

Substance Abuse

A Bahá'í Perspective

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Bahá'í Canada Publications

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Publisher: Bahá'í Canada Publications, 7200 Leslie St.,
Thornhill, Ontario L3T 6L8

ISBN 0-88867-136-9

Printed in the United States of America
in cooperation with Palabra Publications

Preface

Who is this book for?

It is both for the general public and for professionals. While its style is clear and easy to understand for those who are directly affected by substance abuse, it will also be useful to communities and institutions dealing with substance abuse issues and policies on the local, national, and global levels.

What is the scope and what are the effects of substance abuse?

This book provides accurate, up-to-date information about diverse addictive substances that are widely abused worldwide, including alcohol, tobacco, cocaine, marijuana, and heroin.

In North America, alcohol abuse affects one in three families directly. Although its indirect effects are difficult to measure, yet alcohol abuse is known to be a major contributor to violence in the home and in the community. Alcohol and depression are intertwined. Almost half of motor vehicle accidents, including fatal ones, involve alcohol. Furthermore, alcohol is a known risk factor for several of the most common forms of cancer.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that one billion men and 200 million women abuse tobacco. Millions of children are exposed to harmful environmental tobacco smoke due to their parents. The WHO estimates 11,000 deaths per day, or four million deaths per year are due to tobacco.

Why read this book?

Dr. Ghadirian is a practicing physician and professor who has extensive experience in the prevention and treatment of substance abuse. In this concise work, he explains substance abuse and outlines the scope of the problem. He considers the spiritual and emotional toll as well as the social costs of substance abuse. Most importantly, he points the way to substance abuse-free families and communities.

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Illicit Drugs and Society

The breakdown of the old world order and the disintegration of material civilization and traditional ways of life have generated serious chaos and confusion in human affairs and have caused significant anxiety and stress.

Although science and technology have changed people's lifestyle and work pattern and have brought unprecedented comfort and material prosperity, they have not brought a lasting hope and happiness. Science has lost its contact with human feeling and feeling has been manipulated or denied in a variety of ways, one of which is through the use of alcohol and non-medical use of drugs. No one is certain of his/her future and no one knows the true path to peace of mind.

There is a crisis not only in the outside world, but also within the person.¹ The material and social decline of the world is a reflection of the spiritual poverty of humankind. Alcohol and other mind- or mood-altering drugs have become avenues through which humanity finds an escape from the reality of a changing world. Today, millions of people, young and old, men and women, poor and rich, educated and illiterate willingly submit their mind to the influence of alcohol, narcotics, and various mind-altering drugs in their search for hope and happiness. Like wild fire, the use of illegal drugs has spread to every part of the world and no nation has been immune from this devastating epidemic of our time.

Why do people use drugs?

The purpose of writing this booklet is to offer perspectives on preventive education which would also reflect briefly the state of the drug abuse problem in society and highlight the Bahá'í viewpoint on this pervasive and devastating problem. In this booklet the words drugs, psychoactive drugs, illicit drugs, substance abuse and addiction are used interchangeably. These all indicate non-medical use of drugs and by drugs we also include alcohol. In 1994 the

Bangkok Declaration on substance abuse recommended that alcohol and tobacco be considered as a “drug” and the Declaration was later approved by the United Nations. However, tobacco differs from the above mentioned drugs in the sense that although it causes medical diseases it does not have a strong mind altering addictive effect like other drugs.

Not all people who use drugs do so to obtain the same objective. Some use it for pleasure, others out of curiosity and yet others copy their friends. Many young people give in to peer pressure and think taking drugs is “cool”. People may use drugs to battle their inner crises, to block out the harsh reality of life or to search for their identity.

There are as many reasons to use drugs as there are individuals in society. However, the most common reasons given for the use of illicit drugs and alcohol are as follows: peer pressure, curiosity, pleasure, boredom, ignorance, emotional isolation and alienation, changing social structure, urbanization and unemployment, poor coping skills for life stress, search for one’s true self, lack of affection and the breakdown of family life. Whatever the reason for drug use, society bears an important responsibility in providing positive alternatives for substance abuse. If we fail to provide positive alternatives and to rethink our purpose of life and spiritual destiny, drugs are here to stay and will continue to take a high toll on human mind and body.

What are drugs a substitute for?

