

A. A. Furútan

Bahá'í Education for Children

Book 6

"...for when the bough is green and tender
it will grow in whatever way ye train it."

A Teacher's Guide
For Children 11 Years Old



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**For children
11 years old**

A Teacher's Guide

by A. A. Furútan

**Bahá'í Publishing Trust
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A basic and vital requirement
of these days is the matter of
educating the boys and girls.¹

Shoghi Effendi

Foreword

Bahá'í education for children is one of the most important lines of action for the consolidation of the Bahá'í communities. Through children's education, the whole community can gradually be transformed. Observing the great need for a systematic approach to this task, some fifty years ago Hand of the Cause of God 'Alí-Akbar Furútan developed a set of 13 books for the Bahá'í education of children. The books were written in the Persian language for use in the Bahá'í communities in Írán (Persia) and were known as the *Kitáb-i-Dars-i-Akhlagh* (*Books for Moral Education*). The set included 12 books for children aged 5 to 16–18 and a *Teacher's Manual* on the principles of Bahá'í education. An administrative system was put in place by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Írán to assist generations of Bahá'í children to attend these classes, first as students, and later on in their youth and adulthood, as teachers. Availability of these materials and the efforts of various institutions of the Faith and parents to systematically follow up the progress and assist Bahá'í communities to hold children's classes made children's education a vital activity in almost every Bahá'í community in Írán.

Inspired by the spirit of the Four-Year Plan and the need for the systematisation of human resource development, a group of Bahá'í friends in Zambia decided to translate these books into English for possible use by interested national communities. It was obvious from the outset that the books needed not only to be translated but adapted in many instances. With the full permission of Mr. Furútan, the adaptation and changes made in the books include information on the update of the progress of the Faith, modifications based on cultural considerations and the addition of new topics. We are very grateful to Mr. Furútan for his kind permission to make these changes.

We are also thankful to the friends who translated the books

for their interest and hard work. May their meritorious service be crowned with the bounty of the acceptance of the Blessed Beauty.

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Zambia

Lusaka, June 1998

Note on South African Edition

In preparing this edition, an attempt has been made to carry on the work of improving these books, by making corrections to the text, and reviewing some of the stories in the light of versions already published in the West.

Some of the laws mentioned in the lessons are not yet applicable to all Bahá'ís. There is no harm in teaching these to children, who can be told they will apply at a time in the future when the Universal House of Justice notifies the Friends. Such laws are indicated as 'not yet universally binding' in the lessons.

Editor

Introduction

This is the sixth book in the series intended to serve as a guide to teachers of children's classes. The children should have already completed five years of classes before they begin using this book. By the same token, the teachers would have had the opportunity to examine the previous five books and consider suggestions included in the introductions of these books. These suggestions have, hopefully, assisted them in conveying the specific and general messages of these books to the children. While we refrain from repeating the contents of introductions to previous books here, nevertheless teachers are advised to remind themselves of previous introductions and apply the principles suggested therein to enhance their teaching methods.

This book is intended to discuss in more detail certain aspects of the history of the Faith, in addition to presenting more of the laws of Bahá'u'lláh which will form the backbone of the child's character in the years to come. Several prayers and passages from the Holy Writings are also included in the book. The history of the Faith will serve as an inspiration to the students while the laws and the Holy Writings will provide them with some of the necessary tools needed to better deal with the spiritual tests and difficulties of adult life.

Historical topics span the life of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh in a short and specific format. Brief narratives of the lives of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi are also presented. As much as possible, events described in historical form are taken from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Although this quick scan of the history of the Faith from the Báb to Shoghi Effendi may be seen as not doing justice to its richness, the intention here is to provide the students with an overview of the history of the Faith. It is hoped that students will develop the desire to investigate the historical details after being exposed to some of the main events constituting the history of our Faith. It is therefore advisable to have short historical accounts of various events available for those students who may wish to explore the history of the Faith in more

detail. The Holy Writings deal with specific laws of the Faith carefully selected to combine character building with exposing the students to some of the practical aspects of the laws of the Faith. Topics such as truthfulness and humility are combined with the use of perfume to instil in the students the need not only to act differently from the society around them but also to look different!

As usual, dramatic presentation of what is learnt is encouraged. Historical events presented in this book provide ample inspiration to produce plays and compose songs depicting the sacrifices of the Central Figures of the Faith as well as the heroism displayed by the early believers of the Faith. Production of these plays should start early in the year to allow time for practice and final presentation to the parents or the community as a whole.

A. A. Furútan

Format of a Typical Lesson

Each children's lesson will follow basically the same format. It is helpful for children to be in a structured and familiar environment. They will soon learn the format of the class and will look forward to each part of it. The class will begin with prayers. Then the teacher and children will review what was learned in the previous class. There is a brief break after the review, which includes songs, games, and an opportunity for the teacher to register the students. Following the break, the new lesson will be presented, usually with a brief explanation, a story, and sometimes a quotation or prayer to learn. If the teacher has materials for the children to use, they may then draw and colour pictures related to the lesson. The class will close with a prayer, and then a final suggestion from the teacher, asking the children to do something specific at home. Below is a more detailed description of each part of the class.

1 Opening prayer – Each lesson should begin with an opening prayer. One of the students or the teacher may say a prayer to start the lesson. If more than one student would like to say a prayer, this would also be acceptable, as it is good to encourage the children to do this. If they all know the same prayer, however, this is not the time for each of them to recite it. That can be done later as a class activity.

2 Review of previous lesson – Except for the first two lessons, each lesson will begin by reviewing what was learned in the previous class. The teacher can ask questions to give the children a chance to recall what they have learned.

3 Break: songs, games, stories, student registration and children's cleanliness – After the review, the children will enjoy singing and learning new songs and playing games.

Songs – Children should be encouraged to learn Bahá'í songs. If the teacher knows how to play a guitar or a local musical instrument, this will add to the joyful atmosphere

of the class. Members of the community who play musical instruments may also be invited to play for the children.

Games – If the location and the environment are suitable for simple games, the teacher may play with the children; this will help them not to become bored. Games are already included with each lesson in these materials. Of course, if there is another game that the children enjoy, you should feel free to use it. Choose games that are suitable to the children's age and the environment. Games should be played under the teacher's supervision. If the environment is not suitable for this purpose, the children can be asked to have a break and rest, with the teacher lovingly, patiently and firmly ensuring that they maintain acceptable behaviour.

Stories – The children should also be told stories. The teacher should try to tell the children, whenever appropriate, interesting stories with positive and spiritual morals. Other members of the community can also be invited to the class for the same purpose. Tapes of interesting stories can be played at times.

Student registration – The teacher should take advantage of the break time to register the students in a notebook specially prepared and maintained for this purpose. The teacher can ask the children to listen for their names. When the teacher calls a child's name, the child can stand up to show that he or she is present. When the teacher notices one of the students has been absent for more than one or two sessions, he or she may enquire from the others and from the student's parents, and may help, if possible, to encourage the student to attend regularly.

Children's cleanliness – Another objective of the break time is for the teacher to see if all the students have paid sufficient attention to being clean. Undoubtedly, this must be done with the utmost love, kindness and patience, and without any student feeling, in the slightest way, that he or she is being inspected for cleanliness. The teacher, lovingly and

kindly, tries to look closely at the children to see if any one of them has neglected this important matter. Should it be necessary, the teacher may, without addressing any one given child, initiate a discussion in which the importance of cleanliness and the disadvantages of uncleanness are explained to them.

4 New lesson, story or memorization – This is the new material presented during the lesson. It may be a story that the teacher tells to the children, or a prayer for the children to memorize. Remember that stories should be told in ways that make them interesting to the children. The teacher should learn the story before telling it.

5 Drawing and colouring pictures (if material is available) – Children enjoy drawing and colouring and this should be encouraged whenever possible. A picture can be included with each lesson of the course. If the teacher has paper and colouring materials, he or she may trace the pictures for the children to colour. The parents and the Bahá'í community may be able to contribute such items or help raise funds to buy them.

6 Closing prayer – Each class will end with a closing prayer. It is good to encourage the children to say a prayer. However, if none of them knows one, the teacher may say one. Also, the teacher should lovingly remind the children how to behave when prayers are being said. They should be still and listen quietly and attentively.

7 Teacher's suggestion for the week – Before the children leave, the teacher will remind them of what they have learned and will ask them to do something at home. The teacher may ask them simply to think about what they have learned, or to tell the story they have heard in class to their family, or to practise the prayer they are memorizing, or practise being clean, and so on.

1 Creation: Signs of the Power of God

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, may our souls be a sacrifice to Him, in the book *Some Answered Questions* says:

Nothing is deprived of this benefit; either it is a sign of the mercy of God, or it is a sign of His power, His greatness, His justice, His nurturing providence; or it is a sign of the generosity of God, His vision, His hearing, His knowledge, His grace and so on.

Without doubt each being is the centre of the shining forth of the glory of God.²

The sun and its powerful light, the moon with its shining face, the twinkling stars, the lakes and oceans, the mountains and hills, the gentle breezes coming from different directions, the beautiful scenery, various animals, trees and all other created things around us, each is a sign of the greatness of God. Every wave that moves in the sea and with its full might breaks on the shore, every flash of lightning that brightens the sky and every thunderstorm that rages in the air, every star that brightens the sky in the dark night, every river that flows, every butterfly that moves so gently from one flower to another, each and every thing is a clear sign of the power of God and the greatness of our Creator. (The teacher may invite the children to think and share with the class, other things that show signs of the greatness of God.)

Humankind is the greatest creation from God, and as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

... the centre where the glory of all the perfections of God shine forth – that is to say, for each name, each attribute ...³

Man is therefore the greatest sign of the power of God and is able to sing the praise of God by praying fervently saying:

My God, the Object of my adoration, the Goal of my

desire, the All-Bountiful, the Most Compassionate! All life is of Thee and all power lieth within the grasp of Thine omnipotence. Whosoever Thou exaltest is raised above the angels, and attaineth the station: “Verily, We uplifted him to a place on high!”; and whosoever Thou dost abase is made lower than dust, nay, less than nothing. ⁴

Our kind God, as a sign of His mercy and grace, has provided all we need for our comfort and development and has graciously granted us all kinds of gifts in this world. He has given us air, sunlight, rain, good soil, a brain and the power of thought to discuss things. (The teacher may ask children to think of more gifts from God to us.)

We human beings, as the greatest of God’s creation and as the recipient of God’s mercy, blessings and kindness, should therefore thank Him day and night for His special favour. Bahá’u’lláh, in the *Hidden Words*, says:

Thus, ere thou didst issue from thy mother’s womb, I destined for thee two founts of gleaming milk, eyes to watch over thee, and hearts to love thee. Out of My loving-kindness, ’neath the shade of My mercy I nurtured thee, and guarded thee by the essence of My grace and favour. ⁵

We should not forget for one moment our duty to follow His commandments, laws and teachings. We should always be thankful to God for the gifts He has bestowed upon us and pray constantly to Him saying:

He is God! How can we render Thee thanks, O Lord? Thy bounties are endless and our gratitude cannot equal them. How can the finite utter praise of the Infinite? Unable are we to voice our thanks for Thy favours and in utter powerlessness we turn wholly to Thy Kingdom beseeching the increase of Thy bestowals and bounties. Thou art the Giver, the Bestower, the Almighty. ⁶

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, as you walk, talk, eat and go to school, think about the signs of God and His greatness in this world. You will find many examples.”

2 Messengers of God are Lights of Guidance

At certain points along the shores of oceans and on top of tall buildings and towers, powerful lights are usually fixed. These shining lights act as a guide for the boats and ships sailing in the dark nights in the seas and oceans. They protect the ships and their passengers from becoming lost. Similarly, a powerful torch-light or a light fixed on top of a very high building or on a hill in the middle of a village acts as a guide for those who are walking in the dark night towards the village.

