

TRAINING FOR BAHÁ'Í TEACHING

Approved by Bahá'í Reviewing Committee

1943

Bahá'í Publishing Committee
110 Linden Avenue, Wilmette, Illinois

Printed in U.S.A.

4.65.04

TRAINING FOR BAHÁ'Í TEACHING

Compiled by the National Teaching Committee

from the experiences of three classes

1942-1943

"∴The success of the Seven Year Plan must be assured and the magnificent undertaking launched by the American Bahá'ís carried to a glorious consummation."

-Shoghi Effendi

I. AIM

To develop teachers who can effectively present the Faith, either from the public platform or at firesides and discussion groups. This will provide new teachers, now urgently needed to complete and consolidate the Seven Year Plan, and will at the same time increase the effectiveness of the present teachers.

The measure of effective teaching is results, in the response of listeners to the Word and their ultimate acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh.

II. CURRICULUM

Review of the History and Teachings of the Faith
Effective Methods of Presenting the Faith
Relating the Teachings to Current Scientific and Literary Thought
Some Techniques and Psychological Principles
Use of Bahá'í Literature in Teaching
Other Considerations
 Contacts
 Publicity
 Words and Deeds

III. METHOD

Workshop with a leader in charge. Actual performance by students with analysis and discussion by the class. Practice in class to be supplemented by field work with experienced teachers and teaching opportunities provided through Local Spiritual Assemblies and Regional Teaching Committees.

REVIEW OF THE HISTORY AND TEACHINGS OF THE FAITH

"The universality of the Faith, its aims and purposes, episodes in its dramatic history, testimonials to its transforming power, and the character and distinguishing features of its World Order should be emphasized and explained.."

MATERIAL

Historical background of the Faith.
 Highlights in the lives of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.
 Outstanding dates and events in the First Century.
 The Manifestations of God and progressive Revelation.
 The Promised Day.
 Social principles of the Faith.
 Spiritual teachings of the Faith.
 The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

METHODS

- A. A short talk by each student on one of the subjects outlined. This will serve two purposes: to refresh and renew the student's knowledge of the basic aspects of the Faith, and to give practice in speaking on familiar material.

Suggestions for teaching:

1. Use a phraseology which non-Bahá'ís will understand.
2. Try to explain your terms and illustrate their meaning.
3. Give only a few dates and the most important names to avoid confusion. (See p.188-189, "The Promise of All Ages.")
4. Make effective use of dramatic incidents in Bahá'í history.
5. Quote non-Bahá'í writers on Bahá'í history, such as Professor Browne, Gobineau, Nicolas, etc. (See footnotes of "The Dawnbreakers").
6. Relate the Teachings to present-day happenings and thought.

B. Throughout the course the history and Teachings of the Faith should be constantly reviewed. Every assignment will, in reality, deepen the student's knowledge and understanding. Material presented should be based on the Writings; accuracy in teaching should be emphasized; and the class should be able to give actual references to prove points made.

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

--Shoghi Effendi

EFFECTIVE METHODS OF PRESENTING THE FAITH

"..Let him carefully consider every avenue of approach which he might utilize in his personal attempts to capture the attention, maintain the interest, and deepen the faith, of those whom he seeks to bring into the fold of his Faith."

--Shoghi Effendi

MATERIAL

Study and demonstration of the most effective ways of presenting the Faith to:-

- Individuals, in relation to their interests and background
- Groups and organizations
- Religious groups
- Racial and national groups

METHODS

- A. A five-minute conversation by one student with another who impersonates one of the various types, followed by group discussion of the best way to approach and teach this type of person.

1. Suggested types of individuals: questioning atheist, satisfied church-goer, one prejudiced against the Faith, business man, intellectual-philosophic, parent interested in religion in the life of a child, etc.

Sample Talk - With a satisfied church-goer who asks why we need a change.

Conversation: Explain progressive revelation, using Christ's words, "I have yet many things to tell you, but ye cannot bear them now.." The Bahá'í Faith as fulfillment of Christ's teaching. This age of maturity, and its renewal of the teachings of all Prophets. The emphasis of religion in each age - Moses on Law, Christ on love, Bahá'u'lláh on the oneness of man.

Class Discussion: Bahá'í viewpoint essential to any understanding of the station of Christ and Bahá'u'lláh. Bridge the difference in thought by showing similarities in Their teachings, and then explain the unity of the Prophets and the oneness of God. Use Bible quotations as proof. Show that Christianity no longer has power to solve contemporary problems, and that a new spiritual power is needed to unite men, of whatever religion or race.

- B. Students give talks prepared for non-Bahá'í audiences of special interests, after which the class imagine themselves non-Bahá'ís, asking such questions as this group might ask. The speaker answers all questions. At the close, the class discusses the delivery, suggests improvements, and outlines additional teaching and reference material appropriate to the subject.

