Contents

I. Human Nature and Development ................................................................. 4
   A. Follow not the promptings of the self ................................................. 4
   B. Lower and higher natures ................................................................. 4
   C. Three aspects of our humanness: a body a mind and an immortal identity ............ 5
   D. Gradually developed through stages toward maturity ................................ 5
   E. Five outward and five inward powers ................................................... 6
   F. Self has really two meanings: lower and higher ...................................... 7

II. Human Purpose and Potential ................................................................. 7
   A. I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee .................................... 7
   B. Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee ............................ 7
   C. True station, power and well-being: Justice, Unity and Consultation ............... 8
   D. Certitude, fear and love ......................................................................... 8
   E. Knowledge of God, Love of God and Obey God with Sincere Intention ............. 8
   F. Justice, truth and unity .......................................................................... 10

III. Developing Spirituality ........................................................................... 10
   A. Transformation in whole character of mankind both outwardly and inwardly ....... 10
   B. Nothing whatever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause .......... 10
   C. Every word of God can instill new life into every human frame ..................... 10
   D. Man is the supreme Talisman, Education can cause it to reveal its treasures .......... 11
   E. Consort with all men in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship ....................... 11
F. Could ye apprehend with what wonders of My munificence and bounty I have willed to entrust your souls...........................................................................................................11

G. General guidance on spiritual development ..................................................................12

H. Peace of mind and happiness found in spirituality .......................................................15

IV. Capacities Differ and Effort is Needed ..................................................................15
    A. The whole duty of man in this Day is to attain that share of the flood of grace ..........15
    B. Can manifest all the potential forces which inmost true self hath been endowed ......16
    C. Success or failure, gain or loss depend upon our own exertions ................................16
    D. By the power of God’s might resolve to gain the victory over your own selves ........16
    E. He hath endowed every soul with the capacity to recognize the signs of God ..........17
    F. Unto each one hath been prescribed a pre-ordained measure .....................................17
    G. In consequence of the efforts consciously exerted, heart can be so cleansed ..........17

V. Human Soul, Mind and Spirit ..........................................................18
    A. What “oppression” is more grievous than that a soul seeking the truth .................18
    B. Stations or planes of the soul .............................................................................18
    C. Soul cometh forth following commingling of things and their maturation .............18
    D. Soul of man is exalted above and independent of all infirmities of body or mind ......19
    E. Soul is the all-unifying agency ...........................................................................19
    F. Mind, the soul and spirit ....................................................................................19
    G. Mental illness is not spiritual, although its effects may hinder ...............................20

VI. Truth and Knowing .......................................................................20
    A. The spirit that animateth the human heart is the knowledge of God ..................20
    B. Fair speech and truthfulness are as a sun above the horizon of knowledge ..........20
    C. True loss ..............................................................................................................20
    D. Heaven of divine wisdom illumined with luminaries of consultation and compassion ....20
    E. Obliged to describe spiritual reality in terms of sensible things ..............................20
    F. Four criterion for truth ........................................................................................21
    G. Characteristics of the spiritually learned ..............................................................21
    H. Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues .................................................22
    I. Truth is found everywhere, but Bahá’u’lláh is the focal center ................................22
    J. Bahá’í teachings like a sphere; points poles apart and thoughts and doctrines that unite them ..................................................................................................................22
    K. Importance of independent investigation ...............................................................23
    L. Action, reflection, consultation and study (ARCS) ..................................................23

VII. Love and Loving  ...............................................................................23
A. The source of courage and power
B. For love of God and spiritual attraction do cleanse and purify the human heart
C. Kingdom of God is based upon harmony, love, oneness, relationship and union

VIII. Justice and Willing/Fearing/Obeying
A. The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice
B. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men
C. If thine eyes be turned towards mercy and justice
D. The essence of wisdom is the fear of God
E. The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice
F. Twin pillars of reward and punishment
G. Fear of God is the greatest commander
H. No light can compare with the light of justice
I. Justice is a powerful force
J. Fear of God hath ever been the prime factor in the education of His creatures

IX. Essential Requisites for Spiritual Growth
A. Power of God can entirely transmute our characters
B. The essential requisites for our spiritual growth
C. Recital each day of an Obligatory Prayer with pure-hearted devotion
D. Regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures
E. Prayerful meditation on the Teachings
F. Striving to bring our behavior into accordance with the Teachings
G. Teaching the Cause of God
H. Selfless service in the work of the Cause and in our trade or profession
I. HUMAN NATURE AND DEVELOPMENT

A. Follow not the promptings of the self

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. He, verily, is independent of all His creatures.

(Bahá’u’lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas ¶64)

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Your concern about the overemphasis upon the self and ego echoes a central theme of the Manifestation Himself, and it is the subject of many allusions in His Writings wherein, for example, He speaks of "the evil of egotism" and of those who are "captives of egotism." The Master refers to "the rust of egotism" and tells of "... the subtlety of the ego of man. It is the Tempter (the subtle serpent of the mind) and the poor soul not entirely emancipated from its suggestions is deceived until entirely severed from all save God." In another passage He says: "As long as the ego is subjected to carnal desires, sin and error continue." And He promised that with assiduous effort "Man will become free from egotism; he will be released from the material world..."

(4 August 1977 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) (published in 1985 Dec 02, Child Abuse, Psychology and Knowledge of Self)

B. Lower and higher natures

For the inner reality of man is a demarcation line between the shadow and the light, a place where the two seas meet;[1] it is the lowest point on the arc of descent,[2] and therefore is it capable of gaining all the grades above. With education it can achieve all excellence; devoid of education it will stay on, at the lowest point of imperfection.[1 Qur’an 25:55, 35:13, 55:19-25.]

(Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 130)

However, until material achievements, physical accomplishments and human virtues are reinforced by spiritual perfections, luminous qualities and characteristics of mercy, no fruit or result shall issue therefrom, nor will the happiness of the world of humanity, which is the ultimate aim, be attained.

(Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1982), sec. 225, pp. 283–84)

Until man is born again from the world of nature, that is to say, becomes detached from the world of nature, he is essentially an animal, and it is the teachings of God which convert this animal into a human soul.

(An excerpt from the Tablet to the Hague, which is published in Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1982), sec. 227, p. 304)
This matter of the struggle for existence is the fountainhead of all calamities and is the supreme affliction.

(ʻAbdu’l-Bahá, Tablet to the Hague, p. 7)

C. Three aspects of our humanness: a body a mind and an immortal identity

But education is of three kinds: material, human, and spiritual. Material education aims at the growth and development of the body, and consists in securing its sustenance and obtaining the means of its ease and comfort. This education is common to both man and animal.

Human education, however, consists in civilization and progress, that is, sound governance, social order, human welfare, commerce and industry, arts and sciences, momentous discoveries, and great undertakings, which are the central features distinguishing man from the animal.

As to divine education, it is the education of the Kingdom and consists in acquiring divine perfections. This is indeed true education, for by its virtue man becomes the focal centre of divine blessings and the embodiment of the verse “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.”