Imagine that you are a passenger in a sailing ship (or a boat on a lake) in the middle of the night, and suddenly a huge and powerful storm begins to toss the ship around. The storm grows stronger and the captain of the ship (or the steersman of the boat) is doing his best to protect the vessel from sinking and tries hard to move the vessel towards the light on the shore. All of a sudden, by chance, the light on the shore, the only sign of guidance to the ship goes out. What happens to the passengers of the ship? What goes through their minds? What calamities and dangers do they start to imagine?

Similarly, imagine that you are among a group of people who are walking in the middle of a rainy and dark night towards a village. The distance is far, the rain is heavy, and the thick bush ahead makes it difficult to follow the path, but there is a shining light from the village giving direction to the group. All of a sudden, the light goes out and they can no longer tell which is the right direction. What do they think? What are the dangers? What are the chances of the group's moving in the wrong direction and getting lost?

God, out of His generosity, compassion and mercy, from the beginning of creation up until now, has given us His Lights of Guidance to illumine the whole world, in order to show humanity the right path. These Lights of Guidance are the Messengers of God (the Prophets), sent to us by God. God has made these

Divine Souls the light and the source of guidance to the world, through Whom we can find the right path and direction to reach our divine destiny. These Lights of Guidance show us the right path through Their laws, ordinances and teachings. If we neglect these divine Lights, these sources of guidance (i.e. if we do not follow the teachings and laws of God given to us through His Messengers), the darkness of heedlessness, waywardness, degradation and ungodliness will envelop the whole world and humanity, as the ship lost in the dark ocean or the group on their dark path to the village, will continue to face endless miseries.

Regarding these Messengers, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

Souls have appeared in the world who were pure and undefiled, who have directed their attention toward God, seeking the reward of God, attaining nearness to the threshold of God, acceptable in the good pleasure of God. They have been the lights of guidance and stars of the Supreme Concourse. Consider these souls, shining like stars in the horizon of sanctity forevermore.⁷

The Messengers of God illumine our minds and thoughts with the revelation of Their divine teachings, laws and ordinances. They guide us to the straight path and to divine salvation and help us avoid heedlessness and all the misery and pain it brings. Whoever recognizes these Messengers of God and follows their teachings, secures the good of this world and of the next for himself, and the doors of true liberty, comfort and salvation open to him.

Dear children, there have been many Messengers of God sent to us. Those that we know through written history include Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Zoroaster, Muḥammad, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. There have also been prophets like Daniel, Isaiah, Elijah, etc. who came under the shadow of a Messenger of God. In addition there must have been other Messengers and prophets of God sent to people in different parts of the world, such as Africa, that we do not know about because their history was not written. This must be so, because we cannot imagine God

creating His people and leaving them without guidance. With the coming of Bahá'u'lláh, we are blessed to live in a day when all these religions of God are truly one and the same.

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, please remember the names of the different Messengers of God and the religions they have established. Think about how lucky we are to have faith in God and to have recognized His Messenger for today, Bahá'u'lláh. To thank God befittingly, we should try to follow His laws as we learn about them.”

3 The Effect of Religion

‘Abdu’l-Bahá relates the following story:

We shall here relate a story that will serve as an example to all. The Arabian chronicles tell how, at a time prior to the advent of Muḥammad, Nu‘man son of Mundhír the Lakhmite – an Arab king in the Days of Ignorance, whose seat of government was the city of Ḥirih – had one day returned so often to his wine-cup that his mind clouded over and his reason deserted him. In this drunken and insensible condition he gave orders that his two boon companions, his close and much-loved friends, Khalid son of Mudallil and ‘Amr son of Mas‘úd-Kaldih, should be put to death. When he awakened after his carousal, he inquired for the two friends and was given the grievous news. He was sick at heart, and because of his intense love and longing for them, he built two splendid monuments over their two graves and he named these the Smeared-With-Blood.

Then he set apart two days out of the year, in memory of the two companions, and he called one of them the Day of Evil and one the Day of Grace. Every year on these two appointed days he would issue forth with pomp and circumstance and sit between the monuments. If, on the Day of Evil, his eye fell on any soul, that person would be put to death; but on the Day of Grace, whoever passed would be overwhelmed with gifts and benefits. Such was his rule, sealed with a mighty oath and always rigidly observed.

One day the king mounted his horse, that was called Maḥmúd, and rode out into the plains to hunt. Suddenly in the distance he caught sight of a wild donkey. Nu‘mán urged on his horse to overtake it, and galloped away at such speed that he was cut off from his retinue. As night approached, the king was hopelessly lost. Then he made out a tent, far off in the desert, and he turned his horse and headed toward it. When he reached the entrance of the tent he asked, “Will you receive a guest?” The owner (who was Ḥanzalá, son of Abí-Ghafráy-i-Ṭá’i) replied, “Yea.” He came forward and helped Nu‘mán to dismount. Then he went to his wife and told her, “There are clear signs of greatness in the bearing of this person. Do your best to show him hospitality, and

make ready a feast.” His wife said, “We have a ewe. Sacrifice it. And I have saved a little flour against such a day.” Hanzalá first milked the ewe and carried a bowl of milk to Nu‘mán, and then he slaughtered her and prepared a meal; and what with his friendliness and loving-kindness, Nu‘mán spent that night in peace and comfort. When dawn came, Nu‘mán made ready to leave, and he said to Hanzalá: “You have shown me the utmost generosity, receiving and feasting me. I am Nu‘mán, son of Mundhír, and I shall eagerly await your arrival at my court.”

Time passed, and famine fell on the land of Tāyy. Hanzalá was in dire need and for this reason he sought out the king. By a strange coincidence he arrived on the Day of Evil. Nu‘mán was greatly troubled in spirit. He began to reproach his friend, saying, “Why did you come to your friend on this day of all days? For this is the Day of Evil, that is, the Day of Wrath and the Day of Distress. This day, should my eyes alight on Qábús, my only son, he should not escape with his life. Now ask me whatever favour you will.”

Hanzalá said: “I knew nothing of your Day of Evil. As for the gifts of this life, they are meant for the living, and since I at this hour must drink of death, what can all the world’s storehouses avail me now?”

Nu‘mán said, “There is no help for this.”

Hanzalá told him: “Respite me, then, that I may go back to my wife and make my testament. Next year I shall return, on the Day of Evil.”

Nu‘mán then asked for a guarantor, so that, if Hanzalá should break his word, this guarantor would be put to death instead. Hanzalá, helpless and bewildered, looked about him. Then his gaze fell on one of Nu‘mán’s retinue, Sharík, son of ‘Amr, son of Qays of Shaybán, and to him he recited these lines: “O my partner, O son of ‘Amr! Is there any escape from death? O brother of every afflicted one! O brother of him who is brotherless! O brother of Nu‘mán, in thee today is a surety for the Shaykh. Where is Shaybán the noble – may the All-Merciful favour him!” But Sharík only answered, “O my brother, a man cannot gamble with his life.” At this the victim could not tell where to turn. Then a man named Qarád, son of Adja‘ the Kalbite stood up and offered himself

as a surety, agreeing that, should he fail on the next Day of Wrath to deliver up the victim, the king might do with him, Qarád, as he wished. Nu'mán then bestowed five hundred camels on Hanzalá, and sent him home.

In the following year on the Day of Evil, as soon as the true dawn broke in the sky, Nu'mán as was his custom set out with pomp and pageantry and made for the two mausoleums called the Smeared-With-Blood. He brought Qarád along, to wreak his kingly wrath upon him. The pillars of the state then loosed their tongues and begged for mercy, imploring the king to respite Qarád until sundown, for they hoped that Hanzalá might yet return; but the king's purpose was to spare the life of Hanzalá, and to requite his hospitality by putting Qarád to death in his place. As the sun began to set, they stripped off the garments of Qarád, and made ready to sever his head. At that moment a rider appeared in the distance, galloping at top speed. Nu'mán said to the swordsman, "Why delayest thou?" The ministers said, "Perchance it is Hanzalá who comes." And when the rider drew near, they saw it was none other.

Nu'mán was sorely displeased. He said, "Thou fool! Thou didst slip away once from the clutching fingers of death; must thou provoke him now a second time?"

And Hanzalá answered, "Sweet in my mouth and pleasant on my tongue is the poison of death, at the thought of redeeming my pledge."

Nu'mán asked, "What could be the reason for this trustworthiness, this regard for thine obligation and this concern for thine oath?" And Hanzalá answered, "It is my faith in the one God and in the Books that have come down from heaven." Nu'mán asked, "What Faith dost thou profess?" And Hanzalá said, "It was the holy breaths of Jesus that brought me to life. I follow the straight pathway of Christ, the Spirit of God." Nu'mán said, "Let me inhale these sweet aromas of the Spirit."

So it was that Hanzalá drew out the white hand of guidance from the bosom of the love of God, and illumined the sight and the insight of the beholders with the Gospel light. After he had in bell-like accents recited some of the divine verses out of the Evangel, Nu'mán and all his ministers sickened of their idols and their idol-worship and were con-

firmed in the Faith of God. And they said, “Alas, a thousand times alas, that up to now we were careless of this infinite mercy and veiled away therefrom, and were bereft of this rain from the clouds of the grace of God.” Then straightway the king tore down the two monuments called the Smearred-With-Blood, and he repented of his tyranny and established justice in the land.⁸

The teacher can discuss with the children how the effect of their religion is to transform people to be honest, just and fair, and what virtues are needed to establish a peaceful society.

Teacher’s Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, we should all try to be as fine in our faith as Ḥanzalá so that our actions speak for themselves. This is the only way we can influence people’s hearts and attract God’s blessings.”

4 Bahá'u'lláh, the Educator of Humanity

At a time when Persia (Írán) was going through its darkest spiritual period and the ignorance of prejudice and disunity were affecting the life and the souls of many in that land and at a time when the fire of animosity was spreading all over the world and the dark clouds of contention, enmity and strife had covered the whole of humanity, the Blessed Beauty, Bahá'u'lláh, appeared in this world and, through the Hand of the Power of God, raised the banner of unity to bring peace and tranquillity to people of all nations. Day and night He counselled humanity and revealed divine guidance and wisdom in order to lead the people into one united family. Addressing the people of the world He said:

O ye men of wisdom among nations! Shut your eyes to estrangement, then fix your gaze upon unity.⁹

And,

The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch.¹⁰

And again,

Strife and contention are, and have ever been, characteristic of the ferocious beasts of the field, while praiseworthy deeds are worthy of man.¹¹

Those who recognized Him and accepted His Cause became known as Bahá'ís. They began the process of spiritual transformation by loving all the peoples of the world and forgetting altogether about estrangement. They tried to increase their understanding that all the people of the world are brothers and sisters and that, as fast as possible, the old and ancient causes of contention and estrangement must be eradicated from the face of the earth and that we must love each other and behave towards each other with utmost fellowship. Before becoming Bahá'ís, people, in some parts of the world, considered those who were from dif-

ferent religions as enemies. They considered them as “unclean” and would wash themselves if they touched people from other religions. They would burn the books of other religions and act towards the followers of other faiths with animosity and cruelty.

Yet the same people, when they accepted Bahá’u’lláh and became Bahá’ís, began to love everyone and become the well-wishers of humanity. They began to see those whom they regarded as enemies, as friends. Some were even able to forgive those who intended to kill them. It is recorded by non-Bahá’í writers that in some cases, when the enemies of the Faith were about to kill one of the Bahá’ís, just before they did so, the Bahá’í would raise his face towards heaven saying, “O God! O Bahá’u’lláh! Please forgive these people for their actions, as they are ignorant and they do not know what they are doing.”

