SPIRITUALIZING OUR LIVES

A three-day institute designed for the purpose of helping the believers to "translate that which hath been written into reality and action."

"The attainment of any object is conditioned upon knowledge, volition, and action. Unless these three conditions be forthcoming, there is no execution or accomplishment." 'Abdu'l-Bahá

I. OBJECTIVE
To help the individual believer to better "translate that which hath been written into reality and action" by fulfilling the conditions of knowledge, volition, and action.

II. RATIONALE
The Láli
"The days when idle worship was deemed sufficient are ended." TDL p. 3

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH
"Whoso ariseth among you to teach the Cause of His Lord, let him, above all else, teach his own self..." TDL p. 5

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ
"The most vital duty, in this day, is to purify your characters, to correct your manners, and improve your conduct." ADJ p. 21

SHOGHI EFFENDI
"To strive to obtain a more adequate understanding 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." JG p. 113

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
"The healthy development of the Cause requires that this great expansion be accompanied by the dedicated effort of every believer in teaching, in living the Bahá'í life, in contributing to the Fund, and particularly in the persistent effort to understand more and more the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation." JG p. 25
"Consolidating the community is one of the greatest challenges facing American Bahá'ís. Ultimately, the emergence of strong and spiritualized communities must rest firmly upon gaining a clearer apprehension of God's purpose for man and translating that understanding into individual and collective action on a daily basis."

The Meaning of Deepening p. VIII

In gaining a clearer apprehension of God's purpose for man, more and more Bahá'ís are realizing the necessity of expressing that understanding of God's purpose in their daily lives, but often times find themselves in a position of not knowing just how to go about it. The purpose of this institute is to not only offer a clearer apprehension through study and consultation, but also the encouragement and tools to translate that knowledge into action by setting personal goals.

III. GUIDELINES

The guidelines established by the National Teaching Committee should be adhered to as closely as possible. (See 'Guidelines for Deepening Institutes', 1971 or 'Guidelines for Weekend Institutes', 1972)

IV. REFERENCE MATERIAL

Suggested books to be brought by the attendees.

- Advent of Divine Justice
- Tablets of the Divine Plan
- Prayer Book
- Wellspring of Guidance
- Bahá'í World Faith
- Bahá'í Deepening Program (Comprehensive program by NSA.)

Extra copies of each text should be on hand for those who may not have these books.

V. INSTITUTE COORDINATOR

Besides fulfilling the requirements established by the NCC for institute coordinators in their 'Guidelines for Weekend Institutes', the coordinator should also have a good knowledge of goal setting; preferably through personal experience, and a thorough understanding of the Bahá'í Comprehensive Deepening Program books: "The Meaning of Deepening" and "Knowledge, Volition, and Action."
VI. METHODS

"...then the will and the desire are strong enough, the means will be found and the way opened..." Shoghi Effendi

There are many methods of learning. Because learning depends upon the learner, the coordinator will have to be sensitive to the needs of the group and present the needed materials appropriately. The following are some suggestions that might be helpful whatever the situation may be:

1. Involve everyone. The more the students are involved the more they will learn. (Unity in diversity.)
2. Constantly evaluate. (Keep thyself to account.)
3. Focus on the creative word, not teacher. (That has the power.)
4. Consult. (None of us is as smart as all of us.)
5. Begin each session with prayers. (Without the help of the Supreme Concourse we won't get anywhere.)
6. Use music. (Sings for your spirit.)
7. Be happy! (It's contagious!)
8. Know the material. (Unless he teacheth his own self...)  
10. LIVE THE LIFE. (That's what it is all about.)
11. Here are some learning activities that you might want to use:
   A. Reading in or out of class.
   B. Short lecture.
   C. Research topics.
   D. A-V projects (music, slides, etc.).
   E. Discussion groups.
   F. Interviewers or questionnaires.
   G. Games.

VII. SETTING GOALS

Most Bahá'ís have experienced the up-lifting feeling of attending a Bahá'í conference or institute. And likewise most Bahá'ís have experience the let down of going back to their respective homes and jobs. The purpose of this institute is to not only to achieve the up-lifting feeling that results from being with loving people and exposure to the creative word, but also to lay the foundation on which one can further develop his own inner life and private character; which is not only the only means by which we can secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, but also the primary source of personal happiness and self-respect.
Each of us must answer the questions: Where are we? Where do we want to go? How are we going to get there? Many times we lose sight of where we are and want to go amidst the glitter and tinsel of the old world; and if not, we are often content to look at pictures and maps of where we want to go and never actually set out upon the journey. God cannot guide us until we move.