Psychoactive drugs including alcohol can be a substitute for different things in different people. For some it is an antidote for insecurity and fear. They take it to borrow a sense of security and courage. To others it gives an illusion of self-esteem and confidence. To the hopeless it gives a perceived sense of hope and on one who is desolate and depressed it confers a false sense of power and elation. Some use it to escape boredom, to feel “high” and euphoric. Yet others use it to alleviate pain and despair. Whatever the reason for

drug abuse it does not achieve the goal, but provides an illusory excursion into a world of unreality and pleasure. It is a psychological “hijacking of the brain” for a few hours or days with a heavy cost to pay later.

A parallel can be drawn between the spiritual responses to human needs as compared to the struggle to obtain satisfaction through chemical means from the following words of Bahá'u'lláh:

O my Lord! Make Thy beauty to be my food, and Thy presence my drink, and Thy pleasure my hope, and praise of Thee my action, and remembrance of Thee my companion, and the power of Thy sovereignty my succorer, and Thy habitation my home, and my dwelling-place the seat Thou hast sanctified from the limitations imposed upon them who are shut out as by a veil from Thee.²

Who is most vulnerable to substance abuse?

Research has shown that in some cases there is a genetic vulnerability to drugs such as alcohol. Children of alcoholics are obviously more at risk to become alcoholic themselves. But environment also plays an important role in drug dependency. Social and environmental stressors can enhance the unfoldment of the underlying genetic predisposition. Peer pressure has a powerful influence in the spread of drug abuse among young people. If youth come in contact with such influence and are already genetically vulnerable, obviously they are more at risk for drug dependency. But we also see young people who are involved in drug abuse who have no history of addiction in their family. However they may come from broken homes and, having lost contact with their cultural roots, have no faith in the future.

Today drug abuse is a global problem and has crossed all borders of socioeconomic and geographic variations. Nevertheless, there are certain segments of society which are more vulnerable to alcohol and drug abuse for many reasons.³ These are:

- Youth, particularly those who are lonesome or come from broken homes or a deprived social environment.
- Elderly people, especially those who suffer from isolation and loneliness or have chronic pain requiring analgesic medications. Abuse of prescription drugs is quite common among this group of population.
- Children and first degree relatives of alcoholics. Certain addictive drugs may lead to biological vulnerability for addiction in children but more research needs to be done.
- Patients who suffer from depression or other forms of emotional disturbances may be at risk for drug abuse by self-medicating and using drugs to fight depression.
- Minorities, especially those who suffer from isolation, socio-economic instability and discrimination may risk drug use as a way of coping. Native people who have lost their traditional sense of community, cultural values and identity are at risk for alcohol and drug abuse.
- Social isolation, particularly in women who are lonely, separated or divorced without family bonds or support, are vulnerable. The use of cigarette-smoking and alcohol has been on the rise among women since World War II and this trend continues, especially in the industrial world.
- Entertainers, health professionals, police and law enforcers, and many others

Today, virtually anyone in society can be exposed to alcohol and drug dependency. Generally speaking, in a society where people are materially self-centered and are obsessed with instant satisfaction and value material means as the prime source of security and happiness, there is a greater danger for addiction as compared to a society where people are altruistic and look beyond instant gratification for personal fulfillment. In such a society, the true nature of a person is not seen as his flesh and bone, but rather as his mind and

soul. The body is a temple of the soul and not a machine to recycle alcohol and illicit drugs.

How extensive is the substance abuse problem?

The substance abuse problem is no longer confined to the rich and upper class of industrial countries of the world. It has become a global menace to humanity and the "plague of our time". It has afflicted nations and has claimed the lives of thousands of people. It has invaded all walks of life in almost all corners of the planet. From Moscow to Los Angeles, from Sweden to Nigeria, drugs are everywhere. The drug industry is a global market for satisfaction and a technology for pleasure and quick fix. Millions of people, young and old, willingly submit their mind to the nefarious effects of psychoactive drugs each year. Although alcohol and narcotic drugs have existed for ages, they have never been so freely accessible and diversified as they presently are, and added to them are the new synthetic drugs which are described below.

What is the solution?

Most of the approaches to drug and alcohol abuse either focus on stiffening the punishment of offenders or legalizing drugs: What other approaches are there?

Neither severe punitive measures nor the legalization of illicit drugs will solve the problem. The crux of the matter is prevention. Today, most experts in the field of alcoholism and drug abuse agree that prevention is the most effective approach in dealing with the epidemic of substance abuse.