Now imagine, when all the people of the world become Bahá’ís, and become inspired by the same divine source of love and unity, they will all be trying to rid themselves of prejudice, and will strive to live in harmony and concord with one another, and never be the cause of contention and strife. This is how world peace will come, preparing the way for the Kingdom of God to be fully established on earth.

Na‘ím, one of the famous Bahá’í poets in the days of Bahá’u’lláh, wrote:

O members of the human race, we are all one,
The children of the same Just God.
We are each other’s brothers and sisters,
As we are from the same father and mother.
We are all created in the same image,
From the same material and the same water.
No ferocious animal kills its own kind,
Why should we, the human, do this?

For long we suffered from animosity,
Now is the time to enjoy love and fellowship.
We all know that we are the fruits of one tree,

If we do not allow ourselves to be misled
by others.
Whether from Europe, Africa or America,
Or else from Asia, far or near,
We come from the same dust and the
same country,
The citizens of one land and the dwellers of one
city.

Bearing different and diverse names,
Be glad and joyful that we are all the same.
Some are yellow, white, black or red,
We are the same, and part of one creation.
Why such man-made barriers and differences?
When we know we are citizens of the wilderness.
The unity of all religions is the religion
of the world,
And we are the proclaimers of the unity of the
world.

This world is afflicted with pains and calamities,
And the true cure for it is the Cause of Bahá.

The teacher should also discuss the oneness of people from various tribes known to the children, emphasizing the points that the unity of mankind knows no boundaries and that Bahá'ís should not be misled by some of the wrong practices they may see, or the negative things they hear. Their lives should be inspired by an unshakeable belief in the oneness of all humanity.

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, remember as Bahá'ís, we believe in the unity and equality of the people of the world, regardless of tribe, nation, gender, colour of the skin and so on. We love everyone. We regard no one as a stranger.”

5 The Báb, the Forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh

In the world of nature, before the sun rises in the morning from the east, dawn breaks to lighten the horizon and to give the early risers the glad tidings of the coming of the day and the end of the night. It prepares them for a full day of work and activities as it knows that soon the great sun will illumine the whole world.

In the same manner, the Báb, before the rise of the sun of Bahá'u'lláh, enlightened the world with the light of His divine teachings. He especially illumined the hearts of a group of pious and spiritual people who were continuously praying for God's guidance to find the Promised One of All Ages. He, at first indirectly, and later more openly, gave them the glad tidings that soon the great Promised One of All Ages would appear and begin the Era of world unity.

"Báb" is a title that the Báb chose for Himself. "Báb" means "Gate", and by choosing this title for Himself, His intention was to demonstrate to us that He was an intermediary between people and a great Being with divine attributes and power. This great Being, Who was yet to appear, was His beloved by Whose will He [the Báb] moved and acted, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us:

Now what He intended by the term Báb [Gate] was this, that He was the channel of grace from some great Person still behind the veil of glory, Who was the possessor of countless and boundless perfections, by Whose will He moved, and to the bond of Whose love He clung. ¹²

In all His Writings, the Báb clearly explained the station of Bahá'u'lláh. Here are a few of His writings about Bahá'u'lláh:

Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá'u'lláh, and rendereth thanks unto his Lord. ¹³

And again:

O Thou Remnant of God! I have sacrificed myself wholly

for Thee; I have accepted curses for Thy sake, and have yearned for naught but martyrdom in the path of Thy love.¹⁴

Also:

In the year nine, ye will attain the presence of God.¹⁵

As we will learn later, Bahá'u'lláh received Divine Revelation in the year nine of the Bahá'í Era (in 1853, nine years after 1844, the year when the Báb declared His Mission).

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, you will learn later on how the Báb sacrificed His life in order to prepare the people of the world for the coming of Bahá'u'lláh.”

6 History of the Báb

The blessed name of the Báb was Siyyid ‘Alí Muḥammad. His father’s name was Siyyid Muḥammad Riḍá and His mother was Fáṭimih Bagum. He was born on 20 October 1819 in the city of Shíráz in the southern part of Persia (Írán), part of an area called Elam. A few years after His birth, His father passed away and His maternal uncle (Mírzá Siyyid ‘Alí, the merchant) took care of Him. From the early days of his childhood, the Báb became known and distinguished for His divine virtues and perfections. Signs of greatness and wisdom could be witnessed in Him by those who saw Him as a child. There are many stories about the childhood of the Báb and His greatness. Here are three of them:

Hájí Siyyid Javád-i-Karbilá’í had himself encountered the Báb in the years of His childhood. He was normally a resident of Karbilá . . . But he was also a man of travel who embarked now and then on long journeys . . . One of his journeys took him to Shíráz, at the time when the Báb was about nine years old . . . Decades later he recalled that on one of these visits he could hear the intonations of a melodious, enraptured voice, coming from the direction of the alcove reserved for devotions. Before long a boy stepped out of the recess and Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad introduced Him as his nephew who was orphaned. Another visit coincided with the Báb’s return from school. Hájí Siyyid Javád noticed that He held a batch of papers and asked what they were. Very courteously the boy replied that they were His calligraphic exercises. When Hájí Siyyid Javád inspected them he marvelled at their excellence.¹⁶

Not only did the mental faculties of the Báb astound the schoolmaster; the nobility of His character impressed him even more. Indeed all those who were close or near to His person could not but yield to the charm of His being. Years later, when the Báb had raised the call of a new theophany,*

* “theophany” means “manifestation of God to humankind”

the schoolmaster casting his mind over the past told Ḥájí Siyyid Javád-i-Karbilá'í, . . . that Siyyid 'Alí-Muḥammad was always dignified and serene, that He was very handsome and cared little for the pastimes of other boys. Some mornings, the schoolmaster recalled, He was late coming to school and when asked the reason He remained silent. On occasions Shaykh 'Ábid sent other pupils to call at His home and ask Him to come to school. They would return to say that they had found Him at His devotions. One day, when He had come late to school and was questioned by Shaykh 'Ábid, the Báb said quietly that He had been in the house of His 'Grandfather'. Thus do the Siyyids refer to their ancestor the Prophet Muḥammad. To the schoolmaster's remonstrances that He was only a child of ten from whom such rigorous attention to devotions was not demanded, He replied quietly again, 'I wish to be like My Grandfather.'¹⁷

. . . had heard Shaykh 'Ábid relate that it was customary, when the season was clement, for the boys to invite their teacher and their fellow-pupils on Fridays (the day of rest) to an outing in one of the numerous gardens which bordered the city of Shíráz. At times they would find that the Báb had betaken Himself to a shaded, secluded spot in a corner of the orchard to pray and meditate.¹⁸

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, think about these stories and how exceptional the Báb was as a child.”

7 History of the Báb: His Declaration

When the Báb reached adulthood, He began working as a merchant, first in partnership with His uncle and later on independently by Himself, in a port called Búshíhr, situated in the southern part of Persia (Írán), on the Persian Gulf. He became known amongst the people as a pious, righteous and extraordinarily upright person. Though He was engaged in work as a merchant, He spent most of His time in prayer and meditation. Up to the age of twenty-five, the Báb worked as a merchant, manifesting His spiritual qualities and His greatness.

At the age of twenty-five, on the evening of 23 May 1844, the Báb declared His mission to the world and raised His Divine call to the whole of humanity. Some accepted Him as a Prophet of God, but the majority did not recognize Him and His station. Many of the clergy, as the leaders of society who had all the power and privileges, arose as one to stamp out His Cause, while others, mainly from among the clergy of the Shaykhí sect joined Him and began following the Báb's instructions to spread His message.

Immediately after recognizing Him, the new believers, as instructed by the Báb, began travelling around to teach people about the new Faith. The Báb Himself went to Mecca to announce His mission there. On His return from Mecca, when He arrived in Írán, the clergy made so much noise and commotion that they forced the provincial government to persecute some of the followers of the Báb and to send twelve soldiers to arrest the Báb Himself. The soldiers brought the Báb to the governor's office where a large gathering was arranged for people and the clergy. Many people asked various questions of the Báb. He gave them all convincing answers. As the clergy realized the power of His speech and their inability to prove Him wrong, they began again to create noise and commotion and used insulting words. One of the clergy asked the governor's permission to kill the Báb on the spot. The governor instead asked one of his attendants to slap the Báb. He did this so severely that the Báb's turban fell off His head and His face showed the mark of the blow. These events made

many people more curious about the Báb's claim, and they began to investigate and to accept His message. This in turn enraged the clergy, who pressed for more persecution of the Báb, to the extent that the Báb encountered a great deal of hardship and was moved from Shíráz to Işfahán, the large city between Shíráz and the capital. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

. . . On His return, when the news of His arrival at Búshihr reached Shíráz, there was much discussion, and a strange excitement and agitation became apparent in that city. The great majority of the doctors set themselves to repudiate Him, decreeing slaughter and destruction, and they induced Ḥusayn Khán Ajúdán-báshí, who was the governor of Fárs, to inflict a beating on the Báb's missionaries, that is on Mullá Şádiq Muqaddas; then, having burnt his moustaches and beard together with those of Mírzá Muḥammad-ʻAlí of Bárfurúsh and Mullá ʻAlí-Akbar of Ardistán, they put halters on all the three and led them round the streets and bazaars. . . .

The governor of Fárs, acting according to that which the doctors deemed expedient, sent several horsemen, caused the Báb to be brought before him, censured and blamed Him in the presence of the doctors and scholars, and loosed his tongue in the demand for reparation. And when the Báb returned his censure and withstood him greatly, at a sign from the president they struck Him a violent blow, insulting and contemning Him, in such wise that His turban fell from His head and the mark of the blow was apparent on His face. At the conclusion of the meeting they decided to take counsel, and, on receiving bail and surety from His maternal uncle Ḥájí Siyyid ʻAlí, sent Him to His house forbidding Him to hold intercourse with relations or strangers.¹⁹

Before arriving in Işfahán, the Báb sent a letter to the governor of the city and asked for suitable accommodation. The governor asked the leading clergyman of the city to host the Báb. He stayed for forty days with this man, after which He was moved to the house of the governor. The governor was most respectful towards

the Báb and shortly afterwards he recognized His station and became a Bábí. Four months later the governor died. His nephew asked the government officials in the capital (Ṭihrán) what to do with the Báb. The governor in Ṭihrán ordered that the Báb be taken to the capital under special guard. Before He reached Ṭihrán, another order came saying that he should be taken to Tabríz and Máh-Kú. After forty days in Tabríz, the Báb was taken to the prison of Máh-Kú.

Máh-Kú is a town on the border of Írán, Russia and Turkey. In the middle of a range of very high mountains, there is a very strong, well-secured castle. South of the castle is the country of Turkey and to its west is the river Araxes. The famous Persian poet, Hafez, known for his prophetic insight, wrote, years before the appearance of the Báb, this poem alluding to the sacredness of this area. He says:

O zephyr,* shouldst thou pass by the banks of the Araxes,
implant a kiss on the earth of that valley and make fragrant
thy breath. Hail, a thousand times hail, to thee, O abode
of Salmá!²⁰

The Báb Himself addressing the Sháh of Írán, Muḥammad Sháh, regarding the castle of Máh-Kú says:

I swear by the Most Great Lord! Wert thou to
be told in what place I dwell, the first person
to have mercy on Me would be thyself. In the
heart of a mountain is a fortress [Máh-Kú] . . .

