

# Releasing the Powers of Junior Youth

Unit 1

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**PRE-PUBLICATION EDITION  
MATERIAL IN DEVELOPMENT**

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**VERSION VI.B**

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Ruhi Institute

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The Ruhi Institute is an educational institution functioning under the aegis of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Colombia. Its purpose is to develop human resources dedicated to the spiritual, social and cultural progress of the Colombian people. Over the decades its materials have increasingly been used by national Bahá'í communities everywhere.

The approach to curriculum development followed by the Ruhi Institute is not the traditional one of design, field-testing and evaluation, carried out in a linear fashion. The first step in writing any set of materials is taken, rather, when an experience is created at the grassroots in performing some act of service in response to the demands of expansion and consolidation. Materials emerge out of this experience and become an expression of it. They are, on the one hand, a record of the learning that occurs in applying the Writings in a particular area of service and, on the other, an instrument for the systematization of that learning. The approach has been described in the following terms in the small volume *Learning About Growth*:

Once an educational need is identified, a small group of people, working at the grassroots, consult among themselves, develop a set of ideas for educational activities, and put them into practice. The results of this practice are reviewed, evaluated and consulted upon; in light of this consultation, a modified set of educational activities is put into practice, and subjected to reflection that leads to further modification and revision. At no time in this process of curriculum development does action await the final preparation and evaluation of educational materials. At every stage, educational activities proceed with the best materials at hand, in the conviction that it is only through practice and reflection, both pursued in light of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, that more appropriate curricula can gradually evolve. Yet, this is not a setting in which a few individuals are developing materials for their own use, and it does become necessary at some point to finalize the structure and content of each unit so that it may be used with confidence by others. The decision to release a final version of the materials for a given course is made simply when it is noticed that modifications are becoming negligible. It is important to note that the various aspects of this process of consultation, action and reflection are carried out parallel with one another, and not performed in a linear sequence which would be inherently artificial.

In practice the above approach takes somewhat different forms, depending on the nature of the material in development. Generally, however, some three stages can be identified in the development process before the final version of the material is published:

### 1. *Initial Outline*

At this stage a course is little more than a few basic concepts and a set of passages from the Writings that, taken together, are believed to be useful in helping individuals acquire the capabilities they need to participate effectively in a specific act of service. For some time, this initial outline of ideas is used by small groups of individuals in the field.

### 2. *Rough Draft*

As action progresses, the material is refined and begins to reflect new experience gained, incorporating ideas that arise out of it. Not infrequently, certain concepts are amended, new passages from the Writings added, or a series of simple exercises introduced to facilitate comprehension of a topic or to help develop an important skill or attitude. Through this ongoing process of action and reflection, the disparate elements are gradually further consolidated into a recognizable course organized around a sequence of ideas that has emerged naturally in the field of service. This is generally regarded as a rough draft.

### 3. *Pre-Publication Editions*

In time, an initial version of the course is prepared and made more widely available as a pre-publication edition. Through continued use, it becomes apparent when a section needs to be moved or an exercise or two revised. Several successive versions may appear. Gradually, however, fewer and fewer modifications are required to achieve the intended purpose of the course, and the material, at this stage, goes for publication.

At the request of the Ruhi Institute, Palabra Publications is happy to make available to selected organizations and institutions one of the units that has reached the pre-publication stage. It is the first of three units of a book currently in development entitled *Releasing the Powers of Junior Youth*. The Ruhi Institute hopes that, by making the unit available, it will assist those interested in their efforts to establish junior youth groups, a segment of society of such importance to the future fortunes of the Faith. As you begin to create your own experience using the unit, you are encouraged to send your comments on the course content to Palabra Publications for the Ruhi Institute. Widening the experience brought to bear on the process of curriculum development in this way will no doubt enrich the materials and increase their effectiveness.

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## SECTION 1

The period between the ages of 12 and 15 represents a special time in the life of an individual, for it is during these years that he or she leaves childhood behind and undergoes profound change. Not yet in the fullness of their youth, individuals in this age range are often referred to as junior youth. Engaging junior youth in programs that seek to enhance their spiritual and intellectual capacities and prepare them to participate effectively in the affairs of their communities is a most significant act of service. The three units of this book focus on some of the concepts, skills, qualities, and attitudes that experience has shown are required by those wishing to implement one such program.

The set of activities recommended by the Ruhi Institute is generally conducted in small groups at the local level. As the one animating the endeavors of the group, you will be seen as a mentor by several youngsters who within a relatively short span of time will reach the age of 15, the threshold of maturity, when they will assume new responsibilities. In this first unit, we will reflect not so much on the attributes of junior youth, but on the kind of young people that the Writings of the Faith suggest they should grow up to be. What should become clear from the passages you will study is that there are a number of characteristics which are to distinguish every generation of youth and particular forces which must shape their lives. It is quite possible, of course, that you yourself are a young person in your late teens or early twenties, in which case the material presented in this unit will offer you the opportunity to examine your own goals and priorities as well.

To begin, it would be worthwhile for you to think about the members of the junior youth group with which you will soon be working. Try to describe a few of the characteristics you would like them to possess at the age of 15 upon their completion of the three-year program that you will undertake for their spiritual empowerment. The exercise below will help you to clarify for yourself some of the results you hope to achieve with the group.

1. Will the youth you envision be distinguished by a high sense of purpose upon their completion of the program? What would they consider this purpose to be? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. On what would they focus most of their energies? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What would motivate them to work for their goals? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Would they be satisfied with the present conditions of the world? If not, what would they think should be changed? Would they feel empowered to contribute to such change? \_\_\_\_

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5. Below are several statements that reflect attitudes towards learning. To what extent will the young people that you envision possess the attitudes described in each one upon their completion of the program? Possible answers are “a great deal”, “somewhat”, “little”, and “not at all”.

- a. They would be studious and would try to put into action what they learn: \_\_\_\_\_
- b. They would have the habit of reflecting on the results of their actions: \_\_\_\_\_
- c. They would have an open mind and approach learning with humility: \_\_\_\_\_
- d. They would have an ardent desire to cultivate their spiritual powers: \_\_\_\_\_
- e. They would yearn to achieve excellence in learning: \_\_\_\_\_
- f. They would be passionate about the study of the sciences and the arts: \_\_\_\_\_
- g. They would be passionate about the study of the Faith: \_\_\_\_\_
- h. They would show enthusiasm for learning to teach the Faith: \_\_\_\_\_
- i. They would attach great importance to academic achievement: \_\_\_\_\_
- j. They would accept the ideas commonly held by people to be true: \_\_\_\_\_
- k. They would derive as much joy from learning to work for the progress of humanity as they would from learning how to direct their own intellectual and spiritual growth as individuals: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Which of the following statements describe the way the young people that you have in mind would conduct themselves? Mark them.