Primary prevention is intended to prevent or at least delay the initiation of substance abuse. It is also aimed at raising people's awareness of the adverse effects of drugs before contact with the drug takes place. It requires the education of the population as to the nature of life and its purpose. This education begins at home where parents set a model for their young children by educating

and abstaining from alcohol and drugs. But preventive education will not fully succeed so long as parents, teachers, health professionals, leaders of governments and society at large continue to drink or use drugs.

As part of a comprehensive program for prevention, the concept of happiness and freedom needs to be re-examined. True happiness is a very profound personal experience. It is not a commodity to be obtained from a powder, injected liquid or bottle of alcohol. We also need to reflect on the purpose of life and human reality which is essentially noble and spiritual.

The Epidemic of Drug Abuse

Alcohol and illicit drug production have become a major industry which provides a world market for consumption. Production of opium and cocaine among other drugs has become a major source of revenue in certain countries of the world. Some of the South American countries have been major producers of cocaine and in recent years, opium as well. In Asia, the Golden Triangle which includes Thailand, Burma (Myanmar) and Laos, are well-known for their production of opium. Three other countries have emerged on the opium production scene since the 1970s, constituting the Golden Crescent which includes part of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.⁴ The production of illicit opium has exploded in recent years and in a span of seven years (from 1985 to 1992) this production rose 152 per cent. It is estimated that the volume of the annual global illicit production of opium is between 3,000 to 4,000 tonnes.⁵ All of these facts depict a grim picture of humanity which is smitten by a major threat which, in many respects, is as serious as other issues such as environmental pollution and AIDS. The United States has the highest rate of adolescent drug use among all industrialized nations. One half of 40,000 deaths due to car accidents and half of homicides in the USA are alcohol- or drug abuse-related.⁶ Moreover, 50% of AIDS mortality is related to intravenous drug use which is one of the largest sources of new HIV infection.⁷

The problem of drug abuse and addiction has become so widespread and serious that the former Secretary General of the UN Javier Perez de Cuellar stated that “Drug abuse presents a threat to this and coming generations as the plagues which swept many parts of the world in earlier centuries”.⁸ Mr. George Bush, former President of the United States, reflected the public view by considering drug abuse as the number one problem in the U.S.A.⁹ Fewer than 10% of addicted people receive help either through self-help groups or through professional treatment.¹⁰

According to the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) it is estimated that annually 3.3% to 4.1% of the world population is likely to consume illicit drugs. The most serious drug of abuse is heroin, involving 8 million people. Cocaine is more widespread; conservative estimates tell us that 13 million people depend on this drug. Cannabis is the most widely abused drug involving 140 million people around the world, almost 2.5% of the global population.¹¹

Increase in the use of injectable drugs and needle exchange or sharing among drug users have significantly contributed to the spread of HIV (Human Immune Virus) and AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). Estimating conservatively, about 22% of the world’s HIV/AIDS population inject drugs. A significant number of these people transmit HIV/AIDS through the sharing of needles or related behavior.¹²

Not all illicit drugs are derived from plants or plant products. The use of synthetic drugs or designer drugs is on the rise and these are more easily available. Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) have already attracted 30 million people of the world’s population and the number is increasing for these “fashionable” drugs. Ecstasy (MDMA) is a brand of synthetic drug which rapidly causes euphoric mood and sensations and can be easily manufactured all over the world. When law enforcement agencies began to tighten the control of drug trafficking from one country to the other, scientists defied that pressure and now an inexpensive synthetic drug can be produced at home or in a laboratory anywhere in the world. Science does not teach morality and values

are weakened when the pleasure instinct takes over the mind. This is a reflection of crisis in human conscience and personal virtues.

Children and Substance Abuse

It is estimated that there are 80-100 million children in the world under the age of 17 who are homeless and without families. These are children who have lost their parents to war or to AIDS or are “social orphans” of extreme poverty. At least 30 million of these children live or spend most of their time in the streets. Many of these children are involved in robbery, drug trafficking, prostitution and petty crimes.¹³ One third of seven million street children of Brazil are considered to be involved in various forms of drug abuse. On the other hand, there are millions of children worldwide who are born into families where one of the parents is alcoholic or abuses drugs. In the United States alone 200,000 babies are born from mothers who use drugs and these children are at high risk for physical and psychological complications and social adaptation problems as compared to children of parents who do not use drugs.¹⁴ In some countries in Asia and other parts of the world where women work in opium cultivation fields, thousands of children are born addicted to opium or will soon be addicted by mothers who use opium to calm their babies as they work in the field.

