHEN AWAY FROM THE FAMILY**

In the last chapter consideration was given to how to keep children’s attitudes bright and positive while one of the parents is away. Now we will consider an absence from the viewpoint of the person who is away from the family.

The basic guiding principle is that when a member of the family is away, the family is still connected spiritually through bonds of love and through prayer. These ties need to be reinforced physically from time to time via phone calls, social media, and letters. Dorothy Baker would write to her mother nearly every week.13 Dr. Muhájir, who was seldom with his family, regularly called, wrote, prayed for them, and asked others to pray for them. His daughter Gisu still keeps a large collection of the post cards from her father from all over the world.14 His wife Írán writes:

If ever there was real need for Rahmat to be with us, or with his mother, he would immediately return, no matter how far away he was. He said he was so close to us that if things went wrong there was no need to call him: he would instinctively feel it and come home.15

Dorothy Baker had this same intuitive sense. Mary Lou Ewing relates:

Dorothy commented on how she had been protected by Bahá’u’lláh in her mothering. She said that she realized she was [away] from her children a great deal; that it would have been very easy to have an estrangement, to have had a sense of neglect of her parental duties, a sense of separation and deprivation. But she had been comforted over and over by being intuitively aware, even though absent from them, of difficult times which either Louise or Bill might be experiencing. She could be in the middle of a meeting, she could be in the middle of a trip, the middle of prayers or studying, or most anything and one of her children would come into her mind in such a way as to alert her that she should instantly turn to Bahá’u’lláh and ask for their protection. Later on, when she returned home, she would ask about what had happened, and over and over she would be able to tie the prayer, or the sense of urgency for prayer to a crisis that had occurred in their lives. It was something that was on her mind, and about which she was intensely grateful to Bahá’u’lláh--for being close in this parent-daughter relationship, or parent-son relationship.16

But having this protection does not take away the pain of loneliness while one is away from the family. Írán Muhájir comments:

He [Rahmat] once wrote to me from Singapore that on a particular night, after he had been dropped at his hotel following a meeting with the friends, he found he simply could not face going to his room and being alone again. He went to the hotel garden, which faced the sea, and sat on a bench the whole night. “I said a lot of prayers that night,” he wrote, “I wanted to be with my family and have my child by my side. In the morning I decided to go to a book store and buy some books. That evening I went to a silly movie and the next day left for Thailand.”17

The need to build a close-knit family and a warm, loving home is a challenge, and yet the greater challenge is to not become too attached to it. The Hands of the Cause provide excellent role models for this aspect of Bahá’í life.

O ye homeless and wanderers in the path of God! Prosperity, contentment, and freedom, however much desired and conducive to the gladness of the human heart, can in no wise compare with the trials of homelessness and adversity in the pathway of God; for such exile and banishment are blessed by the divine favour, and are surely followed by the mercy of Providence. The joy of tranquillity in one’s home, and the sweetness of freedom from all cares shall pass away, whilst the blessing of homelessness shall endure forever, and its far-reaching results shall be made manifest.18

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

In our own family we were blessed that our children followed in our footsteps. During their youth they traveled more for the Cause than we did in our youth and gave their vacations and upwards of a year of Youth Service to the Cause in far off lands. They looked forward to it, planned for it, were transformed by each journey, and considered their travels and services to be a sign of their growing maturity. And when they returned from each trip, our family circle was renewed with wonderful stories and tales of adventure.

**THE EXTENDED FAMILY**

As pioneers we pretty much sacrificed the idea of having close, continual contact with our relatives. They were remembered in our thoughts, our prayers, our conversation, and our photo album. Our extended family, in practice, however, was always the dear Bahá’ís wherever we lived. Thanks to Bahá’u’lláh, we were never without “adopted” grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, and cousins. And when we were able to get back home every few years to see “the real ones,” the kids were delighted to find that, with no effort at all, they suddenly had these marvelous souls surrounding them who cherish them beyond anything imaginable. The get-togethers were not frequent but the bonds and friendships that were created are still deep. No doubt there is great truth in the saying, “Distance makes the heart grow fonder.”

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What are the purposes of Bahá’í life that help keep a family united?
2. When a person enters a Bahá’í home, what characteristics should he/she experience?
3. What are the six activities which enable a family to maintain its unity while responding to the diverse needs and wants of its members?
4. When is a good time to pray together as a family?
5. According to the Universal House of Justice, what is the “panacea for domestic conflict”? What should be the characteristics of this conflict-resolution tool?
6. What are the five basic ground rules for family living recommended in the BLDH program?
7. Why is dining together as a family once a day or as regularly as possible so important?
8. What is a “family night”? What is its purpose? What are some examples of family night activities?
9. When traveling or away from home, how can we stay connected to our family?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* In consultation with my family, I will plan:
  + daily family prayers
  + family ground rules
  + family dinner time
  + a weekly family night
  + a monthly family outing
  + a yearly family vacation
* I will read:
  + *Bahá’í Marriage and Family Life: Selections from the Writings of the Bahá’í Faith* from the works of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and The Universal House of Justice, (Thornhill, Ontario: Bahá’í Canada Publications, 1983),
  + *Creating a Successful Family* by Khalil A. Khavari and Sue Williston Khavari (London: Oneworld Publications, Ltd., 1989),
  + *The Family Repairs and Maintenance Manual* by Agnes Ghaznavi (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1989),
  + *Family Fun and Togetherness* by Wayne Rickerson (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1979), and/or
  + *Family Home Evening: Resource Book*, (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1983)

# SECTION VI, PART 2: THE OUTER SOCIAL QUADRANT

In the outer portion of the Social Quadrant the social circle is extended from the inner life of the family to the outer social life. The microcosm of the family opens its doors to the multi-layered macrocosm of the world--our friends, our Bahá’í community, our work community, and society in general. (See Figure VI.1 above.) Communication continues to be the key process for initiating, maintaining, and enriching our emotional relationships with the social environment.

CHAPTER 49: FRIENDS

To live the life . . .. Visit your neighbors when they are sick or in trouble, offer your services to them, try to show them that you are longing to serve them. . ..

Show the world that in spite of the utmost suffering, poverty, sickness, you have something which gives you comfort, strength and peace--that you are happy--serene--satisfied with all that is in your life.

Then they will want what you possess--and will need no further teaching--after you tell what it is.1

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

In this chapter, the intimate circle of the family is expanded to the larger circle of our friendships. The BLDH Circle can be used to analyze the different, shared interests which serve as a basis of friendships. They could be physical interests such as sports, cooking, neighborhood improvement, or business interests. The friendship could be based on shared intellectual concerns: professional colleagues, cultural groups, and fellow students. Common interests in the spiritual side of life are the basis of our friendship with the believers and others who are spiritually-inclined. The more aspects two people share in common, the easier it is to form a friendship. Even within the Faith, this same principle applies because there are believers who are more interested in one aspect of life than another. It is natural, however, that, because the Bahá’í Revelation deals with the more profound concerns of life, friendships with our spiritual brothers and sisters should also be more profound.

Another way to analyze friendships is to see our contacts on a spectrum ranging from total strangers, to acquaintances, to friendships, to deeper spiritual friendships, to soul companions. (See Figure 49.1) These degrees of friendship are shown as corresponding to a parallel set of events beginning with a first encounter, perhaps at a social event, then to hospitality shown during an indirect fireside, which eventually leads to direct teaching of the friend and his or her eventual confirmation as a believer. (See chapter on “Teaching” for a definition of these two types of firesides.) The friendship–sometimes over the course of months and sometimes over the course of years or even decades--continues to deepen through study classes, teaching events, and, in general, serving the Faith together.

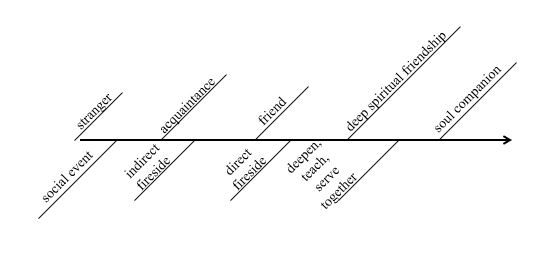


Figure 49. 1: Friendship as a Continuum

The degree of shared interests can be viewed as the amount of overlap between two circles. The greater the area of overlay, the deeper the friendship. (See Figure 49.2 below.)

Both of these graphic metaphors express the concept that there is no limit to the depths of a friendship (the continuing arrow in the first figure and the amount of overlap in the second). This is true regardless of the sex. The condition and limitation, however, is that friendship, outside of the institution of marriage, should not be expressed in sexual acts:

Outside of their normal, legitimate married life they [the believers] should seek to establish bonds of comradeship and love which are eternal and founded on the spiritual life of man, not on his physical life.2 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

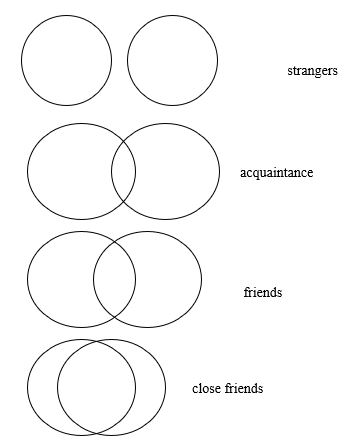


Figure 49. 2: Friendship as Overlapping Interests

Bahá’í Law restricts permissible sexual intercourse to that between a man and the woman to whom he is married.3 --The Universal House of Justice

No matter how devoted and fine the love may be between people of the same sex to let it find expression in sexual acts is wrong.4 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

**FRIENDSHIPS OUTSIDE OF MARRIED LIFE**

It is possible to become too dependent on the friendship of your spouse. The need to open this circle of intimacy to the social world is emphasized by Dr. Erik Blumenthal:

Human beings, as social creatures, need to feel that they belong, and not only at work and in their marriages but in all spheres of their life. For example, if a married couple have no friends in common, they end up experiencing not only increasing isolation but also a kind of inner poverty.5

When a couple share a friendship with others, this enriches their social life. But there can also be friendships which are not necessarily held in common; friendships, for example, which are based on a particular interest which is not shared with the spouse. This enriches the life of the individual directly and indirectly and it is healthy for the marriage and the life of the family.

**FRIENDSHIPS WITH NON-BAHÁ’ÍS**

It was Javidukht Khadem who first counseled me to seek social balance by having good friends both within and outside the Bahá’í community. When she explained that she and Mr. Khadem had close friendships that had nothing to do with the Faith, I was amazed. I thought that a Hand of the Cause would only have time for Bahá’í affairs.

Forming friendships with people who are not yet believers is healthy for several reasons. It enables us to enjoy a diversity of people who have a wide range of interests, talents, and ways of perceiving the world.[[65]](#footnote-65)a It provides the surest way for teaching the Faith--through deeds instead of words:

Not all of us are capable of serving in the same way, but the one way every Bahá’í can spread the Faith is by example. This moves the hearts of people far more deeply than words ever can.

The love we show others, the hospitality and understanding, the willingness to help them, these are the very best advertisements of the Faith. They will want to hear about it when they see these things in our lives.6 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

Also, in the communities where we live, having ties of friendship with non-believers keeps the Bahá’ís from being perceived as an exclusive, insular, fanatical religious group. The International Teaching Centre at the Bahá’í World Centre describes this aspect of a healthy Bahá’í community as follows:

Beyond opening the doors of the Bahá’í community to the outside world, the believers are also exerting themselves to reach out. Bahá’ís are striving to expand their social circles and ultimately their friendships, as friendship is the surest foundation for touching the hearts. To pursue these aims, individuals have begun to examine their priorities, including services they are rendering the Faith, and to reorder their lives so as to allow themselves more time for interaction with their relatives, friends, and coworkers. Ultimately, what is the point of striving to become more effective teachers if we are not meeting people to teach?7

Following Mrs. Khadem’s advice, my wife and I formed several deep friendships with people outside of the Bahá’í community. A few have become Bahá’ís. Others have become friends of the Faith who mention the Cause in positive terms in their social and professional circles.

Because we and our friends had to move from time to time to other cities and countries, some friendships faded away. Some of our friends, however, have had the good fortune of coming into contact with Bahá’ís in other communities. And we have occasionally become friends with people who had learned about the Faith through friendships with Bahá’ís previously. I often imagine the destiny of these people as being like a chain-linked pathway. Each new Bahá’í friendship is a link in their chain until they finally reach their Heart’s Desire. In this sense the international Bahá’í community is a collaborative effort. Some of us are making contacts and then passing them on. Others are receiving former contacts and deepening the relationship, until finally, someone along the chain receives the blessing of being able to confirm the person in the Faith. I will always remember the day when I received a telegram that said only “Alláh'u’Abhá!” and signed “Bev.” It was from a former friend and colleague who had finally accepted the Faith after passing through the hands of several other “links” over the course of about six years. The telegram was her sweet way of thanking her “first link.” I believe that prayer has a great deal to do with the destiny of our friends who we “pass on” to the guiding hands of Bahá’u’lláh.

**BAHÁ’Í FRIENDSHIPS**

Of course, it is with our fellow believers that we are most likely to share interests and to form deep and lasting friendships. I find that this is especially true when we work together on projects and campaigns. There is something magical about facing tests and difficulties together. The tears and sweat of suffering seem to seal the bonds of never-to-be-forgotten comradeship.

**MAKING FRIENDS**

Some of the best advice I have ever received about human relations in general and initiating friendships in particular was from Dale Carnegie in his famous book *How to Win Friends & Influence People*. A few of his fundamental principles are listed below.

* Fundamental Techniques for Handling People:
  + Don’t criticize, condemn or complain.
  + Give honest and sincere appreciation.
  + Arouse in the other person an eager want.
* Six Ways to Make People Like You
  + Become genuinely interested in other people.
  + Smile.
  + Remember that a person’s name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.
  + Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.
  + Talk in terms of the other person’s interests.
  + Make the other person feel important--and do it sincerely.8

It is not possible here, but an entire book could be written regarding how these principles were manifested in the life of the Master.

**MAINTAINING FRIENDSHIPS**

To keep a friendship alive requires an investment of time and energy. There is no way around it. It takes a great deal of effort to so arrange our busy lives that we have time for the Faith, our family, our work, our self, and our friends. Another challenge in maintaining friendships with non-believers is to balance the motive of teaching on the one hand with the motive of detached sincerity on the other. There can be no doubt that the ultimate hope for any such friendship is that the friend will accept his or her Lord--the Messenger of God for this Day. There could be no friendlier act of kindness than to serve as an instrument for a friend to come into the fold of the Most Great Name. The Guardian confirms this prime motive when he speaks of the “means whereby he can enlist successively the sympathy, the support, and ultimately the allegiance of those with whom he comes in contact”9

If we go to the extreme of over-emphasizing the teaching motive, we are perceived as being fanatical and insincere--especially if we “dump” the friendship just because he or she didn’t show any interest when we mentioned the Faith for the first time. If we have this tendency, what is needed is patience, extreme patience--and lots of prayer. In Barranquilla we had a friend who, only after ten years, did he begin to consider the Teachings as his own. It took several years for Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl to accept the Faith, but then he became the most erudite Bahá’í of his time.

If we go to the other extreme, we so much enjoy the friendship that we sometimes lose track of the goal; that we need to help our friends to fulfil the purpose of their earthly life--the acceptance of Bahá’u’lláh and allegiance to His Teachings. In this case, what is needed is greater boldness and audacity by mentioning the Faith and giving Bahá’í literature; then praying a lot.