\_\_\_\_ They would strive to live by the standards established in the writings.

\_\_\_\_ Their standards would be more or less the same as those adopted by the generality of youth.

\_\_\_\_ They would look in the Baha'i community for standards to govern their lives.

\_\_\_\_ They would strive to overcome the challenges of living according to the standards of the Faith.

\_\_\_\_ They would recognize contradictions between their beliefs and actions, when they arise.

\_\_\_\_ They would believe in the principles of the Faith, but their actions would reflect the accepted norms of society.

\_\_\_\_ They would forgo high standards in order to find a balance between the demands of the Faith and the dictates of the social environment in which they live.

7. Below are several questions that will help you think about the implications of a pure and chaste life. To what extent will the young people that you are imagining understand these implications?

a. Would their conduct be frivolous? \_\_\_\_\_

b. Would they be attached to trivial and misdirected pleasures? \_\_\_\_\_

c. Would worldly pleasures distract them? \_\_\_\_\_

d. Would they follow fashions and fads even when they are contrary to the standards of chastity? \_\_\_\_\_

e. Would they think purity only means not having extra marital sex? \_\_\_\_\_

f. Would they exercise moderation in the way they dress? \_\_\_\_\_

g. Would they exercise moderation in the way they speak? \_\_\_\_\_

h. Would they exercise moderation in activities in which they take part for entertainment? \_\_\_\_\_

i. Would they be distinguished by their modesty and humility? \_\_\_\_\_

- j. Would they be distinguished by their freedom from jealousy and envy? \_\_\_\_\_
  - k. Would they be distinguished by their purity, decency, and clean-mindedness? \_\_\_\_\_
  - l. Would they be vigilant in controlling their lower passions? \_\_\_\_\_
8. How strong would the willpower of the youth be upon their completion of the program to accomplish each of the following? Decide between “very strong”, “reasonably strong”, and “weak”.
- a. Resist temptations: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Overcome challenges: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Persevere in the face of tests and difficulties: \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Resist pressures that require them to act contrary to the standards of the Faith: \_\_\_\_\_

## SECTION 2

Let us now turn to a few passages from the Writings and examine how they describe a Bahá'í youth. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

**“O loved ones of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá! Man’s life has its springtime and is endowed with marvelous glory. The period of youth is characterized by strength and vigor and stands out as the choicest time in human life. Therefore you should strive day and night so that endowed with heavenly strength, inspired with brilliant motives and aided by His celestial power and heavenly grace and confirmation, you may become the ornaments of the world of humanity, and preeminent among those who are initiated into true learning and the love of God. You must be distinguished amidst men by your sanctity and detachment, loftiness of purpose, magnanimity, determination, noble mindedness, tenacity, the elevation of your aims and your spiritual qualities; that you may become the means of exaltation and glory for the Cause of God and the dawning places of His heavenly bestowals; that you may conduct yourselves in conformity with the counsels and exhortations of the Blessed Beauty—may my life be offered up for His loved ones—and by reflecting Bahá’í qualities and attributes, you may stand out distinguished from others. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá eagerly anticipates that each one of you may become even as a fearless lion moving in the pastures of human perfection and a musk-laden breeze wafting over the meads of virtue.”<sup>1</sup>**

- 1. Complete the following sentences on the basis of the above quotation:
  - a. The springtime of human life is endowed with \_\_\_\_\_ .



- b. The period of youth is characterized by \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- c. The period of youth stands out as the \_\_\_\_\_ in human life.
- d. During the period of youth we should strive day and night so that endowed with \_\_\_\_\_, inspired with \_\_\_\_\_ and aided by His \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, we may become the \_\_\_\_\_ of the world of humanity.
- e. During the period of youth we should strive day and night that we may become preeminent among those who are initiated into \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- f. During the period of youth we must be distinguished by our \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- g. During the period of youth we must be distinguished by \_\_\_\_\_ of purpose.
- h. During the period of youth we must be distinguished by \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ mindedness, \_\_\_\_\_, the elevation of our \_\_\_\_\_ and our \_\_\_\_\_ qualities.
- i. During the period of youth we must become the \_\_\_\_\_ of the exaltation and glory for the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ of His \_\_\_\_\_.
- j. During the period of youth we must strive to conduct ourselves in \_\_\_\_\_ with the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of the Blessed Beauty.
- k. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá eagerly anticipates that every youth may become even as a \_\_\_\_\_ moving in the pastures of \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_ wafting over the meads of \_\_\_\_\_.

2. You have probably heard one expression or another of the popular belief that youth should focus on having fun, for they will have to face the serious matters of life soon enough. This is clearly not in agreement with the above statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. What are some of the assumptions underlying this popular notion? Discuss this question with the group of friends with whom you are studying today, and write your conclusions here.

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### SECTION 3

In the following prayer, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá expresses some of His hopes for Bahá’í youth:

**“O Thou kind Lord! Graciously bestow a pair of heavenly wings unto each of these fledglings, and give them spiritual power that they may wing their flight through this limitless space and may soar to the heights of the Abhá Kingdom.**

**“O Lord! Strengthen these fragile seedlings that each one may become a fruitful tree, verdant and flourishing. Render these souls victorious through the potency of Thy celestial hosts, that they may be able to crush the forces of error and ignorance and to unfurl the standard of fellowship and guidance amidst the people; that they may, even as the reviving breaths of the spring, refresh and quicken the trees of human souls and like unto vernal showers make the meads of that region green and fertile.**

**“Thou art the Mighty and Powerful; Thou are the Bestower and the All-Loving.”<sup>2</sup>**

1. Complete the following sentences on the basis of the above quotation:
- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá likens those in their early youth to fledglings in need of a pair of \_\_\_\_\_ and asks God to give them \_\_\_\_\_ that they may \_\_\_\_\_ through limitless space and may \_\_\_\_\_ of the Abhá Kingdom.
  - He likens those in their early youth to fragile \_\_\_\_\_ and beseeches God to strengthen them so that each one may become a \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
  - He asks God to render them victorious that they may be able to crush the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and to unfurl the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