Children raised in dysfunctional alcoholic and drug addicted families tend to have problems similar to those of their parents. For example, sons of alcoholics are four times more at risk for developing alcoholism than those in the general population. Female children of alcoholics show more anxiety or sometimes depressive disorder as compared to women who come from non-alcoholic parents. Approximately 10-15 percent of Americans are believed to suffer from alcoholism and 28-34 million people are children of alcoholics.¹⁵ Violence and conflicts, separation and divorce are common among the families of alcoholics. As a

result of these and many other conflicts, the family is no longer a haven and a fortress for well-being for children.

***What do the Children of Alcoholics Say?*¹⁶**

"Dad gets drunk every day, he hits me and mum . . . he broke my arm once. If I have bruises he . . . stops me going to school. He says if we ever tell anyone he will kill us . . . I'm scared . . . it's getting worse."

A Girl

"Please don't stop my mother smoking . . . I would rather she smoked than drank."

A boy with fetal alcohol syndrome

"Dad drinks and hits mum. I took an overdose last week. I want to die. I don't talk to mum it would only add to her problems . . . It's all my fault."

A Girl

"Mum says Dad is drinking again. Dad says he isn't . . . I'm confused . I'll just try to work it out."

Tasha, 7

"The caller said he saw the two-year-old wandering down the road wearing a T-shirt, underpants and socks. The caller asked him where he lived and the child took him to a house 200-300 yards away. The front door was opened and a man and a woman were asleep on a sofa in a cigarette smoke filled room which also smelled alcohol. The child went to the woman, calling her "mummy" and shook her. She told him to "bugger off".

Neighbor

The Gift of the Mind

According to the Bahá'í teachings, human thought constitutes an individual's reality. Moreover, the power of the intellect and of understanding is lauded as "God's greatest gift" to humankind.¹⁷ According to these teachings, the use of intoxicants is an impediment to the progress of mind and soul and is in conflict with the true purpose of life. The goal of the human journey in this world is to fulfill one's potential and to recognize the nobility of nature and the loftiness of purpose of each person. To complete this journey one needs to make a realistic and systematic use of one's full capacity as a noble being and to draw upon one's physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual powers in order to fulfill that potential. The mind, so much targeted by illicit drugs, is an irreplaceable gift in the journey of life.

Inner Peace and Tranquility

Human's search for inner peace and tranquility has been an age-long quest. In the course of history an array of herbs and chemicals were found for nutritional and cultural uses and these also possessed addictive effects. Although these substances had remedial effects, they were also used for pleasure-seeking or pain-relieving behavior. However, true peace and tranquility is essentially an inner experience. Choosing an external object such as alcohol or other habit-forming drugs to alleviate inner tension and insecurity is an exercise in futility. It calls to mind the following statement of Bahá'u'lláh: "O Son of Spirit! There is no peace for thee save by renouncing thyself and turning unto Me; for it behooveth thee to glory in My name"¹⁸ In another place Bahá'u'lláh compares the spiritual effect of the "Mystic Wine" with the effect of the material wine (alcohol). The "Mystic Wine", He asserts, "... hath a different intoxication and imparteth another exhilaration. The one diminisheth the intelligence of man, the other increaseth it. The one leadeth to perdition, the other bestoweth life."¹⁹ The "Mystic Wine" is the creative words of

the divine revelation which ignites in the hearts the love of God and humanity.

Drug abuse and addiction are types of relationships which one forms with an inanimate and enticing object. The result of this relationship is dependence on the drug. Ultimately the person becomes a victim of the addicting power of this substance. Thus a human being, who is the crown of creation, is overpowered by a dust which is an element of the mineral kingdom!

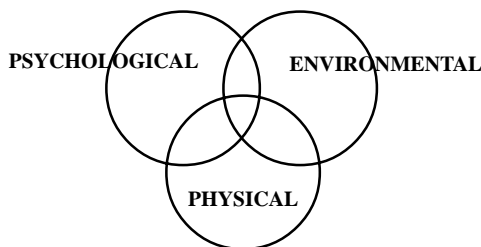
Drugs and Human Attitude

No doubt that society and social organizations play an important role in individual behavior. But the individual's behavior also influences the attitude of society. The individual, family and early education play a very important role in the shaping of society. Therefore proper use or abuse of the human mind and mood depends largely on early education and acquired attitude toward oneself. It is quite conceivable that behavioral attitudes more than knowledge will influence the shaping of certain behavior. Attitudes are acquired during early education and adapted later as a way of life. The learned behavioral attitudes become values, and the values guide decisions about behaviour, such as the decision to drink or to abstain from drinking.²⁰