We must do something about making the attributes of God part of our lives and that requires daily exertions and conscious knowledge. Setting goals helps us to take an active part in our transformation process.

VIII. COURSE OUTLINE

The following is a suggested course outline.

There is more material than can be properly covered in one weekend; therefore, it is important for the coordinator to be familiar with all the material in order to know what would be most appropriate for a particular institute.

SESSION I

Note: The material has been divided into five sessions. These are given only as guides. The coordinator is responsible to select the material that will better enable the believers to live the Bahá’í life.

Begin each session with a round of prayers.

Give a brief introduction of the purpose and methods of the institute.

Read and discuss “The Nature of Deepening” W3 p. 113-5

Discuss briefly each of the four questions given us by the UHJ.

1. What is Bahá’u’lláh’s purpose for the human race?
   References: GWE pp. 299, 215, 278-9
   BWI pp. 125, 102-3

2. For what ends did Bahá’u’lláh submit to the appalling cruelties and indignities heaped upon Him?
   References: GWE pp. 99-100, 307
   BWI pp. 224

3. What does Bahá’u’lláh mean by “a new race of men”?
   References: HW Arabic 1, 27
   TDP p. 17
   ADJ p. 25

4. What are the profound changes which Bahá’u’lláh will bring about?
   References: GWE p. 255, 249
   WOB p. 170, 155

Note: Encourage the friends to retire early, as classes will require them to be alert.
SESSION II

Prayers
Have everyone write down the answers to the questions of:
Where am I?
Where do I want to go?
How can I get there?
Share and discuss.

"Knowledge, Volition, and Action"
Go through the entire book, discussing the material as you go.

Read "Words of the Bab" TDP p. 3
Discuss 'Imperative need to deepen in the Cause; WG p. 114

SESSION III

Prayers
Have everyone write down some things they could do every day to spiritually transform their lives.

How would those things transform you?
How could you know if you had accomplished those things?
Why is it so hard to do them?

"The Meaning of Deepening"
How do we reflect the attributes of God? p. 21
Can we spiritualize our habits? p. 26-7
How to be happy? p. 28 quote by 'Abdu'l-Baha.
How do we do it? p. 32
What about test? p. 38 (quote by 'Abdul-Baha.)

Read "Words of Baha'u'llah" TDP p. 3-7

SESSION IV

Prayers
Discuss the three conditions of an Apostle of Baha'u'llah.
TDP p. 17-29

Read "Such a chaste and holy life..." ADJ p. 25
Read "Three fields of service open to youth" WG p. 94-5

Have each person write where he would like to be a year from now. Share.

Note: You may wish reserve some time for discussing anything that might be of special interest to the friends or a special program developed by the believers there.
SESSION V

Prayers

Read "How Staggering the Responsibility"  ADJ p. 17-8
Read "The Role of the Individual"  WP p. 25

Set goals. Have each person write down daily goals to be kept for the following week. Make sure that these goals are attainable, measurable, and that the believer has some commitment to them. There are many different ways to set goals. Through consultation each person should be able to decide which way is best for him or her. At the end of the week each person should evaluate their accomplishments and establish new goals. Some areas to consider when setting goals are: prayer, study, service, teaching, professional, educational, family, the Fund, attitude (e.g. truthfulness, not backbiting, being happy), memorizing, and to bring thyself to account each day. One may also want to relate his goals to the three fields of service given us by the Universal House of Justice.

An example of some daily goals to be fulfilled during a given week might be like this:

"First, the foundation of all their other accomplishments, is their study of the teachings, the spiritualization of their lives, and the forming of their characters in accordance with the standards of Baha'u'llah."  WP p. 94

I. Study of the Teachings.
A. I will read from the Writings 5-10 mins. every morning and 20-25 mins. every evening or
B. I will read at least 10 pages every day

II. Spiritualization.
A. I will pray at least 5 mins. every morning and 10 mins. every evening.
B. I will say this every day.
C. I will memorize the pray by the end of the week.
D. I will bring myself to account each evening.
E. I will meditate so much each day.

III. Forming of character.
A. Today I will look upon every with bright and friendly face.
B. Every morning I will read a quote from the Writings and concentrate on it all day.

"Thought, prayer, meditation, and study of the sacred scriptures are all very important; but if no spiritual goals are set and no action is taken to achieve them, no spiritual transformation will take place."

"Knowledge, Volition, and Action"  p.13

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