This is the ultimate goal of the world of humanity.

(ʻAbdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, chapter 3: The Need for and Educator)

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When studying at present, in English, the available Bahá’í writings on the subject of body, soul and spirit, one is handicapped by a certain lack of clarity because not all were translated by the same person, and also there are, as you know, still many Bahá’í writings untranslated. But there is no doubt that spirit and soul seem to have been interchanged in meaning sometimes; soul and mind have, likewise, been interchanged in meaning, no doubt due to difficulties arising from different translations. What the Bahá’ís do believe though is that we have three aspects of our humanness, so to speak, a body a mind and an immortal identity—soul or spirit. We believe the mind forms a link between the soul and the body, and the two interact on each other.

(From a letter dated 7 June 1946 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual)

D. Gradually developed through stages toward maturity

The beginning of the formation of man on the terrestrial globe is like the formation of the human embryo in the womb of the mother. The embryo gradually grows and develops until it is born, and thereafter it continues to grow and develop until it reaches the stage of maturity. Although in infancy the signs of the mind and the spirit are already present in man, they do not appear in a state of perfection, and remain incomplete. But when man attains maturity, the mind and the spirit manifest themselves in the utmost perfection.

(‘Abdu’l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, chapter 51.2)
The long ages of infancy and childhood, through which the human race had to pass, have receded into the background. Humanity is now experiencing the commotions invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax, and must gradually be superseded by the calmness, the wisdom, and the maturity that characterize the stage of manhood. Then will the human race reach that stature of ripeness which will enable it to acquire all the powers and capacities upon which its ultimate development must depend.

Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.

(Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 202-204)

Just as the organic evolution of mankind has been slow and gradual, and involved successively the unification of the family, the tribe, the city-state, and the nation, so has the light vouchsafed by the Revelation of God, at various stages in the evolution of religion, and reflected in the successive Dispensations of the past, been slow and progressive. Indeed the measure of Divine Revelation, in every age, has been adapted to, and commensurate with, the degree of social progress achieved in that age by a constantly evolving humanity.

...Similarly there are periods and stages in the collective life of humanity. At one time it was passing through its stage of childhood, at another its period of youth, but now it has entered its long-predicted phase of maturity, the evidences of which are everywhere apparent.... That which was applicable to human needs during the early history of the race can neither meet nor satisfy the demands of this day, this period of newness and consummation. Humanity has emerged from its former state of limitation and preliminary training. Man must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moral standards, new capacities. New bounties, perfect bestowals, are awaiting and already descending upon him. The gifts and blessings of the period of youth, although timely and sufficient during the adolescence of mankind, are now incapable of meeting the requirements of its maturity." "In every Dispensation," He moreover has written, "the light of Divine Guidance has been focused upon one central theme.... In this wondrous Revelation, this glorious century, the foundation of the Faith of God, and the distinguishing feature of His Law, is the consciousness of the oneness of mankind."

(Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day is Come, p. 117-119)

**E. Five outward and five inward powers**

There are five outward material powers in man which are the means of perception -- that is, five powers whereby man perceives material things. They are sight, which perceives sensible forms; hearing, which perceives audible sounds; smell, which perceives odours; taste, which perceives edible things; and touch, which is distributed throughout the body and which perceives
tactile realities. These five powers perceive external objects. Man has likewise a number of spiritual powers: the power of imagination, which forms a mental image of things; thought, which reflects upon the realities of things; comprehension, which understands these realities; and memory, which retains whatever man has imagined, thought, and understood. The intermediary between these five outward powers and the inward powers is a common faculty, a sense which mediates between them and which conveys to the inward powers whatever the outward powers have perceived. It is termed the common faculty as it is shared in common between the outward and inward powers.


**F. Self has really two meanings: lower and higher**

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 our selves. 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.

(From a letter dated 10 December 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) (in *Compilations of Compilations, v2, Living the Life, #1318*)

**II. HUMAN PURPOSE AND POTENTIAL**

**A. I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee**

O SON OF MAN!
Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty.

(Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic #3)

**B. Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee**

I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth.

(Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá’u’lláh*, CLXXXI p. 313)

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The meaning of the short prayer...is simply that Bahá’u’lláh has put into one brief sentence the very essence of life, which is that we come from one Father, and pass, on the road of life, through tests and trials and experiences, so that our souls may grow; and that the reason for our existence is to learn to know and understand our Creator. As we do this, we will increase our love for Him and will worship Him.

(From letter dated October 5, 1953 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

C. **True station, power and well-being: Justice, Unity and Consultation**

Say: No man can attain his true station except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation.

(Bahá’u’lláh, From a Tablet - translated from the Arabic, #2 in *Consultation: A Compilation*)

D. **Certitude, fear and love**

Let them strive by day and by night to establish within their children faith and certitude, the fear of God, the love of the Beloved of the worlds, and all good qualities and traits.

(*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, no. 95.2*)

E. **Knowledge of God, Love of God and Obey God with Sincere Intention**

Briefly, good deeds become perfect and complete only after the knowledge of God has been acquired, the love of God has been manifested, and spiritual attractions and goodly motives have been attained. Otherwise, though good deeds be praiseworthy, if they do not spring from the knowledge of God, from the love of God, and from a sincere intention, they will be imperfect.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, chapter 84)

Verily, God has chosen you for His love and knowledge; God has chosen you for the worthy service of unifying mankind; God has chosen you for the purpose of investigating reality and promulgating international peace; God has chosen you for the progress and development of humanity, for spreading and proclaiming true education, for the expression of love toward your fellow creatures and the removal of prejudice; God has chosen you to blend together human hearts and give light to the human world. The doors of His generosity are wide, wide open to us; but we must be attentive, alert and mindful, occupied with service to all mankind, appreciating the bestowals of God and ever conforming to His will....

The honor of man is through the attainment of the knowledge of God; his happiness is from the love of God; his joy is in the glad tidings of God; his greatness is dependent upon his servitude to God. The highest development of man is his entrance into the divine Kingdom, and the outcome of this human existence is the nucleus and essence of eternal life. If man is bereft of the divine bestowals and if his enjoyment and happiness are restricted to his material inclinations, what distinction or difference is there between the animal and himself? In fact, the animal’s happiness is
greater, for its wants are fewer and its means of livelihood easier to acquire. Although it is necessary for man to strive for material needs and comforts, his real need is the acquisition of the bounties of God. If he is bereft of divine bounties, spiritual susceptibilities and heavenly glad tidings, the life of man in this world has not yielded any worthy fruit. While possessing physical life, he should lay hold of the life spiritual, and together with bodily comforts and happiness, he should enjoy divine pleasures and content. Then is man worthy of the title man; then will he be after the image and likeness of God, for the image of the Merciful consists of the attributes of the heavenly Kingdom. If no fruits of the Kingdom appear in the garden of his soul, man is not in the image and likeness of God, but if those fruits are forthcoming, he becomes the recipient of ideal bestowals and is enkindled with the fire of the love of God. If his morals become spiritual in character, his aspirations heavenly and his actions conformable to the will of God, man has attained the image and likeness of his Creator; otherwise, he is the image and likeness of Satan. Therefore, Christ hath said, “Ye shall know them by their fruits.”