Interactions of Psycho-Bio-Social Factors

Addictive behavior is influenced by psychological, environmental and physical (biological) factors which are in constant interaction in day to day life. Psychological factors may include emotional distress, depression, boredom or other states of mood or mind. Among the environmental factors, the influence of peer pressure, availability of alcohol and drugs, social and cultural attitude toward drinking and substance abuse and the role of media, public figures and friends in addictive behavior are but some of

the contributing factors. Among the physical factors, although the role of genetic vulnerability in alcoholic families is being explored, elderly people with physical aches and pain and patients with chronic disease requiring pain relieving medications may be at risk for the non-medical use of narcotics, tranquilizers or alcohol.



Drugs and the Physical and Mental Reality

The physical reality or the human body is lauded by the Báb as the throne of an individual's spiritual reality.

As this physical frame is the throne of the inner temple, whatever occurs to the former is felt by the latter. In reality that which takes delight in joy or is saddened by pain is the inner temple of the body, not the body itself. Since this physical body is the throne whereon the inner temple is established, God hath ordained that the body be preserved to the extent possible, so that nothing that causes repugnance may be experienced. The inner temple beholdeth its physical frame, which is its throne. Thus if the latter is accorded respect, it is as if the former is the recipient. The converse is likewise true.²¹

Consequently one can perceive a person as the guardian of the temple of the soul in this earthly life. As much as the body needs to grow and develop, so does the soul which has a destiny of its own. To achieve its destiny, the soul needs the physical frame as its instrument.

We are endowed with five senses through which we perceive the material world: sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch (outward powers). Besides these sensory powers, there are other powers such as imagination, comprehension and memory (inward powers).²² There is an interrelationship between these two groups of powers which makes it possible for us to perceive the reality of things around us. The sensory network transmits the stimulation and activities of the outer world of matter to the inner world of reality through the messengers of the brain called neurotransmitters. The brain functions as a superb central computer which receives these messages and responds in an appropriate manner through the instrumentality of human will and wisdom (programmer).

Non-medical use of drugs interferes with the quality and quantity of the work of the neurotransmitters and consequently affects perception and processing of information related to our feeling and thought. The sensory and perceptual messages may excite or inhibit emotion, resulting in the alteration of mood and thinking. They may kindle intellectual activity and bring about a new thought or idea or they may excite a very strong emotion. Under certain conditions the perception of the sensory system and the interpretation of the perceived images or messages may become distorted, thus giving rise to a false impression of reality or excessive emotional reaction to an ordinary external event.²³ As an example, in a state of drug-induced psychosis a rose may be perceived not as a rose, but rather as a frightening object which arouses tremendous fear and anxiety. The consumption of an intoxicant causes a misperception of reality which in this case is defined as an illusion.²⁴

Bahá'í Attitude towards Substance Abuse

The Bahá'í attitude toward drugs is very explicit. The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of drugs prescribed by physicians for medical or psychological treatment. Indeed, the science of medicine is discovering the therapeutic effect of some of these substances which are also abused. But its teachings are quite emphatic about

the prohibition of the non-medical use of narcotics and other forms of psychotropic and psychedelic drugs.

Consumption of alcohol is prohibited in the Bahá'í Faith. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that it "is the cause of chronic diseases, weakeneth the nerves and consumeth the mind."²⁵ Furthermore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá indicates that "Regarding the use of liquor: According to the text of the Book of Aqdas, both light and strong drinks are prohibited. The reason for this prohibition is that alcohol leadeth the mind astray and causeth the weakening of the body."²⁶

The idea of "moderate" drinking, which is popular in society at large, has been a subject of considerable debate in many centres concerned with the problem of alcoholism. Not only is the term "moderate" vague, but what is moderate for one person may not be so for another. Moreover, it may become very difficult to draw a line between "moderate" and "heavy" drinking at a time when emotional tension runs high and the individual is encircled by stress and life crises. It is also known that many alcoholics were initially "moderate" drinkers. In view of all of this, there is a growing notion that complete abstinence from drinking presents the most realistic option for prevention of alcoholism.²⁷

Concerning opium, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that it "fasteneth on the soul, so that the user's conscience dieth, his mind is blotted away, his perceptions are eroded. It turneth the living into the dead. It queneth the natural heat."²⁸ The Bahá'í writings further state that the use of opium "layeth to ruins the very foundation of what it is to be human."²⁹

The greatest danger of opium and its derivatives lies in the user's rapid development of chemical tolerance, resulting in strong psychological and physiological dependency. As a result of brain cells' dependency on these drugs, when they are abruptly withdrawn, the resulting withdrawal symptoms can be very serious.³⁰

Drugs like cocaine, depending on the quantity consumed, may cause excessive emotional excitement and paranoid ideas. It stimulates the brain centres for pleasure and causes an overpowering desire for the use of this substance. With certain illicit drugs (Phencyclidine-PCP), perception of reality may become so disturbed that the

individual may attempt self-mutilation or develop violent and unpredictable destructive behavior.