A very practical set of guidelines for personal teaching is given by Nathan Rutstein in his book *Teaching the Bahá’í Faith*:

1. Pray and deepen every morning and evening.

2. Select a person to teach.

3. Once the selection is made, pray for the seeker every day.

4. Love the person.

5. Serve the person.

6. Be a friend to the person.

7. Be a “balm” to his/her suffering.

8. Have a Local Spiritual Assembly pray for the person.

9. Be patient.

**BREAKING OFF A FRIENDSHIP**

It sometimes happens that we need to break off, or more often, reduce the intensity of a friendship. This can happen when we find that the friend is having a negative influence on us, or we find out that their reputation in the community is not a good one. This doesn’t mean that we should not associate with those people who need to be transformed. But we should be attentive to maintaining the good name of the Faith. This is especially true in societies where, for example, politicians are in disrepute and have ulterior motives and where people are sometimes involved in the mafia, drug-trafficking, and subversive movements. This can also happen when we find that we are unable to reverse a tendency in a friendship to dwell on the negative or the mundane, to backbite, and continually criticize. Still another situation is where the friend insists that the relationship become physical. Not in all cases, but in some, it is advisable to break off such friendships.

In all of these situations, experience has taught me that it is best to continue to show cordiality and not to completely shun someone. Bahá’u’lláh makes it clear that we need to evaluate our friendships in terms of the degree of “righteousness” of the other person:

O My Son! The company of the ungodly increaseth sorrow, whilst fellowship with the righteous cleanseth the rust from off the heart.10

O Son of Dust! Beware! Walk not with the ungodly and seek not fellowship with him, for such companionship turneth the radiance of the heart into infernal fire.11

O Son of My Handmaid! Wouldst thou seek the grace of the Holy Spirit, enter into fellowship with the righteous . . .12

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What are the characteristics and examples of actions of a good friend? (Using the Circle can be helpful.) Am I a good friend to someone?
2. Should a sincere friendship include teaching the Faith to the friend? Explain.
3. Do I have meaningful friendships in my life? If married, do you have friendships other than with your spouse?
4. Do I have at least a few friends with whom I can deeply discuss any aspect of the BLDH Circle?
5. Are my friendships characterized by mutual support, that is, do we support one another in our personal growth in all four quadrants of the Circle?
6. Do I have both Bahá’í and non-Bahá’í friends?
7. Am I closing myself off from the world by confining my friendships to only the Bahá’í community?
8. Are my friendships within the Bahá’í Community only superficial; restricted to shared participation in Bahá’í meetings and events?
9. Do I need to make new friends?
10. Do I need to strengthen a friendship which has already begun?
11. What are legitimate reasons for cutting off a friendship?
12. Do I need to cut off a friendship which is not positive?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will develop a new friendship with someone I enjoy being with and who I believe would eventually be receptive to the Bahá’í Message.
* I will reflect on the quantity and the quality of my friendships from time to time in the light of this chapter.
* I will read:
  + *How to Win Friends & Influence People* by Dale Carnegie (New York: Pocket Books, 1981) and/or
  + Chapter 11: “Personal Teaching” in *Teaching the Bahá’í Faith*, by Nathan Rutstein (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1984)

CHAPTER 50: THE BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITY

A community . . . 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.1

--The Universal House of Justice

**THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A BEAUTIFUL BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITY**

If we apply the formula for beauty which was discussed in chapters 4-9, we know that for a Bahá’í community to be beautiful it must be characterized by “BOUCH”: Balance, Order, Unity, Contrast, and Harmony.

Two of these qualities are emphasized in the following statement of the Universal House of Justice:

Unity of mankind is the pivotal principle of His Revelation; Bahá’í communities must therefore become renowned for their demonstration of this unity. In a world becoming daily more divided by factionalism and group interests, the Bahá’í community must be distinguished by the concord and harmony of its relationships.2

Briefly, using the BLDH Circle as a planning guide, a Local Spiritual Assembly can achieve balance by planning a combination of spiritual, social, educational, and administrative activities.3 These can take place during the same event, or, different activities can have different emphases. There could be, for example, group worship balanced with recreational activities; teaching campaigns balanced with “clean up the Bahá’í Center” campaigns; or, study circles balanced with the production of music. Certainly, the arts should be a part of as many community activities as possible because it is through them that the higher emotions of the believers can best be activated and the feelings of unity, harmony, and renewed dedication to the Cause be created.

The Local Assembly can provide order by planning events sufficiently in advance, maintaining frequent and high-quality communication with the believers through such means as Feast reports and bulletins, and setting ground rules for behavior at meetings and events. A few examples of the latter will suffice. Ground rules of course depend on the norms of the culture. In one of our communities in Colombia, we agreed to the following:

- At a public meeting, after the presentation, the friends will mix with the public to form small discussion groups rather than interacting only with one another.

- At public meetings where there is food served, the friends will invite the others to serve themselves first and will take their place in line last or in conversational company with a guest.

- When children are interrupting others at a meeting, the parent needs to take them apart until they are able to return without causing disturbance.

- At assembly meetings, when a guest enters and when he or she leaves the consultation, the assembly members will stand to greet and welcome the person and again, after the consultation, to bid her or him farewell.

Unity can be established by planning regular, well-organized community gatherings all of which are designed to contribute to the accomplishment of the goals of the teaching plan and to foster a feeling of oneness, of belonging to one great family--the people of Bahá.

Contrast can be enhanced by assuring that our teaching plans cover all strata of society and a variety of races, cultures, and minority groups. Building a diverse community will contribute to the distinctiveness of the Bahá’í community. Another way to achieve contrast is the type of gatherings which the community and the assembly plan: serious activities and fun activities, activities in the city and activities in the country, activities for youth and activities for children, and so on.

Harmony can be achieved by assuring that each member of the community has found a way to contribute his or her talents to the service of the Faith. The Local Spiritual Assembly then needs to integrate this diversity of talents, skills, and abilities into a well-orchestrated program of activities and projects designed to accomplish the goals of the plan. Another means of attaining harmony is in the planning process. Not too many activities should be planned back-to-back. Time should be allowed in the calendar for families to spend time together. Also, care should be taken to plan local activities around regional and national events thereby avoiding conflicts which can destroy a sense of community harmony.

All of these qualities, of course, need to be manifested at the interpersonal level as well. For a community to be beautiful, backbiting needs to be avoided, laws need to be adhered to, assemblies need to be obeyed, and loving support needs to be given to one another.

**ENCOURAGEMENT**

Indeed the believers have not yet fully learned to draw on each other’s love for strength and consolation in time of need. The Cause of God is endowed with tremendous powers, and the reason the believers do not gain more from it is because they have not learned to fully draw on these mighty forces of love and strength and harmony generated by the Faith.4

--Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

One of the means for drawing on each other´s love for strength is through the encouragement of one another. Hand of the Cause Zikrullah Khadem tells how Hand of the Cause Tarázu’lláh Samandarí considered that the writings could be viewed as falling into two categories. Half of them deal with laws, principles, teachings, and history. The other half is “encouragement” --encouragement given by the Central Figures and the Guardian to the believers so that they will know how important their role is in the building of the New World Order, how precious their lives are, and how urgent it is for them to arise to serve.5

At the 1992 World Congress Rúhíyyih Khánum related how she had become upset when Shoghi Effendi referred to his death and he wondered (out loud) what she would do after his passing. After the 1963 election of the Universal House of Justice her services to the Faith were guided by his comment, “I suppose you will travel and encourage the friends.”6

Giving encouragement was also one of the outstanding qualities of Hand of the Cause Dorothy Baker. Hand of the Cause A. Furútan relates: “When I was the speaker [at a conference] she always encouraged me afterwards, praising my speaking. Once she said, ‘Come sit next to me, my brilliant speaker.’”7

This same ability needs to be manifested amongst the believers. The writings encourage us to encourage one another:

The real secret of universal participation lies in the Master’s oft-expressed wish that the friends should love each other, constantly encourage each other, work together, be as one soul in one body . . .8

--The Universal House of Justice

We must love each other. We must ever praise each other. We must bestow commendation upon all people, thus removing the discord and hatred which have caused alienation amongst men.9

--‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Concern yourselves with one another. Help along one another’s projects and plans. Grieve over one another. . .10 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE UNITY OF THE BELIEVERS**

Because of its pre-eminent position amongst the Bahá’í principles, unity needs to be explored in further depth.

One of the most paramount needs of the cause in . . . is that the friends should unite, should become really keenly conscious of the fact that they are one spiritual family, held together by bonds more sacred and eternal than those physical ties which make people of the same family. If the friends will forget all personal differences and open their hearts to a great love for each other for the sake of Bahá’u’lláh, they will find that their powers are vastly increased, they will attract the heart of the public, and will witness a rapid growth of the Holy Faith in . . .11

--Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

Dorothy Baker, just before being appointed Hand of the Cause of God, felt the devastating effect of disunity while serving on the National Assembly and facing false rumors which were being spread about herself. She told a friend: “I feel like getting out of the teaching work--let it all go, and go back to being a housewife.”12 Fortunately, she persevered.

The Universal House of Justice underlines the importance of unity; views it as a key feature of a Bahá’í community; relies upon the assemblies to foster its growth; and calls upon the believers to promote it by supporting their Local Spiritual Assemblies, a divinely-ordained institution which it refers to as “this great prize, this gift of God”:

This . . . Plan must witness the development in the world-wide Bahá’í community of distinctive Bahá’í characteristics implanted in it by Bahá’u’lláh Himself. Unity of mankind is the pivotal principle of His Revelation; Bahá’í communities must therefore become renowned for their demonstration of this unity. . .. The practice and development of such Bahá’í characteristics are the responsibility alike of individual Bahá’ís and the administrative institutions, although the greatest opportunity to foster their growth rests with the Local Spiritual Assemblies.

. . . This great prize, this gift of God within each community must be cherished, nurtured, loved, assisted, obeyed and prayed for.

Such a firmly-founded, busy and happy community life as is envisioned when Local Spiritual Assemblies are truly effective, will prove a firm home foundation from which the friends may derive courage and strength and loving support in bearing the Divine Message to their fellow-men and conforming their lives to its benevolent rule.13

In my own experience it has become increasingly clear to me that what is needed is not just “any old unity,” not just “getting along together,” not just achieving high levels of “participation,” but rather a unity that is deep and intense; a unity of hearts, a unity of vision, a unity in feeling and action, a unity in sacrificing the well-being of oneself for the well-being of our Bahá’í brothers and sisters.

Several of the very inspiring letters written by Bahíyyih Khánum emphasize the intensity of the unity needed amongst the friends; for example:

It is clear that the stronger grow the bonds of yearning love among the believers, and the fiercer its fire, the more will they find themselves embraced by the bounties of the Ancient of Days, and receiving the continuous confirmations of the Greatest Name.14

The Believers are the pivots upon which the fate of nations hang; and a difference among two believers is quite sufficient to consume and destroy a whole country.15

I was particularly moved by a nine-page letter written by Bahíyyih Khánum in which she tells of the sensitivity of Shoghi Effendi to the unity of the believers and their obedience to the Assemblies. She describes how, after the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and during the seditious activities of the Covenant Breakers it was the “staunchness and loyalty and high resolve and unity and love and fervor among all the friends” which enabled him to return from Switzerland “to carry out his sacred obligations.” Bahíyyih Khánum then tells how on two, separate occasions “a certain ill-feeling had arisen, and further, that some did not, as they should, respect and duly defer to their Spiritual Assembly” and that “he noted from certain letters an absence of spirituality and good-fellowship among some of the friends, and a lack of respect among some for their Assemblies.” These incidents drove him away from the Holy Land. He couldn't stand the disunity.

Before leaving, the Guardian told her, “My heart is sensitive. Just as I feel the ill-feeling that exists between individuals, and am injured by it, so too do I treasure the excellent qualities of the believers; indeed, I hold these dearer than words can tell.” He then told her that the love of the friends “must be so great that they worship one another, and shut any mutual ill-feeling out of their hearts.”

And finally, Shoghi Effendi asked the Greatest Holy Leaf to tell the friends that he was waiting to feel reflected in his heart the “lights” of “mutual agreement, understanding and loving affection, and their deference to the authority of their Spiritual Assemblies.” He then added, “And whenever I shall feel such lights reflected, I will at once return to the Holy Land and engage in the fulfilment of my sacred obligations.”16

This occurred decades ago in this physical world, but it is also happening on a daily basis now in the spiritual realm. We are capable, through disunity and by not giving our whole-hearted loyalty to the Institutions, of “driving away” the spirit of Shoghi Effendi which we need so desperately in these “darkest hours.”

The Greatest Holy Leaf, in her letters, constantly calls upon the believers to exemplify Bahá’í virtues and to be united. Only thus, she explains, will our communities “become reflections of the gardens of the Concourse on High, mirroring forth the radiance of the Abhá Kingdom.”17And only in this way will we receive a bounty which she so movingly described:

From Their supernal realms and Their immortal heights, He the exalted Báb, and He Who is the Beauty of the All-Glorious, and the wondrous presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, all These are gazing down upon Their faithful loved ones, beholding what they do under all conditions, their behaviour and conduct, and all their words and ways, waiting to cry ‘Well done!’ when They see the Teachings carried out, and ‘Blessed art thou!’ to whoso may excel in doing the bidding of his Lord.18

Therefore, let us strive, as individuals, to give ourselves to the development of our Bahá’í communities, just as the builder who constructs his house brick by brick in the full confidence that in return he will receive, sooner or later, warmth and protection from the house.

Let us unite, let us hold each other tightly, let us merge our hearts, let us create--so long as the warmth of this earth endures, so long as no earthquakes, cataclysms, icebergs or comets come to destroy us--let us create for Earth a brain and a heart, let us give a human meaning to the superhuman struggle.19

--Nikos Kazantzakis

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION?**

1. Am I keeping in close, loving touch with the members of my Bahá’í community?
2. Am I gladly attending Nineteen Day Feasts and Holy Day observances?
3. Am I wholeheartedly participating in reflection meetings, institutes, conferences, and winter schools?
4. Am I enthusiastically participating in at least one of the core activities: study circles, devotional meetings, children’s classes, or pre-youth groups?
5. Am I making a positive contribution to the life of my Bahá’í community?
6. Am I giving my whole-hearted support to the Bahá’í institutions at the local, regional, national and international levels?
7. Do I earnestly seek guidance from the Bahá’í institutions for personal initiatives in promoting the Faith and personal problems when necessary?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will contribute to my Bahá’í community life by helping to improve the quality of:
  + my devotion and obedience to and support of the Local Spiritual Assembly
  + the Nineteen Day Feast
  + the Holy Day observances
  + children’s classes
  + pre-youth and youth activities
  + study circles
  + devotional meetings
  + deepening classes
  + teaching campaigns
  + social get-togethers
  + the Bahá’í Center
  + communication systems
  + consultation
* I will read:
  + “Issues Concerning Community Functioning” (a memorandum prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, February 1993),20
  + *Bahíyyih Khánum: The Greatest Holy Leaf*, a compilation prepared by the Research. Department of the Universal House of Justice, Bahá’í World Centre, (Haifa, Israel: World Centre Publications, 1982), and/or
  + *Love and Estrangement in the Bahá’í Community* by Arnold P. Nerenberg (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1986).

CHAPTER 51: WORK COMMUNITY

The great thing is to ‘Live the Life’--to have our lives so saturated with the Divine teachings and the Bahá’í Spirit that people cannot fail to see a joy, a power, a love, a purity, a radiance, an efficiency in our character and work that will distinguish us from worldly-minded people and make people wonder what is the secret of this new life in us.1 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

Besides belonging to a family and a Bahá’í community, we also belong to a work community. It is amongst our co-workers and professional colleagues that we spend at least a third of our waking hours and expend the energy of the most productive years of our life. It is in the work community that we can so clearly and transparently show forth and forge the virtues of a Bahá’í way of life and competence in the consultative process which is so unique to the Bahá´í approach to communication and problem-solving. And it is our fellow workers who can most easily be attracted to the Faith through our example.