- d. He prays that they may, even as the reviving \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_, refresh and \_\_\_\_\_ the trees of \_\_\_\_\_ and like unto \_\_\_\_\_ make the meads of that region \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
2. In the prayer, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asks God to bestow upon the youth spiritual powers. Which of the following do you associate with spiritual power?
- \_\_\_ loftiness of purpose
  - \_\_\_ reliance on God
  - \_\_\_ chastity
  - \_\_\_ slyness
  - \_\_\_ competitiveness
  - \_\_\_ solidarity
  - \_\_\_ upright character
  - \_\_\_ worldly ambition
  - \_\_\_ magnanimity
  - \_\_\_ purity of intention
  - \_\_\_ craving for social status
  - \_\_\_ love of God
  - \_\_\_ attraction to luxury
3. In the prayer, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asks God to enable the youth to crush the forces of error and ignorance. Decide which of the following will assist youth in their struggle against such forces:
- \_\_\_ ability to overcome prejudice
  - \_\_\_ ability to contribute to unity of thought
  - \_\_\_ ability to manipulate others
  - \_\_\_ ability to discern right from wrong
  - \_\_\_ ability to express profound ideas with clarity
  - \_\_\_ ability to put material means to good use
  - \_\_\_ ability to control others
  - \_\_\_ ability to overcome the promptings of the lower nature
  - \_\_\_ ability to be impartial in judgment
  - \_\_\_ ability to promote justice

4. In the prayer, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asks God to enable the youth to unfurl the standard of fellowship and guidance. Decide which of the following will assist youth in such efforts:

- \_\_\_ ability to establish bonds of friendship
- \_\_\_ ability to overcome tests and difficulties
- \_\_\_ ability to identify the faults and shortcomings of others
- \_\_\_ ability to overlook the faults of others
- \_\_\_ ability to serve society selflessly
- \_\_\_ ability to rejoice in the success of others
- \_\_\_ ability to instill hope in others
- \_\_\_ ability to overcome prejudice
- \_\_\_ ability to promote self interest
- \_\_\_ ability to promote the well-being of the community

## SECTION 4

The quotations we studied in the last two sections give us insight into some of the characteristics that a Bahá’í youth should possess. Clearly by the time young people reach the age of 15, much will be expected of them. Indeed, we know that the Writings refer to the age of 15 as the beginning of maturity. It is at this age that Bahá’í laws such as those related to prayer and fasting become binding on the individual. About the passage to maturity ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

**“The suckling babe passeth through various physical stages, growing and developing at every stage, until its body reacheth the age of maturity. Having arrived at this stage it acquireth the capacity to manifest spiritual and intellectual perfections. The lights of comprehension, intelligence and knowledge become perceptible in it and the powers of its soul unfold.”<sup>3</sup>**

1. There are many thoughts about youth that can be examined in the light of the above statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Which of the following do you think apply to a fifteen-year-old person? He or she

- \_\_\_ has the spiritual capacity to reflect on the meaning of life and death.
- \_\_\_ is able to consider profound themes only if they are clothed in the garb of fun.
- \_\_\_ has the intellectual capacity to analyze the forces that are influencing his or her life.
- \_\_\_ has the capacity to engage in diligent work.
- \_\_\_ has the spiritual capacity to overcome difficult challenges.
- \_\_\_ has the capacity to hold spiritual and moral classes for children.
- \_\_\_ has the capacity to explain the teachings and principles of the Faith with eloquence and conviction.

- \_\_\_\_\_ does not need parental support and love.
- \_\_\_\_\_ can assume responsibility for observing Bahá'í laws.
- \_\_\_\_\_ has the intellectual capacity to understand social processes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ can engage in meaningful service to society.

2. You may wish to memorize the prayer below:

**“O Lord! Make this youth radiant, and confer Thy bounty upon this poor creature. Bestow upon him knowledge, grant him added strength at the break of every morn and guard him within the shelter of Thy protection so that he may be freed from error, may devote himself to the service of Thy Cause, may guide the wayward, lead the hapless, free the captives and awaken the heedless, that all may be blessed with Thy remembrance and praise. Thou art the Mighty and the Powerful.”<sup>4</sup>**

## SECTION 5

Certain physical, intellectual, and spiritual powers are brought into focus when young people cross the age of 15, the threshold of maturity. Required to leave the attitudes, thoughts, and habits of childhood behind, they are to cultivate new capacities. Channeling these powers into the service of the Cause of God is to begin in the prime of one's youth. Bahá'u'lláh states:

**“Blessed is he who in the prime of his youth and the heyday of his life will arise to serve the Cause of the Lord of the beginning and of the end, and adorn his heart with His love. The manifestation of such a grace is greater than the creation of the heavens and of the earth. Blessed are the steadfast and well is it with those who are firm.”<sup>5</sup>**

The service rendered to the Cause by each generation of youth is indispensable to its advancement. Shoghi Effendi underscores the significance of the contribution that youth make:

**“It is on young and active Bahá'ís, like you, that the Guardian centers all his hopes for the future progress and expansion of the Cause, and it is on their shoulders that he lays the responsibility for the upkeep of the spirit of selfless service among their fellow believers. Without that spirit no work can be successfully achieved. With it triumph, though hardly won, is but inevitable.”<sup>6</sup>**

As to those characteristics that make youth specially suited for the field of service, the Universal House of Justice in a message to all National Spiritual Assemblies writes:

**“The endurance of youth under arduous conditions, their vitality and vigor, and their ability to adapt themselves to local situations, to meet new challenges, and to impart their warmth and enthusiasm to those they visit, combined with the standard of conduct upheld by Bahá'í youth, make them potent instruments for the execution of the contemplated projects. Indeed, through these distinctive qualities they can become the spearhead of any enterprise and the driving force of any undertaking in**

**which they participate, whether local or national. Our expectant eyes are fixed on Bahá'í youth.”<sup>7</sup>**

Complete the following sentences on the basis of the above quotations:

- a. Those who arise to serve the Cause of God in the prime of their youth are \_\_\_\_\_ .
- b. Those who arise to serve the Cause of God in the prime of their youth and adorn their hearts with His love are \_\_\_\_\_ .
- c. The responsibility for the upkeep of the spirit of selfless service among their fellow believers rests on the shoulders of \_\_\_\_\_ .
- d. Without the spirit of selfless service, whose upkeep rests on the shoulders of young and active Bahá'ís, no work can be \_\_\_\_\_ .
- e. Through the spirit of selfless service, whose upkeep rests on the shoulders of young and active Bahá'ís, the triumph of the Cause, though hardly won, is \_\_\_\_\_ .
- f. The \_\_\_\_\_ of youth under arduous conditions and their \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ makes them potent instruments for the execution of projects.
- g. As potent instruments for the execution of projects, youth can exercise their ability to \_\_\_\_\_ themselves to local situations, to \_\_\_\_\_ new challenges, to \_\_\_\_\_ their warmth and enthusiasm to those they visit.
- h. Through their distinctive qualities youth can become the \_\_\_\_\_ of any enterprise and the \_\_\_\_\_ of any undertaking in which they participate.