A man may be a Bahá’í in name only. If he is a Bahá’í in reality, his deeds and actions will be decisive proofs of it. What are the requirements? Love for mankind, sincerity toward all, reflecting the oneness of the world of humanity, philanthropy, becoming enkindled with the fire of the love of God, attainment to the knowledge of God and that which is conducive to human welfare....

The first sign of faith is love. The message of the holy, divine Manifestations is love; the phenomena of creation are based upon love; the radiance of the world is due to love; the well-being and happiness of the world depend upon it. Therefore, I admonish you that you must strive throughout the human world to diffuse the light of love.


The first teaching is that man should investigate reality, for reality is contrary to dogmatic interpretations and imitations of ancestral forms of belief to which all nations and peoples adhere so tenaciously. … Reality is one; and when found, it will unify all mankind. Reality is the love of God. Reality is the knowledge of God. Reality is justice. Reality is the oneness or solidarity of mankind. Reality is international peace. Reality is the knowledge of verities. Reality unifies humanity.


One can hardly imagine what a great influence genuine love, truthfulness and purity of motives exert on the souls of men. But these traits cannot be acquired by any believer unless he make a daily effort to gain them.

(Shoghi Effendi, 19 December 1923 to the Bahá’ís the East -- translated from the Persian)

The guiding principles of the Bahá’ís are: honesty, love, charity and trustworthiness; the setting of the common good above private interest; and the practice of godliness, virtue and moderation. Ultimately, then, their preservation and happiness are assured.

(From a letter dated 18 December 1925 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly, translated from the Persian)
His Teachings imbue us with the abundance of God’s love for His creatures; they impress upon us the indispensability of justice in human relations and emphasize the importance of adhering to principle in all matters; they inform us that human beings have been created “to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization” and that the virtues that befit the dignity of every person are: “forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth”.

(From a letter dated 26 November 1992 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the World)

F. Justice, truth and unity

... justice, as a faculty of the soul, enables the individual to distinguish truth from falsehood and guides the investigation of reality, so essential if superstitious beliefs and outworn traditions that impede unity are to be eliminated; that, when appropriately brought to bear on social issues, justice is the single most important instrument for the establishment of unity; that work performed in the spirit of service to one’s fellow human beings is a form of prayer, a means of worshipping God.

(From a letter dated 2 March 2013 written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of Iran)

III. DEVELOPING SPIRITUALITY

A. Transformation in whole character of mankind both outwardly and inwardly

[I]s 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.

(Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*: The Book of Certitude: par. 270)

B. Nothing whatever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause

Nothing whatever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause than dissension and strife, contention, estrangement and apathy, among the loved ones of God....

(*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, sec. 5, p. 9)

C. Every word of God can instill new life into every human frame

Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth. All the
wondrous works ye behold in this world have been manifested through the operation of His supreme and most exalted Will, His wondrous and inflexible Purpose.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, LXXIV. p. 141-143)

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Bahá’u’lláh wrote voluminously about the purpose of this mysterious force and its transformative effects, but the essence can be drawn from these few perspicuous words: “Through the movement of Our Pen of Glory We have, at the bidding of the Omnipotent Ordainer, breathed a new life into every human frame, and instilled into every word a fresh potency. All created things proclaim the evidences of this worldwide regeneration.” And again: “A new life is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth; and yet none hath discovered its cause or perceived its motive.” And yet again: “He Who is the Unconditioned is come, in the clouds of light, that He may quicken all created things with the breezes of His Name, the Most Merciful, and unify the world, and gather all men around this Table which hath been sent down from heaven.”

(May 1992, tribute to Bahá’u’lláh from the Universal House of Justice, on the occasion of the Centenary Commemoration at Bahjí of the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh)

D. **Man is the supreme Talisman, Education can cause it to reveal its treasures**

Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess. Through a word proceeding out of the mouth of God he was called into being; by one word more he was guided to recognize the Source of his education; by yet another word his station and destiny were safeguarded. The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom….

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, section CXXII, pp. 259–60)

E. **Consort with all men in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship**

Consort with all men, O people of Bahá, in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship. If ye be aware of a certain truth, if ye possess a jewel, of which others are deprived, share it with them in a language of utmost kindliness and good will. If it be accepted, if it fulfill its purpose, your object is attained. If anyone should refuse it, leave him unto himself, and beseech God to guide him. Beware lest ye deal unkindly with him. A kindly tongue is the lodestone of the hearts of men. It is the bread of the spirit, it clotheth the words with meaning, it is the fountain of the light of wisdom and understanding….

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, CXXXII, par. 5)

F. **Could ye apprehend with what wonders of My munificence and bounty I have willed to entrust your souls**

O My servants! 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. Ye would find yourselves independent of all else but Me, and would perceive, with your inner and outer eye, and as manifest as the revelation of My effulgent Name, the seas of My loving-kindness and bounty moving within you. Suffer not your idle fancies, your evil passions, your insincerity and blindness of heart to dim the luster, or stain the sanctity, of so lofty a station . . .

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, sec. CLIII, p. 326-27)

G. General guidance on spiritual development

First and foremost, one should use every possible means to purge one’s heart and motives, otherwise, engaging in any form of enterprise would be futile. It is also essential to abstain from hypocrisy and blind imitation, inasmuch as their foul odor is soon detected by every man of understanding and wisdom. Moreover, the friends must observe the specific times for the remembrance of God, meditation, devotion and prayer, as it is highly unlikely, nay impossible, for any enterprise to prosper and develop when deprived of divine bestowals and confirmation. One can hardly imagine what a great influence genuine love, truthfulness and purity of motives exert on the souls of men. But these traits cannot be acquired by any believer unless he makes a daily effort to gain them... It is primarily through the potency of noble deeds and character, rather than by the power of exposition and proofs, that the friends of God should demonstrate to the world that what has been promised by God is bound to happen, that it is already taking place and that the divine glad-tidings are clear, evident and complete. For unless some illustrious souls step forth into the arena of service and shine out resplendent in the assemblage of men, the task of vindicating the truth of this Cause before the eyes of enlightened people would be formidable indeed. However, if the friends become embodiments of virtue and good character, words and arguments will be superfluous. Their very deeds will well serve as eloquent testimony, and their noble conduct will ensure the preservation, integrity and glory of the Cause of God.

(From a letter dated 19 December 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá’ís of the East - translated from the Persian) (Compilations of Compilations, v2, Living the Life, #1267)

Perhaps the reason why you have not accomplished so much in the field of teaching is the extent you looked upon your own weaknesses and inabilities to spread the message. Bahá’u’lláh and the Master have both urged us repeatedly to disregard our own handicaps and lay our whole reliance upon God. He will come to our help if we only arise and become an active channel for God’s grace. Do you think it is the teachers who make converts and change human hearts? No, surely not. They are only pure souls who take the first step, and then let the spirit of Bahá’u’lláh move them and make use of them. If any one of them should even for a second consider his achievements as due to his own capacities, his work is ended and his fall starts. This is in fact the reason why so many competent souls have after wonderful services suddenly found themselves absolutely impotent and perhaps thrown aside by the Spirit of the Cause as useless souls. The criterion is the extent to which we are ready to have the will of God operate through us.