1. Suggested groups and organizations: social (i.e., peace, world government, world language, economics, racial amity); cultural (i.e. art and religion); humanitarian and charitable; educational (i.e., university students, parent-teachers); scientific.

2. Suggested religious groups: Jewish, Muhammadan, Buddhist, Roman Catholic, Theosophist, Christian Scientist (Bahá'í teachings on prayer and healing of interest), various other Christian sects, a church group of young people, students of comparative religion.

RELATING THE TEACHINGS TO CURRENT SCIENTIFIC AND LITERARY THOUGHT

MATERIAL

Review of current literature.

Study of intellectual trends, as related to the Faith.

METHODS

A. Analysis by the student of any current book or article in which a "bridge" to the Faith can be found. Class discussion on how to approach the author, and how to relate the Teachings to his thought.

1. Finding "Bridges"; current books and magazines, government publications indicating trends, literature by the Carnegie Foundation, significant radio talks, etc. List other sources.
2. Examples of articles suitable for review:
 - "Should Labor Have Glass Pockets?" (Reader's Digest, January 1942).
 - "Shall the Next Peace Fail?" (Rotarian, March, 1942)
 - "Youth Finds a New Road to Religion" (Reader's Digest, March, 1942)

Sample Review and Discussion - "Shall the Next Peace Fail?"

Review: The article discusses various peace plans, and the lack of a feeling of security among nations as the greatest barrier to peace. It outlines reasons for failure of the League, upholding the right of countries to defend themselves.

"Bridges" to the Faith: Need for police force to insure world peace. The plan for a world tribunal is a more inclusive conception of collective action against an aggressor. Each nation cannot act in accordance with its own desires only; all must be united in a World Order with an inter-national police force. Lasting world peace must have a spiritual foundation. Only the power of spirit can abolish prejudices of race, religion, nation, etc. which are the real factors to consider in establishing permanent peace.

Class Discussion: Difference between the Lesser and Most Great Peace. The former is not permanent, but must come to be based on a spiritual foundation, the Law of God, which will gradually unfold the Most Great Peace under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh.

B. A short talk by the student on trends in some field of modern thought, comparing and contrasting these trends with the Teachings.

1. Suggested fields: scientific advancement, modern philosophy, religious trends, world government.

Sample Talk on Scientific Trends. (Outline):

Need for control in uses of scientific discoveries. Great changes in thinking since 1890, toward a realization that the scope of science is limited: a truer humility. Many scientists believe in God, but not in Revelation as we do.

SOME TECHNIQUES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

"Stop being conscious of your frailties, therefore; have a perfect reliance upon God; let your heart burn with the desire to serve His mission and promulgate His Cause and you will observe how eloquence and the power to change human hearts will come as a matter of course."

-- Shoghi Effendi

MATERIAL

Class discussion of effective principles and techniques of teaching.
Practice in preparing and giving talks of various lengths.
Conducting public meetings and firesides, as class demonstration and in actual field work.

METHODS

A. General Considerations

1. When asked to speak do so whenever humanly possible. Practice gives ease and confidence.
2. In approaching your subject, gather together the thoughts you already have rather than trying to unearth quantities of material. Think and pray about the subject. Then fill out your own thoughts with necessary material from the Writings, recognized authoritative books, clippings, and other sources. In this way the talk will become your own expression, instead of a memorized summary of available data on the subject.
3. Mental attitude: Knowledge that Bahá'u'lláh will aid and sustain you; confidence that any Bahá'í has something to share with non-Bahá'ís.
4. Naturalness: Don't try to imitate another speaker. Be yourself, and include your audience in the talk. (i.e., "You and I have both faced this problem.")
5. Appearance: Clothes should be dignified, appropriate, not too arresting or distracting, well-groomed. Avoid affectations and useless gestures.
6. Language: Pronounce all words correctly; use a dictionary. Speak distinctly and with utmost sincerity. Use vivid words and phrases from the Teachings, and avoid repeating stereotyped phrases over and over again. Speak slowly enough so that the audience can keep up, avoiding the condensation of ideas used in writing. Colloquialisms in good usage are permissible, but avoid slang. Avoid doubtful words, such as sect, cult, vibrations, cosmic consciousness, etc.
7. Whenever possible quote the actual words of Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Memorize key sentences so that non-Bahá'ís may realize the beauty and power of the Teachings. Help the audience experience the power of the Faith by using stories about its history and Founders. Somewhere in your talk manage to give the Message.
8. Stick to your theme and develop it to an effective conclusion.

(For many suggestions as to the psychology of public speaking, see H. S. Overstreet, "Influencing Human Behavior.")

Techniques and Psychological Principles

B. The Speaker's Equipment

1. Collect ideas all the time, from Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í reading, the radio, contacts, etc.
2. Acquire a Bahá'í library of the most essential books. Collect study outlines.
3. Maintain a clipping book, classifying articles in index under Bahá'í principles and teachings on various subjects.
4. Keep a notebook of interesting thoughts that may occur to you from time to time, and explanations of points in the Teachings by Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í speakers.