In this mountain I have remained alone, and have come
to such a pass that none of those gone before Me have
suffered what I have suffered, nor any transgressor endured
what I have endured!²¹

The residents of Máh-Kú were of the Kurdish tribe. They were followers of a sect of Islám called Sunní. Sunnis and Kurds were known to be traditionally against the Shí'ah sect, the spiritual leaders and those who were of the lineage of the Prophet Muḥammad. Máh-Kú was also very remote and isolated with little com-

* “zephyr” means “soft gentle breeze”

munication with other cities in Írán. Since the Báb was a Siyyid, one from the lineage of the Prophet Muḥammad, and since His mission began amongst, and many of His early believers were Shí'ahs, the government of Persia exiled the Báb to Máh-Kú, thinking that owing to the animosity between the people of Máh-Kú and Shí'ahs, and because of the remoteness of the region, people would forget about the Báb and His Cause would die out. This had the opposite effect. More and more people from that region accepted the Báb. The clergy of the region, concerned about the rapid spread of the Báb's Message among the people of Máh-Kú, demanded that the government transfer the Báb from Máh-Kú to Chihríq. The government exiled the Báb to Chihríq and put Him under the charge of a person by the name of Yaḥyá Khán. Yaḥyá Khán was known to be a very cruel and harsh man. After three months in Chihríq, the Báb was brought to Tabríz, the capital city of that province. A gathering of the government officials and the clergy was arranged, to which the Báb was brought for questioning. They asked many questions of the Báb and received eloquent and convincing answers. After a long time of interrogating Him, they could not point out anything to which He had not given an indisputable answer. This made the clergy angry and they had the Báb beaten. After this, they returned Him to exile in Chihríq and increased the severity of His imprisonment. In addition, they began a plan through which people in all the cities and villages of Írán were incited to systematically eradicate the followers of the Báb (the Bábís). They were encouraged to kill them, loot their belongings and burn their homes. Many Bábís were killed as a result of this plan.

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, think of how prejudiced and biased the clergy were at the time of the Báb. Tell the story of the Báb to your family.”

8 History of the Báb: His Martyrdom

Some two years and three months after the Báb was imprisoned in Chihríq, an order came from the Prime Minister of Násiri'd-Dín Sháh to bring the Báb from Chihríq to Tabríz and to ask the clergy of Tabríz to issue a religious ruling as to what should be done with the Báb. He was brought to Tabríz and taken before a few of the top religious leaders. The religious leaders ruled that the Báb must be killed. The government asked Sám Khán, a Christian regiment leader from the town of Urúmíyyih, to execute the command in a public place. The government officials removed the Báb's turban and cloak and brought Him to a central square in the middle of town and kept Him imprisoned in one of the rooms in the square. On the second day, the Báb, together with a young man by the name of Muḥammad-'Alí, who was a follower of the Báb and was also sentenced to death, was handed over to Sám Khán, the head of the army regiment. 'Abdu'l-Bahá relays the story:

. . . An iron nail was hammered into the middle of the staircase of the very cell wherein they were imprisoned, and two ropes were hung down. By one rope the Báb was suspended and by the other rope Aqá Muḥammad-'Alí, both being firmly bound in such wise that the head of that young man was on the Báb's breast. The surrounding housetops billowed with teeming crowds. A regiment of soldiers ranged itself in three files. The first file fired; then the second file, and then the third file discharged volleys. From the fire of these volleys a mighty smoke was produced. When the smoke cleared away they saw that young man standing and the Báb seated by the side of His amanuensis Aqá Siyyid Ḥusayn in the very cell from the staircase of which they had suspended them. To neither one of them had the slightest injury resulted.

Sám Khán the Christian asked to be excused; the turn of service came to another regiment, and the chief of the far-rāshes withheld his hand. Aqá Ján Big of Khamsíh, colonel

of the bodyguard, advanced; and they again bound the Báb together with that young man to the same nail. The Báb uttered certain words which those few who knew Persian understood, while the rest heard but the sound of His voice.

The colonel of the regiment appeared in person: and it was before noon on the twenty-eighth day of Sha‘bán in the year [A.H.] one thousand two hundred and sixty-six*. Suddenly he gave orders to fire. At this volley the bullets produced such an effect that the breasts [of the victims] were riddled, and their limbs were completely dissected, except their faces, which were but little marred.²²

Teacher’s Suggestion for the Week

“Dear Children, this is a sad story of how people can be so heartless as to kill the Messenger of God. This has happened before in history. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is another example. Please think of why the Báb sacrificed His life in this way.”

* 9 July 1850

9 History of the Bábís after the Martyrdom of the Báb

Below is a brief example of how much cruelty some of the followers of the Báb were subjected to, after the Báb was executed and how bravely and steadfastly they withstood the persecution.

Martyrdom of Quddús

Quddús was one of the most prominent followers of the Báb. The people of Bárfurúsh (the home town of Quddús in the north of Irán near the Caspian Sea) instigated by the clergy, descended on Quddús. While they did their utmost to belittle Quddús and to inflict harm, Quddús sought forgiveness for them and asked God to lead them aright.

“Forgive, O my God,” he cried, “the trespasses of this people. Deal with them in Thy mercy, for they know not what we already have discovered and cherish. I have striven to show them the path that leads to their salvation; behold how they have risen to overwhelm and kill me! Show them, O God, the way of Truth, and turn their ignorance into faith.”²³

Quddús was slapped by one individual who ridiculed him with great viciousness. Quddús said to him:

“May God requite you for your deed, inasmuch as you have helped to add to the measure of my afflictions.”²⁴

When Quddús reached the site of his martyrdom, he proclaimed aloud:

“Would that my mother were with me, and could see with her own eyes the splendour of my nuptials!★”²⁵

Quddús had hardly spoken these words when the mob attacked him and, with shameful savagery, cut him into pieces which they threw into the fire they had made for the purpose. That night, a clergyman who had the love of the Faith in his heart arranged for the collection and subsequent burial of the remains of Quddús.

* “nuptials” means “wedding”. Quddús’ mother wanted him to marry.

Martyrdom of Sulaymán Khán

Sulaymán Khán was the son of one of the early followers of the Báb. During the events of 1853, which will be studied later, Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, the king of Persia, asked one of his ministers, Hájibu'd-Dawlih, to question Sulaymán Khán on the incident of the year 1853. Nabil relates the story as follows:

“. . . Hájibu'd-Dawlih had been commanded by Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh to enquire into the complicity of the accused, and, if assured of his innocence, to induce him to recant. If he submitted, his life was to be spared and he was to be detained pending the final settlement of his case. In the event of his refusal, he was to be put to death in whatever manner he himself might desire.

“The investigations of Hájibu'd-Dawlih convinced him of the innocence of Hájí Sulaymán Khán. The accused, as soon as he had been informed of the instructions of his sovereign, was heard joyously exclaiming: “Never, so long as my life-blood continues to pulsate in my veins, shall I be willing to recant my faith in my Beloved!” . . . He was asked to determine the manner in which he wished to die. “Pierce holes in my flesh,” was the instant reply, “and in each wound place a candle. Let nine candles be lighted all over my body, and in this state conduct me through the streets of Ṭihrán. Summon the multitude to witness the glory of my martyrdom, so that the memory of my death may remain imprinted in their hearts and help them, as they recall the intensity of my tribulation, to recognize the Light I have embraced. After I have reached the foot of the gallows and have uttered the last prayer of my earthly life, cleave my body in twain and suspend my limbs on either side of the gate of Ṭihrán, that the multitude passing beneath it may witness to the love which the Faith of the Báb has kindled in the hearts of His disciples, and may look upon the proofs of their devotion.”

“Hájibu'd-Dawlih instructed his men to abide by the expressed wishes of Hájí Sulaymán Khán, and charged me

to conduct him through the market as far as the place of his execution. As they handed to the victim the candles they had purchased, and were preparing to thrust their knives into his breast, he made a sudden attempt to seize the weapon from the executioner's trembling hands in order to plunge it himself into his flesh. "Why fear and hesitate?" he cried, as he stretched forth his arm to snatch the knife from his grasp. "Let me myself perform the deed and light the candles." Fearing lest he should attack us, I ordered my men to resist his attempt and bade them tie his hands behind his back. "Let me," he pleaded, "point out with my fingers the places into which I wish them to thrust their dagger, for I have no other request to make besides this."

"He asked them to pierce two holes in his breast, two in his shoulders, one in the nape of his neck, and the four others in his back. With stoic calm he endured those tortures. Steadfastness glowed in his eyes as he maintained a mysterious and unbroken silence. Neither the howling of the multitude nor the sight of the blood that streamed all over his body could induce him to interrupt that silence. Impassive and serene he remained until all the nine candles were placed in position and lighted.

"When all was completed for his march to the scene of his death, he, standing erect as an arrow and with that same unflinching fortitude gleaming upon his face, stepped forward to lead the concourse that was pressing round him to the place that was to witness the consummation of his martyrdom. . . ."

". . . Enveloped by the flames, he walked as a conqueror might have marched to the scene of his victory . . . He was still alive when his body was hewn into two halves with a hatchet. The praise of his Beloved, despite such incredible sufferings, lingered upon his lips until the last moment of his life.' . . ."²⁶

These are just two of the stories of how the early believers demonstrated their faith, courage and steadfastness in the path

of God and withstood the cruel onslaught of the enemies of the Faith. Thousands of believers gave their lives to show their belief in the new religion that the Báb had brought.

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, please try to remember these stories and share them with your family.”

10 Messengers of God Have All Been Opposed

After the martyrdom of the Báb, His followers (the Bábís) became the target of new attacks, persecutions and animosity. From all directions they were attacked and persecuted. It is difficult for a sound mind to believe how men, through ignorance, could ill-treat a group of people who believed in the unity of God and the unity of His people, wished for nothing but the well-being of all the peoples of the earth and were ready to give their lives for their beliefs.

If we study the history of past religions, we see that this has been the pattern, and all the previous Prophets faced opposition from the people of their time.

Every Prophet of God has had to suffer from the opposition of the people He has been sent to teach. In fact, this opposition is one of the signs of a Prophet. People do not want to change their ways. The clergy always fear that they will lose their wealth and their power over the people.

The following stories tell how Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad faced the opposition of the people.

Moses, who was an Israelite was adopted as a baby and brought up in the palace of Pharaoh, in Egypt. I am sure that you all have heard the story of Moses. When Moses had grown older, He was angry with the Egyptians because they treated the Israelites, who were their slaves, very cruelly. One day Moses saw an Egyptian beating an Israelite and in a sudden rage He grabbed the Egyptian and killed him in anger. He then realized what a terrible thing He had done and feared for His life, so He ran away to the land of Midian. He had many years of hardship earning His living as a shepherd. One day, as He was minding the sheep, He noticed that a bush was on fire, but it was not being burnt up. He moved closer to have a better look. Suddenly He heard a voice say, "Moses, take off your shoes for this is holy ground." He realized that God was speaking to him. God told Him that He was God's Messenger

and that He was to return to Egypt and bring the Jews [Israelites] out of Egypt.

Moses felt that He was not worthy to be a Manifestation of God and hesitated for some time to accept this responsibility, but in the end He knew that He would have to obey God.

When He returned to Egypt the people did not accept Him, and opposed Him. Moses was able to prove to them that God had given Him special powers and that God wanted Him to help the Israelites to leave Egypt and go to the Promised Land. They were not happy. They were slaves, but they felt that that was better than going out into the unknown wilderness with Moses.

Moses went to Pharaoh and told him that God had commanded Him to take the Israelites out of Egypt to the desert. Of course Pharaoh did not want his slaves to go so he refused. Then God sent many terrible plagues to the people of Egypt. Finally, Pharaoh let the Israelites go and they all packed up and followed Moses into the desert. Even then Moses' troubles were not over, as Pharaoh changed his mind again and sent his army to pursue them and bring them back. Then Moses raised His rod and the waters of the Red Sea parted and the Israelites were able to cross. Just as they reached the other side and the Egyptian soldiers were close behind, the sea came rushing back again, and all the Pharaoh's soldiers were drowned. It is hard to believe, but that was not the end of the opposition to Moses. The Israelites opposed Him again and again, but He knew that God wanted Him to persevere, and He carried on.