Stop being conscious of your frailties, therefore; have a perfect reliance upon God; let your heart burn with the desire to serve His mission and proclaim His call; and you will observe how eloquence and the power to change human hearts will come as a matter of course.
The problem with which you are faced is one which concerns and seriously puzzles many of our present-day youth. How to attain spirituality is, indeed, a question to which every young man and woman must sooner or later try to find a satisfactory answer. It is precisely because no such satisfactory reply has been given or found, that modern youth finds itself bewildered, and is being consequently carried away by the materialistic forces that are so powerfully undermining the foundation of man’s moral and spiritual life.

Indeed, the chief reason for the evils now rampant in society is a lack of spirituality. The materialistic civilization of our age has so much absorbed the energy and interest of mankind, that people in general no longer feel the necessity of raising themselves above the forces and conditions of their daily material existence. There is not sufficient demand for things that we should call spiritual to differentiate them from the needs and requirements of our physical existence. The universal crisis affecting mankind is, therefore, essentially spiritual in its causes. The spirit of the age, taken on the whole, is irreligious. Man’s outlook upon life is too crude and materialistic to enable him to elevate himself into the higher realms of the spirit.

It is this condition, so sadly morbid, into which society has fallen, that religion seeks to improve and transform. For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling that 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 to merely accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality, which he can acquire chiefly by the 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 that 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 become 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, already stated, is the very foundation and purpose of the Religion of God.

If we could perceive the true reality of things we would see that the greatest of all battles raging in the world today is the spiritual battle. If the believers like yourself, young and eager and full of life, desire to win laurels for true and undying heroism, then let them join in the spiritual battle—whatever their physical occupation may be—which involves the very soul of man. The hardest and the noblest task in the world today is to be a true Bahá’í; this requires that we defeat not only the current evils prevailing all over the world, but the weaknesses, attachments to the past, prejudices, and selfishnesses that may be inherited and acquired within our own characters; that we give forth a shining and incorruptible example to our fellow-men.
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 downstream 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. Sometimes, of course, people fail because of a test they just do not meet, and often our severest tests come from each other. Certainly the believers should try to avert such things, and if they happen, remedy them through love. Generally speaking nine-tenths of the friends’ troubles are because they don’t do the Bahá’í thing, in relation to each other, to the administrative bodies or in their personal lives.


...as we suffer these misfortunes we must remember that the Prophets of God Themselves were not immune from these things which men suffer. They knew sorrow, illness and pain too. They rose above these things through Their spirits, and that is what we must try and do too, when afflicted. 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.

(From a letter dated 5 August 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) (in Compilations of Compilations, v2, Living the Life, # 1322)

Human frailties and peculiarities can be a great test. But the only way, or perhaps I should say the first and best way, to remedy such situations, is to oneself do what is right. One soul can be the cause of the spiritual illumination of a continent. Now that you have seen, and remedied, a great fault in your own life, now that you see more clearly what is lacking in your own community, there is nothing to prevent you from arising and showing such an example, such a love and spirit of service, as to enkindle the hearts of your fellow Bahá’ís.

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.

(From a letter dated 30 September 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) (in Compilations of Compilations, v2, Living the Life, # 1323)

...the Bahá’ís must, in view of the condition of the world today, stand forth firmly and courageously as followers of Bahá’u’lláh, obeying His Laws, and seeking to build His World Order. Through compromise we will never be able to establish our Faith or win others’ hearts to it. This involves often great personal sacrifice, but we know that, when we do the right thing, God gives us the
strength to carry it out, and we attract His blessing. We learn at such times that our calamity is indeed a blessing.

(From a letter dated 5 May 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers)
(published in Compilations of Compilations, v2, Living the Life, # 1339)

H. Peace of mind and happiness found in spirituality

Peace of mind is gained by the centering of the spiritual consciousness on the Prophet of God; therefore you should study the spiritual Teachings, and receive the Water of Life from the Holy Utterances. Then by translating these high ideals into action, your entire character will be changed, and your mind will not only find peace, but your entire being will find joy and enthusiasm.


The fulfilment of our personal ambitions in life is very seldom what brings us happiness. On the contrary, it usually arouses an entire group of new ambitions. On the other hand, when we immerse ourselves in our duties both as human beings, to our families and our associates, and as Bahá’ís toward the Cause of God and serving it to the best of our ability in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we begin to know what happiness means.(From a letter dated 23 May 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

IV. CAPACITIES DIFFER AND EFFORT IS NEEDED

A. The whole duty of man in this Day is to attain that share of the flood of grace

The whole duty of man in this Day is to attain that share of the flood of grace which Godoureth forth for him. Let none, therefore, consider the largeness or smallness of the receptacle. The portion of some might lie in the palm of a man’s hand, the portion of others might fill a cup, and of others even a gallon-measure.

(Bahá’u’lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 8)

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Thus is it clearly demonstrated that by their essential nature, minds vary as to their capacity, while education also playeth a great role and exerteth a powerful effect on their development.

(Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, section 104.2)

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We are created, spiritually and physically, with different capacities. But as each soul is judged by God according to his own capacities and what he does with them, we see both justice and mercy in the Plan of God.
(From a letter dated 13 March 1950 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

B. Can manifest all the potential forces which inmost true self hath been endowed

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.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, sec. XXVII)

C. Success or failure, gain or loss depend upon our own exertions

The incomparable Creator hath created all men from one same substance, and hath exalted their reality above the rest of His creatures. Success or failure, gain or loss, must, therefore, depend upon man’s own exertions. The more he striveth, the greater will be his progress.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, sec. XXXIV, pp. 81–82)

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The harder you strive to attain your goal, the greater will be the confirmations of Bahá’u’lláh, and the more certain you can feel to attain success. Be cheerful, therefore, and exert yourself with full faith and confidence. For Bahá’u’lláh has promised His Divine assistance to everyone who arises with a pure and detached heart to spread His holy Word, even though he may be bereft of every human knowledge and capacity, and notwithstanding the forces of darkness and of opposition which may be arrayed against him. The goal is clear, the path safe and certain, and the assurances of Bahá’u’lláh as to the eventual success of our efforts quite emphatic. Let us keep firm, and whole-heartedly carry on the great work which He has entrusted into our hands.

(Dated 3 February 1937 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

Personal effort is indeed a vital prerequisite to the recognition and acceptance of the Cause of God. No matter how strong the measure of Divine grace, unless supplemented by personal, sustained and intelligent effort it cannot become fully effective and be of any real and abiding advantage.

(From a letter dated 27 February 1938 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) (in Compilations of Compilations, v2, Living the Life, # 1283)

When the will and the desire are strong enough, the means will be found and the way opened.