## SECTION 6

A number of concepts are generally associated with the services performed by youth, among them spontaneity, excitement, and the freedom to pursue whatever possibilities capture the imagination. While there is validity in associating these concepts with service, we should exercise care not to overemphasize them. It is all too easy to fall into the habit of reducing the activities of youth to a series of exciting events, forgetting the value of understanding the nature of process and neglecting the need to learn the discipline of systematic action. Together with your friends studying this course, think of some acts of service to be undertaken by youth that contribute directly to one of the systematic processes through which the Faith advances, for example, the spiritual education of children, the consolidation of community life, and the development of human resources. Are not these activities conducive to joy? Do they not allow for the appropriate degree of spontaneity?

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## SECTION 7

We often hear that the period of youth is a time of preparation. This statement is true indeed. Referring to the great changes needed in the world today, the Universal House of Justice writes that “the transformation which is to occur in the functioning of society, will certainly depend to a great extent on the effectiveness of the preparations the youth make for the world they will inherit.”<sup>8</sup> What we should ask, then, is how young people can best prepare themselves for the responsibilities they will inherit.

This question often gives rise to others related to the relationship between studies—whether academic, vocational, or professional—and service to the Faith. Specifically, it is sometimes not clear how much energy young people should devote to each. One extreme is to advise youth to dedicate themselves fully to their education and to wait until they have gained more life experience before becoming seriously engaged in service to the Faith. The other extreme is to encourage them to forgo any formal education and to spend their energies entirely in the field of service, especially at this time of great opportunity. Both of these extremes, of course, should be avoided. Below are a few quotations from the writings to help you think through this set of issues. After reading them, write down in the space that follows your own understanding of how youth should approach the question of studies and service.

That service to the Faith should be central to the life of every Bahá’í youth is clear from many passages, such as the following written on behalf of the Guardian:

**“The youth should become severed from all things of the world and filled with the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit, arise to spread the Message and quicken the hearts.”<sup>9</sup>**

This next passage written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi refers to the need for youth to develop their intellectual and spiritual capacities as part of their preparation for the future:

**“His hope, as well as that of the friends, is that you should increase both in number and spirituality. The future of this Cause, which is so dear to us all, depends upon the energy and devotion of the rising generation. It is you who before long will be**

**called to shoulder its responsibilities and undertake its spread. To do that, however, you ought to be well equipped. You ought to have your intellectual as well as spiritual side equally developed.”<sup>10</sup>**

A letter written by the Universal House of Justice further explains:

**“For any person, whether Bahá’í or not, his youthful years are those in which he will make many decisions which will set the course of his life. In these years he is most likely to choose his life’s work, complete his education, begin to earn his own living, marry, and start to raise his own family. Most important of all, it is during this period that the mind is most questing and that the spiritual values that will guide the person’s future behavior are adopted.”<sup>11</sup>**

And another letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice provides the following relevant guidance:

**“Many youth have found that dedicating a period of service to the Faith, either in their own countries or abroad, is an excellent means of gaining knowledge and experience, setting the stage for a life of devotion to the Cause. However, care should be taken to ensure that, in an effort to help youth reach greater heights of service, they are not prompted to disregard the need to prepare themselves for the future. A period of full-time service to the Faith can, of course, be a valuable component of their preparation. Whether they are at a point in their studies or careers where they can undertake such a service is a matter which has to be determined on a case-by-case basis, through consultations with parents, friends and the institutions of the Faith. In all cases, obtaining an education within one’s range of possibilities and acquiring a trade or profession with which to earn one’s livelihood must be given due importance. Yet to define the fruitful years of youth exclusively as a stage of preparation would be to overlook the creative energies which are available to youth in such abundance. After all, so many of the early heroes of the Faith were young men and women who arose to accomplish the greatest of deeds in the path of their Beloved.”<sup>12</sup>**

Now, write a brief statement that reflects your understanding of the issues involved:

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## SECTION 8

No doubt the statement you wrote in the last section stresses how important it is for youth to prepare themselves adequately for the world they will inherit by receiving an academic education or training in a vocation or profession. But you surely also noted that service to the Faith cannot be “put on hold” while one studies. Such an attitude tends to perpetuate itself into the future as one gets older, and one can end up waiting all one’s life for the right conditions in order to begin to serve in earnest. This view of the relationship between studies and service can arise when education is defined in terms of book learning alone. When instead we see service as an arena in which knowledge is applied and in which the intellect is developed, then this kind of thinking is easily avoided, and service is considered not only part of, but central to, any sound process of preparation for the future. Indeed, when service to the Cause begins in the prime of youth, it becomes a guiding principle throughout one’s life, enabling one to chart a proper course and keep one’s direction clear.

This realization leads naturally to questions about the kind of preparation youth require to enhance their capacity for service. There is a tendency to think that, by participating in the many events and activities of the Bahá’í community, including those that satisfy their natural desire to have fun together, young people will develop their capacities and prepare themselves adequately for a life of service to the Cause. Yet the writings suggest that such an informal educational process, while necessary, is not sufficient. If we look carefully, we see that Shoghi Effendi expressed the hope that youth would be “well educated and trained” in the teachings and that they would acquire a “thorough” and “sound” knowledge of the Faith. Many of the messages of the Universal House of Justice speak in similar terms. Of course, at the beginning of the Four Year Plan in 1996, the House of Justice called for the establishment of a network of training institutes around the world charged with the responsibility for developing the human resources of the Cause through formal programs. Since then, Bahá’ís everywhere have been engaged in a systematic educational process to develop their capacity for service, and youth have remained in the forefront of this process of preparation. To one international youth conference, the House of Justice wrote:

**“Now that the operation of the training institute has become an integral component in the life of each of your national communities, the Universal House of Justice hopes that you will be able to continually increase your capacity to respond to the multiple needs of the Cause in your region. In whatever field of service you labor, do not lose sight of the central aim of the Four Year Plan. Teach with zeal, participate in the courses offered by your institutes, learn to become teachers of those same courses for the multitudes that enter the Faith, expand your numbers, and arise to harness the spiritual forces that will galvanize your generation.”<sup>13</sup>**

## SECTION 9

As we saw in the two preceding sections, we have to be mindful when considering any situation not to break it apart in such a way that we begin to compartmentalize aspects of our lives, which can lead to unnecessary contradictions. In general, the human mind has a tendency to fragment the world it encounters. Reality—physical, social, or spiritual—is too vast to be understood in its entirety. It is not unreasonable, then, to break it up in order to understand it in

parts. However, when this is done without taking into account the wholeness of reality, difficulties arise. Conflicts among people of different races, colors, nationalities, and religions are examples of some of the many problems that can emerge from a fragmented conception of existence. For, the oneness of humanity is real, and its division along racial, ethnic, and national lines a product of the human mind and the result of historical circumstances.