When Jesus started teaching the people, at first they said, "Who does he think he is, trying to teach us? Isn't he that poor carpenter from Nazareth? We won't listen to him." Later, gradually, people began to listen to His Message, and many people believed in Him. The priests began to fear that Jesus was becoming too popular. They did not like the things He was teaching, even though what He was teaching was the truth. Their opposition became so great that they asked the Roman governor to arrest Him and try Him. Eventually He was condemned to death, and they nailed Him to the cross.

When Muḥammad was forty years old He received His call from God to teach the people. When He told His wife about His experience on Mount Hira she believed that it was a call from God. Over the next four years His cousin 'Alī and other friends and relatives also accepted that He was a Messenger from God.

At a large gathering of His own tribe He announced His mission. Again, He announced His mission to a general meeting of the inhabitants of Mecca, His home town. He called on them to leave the worship of idols and to worship the one true God. This announcement aroused the fiercest opposition from the leading citizens of Mecca, because the Kaaba in Mecca was the centre of the worship of idols. If people stopped worshipping the idols in Mecca the city would lose its importance and its wealth.

The people rose to destroy Muḥammad and His followers, and Muḥammad was saved only by the protection of His uncle. Many of His followers suffered cruel torture and had insults thrown at them.

Muḥammad's message was simple: There is only one God. Muḥammad was God's Messenger to mankind. Idol worship was prohibited. Some barbaric actions, such as the burying of live baby daughters, were prohibited. The Muslims had to purify their thoughts and actions and prepare for the Day of Judgement.

The lives of Muḥammad and His followers were continually threatened by the angry inhabitants of Mecca. His family and tribe were called upon to stop Muḥammad from teaching the new religion. Soon after, His wife died, followed by the death of the uncle who protected Him. It was the custom for anyone who found an opportunity to kill a person who was not under the protection of a clan, to do so, and so now Muḥammad expected to be killed at any time by anyone who came across Him. He sought the protection of a nearby clan but they rejected Him. Finally He felt humiliated but accepted the protection of the clan of Banū-Nawfal, who was an idol worshipper.

For a year or two Muḥammad continued to live in Mecca and quietly taught people the new Faith. At the time of the annual pilgrimage to worship the idols, Muḥammad met members of the Yathrib tribes. Many

of them believed in His Message. From then on Muḥammad sent many of His followers to go and live in the safety of Yathrib. Eventually the Meccans made a plan to kill Muḥammad one night. He knew what they were plotting and escaped to Yathrib. From then on Yathrib was called Medina. The date of this flight to Medina was AD 622, and this date is considered to be the beginning of the Faith of Islám.

This was not the last of His problems, as many of the tribes of Medina also opposed Him. There were wars between Muḥammad's followers and the tribes of Mecca, but that story is too long to be told here.

These stories tell how terrible was the opposition to the Prophets of God.

The teacher may either add or instead tell the story of the sufferings of other Messengers of God, with whom the children may be more familiar.

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear Children, please think of the hardship all the Messengers of God have been subjected to and why they have all willingly accepted these tribulations.”

11 Review of Lessons 1, 2 and 3

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, think how kind God is to send His Messengers; He does this because He loves us. For us to show our love to Him, we should try to obey Him and follow His commandments.”

12 Review of Lessons 4 and 5

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, see how God prepared humanity before sending Bahá'u'lláh to us. He has come to show us the right path: the path to peace. We, as Bahá'ís, should obey Him and promote His Faith through our actions.”

13 Review of Lessons 6, 7, 8 and 10

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, the story of the Báb, His love for Bahá'u'lláh and His sacrifice of His life is a great lesson for the whole humanity. Please try to think about the history of our Faith.”

14 The Rise of Bahá'u'lláh, Part 1

After the Martyrdom of the Báb, many of His followers were killed, many were arrested and many scattered while some, intimidated by their enemies, were forced to be silent. Many of the believers became discouraged with this situation and some, losing hope, involved themselves in actions that were against the spirit of the Faith of the Báb.

The only person who, in the midst of all this confusion and the attacks on the Bábís, was able calmly and steadfastly to face the enemies of the Faith was Bahá'u'lláh. He was the only One Who could encourage the Bábís to remain steadfast in their Covenant with the Báb and face opposition from the clergy and the government with courage, assured of final victory. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is quoted as saying that if Bahá'u'lláh had not risen to revive the Bábís, the Faith of the Báb would have disappeared from the face of the earth. Bahá'u'lláh became known as the source of hope for the Bábís. Finally, the King, Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, ordered the arrest and imprisonment of Bahá'u'lláh. For four months, Bahá'u'lláh was kept in a terrible underground prison called the Black Pit. They put a very heavy chain on His neck and put His ankles in fetters. Bahá'u'lláh has described the prison as follows:

We were consigned for four months to a place foul beyond comparison. As to the dungeon in which this Wronged One and others similarly wronged were confined, a dark and narrow pit were preferable. Upon Our arrival We were first conducted along a pitch-black corridor, from whence We descended three steep flights of stairs to the place of confinement assigned to Us. The dungeon was wrapped in thick darkness, and Our fellow-prisoners numbered nearly a hundred and fifty souls: thieves, assassins and highwaymen. Though crowded, it had no other outlet than the passage by which We entered. No pen can depict that place, nor any tongue describe its loathsome smell. Most of these men had neither clothes nor bedding to lie on.²⁷

‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited His Father Bahá’u’lláh in this prison and He wrote:

They sent me with a black servant to His blessed presence in the prison. The warden indicated the cell, and the servant carried me in on his shoulders. I saw a dark, steep place. We entered a small, narrow doorway, and went down two steps, but beyond those one could see nothing. In the middle of the stairway, all of a sudden we heard His blessed voice: ‘Do not bring him in here’, and so they took me back. We sat outside, waiting for the prisoners to be led out. Suddenly they brought the Blessed Perfection out of the dungeon. He was chained to several others. What a chain! It was very heavy. The prisoners could only move it along with great difficulty. Sad and heart-rending it was.²⁸

After four months, they released Bahá’u’lláh, but forced Him to leave His native country (Persia) and go into exile in ‘Iraq, together with His family and some of His followers. He and His followers lived in Baghdád, in ‘Iraq, for more than ten years. During this time, although He was the target of many attacks and onslaughts from the enemies of the Faith, He became very popular and loved by the majority of the people.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

Now Bahá’u’lláh so acted that the hearts of this sect were drawn towards Him, while most of the inhabitants of ‘Iraq were reduced to silence and speechlessness, some being amazed and others angered.²⁹

He spent all His time in Baghdád in training and educating the Bábís and helping them to regain their fame as people of virtue and spiritual insight. In a short period of time, under His leadership, the Bábís became known again as people who were focused on acquiring virtues and spreading peace amongst men, and as people who would like to disassociate themselves from any misconduct. The same people who were disenchanted with the Bábís because of the misconduct of a small group, seeing the positive

change because of the influence Bahá'u'lláh exerted on them, came to love them again and talked about them as people of God and spirit. More and more, people talked about the new spirit generated amongst the Bábís. Their fame spread in Írán and 'Iraq. People started to see a new movement and a revitalizing power amongst the Bábís. This was a cause of concern for the clergy in Írán and Baghdád. They gave the Sháh of Írán the idea that if Bahá'u'lláh stayed in Baghdád, His influence would become stronger and stronger and many more people would follow Him, and Bahá'u'lláh's influence was a danger to the government of Írán. Eventually, the government of Írán, under the influence of the clergy, asked the government of the Ottoman Empire to transfer Bahá'u'lláh from Baghdád to the capital of the Ottoman Empire, Constantinople (also known as Istanbul). On 21 April 1863, Bahá'u'lláh left Baghdád for a beautiful garden just outside the city where He stayed for twelve days. On the ninth day (29 April.1863) His family joined Him. On the twelfth day (2 May 1863) He and His family, along with a group of His followers, left Baghdád for Constantinople.

On the afternoon of the first day of His arrival in this garden (Tuesday 21 April 1863), Bahá'u'lláh openly proclaimed His Mission to many people present in the garden. He proclaimed Himself to be the Promised One of all Ages and the One the Báb had foretold, and for Whose coming He had prepared the way. Because of this great event, the proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, the whole period of the twelve days is known as the Festival of Riḍván and it is the greatest celebration for the Bahá'ís. "Riḍván" means "paradise". The first, the ninth and the twelfth days of Riḍván (21, 29 April and 2 May) are Bahá'í Holy Days when Bahá'ís should suspend work.

Bahá'u'lláh and His family were escorted by government officials and soldiers all the way from Baghdád to Constantinople. During this journey the government officials showed the utmost respect and consideration to Bahá'u'lláh and His family. On their arrival in Constantinople, Bahá'u'lláh and His family were taken to a small inn, designated by the government for their accommo-

dition. After three days in the small and crowded inn, they were moved to a house. Everyone was respectful and courteous to Bahá'u'lláh, although a small group of people were against Him and showed signs of antagonism. Some of the distinguished inhabitants of Constantinople came to pay special visits to Him. Bahá'u'lláh stayed in Constantinople for four months, and it was a relatively quiet time. He never complained to anyone and did not visit any government officials to complain about His situation or His exile. He advised others who were mistreated to appeal to the government for justice, but for Himself He said He was ready to receive whatever was His destiny and He never asked for help from anyone. After a few months, another order came from the court of the Ottoman Empire, decreeing that Bahá'u'lláh must be exiled to Adrianople. This was His third exile.

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, remember the days of Riḍván. They are the most joyous and the greatest Bahá'í celebrations. We should celebrate them every year. They are 21 and 29 April and 2 May. We should not work on these days, as they are our Holy Days.”

15 The Rise of Bahá'u'lláh, Part 2

Bahá'u'lláh, His family and believers left Constantinople and arrived in Adrianople twelve days later. The spiritual and virtuous manner in which the believers lived in Adrianople won the love and respect of the dwellers of that city, as well as of the government officials, in a short period of time. Bahá'u'lláh Himself began visiting the learned, the clergy and the distinguished and famous people of Adrianople. His fame spread everywhere and people began to show their respect towards Him. The enemies of Bahá'u'lláh however continued to plot against Him. Suddenly the central government of the Ottoman Empire sent an order that Bahá'u'lláh was, once again, to be exiled. They gave no explanation, and did not say where He was to be sent. The companions of Bahá'u'lláh all wanted to be allowed to accompany Him on this journey, but the government would not grant this request. One of Bahá'u'lláh's followers, who could not imagine being separated from Bahá'u'lláh, cut his throat with his own hands in protest at being separated from Bahá'u'lláh. Eventually the government agreed that the majority of Bahá'u'lláh followers could accompany Him. They were sent from Adrianople by sea to the prison-city of 'Akká. Bahá'u'lláh had prophesied and forewarned the believers that they would soon be exiled from Adrianople to 'Akká, and be imprisoned there. The followers were happy to see His words come true and were delighted to be with Him on this journey.

Bahá'u'lláh and His companions, who numbered about seventy, were taken directly to the prison of 'Akká, immediately after arriving in this remote town. There was absolutely no facility for comfort in this prison. The food given to the prisoners was so bad that after a while they asked the prison officials if they could buy their own. Permission was granted. In the early days of their stay, the children cried all the time because of the bad conditions in the prison. No one could sleep properly. Friends were affected and became bed-ridden with fever and other diseases. Three of the friends died shortly after their arrival in the prison, and their

souls took their flight to the Abhá Kingdom. This imprisonment lasted for two years, during which time, none of the Bahá'ís were allowed to leave the prison except for a few of the believers, who, once a day could go out accompanied by the soldiers to purchase food.