Psychedelic substances such as LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) and mescaline may alter the perception and interpretation of messages received by the brain from the outer powers or external stimuli. As a result, visual and auditory experiences may be perceived in a highly exaggerated manner or may be interpreted irrationally. These substances can also affect the inner powers, particularly the power of imagination and the grasp of reality, with resulting impairment of judgement and false perceptual experiences.³¹

The attitude the Bahá'ís should have toward the non-medical use of hallucinogens and psychedelic drugs such as mescaline, LSD and cannabis is explicit, as shown in the following statements of the Universal House of Justice.

Concerning the so-called 'spiritual' virtues of the hallucinogens . . . spiritual stimulation should come from turning one's heart to Bahá'u'lláh, and not through physical means such as drugs and agents ... hallucinogenic agents are a form of intoxicant. As the friends, including the youth, are required strictly to abstain from all forms of intoxicants, and are further expected conscientiously to obey the civil law of their country, it is obvious that they should refrain from using these drugs.³²

The Universal House of Justice further states that,

Bahá'í should not use hallucinogenic agents, including LSD, peyote, and similar substances, except when prescribed for medical treatment. Neither should they become involved in experiments with such substances.³³

Hashish is another substance of abuse which is a highly potent form of cannabis (marijuana). It diminishes human motivation and goal-

oriented activities and distorts perception of time. Moreover, among other adverse effects, including genetic ones, it impairs concentration and can precipitate hallucination. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addresses the non-medical use of hashish with these strong words:

Alcohol consumeth the mind and causeth man to commit acts of absurdity, but . . . this wicked hashish extinguisheth the mind, freezeth the spirit, petrifieth the soul, wasteth the body and leaveth man frustrated and lost.³⁴

In the Bahá’í teachings, not only is total abstinence from all alcoholic beverages enjoined, but never before in history has the utterance of a Divine Manifestation been so explicit in outlining the effects of addictive substances such as alcohol and narcotics on the human mind and soul. Consumption of tobacco, although not forbidden, is discouraged.

Primary Prevention

Improving the quality of human life and people’s attitude toward themselves and others are some of the basic principles of divine education. According to the Bahá’í writings, “unless the moral character of a nation is educated, as well as its brain and its talents, civilization has no sure basis”.³⁵

Closely related to the subject of prevention is the fact that drug addiction is basically a human crisis. Hence, to heal the drug problem, one must search for a solution to personal, family and societal needs and conflicts as well. Drug use which is started can also be stopped, but there is no gain without pain.

There are two essential elements in the development of drug abuse and addiction which require special attention: a) availability of drugs and b) behavioral attitude toward these substance. While law enforcing and government agencies are responsible for control of the availability and accessibility of non-prescribed drugs, individuals, families and community play a central role in the shaping of attitudes toward the use

of these substances. Prevention through education is based on the notion that through the development of a healthy and intelligent attitude toward self and intoxicants available in the environment, individuals are given the tools to avoid the problem of substance abuse and addiction which has become a global scourge to humanity. Indeed, our behavioral attitude toward alcohol and other drugs will have an important bearing on the availability, distribution, sale and trafficking of these substances. If behavioral attitude on all three levels of the individual, family and society is not changed, governments and law enforcement agencies will be unable to successfully eradicate the spread of substance abuse and addictions, even if they are able to restrict the production of the plants from which they come.

Primary prevention of substance abuse involves close collaboration between the three levels of human society: individual, family and society at large. The latter also encompasses the role of government.³⁶

Individual

The individual is the unit of human society like the cell in the human body. Its role has a fundamental effect on the life of the family and society. On the individual level there are a number of factors which relate prevention of substance abuse to the Bahá'í Writings as follows:

1. *Sense of purpose in life:* The Bahá'í Faith teaches that “the generating impulse and the primary purpose” of life is to know and to love God³⁷ and to “to carry forward an every-advancing civilization”.³⁸ By living in this manner, the energy which might have been spent in excessive preoccupation with self and self-gratification is instead invested in the interest and well-being of others. When one recognizes the primary purpose and spiritual mission in one's life, it gives a new meaning to one's existence and destiny. This new perspective will guide the person away from substance abuse which is, basically, a search for the true self and meaning in life.