(Shoghi Effendi, 21 February 1957) (Living the Life, 38)

D. By the power of God’s might resolve to gain the victory over your own selves
Every man of insight will, in this day, readily admit that the counsels which the Pen of this wronged One hath revealed constitute the supreme animating power for the advancement of the world and the exaltation of its peoples. 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 worshipers. These idols form the obstacle that impedeth man in his efforts to advance in the path of perfection. We cherish the hope that the Hand of Divine power may lend its assistance to mankind, and deliver it from its state of grievous abasement.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, sec. XLIII, p. 93)

E. **He hath endowed every soul with the capacity to recognize the signs of God**

He hath endowed every soul with the capacity to recognize the signs of God. How could He, otherwise, have fulfilled His testimony unto men, if ye be of them that ponder His Cause in their hearts. He will never deal unjustly with any one, neither will He task a soul beyond its power. He, verily, is the Compassionate, the All-Merciful.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, section LII)

F. **Unto each one hath been prescribed a pre-ordained measure**

And now, concerning thy question regarding the creation of man. Know thou that all men have been created in the nature made by God, the Guardian, the Self-Subsisting. Unto each one hath been prescribed a pre-ordained measure, as decreed in God’s mighty and guarded Tablets. All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition. Your own acts testify to this truth.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, sec. LXXVII, p. 149)

G. **In consequence of the efforts consciously exerted, heart can be so cleansed**

There can be no doubt whatever that, in consequence of the efforts which every man may consciously exert and as a result of the exertion of his own spiritual faculties, this mirror can be so cleansed from the dross of earthly defilements and purged from satanic fancies as to be able to draw nigh unto the meads of eternal holiness and attain the courts of everlasting fellowship....

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, section CXXIV)

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It is often difficult for us to do things because they are so very different from what we are used to, not because the thing itself is particularly difficult. With you, and indeed most Bahá’ís, who are now, as adults, accepting this glorious Faith, no doubt some of the ordinances, like fasting and daily prayer, are hard to understand and obey at first. But we must always think that these things are given to all men for a thousand years to come. For Bahá’í children who see these things practiced in the home, they will be as natural and necessary a thing as going to church on Sunday was to the more pious generation of Christians. Bahá’u’lláh would not have given us these things if they would not greatly benefit us, and, like children who are sensible enough to realize their father is wise and does what is good for them, we must accept to obey these ordinances even though at first we may not see
any need for them. As we obey them we will gradually come to see in ourselves the benefits they confer.

(From a letter dated 16 March 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) (in *Compilations of Compilations, v2, Living the Life, # 1321*)

V. HUMAN SOUL, MIND AND SPIRIT

A. What “oppression” is more grievous than that a soul seeking the truth

What “oppression” is more grievous than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it?

(Bahá’u’lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 31)

B. Stations or planes of the soul

As to thy question regarding the soul: Know thou that among the people there are numerous treatises and manifold views as to its stations. Among these are the soul of the kingdom, the soul of the dominion, the celestial soul, the divine soul, the sanctified soul, as well as the benevolent soul, the contented soul, the soul pleasing unto God, the inspired soul, the irascible soul, and the concupiscent soul.


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As to the planes of the soul, its conditions and degrees; the cause of its abasement and exaltation and its origin; know thou that spirit has illimitable stations and innumerable conditions or degrees. But in the world of existence they are generally limited and enumerated as the cohesive mineral (nafs jamádiyyih ma’daniyyih), the growing vegetable (námíyih nabátíyyih), the sensible animal (ḥayáwáníyyih hasásíyyih), the mortal human (násútíyyih ínsáníyyih), the abased soul (ammárih), the self-accusing soul (lawwámih), the inspired soul (mulhamih), the assured soul (muṭma’innih), the contented soul (ráḍíyyih), the approved or accepted soul (marḍíyyih), the perfect soul (kámilih), the soul of Malakút, the soul of Jabarút, and the soul of Láhút.


C. Soul cometh forth following commingling of things and their maturation

Know that the soul which is common to all men cometh forth following the commingling of things and after their maturation, as thou dost observe in the germ: once it hath developed to its predestined stage, God manifesteth the soul that was latent within it. Thy Lord, verily, doeth what He willeth and ordaineth what He pleaseth.
D. Soul of man is exalted above and independent of all infirmities of body or mind

Know thou that the soul of man is exalted above, and is independent of all infirmities of body or mind. That a sick person showeth signs of weakness is due to the hindrances that interpose themselves between his soul and his body, for the soul itself remaineth unaffected by any bodily ailments. Consider the light of the lamp. Though an external object may interfere with its radiance, the light itself continueth to shine with undiminished power. In like manner, every malady afflicting the body of man is an impediment that preventeth the soul from manifesting its inherent might and power. When it leaveth the body, however, it will evince such ascendancy, and reveal such influence as no force on earth can equal. Every pure, every refined and sanctified soul will be endowed with tremendous power, and shall rejoice with exceeding gladness.

Consider the lamp which is hidden under a bushel. Though its light be shining, yet its radiance is concealed from men. Likewise, consider the sun which hath been obscured by the clouds. Observe how its splendor appeareth to have diminished, when in reality the source of that light hath remained unchanged. The soul of man should be likened unto this sun, and all things on earth should be regarded as his body. So long as no external impediment interveneth between them, the body will, in its entirety, continue to reflect the light of the soul, and to be sustained by its power. As soon as, however, a veil interposeth itself between them, the brightness of that light seemeth to lessen.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, sec. LXXX)

E. Soul is the all-unifying agency

...the various organs and members, the parts and elements, that constitute the body of man, though at variance, are yet all connected one with the other by that all-unifying agency known as the human soul, that causeth them to function in perfect harmony and with absolute regularity, thus making the continuation of life possible. The human body, however, is utterly unconscious of that all-unifying agency, and yet acteth with regularity and dischargeth its functions according to its will.

(“Abdu’l-Bahá, Tablet to August Forel)

F. Mind, the soul and spirit

As regards the mind, the soul, and the spirit: In answering such a question Bahá’u’lláh says: “You asked concerning the mind, the self and the soul (or spirit). Know that these three, and similar powers attributed to man, are manifestations of that reality which is the ground of his being ... the difference between these powers is due to the difference of organs through which that reality is manifested, otherwise that reality is the same....” This subject is explained thoroughly in the talks of the Master, especially in “Some Answered Questions”. There are also many Tablets explaining it. You could easily refer to them.

(From a letter dated 11 May 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual)
G. Mental illness is not spiritual, although its effects may hinder

... mental illness is not spiritual, although its effects may hinder and be a burden to an individual who is striving toward spiritual progress.

(26 July 1988 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

VI. TRUTH AND KNOWING

A. The spirit that animateth the human heart is the knowledge of God

The spirit that animateth the human heart is the knowledge of God, and its truest adorning is the recognition of the truth that “He doeth whatsoever He willeth, and ordaineth that which He pleaseth.” Its raiment is the fear of God, and its perfection steadfastness in His Faith. Thus God instructeth whosoever seeketh Him. He, verily, loveth the one that turneth towards Him.