If we are not careful and adopt such a fragmented approach to our lives, we can create all kinds of dichotomies that are largely imaginary. Work, leisure, family life, spiritual life, physical health, intellectual pursuits, individual development, collective progress, and so on become pieces that together make up our existence. When we accept such divisions as real, we feel pulled in many directions, trying to respond to what we consider to be the demands of these different facets of life. We are bewildered by apparently conflicting aims: Should I sacrifice my family life to serve the Cause? Will not serving the Faith interfere with my efforts to raise my children? These are two examples of the myriad of questions that can arise.

To resolve the dichotomies we have created, we sometimes try to divide our time equally among the various demands placed on us. On other occasions, we attempt to prioritize responsibilities and focus our energies on those we believe to be the most important at any particular moment. A careful allotment of time and energy is of course necessary. But it is only fruitful when we remain conscious of the interconnectedness of the many aspects of our lives. If we fail to see the whole, the tension created among all the parts can give rise to anxiety and even confusion.

Below are various aspects of life placed in pairs that should reinforce each other, but which are sometimes thought to be in conflict. For each one of the sentences that follow the pair, decide whether it represents the kind of thinking that is conducive to an integrated way of life or whether it is indicative of a tendency towards fragmentation. Mark it with an “I” or “F” accordingly.

1. Family and work

\_\_\_ My family life will suffer if I work hard at my job.

\_\_\_ I often discuss with my family my accomplishments at work and the challenges I face there.

\_\_\_ Of course women can excel in their careers, but the children always pay the price.

\_\_\_ If I want to raise my children well, I will have to forget about my profession.

\_\_\_ I can advance in my profession and fully attend to my family responsibilities.

2. Education and service to the Cause

\_\_\_ I have to choose between pioneering and education, since it is not possible to do both.

\_\_\_ Academic achievement is a prerequisite for entering the field of service.

\_\_\_ The knowledge I gain through my studies is an asset in the field of service, and the experience I gain in the arena of service enhances my abilities.

\_\_\_ I have to abandon my studies if I really want to devote myself to the Cause.

\_\_\_ One of my greatest aspirations is to learn to apply the teachings of the Faith in endeavors that promote the betterment of the world.

\_\_\_ The period of service that I dedicate to promoting the Faith or participating in a Bahá'í-inspired social and economic development project will assist me in choosing a suitable field of study.

3. Intellectual development and development of spiritual qualities

\_\_\_ The independent investigation of truth requires the cultivation of the intellect, as well as the acquisition of spiritual qualities.

\_\_\_ In teaching the Faith to others, we should just show them love; what we say is not important.

\_\_\_ Intellectual development requires justice, honesty, and lack of prejudice.

\_\_\_ To develop spirituality, one has to let go of one's intellect.

\_\_\_ Our minds and hearts are not separate from each other; they represent complementary and mutually interactive aspects of one reality—our soul.

\_\_\_ Spiritual qualities are developed through conscious knowledge and the exercise of good deeds.

4. Material life and spiritual life

\_\_\_ I must deny myself material pleasure in order to develop spiritually.

\_\_\_ Spiritual matters should be put aside until we are old; during our youth we should take advantage of every opportunity to advance materially.

\_\_\_ The material needs of people have to be satisfied before they are ready to pay attention to spiritual matters.

\_\_\_ The purpose of my life on this material plane is to develop my spiritual qualities and powers.

\_\_\_ We should enjoy all the bounties that the world has to offer but should not allow earthly desires to take hold of our hearts and prevent us drawing nearer and nearer to God.

## SECTION 10

In this unit we are considering not so much the attributes that define junior youth, but the characteristics of the young men and women that the Writings suggest they should grow up to be. We began this exploration by looking at two quotations that gave us insights into some of these characteristics. We then saw that the age of 15 marks a special point in the life of an individual, for it represents the threshold to maturity, when new powers and capacities are brought into focus. We know what a significant role young people can play in the life of the Cause and how important it is for their tremendous capacities to be directed towards service to the Faith. We have also acknowledged the need for youth to consciously prepare themselves for their future life, and we have seen that service itself is an essential part of this process of preparation, along with their studies—both those needed to acquire the knowledge and skills to earn a livelihood and those that will enhance their capabilities to perform acts of service for the Faith.

You may find it useful to pause here and reflect on what you have studied up to this point. Below are several statements. Read each one and decide whether it is true or false. Although the answer in some cases may be obvious, we hope that you will give the overall exercise adequate attention. It is intended to take you through a sequence of ideas which will help you to organize your thoughts about the material we have covered so far.

- a. For an individual, turning 15 means reaching the age of maturity, but this is more a symbolic mark and does not affect his or her life in any meaningful way.

T  F

- b. Most youth are immature and cannot assume major responsibilities; they are easily distracted and cannot be relied upon. T  F
- c. Youth are eager to assume responsibility for the work of the Faith, but because of their inexperience and immaturity, they are unable to accomplish a great deal. T  F
- d. When a young person reaches the age of maturity, he or she can take on more responsibilities in some areas of life, but not in others. T  F
- e. Youth have all the potential to arise and serve the Faith with great distinction. T  F
- f. Youth can show forth the willpower and dedication to do great deeds for the Faith. T  F
- g. Those who arise to serve the Cause in the prime of their youth are greatly blessed. T  F
- h. Youth should focus most of their attention on their studies; their extra time can be devoted to service to the Faith. T  F
- i. All Bahá'í youth should receive the highest levels of academic training in order to be able to serve the Faith. T  F
- j. All fields of human endeavor are open to Bahá'í youth; they should choose those suited to their talents and circumstances, enter them in a spirit of service, and strive for excellence. T  F
- k. Youth do not have enough experience and knowledge to teach the Faith effectively; it is best they serve in other ways. T  F
- l. Youth do not have the experience and knowledge needed to teach the Faith directly and should be encouraged, instead, to demonstrate a model of life worthy of emulation by their fellow youth. T  F
- m. Youth have great potential to understand the teachings of the Faith and to impart them to their peers. T  F
- n. Youth have great potential to understand the teachings of the Faith and to impart them to people from all walks of life, both young and old. T  F
- o. Youth are eager to acquire the knowledge and abilities needed to teach the Faith. T  F
- p. Youth are one of the greatest resources of the Faith and should be helped, through proper training programs and constant encouragement, to become capable teachers of the Faith. T  F