2. *Human worth and nobility:* Realization of human nobility in creation is an important step in prevention. Many substance abusers and alcoholics suffer from a loss of self-esteem and often hopelessness. Recognizing the nobility within oneself plays a valuable role in enhancement of self esteem and acceptance of one's self. On the other hand, alcohol and illicit drug use is effectively a form of distortion of one's perception of the true self as a result of one's inability to come to terms with oneself. Expounding on the essence of the individual's nobility in creation, Bahá'u'lláh exhorts humanity with these mystic words, "O Son of Spirit! I created thee rich, why dost thou bring thyself to poverty? Noble I made thee, where-with dost thou abase thyself?"³⁹

3. *A new vision of happiness:* Changing our attitude toward psychoactive and habit forming drugs requires a re-examination of our concept of joy and happiness. True happiness, so much sought after, is essentially a spiritual experience. Yet to many it is perceived and searched after as a commodity to acquire materially.⁴⁰ This materialistic perception of happiness is a stumbling block on the road to prevention of substance abuse or recovery from it.

4. *Obedience and freedom:* The true meaning of freedom is often misunderstood. According to the Bahá'í teachings, true freedom comes from emancipation of self from the captivity of the world of nature.⁴¹ Moreover, liberty and freedom are believed to be achieved through obedience to the laws and ordinances of God, revealed for the well-being of humankind in each dispensation. Such obedience, free from superstition, is considered to protect one's freedom to be one's true self. By becoming addicted to alcohol or illicit drugs, one loses this freedom and becomes a captive of the realm of nature.

5. *Striving for purity:* Cleanliness and purity are essential virtues for personal and spiritual progress in the journey of life. For instance, the problem of drug abuse or addiction includes not only the inges-

tion of harmful substances, but also involves behavioral and spiritual destiny. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

O Lord! Give to the people of Bahá cleanliness and holiness in all conditions, purify and free them from all defilement, deliver them from the use of all that is execrated, liberate them from the chains of habits, so that they may be pure and free, clean and spotless, that they may be worthy servants of the Sacred Threshold and may deserve to enter into relation with God. Deliver them from alcohol and tobacco, and save them from opium, the purveyor of madness! Make them companions of the holy breezes, in order that they may know the pleasures of the wine of the love of God, and that they may attain to the joy and happiness of attraction to the Kingdom of Abha!⁴²

Family

Preventive education begins in childhood and at home. The role of parents is to educate their children about the sanctity of life and human values and how to grow spiritually in a material world. Parents should familiarize their children with the harsh reality of life and with the fact that one cannot always gratify one’s needs immediately. They should be open to discuss the question of alcohol, drugs and addiction and allow the children to talk about it whenever necessary.

The Bahá’í teachings emphasize that a human being is created noble and is the “Supreme Talisman”, is like “a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education alone can cause it to reveal its treasures and enable mankind to benefit therefrom”.⁴³ Family is the foundation and wellspring of human society. It is a miniature of the nation. Changes in the family are reflected in society.⁴⁴ The family as a system is influenced by external and internal forces including drugs and alcohol. As much as family breakdown can render its members vulnerable to the influences of alcohol and drugs, these substances of abuse can also influence and ruin family bonds and relationships. Therefore, family education on prevention can have far-reaching effects.

Moreover, love and unity within the family can have a protective effect in a drug abuse environment. Often our children are not prepared to face, with confidence and faith, the challenge of the drug world out there.

Society

On the societal level, there are a number of issues to be considered to prevent drug abuse. Detailing these issues is not possible in this booklet, however some of the ingredients can be summarized as follows.⁴⁵

1. *Relational skills and stress management:* Education is needed, especially for the youth, about skills required for problem solving and coping with stress and stress management as well as coping with isolation and boredom. Large scale public education should be encouraged on the true nature of the person and safeguarding human mind and character through creative words of Divine reality.

2. *The role of the media:* Media plays a very important role in shaping public views and attitude toward drinking and drugs. Unfortunately due to commercial interest in promotional advertising of tobacco and alcoholic beverages, the media have contributed to the impediment of preventive education to discourage tobacco and alcohol consumption. Society bears a heavy responsibility in its widespread use of alcohol at anniversaries, festivities and many other occasions which further encourages the media for publicity.