As we consider the status of our human relations at our work place and the quality of the communication that sustains them, three themes can serve for reflection.

**RELATIONSHIP WITH SUPERVISOR**

If you have a boss, this is probably one of the most important relations in your vocational life. Our boss is probably the one person who is certain to know that we are Bahá’ís and is the most likely to want to be informed, at least superficially, about the basic Bahá’í beliefs. He or she is in the best position to judge the excellence of our work performance. If we are criticized for being Bahá’ís, it is our boss who is also in the best position to defend us. And when it is time to ask permission to observe a Bahá’í Holy Day, it is our supervisor who will be asked for permission.

Whenever I begin a new job, I take my supervisor an introductory Bahá’í pamphlet or booklet. I simply tell him or her that, if the subject of my religion comes up in discussion, I think that he or she would like to be at least basically informed regarding the teachings of the Bahá’í Faith. This literature has always been received gratefully. Few people in managerial positions like to be caught uninformed and they want to be assured that they don’t have some kind of “weirdo” working for them.

One of the best approaches I have found towards employee-to-supervisor relations is to treat your boss as a client, regardless of the nature of the work. Find out what he or she wants and expects and then deliver it. If this conflicts with what you want to contribute to the enterprise, then you need to consult with your superior. Perhaps a way can be found for you to both meet expectations and make a distinctive contribution to the organization. Or, perhaps a different position can be found within the institution or at a different institution.

**SOCIAL RELATIONS WITH FELLOW WORKERS**

Our work is not just a place where we check in and check out each day. It is a community full of intense feelings, conflicts, possible friendships, and opportunities to help others, through encouragement and support, to become what they dream of becoming.

Once, during a conversation with my boss, he told me that there were people in the work community who find me interesting, who would like to be friends, but who see me as always being “on task” at work and thoroughly immersed in Bahá’í activities during my off hours. His advice to me was to find more time to socialize with the members of the work community. When I reflected on his comment, I realized that he was right. My free time was completely taken up with family affairs, Bahá’í meetings, teaching campaigns, and administrative tasks. The lifestyle I was projecting to my fellow workers was one of a workaholic and religious fanatic. In their viewpoint my work performance was excellent but I had no time “to be human.” I was always trying to complete all of my tasks at work so that my time at home would be free for my family and the Faith. It was not a lifestyle that they were attracted to. “To be a Bahá’í you have to be a religious zealot,” was their interpretation.

It was at that time that I was first learning about the BLDH Circle concept. It helped me realize that there were aspects of my life that I was neglecting. I began relaxing more at work and socializing more after work hours. Some very wonderful friendships developed. Some of these colleague/friends became very much attracted to the Faith and a few either became Bahá’ís or told me later, after they had moved on to other jobs, that they had enrolled in the Faith.

**CONFLICT WITH CO-WORKERS**

When we feel tension in our relations with anyone at work we need to communicate with the person and try to work out the problem as best possible. The principle of unity is fundamental for any group of people. Tension and disunity keep us from doing our best. Of course, non-believers do not know the principles of Bahá’í consultation, nor do they necessarily value unity. More often than not they place greater value on creating an atmosphere of intrigue and “one-upmanship.”

For chronic cases of conflict, I find that prayer and visualization to be particularly effective. Ask Bahá’u’lláh to bring harmony to the relationship; visualize an ideal interaction with the person; then approach the next day fully expecting the ideal scene to be realized. Many times, just giving this positive energy to the situation is enough to break the icy crust of conflict and open the way to a cordial if not warm relationship.

Act in accordance with the counsels of the Lord: . . . Should any come to blows with you, seek to be friends with him; should any stab you to the heart, be ye a healing salve unto his sores; should any taunt and mock at you, meet him with love. Should any heap blame upon you, praise ye him; should he offer you a deadly poison, give him the choicest honey in exchange, and should he threaten your life, grant him a remedy that will heal him evermore. Should he be pain itself, be ye his medicine; should he be thorns, be ye his roses and sweet herbs. Perchance such ways and words from you will make this darksome world turn bright at last; will make this dusty earth turn heavenly, this devilish prison place become a royal palace of the Lord . . .2 --‘Abdu’l-Bahá

If we try our best to exemplify these Bahá’í virtues, we can be sure of positive results as described by the Guardian:

Indeed if the friends could seek, and exert themselves, to become 100 percent Bahá’ís they would see how greatly their influence over others would be increased, and how rapidly the Cause would spread. The world is seeking not a compromise but the embodiment of a high and shining ideal. The more the friends live up to our teachings in every aspect of their lives, in their homes, in business, in their social relationships, the greater will be the attraction they exercise over the hearts of others.3 --Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary)

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What qualities should the members of our work community see manifested in us to such an extent that they “wonder what is the secret of this new life in us”? If we lack any of these qualities, how can we obtain them?
2. Why should our supervisor be informed about the basic beliefs of the Bahá’í Faith?
3. When our co-workers are conflictive; engage in back-biting and the spreading of rumors; and/or create an atmosphere of intrigue and “one-upmanship”; what can we do to bring about an ambience of kindness, cooperation, and unity?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will try my utmost to exemplify “the Bahá’í way” in my work community.
* I will become more conscious of my relationships with my boss and my fellow-workers and work to assure that they are as positive as possible.
* I will present my supervisor with introductory Bahá’í literature.
* I will consider the possibility of taking time to socialize with my colleagues with an eye to forming possible friendships and attracting them to the Faith.

CHAPTER 52: SOCIETY

On this journey the wayfarer dwelleth in every abode, however humble, and resideth in every land. In every face he seeketh the beauty of the Friend; in every region he searcheth after the Beloved. He joineth every company and seeketh fellowship with every soul, that haply in some heart he may discern the secret of the Beloved, or in some face behold the beauty of the Adored One.1 --Bahá’u’lláh

**THE ONENESS OF HUMANITY**

In this sphere of the BLDH Circle (see Figure VI.1 above) the circles of our family, our friends, our fellow-believers, and our colleagues, opens up to the entire world; to society in the widest sense of the term: people in the community where we live, people from other regions and countries, people from other cultures, from other races, from other religions, and from other social-economic classes—in person or online.

This circle of our social contacts must be ever-widening and ever-diversifying. The circle of our love must embrace every member of the human race. “The spiritual person,” as defined by Dr. Muhájir, “is the person who loves everyone.”2 And in each human being the spiritual person, as described by Bahá’u’lláh in the passage above, will find reflected a multitude of attributes of an all-loving Creator. Thus, social interaction becomes a means for us to fulfil one of the purposes of our life: to ever-increase our knowledge of God.

The organic oneness of humankind implies that if we desire the well-being of any individual or group, including ourselves and our family, we must promote the well-being of the entire race. If all of humanity is growing in prosperity and happiness, then each part will be receiving these same benefits.

How can one man alone save his soul here on earth

unless all souls are saved together in all the world?

If one babe starves on earth, then we all die of hunger;

if one at the world’s ends should raise his hands to slay,

we have all raised our hands, and we’re all slayers too;

we’re all twined in one root, we blossom in one soul.3

--Nikos Kazantzakis

**THE MANDATE TO EXPAND OUR USUAL SOCIAL CIRCLES**

If we are shy we must overcome timidity; if we know only one language we should learn a second one; if we are only familiar with one culture, we need to experience a different one; if we have prejudices, we need to deepen in the Writings, pray to Bahá’u’lláh to open our hearts, and then interact with those towards whom we feel prejudiced. Only in this way can we fulfil the admonitions of the Blessed Beauty:

Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship . . . They that are endued with sincerity and faithfulness should associate with all the peoples and kindreds of the earth with joy and radiance, inasmuch as consorting with people hath promoted and will continue to promote unity and concord, which in turn are conducive to the maintenance of order in the world and to the regeneration of nations. Blessed are such as hold fast to the cord of kindliness and tender mercy and are free from animosity and hatred.4

Bahá’u’lláh does not leave this admonishment in general terms. He specifically instructs us to conquer the weaknesses of the lower self through the Fire of His love and then to radiantly interact with those who live near us:

Be most loving one to another. Burn away, wholly for the sake of the Well-Beloved, the veil of self with the flame of the undying Fire, and with faces joyous and beaming with light, associate with your neighbors.5 --Bahá’u’lláh

To assure that we do not become recluses and that we continually meet new people, He obliges us, in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, to always accept social invitations:

Whensoever ye be invited to a banquet or festive occasion, respond with joy and gladness . . .6

‘Abdu’l-Bahá guides us in regards to how we should feel towards others who we may not yet know well:

Do not be satisfied until each one with whom you are concerned is to you as a member of your family. Regard each one either as a father, or a brother, or as a sister, or as a mother, or as a child. If you can attain to this, your difficulties will vanish; you will know what to do.7

Wherefore must the loved ones of God associate in affectionate fellowship with stranger and friend alike, showing forth to all the utmost loving-kindness, disregarding the degree of their capacity, never asking whether they deserve to be loved. In every instance let the friends be considerate and infinitely kind.8

The beloved Guardian gives us further advice concerning how to carry out the process of social interaction with an eye to swelling the ranks of the followers of the Blessed Perfection.

Let him [the individual believer] survey the possibilities which the particular circumstances in which he lives offer him, evaluate their advantages, and proceed intelligently and systematically to utilize them for the achievement of the object he has in mind. Let him also attempt to devise such methods as association with clubs, exhibitions, and societies, lectures on subjects akin to the teachings and ideals of his Cause such as temperance, morality, social welfare, religious and racial tolerance, economic cooperation, Islám, and Comparative Religion, or participation in social, cultural, humanitarian, charitable, and educational organizations and enterprises which, while safeguarding the integrity of his Faith, will open up to him a multitude of ways and means whereby he can enlist successively the sympathy, the support, and ultimately the allegiance of those with whom he comes in contact.9

The individual alone must . . . mix, in obedience to the counsels of the Author of his Faith, and in imitation of the One Who is its true Exemplar, with men and women, in all walks of life, seek to touch their hearts through the distinction which characterizes his thoughts, his words and his acts, and win them over, tactfully, lovingly, prayerfully and persistently, to the Faith he himself espoused.10

By all means persevere and associate in a friendly spirit with other groups of young people, particularly of a different race or minority nationality, for such association will demonstrate your complete conviction of the oneness of mankind and attract others to the Faith, both young and old alike.

A spirit of prejudice-free, loving comradeship with others is what will open the eyes of people more than any amount of words. Combined with such deeds you can teach the Faith easily.11

The Bahá’ís must realize that the success of this work [teaching] depends upon the individual. The individual must arise as never before to proclaim the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. The most effective way for them to carry on their work is for the individual to make many contacts, select a few whom they feel would become Bahá’ís, develop a close friendship with them, then complete confidence, and finally teach them the Faith, until they become strong supporters of the Cause of God.12

In addition to serving as a means for teaching the Faith, there are other benefits to be derived from expanding the diversity of our social contacts. By interacting with those who are different from ourselves, we are able to learn from them: their ways of thinking and perceiving, their beliefs and attitudes, and their way of living. As we learn to see things from another’s point of view, our own “worldview” is enriched and our previous misconceptions are corrected. These new insights often cast a new light on our understanding of the Writings. In the end, both the Bahá’í and his or her contact benefit from the experience.

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION?**

1. Am I neglecting the social aspect of my life?
2. Am I too much of a recluse?
3. Am I dedicating too much time to socializing, thereby neglecting the family, Bahá’í, and vocational aspects of my life?
4. Do I need to meet significantly different kinds of people; people from other races, nationalities, and cultures?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will go out of my way to meet my neighbors.
* I will respond, whenever possible, to social invitations.
* I will try to make contacts and establish friendships with members of minority groups in my community.
* I will join a club or philanthropic organization in order to increase the circle of my social contacts.
* I will use social media to share the Teachings according to the needs of the recipients.

# SECTION VII: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

THE SHAPE OF A DAY[[66]](#footnote-66)a

Every day, like a story, should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Using the metaphor of the sine curve (see Figure III.1 above), the day should begin and end with inner life processes below the horizontal line. On the BLDH Circle these are found in the inner quadrants. The middle part of the day is the “hill” above the line. This is the field of “action” which is composed of the processes found mainly in the outer quadrants. Each day we need to reconquer the hill and plant the flag of victory on its summit.

**Early Morning Routines**

I once saw a movie called *The Reds* starring Warren Beatty and Diane Keaton about the life of John Reed, an American reporter who supported and eventually gave his life to the Russian revolution. In one scene a Bolshevik propaganda mission with a cavalry escort was traveling through a rural area of Russia when they were suddenly attacked by the White army, the counter-revolutionary forces. The red cavalry mounted their steeds inside of the freight cars. Upon signal, all of the sliding doors were flung wide open and the cavalry burst out with tremendous speed and fury to lead a highly successful counter-attack against the enemy. The scene was extremely impressive but it wasn't until I saw a “behind the scenes” documentary that I understood how they got so many horses and riders to come leaping out of the freight cars with such force. What they had done “off camera” was build an earthen ramp on the opposite side of the train from the enemy. Then, from a good distance back the entire calvary charged the open side of the freight cars. Just before the horses were about to crash into the closed door on the opposite side, they hurled them open. Having gathered so much momentum the horses went *flying* out of the train cars creating a sensational, extremely energizing feeling in the viewers.

This same image of building up physical momentum for an energetic “launch” can be applied to the dynamics of beginning a new day. As I mentioned earlier, in my youth I would roll out of bed and into my jeans waking up somewhere along a campus sidewalk on my way to my first class. Over time I have built up the momentum of a healthy, two-hour, early morning routine. Now people ask me how I am able to begin my day with such energy and happiness when everyone else has to first drink a grumpy cup of coffee with only one eye open, gradually opening the other as they “e-a-s-e” into the day.

To create a high-quality, early morning schedule there are several time management techniques which are helpful:

- To avoid feeling crushed by the weight of a highly-disciplined routine put balance in your schedule by planning, whenever possible, one leisurely, “time out” morning each week.

- Successful mornings begin the night before. At the dinner table or after evening family prayers, plan the following morning and day with the family. Prepare whatever you will need the night before. Before retiring, use prayer, verbalizations and visualization to reinforce the image of starting the next day with joy and energy.

- Measure your morning needs in order to know how long activities take. Then add a cushion of an extra fifteen minutes in order to avoid a “rushed” feeling.

- Schedule and assign responsibility for recurring activities (such as, “Who is going to take out the garbage?”) to avoid time wasted in decision-making and self-motivation.

- Build your routine around essentials and do them first. Then allow time for whatever gives you a truly “quality” morning: private prayer, a cup of coffee, reading the news, exercise, meditating for a few minutes in the garden, or anything

else.1

A sample early morning routine follows:

5:30: awaken and recall dreams

5:45: morning hygiene

6:15: dawn prayers

6:45: breakfast

7:00: family gathering for memorization, prayers, vignettes from Bahá’í history, and consultation (3-7 minutes each)

7:30: departure

**Midday Centering**

You may want to make a short return to the inner-life realm in the course of the day. This is a brief intermission used to regain balance and poise and to “catch your breath.” It may consist of prayers (especially the Noon Day Obligatory Prayer), a “siesta,” meditation, or visualization. Centering gives us that added burst of energy needed to get us through the day.

**Afternoon Routines**

Afternoons are a good time to schedule exercise unless you prefer including it in your early morning routine. (Strenuous physical activity after a large dinner is not recommended.)