(Bahá’u’lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, CXXXIV: “The first and foremost duty prescribed…”)

B. Fair speech and truthfulness are as a sun above the horizon of knowledge

Fair speech and truthfulness, by reason of their lofty rank and position, are regarded as a sun shining above the horizon of knowledge....

(Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 40)

C. True loss

True loss is for him whose days have been spent in utter ignorance of his self.

(Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 156)

D. Heaven of divine wisdom illumined with luminaries of consultation and compassion

The Great Being saith: The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.

(Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after The Kitáb-i-Aqdas [rev. ed.], (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1982), p. 168)

E. Obliged to describe spiritual reality in terms of sensible things
…when you wish to express the reality of the spirit and its conditions and degrees, you are obliged to describe them in terms of sensible things, since outwardly there exists nothing but the sensible.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 2014), Chapter 16.4)

F. Four criterion for truth

Know, therefore, that what the people possess and believe to be true is liable to error. For if in proving or disproving a thing a proof drawn from the evidence of the senses is advanced, this criterion is clearly imperfect; if a rational proof is adduced, the same holds true; and likewise if a traditional proof is given. Thus it is clear that man does not possess any criterion of knowledge that can be relied upon.7

But the grace of the Holy Spirit is the true criterion regarding which there is no doubt or uncertainty. That grace consists in the confirmations of the Holy Spirit which are vouchsafed to man and through which certitude is attained.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, chapter 83) [Note: Notes from two talks by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Promulgation of Universal Peace add inspiration as a fourth criterion and the 16 August 1912 notes state: “Consequently, it has become evident that the four criteria or standards of judgment by which the human mind reaches its conclusions are faulty and inaccurate. All of them are liable to mistake and error in conclusions. But a statement presented to the mind accompanied by proofs which the senses can perceive to be correct, which the faculty of reason can accept, which is in accord with traditional authority and sanctioned by the promptings of the heart, can be adjudged and relied upon as perfectly correct, for it has been proved and tested by all the standards of judgment and found to be complete. When we apply but one test, there are possibilities of mistake. This is self-evident and manifest.” RC]

G. Characteristics of the spiritually learned

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

For every thing, however, God has created a sign and symbol, and established standards and tests by which it may be known. The spiritually learned must be characterized by both inward and outward perfections; they must possess a good character, an enlightened nature, a pure intent, as well as intellectual power, brilliance and discernment, intuition, discretion and foresight, temperance, reverence, and a heartfelt fear of God. For an unlit candle, however great in diameter and tall, is no better than a barren palm tree or a pile of dead wood…. 
An authoritative Tradition states: “As for him who is one of the learned: he must guard himself, defend his faith, oppose his passions and obey the commandments of his Lord. It is then the duty of the people to pattern themselves after him.”


H. Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues

Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues. Without truthfulness progress and success, in all the worlds of God, are impossible for any soul. When this holy attribute is established in man, all the divine qualities will also be acquired.


I. Truth is found everywhere, but Bahá’u’lláh is the focal center

Truth is found everywhere. It would be indeed difficult to find a creed or a doctrine of any sort in this world that did not possess some facet of truth; this is what Bahá’u’lláh believed and taught. But everything has a source or focal center; the focal centers of truth are not broken up or distributed at random, but, like the sun, are concentrated in one mighty source whom we call a Prophet or Manifestation of God. What we find in each other, and in various creeds, are rays from this source -- but the source is the all-important thing, and to recognize and turn to it gives one an infinitely greater degree of strength and enlightenment than to try to find its rays, one here and one there, scattered about among our fellow men.

(From a letter dated 7 July 1942 written on behalf of the Guardian in response to a question about the status of a number of different religious groups and movements)

J. Bahá’í teachings like a sphere; points poles apart with doctrines that unite

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. One might liken Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings to a sphere; there are points poles apart, and in between the thoughts and doctrines that unite them. 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, we must not be so liberal as to cease to preserve the character and unity of our Bahá’í system, nor fanatical and dogmatic. 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, for anyone who believes in our teachings can become a Bahá’í and they represent all elements of the population.

(From a letter dated 5 July 1947 to an individual believer written on behalf of the Guardian)

‘Ulamá’, from the Arabic ‘alima, to know, may be translated learned men, scientists, religious authorities.
K. Importance of independent investigation

Among the things to be inculcated in children so as to prepare them for the future is the virtue of justice, which underscores the importance of one’s seeing with one’s own eyes and for one’s own self—the importance, in other words, of independent investigation. Without some form of training or orientation one cannot investigate truth. This is so for a scientist who would hardly be able to discover material reality without preparation by some form of training. The open attitude of the Faith to learning should encourage confidence in the friends that they are being endowed with the ability to develop searching minds. The more they study the Teachings the more is this ability awakened and increased. (From a letter dated 31 July 2007 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) (published in the Family Life compilation, March 2008)

L. Action, reflection, consultation and study (ARCS)

… the Bahá’í community has adopted a mode of operation characterized by action, reflection, consultation and study—study which involves not only constant reference to the writings of the Faith but also the scientific analysis of patterns unfolding. Indeed, how to maintain such a mode of learning in action, how to ensure that growing numbers participate in the generation and application of relevant knowledge, and how to devise structures for the systemization of an expanding worldwide experience and for the equitable distribution of the lessons learned—these are, themselves, the object of regular examination.

(From a letter dated 2 March 2013 written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of Iran)

VII. LOVE AND LOVING

A. The source of courage and power

The source of courage and power is the promotion of the Word of God, and steadfastness in His Love.

(Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 156)

B. For love of God and spiritual attraction do cleanse and purify the human heart

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

This love is not of the body but completely of the soul. And those souls whose inner being is lit by the love of God are even as spreading rays of light, and they shine out like stars of holiness in a pure and crystalline sky. For true love, real love, is the love for God, and this is sanctified beyond the notions and imaginings of men.
We must love God, and in this state, a general love for all men becomes possible. We cannot love each human being for himself, but our feeling towards humanity should be motivated by our love for the Father Who created all men.

(From a letter dated 4 October 1950 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) (in *Compilations of Compilations*, v2, Living the Life, #1327)

C. **Kingdom of God is based upon harmony, love, oneness, relationship and union**

In short, the foundation of the Kingdom of God is based upon harmony and love, oneness, relationship and union, not upon differences, especially between husband and wife

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, From a Tablet translated from the Persian)

VIII. **JUSTICE AND WILLING/FEARING/OBEYING**

A. **The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice**

SON OF SPIRIT!
The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behoveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.

(Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 2.)

B. **The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men**

The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men. The ocean of divine wisdom surgeth within this exalted word, while the books of the world cannot contain its inner significance.


C. **If thine eyes be turned towards mercy and justice**

O son of man! If thine eyes be turned towards mercy, forsake the things that profit thee and cleave unto that which will profit mankind. And if thine eyes be turned towards justice, choose thou for thy neighbor that which thou choosest for thyself....