- q. Youth require special activities that allow them to have fun; it is difficult for them to be serious over an extended period of time. T  F
- r. Learning to be systematic comes later in life, when spontaneity has run out. T  F
- s. Youth should be given opportunities that allow them to exercise their ability to endure arduous conditions and adapt themselves to new situations. T  F
- t. Youth have the power to overcome tests by exemplifying in their lives the high moral standards set forth in the Teachings. T  F
- u. Youth have inquisitive minds and can find answers to their questions by participating fully in the life of the community. T  F
- v. It is the youth who contribute decisively to the vigor, the purity and the driving force of the Bahá'í community. T  F
- w. The great potentialities latent within the Bahá'í community can unfold through the spirit of selfless service demonstrated by youth. T  F

## SECTION 11

It is hoped that the exercise in the last section helped you to consolidate your thinking about the period of youth and that the image you have acquired of this stage of life is one of active service, combined with rigorous preparation for the future. Let us consider this point further.

The interplay that we have discussed between service, education, and preparation needs to unfold within a particular context. Specifically, it should contribute to two processes of transformation envisioned in the writings of the Faith: the pronounced intellectual and spiritual growth of the individual and the transformation of society. We know that **“the supreme and distinguishing function”** of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is **“none other than the calling into being of a new race of men,”**<sup>14</sup> and every Bahá'í strives daily to align his or her thoughts and actions with those of the individual depicted in the Sacred Text. The writings emphasize an equally profound transformation in the structure of society. **“Soon will the present-day order be rolled up,”** Bahá'u'lláh tells us, **“and a new one spread out in its stead.”**<sup>15</sup> **“All men”**, He declares, **“have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.”**<sup>16</sup>

This dual transformation will only occur through conscious effort, and it is essential that young people realize its implications for their lives and become endowed with a strong sense of purpose, both to take charge of their own personal growth and to contribute to the transformation of society. Such a twofold moral purpose will naturally find expression in a life of service.

The following quotations shed light on one aspect of this sense of moral purpose—related to our own intellectual and spiritual growth:

**“The purpose of the one true God in manifesting Himself is to summon all mankind to truthfulness and sincerity, to piety and trustworthiness, to resignation and submissiveness to the Will of God, to forbearance and kindness, to uprightness and wisdom. His object is to array every man with the mantle of a saintly character, and to adorn him with the ornament of holy and goodly deeds.”<sup>17</sup>**

**“The foundation-stone of a life lived in the way of God is the pursuit of moral excellence and the acquisition of a character endowed with qualities that are well-pleasing in His sight.”<sup>18</sup>**

**“It is given to man to obtain knowledge, to attain to great spiritual perfection, to discover hidden truths and to manifest even the attributes of God...”<sup>19</sup>**

**“The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence.”<sup>20</sup>**

1. Complete the following sentences on the basis of the above quotations:
  - a. The purpose of the one true God in manifesting Himself is to summon all mankind to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
  - b. God’s object is to array every man with \_\_\_\_\_  
and to adorn him with \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - c. The foundation-stone of a life lived in the way of God is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - d. It is our duty to obtain \_\_\_\_\_ , to attain \_\_\_\_\_  
to discover \_\_\_\_\_ and to manifest \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - e. The purpose of God in creating us has been, and will ever be, to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ and to \_\_\_\_\_ .
  
2. A vision of the possibilities inherent in the human soul helps to shape an individual’s sense of purpose. In what way are the two connected? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. There is also a strong connection between an individual’s sense of purpose and an understanding that this earthly life is but a small part of an eternal journey towards the presence of God. Can you explain why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The next set of quotations shed light on the other aspect of this sense of moral purpose, that is, to contribute to the transformation of society:

**“This Wronged One testifieth that the purpose for which mortal men have, from utter nothingness, stepped into the realm of being, is that they may work for the betterment of the world and live together in concord and harmony.”<sup>21</sup>**

**“And the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world’s multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men? No, by the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight.”<sup>22</sup>**

**“How excellent, how honorable is man if he arises to fulfill his responsibilities; how wretched and contemptible, if he shuts his eyes to the welfare of society and wastes his precious life in pursuing his own selfish interests and personal advantages.”<sup>23</sup>**

**“Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men.”<sup>24</sup>**

**“They who are the people of God have no ambition except to revive the world, to ennoble its life, and regenerate its peoples.”<sup>25</sup>**

1. Complete the following sentence on the basis of the above quotations:
  - a. The purpose for which we have, from utter nothingness, stepped into the realm of being, is that we may \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - b. The honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - c. There is no larger bounty conceivable than an individual should, looking within himself, find that by \_\_\_\_\_ , he has become \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - d. How honorable man is if he arises to \_\_\_\_\_ ; how wretched and contemptible, if he shuts his eyes to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - e. We should not busy ourselves in \_\_\_\_\_ , but should fix our thoughts on that which will \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - f. They who are the people of God have no ambition except to \_\_\_\_\_ , to \_\_\_\_\_ , and \_\_\_\_\_ .



2. An individual's sense of purpose is shaped, in part, by a vision of the great opportunities open to humanity at this stage of development when its unification into one common family is a real possibility. In what way are the two connected? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. There is also a connection between an individual's sense of purpose and an understanding that humanity is on a long evolutionary path leading to a Divine civilization. Can you explain why? \_\_\_\_\_

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## SECTION 12

As suggested by the exercises in the last section, an understanding of the nature of the change in the individual and society envisioned in the writings is fundamental to the sense of purpose that young people should possess. To acquire the gemlike qualities that **“lie hidden within the mine of their true and inmost selves”**<sup>26</sup> and to contribute to the creation of a materially and spiritually prosperous world civilization, they must appreciate the magnitude of the transformation called for by Bahá'u'lláh. Of course, people everywhere speak about the need for change today. What we should realize is that the transformation destined to occur in the individual and society under the direct influence of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is far greater than what most people would even imagine possible.