Bahá'ís from Írán and 'Iraq who heard about the exile of Bahá'-u'lláh made long journeys on foot, on pilgrimage to 'Akká to see Bahá'u'lláh. These Bahá'ís, after coming all the way from distant countries, sometimes walking for four or five months, were not allowed to enter 'Akká. Unable to visit Him, these dear friends would go around the city wall and stand at a place where they could see Bahá'u'lláh through the window of His prison from afar. They loved Him so much that they were satisfied with seeing Him from a distance and then returning home. Bahá'u'lláh waved to them through this window.

Bahá'u'lláh, in one of His Tablets, has described the calamities He and His followers faced in this prison. The following is a description of the situation based on one of His Tablets:

After arrival in 'Akká, soldiers surrounded Us and everyone, man, woman, child and adult, was housed in the Prison. For the first night, no one was allowed to eat or drink anything. The soldiers were so preoccupied with themselves that they forgot all about Us. They did not even respond to a request for water. We had lived in Adrianople for five years, and all the dwellers of that city, learned and ignorant, poor and rich, testified to the purity of the motive of Our mission and the righteousness of the actions of Our people. In spite of this, it is now some time that we have all been incarcerated in this Prison.

One of Our followers cut his own throat, as he could not bear to see Us in the hands of the oppressors. During Our journey from Adrianople to 'Akká, We had to change Our ship three times, and you can imagine how much the children suffered in this process. After We left the ship the soldiers denied permission for Our friends to accompany

Us. They persisted with this in spite of the fact that one of the four, disturbed by separation from Us, threw himself in the sea. These are some of the hardships that have been inflicted upon Us and still the prison authorities persist in their injustice. Every day there is a new affliction. Every day the whole group is given three loaves of bread, bread that cannot be eaten by anyone. From the foundation of the world until the present day a cruelty such as this hath neither been seen nor heard of.³⁰

‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes the situation of the prison as follows:

. . . At that time the air of ‘Akká was poisonous, and every stranger, immediately following his arrival, would be taken ill. Muḥammad-Báqir and Muḥammad-Ismá‘íl came down with a violent ailment and there was neither doctor nor medicine to be had; and those two embodied lights died on the same night, wrapped in each other’s arms. They rose up to the undying Kingdom, leaving the friends to mourn them forever. There was none there but wept that night.

When morning came we wished to carry their sanctified bodies away. The oppressors told us: “You are forbidden to go out of the fortress. You must hand over these two corpses to us. We will wash them, shroud them and bury them. But first you must pay for it.” It happened that we had no money. There was a prayer carpet which had been placed under the feet of Bahá’u’lláh. He took up this carpet and said, “Sell it. Give the money to the guards.” The prayer carpet was sold . . . and that sum was handed over. But the two were never washed for their burial nor wrapped in their winding sheets; the guards only dug a hole in the ground and thrust them in, as they were, in the clothes they had on; so that even now, their two graves are one, and just as their souls are joined in the Abhá Realm, their bodies are together here, under the earth . . .³¹

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, think of the suffering of Bahá'u'lláh. Why did He suffer so much for forty years? Yes, to save humanity from suffering. To show us the path to peace and unity. We should follow His teachings and laws if we want our happiness in this world and the next.”

16 Review of Some Bahá'í Laws

In spite of unimaginable sufferings, some of which were mentioned in the previous lessons, Bahá'u'lláh dedicated His time to guiding the people of the earth and to educating humanity for a better and a peaceful world. He guided the world to the Kingdom of God through His laws and teachings. Some of these laws were studied in previous years, and some will be studied this year. Before learning about new laws, let us review the ones we have so far learned. Here is a list of them. The teacher should discuss each one of them briefly in case there are students who either have forgotten or did not attend the previous year's class.

1 Acquiring Virtues:

To be a Bahá'í is to be the embodiment of all human virtues.³²

2 Love and Unity:

The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch.³³

3 Cleanliness:

And although bodily cleanliness is a physical thing, it hath, nevertheless, a powerful influence on the life of the spirit.³⁴

Be ye the very essence of cleanliness amongst mankind.³⁵

. . . in every aspect of life, purity and holiness, cleanliness and refinement, exalt the human condition and further the development of man's inner reality.³⁶

4 Truthfulness:

Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues.³⁷

5 To wake up early in the morning:

Blessed is he who, at the hour of dawn, centring his thoughts on God, occupied with His remembrance . . .³⁸

6 Kindness to animals:

Unless ye must,
Bruise not the serpent in the dust,
How much less wound a man.
And if ye can,
No ant should ye alarm,
Much less a brother harm.³⁹

7 Obeying parents:

There are also certain sacred duties on children toward parents, which duties are written in the Book of God, as belonging to God. The (children's) prosperity in this world and the Kingdom depends upon the good pleasure of parents, and without this they will be in manifest loss.⁴⁰

8 Avoiding discord, contention and strife:

. . . beware lest your hands or tongues cause harm unto anyone among mankind.⁴¹

Strife and contention are, and have ever been characteristic of the ferocious beasts of the field, while praiseworthy deeds are worthy of man.⁴²

9 Avoiding bad language:

Verily I say, the tongue is for mentioning what is good, defile it not with unseemly talk.⁴³

10 Not entering a home without the owner's permission:

. . . no man should enter the house of his friend save at his friend's pleasure, nor lay hands upon his treasures . . .⁴⁴

11 Good manners:

O people of God! I admonish you to observe courtesy, for above all else it is the prince of virtues.⁴⁵

12 To see competent doctors in times of illness:

Resort ye, in times of sickness, to competent physicians
. . .⁴⁶

13 Avoiding association with the ungodly:

O Son of Dust! Beware! Walk not with the ungodly and seek not fellowship with him, for such companionship turneth the radiance of the heart into infernal fire.⁴⁷

. . . The company of the ungodly increaseth sorrow, whilst fellowship with the righteous cleanseth the rust from off the heart . . .⁴⁸

14 Reading the Holy Writings every morning and evening:

Recite ye the verses of God every morn and eventide.⁴⁹

15 To be kind to all:

The followers of the one true God hold dear not only human beings but animals as well. Man should, therefore, be kind to both human beings and animals and try to the extent possible to protect animals and provide for their comfort.⁵⁰

16 Not shaving one's head:*

Shave not your heads; God hath adorned them with hair . . .⁵¹

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, try to think about all of these laws and remember to practise them in your lives.”

* Not yet universally binding.

17 Some More Laws

Use of perfume and rose water:

One of the other teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is to use rose water and pure perfume. In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* He says:

Make use of rose-water, and of pure perfume; this, indeed, is that which God hath loved from the beginning that hath no beginning . . .⁵²

The use of rose water and perfume is a token of observing refinement and immaculate cleanliness, and every Bahá'í should try to do so as far as possible. In previous years you learned how much the importance of cleanliness has been emphasized in the Bahá'í Faith. As Bahá'ís, we should try to be clean at all times. Bahá'u'lláh says:

Be ye the very essence of cleanliness amongst mankind.⁵³

In no other religion has so much emphasis has been given to cleanliness. When we try to be clean at all times, making sure that our clothes are also clean, and use perfume whenever possible, everyone who comes near us will be aware of the wonderful fragrance of the perfume.

Kissing of hands is forbidden:

Bahá'u'lláh, in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, says:

The kissing of hands hath been forbidden in the Book. This practice is prohibited by God, the Lord of glory and command.⁵⁴

According to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, it is forbidden for Bahá'ís to kiss the hands of another person. In the past, the clergy had their hands stretched out when moving amongst the people, for the people to rush forward and kiss them as a sign of respect. People did so and regarded it as an act which brought spiritual reward. In addition, the younger ones kissed the hands of the elder ones to show respect. People did the same with kings, to show their submission to the kings. The kissing of hands is an act that brings

one person to a lower station than that of another and also brings pride to the heart of the other. Bahá'u'lláh disapproved of this and forbade the Bahá'ís to kiss the hands of others.

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, remember the laws that we learned today. Talk about them with your family and others.”

18 It is Forbidden to Lie

One of the laws of Bahá'u'lláh is that lying is forbidden and the Bahá'ís are told to be strictly truthful. In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* He says:

Adorn . . . your tongues with absolute truthfulness . . .⁵⁵

And again He says:

The tongue hath been created to bear witness unto My truth; defile it not with falsehood.⁵⁶

‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

The individual must be educated to such a high degree that he would rather have his throat cut than tell a lie, and would think it easier to be slashed with a sword or pierced with a spear than to utter calumny . . .⁵⁷

If we put all the possible sins one can commit on one side of the scale, and the sin of telling lies on the other side, telling lies will be heavier. A Bahá'í should avoid telling an untruth no matter how small it may be. He must say the truth under all circumstances. Truthfulness is like a lamp that helps us find our way in a dark night, while lying is like a deep well that one falls into. Truthfulness causes you to prosper, while lying creates problems and eventually destroys a person. All the religions of the world have praised truthfulness and have forbidden lying.

A Bahá'í should never deviate from the truth and should never defile his or her tongue with lying. We should remember what Bahá'u'lláh says:

Adorn . . . your tongues with absolute truthfulness. . .⁵⁸

Children, today we have a story about telling the truth. I am now going to tell you the story of Wamboka, a boy who used to look after cattle.

Wamboka was not an honest boy, and he suffered very much because he did not tell the truth. Wamboka lived in a house deep in a forest which

had many wild animals. He had a sister whom he loved very much. Her name was Nguyo. Wamboka did not want Nguyo to be hurt by the animals. Therefore he taught her a special song, and told her that he would sing it if he was ever chased by the animals. He told her to be ready at such times to open the door and then quickly close it after him.

Wamboka used to look after the cattle every day. Some days he would become very tired of the work. One day, when he was very bored, he thought he would fool Nguyo. He decided that he would pretend to be chased by wild animals. When returning home, he began to shout, “Animals, animals!” and sing the special song from far away. When Nguyo heard the shouting and singing, she quickly ran to the door. She thought the wild animals were going to hurt her brother. She opened the door quickly but she saw him standing there laughing “Ha, ha, ha! I fooled you.”

The next day, Wamboka went to look after the cattle again. In the evening as he was returning home, he once again began to shout and sing the song.

Nguyo thought that this time the wild animals were really going to eat her brother. Once more she rushed to open the door. Again the boy started to laugh at his sister. Nguyo was very angry and said, “Next time I will not open the door for you, and the animals may really hurt you.”

For the next few days Wamboka continued to play the same trick, until one day, when he was returning home, he suddenly saw that some wild animals were coming towards him. He began to run and shout “Animals, animals!” and shout the special song. Nguyo was cooking supper. She could hear from far away, but she thought that he was playing his game again. She continued cooking and cleaning the house. By now the voice of Wamboka could be heard very loudly. He was not singing the song but he was shouting as if something were very wrong. Suddenly Nguyo could not hear her brother any more. She went to the window and looked outside. What do you think she saw? Her poor brother had been eaten by the animals.⁵⁹

Ask a boy and a girl to act out the story of Wamboka and Nguyo. This can be a good activity for the Nineteen-Day Feast.