**Evening Routines**

Eating dinner together as a family, reading the Word of God, and family prayer need to become habitual. This is an ideal time for building feelings of belonging and mutual appreciation.

**Nighttime Routines**

I have found that having a “sleep ritual” helps me to fall asleep. Most mammals go through a pattern of movements in preparation for sleep. The fox, for example, digs up the ground and begins to circle around on this spot, first in one direction and then in the other; its muzzle almost touches the tip of its tail. With this behavior the fox creates a small hollow in which to lie. Then it sits down, curls up its tail toward its head, and at last lies down. The upper part of the body and head are curved toward the base of the tail. Finally, the fox lifts its head briefly and drops it again, and pushes its muzzle under its tail.2

Here is a sample “sleep ritual” for a human being who also happens to be a Bahá’í:

8:50 - Evening hygiene.

9:00 - With spouse: pray, read Holy Word, and consult.

9:10 - Reflection: call self to account using goal check list, point system, and journal notes to self.

9:15 - Visualize a successful next day and use chosen verbalizations.

9:20 - Read a Bahá’í book or something else for leisure.

9:30 - Fall asleep repeating the Greatest Name or listening to a recording of the Word of God.

MOVING FROM THE OLD SELF TO THE NEW SELF

In this last section we will take one last look at how the BLDH program operates as a whole; as a natural, flowing process which helps us to move from one stage of development to another.

**The BLDH Circle as a Tool for Reflection**

Self-transformation begins with self-knowledge. Self-knowledge means self-diagnosis. The BLDH Circle serves as a tool to pry open the seamless self for analysis and targeted improvement. It contains metaphorical, vehicular-type feedback systems: pressure gauges to check for stress; speedometers to tell us when we’re moving too fast or too slow; odometers to show us how far we have come and to help us calculate how far we have to go to the next gas station; warning lights to tell us when our emotional tanks are too low, when our brake system is failing, and when our safety systems are not engaged. Like any feedback system, the lights and gauges need be in front of us, within easy view, and regularly checked --even while we are driving in heavy traffic. For this reason, it has been recommended that the BLDH Circle, like a car’s dashboard, be on permanent display in a place where you can meditate on it regularly.

As we look at our self reflected in the Circle, a very healthy reaction is a certain disgust with our present, old-world-order self; a feeling of being fed-up with old ways, of being sick of negative habits, of being repulsed by our animalistic behavior; detestation of and disdain for the controlling power of the lower self. This gradual build-up of negative energy is needed in order to fully reject an undesirable way of being. It is just as necessary, I believe, as is the positive energy which lures us forward to new ideals, new goals, and new ways of feeling, thinking, speaking and doing. A woman once said to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “I am dejected today. I hate myself.” The Master told her:

It is a sign of progress . . .. If a man has a thousand good qualities, he must not look at them. He must search always for his shortcomings and attend to them. If a man has a strong building . . . but which has a small crevice in one of its walls, he will, no doubt, forget its adornment and firmness and will turn his whole attention to having that small defect removed.3

When we examine our lifestyle, we need to keep in mind that there is no one ideal pattern of Bahá’í life. For instance, not all of the outstanding teachers in this Faith have gone pioneering. Not all of our heroes, heroines and wonderful role models have married. Many outstanding couples didn’t have children. Not all of our outstanding leaders and administrators have obtained university degrees. Many renowned teachers and pioneers have been content with part-time jobs or subsistence work in order to have more time for the Faith or to maintain a pioneering post. And not all of our most dynamic women were active in the Faith during their child-rearing years. The point is that you must know yourself deeply and then weave the principles of the Faith into your own unique lifestyle of service to God and His creatures.

As we reflect on the multitude of questions which flood our minds such as: Am I happy with my present situation? Am I too strict with myself? Am I too lax in my self-discipline? Am I enjoying the present but with an eye to future, more ideal scenes for myself, my family and humanity? Am I feeling stress in any areas of my life? and so on, we can use the four quadrants to examine any aspect of life: spiritual, physical, psychological, or social. We have four categories of: health, illness, joy, sadness, responsibility, growth, tests, routines, energy, strength, pain and ecstasy. We have four, multi-colored gardens in our life which need constant cultivating. If we pay too much attention to one, the others will become choked with weeds. But if we keep a balanced approach and follow the counsels of the Divine Gardener our lives will produce enchanting flowers and abundant food for our souls, our hearts, our minds, and our body.

If we allow them to, the four quadrants of our lives can draw and quarter us. The cries ring out from all sides: Bring in the troops to the Faith! Be dedicated to your family! Keep abreast of developments in your professional field! Balance your budget! Fix the leaky roof! They can make us, at times, want to turn away from it all in desperation and to walk off into the sunset. . . But it is the gravitational, love-force of the Circle’s Center which keeps pulling us back to the task, lifting us up “to the heaven of holiness,” unfolding “the drooping wings” of the broken bird of our spirit to start us again on our flight.

**We Are Not Alone**

After we know our self, after we have reflected on the task of transformation which lies before us, we need to gather spiritual momentum through prayer, meditation, and deepening on the Word of God. If we had to rely on our own ability, the task would be impossible. Bahá’u’lláh reminds us that a Superior Force is at our disposal. “Arise, O people,” is His Cry, “and, by the power of God’s might, resolve to gain the victory over your own selves. . ..”4 Our arsenal of support systems which an all-loving Creator has supplied us is replete: the Holy Spirit, the Central Figures, the Covenant, the Guardianship, the Supreme Concourse, the Universal House of Justice, the Spiritual Assemblies, the “learned of Bahá,” our family, our friends, professional specialists, and the healing power of nature--all of these and others stand at our call and beckon ready to rush to our aid as soon as our own soul decides to arise to “struggle and struggle again.”5

**The Law of Reciprocation**

As we feel God’s power surge within us, we move into the meditative process of considering concrete alternatives for definite action, then we set goals and time frames, visualize the goal already won, and finally act with the full force of our soul.

And as we act, we need to completely trust in the oft-referred-to law of reciprocation, knowing that for every positive effort made, there will be a positive response:

He, verily, will aid everyone that aideth Him, and will remember everyone that remembereth Him.6

--Bahá’u’lláh

Teach the Faith and you will be taught the Divine Mysteries.

Take care to follow the law of the Fast and the Fast will strengthen you to follow all of God’s other laws.

Fortify the Nineteen Day Feast and the Feast will become a fortification for your spirit.

Serve God and He will assist you through His guidance.

Give to the Fund and abundant blessings will be given to you.

Pray to God--Whose “love exceeds His wrath”7--and your prayers will be answered by Him.

Take care of your body and your body will be your strong instrument for the care of others.

Invest in your vocation and it will give you resources to invest in Bahá’u’lláh’s World Order.

Protect your family and they will be your protection in time of need.

Manage your time wisely and you will have time to pursue wisdom.

Visualize your chosen possibility and the realized vision will enrich your life.

Create your own unique BLDH Circle and allow it to help in the re-creation of you.

--This Author

**QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW, REFLECTION, AND / OR DISCUSSION**

1. What is the typical “shape” of your day? Can it be improved? How?
2. Are you interested in putting the BLDH Circle and program to work in your life to help you with the self-transformation process? If so, how will you go about it?
3. What are the sources of support upon which you can draw to reach your goals? How will you take advantage of the principle of reciprocity?

**SAMPLE GOALS**

* I will print the BLDH Circle or create my own and place it where I can easily refer to it regularly.
* I will show others how the BLDH Circle and program can help them.
* I will review the BLDH program or pertinent sections of it at least once a year during the Fast or a vacation.
* I will read Chapter VII: “Habit” in *Prescription for Living* by Rúhíyyih Rabbani (Oxford: George Ronald, 1978).

# CONCLUSION

I would like to close with a poem which expresses so fully the spirit of this no doubt inadequate effort to offer to the friends a practical, systematic, yet aesthetic approach to the transformation of their lives--lives “upon which must depend the very life of all men.”1 I include it here as a tribute to my dear, Native American Indian brothers and sisters who have taught me to “dance with the Circle” and to the man who made so much of this possible, Daniel C. Jordan.a[[67]](#footnote-67)

Sacredness

Sacredness is the flowing harmony of the universe

Manifested within the all that is

By the flowering of the everywhere Spirit

Our sacred path is the walkway of balance

Along this stream of being

Beside this river of joy and beauty

Flowering within the all that is.

To see is to observe this sacredness;

To watch from our own center

Without interference

The flowing return of all things to their source

As the river returns to the Ocean.2

--Lee Brown

**NOTES**

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5. Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 14.
6. The Universal House of Justice, *To the Peoples of the World*, (Ottawa, Canada: The Association of Bahá’í Studies, 1986), 3.
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**Chapter 1--WHOLENESS**

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2. See Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust), 184.
3. See Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán: The Book of Certitude*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1950), 101.
4. Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Reality of Man: Excerpts from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1972), 24.
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9. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1981), 236.
10. Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Reality of Man: Excerpts from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1972), 47, 51, 52.
11. My term “manifold nature” of man is not meant to contradict ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reference to “two natures” (Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Reality of Man: Excerpts from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, [Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1972], 24.) but rather to further break down each of these main categories. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself expanded upon the central concept of duality: “This human reality stands between the higher and the lower in man, between the world of the animal and the world of the Divinity. . .. From this standpoint his nature is threefold: animal, human, and divine.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, comp. Howard MacNutt [Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982], 465.) He also differentiated the “human spirit” from man’s “spirit of faith” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, [Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1981], 208, 235.)
12. I have emphasized the term “processes” because the BLDH program is based on the organismic, process, holistic cosmology of Alfred North Whitehead. It has helped me to move from perceiving reality as things, solid parts, and material components to seeing reality as transformations, becoming, change, transitions, development, and processes. In a metaphorical sense, I am shifting from seeing “nouns” to seeing “verbs.” Whitehead continually reminds us that we can no longer see atoms of matter but rather atoms of process (See Victor Lowe, *Understanding Whitehead*, [Baltimore, John Hopkins Press, 1966], 44). He sees atoms and all other systems of whatever size as organisms, as “societies,” which are continually experiencing the process of change. Thus, the BLDH program focuses on everyday life processes. For example, instead of concentrating on children, it emphasizes “communicating” with children; instead of expounding on “what” we should become as Bahá’ís--nothing less than saints and heroes, of course--it focuses on the process of “how” to become ever saintlier and heroic.
13. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1981), 236.
14. See: Shoghi Effendi, (through his secy.) to an individual believer, 8 January 1949, in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, comp. Helen Hornby, 2nd rev. ed. (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988), 114.

**Chapter 2--TRANSFORMATION**

1. Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán: The Book of Certitude*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1950), 240-41.
2. See Victor Lowe, *Understanding Whitehead*, (Baltimore, The John Hopkins Press, 1966), 44 and Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1953), 86, 88, 99-100.
3. See George Bondra, *The Anisa Model: A Scientific Paradigm for Education and Its Implications for a Theory of Evaluation*, unpublished Ed. D. dissertation, (School of Education, University of Massachusetts, 1980), 124.
4. Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 7.
5. Charles Hartshorne, one of the greatest process philosophers and founder of process theology, describes Alfred North Whitehead’s organismic philosophy in such elevated terms that one cannot help but suspect that Whitehead may be the Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle of this age: “. . . one may say that the basic principles of our knowledge and experience, physical, biological, sociological, aesthetic, religious--are in this philosophy given an intellectual integration such as only a thousand or ten thousand years of further reflection and inquiry seem likely to exhaust or adequately evaluate . . .” (Charles Hartshorne, *Whitehead’s Philosophy: Selected Essays, 1935-1970*, [Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1970], 19.)
6. I am deeply indebted to my mentor and friend, the late Professor Daniel C. Jordan, former Dean of the School of Education, National University, San Diego; for opening my mind to the beauty of process philosophy; for helping me to find the connections between it and the Bahá’í Revelation; and for encouraging me to apply both the Revelation and process philosophy to the transformation of the field of education and my own personal life.
7. Based on my notes of lectures of Dr. Daniel C. Jordan, School of Education, National University, San Diego, 1981-1982 and on my study of the major works of Alfred North Whitehead: *Process and Reality*, *Science and the Modern World*, *Adventure of Ideas*, *Modes of Thought*, and *Aims of Education*.
8. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected ed., (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1978), 208.
9. Whitehead uses the terms efficient (material) and final (spiritual) causation.
10. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1981), 182.
11. See Ervin Laszlo, *The Inner Limits of Mankind: Heretical Reflections on Today’s Values, Culture and Politics*, (London: Oneworld Publications Ltd, 1989), 121.
12. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi 2d ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1952), 262.
13. Ibid., 340.
14. Ibid., 260.
15. Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán: The Book of Certitude*, 101.
16. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, 250.
17. Ibid., 68.
18. Ibid., 148
19. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1945), 101.
20. Thornton Chase, *In Galilee*, (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1985), 32.
21. Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1938), 132-33.
22. Ibid., 295.
23. M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1978), 69.
24. Ibid., 71.
25. William Bridges, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life’s Changes*, (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1980), 103.
26. Gayle Delaney, *Breakthrough Dreaming: How to Tap the Power of Your 24-Hour Mind*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 381.
27. Bahíyyíh Na*kh*javání, *Four on an Island*, (Oxford, George Ronald, 1983), 118-19.
28. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, 200.
29. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 119.
30. Bahá’u’lláh, “The Seven Valleys”, in *The Call of the Divine Beloved* (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 2019), verse 16.
31. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 138.
32. See *Crisis and Victory*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Bahá’í World Centre, (London: The Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988).
33. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 136-7.
34. Nabíl-i-A`zam [Muhammad-i-Zarandí], *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil’s Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá’í Revelation*, trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1932), 137-38
35. Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1960), 92.
36. Muriel Blackwell, *Potter and Clay*, (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1975), 92.
37. Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), 332.
38. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1947), 102.
39. See: Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1947), 10; Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 74; Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day*, (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust), 122.
40. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 338.
41. Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán: The Book of Certitude*, 240-41.

**Chapter 3--THE INNER LIFE AND THE OUTER LIFE**

1. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d ed. (Wilmette, IL, 1952: Bahá’í Publishing Trust), 270-71.
2. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in *Bahá’í Education: A Compilation of Extracts from the Bahá’í Writings*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (London: The Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1987), 22.
3. Bahá’u’lláh, cited in *Bahá’í Education: A Compilation of Extracts from the Bahá’í Writings*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (London: The Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1987), 3.
4. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.), in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1980), 14.
5. Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration*, 130.
6. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d ed.* (Wilmette, IL, 1952: Bahá’í Publishing Trust), 277.
7. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in *The Individual and Teaching--Raising the Divine Call: Extracts from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi*, comp. Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1977), 7.
8. Shoghi Effendi, cited in *The Individual and Teaching--Raising the Divine Call: Extracts from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi*, comp. Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1977), 15.
9. Shoghi Effendi quoted in William Sears, *Pilgrimage to Haifa - Part Two - Wm. B. Sears, April 1954*, (copy given to author by Knight of Bahá’u’lláh, Olivia Kelsey) 7.
10. Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1968), 66.
11. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912*, (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 178.
12. Shoghi Effendi cited in Shoghi Effendi and The Universal House of Justice, *A Special Measure of Love: The Importance and Nature of the Teaching Work among the Masses*, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974), 5.
13. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Committee at the Bahá’í World Centre and Marzieh Gail (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 150.
14. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992), 73-74.
15. Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán: The Book of Certitude*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1950), 238.
16. Nabíl-i-A’zam [Muhammad-i-Zarandí], *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil’s Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá’í Revelation*, trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1932), 383.
17. Bahá’u’lláh, “The Seven Valleys”, in *The Call of the Divine Beloved* (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 2019), verses 55-56.
18. Ibid., verse 56.