C. Planning the Talk.

1. Topic: Make it timely and one to suit your audience. Select a title which will arouse interest in advance and have good publicity "punch."
2. Prepare an outline, not too lengthy, preferably on one sheet of paper. A good practice is to make outlines of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks to learn how He developed subjects. (See "Promulgation of Universal Peace").
3. Choose one theme and develop it. Too many points not well covered cause confusion and weaken the talk. The whole idea should be reducible to one sentence; your development and illustration will help the audience to think it through.
4. Start your talk with something that makes a difference to the audience, to awaken interest. Begin with an effect needing a cause, or present a conflict or problem (i.e., world conditions).
5. Select one or two quotations from recognized authorities on the subject, one or more from Bahá'í Writings, but not too lengthy. Use humor sparingly unless you have a gift for it, but use stories and illustrative material.
6. Check on the accuracy of your ideas. Untruthfulness has a bad spiritual effect.
7. Endeavor to use a fresh approach, but avoid sensationalism.
8. Avoid political and controversial matters, and do not attack the existing religious beliefs of the group. Help them to "bridge over" from their viewpoint to yours.
9. Develop an effective conclusion.
10. Limit your talk to about forty minutes, or the time in which you can hold the undivided attention of the audience. Fireside talks may be even shorter. Note the brevity of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks.

D. Conduct of Public Meetings

1. Environment: Warm and hospitable, with a host or hostess; no embarrassment to late-comers; comfortable arrangement of chairs and ventilation; flowers if possible; carefully-chosen music or none at all; literature available, as well as a Temple picture or exhibit.
2. Chairman:
 - a. After greeting audience, give a few well-chosen words on the subject (but do not make a speech).
 - b. Read a short excerpt from the Writings related to the point of the talk. New people cannot absorb long quotations. Select reading in advance and practice reading it aloud.
 - c. Introduce speaker, always repeating the name at end of introduction.

Techniques and Psychological Principles

- d. If discussion follows the talk, remember that too-long discussions are worse than none.
 - e. Close with general brief comment and mention when other Bahá'í meetings occur in that locality. If customary, a prayer can be read or another short excerpt from the Writings.
 - f. It is a good idea for the chairman to prepare a brief talk on the subject for use if something prevents the speaker's coming. Or if the speaker does not handle his subject adequately, the chairman may add a few carefully-chosen remarks to sum it up.
 - g. Be gracious. The chairman is really the host of the occasion.
3. Questions and Answers:
- a. Listen carefully to the question.
 - b. Do not make up an answer if you don't know it. Let someone else answer in this case, or if no Bahá'í present is able, advise the questioner that you will look it up and answer at the next meeting.
 - c. Agree when possible with the questioner, and develop from the points of agreement.
 - d. Avoid arguments with other Bahá'ís as to interpretation of the Teachings.
 - e. If three or four Bahá'ís have already spoken to the point, better not add any more, as it gives non-Bahá'ís a feeling of being attacked en masse.
 - f. Do not get angry whatever happens; if the Cause should be attacked or violent or unreasonable objections raised. Use prayer silently and answer kindly and firmly.
4. Do not be disturbed if your talk does not appeal to every member of the audience. Bahá'ís are a cross section of humanity, and each Bahá'í attracts a different type of listener.
 5. Never speak down to the audience. Adapt your talk to the type and size of group.
 6. An invitation to investigate the Teaching is an effective part of every talk, for those who learn of the Faith for the first time.

E. Suggestions for Firesides

1. Short informal talks by one or several speakers, introducing the various aspects of the Faith or following an outline (i.e., thirty-six lessons.)
2. Knowledge of background of listeners is helpful.
3. Group planning valuable, with prayers beforehand and consultation afterward.
4. Encourage questions and free discussion. Strict attention to questions and use of tact and kindness in response.
5. Serving refreshments may be used to lighten discussion or terminate it, to allow more personal talks with individuals.

USE OF BAHÁ'Í LITERATURE IN TEACHING

MATERIAL

Review and discussion of Bahá'í books, pamphlets, magazines, and study outlines as sources for teaching.

METHODS

A. Discussion of Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, when and where revealed, and what they contain.

B. Check references with special reference to use in teaching.

Books and pamphlets are suggested:

Gleanings
Prayers and Meditations
Hidden Words
Seven Valleys - Four Valleys
Iqan
Promised Day is Come
World Order of Bahá'u'lláh
Epistle to the Son of the Wolf.
Other Major Tablets (9) of Bahá'u'lláh
Bahá'í World Faith
Some Answered Questions
The Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
Mysterious Forces of Civilization
Promulgation of Universal Peace
Reality of Man
Wisdom of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
America's Spiritual Mission
Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
Bahá'í Administration
Advent of Divine Justice

C. Classification of Bahá'í Study Sources. (See pamphlet by Kenneth Christian under this title.)