Trustworthiness:

One of the laws of Bahá'u'lláh is to be trustworthy and to avoid the use of things that do not belong to us without the owner's full permission. There are several Writings of Bahá'u'lláh where He emphasizes the importance of trustworthiness. Some are given here as an example:

. . . trustworthiness. Verily it is the door of security for all that dwell on earth and a token of glory on the part of the All-Merciful.⁶⁰

Trustworthiness is the greatest portal leading unto the tranquillity and security of the people. In truth the stability of every affair hath depended and doth depend upon it.⁶¹

O people of Bahá! Trustworthiness is in truth the best of vestures for your temples and the most glorious crown for your heads. Take ye fast hold of it at the behest of Him Who is the Ordainer, the All-Informed.⁶²

If the loved ones of God are not adorned with the ornaments of trustworthiness, truthfulness and uprightness, they harm not only themselves but humanity in general.⁶³

What shall faith and piety avail if trustworthiness be lacking? Of what consequence can they be? What benefit or advantage can they confer?⁶⁴

And Shoghi Effendi says:

. . . a person who is not adorned with the ornaments of virtue, sanctity and morality, is not a Bahá'í, even though he may call himself one and be known as such.⁶⁵

Trustworthiness is regarded very highly in the Bahá'í Faith. A trustworthy person is regarded as having a very high station in the sight of God and is very dear to God. A trustworthy and honest person is someone who is never greedy for other people's posses-

sions and will never use, or interfere with, other people's belongings, even to the extent of a mustard seed.

Bahá'u'lláh says Bahá'ís should be able to pass through a town full of gold without paying any attention to it. Bahá'ís should be the essence of trustworthiness and faithfulness. They must adhere to the laws of Bahá'u'lláh in this regard. A trustworthy person is loved by everyone and has a great station in this world and the next. In one His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh says:

He is My true follower who, if he come to a valley of pure gold, will pass straight through it aloof as a cloud, and will neither turn back, nor pause. Such a man is, assuredly, of Me . . . And if he met the fairest and most comely of women, he would not feel his heart seduced by the least shadow of desire for her beauty. Such an one, indeed, is the creation of spotless chastity. Thus instructeth you the Pen of the Ancient of Days, as bidden by your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful.⁶⁶

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, remember that God, Who loves us very much, wants us to be always truthful and trustworthy. This is the foundation of our spiritual growth. Never tell a lie. Never be dishonest.”

19 Not Being Proud

One of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is for us not to be pompous and proud. In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* He says:

Let no man exalt himself above another.⁶⁷

This means that no one should consider himself to be better than others. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

Egoism is the cause of all discord. No affliction in the realm of existence compareth to selfishness, which causeth man to prefer himself above others. It giveth rise to arrogance and heedlessness. All adversities, when carefully studied, are caused by selfishness. We must avoid it and prefer others to ourselves. . . . Egoism causeth man to utterly forget God.⁶⁸

A Bahá'í following divine guidance should always struggle with his ego and avoid looking down on others. We should be humble and see others as equal to, or even better than, ourselves. When we do something good or achieve success, we should be grateful to God, Who has helped us to achieve it. We should not become proud of ourselves, thinking we are better than others.

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, one of the worst qualities for a person to have is to be proud of himself or herself. A self-centred person is someone that thinks he or she is greater than others. Pride is bad, and God does not like those who are proud of themselves. A proud person will never enter the presence of God. Please try to remember this.”

20 God Knows the Secrets of Our Hearts

Bahá'u'lláh, in one of His Tablets, has stated clearly that God knows and is aware of the secrets of our hearts. There is nothing that can be kept hidden from Him. He knows what we think. He can read our thoughts. He hears what we say. He watches and observes what we do. He is with us and sees us, whether we are in public or in private, with others or alone, in the open air or in hiding. He sees what we do and hears what we say under all circumstances. He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing, and the All-Knowing. In the *Hidden Words* He says:

O Heedless Ones! Think not the secrets of hearts are hidden, nay, know ye of a certainty that in clear characters they are engraved and are openly manifest in the holy Presence.⁶⁹

Again, He says:

. . . Verily I say, whatsoever ye have concealed within your hearts is to Us open and manifest as the day . . .⁷⁰

In another Tablet He says:

Think not the deeds ye have committed have been blotted from My sight. By My beauty! All your doings hath My Pen graven with open characters upon tablets of chrysolite.⁷¹

As Bahá'ís therefore, whatever we say, we should know that God is listening and watching us at that moment. We should learn, since we know that there is nothing that God does not know, and nothing that God does not see. This helps us to do the right thing at all times and protects us.

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, never forget that God is always with us. He sees us, He watches us and He listens to us. We should obey His laws in order to please Him.”

21 Learning a Prayer

O Divine Providence! All existence is begotten by Thy bounty; deprive it not of the waters of Thy generosity, neither do Thou withhold it from the ocean of Thy mercy. I beseech Thee to aid and assist me at all times and under all conditions, and seek from the heaven of Thy grace Thine ancient favour. Thou art, in truth, the Lord of bounty, and the Sovereign of the kingdom of eternity.⁷²

Bahá'u'lláh

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, please say this prayer at home regularly.”

22 The Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'u'lláh, during His life on this earth, encountered many difficulties, exiles, calamities, hardships and problems – all at the hands of the enemies of the Faith. For almost fifty years of His life, Bahá'u'lláh guided the people of the world to the path of God, leading them to peace and tranquillity. He showed them how the unity of the entire human race can be established and how people all over the world can live together in harmony, love and co-operation.

Bahá'u'lláh accepted all the sufferings that came to Him on this earth to save humanity from all the contention, animosity, fighting and hatred that have caused the people of the world to suffer throughout history. At the age of seventy-four, on 29 May 1892, He passed away at Bahjí, a place outside 'Akká where He lived for the last few years of His earthly life. His human temple disappeared from this earth and from our mortal eyes, but He continues to guide and assist us from the Abhá Kingdom.

The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, where His body is buried, is in the vicinity of Bahjí and is the most holy spot on earth and the Point of Adoration for the Bahá'ís. On His ascension, leaders of different religions and civic authorities sent telegrams to 'Abdu'l-Bahá expressing their condolences, acknowledging the greatness of Bahá'u'lláh and expressing their respect and sorrow.

On the ninth day after the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá called nine believers residing in Haifa together. He explained to them that shortly before Bahá'u'lláh had passed away, He had given him a sealed Book and instructed Him to open it and to read and proclaim its contents openly after He had passed away. 'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasized that He Himself was not aware of the contents of the Book. After this explanation, He unsealed the Book and gave it to one of the friends to read. In the afternoon of that day, He asked that the Book be read to a large gathering of the Friends at the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.

This Book is called the *Book of My Covenant* and is written by

Bahá'u'lláh as His will. It is a very sacred and important book and has much important advice for us. Here is a selection from it.

The aim of this Wronged One in sustaining woes and tribulations, in revealing the Holy Verses and in demonstrating proofs hath been naught but to quench the flame of hate and enmity, that the horizon of the hearts of men may be illumined with the light of concord and attain real peace and tranquillity.⁷³

We exhort you, O peoples of the world, to observe that which will elevate your station.⁷⁴

Verily I say, the tongue is for mentioning what is good, defile it not with unseemly talk.⁷⁵

Great and blessed is this Day – the Day in which all that lay latent in man hath been and will be made manifest. Lofty is the station of man, were he to hold fast to righteousness and truth and to remain firm and steadfast in the Cause.⁷⁶

O ye that dwell on earth! The religion of God is for love and unity; make it not the cause of enmity or dissension.⁷⁷

Conflict and contention are categorically forbidden in His Book.⁷⁸

The Will of the divine Testator is this: It is incumbent upon the Aghşán,* the Afnán and My Kindred to turn, one and all, their faces towards the Most Mighty Branch.⁷⁹

The teacher should assist the students to discuss the meanings of each of the passages.

In the last passage, Bahá'u'lláh clearly appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Centre of His Covenant, as His successor and as the One to Whom all the Bahá'ís must turn to for guidance. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was known by many titles such as “The Greatest Branch” and “The Mystery of God” but He never used them and preferred to be called “'Abdu'l-Bahá”, which means “the servant of Bahá”.

* “Aghşan” refers to sons and daughters of Bahá'u'lláh; “Afnán” refers to relatives of the Báb.

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, please note that Bahá'u'lláh, out of His love for us, and to protect His Cause from disunity and to save us from the harmful effects of being disunited, gave us ‘Abdu'l-Bahá to take care of us and to guide us.”

23 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was born in Ṭīhrán, Írán (Persia), at midnight on 23 May 1844. This is the same night that the Báb declared His mission. From the early days of His life, people could see signs of greatness, courage and intelligence in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He was not eager to play in the usual children’s games. He never went to school to receive normal education. One of the princes from the West asked ‘Abdu’l-Bahá what His interests were during His childhood. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá replied that when He was a child, He was eager to listen to and memorize the Writings of the Báb.

Up to the age of eight, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had a very comfortable and privileged life. As Bahá’u’lláh began to face opposition and hardship from His enemies, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, though a child, began to be a partner in all these sufferings. He was with Bahá’u’lláh most of the time. At the age of twelve, when He was in Baghdád, He conversed and discussed with the learned and renowned clergymen, surprising everyone with His knowledge and perfection. People called Him “the Wise Youth”. When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was asked how He learned so much at such a tender age, He said that He had learned from His Father, Bahá’u’lláh.

Physically, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was handsome. He was kind, generous and considerate, sharing whatever He had with others. He was a source of consolation and tranquillity to the household of Bahá’u’lláh, doing His utmost to take the weight of the adversities and sufferings from the shoulders of the family members. He was loved by everyone, Bahá’í and non-Bahá’í, young and old, and by people from all levels of society. Everyone would refer to Him as “the Master”. On arrival in ‘Akká, the residents showed a great deal of hostility to Bahá’u’lláh and His companions and considered that causing suffering to them was an act which attracted spiritual rewards. Gradually, as a result of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s forbearance, wisdom, love, kindness and generosity, the enemies of the Faith calmed down and reduced the intensity of their opposition.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá spent very little on Himself. He ate a very simple meal only twice a day. He wore simple clothing and never looked

for comfort for Himself. He was kind and affectionate to children. He loved flowers and plants and would often give flowers to the pilgrims.

Here is a summarized translation of a description of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá by a prominent individual:

‘Abdu’l-Bahá is of average height and beautiful in appearance. He has a handsome and attractive countenance. He wears a white cloak and a special small turban on His head. He is strongly built and His face illumined. His long hair is at times on His shoulders and at times hidden under His small turban. Signs of certitude and assurance can be seen in His countenance. He has gentle yet penetrating eyes. On His wide forehead can be seen signs of suffering and adversities undergone in the path of God. He loves all and shows infinite kindness to everyone. From His countenance and appearance, signs of kindness, courage and magnanimity are obvious, to the extent that there is no one who, on seeing Him, would not testify to His greatness, His illumined nature and sensitive heart. No one would hesitate to acknowledge that all the virtues and qualities that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has are God-given, not things learnt or acquired as a human being.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has a gentle and breathtaking smile which attracts the hearts. His way of walking reminds us of the movement of a kind and powerful King among His people, Whose heart is filled with love for His people. He is very kind to the people and shows utmost love and gentleness to His relatives as a kind father would do. His movements and bearing indicate His power and might. His tongue is eloquent and powerful. His silence and meditation are at times long and deep. His vision is world-embracing. Whoever sees Him, sees in Him a loving and compassionate elder brother. He takes care of the poor and the orphan and is kind to every human being, calling everyone to arise and dedicate his life to the service of humanity. He

spent all His energy serving humanity and the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. At the age of sixty-eight, during His eight-month visit to North America, 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave over six hundred talks spreading the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh in that vast continent.

Look at Me, follow Me, be as I am,
'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Teach the Cause . . .

Love mankind . . .

Serve your Lord . . .

Sacrifice . . .

Look at Me . . .⁸⁰

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the Perfect Exemplar for the Bahá'ís. We should learn about Him and His life and try to follow Him as much as we can. 'Abdu'l-Bahá will help anyone who tries to live a Bahá'í life.”