**Chapter 4--BEAUTY**

1. Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán: The Book of Certitude*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1950), 240-41.
2. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1981), 224.
3. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Committee at the Bahá’í World Centre and Marzieh Gail (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 93.
4. Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, 101.
5. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 241.
6. Bahá’u’lláh cited in Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *The Desire of the World: Materials for the Contemplation of God and His Manifestation for this Day Compiled from the Words of Bahá’u’lláh*, comp. Rúhíyyih Rabbani, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1982), 176-77.
7. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1939), Arabic no. 3.
8. Ibid., 12.
9. Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), 341
10. Ibid., 353.
11. *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 7th ed., s.v. “beauty.”
12. Ibid., 190, 12-13.
13. Dru Scott, *How to Put More Time in Your Life*, (New York: American Library, 1980), 47.

**Chapter 5--UNITY**

1. *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 7th ed., s.v. “unity.”
2. For a fairly comprehensive list of passages from the Writings concerning this theme download Ocean or see *An Index of Quotations from the Bahá’í Sacred Writings*, 1st ed., comp. James Heggie, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1983), s.v. “goal,” “purpose.”

**Chapter 6—ORDER**

1. *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 7th ed., s.v. “order.”
2. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992), 85.
3. Ibid., 19.
4. Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1966), 75.
5. From the author’s notes of the Jordan lectures at National University, San Diego, 1981-1982. (I have not yet been able to locate this statement in Whitehead’s works.)
6. Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *Prescription for Living*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1978), 120.
7. Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), 114.
8. Ibid., 123.

**Chapter 7—CONTRAST**

1. *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 7th ed., s.v. “contrast.”
2. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected ed., (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1978), 114.
3. Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *Prescription for Living*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1978), 132.
4. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 201.
5. Ibid., 339.

**Chapter 8—BALANCE**

1. *Webster’s New International Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. “balance.”
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of* ‘*Abdu’l-Bahá*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Committee at the Bahá’í World Centre and Marzieh Gail (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 17.
6. Agnes Ghaznavi, *The Family Repairs and Maintenance Manual*, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989), 70.
7. Ibid., 71-72.
8. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d ed.* (Wilmette, IL, 1952: Bahá’í Publishing Trust), 216.
9. Ibid., 342.
10. Ibid., 342-342.
11. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 69.
12. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Committee at the Bahá’í World Centre and Marzieh Gail (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 152-53.
13. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í World Faith*, 2nd ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1956), 262.
14. Shoghi Effendi, through his secy., letter dated 5 July, 1946 to an individual believer, quoted in Agnes Ghaznavi, *The Family Repairs and Maintenance Manual*, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989), 112.
15. Shoghi Effendi, through his secy., *The Bahá’í Life*, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada (Ottawa: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada, 1974), 13.
16. Ian Semple, “The indispensability of consultation for ordering human affairs,” unpublished seminar quoted in Agnes Ghaznavi, *The Family Repairs and Maintenance Manual*, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989), 71.
17. Eccles. 3:1-8
18. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, 213.
19. Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 138.
20. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970), 177.

**Chapter 9—HARMONY**

1. *Webster’s New International Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. “harmony.”
2. Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1938), 112.
3. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974), 100.
4. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected ed., (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1978), 341.
5. Shoghi Effendi, through his secy., letter dated 5 July 1946 to an individual believer quoted in Agnes Ghaznavi, *The Family Repairs and Maintenance Manual*, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989), 112.
6. Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *Prescription for Living*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1978), 135.
7. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 72-73.
8. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 107.
9. Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), 371.
10. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 466.
11. Ibid., 468.

**Chapter 10--THE NATIVE AMERICAN MEDICINE WHEEL**

1. Michael Bopp and Judie Bopp, *Overview: The Four Worlds Development Project*, (Lethbridge, Alberta: Four Winds Development Project, The University of Lethbridge, 1988), 12 and Sun Bear, Wabun Wind, and Crysalis Mulligan, *Dancing with the Circle: The Medicine Wheel Workbook*, (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1991), 1.
2. Sun Bear, Wind, and Mulligan, *Dancing with the Circle*, 2.
3. Ibid., 1.
4. I do not have a source for this diagram, but, for a similar one, see: Sun Bear, Wind, and Mulligan, *Dancing with the Circle*, 2.
5. Sun Bear, Wind, and Mulligan, *Dancing with the Circle*, 1.
6. Judie Bopp, Michael Bopp, Lee Brown, and Phil Lane, *The Sacred Tree*, (Lethridge, Alberta: Four Worlds Development Project, The University of Lethbridge, 1988), 11.
7. As accessed on 10/27/2020 at https://seventhfireblog.wordpress.com/2016/10/03/medicine-Circle-teachings-part-1/
8. Sun Bear, Wind, and Mulligan, *Dancing with the Circle*, 31.
9. Ibid., xv-xvii.
10. Michael Bopp and Judie Bopp, *Overview: The Four Worlds Development Project*, 4. (Also see the Four Worlds International Institute website: http://home.uleth.ca/~4worlds/.
11. Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, Inc., 1980), 307.
12. Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 288.

**Chapter 11--UNIVERSAL MANDALAS**

1. Carl G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 333.
2. Carl G. Jung, 2nd ed. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 387-90.
3. Yaya Diallo, in Yaya Diallo and Mitchel Hall, *The Healing Drum: African Wisdom Teachings*, (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1989), 114.
4. Carl G. Jung, “Commentary to *Secret of the Golden Flower*,” CW 13, par. 31, mod. cited in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 396.
5. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 387.
6. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, comp. Helen Hornby, 2nd rev. ed. (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988), 508-509.
7. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 389.
8. Ibid., 357.
9. Heita Copony, *Mystery of Mandalas*, (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1988), 1.
10. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 387-388.
11. Ibid., 360-361.

**Chapter 12--THE PARTS OF THE BLDH CIRCLE**

1. *Constitution of the World Health Organization*, amended ed. (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1976), preamble.
2. Paul Harrison, *The Third World Tomorrow*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1980), 40-41.
3. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 365.
4. Daniel C. Jordan and Donald T. Streets, “The Anisa Model: A New Basis for Educational Planning” in *Young Children*, (June, 1973): 294-300.
5. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected ed., (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1978), 108.
6. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *The Throne of the Inner Temple*, comp. Elias Zohoori (Kingston, Jamaica: University Printery and School of Printing, University of the West Indies, 1985), 21.
7. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í World Faith*, 2nd ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1956), 262.
8. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992), 38, 74.
9. The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1976), 145.
10. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Bahá’í Writings on Music*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (Oakham, England: The Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1973), 6.
11. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 90.
12. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í World Faith*, 2nd ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1956), 337.
13. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, trans. Marzieh Gail and Ali-Kuli Khan, 2nd ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970), 1.
14. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, comp. Howard MacNutt (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 351, 29-31.
15. Ibid., 465.
16. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1981), 208-209.
17. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Reality of Man: Excerpts from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1972), 13.
18. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Committee at the Bahá’í World Centre and Marzieh Gail (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 118.
19. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d ed.* (Wilmette, IL, 1952: Bahá’í Publishing Trust), 290.
20. See Mike Samuels and Nancy Samuels, *Seeing with the Mind’s Eye: The History, Techniques and Uses of Visualization* (New York: Random House Inc., 1975), 95.
21. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 87.
22. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 73.
23. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1953), 33.
24. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 244.
25. Nikos Kazantakis, *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*, trans. Kimon Friar (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1958), 368.
26. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, comp. Howard MacNutt (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 377.
27. Margaret Magdalene Carney, “The Learning Competence Paradigm of the Anisa Model and the Preparation of Teachers” (Ed.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 1977), 151.
28. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 454.
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**Chapter 13--THE CENTER OF THE CIRCLE**

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3. Shoghi Effendi, through his secy.,letter dated 28 October 1949 to an individual believer, in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, comp. Helen Hornby, 2nd rev. ed. (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988), 110.
4. Siyyid Husayn-i-Yazdí, in Nabíl-i-A`zam [Muhammad-i-Zarandí], *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil’s Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá’í Revelation*, trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1932), 505.
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6. Ibid., 509.
7. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1939), Arabic no. 13.
8. Ibid., 6-7.
9. Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1938), 187.
10. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 10.
11. Ibid.
12. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2nd ed. (Wilmette, IL, 1952: Bahá’í Publishing Trust), 178.
13. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 231.
14. Bahá’u’lláh cited in Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *The Desire of the World: Material for the contemplation of God and His Manifestation for this Day Compiled from the Words of Bahá’u’lláh*, comp. Rúhíyyih Rabbani, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1982), 168-173.
15. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Proclamation of Bahá’u’lláh*, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1967), 93.
16. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 197-8.
17. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992), 85.
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19. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, 320.
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23. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 494-95.
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25. This has a marvelous correlation with the concept of the Sadratu’l-Muntahá, “The Lote-Tree beyond which there is no passing . . . ,” an Arabic word which is “the symbol of the Manifestation of God, to which no one has access.” (See Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh: Masra`ih and Bahjí 1877-92, Volume Four*, [Oxford: George Ronald, 1987], 436.)
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9. See *Webster’s New International Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. “hamartiology” and David Bohm, *Unfolding Meaning: A Weekend of Dialogue with David Bohm* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul Inc., 1985), 63-64.
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12. The Universal House of Justice, “Ridván Message to Bahá’ís of the World,” *Bahá’í News*, May 1990, 2.
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14. Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1938), 24.
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16. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974), 348.
17. The Universal House of Justice, in Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 190.
18. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912* comp. Howard MacNutt (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 65-66.
19. The Universal House of Justice citing Shoghi Effendi, in Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 191.
20. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Committee at the Bahá’í World Centre and Marzieh Gail (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 99-100.
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3. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1985), Arabic no. 38.
4. Ibid., Arabic no. 39.
5. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992), 73.
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8. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 20.
9. Ibid., 29.
10. Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1958), 470.
11. Bahá’u’lláh, “The Seven Valleys”, in *The Call of the Divine Beloved* (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 2019), verse 29.
12. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 15.
13. These metaphors which emphasize the “nourishing” aspect of God, I believe, help give a more balanced understanding of “His/Her” attributes. God is not masculine or feminine, “He/She” manifests the best of both masculine and feminine qualities.
14. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 35, 37.
15. Ibid., 58.
16. Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1960), 117.
17. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1971), 43.
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2. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.), in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1980), 14.
3. Ibid., 17.
4. Shoghi Effendi, *Principles of Bahá’í Administration*, (Bungay, Suffolk, Great Britain: Richard Clay [The Chaucer Press], Ltd, 1950), 90-91.
5. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 143.
6. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 241.
7. Shoghi Effendi, in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith*, comp. Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1983), 21.
8. Ibid.
9. Bahá’u’lláh, cited in Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Desire of the World: Materials for the Contemplation of God and His Manifestation for the Day Compiled from the Words of Bahá’u’lláh*, comp. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1982), 171, 173.

**Chapter 16--FASTING**

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3. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Corinne True, *Table Talks by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Chicago, 1907), published in “Star of the West,” vol. IV, no. 18, p. 305, and in Duane L. Herrmann, *Fasting: A Bahá’í Handbook*, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, c. 1987), 15.
4. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1950), 175.
5. Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, (London: The Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1992), 163.
6. Ibid., 159.
7. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1950), 337.
8. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting: Selection of Extracts an Prayers from the Bahá’í Writings Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice*, (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 2000), 3.
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12. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í World Faith*, 2nd ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1956), 368.
13. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.), dated 10 January 1936, published in “Bahá’í News, March 1936, p. 1, and in Duane L. Herrmann, *Fasting: A Bahá’í Handbook*, 23.
14. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1985), Arabic no. 10.
15. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Desire of the World: Materials for the Contemplation of God and His Manifestation for this Day Compiled from the Words of Bahá’u’lláh*, comp. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1982), 137-8.
16. Javidukht Khadem, *Zikrullah Khadem, The Itinerant Hand of the Cause of God, With Love*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1990), 19-20.

**Chapter 17—PRAYER**

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2. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.), in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1980), 14-5.
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5. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian no. 8.
6. Ibid., 29.
7. Bahá’u’lláh, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 27.
8. Ibid., 174.
9. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992), 29-30.
10. The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1976), 145.
11. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í World Faith*, 2nd ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1956), 368.
12. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Selections from Bahá’í Scripture*, comp. and ed. David Hofman, (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1941), 250; and published in Ruth J. Moffet, *Du’á: on Wings of Prayer*, (Happy Camp, Calif.: Naturegraph Publishers, Inc., 1984), 57.
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15. Shoghi Effendi, *Principles of Bahá’í Administration*, (Bungay, Suffolk, Great Britain: Richard Clay [The Chaucer Press], Ltd, 1950), 83.
16. Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1938), 210.
17. Ibid., 273.
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21. Ibid., verse 7.
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23. Shoghi Effendi, *The Bahá’í Life*, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada (Ottawa: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada, 1974), 1.
24. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Selections from Bahá’í Scripture*, 250.
25. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 71.
26. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 73.
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28. Ibid., 236.
29. *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting: Selection of Extracts and Prayers from the Bahá´í Writings*, compiled by The Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá´í World Centre, 2000), 3.
30. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 4.
31. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 146.
32. Ibid.
33. *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting: Selection of Extracts and Prayers from the Bahá´í Writings*, compiled by The Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, 4.
34. Ibid. 5.
35. Ibid., 4-5.
36. Marzieh Gail, *Summon Up Remembrance*, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1987), 259.
37. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 30.
38. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, *Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude*, 4.
39. Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970), 194.
40. Ibid., 243.
41. Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1938), 78-9.
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44. Ibid., 235.
45. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 3:694-95.
46. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í World Faith*, 359.
47. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 89.
48. Alice Dudley, “Notes on Pilgrimage to Haifa: April 15-23, 1957,” 3. (Copy given to the author by Knight of Bahá’u’lláh Olivia Kelsey)
49. Genevieve L. Coy, in Roy Wilhelm, Stanwood Cobb, Genevieve L. Coy, *In His Presence: Visits to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1989), 104.
50. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Selections from Bahá’í Scripture*, 258.
51. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá quoted in a radio program on prayer given by Dorothy Baker, in Dorothy Freeman, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker*, 147.
52. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 30.
53. Ibid., Arabic no. 28.
54. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 32.
55. I have found that when the habit of saying the long Obligatory Prayer in the morning is interrupted, it is more difficult to remember the Noon Day Prayer or to say the long Obligatory Prayer at night. In this case, two techniques have proven helpful. One is simply writing or programming “Noon Day Prayer” into a daily paper or digital calendar as a reminder. (A friend of mine calls this “making an appointment with God.”) The second technique I learned from a colleague. In order to remember the Noon Day Prayer on days when I am not able to say the long Obligatory Prayer in the morning, I take off my Bahá’í ring from my right hand and place it on my left hand. Because it feels strange and slightly loose, it serves as a reminder until I pray. Then I return it to my right hand. The same thing can be done with a wristwatch.
56. Javidukht Khadem, *Zikrullah Khadem, The Itinerant Hand of the Cause of God, With Love*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1990), 46.
57. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1950), 141-42.
58. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Selections from Bahá’í Scripture*, 250.
59. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, v.
60. The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, 94.
61. Carl G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 224.
62. Dorothy Freeman, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker*, 189.
63. Bahá’u’lláh, in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970), 119.
64. Dorothy Freeman, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker*, 157.
65. Ibid., 183.
66. Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, (London: The Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1992), 648.
67. Ibid., 273.
68. ‘In the Persian Bayán, Unit 9, chapter 6, the Báb prescribed reciting this prayer 314 times.’ (Memorandum from the Research Department to the Universal House of Justice, 28 August 1991).
69. Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, 24.
70. Violette Nakhjavani, *A Tribute to Amatu’l-Bahá**Rúhíyyih Khánum*, Thornhill, Ontario: Bahá’í Canada Publications, 2000), 72.
71. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that “in every word and movement of the Obligatory Prayer there are allusions, mysteries and a wisdom that man is unable to comprehend, and letters and scrolls cannot contain.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 167.
72. Dorothy Freeman, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker*, 157.
73. Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *A Manual for Pioneers*, (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974), 4.