(*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 64)
D. **The essence of wisdom is the fear of God**

The essence of wisdom is the fear of God, the dread of His scourge and punishment, and the apprehension of His justice and decree.

*(Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh revealed after The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 155)*

E. **The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice**

The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice, is for man to free himself from idle fancy and imitation, discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye.

*(Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 157)*

F. **Twin pillars of reward and punishment**

The structure of world stability and order hath been reared upon, and will continue to be sustained by, the twin pillars of reward and punishment. And in another connection He hath uttered the following in the eloquent tongue: Justice hath a mighty force at its command. It is none other than reward and punishment for the deeds of men. By the power of this force the tabernacle of order is established throughout the world, causing the wicked to restrain their natures for fear of punishment. In another passage He hath written: Take heed, O concourse of the rulers of the world! There is no force on earth that can equal in its conquering power the force of justice and wisdom.

*(Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after The Kitáb-i-Aqdas revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Wilmette: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1997), page 164)*

G. **Fear of God is the greatest commander**

O ye My Aghsán, My Afnán and My Kindred! We exhort you to fear God, to perform praiseworthy deeds and to do that which is meet and seemly and serveth to exalt your station. Verily I say, fear of God is the greatest commander that can render the Cause of God victorious, and the hosts which best befit this commander have ever been and are an upright character and pure and goodly deeds.

*(Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh revealed after The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 222)*

H. **No light can compare with the light of justice**

No light can compare with the light of justice. The establishment of order in the world and the tranquility of the nations depend upon it.

I. **Justice is a powerful force**

Justice is a powerful force. It is, above all else, the conqueror of the citadels of the hearts and souls of men, and the revealer of the secrets of the world of being, and the standard-bearer of love and bounty.

(Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, page 32.

J. **Fear of God hath ever been the prime factor in the education of His creatures**

The fear of God hath ever been the prime factor in the education of His creatures. Well is it with them that have attained thereunto!


IX. **ESSENTIAL REQUISITES FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

A. **Power of God can entirely transmute our characters**

The power of God can entirely transmute our characters and make of us beings entirely unlike our previous selves. Through prayer and supplication, obedience to the divine laws Bahá’u’lláh has revealed, and ever-increasing service to His Faith, we can change ourselves.

(From a letter dated 22 November 1941 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual)

B. **The essential requisites for our spiritual growth**

When a person becomes a Bahá’í, actually what takes place is that the seed of the spirit starts to grow in the human soul. This seed must be watered by the outpourings of the Holy Spirit. These gifts of the spirit are received through prayer, meditation, study of the Holy Utterances and service to the Cause of God. The fact of the matter is that service in the Cause is like the plough which ploughs the physical soil when seeds are sown. It is necessary that the soil be ploughed up, so that it can be enriched, and thus cause a stronger growth of the seed. In exactly the same way the evolution of the spirit takes place through ploughing up the soil of the heart so that it is a constant reflection of the Holy Spirit. In this way the human spirit grows and develops by leaps and bounds.

Naturally there will be periods of distress and difficulty, and even severe tests; but if that person turns firmly toward the divine Manifestation, studies carefully His spiritual teachings and receives the blessings of the Holy Spirit, he will find that in reality these tests and difficulties have been the gifts of God to enable him to grow and develop. Thus you might look upon your own difficulties in the path of service. They are the means of your spirit growing and developing. You will suddenly find that you have conquered many of the problems which upset you, and then you will wonder why they should have troubled you at all. An individual must center his whole heart and mind on service to the Cause, in accordance with the high standards set by Bahá’u’lláh. When
this is done, the Hosts of the Supreme Concourse will come to the assistance of the individual, and every difficulty and trial will gradually be overcome.

(From a letter dated 6 October 1954 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) (in *Compilations of Compilations, v2, Living the Life, # 1334*)

Success will crown the efforts of the Friends on the home front, when they meditate on the Teachings, pray fervently for divine confirmations for their work, study the Teachings so they may carry their spirit to the seeker, and then act, and above all persevere in action. When these steps are followed, and the teaching work carried on sacrificially and with devoted enthusiasm, the Faith will spread rapidly.

(From a letter dated 11 March 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) (From the compilation *The Importance of Deepening Our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith*) [161]

It should also be noted that it is neither possible nor desirable for the Universal House of Justice to set forth a set of rules covering every situation. Rather is it the task of the individual believer to determine, according to his own prayerful understanding of the Writings, precisely what his course of conduct should be in relation to situations which he encounters in his daily life. If he is to fulfil his true mission in life as a follower of the Blessed Perfection, he will pattern his life according to the Teachings. The believer cannot attain this objective merely by living according to a set of rigid regulations. When his life is oriented towards service to Bahá’u’lláh, and when every conscious act is performed within this frame of reference, he will not fail to achieve the true purpose of his life.

Therefore, every believer must continually study the Sacred Writings and the instructions of the beloved Guardian, striving always to attain a new and better understanding of their import to him and to his society. He should pray fervently for divine guidance, wisdom and strength to do what is pleasing to God, and to serve Him at all times and to the best of his ability. (From a letter by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer October 17, 1968: *National Bahá’í Review*, No 47, November 1971, p. 3) (*Lights of Guidance*, p. 359)

The Universal House of Justice suggests that through daily prayer, and specially by observing the daily obligatory prayers, through study of the Writings, through active participation in teaching efforts and in the activities of the community, and through constant effort to sacrifice for the Faith you love so well, you will provide a spiritual counterpart to the professional help you will receive from the experts. You should also endeavor to engage in some useful occupation, or train yourself to have such an occupation, as work is itself another means at our disposal, in accordance with our Teachings, to draw nearer to God, and to better grasp His purpose for us in this world.

(From a letter dated 6 April 1976 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)
Bahá’u’lláh has stated quite clearly in His Writings the essential requisites for our spiritual growth, and these are stressed again and again by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His talks and Tablets. One can summarize them briefly in this way:

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.

These points, expressed in other words, have already been conveyed to the friends in Europe by the Counselors, but the House of Justice wishes to stress them, because they represent the path towards the attainment of true spirituality that has been laid down by the Manifestation of God for this age.

(From a letter dated 1 September 1983 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly)

The way to attain that radiant faith to which you aspire is to practice steadfastly the Bahá’í life, the essential requirements of which include daily recitation of the obligatory prayers with pure-hearted devotion; regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures, specifically at least each morning and evening, with reverence, attention and thought; prayerful meditation on the Teachings, so that we may understand them more deeply, fulfil them more faithfully, and convey them more accurately to others; the daily attempt to bring our behavior more into accord with the high standards that are set forth in the Teachings; teaching the Cause of God; and, finally, selfless service in the work of the Cause and in the carrying on of our trade or profession. Those who attend faithfully to these duties grow spiritually, gain courage and become attractive to others.