24 Learning a Prayer

O Lord! Guard Thou the children that are born in Thy day, are nurtured at the breast of Thy love, and fostered in the bosom of Thy grace. O Lord, they are verily young branches growing in the gardens of Thy knowledge, they are boughs budding in Thy groves of grace. Grant them a share of Thy generous gifts, make them to thrive and flourish in the rain that raineth from the clouds of Thy bestowal. Thou art verily the Generous, the Clement, the Compassionate!⁸¹

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Teacher’s Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, say this prayer at home and share it with others whenever you can.”

25 Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

The teacher should discuss these Writings with the children and help them understand them. The children should be encouraged to take part in explaining the meaning of these writings.

. . . Be thou a summoner to love, and be thou kind to all the human race. Love thou the children of men and share in their sorrows. Be thou of those who foster peace. Offer thy friendship, be worthy of trust. Be thou a balm to every sore, be thou a medicine for every ill. Bind thou the souls together. Recite thou the verses of guidance. Be engaged in the worship of thy Lord, and rise up to lead the people aright. Loose thy tongue and teach, and let thy face be bright with the fire of God's love. Rest thou not for a moment, seek thou to draw no easeful breath. Thus mayest thou become a sign and symbol of God's love, and a banner of His grace.⁸²

Never is it the wish of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to see any being hurt, nor will He make anyone to grieve; for man can receive no greater gift than this, that he rejoice another's heart. I beg of God that ye will be bringers of joy, even as are the angels in Heaven.⁸³

Think ye at all times of rendering some service to every member of the human race. Pay ye no heed to aversion and rejection, to disdain, hostility, injustice: act ye in the opposite way. Be ye sincerely kind, not in appearance only. Let each one of God's loved ones centre his attention on this: to be the Lord's mercy to man; to be the Lord's grace. Let him do some good to every person whose path he crosseth, and be of some benefit to him. Let him improve the character of each and all, and reorient the minds of men.⁸⁴

O army of God! Through the protection and help vouchsafed by the Blessed Beauty – may my life be a sacrifice to His loved ones – ye must conduct yourselves in such a

manner that ye may stand out distinguished and brilliant as the sun among other souls. Should any one of you enter a city, he should become a centre of attraction by reason of his sincerity, his faithfulness and love, his honesty and fidelity, his truthfulness and loving-kindness towards all the peoples of the world, so that the people of that city may cry out and say: “This man is unquestionably a Bahá’í, for his manners, his behaviour, his conduct, his morals, his nature, and disposition reflect the attributes of the Bahá’ís” Not until ye attain this station can ye be said to have been faithful to the Covenant and Testament of God. For He hath, through irrefutable Texts, entered into a binding Covenant with us all, requiring us to act in accordance with His sacred instructions and counsels.⁸⁵

Teacher’s Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, think about these wonderful writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Meditate on what they mean and try to practise them in your lives.”

26 Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith

Forty days after the ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His Will and Testament was read in a gathering of the Bahá'ís in the Holy Land. By this means, it became known that Shoghi Effendi was appointed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Guardian of the Faith to whom all the Bahá'ís must turn for guidance. The Greatest Holy Leaf, the daughter of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sister, sent the following telegram to the Bahá'í world.

IN WILL SHOGHI EFFENDI APPOINTED GUARDIAN OF CAUSE
AND HEAD OF HOUSE OF JUSTICE. INFORM AMERICAN
FRIENDS. GREATEST HOLY LEAF.⁸⁶

And

WILL AND TESTAMENT FORWARDED SHOGHI EFFENDI
CENTRE CAUSE. GREATEST HOLY LEAF.⁸⁷

Here is a selection from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament regarding Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith.

O my loving friends! After the passing away of this wronged one, it is incumbent upon the Aghşán (Branches), the Afnán (Twigs) of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abhá Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi – the youthful branch branched from the two hallowed and sacred Lote-Trees and the fruit grown from the union of the two offshoots of the Tree of Holiness, – as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, he unto whom all the Aghşán, the Afnán, the Hands of the Cause of God and His loved ones must turn. He is the Interpreter of the Word of God . . .

. . . whoso opposeth him hath opposed God . . . whoso disputeth with him hath disputed with God . . . My object is to show that the Hands of the Cause of God must be ever watchful and so soon as they find anyone beginning to

oppose and protest against the Guardian of the Cause of God, cast him out from the congregation of the people of Bahá and in no wise accept any excuse from him.⁸⁸

According to the text of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament, Shoghi Effendi is the Guardian of the Cause of God and the centre of guidance to whom all the Bahá’ís must turn after the ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Several times in His Will and Testament, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá commands the Bahá’ís to obey Shoghi Effendi. He clearly explains that whosoever opposes him has opposed God; whosoever denies him has denied God; and whosoever does not obey him has not obeyed God. He further emphasizes that whosoever denies Shoghi Effendi must be excommunicated from the Bahá’í community.

When Shoghi Effendi was still a very young child, one of the American Bahá’í ladies wrote ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, that in the Bible it is mentioned that “a little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11: 6) and asked if this meant a “real, living child who exists”. In reply, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sent her a Tablet as follows:

O Maidservant of God!

Verily, that child is born and is alive and from him will appear wondrous things that thou wilt hear of in the future. Thou shalt behold him endowed with the most perfect appearance, supreme capacity, absolute perfection, consummate power and unsurpassed might. His face will shine with a radiance that illumines all the horizons of the world; therefore forget this not as long as thou dost live inasmuch as ages and centuries will bear traces of him.

Upon thee be greetings and praise.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá ‘Abbás⁸⁹

From ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reply, we note the following important points.

- 1 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in response to the lady who asked the question, agrees that the Guardian of the Cause of God was at the time of writing the Tablet, in existence.

- 2 He showers praise upon the Guardian of the Cause and uses words such as, “most perfect appearance”, “supreme capacity”, “absolute perfection”, “consummate power” and “unsurpassed might” to describe him and his service to the Cause.
- 3 He states that the greatness and power of the Guardian will spread throughout the whole world and he will illumine the world of humanity.
- 4 The greatness of his work will shine for centuries and ages.

From this Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the greatness of the station of Shoghi Effendi; the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith can be better understood. The more we study the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the more we realize that it is not an easy task to thoroughly understand the station of Shoghi Effendi. The best that we, the lovers of Bahá’u’lláh, can do is to make ourselves humble before Shoghi Effendi and to obey his guidance.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself gave clear instructions on how the Universal House of Justice should be established. After the passing of Shoghi Effendi, following ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s guidance, the Universal House of Justice was established and began to guide the Bahá’ís of the world. This supreme Body of the Bahá’í Faith has nine members and is elected by the Bahá’ís of the world. Its Seat is in the Holy Land, in the city of Haifa, Israel, on the slopes of Mount Carmel near the Bahá’í Holy Shrines.

Teacher’s Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, think about how God had planned for us to receive His continued guidance after the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, first through Shoghi Effendi and then through the Universal House of Justice.”

27 Selections from the Writings of Shoghi Effendi

The teacher should assist the students to understand every selection and also to discuss the importance of trying to follow its guidance in our lives.

The Guardian's message to you is that you should constantly strive to mirror forth in your private lives, and also in your social relationships, the beauty, purity and regenerative power of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh. The Bahá'í youth of today should be an example to the youth of the world, and should therefore live up to the highest standards of conduct. Nothing short of such a close, united and concrete adherence to the ideals and teachings of the Faith by every young Bahá'í man and woman can impress and attract to it the serious attention and consideration of the world outside.⁹⁰

It is no use waiting for some able and eloquent teacher to take all the responsibility for the spread of the Cause. For such a thing is not only contrary to the spirit of the Teachings but to the explicit text of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, both of whom place the obligation of teaching not on any particular class, as in former ecclesiastical organizations,* but on every faithful and loyal follower of the Cause. The teaching of the Word is thus made universal and compulsory. How long then shall we wait to carry out this command, the full wisdom of which only future generations will be able to appreciate? We have no special teachers in the Cause. Everyone is a potential teacher. He has only to use what God has given him and thus prove that he is faithful to his trust.⁹¹

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, try to understand the writings of Shoghi Effendi given in this lesson.”

* “ecclesiastical organizations” means “churches”

28 The Universal House of Justice

The Blessed Beauty, Bahá'u'lláh, promised us that after His passing to the Abhá Kingdom, He would always be with us. He left provision for both our immediate and future guidance. He appointed His eldest Son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Beloved Master, as His Successor and the only interpreter of His Holy Word. He also formulated the Institution of the Universal House of Justice in His Most Holy Book, the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. 'Abdu'l-Bahá in turn appointed Shoghi Effendi to succeed Him, as the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, its divinely guided leader and interpreter of the Holy Word. When the Guardian passed away, the Universal House of Justice, as ordained by Bahá'u'lláh, detailed and planned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and prepared by Shoghi Effendi, was established, ensuring continued guidance for the Bahá'í community. In 1963 (120 BE), nearly six years after the passing of the Beloved Guardian, the first Universal House of Justice was elected.

During this lesson we are going to learn about the Supreme Institution of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice.

Since 1963, every five years an International Convention has been held in Haifa, Israel, to elect the members of the Universal House of Justice. Members of every National Spiritual Assembly in the world come to cast their ballots or send them by post if they cannot attend in person. Nine men above the age of twenty from amongst all the Bahá'ís of the world are elected as members of the Universal House of Justice. As to why Bahá'u'lláh stipulated that the members should be men, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has told us:

There is divine wisdom in this which will presently be made manifest even as the mid-day sun.⁹²

Like all Bahá'í elections there is absolutely no nominating or electioneering for the membership, and all votes are completely secret. 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave clear instructions as to how the Universal House of Justice should be established.

The Universal House of Justice has been promised divine guidance by Bahá'u'lláh in its deliberation on all matters “*which have*

not outwardly been revealed in the Book."⁹³ This means that if there are any questions they must be directed to this infallible Institution. The Universal House of Justice has the power to legislate laws that have not been explicitly decreed in the Holy Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. It can retract laws previously enacted by the Universal House of Justice if it deems it necessary, but not those of Bahá'u'lláh.

The Universal House of Justice appoints the members of the Continental Boards of Counsellors. It has also created other institutions, such as the International Teaching Centre. The members of the International Teaching Centre are also appointed directly by the Universal House of Justice.

In due time the people of the entire world will come under the divine guidance and protection of Bahá'u'lláh through the Universal House of Justice.

The men of God's House of Justice have been charged with the affairs of the people. They, in truth, are the Trustees of God among His servants and the daysprings of authority in His countries.⁹⁴

In summary, the Universal House of Justice is the Supreme Infallible Institution of the Cause of God. It is constantly under the direct divine Guidance of the Blessed Beauty, and every law or decision that they make is as though Bahá'u'lláh Himself were guiding us. We are so blessed and honoured that we have this sublime Institution to direct and guide the people and the nations.

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

"Dear children, think of how lucky we are as Bahá'ís to have the bounty of being under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. Bahá'ís all over the world receive guidance from the Universal House of Justice."

29 Review of Lessons 14, 15 and 22

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, remember the history of Bahá'u'lláh. Share it at home with your family members and think about His sufferings.”

30 Review of Lessons 7, 8 and 9

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, please think about the events in the life of the Báb.”

31 Review of Lessons 22, 25 and 27

Teacher's Suggestion for the Week

“Dear children, think about how religion can influence our lives.”

32 Preparation for Year-End Celebration

Programme for the End-of-Year Celebration: an Example

- 1 Opening Prayer
- 2 Speech by one of the students on what they learned this year
- 3 Songs
- 4 Recital of Holy Writings by some of the students
- 5 Break
- 6 Play
- 7 Closing Prayer

33 Year-End Celebration

The celebration is organized with the full participation of the students and held in the presence of their parents and close family friends. Members or representatives of the Local Spiritual Assembly and the Child Education Committee, as well as Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, should also be invited. If there are other children's classes in the nearby communities, they may also be invited.

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