**Chapter 18 – MEDITATION FOR SPIRITUAL PURPOSES**

1. Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970), 217.
2. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912*, (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 176.
3. Ibid., 175.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 176.
7. Bahá’u’lláh, “The Seven Valleys”, in *The Call of the Divine Beloved* (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 2019), verse 44.
8. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 143.
9. “You cannot apply the name ‘man’ to any being void of this faculty of meditation; without it he would be a mere animal, lower than the beasts.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912*, [London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969], 175.)
10. Excerpt from a letter from the Guardian (almost certainly through his secretary) to Mrs. Nina Mattheson (early 1940’s). This was obtained from Florence Reeb of Columbus, Ohio who copied it from Miss Pearle Easterbrook. I haven’t been able to find a published source.
11. Shoghi Effendi, *Principles of Bahá’í Administration*, (Bungay, Suffolk, Great Britain: Richard Clay [The Chaucer Press], Ltd, 1950), 90-1.
12. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Selections from Bahá’í Scripture*, comp. and ed. David Hofman, (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1941), 251.
13. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912*, (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 174.
14. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Selections from Bahá’í Scripture*, 251.
15. Shoghi Effendi, *Principles of Bahá’í Administration*, 91.
16. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992), 65.
17. Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1938), 253.
18. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 147.
19. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 249.
20. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 214.
21. R. Mehrabkhani, *Mullá Husayn: Disciple at Dawn*, (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1987), 97.
22. Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh: Masra’ih and Bahjí 1877-92. Volume Four*, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987), 323.
23. Ibid., 323-24.
24. Elena Serocki, “Heaven Can Wait.” *Reader’s Digest*, May 2001, 112.
25. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1950), 13.
26. Ibid., 152.
27. Dr. Cobb either talked about this during a conference I attended or I read it in one of his books. I do not have a solid reference.
28. I don’t remember when or where, but Dr. Kahn told this story at a conference during the early 70’s when he was an Auxiliary Board Member and living in Ann Arbor, Michigan in the United States.
29. Dorothy Freeman, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker*, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1984), 208, 271.
30. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Desire of the World: Materials for the Contemplation of God and His Manifestation for this Day Compiled from the Words of Bahá’u’lláh*, comp. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1982).
31. Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh: Masra’ih and Bahjí 1877-92*. Vol. 4, 244.
32. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 143.
33. Bahá’u’lláh, cited in Rúhiyyih Rabbaní, *The Desire of the World: Materials for the Contemplation of God and His Manifestation for this Day Compiled from the Words of Bahá’u’llah*, 171.
34. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, 242.
35. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Bahá’í Magazine,” Vol. 19 #3, 1928.
36. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *Prescription for Living*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1978), 92.
37. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1981), 208-9.
38. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í World Faith*, 2nd ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1956), 370-71.
39. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 144-45.

**Chapter 19—DEEPENING**

1. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992), 85.
2. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1950), 326.
3. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith*, comp. Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1983), 2.
4. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 73.
5. Ibid., 74.
6. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.), in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, comp. Helen Hornby, 2nd rev. ed. (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988), 569.
7. Shoghi Effendi, through his secy., in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith*, 29.
8. Dorothy Freeman, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker*, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1984), 70.
9. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974), 100.
10. The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 114-15.
11. Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970), 211.
12. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, 343.
13. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London: Addresses and Notes of Conversations*, (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 80.
14. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, comp. Howard MacNutt (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 460.
15. Shoghi Effendi, *Principles of Bahá’í Administration*, (Bungay, Suffolk, Great Britain: Richard Clay [The Chaucer Press], Ltd, 1950), 11.
16. The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1976), 99.
17. Shoghi Effendi, *Principles of Bahá’í Administration*, 1.
18. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 119.
19. The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, 209.
20. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith*, 11.
21. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in J.E. Esslemont, *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974), 144.
22. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, 200.
23. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 200.
24. Dorothy Freeman, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker*, 208.
25. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, *The Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith*, 2.
26. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 460.
27. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.), in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, 565.
28. Ibid., 566.
29. Ibid., 568.
30. Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1968), 69.
31. Shoghi Effendi, in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, *The Individual and Teaching--Raising the Divine Call: Extracts from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi*, comp. Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1977), 31.

**Chapter 20—TEACHING**

1. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992), 33.
2. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1971), 117
3. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 39.
4. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.), in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, *The Individual and Teaching--Raising the Divine Call: Extracts from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi*, comp. Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1977), 35.
5. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust. 1985), Arabic no. 39.
6. Ibid., Arabic no. 35.
7. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 32-33.
8. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 196.
9. Bahá’u’lláh quoting the Qur’án 29:69, in Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970), 195.
10. The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1976), 77.
11. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 202-3.
12. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970), 177.
13. Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1968), 69.
14. Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 44.
15. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.), in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, comp. Helen Hornby, 2nd rev. ed. (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988), 118.
16. H. M. Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh*, (London: George Ronald Publisher, 1971), 171.
17. Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, (London: The Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1992), 566.
18. Ibid., 550.
19. William Sears and Robert Quigley, *The Flame: the Story of Lua*, (Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1972), 99.
20. Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1960), 51.
21. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 449-50.
22. Ibid., 450.
23. Dorothy Freeman, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker*, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1984), 298.
24. Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, 272.
25. Marzieh Gail, *Summon Up Remembrance*, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1987), 134-35.
26. Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, 188-89.
27. Ibid., 574.
28. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.), cited in “Bahá’í News”, No. 292, June 1955, p 10.
29. Message from the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, providing the details of the Five Year Plan, 29 December 2015 (as accessed at

<https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/#20151229_001>, on May 25, 2020)

1. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.), cited in “Bahá’í News”, No. 317, July 1957, p 4.
2. I have not been able to find the source of this statement.
3. Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, 443.
4. Ibid., 280-81.
5. Ibid., 212.
6. Ibid., 433.
7. The scientific name for cascara sagrada bark is Rhamnus purshiana. It is available in capsule form from Nature’s Sunshine Products, Spanish Fort, Utah, 84660 (Stock No. 170-8).
8. I have not yet found the source of this story.
9. Allan L. Ward, *239 Days: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Journey in America*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1979), 173, 175.
10. Ibid., 176.
11. Shoghi Effendi through his secy., in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, *The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call*, comp. Research Department at the Bahá’í World Centre [Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1977], 36.
12. Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *A Manual for Pioneers*, (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974), 4.

**Chapter 21--SERVICE**

1. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 138.
2. Ibid.
3. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1950), 250.
4. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, trans. Marzieh Gail and Ali-Kuli Khan, 2nd ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970), 103.
5. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 3.
6. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (New York: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1930), 1:61.
7. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 171.
8. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992), 138.
9. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, The Universal House of Justice, *Bahá’í Marriage and Family Life: Selections from the Writings of the Bahá’í Faith*, (Thornhill, Ontario: Bahá’í Canada Publications, 1983), 53.
10. Ibid., 74.
11. Ibid., 76.
12. Shoghi Effendi (though his secy.), *Principles of Bahá’í Administration*, (Bungay, Suffolk, Great Britain: Richard Clay [The Chaucer Press], Ltd, 1950), 24.
13. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.), in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, *The Individual and Teaching--Raising the Divine Call: Extracts from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi*, comp. Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1977), 31.
14. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 2:460.
15. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 62.
16. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 2:460.
17. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912*, (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 176-77.
18. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í World Faith*, 2nd ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1956), 375.
19. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 2:430.
20. Ibid. (this author’s arrangement of text)
21. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, 246.
22. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 49.
23. Ibid., 33.
24. Ibid., 30.
25. Ibid., 46.
26. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 2:460.
27. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.), in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, comp. Helen Hornby, 2nd rev. ed. (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988), 118.
28. Bahá’u’lláh, in *Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 70.
29. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 1:68.
30. The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon: Selected Messages, 1983-1992*, (Riviera Beach, Fla.: Palabra Publications, 1992), 80.
31. I have not been able to locate the source of this story.
32. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 511.
33. Rúhíyyih Rabbani, “Shoghi Effendi: Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith,” third of three talks at the National Bahá’í Youth Conference, June 19-21, 1970, Wilmette and Evanston, IL
34. Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, (London: The Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1992), 562.
35. Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Freedom*, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1973), 56-7.

**Chapter 22--HUQÚQU’LLÁH**

1. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992), 55.
2. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice, *Huqúqu’lláh*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (Thornhill, Ontario: Bahá’í Canada Publications, 1986), 3.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 11.
5. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice, *Huqúqu’lláh*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (Thornhill, Ontario: Bahá’í Canada Publications, 1986), 24.
6. Shoghi Effendi, in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice, *Huqúqu’lláh*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 29.
7. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice, *Huqúqu’lláh*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 26.
8. William Hatcher, “Education for Huqúqu’lláh” *Institution of Huqúqu’lláh Newsletter*, No. 9, May 1993, 4 -5.
9. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1985), Arabic no. 38.
10. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice, *Huqúqu’lláh*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1.
11. Ibid., 2.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 3.
14. Ibid., 11.
15. Ibid., 12.
16. Ibid., 14.
17. Ibid., 18.
18. Ibid., 12.
19. Ibid., 20.
20. Ibid., 7.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 26.
23. Ibid., 6.
24. Ibid., 7.
25. Ibid., 1.
26. Ibid., 12.
27. Ibid., 7.
28. Ibid., 4.
29. Ibid., 14.
30. Ibid., 2.
31. Ibid., 3.
32. Ibid., 16.
33. Ibid., 15.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., 17.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., 3.
40. Ibid., 9.
41. Ibid., 4.
42. Ibid.
43. See the pamphlet: Horace Holley, “The God Who Walks with Men,” (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1954).
44. Audio recording of Tarázulláh Samandarí, “In His Presence”, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1963).
45. Tarázu’lláh Samandarí, *Moments with Bahá’u’lláh*, (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1995), 50.
46. See Note 161, in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 234-35.

**Chapter 23--THE FUNDS**

1. Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1938), 211-12.
2. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in “Utterances of Abdul-Baha upon the Mashrak-el-Azkar,” in *Star of the West* 7, no.17 (January 1916): 139.
3. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1981), 178-79.
4. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *Prescription for Living*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1978), 114, 118.
5. Shoghi Effendi, *Principles of Bahá’í Administration*, (Bungay, Suffolk, Great Britain: Richard Clay [The Chaucer Press], Ltd, 1950), 95.
6. Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh: Adrianople 1863-68. Volume Two*, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1977), 276-80.
7. Related to the author by Mr. Artemus Lamb.
8. Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, (London: The Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1992), 108.
9. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1985), Arabic no. 48.
10. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.), *Lifeblood of the Cause*, (Oakham, England: The Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1975), 9.
11. Ibid., 10.
12. The Universal House of Justice, through the Department of the Secretariat, letter to all National Spiritual Assemblies dated 31 October 1993.
13. I have not been able to find the source of this story.
14. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.), *Lifeblood of the Cause*, 10.
15. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 76-7.
16. This story was told on a recording of stories from the history of the Faith distributed by the treasurer’s office of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States. I have not been able to find the original source.
17. I have not been able to find the source of this story.

**Chapter 24--DEVOTIONAL MEETINGS**

1. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992), 61.
2. The Universal House of Justice, *The Four Year Plan: Messages of the Universal House of Justice*, (Riviera Beach, Fl.: Palabra, 1996), 35.
3. John E. Esslemont, *Bahá´u´lláh and the New Era*, (Wilmette, Ill: Bahá´í Publishing Trust, 1950), 117.
4. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 61.
5. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 71.
6. Artemus Lamb, “Haifa Notes,” October 21, 1953.
7. Ruth Smith, Emily Chavous, John and Ethyl Gloeckner, Olivia Kelsey and a few others whose names I do not recall were the driving force behind these meetings.
8. As accessed at <http://bahai-library.org/uhj/devotional.meetings.html> on June 25, 2020.

**Chapter 25--THE NINETEEN DAY FEAST**

1. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992), 40.
2. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (New York: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1930), 2:469.
3. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Meetings; The Nineteen Day Feast*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1976), 20-1.
4. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í World Faith*, 2nd ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1956), 407-408.
5. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Meetings; The Nineteen Day Feast*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 18.
6. Ibid., 20.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 21.
9. Ibid., 23-24.
10. Related to the author by Charles Cornell, long-time pioneer with his wife Jacqueline and children in Siguatepeque, Honduras.
11. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.), in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, comp. Helen Hornby, 2nd rev. ed. (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988), 239.
12. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Meetings; The Nineteen Day Feast*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 19.
13. I cannot recall when he told us this.
14. Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary), in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Meetings; The Nineteen Day Feast*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 24.

**Chapter 26--HOLY DAYS**

1. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992), 60.
2. Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh: Baghdád 1853-63. Volume One*, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1974), 56.
3. *Principles of Bahá’í Administration*, (Bungay, Suffolk, Great Britain: Richard Clay [The Chaucer Press], Ltd, 1950), 54.
4. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 177.
5. Bahá’u’lláh, cited in Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Desire of the World: Materials for the Contemplation of God and His Manifestation for this Day Compiled from the Words of Bahá’u’lláh*, comp. Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1982), 173.
6. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 245.
7. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 476.
8. Bahá’u’lláh, “The Seven Valleys”, in *The Call of the Divine Beloved* (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 2019), verse 85.
9. Ibid. verse 71.

**SECTION III--PSYCHOLOGICAL QUADRANT**

1. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1981), 209.
2. Ibid., 209.
3. Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán: The Book of Certitude*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1950), 192.

**SECTION IV, PART 1--THE INNER PSYCHOLOGICAL QUADRANT**

1. The question arises, “Are the Writings revealed by Bahá’u’lláh a form of reality which existed first in the spiritual realm of potentiality?” I would answer this in the affirmative and would consider the Writings, in this case, to be somewhat of a step-down-transformer which support the conversion of pure potentiality into reality. They stand between the world of spirit and the world of action and imbue us with noble, high-minded aims.
2. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d ed. (Wilmette, IL, 1952: Bahá’í Publishing Trust), 250.
3. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d ed., 149.
4. Ibid.
5. *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 7th ed., s.v. 956.
6. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1945), 101.
7. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d ed. (Wilmette, IL, 1952: Bahá’í Publishing Trust), 71.
8. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, new translation, (New York: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1930), 1:85.
9. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Committee at the Bahá’í World Centre and Marzieh Gail (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 135.
10. In the field of total quality management, the PIE cycle is used: planning, implementation, and evaluation. In the BLDH program planning is preceded by prayer, spiritual meditation, and deepening; planning is broken into the first four Inner Quadrant processes as explained above; implementation is equivalent to action; and evaluation is equivalent to reflection.
11. Shoghi Effendi, *Principles of Bahá’í Administration*, (Bungay, Suffolk, Great Britain: Richard Clay [The Chaucer Press], Ltd, 1950), 90-91.