(From a letter dated 11 July 1994 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

C. Recital each day of an Obligatory Prayer with pure-hearted devotion

Thou hast written concerning obligatory prayer. Such prayer is binding and mandatory for everyone. Most certainly guide all to its observance, because it is like unto a ladder for the souls, a lamp unto the hearts of the righteous, and the water of life from the garden of paradise. It is a clear duty prescribed by the All-Merciful, in the observance of which it is in no wise permissible to be dilatory or neglectful.
Recite the Obligatory Prayer and supplications as much as thou art able, so that day by day thou mayest attain to increased firmness and steadfastness and find greater joy and gladness. Thus the circle of divine knowledge will grow wider, and the fire of the love of God will burn brighter within thee.

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You should rest assured that your strict adherence to the laws and observances enjoined by Bahá’u’lláh is the one power that can effectively guide and enable you to overcome the tests and trials of your life, and help you to continually grow and develop spiritually.

The Guardian particularly appreciates the fact that you have been faithfully observing Bahá’u’lláh’s injunction regarding the recital of the daily obligatory prayers, and have thereby set such a high example before your Bahá’í fellow-youth. These daily prayers have been endowed with a special potency which only those who regularly recite them can adequately appreciate. The friends should therefore endeavor to make daily use of these prayers, whatever the peculiar circumstances and conditions of their life.

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated 23 February 1939 to two believers)

D.  Regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures

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. Fear ye God, O My servants, one and all. Pride not yourselves on much reading of the verses or on a multitude of pious acts by night and day; for 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. 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.

(Bahá’u’lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, para. 149)

O friend of mine! The Word of God is the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable. It hath ever dominated and will continue to dominate the realm of being. The Great Being saith: The Word is the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked. No sooner had but a glimmer of its effulgent splendour shone forth upon the mirror of love than the blessed word
'I am the Best-Beloved' was reflected therein. It is an ocean inexhaustible in riches, comprehending all things. Every thing which can be perceived is but an emanation therefrom. High, immeasurably high is this sublime station, in whose shadow moveth the essence of loftiness and splendour, wrapt in praise and adoration.

(Bahá’u’lláh, Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 173)

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The Holy Word has been extolled by the Prophets of God as the medium of celestial power and the wellspring of all spiritual, social and material progress. Access to it, constant study of it and daily use of it in our individual lives are vital to the inner personal transformation towards which we strive and whose ultimate outer manifestation will be the emergence of that divine civilization which is the promise of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh.

The blessings which flow from the Word of God are implicit in this instruction of Bahá’u’lláh in The Kitáb-Áqdas, the Mother Book of His Revelation: “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.” Again in the same book, He bids us recite the “verses of God every morning and evening.” An astonishing insight as to the sublime influence of the revealed Word is conveyed in this further instruction gleaned from one of His Tablets: “Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men. Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul.”

(From a letter dated 10 July 1989 written by the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies) (in Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1986-2001, #68.1)

E. Prayerful meditation on the Teachings

Praise be to God that the spirit of the Holy Writings and Tablets which have been revealed in this wondrous Dispensation concerning matters of major or minor importance, whether essential or otherwise, related to the sciences and the arts, to natural philosophy, literature, politics or economics, have so permeated the world that since the inception of the world in the course of past Dispensations and bygone ages nothing like it has ever been seen or heard. 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.

(From a letter written by Shoghi Effendi 13 January 1923 to the Bahá’ís of Adhirbayjan) (From the compilation The Importance of Deepening Our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith [69])
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.

(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 30 January 1925 written on his behalf to an individual believer) (in Compilations of Compilations, v2, Living the Life, # 1270)

Ours is the duty to ponder these things in our heart, to strive to widen our vision, and to deepen our comprehension of this Cause, and to arise, resolutely and unreservedly, to play our part, however small, in this greatest drama of the world’s spiritual history.


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. An exact and thorough comprehension of so vast a system, so sublime a revelation, so sacred a trust, is for obvious reasons beyond the reach and ken of our finite minds. We can, however, and it is our bounden duty to seek to derive fresh inspiration and added sustenance as we labor for the propagation of His Faith through a clearer apprehension of the truths it enshrines and the principles on which it is based.


**F. Striving to bring our behavior into accordance with the Teachings**

See III and IV above.

**G. Teaching the Cause of God**

Whoso ariseth among you to teach the Cause of his Lord, let him, before all else, teach his own self, that his speech may attract the hearts of them that hear him. Unless he teacheth his own self, the words of his mouth will not influence the heart of the seeker....

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, sec. 128, p. 277)

Teach thou the Cause of God with an utterance which will cause the bushes to be enkindled, and the call ‘Verily, there is no God but Me, the Almighty, the Unconstrained’ to be raised therefrom. Say: Human utterance is an essence which aspieth to exert its influence and needeth moderation. As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure. As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets. 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.

(From the Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat, published in Tablets of Bahá’u’l-Láh Revealed after The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, pp. 142-43)

O My Name! Utterance must needs possess penetrating power. For if bereft of this quality it would fail to exert influence. And this penetrating influence dependeth on the spirit being pure and the heart stainless. Likewise needeth moderation, without which the hearer would be unable to bear it, rather he would manifest opposition from the very outset. And moderation will be obtained by blending utterance with the tokens of divine wisdom which are recorded in the sacred Books and Tablets. Thus when the essence of one’s utterance is endowed with these two requisites it will prove highly effective and will be the prime factor in transforming the souls of men. This is the station of supreme victory and celestial dominion.


H. Selfless service in the work of the Cause and in our trade or profession

That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’l-Láh, sec. 117, p. 250)

The station of absolute self-surrender transcendeth, and will ever remain exalted above, every other station.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’l-Láh, sec. 160, p. 338)

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Whensoever ye behold a person whose entire attention is directed toward the Cause of God; whose only aim is this, to make the Word of God to take effect; who, day and night, with pure intent, is rendering service to the Cause; from whose behavior not the slightest trace of egotism or private motives is discerned who, rather, wondereth distracted in the wilderness of the love of God, and drinketh only from the cup of the knowledge of God, and is utterly engrossed in spreading the sweet savours of God, and is enamoured of the holy verses of the Kingdom of God--know ye for a certainty that this individual will be supported and reinforced by heaven; that like unto the morning star, he will forever gleam brightly out of the skies of eternal grace. But if he show the slightest taint of selfish desires and self love, his efforts will lead to nothing and he will be destroyed and left hopeless at the last.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 71)

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. We must become entirely selfless and devoted to God so that every day and every moment we seek to do only what God would have us do and in the way He
would have us do it. If we do this sincerely then we shall have perfect unity and harmony with each other. Where there is want of harmony, there is lack of the true Bahá’í Spirit. Unless we can show this transformation in our lives, this new power, this mutual love and harmony, then the Bahá’í teachings are but a name to us.

(From a letter dated 14 February 1925 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) (in Compilations of Compilations, v2, Living the Life, # 1271)

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It is true that by serving the Cause and the community one becomes forgetful of self and attracts divine blessings. However, one must also be moderate and find a balance between service and taking good care of one’s self.

(From a letter dated 29 December 1995 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)