Let us try to get a glimpse into the magnitude of the change that will occur at the level of the individual by reflecting on several quotations. Bahá'u'lláh tells us:

**“A race of men, incomparable in character, shall be raised up which, with the feet of detachment, will tread under all who are in heaven and on earth, and will cast the sleeve of holiness over all that hath been created from water and clay.”**<sup>27</sup>

And in one passage He says:

**“Say: He is not to be numbered with the people of Bahá who followeth his mundane desires, or fixeth his heart on things of the earth. 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. From his garment the Concourse on high can inhale the fragrance of sanctity...”**<sup>28</sup>

In another passage, He declares:

**“The companions of God are, in this day, the lump that must leaven the peoples of the world. They must show forth such trustworthiness, such truthfulness and**

**perseverance, such deeds and character that all mankind may profit by their example.”<sup>29</sup>**

And He further explains:

**“Within the very breath of such souls as are pure and sanctified far-reaching potentialities are hidden. So great are these potentialities that they exercise their influence upon all created things.”<sup>30</sup>**

‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us:

**“O ye friends of God! Show ye an endeavor that all the nations and communities of the world, even the enemies, put their trust, assurance and hope in you; that if a person falls into errors for a hundred-thousand times he may yet turn his face to you, hopeful that you will forgive his sins; for he must not become hopeless, neither grieved nor despondent. This is the conduct and the manner of the people of Bahá. This is the foundation of the most high pathway! Ye should conform your conduct and manners with the advices of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.”<sup>31</sup>**

The splendor of the attributes that will characterize this new human being, as described in the Writings, is dazzling, and we are overwhelmed by the glimpses we get of the powers and capacities of this “new race of men”. Upon reading such passages we could react in different ways. We might be inclined to think the standard set by the Writings is so far beyond our reach that we slip into mediocrity; in such a state, we allow ourselves to be lulled into believing it is sufficient to simply avoid unseemly behavior. When one is endowed with a strong sense of purpose, however, passages like those above are a constant source of encouragement and spur one on to greater heights.

Yet we are also blessed with another source of inspiration in the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the perfect Exemplar of His Father’s teachings. Though conscious that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá moves in a sphere of His own and that no human being can ever hope to attain His exalted station, we see in Him the embodiment of every Bahá’í ideal and strive towards the standard of conduct which He exemplified. You and your friends studying this course may find it helpful to choose phrases from the above quotations and think of episodes from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s life that reflect the qualities mentioned in each. For example, when we try to envision walking with “the feet of detachment”, stories from His life come to mind that show us what it means to go through this world detached from all created things. When we think of “the fragrance of sanctity”, we know that it is from His “garment” that the “Concourse on high” could inhale its sweetness, and we remember stories that illustrate His utter sanctity.

## **SECTION 13**

Now let us consider the profound process of transformation that must occur at the level of society. Bahá’u’lláh states:

**“By Myself, the day is approaching when We will have rolled up the world and all that is therein, and spread out a new Order in its stead.”<sup>32</sup>**

He tells us further:

**“The world’s equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this Most Great, this new World Order. Mankind’s ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System, the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.”<sup>33</sup>**

And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá affirms:

**“Justice and truth will encompass the world; enmity and hatred will disappear; all causes of division among peoples, races and nations will vanish; and the cause of union, harmony and concord will appear. The negligent will awake, the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the dumb will speak, the sick will be cured, the dead will arise. War will give place to peace, enmity will be conquered by love, the causes of dispute and wrangling will be entirely removed, and true felicity will be attained. The world will become the mirror of the Heavenly Kingdom; humanity will be the Throne of Divinity.”<sup>34</sup>**

In another passage He explains:

**“That which was applicable to human needs during the early history of the race could neither meet nor satisfy the demands of this day and period of newness and consummation. Humanity has emerged from its former degrees of limitation and preliminary training. Man must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moralities, new capacities. New bounties, bestowals and perfections are awaiting and already descending upon him.”<sup>35</sup>**

And He exhorts us:

**“... we must strive with heart and soul in order that this darkness of the contingent world may be dispelled, that the lights of the Kingdom shall shine upon all the horizons, the world of humanity become illumined, the image of God become apparent in human mirrors, the law of God be well established and that all regions of the world shall enjoy peace, comfort and composure beneath the equitable protection of God.”<sup>36</sup>**

As in the case of the individual, it is difficult for us to imagine the full splendor of the civilization destined to come into being. Indeed, it would hardly be possible to describe its features. Yet we cannot be so overwhelmed by the magnitude of the transformation required that we think it will occur magically, without effort on our part. Our eyes should remain fixed on Bahá’u’lláh’s world order, and we should recognize that even the smallest act can contribute towards its construction. To reflect further on the extent of the change that will take place in society, fill in the blanks in each of the sentences below, using one of the following words or phrases.

disappear, vanish, give place, spread out, enjoy, shine, conquered, removed, attained, encompass, rolled up, dispelled, appear, illumined, become, established

a. The day is approaching when the world and all that is therein will be \_\_\_\_\_ .

- b. The day is approaching when a new Order will be \_\_\_\_\_ in place of the present one.
- c. Justice and truth will \_\_\_\_\_ the world.
- d. Enmity and hatred will \_\_\_\_\_.
- e. All causes of division among peoples, races and nations will \_\_\_\_\_.
- f. The cause of union, harmony and concord will \_\_\_\_\_.
- g. War will \_\_\_\_\_ to peace.
- h. Enmity will be \_\_\_\_\_ by love.
- i. The causes of dispute and wrangling will be entirely \_\_\_\_\_.
- j. True felicity will be \_\_\_\_\_.
- k. The world will \_\_\_\_\_ the mirror of the Heavenly Kingdom.
- l. The darkness of the contingent world will be \_\_\_\_\_.
- m. The world of humanity will become \_\_\_\_\_.
- n. The lights of the Kingdom will \_\_\_\_\_ upon all the horizons.
- o. The law of God will be well \_\_\_\_\_.
- p. All regions of the world will \_\_\_\_\_ peace, comfort and composure beneath the equitable protection of God.

## SECTION 14

The passages and exercises in the last two sections have given us insight into the profound transformation that will take place in the individual and society as a result of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. To consider further the magnitude of the transformation He envisioned, read the statements below. Each one expresses some praiseworthy attribute of the individual or society such as justice, fairness, or loving-kindness. Yet the passages in the preceding sections leave little doubt that Bahá'u'lláh has called humanity to a much higher standard of individual and collective conduct. Try to rephrase each of the sentences so that it illustrates more clearly the standard set by His Revelation. An example for the first statement is provided to assist you.

- a. One must control one's feelings of jealousy and not be consumed by them.
- b. We should blot out from our hearts any trace of jealousy.