**Chapter 27--MEDITATION FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL PURPOSES**

1. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al., 72.
2. I am indebted to Professor Daniel C. Jordan for this definition of meditation given during one of his lectures. He considered it to be in harmony with the organismic cosmology of Alfred North Whitehead.
3. *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 7th ed., s.v. 275.
4. David Bohm, *Unfolding Meaning: A Weekend of Dialogue with David Bohm* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul Inc., 1985), 81.
5. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 72.
6. Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1966), 63.
7. From a copy of May Maxwell pilgrim’s notes regarding “Illumination of the Meaning of the Greatest Name,” a compilation of statements by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Mírzá Abu’l-Fadl given to the author by Knight of Bahá’u’lláh Olivia Kelsey.
8. Stanwood Cobb, *Wings of the Spirit* (Washington, D.C.: Avalon Press, 1971) 63.
9. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912*, 175-76.
10. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. 156.
11. Ibid., 86.
12. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992), 19-20.
13. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá quoted in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, comp. Helen Hornby, 2nd rev. ed., (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988) 512.
14. Ibid., 66.
15. Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán: The Book of Certitude*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1950), 194.
16. Dorothy Freeman, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker*, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1984), 271.
17. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912*, 29.
18. The late Professor Jesús María Guillem, Spanish poet, philosopher and linguist; a long-time resident of Barranquilla whose inspiration and friendship were a great source of spiritual sustenance in my quest to continue with “the ascent.”
19. Carl G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 186-87.
20. Mike Samuels and Nancy Samuels, *Seeing with the Mind’s Eye: The History, Techniques and Uses of Visualization* (New York: Random House Inc., 1975), 40.
21. The Universal House of Justice, *Century of Light*, (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 2001), 131-32.
22. Marzieh Gail, *Arches of the Years*, (Oxford, George Ronald, Publisher, 1991), 302.
23. Ibid., 180.
24. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 50.
25. Ibid., 302.
26. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas,* 6.
27. Ibid., 41.
28. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust), 150.
29. Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1938), 98.
30. Ibid., 257.
31. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 50.
32. Ibid., 136.
33. *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, comp. Helen Hornby, 2nd rev. ed., (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988), 364.
34. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 26.
35. Ibid., 38.
36. A copy of these notes was given to the author by Knight of Bahá’u’lláh Olivia Kelsey.
37. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 72.
38. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 25.
39. Bahá’u’lláh, “The Seven Valleys”, in *The Call of the Divine Beloved* (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 2019), verse 23.
40. The following is some wise counsel which I received from Ruth Hampson, Administrative Assistant of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States in answer to my inquiry regarding Transcendental Meditation:

Meditation is an important element in the Bahá’í Faith; we feel confident that as you explore the Writings you will become more aware of references to it. There appears to be many approaches to it, and each believer is free to discover his own way. While making his search, the believer should use the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh as the Standard for determining the relative value of the activity; the important criteria is whether it reflects Bahá’u’lláh’s Divine Counsel. (February 23, 1972)

1. For information write to: Maharishi International University, Fairfield, Iowa 52556-2091.
2. Jayne I. Gackenbach, in her article “Women and Meditators as Gifted Lucid Dreamers,” summarizes some of the TM research:

Meditators exhibit fewer stress-related personality characteristics than people who do not meditate . . .

. . . women’s overall increase in general coherence . . . [demonstrates] a more synchronized and less lateralized pattern of neuroelectical neurological organization. (“Coherence,” in this context refers to “the integration of neurons everywhere in the central nervous system.”) A team of researchers from Maharishi International University “argue[s] that an individual probably would prefer to engage in activities that increase coherence, both between and within hemispheres, because this integration would imply an enhanced cognitive or thinking ability as well as an increased emotional stability.”

Enhanced parasympathetic nervous-system function and biological relaxation in TM meditators has been reported, supporting the claim that TM reduces stress. Regular meditation practice appears to increase both dream recall and dream frequency for both sexes, but especially for women. (Stanley Krippner, Ed., *Dreamtime & Dreamwork*, (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1990), 244, 248, 249, 250.

1. A copy of these pilgrim’s notes was given to the author by Knight of Bahá’u’lláh Olivia Kelsey.
2. For more information write to: Silva International, Inc., P.O. Box 2249, Laredo, TX, 78044-2249, U.S.A.
3. This statement came from either Dr. Cobb’s writings, his lectures, or his personal conversations with the author. I cannot recall which.

**Chapter 28--GOAL-SETTING**

1. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d ed. (Wilmette, IL, 1952: Bahá’í Publishing Trust), 323-24.
2. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 437.
3. Yaya Diallo, in Yaya Diallo and Mitchell Hall, *The Healing Drum: African Wisdom Teachings*, (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1989), 152-53.
4. Nabíl-i-Azam (Muhammad-i-Zarandí), *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabíl’s Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá’í Revelation*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970), 137-38.
5. Paul Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchard, *Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources*, 5th ed., (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1988), 45.
6. Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), 102.
7. Ibid., 330.
8. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 80.
9. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912*, (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 178.
10. Quoted in Kopang Clemendi Mokhetho, Maranyane Moupanaga, and Lefa Julius Lerotholi, *The Success Theorem*, (Houston, TX: Strategic Book Publishing, 2013) 47.
11. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, 79.
12. Ghadirian,’Abdu’l-Missagh, “Human Response to Life Stress and Suffering.” *Bahá’í Studies Notebook* (Ottawa, Ontario) 3,nos. 1 & 2 (March 1983): 49-62.
13. Adapted from Nielson, Linda. “Teaching Adolescents the Skills of Self-Management” *The Education Digest* (September 1984): 32-35.
14. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 38.
15. Paul Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchard, *Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources*, 5th ed., (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1988), 380.
16. Ibid., 45.
17. Burns, David D. “The Perfectionist’s Script for Self-Defeat.” *Psychology Today*, November 1980, 34-52.
18. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 35.
19. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted by Alí Nakhjavani in his talk “Our Spiritual Growth at the World Centre” in Haifa on November 25, 1983 reprinted by the National Teaching Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Colombia. I highly recommend reading this talk in which this concept of minimum and maximum is more thoroughly discussed.
20. Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, (London: The Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1992), 225.
21. Ibid., 389.
22. Ibid., 550.
23. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, 22.
24. Bahá’u’lláh, in Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 119.
25. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, 190.
26. Ibid., 71.
27. Based on a very useful instrument titled “A Planning Worksheet for Implementing Goals” for which I would like to thank my professor, Anne C. Boe, President of Career Networks, 309 Laurel, San Diego, California 92101, tel. (714) 239-8749.
28. Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Freedom*, (Oxford, George Ronald, 1973), 52.
29. Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970), 177.
30. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1939), Arabic no. 38.
31. Ibid., Arabic no. 31.
32. Marzieh Gail, *Arches of the Years*, (Oxford, George Ronald, Publisher, 1991), 120.
33. Shoghi Effendi through his secy, *Bahá’í Marriage and Family Life: Selections from the Writings of the Bahá’í Faith*, (Thornhill, Ontario: Bahá’í Canada Publications, 1983), 75.
34. Ibid., 74.
35. Shoghi Effendi through his secy. to an individual believer, July 17, 1938, *Bahá’í Education: A Compilation of Extracts from the Bahá’í Writings*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (London: The Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1987), 54-55.
36. The Universal House of Justice, from a letter dated November 19, 1978, to an individual believer, *Bahá’í Marriage and Family Life: Selections from the Writings of the Bahá’í Faith*, (Thornhill, Ontario: Bahá’í Canada Publications, 1983), 76.
37. Dorothy Freeman, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker*, (Oxford, George Ronald, Publisher, 1984), 282.
38. Barron Harper, *Lights of Fortitude*, (Oxford, George Ronald, Publisher, 1997), 158-9.
39. Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, 34.
40. The Universal House of Justice through its secretariat, to an individual dated 19 April 1979. *Bahá’í Studies Notebook* III Nos. 1 & 2 (March, 1983) 12.
41. Shoghi Effendi, *Principles of Bahá’í Administration*, (Bungay, Suffolk, Great Britain: Richard Clay [The Chaucer Press], Ltd, 1950), 24.
42. The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon: Selected Messages, 1983-1992*, (Riviera Beach, Fla.: Palabra Publications, 1992), 141.
43. This fact is not often related in Bahá’í history books. I do not know where I read it.
44. For an excellent further discussion of priority-setting see Janice L. Cockrell, “The Bahá’í Mother as a Health Professional: Establishing Priorities,” *Bahá’í Studies Notebook* IV No.1 (August, 1985) 21-27.

**Chapter 29--TIME MANAGEMENT**

1. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in “The Divine Art of Living,” in *Star of the West* 8, no.2 (April, 1917): 23-28.
2. Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 39. (This author’s arrangement of phrases.)
3. Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, (London: The Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1992), 432.
4. I think that I read this in the following biography, but I am not certain. Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, (London: The Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1992).
5. Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, 548.
6. Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Freedom*, (Oxford, George Ronald, 1973), 52.
7. Dorothy Freeman, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker*, (Oxford, George Ronald, Publisher, 1984), 117-18.
8. I have not been able to trace the source of this recorded talk by The Hand of the Cause of God Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih *Kh*ánum.
9. Gibbs, Nancy. “America Runs Out of Time.” *Time*, April 24, 1989, 38-40.
10. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá quoted in: Dorothy Freeman, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker*, 145.
11. Shoghi Effendi, *The Baha’i Life*, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada (Ottawa: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada, 1974), 2-3.
12. Dorothy Freeman, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker*, 217.
13. From a talk by Hand of the Cause of God Mr. A. Q. Faizi recorded during a visit to Guatemala during the 1970’s. I have a recording of this talk but it has no introductory lead.
14. An adaptation of drawing from: Dru Scott, *How to Put More Time in Your Life*, (New York: American Library, 1980), 85.
15. Gibbs, Nancy. “America Runs Out of Time.” *Time*, April 24, 1989, 40.
16. Dru Scott, *How to Put More Time in Your Life*, (New York: American Library, 1980), 113-28.
17. ‘Alí-Akbar Furútan, compiler and editor, *Stories of Bahá’u’lláh*, (Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1986), 51.
18. Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, 662.
19. Dorothy Freeman, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker*, 118.
20. Ibid., 212-13.
21. Ibid., 100.
22. Ibid., 119.
23. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.) to an individual believer, *The Bahá´í Life*, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada, 4-5.
24. Khadem, Dhikru’llah “Remembrances of Shoghi Effendi, Part 2” sound cassette of address at conference of Association for Bahá’í Studies, Ottawa, 1984. Images International.
25. M. R. Garis, *Martha Root: Lioness at the Threshold*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1983), 53, 135.
26. Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, 622, 643.
27. In August of 1982 I was with Dr. Jordan in his office. He told me about his personal notebooks which contained his ideas about how the development of the Anisa Model of Education should be carried forward; that he travelled a great deal; that he feared that something might happen to him on one of his lecture tours; and that he wanted others to know about the existence of his notes. Just two months later in October, while on a trip to New York City, he was murdered (at the relatively young age of 50). (Unfortunately, his last notebook was confiscated by the police for the investigation and was never returned.)
28. Related to the author by Dr. Cobb. This incident may also have been published in one of Stanwood Cobb’s books.
29. See Dorothy Freeman, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker*, (Oxford, George Ronald, Publisher, 1984).
30. See Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, 632.
31. A note of interest: Hand of the Cause Dr. Muhájir was an avid reader. When he visited Honduras in 1977 nearly half of his suitcase was books. When he met with the friends in the National Center regarding mass teaching he referred to this book (New York: The Dial Press, 1975) and to assertiveness training. He mentioned it in relation to having new believers sign or give their finger prints on a declaration card. He referred to this as a first act of assertion, a way of confirming belief and saying, “Yes, I am a Bahá’í.”

**Chapter 30--VISUALIZATION**

1. Shakti Gawain, Creative Visualization, (Mill Valley, Calif.: Whatever Publishing, Inc., 1978), 14.
2. A. Richardson, Mental Imagery, (New York: Springer Publishing Co., 1969), 88.
3. Mike Samuels and Nancy Samuels, *Seeing with the Mind’s Eye: The History, Techniques and Uses of Visualization* (New York: Random House Inc., 1975), 65.
4. Don Gerrard in preface to Mike Samuels and Nancy Samuels, *Seeing with the Mind’s Eye: The History, Techniques and Uses of Visualization* (New York: Random House Inc., 1975), xi.
5. Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 19 July 1956, *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America/1947-1957*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1965), 148.
6. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912*, (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 175.
7. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d ed. (Wilmette, IL, 1952: Bahá’í Publishing Trust), 327.
8. Mike Samuels and Nancy Samuels, *Seeing with the Mind’s Eye: The History, Techniques and Uses of Visualization*, 71.
9. From a copy of May Maxwell pilgrim’s notes regarding “Illumination of the Meaning of the Greatest Name,” a compilation of statements by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Mírzá Abu’l-Fadl given to the author by Knight of Bahá’u’lláh Olivia Kelsey.
10. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 156.
11. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Committee at the Bahá’í World Centre and Marzieh Gail (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 79.
12. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in *Bahá’í Education: A Compilation of Extracts from the Bahá’í Writings*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (London: The Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1987), 6.
13. Mike Samuels and Nancy Samuels, *Seeing with the Mind’s Eye: The History, Techniques and Uses of Visualization*, 65-66.
14. Nikos Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 391.
15. Ibid.
16. Írán Furútan Muhájir, *Dr Muhájir: Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahá’u’lláh*, (London: The Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1992), 565-66.
17. Robert Chartham, *What Turns Women On*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1974), 199.
18. Mike Samuels and Nancy Samuels, *Seeing with the Mind’s Eye: The History, Techniques and Uses of Visualization*, 148.
19. See Allman, William F., “The Mental Edge: The Brain Is the Key to Peak Performance, in Sports and Life.” *U.S. News & World Report*, August 3, 1992, 50-56, and Mike Samuels and Nancy Samuels, *Seeing with the Mind’s Eye: The History, Techniques and Uses of Visualization* (New York: Random House Inc., 1975).
20. Mike Samuels and Nancy Samuels, *Seeing with the Mind’s Eye: The History, Techniques and Uses of Visualization*, 66.
21. Ibid.
22. Samuels, M. and H. Bennett, *Be Well*, (New York: Random House-Bookworks, 1974), 144.
23. Mike Samuels and Nancy Samuels, *Seeing with the Mind’s Eye: The History, Techniques and Uses of Visualization*, 226.
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23. A loving relationship exists, I would say, when the two people involved, via interaction with one another and the Word of God, grow closer to God, to one another, and to their own true selves, thereby creating a benevolent atmosphere of mutual assistance in which each person can transform his own self while helping the other person to do the same for the purpose of better serving the Cause of God and humanity.

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**Chapter 48--FAMILY**

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2. Words attributed to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Roy Wilhelm, Stanwood Cobb, Genevieve L. Coy, *In His Presence: Visits to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1989), 146.
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3. Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1958), 675-76.
4. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 35-6.
5. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1950), 316.
6. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992), 75.
7. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London: Addresses and Notes of Conversations*, (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 92.
8. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 24.
9. Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 42-3.
10. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of the Faithful* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970), 148.
11. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.), in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, The Universal House of Justice, Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File, comp. Helen Hornby, 2nd rev. ed. (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988), 630.
12. Ibid., 600.

**SECTION VII--PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

1. Based on principles in: Dru Scott, *How to Put More Time in Your Life*, (New York: New American Library, 1980), 137-38.
2. Alexander Borbély, *Secrets of Sleep*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1986), 106.
3. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Allan L. Ward, *239 Days: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Journey in America*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1979), 130.
4. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of The Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 86.
5. Shoghi Effendi (through his secy.), in Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, The Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, comp. Helen Hornby, 2nd rev. ed. (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Tr ust, 1988), 365.
6. Bahá’u’lláh, in The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon: Selected Messages, 1983-1992*, (Riviera Beach, Fla.: Palabra Publications, 1992), 59.
7. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1950), 130.