3. *Positive alternatives:* Society, aided by government, should provide positive alternatives to addictive substances which would facilitate and promote a drug-free society. These alternatives should take into consideration the emotional, physical, intellectual, social and spiritual needs of individuals. They may include activities such as art and creativity, sports, social and cultural exchange and interactions, prayer and meditation, dance workshops for youth and helping the poor and deprived, etc.⁴⁶

4. Challenge to serve humanity: Human relationship with environment is dynamic and constantly changes. Individuals should be challenged to strive for nobility and excellence in all human endeavors, particularly service. Society should encourage the spirit of service to others especially young people.

5. Friendship and intimacy: Strengthening bonds of friendship and interpersonal intimacy in human society is important. Love and harmony can be a healing medicine against isolation and loneliness, so much related to substance abuse problems.

6. Public figures as examples: Parents and public educators, entertainers, health professionals, celebrities, and government leaders should set the example by abstaining from alcohol and drugs. Drug use is rampant, especially in the entertainment industry. There is a need to re-examine this life style and re-evaluate the concept of joy and excitement in society.

7. Therapeutic community: There is a need to expand the concept of therapeutic community into a Bahá'í culture of healing and spirituality. The Bahá'í community should become a healing community to understand and emotionally as well as spiritually assist those who are affected by the problem of addiction.

8. Dare to be different: Educating children to dare to be different and take a drug-free stance in the face of peer pressure. The school system should provide systematic and realistic education about the effects and dangers of substances of abuse.

9. Pollution-free internal environment: We need to redefine environment beyond the traditional concept of external environment. Our internal environment which includes the climate of mind and soul needs as much attention and protection as the external environment so much talked about. Let's clean up and protect this internal environment from the pollution of substance abuse.

10. *Instant satisfaction:* We are living in a society which has an obsessive fascination with instant gratification and seeks out the quick fix for everything. In such an environment, tolerance to pain and contentment to postpone immediate satisfaction are unpopular virtues. We can grow not only through joy, but also through day to day life stress and suffering.

11. *Governments:* Government leaders and politicians should exercise their moral responsibilities and political will in curbing this human tragedy. They must make a united and concerted effort to halt production, trafficking and consumption of illicit drugs and alcohol. A few points about international collaboration for prevention of substance abuse among the nations, which has increased considerably, follows below.

12. *Spiritual perspective:* Spiritual orientation and consciousness of our true destiny in this world and the world beyond will assist us to re-evaluate our attitude toward the world around us as well as toward the world within ourselves.

International Efforts toward Drug Abuse Prevention

Systematic international efforts to control the drug problem began after the turn of the 20th century. The involvement of the UN in drug control activities began as of 1946 when it took over responsibility from the League of Nations. In 1990, the United Nations created a special organization to act against illicit drug production, trafficking and consumption. This organization, which is called the United Nations International Drug Control Program (UNDCP) was established in Vienna. The main objective of this organization is to control production, trafficking and consumption of drugs under the UN. In the same year (1990), the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed the period of 1991-2000 as the United Nations' Decade Against Drug Abuse. This decision was to intensify international cooperation and to encourage greater efforts on the part of member States to eradicate drug abuse.⁴⁶ Non-

Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have played an increasingly important role in curbing and prevention of alcohol and drug abuse. The Bahá'í International Community (B.I.C.), as an NGO, has collaborated closely with the UN over the past twenty years in the fields of prevention of drug abuse and the education of communities on this problem.

The Bahá'í International Community has participated in several international conferences on the subject of alcohol and drug abuse and its prevention such as the International Conference on Drug Abuse and Trafficking held in Vienna in 1987 and the NGO World Forum on Drug Demand Reduction in Thailand in 1994 as well as the NGOs conference held during the special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1990 and again in 1998 in New York which discussed global problems of substance abuse.

In the 1987 International Conference of Vienna, it was recommended and then approved by the United Nations that all nations of the world observe June 26 each year as the International Day against Drug Abuse (Drug Prevention Awareness Day). This designation has been observed since 1988 and its designation is to increase public awareness and strengthen cooperation for the eradication of drug abuse. The Bahá'í communities are encouraged to participate in observing this day and to contribute to the healing process of this world wide epidemic. Armed with the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith and believing in the principle of harmony between science and religion, Bahá'ís can contribute significantly to preventive education of substance abuse and share the healing remedy of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh with millions of suffering humanity worldwide.

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