**CONCLUSION**

1. Bahá’u’lláh, in The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon: Selected Messages, 1983-1992*, (Riviera Beach, Fla.: Palabra Publications, 1992), 59.
2. Lee Brown, an unpublished poem.

1. According to Merriam-Webster the word “holistic” means “relating to or concerned with wholes or with complete systems rather than with the analysis of, treatment of, or dissection into parts” (see: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/holistic>). “Holism” is defined as “the tendency in nature to form wholes that are greater than the sum of the parts.” LDH uses the newer variant “wholistic” in order to emphasize the importance of transforming “the whole person.” However, LDH also analyzes and seeks to transform “the parts” of the whole person. Additionally, it goes beyond the traditional analysis of the parts of human—body, mind, spirit, and soul—to include “relationships,” especially, but not exclusively, human relationships. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. On the BLDH Circle the processes associated with the inner life are found in the inner circle; the outer life processes are in the outer sphere. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. aRefer again to Figure 1.1 to see a partial “slice” of the “infinite onion.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. When I introduce the Circle of Life in Dynamic Harmony to a group from mixed or no religious background, in order to promote reflection, I use the Universal LDH Circle which contains a question mark in the center. (See Appendix 2.) For Christian audiences, I use the LDH Circle which appears as Appendix 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The word “yantra” is Sanskrit. It means "machine” or “contraption.” Yantras are mystical, geometric diagrams, mainly from the Tantric traditions of the Indian religions and are used for meditation. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. aThis room was in the house of ‘Abdu’lláh Páshá which has now been fully restored--divan, samovar and all--and is open to pilgrims*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. aEven before this became obligatory in the West, my spiritual mother, Olivia Kelsey, encouraged me to take advantage of its power and she taught me a “handy” way to keep track of the 95 count. On one hand, the tip of the thumb and its two first joints are counted as 1 to 3. Then the tip of each finger and the three joints of each are counted to give you 4 to 19. The thumb and fingers on the other hand are used to count five groups of 19 which totals 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. a‘Abdu’l-Bahá includes “intuition” as one of the prerequisites “inward . . . perfections” of the “spiritually learned.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, trans. Marzieh Gail and Ali-Kuli Khan, 2nd ed. [Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970], 33-4.) Erik Blumenthal defines intuition as “inner vision--immediate, unreflected, total perception.” (Erik Blumenthal, *To Understand and Be Understood*, [London: Oneworld Publications, Ltd, 1987], 121.) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. aI learned this technique from Horace Holley. Olivia Kelsey told me that he would write a passage from *The Hidden Words* on a piece of paper and place it in his shirt pocket. Then, during “off moments” during the day he would take it out, read it, and meditate on it. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. aIn a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, September 1, 1983, six ways are outlined to assist the believers to “conscientiously strive to increase their spirituality.” It is the purpose of the LDH program in general, and the Spiritual Quadrantt processes in particular, to support these six methods:

    1. The recital each day of one of the Obligatory Prayers with pure-hearted devotion.

    2. The regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures, specifically at least each morning and evening, with reverence, attention and thought.

    3. Prayerful meditation on the teachings, so that we may understand them more deeply, fulfil them more faithfully, and convey them more accurately to others.

    4. Striving every day to bring our behavior more into accordance with the high standards that are set forth in the Teachings.

    5. Teaching the Cause of God.

    6. Selfless service in the work of the Cause and in the carrying on of our trade or profession.

    (*Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, comp. Helen Hornby, 2nd rev. ed. [New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988], 540.) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. When I asked Mr. Furútan about this image, he replied smiling, “I was a teacher. I like metaphors.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. aAt a meeting in Tegucigalpa Dr. Muhájir told us that this was important; that this was the believer’s first “affirmation” of his or her faith*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. aLong-time pioneer in Honduras who was devoted to teaching amongst the Jicaque Indians, mother of Maralynn Dunbar and mother-in-law of Hooper Dunbar. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Since this time, activities for pre-youth, 12 to 15 years of age, have been added to the Core Activities. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. aWith reference to attending dawn prayers in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, the Bahá’í House of Worship, Bahá’u’lláh has explained that, although the actual time specified in the Book of God is ‘the hour of dawn,’ it is acceptable at any time from ‘the earliest dawn of day, between dawn and sunrise, or even up to two hours after sunrise’. (Bahá’u’lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, [Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992], 226.) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. “The Bahá’í calendar, technically called the Badi calendar, is a solar calendar of 365 days, or 366 days in certain years. It consists of 19 months having 19 days each. The remaining four days (or five if necessary) make up an intercalary period called Ayyám-i-Há which is placed between the 18th and 19th months.” (as accessed at <https://bahaipedia.org/Calendar> on May 22, 2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Indeed, the Pilgrimage, ordained in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, should be on the BLDH Circle as a key, transforming process. But, because it is not regularly recurring, I have decided to discuss it here*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The anniversaries of births of The Báb and of Bahá’u’lláh are now celebrated on adjacent days according to the Muslim lunar calendar. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. aOne of the purposes of the Inner Quadrantt processes is to encourage people to spend more time in a planning mode and to provide for higher quality short-term and long-term planning which can be just as enjoyable as carrying out the plan. In the LDH program planning is a broad concept which has been broken down into the first four processes in the Inner Psychological Quadrantt: meditation for psychological purposes, goal-setting, time management, and visualization. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. aThe essential role of the emotions can be seen in the above passage from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in which he counsels one of the friends to “derive joy” from the chanting of and the meaning of the Words of God and then to transform them into actions. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. For several years, in order to better control the amount of time our children viewed televion and the content that they were watching, we kept the TV locked in a cabinet. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. An excellent, currently popular acronym for good goal-setting is called “SMART Goals”: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, & Time Bound. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. aOne of the pleasures of everyday life is to check off daily goals as they are accomplished. It gives a “lift” and confirms that we are moving toward our greater goals. Personally, I enjoy writing daily goals on a self-stick note and drawing a single straight line through each accomplished item. I can still read the item in case I need to refer back to it and I find it more dramatic than a check mark or deleting items from an electronic list. (I had a colleague who, at the end of the day, when she had carried out more tasks than were on her list, would actually add the item just so she could cross it off in order to increase her feelings of accomplishment!) [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. aThis statement belongs to the category “Pilgrim’s Notes.” [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. aDream researcher and therapist, Dr. Gayle Delaney describes people who regularly have anxiety-filled dreams about taking an examination. In their dreams they: have not studied; studied the wrong thing; find themselves in the wrong room; forgot everything; or feel that they have no chance of passing. She comments, “In my experience, people [from North American culture] who have this dream once every week or two are living in the fast lane and have an unhealthy schedule of constant deadlines that they can only meet with great difficulty and sacrifice.” She was also surprised to find that “some don't mind the feeling [of living life as an exam]; others don't believe there is any other way to survive.” (Gayle Delaney, *Breakthrough Dreaming: How to Tap the Power of Your 24-Hour Mind*, [New York: Bantam Books, 1991], 372-73.) [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. a For these time management techniques and many of the others in this chapter I am greatly indebted to Dru Scott, Ph.D., author of *How to Put More Time in Your Life*, (New York: New American Library, 1980). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. a This was the lifestyle of the beloved Guardian. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. b This was the lifestyle of Dr. Muhájir. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. a The LDH program contains many such references which can be consulted. Another excellent source is the Journal of Bahá’í Studies which contains articles by Bahá’ís who are experts in fields such as health care, human sexuality, nutrition, and marital and family relations. It can be subscribed to via the Association for Bahá’í Studies at <https://bahaistudies.ca/> or at 34 Copernicus Street, Ottawa, ON, Canada, KlN7K4. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See, for example: Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1938), 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. aBahá’u’lláh once lamented that during His journey from Baghdád to Constantinople, there was no one in his retinue who could play a musical instrument and thereby help ease the boredom of travel. (I have not been able to locate the source of this story.) [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. aHand of the Cause Zikrullah Khadem during a conference in 1984 “recounted the story of a recent Persian martyr, Habíbu’lláh Awjí, one of those blessed and heroic souls. In a moving voice, he called to Awjí in the Abhá Kingdom to join while he read the poem that Awjí had composed and recited at the time of his martyrdom.” (Javidukht Khadem, Zikrullah Khadem, The Itinerant Hand of the Cause of God, With Love, [Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1990], 134.) [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Unlike the U.S., the Canadian government no longer includes “dairy” as a separate category in their food guide. See: “Is milk healthy? Canada’s new food guide says not necessarily” (BBC News, January 22, 2019) as accessed at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-46964549#:~:text=Canada%20has%20released%20a%20new,a%20variety%20of%20unprocessed%20foods> on June 10, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. I was aided with my weight loss endeavors by the book and YouTube videos of Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson. See her book Bright Line Eating, (New York City, NY: Hay House, Inc.) 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See qubounding.com; leapsandrebounds.com; and/or cellercize.com [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See Chapter 45 regarding the importance of communion with nature as a leisure-time activity. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Stanwood Cobb once told us that, in his experience, people who work alone all day long (like his father who was an artist), enjoy leisure time in the company of others while those who work with people all day enjoy being alone after work. As an educator I fall in the latter category. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. a I think this valuable insight needs to be a continual point of discussion in relation to how we use our vacation time for the Faith. On the one hand we want to offer our talents and services to the Cause. But on the other, as a professional teacher, for example, I didn’t look forward to giving Bahá’í children’s classes during vacations. Nor do I think that a cook would always want to be cooking for a Bahá’í summer school. For at least part of our vacation time, the “bus driver’s holiday” syndrome needs to be avoided. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. aDreams may serve as a channel of inspiration for those faithful souls in the Supreme Concourse which Bahá’u’lláh states are “possessed of such power that all the worlds which the Almighty hath created can benefit” through them, and which furnish “the power through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest.” (Bahá’u’lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, [Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1950], 161.) [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. aWe share the air which needs to be kept free from contaminants and pollutants such as virus-ridden respiratory droplets, smoke, smog, noise, and unsafe levels of electromagnetic fields. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. bEven though stores and other properties may be privately owned, they do generate public wealth through the tax system. If the establishment earns more, then they can pay more taxes which will, in turn, increase the wealth of the public treasury. Therefore, we should help the private sector preserve the cleanliness and beauty of their establishments and help prevent vandalism in any way we can. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. cWe need to create a feeling of: “This is my planet. It is my home in space. What can I do to help conserve its resources and live in harmony with its ecological systems?” [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. aMonthly amount to be placed in this fund can be calculated by ascertaining or estimating the amounts for the sub-categories, adding them, and then dividing the sum by twelve. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. a“partner,” or “companion” depending on the circumstances. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. bIf you are an adolescent living at home with brothers and/or sisters you might change this category to “siblings,” “brother(s),” or “sister(s).” [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. cThe size of our Bahá’í and work communities may vary but the degree of intimacy is the predominate organizational factor in this scheme. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. aSome people have trouble controlling emotional impulses when they should. Others have feelings which should be expressed but they cannot. For example, they feel gratitude and love, but they are not able to communicate it. The Master emphasized the need for this type of emotional training: “It is the hope of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that those youthful souls in the schoolroom of the deeper knowledge will be tended by one who traineth them to love.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, [Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978], 134.) [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. By allowing others to reciprocate, that is, allowing others to love them--thereby helping the other people to develop their potential for expressing love. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Process is defined as “an ordered expression of a potentiality.” Usually, the expression begins in the soul, then, as a particular energy pattern in the brain and finally, but not always, it is translated into a particular energy pattern in the body, i.e., an action. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. aThe other luminary is “compassion.” [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. aFor the sake of simplicity and clarity, the Life in Dynamic Harmony program will use the upper case “S” to refer exclusively to the higher Self and the lower case “s” to refer to either the lower self or the composite, dual-natured self, depending on the context. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. a‘Abdu’l-Bahá has specified some of the “characteristics as are worthy of blame: These natural impurities are evil qualities: anger, lust, worldliness, pride, lying, hypocrisy, fraud, self-love, etc.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, [Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1981], 92.) [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. aIn this context the term “ego” refers to the true Self, not the lower self. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Research has shown that we are able to enter into a symbiotic relationship with mammals in which vital, biological processes are mutually regulated, thereby increasing the health and well-being of both the animal and the human. This is because both mammals and humans, in terms of the triune model of the brain, both have a limbic brain capable of interacting with one another. Hence, the saying, “A dog is man’s best friend” now has a more scientific and love-related meaning. I highly recommend the book *A General Theory of Love* by Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. aThe need for this “deference to one another’s wishes” to be a mutual effort is implied in a comment of Shoghi Effendi to a pilgrim: “Regarding American husbands, the Guardian said he did not approve of their subjugation by their wives, it was a sign of degeneration.” (Marzieh Gail, *Arches of the Years*, [Oxford, George Ronald, Publisher, 1991], 315.) [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. aI highly recommend the following book, especially for all Western Bahá’í men, but also for adolescents, for those who have chosen to remain single, and for those who have a spouse who travels a great deal: *The New Celibacy: How to Take a Vacation from Sex and Enjoy It* by Gabrielle Brown, Ph.D. In my opinion, its perspective is not totally in accord with the Faith, but the author, in my opinion, is heading in the right direction by helping us to move our focus away from sex. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. In my family the tradition was to place matchsticks between the sheets of the marital bed! [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. aIn one of her talks Ruhíyyíh Khánum made a point of reminding everyone that, even though Bahá’u’lláh recommended having offspring, it was not absolutely necessary to have children in order to have a fulfilling marriage and life. She herself was an example of this. Of course, adoption is another alternative recommended by Bahá’u’lláh. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Tragically, we lost our youngest son Aaron at the age of 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. In order to facilitate communication, we kept a pencil and note paper beside each phone and we placed clips beside each bedroom door for phone messages and mail. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. When two siblings decided to share a food that needed to be cut in half, such as a piece of cake, we applied the “Wisdom of Solomon Rule”: one cuts, the other chooses! [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. This is probably one of the few rules that does not apply to the whole family. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. A related, beautiful story is told by the Master: “I had a little son. When he was three or four, and I would be asleep, he would come and very gently, very softly, slip into bed beside me. It was an indescribable joy.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá quoted in *Mahmud’s Diary*, p. 49, in Marzieh Gail, *Summon Up Remembrance*, [Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1987], 235.) This child, whose name was Husayn, died at about the age of five. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and His wife, Munírih Khánum, also lost four other children. Four daughters survived the rigors of the prison. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. A helpful tool for pulling family trips off smoothly is what I call a “what to take list.” In a special notebook I kept a sheet which has columns of items. Each column represents a different kind of trip: beach trip list, mountain/camping trip list, teaching trip list, and a professional/administrative trip list. It’s not full-proof but it lowers the rate of: “We have to turn around and go back. I forgot to pack the \_\_\_” [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. aPioneers need to keep in mind that they are in a country primarily to form friendships with the nationals. It doesn't mean that friendships cannot be formed with fellow countrymen residing abroad, but going to an extreme, needs to be avoided. The key here seems to be fluency in the national or native language. Pioneers who are fluent tend to do fine. Those who are not, tend to confine themselves to friendships in which they can speak their native tongue. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. aThis same principle should apply to each week, month, year, and even longer cycles of time. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. aThis poem was read and presented to Professor Jordan by its author, Lee Brown, a Native American Indian traditional leader, just two months before Dr. Jordan’s passing. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)