- a. We should try to be courteous to everyone we meet, whether friend or stranger.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
  
- a. We should be thankful for the wealth God has given to us and always contribute to charities when asked.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
  
- a. One should strive not to enter into conflict with others.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
  
- a. To live a moral life implies that we should not cause harm to anyone.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
  
- a. To live in peace, we should learn to tolerate peoples of diverse cultures, backgrounds, and religions.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
  
- a. People should learn to stand up for their rights.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
  
- a. It is imperative for governments to dedicate the resources needed to create the best programs possible for those schools that are training the minds of our future leaders.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
  
- a. Prisons should be modernized in order to rehabilitate criminals.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_

Now reflect on the sentences you have written in light of the passages below. The first one helps us to think about how purified of earthly desires hearts must be:

**“O Son of Earth! Know, verily, the heart wherein the least remnant of envy yet lingers, shall never attain My everlasting dominion, nor inhale the sweet savors of holiness breathing from My kingdom of sanctity.”<sup>37</sup>**

Regarding the way we should treat one another, the following quotation offers some insight:

**“So intense must be the spirit of love and loving-kindness, that the stranger may find himself a friend, the enemy a true brother, no difference whatsoever existing between them.”<sup>38</sup>**

This quotation sheds light on proper attitudes towards giving:

**“O Children of Dust! Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.”<sup>39</sup>**

Concerning the nature of our interactions with others, we read:

**“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.”<sup>40</sup>**

And we read the following regarding the question of moral behavior:

**“The days when idle worship was deemed sufficient are ended. The time is come when naught but the purest motive, supported by deeds of stainless purity, can ascend to the throne of the Most High and be acceptable unto Him.”<sup>41</sup>**

As for the treatment of people of different backgrounds, this passage provides us with insight:

**“Consort with all the peoples, kindreds and religions of the world with the utmost truthfulness, uprightness, faithfulness, kindness, good-will and friendliness; that all the world of being may be filled with the holy ecstasy of the grace of Baha, that ignorance, enmity, hate and rancor may vanish from the world and the darkness of estrangement amidst the peoples and kindreds of the world may give way to the Light of Unity. Should other peoples and nations be unfaithful to you show your fidelity unto them, should they be unjust toward you show justice towards them, should they keep aloof from you attract them to yourself, should they show their enmity be friendly towards them, should they poison your lives sweeten their souls, should they inflict a wound upon you be a salve to their sores. Such are the attributes of the sincere! Such are the attributes of the truthful.”<sup>42</sup>**

The quotation below helps us to understand how an awareness of the oneness of humanity affects social relations:

**“I hope that each one of you will become just, and direct your thoughts towards the unity of mankind; that you will never harm your neighbors nor speak ill of any one; that you will respect the rights of all men, and be more concerned for the interests of others than for your own.”<sup>43</sup>**

As for access to education, the following passage addresses this issue:

**“Bahá’u’lláh has announced that inasmuch as ignorance and lack of education are barriers of separation among mankind, all must receive training and instruction. Through this provision the lack of mutual understanding will be remedied and the unity of mankind furthered and advanced. Universal education is a universal law.”<sup>44</sup>**

Regarding the administration of justice, we read the following:

**“Divine civilization, however, so traineth every member of society that no one, with the exception of a negligible few, will undertake to commit a crime. There is thus a great difference between the prevention of crime through measures that are violent and retaliatory, and so training the people, and enlightening them, and spiritualizing them, that without any fear of punishment or vengeance to come, they will shun all criminal acts. They will, indeed, look upon the very commission of a crime as a great disgrace and in itself the harshest of punishments.”<sup>45</sup>**

## SECTION 15

We have talked about a twofold sense of purpose that impels individuals to take charge of their own spiritual and intellectual growth and contribute to the welfare of society. We have seen how this twofold sense of purpose, so necessary for young people today, is strengthened by an understanding of the nature and the magnitude of the transformation in the individual and in society envisioned in the Writings. What we also need to realize is that these two processes of change are intimately linked. Developing one’s potential and working for the welfare of society cannot be separated, for a person’s moral standards and behavior shape his or her environment and in turn are molded by the structure of society. A letter written on behalf of the Guardian states:

**“We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.”<sup>46</sup>**

On the basis of the above quotation, decide whether the following statements are true or false:

- a. The individual will be transformed only when society has been fully reformed. T  F
- b. Society’s ills will completely vanish only when its individual members have become spiritual. T  F
- c. When just laws are enacted, society will be free from oppression, regardless of the way individuals may behave. T  F

- d. Society will be free from oppression when every individual strives to be just. T  F
- e. All members of a society can be just even if the legal system operating in it is unjust. T  F
- f. Once everyone becomes spiritual, the problems of society will be solved. T  F
- g. An individual's conduct influences the social environment. T  F
- h. A just society will be the result of efforts to eliminate unjust structures and to educate individuals to be fair-minded and truth seeking. T  F
- i. No one can escape the effects of his or her social environment. T  F
- j. Human beings, aided by their spiritual powers, can overcome the negative effects of the social environment. T  F
- k. Prejudice will disappear once everyone acknowledges the oneness of humanity. T  F
- l. Prejudice will disappear only when society eradicates every trace of discrimination in its laws and institutions. T  F
- m. Every form of prejudice can be abolished through the enactment of just laws and the training of souls to investigate the truth and associate with everyone with love and fellowship. T  F
- n. When everyone believes that humanity is one, we will have unity. T  F
- o. The establishment of unity in the world requires the transformation of the individual and of the structure of society. T  F

## SECTION 16

The ideas presented in the last section bring us back to the question of service, for it is in the field of service that we develop our potentials and effect change in society. That participating in a process of social transformation implies a life dedicated to service needs little elaboration. What may require more thought, however, is the way in which service contributes to the intellectual and spiritual growth of the individual. Below is a list of activities. Try to think of some spiritual qualities that are needed in performing each one and in ensuring its effectiveness.



- a. Holding a devotional meeting: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- b. Paying a visit to someone's home for the purpose of discussing the Faith: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- c. Teaching a children's class: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- d. Assisting a junior youth group as an animator \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- e. Teaching the Cause as part of a personal plan: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- f. Teaching the Cause as part of a collective effort: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- g. Acting as a tutor of a study circle: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Now, below are a few spiritual qualities that we are all striving to develop. For each group, choose one of the activities above that you believe enhances significantly the qualities mentioned. Describe in what ways you think the activity contributes to the development of the qualities in the one who performs it.

- a. Truthfulness, trustworthiness, and justice: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b. Forbearance and kindness: \_\_\_\_\_

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c. Sanctity, sincerity, and radiance: \_\_\_\_\_

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d. Courage, trust, confidence, and humility: \_\_\_\_\_

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e. Resignation and submissiveness to the Will of God: \_\_\_\_\_

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## SECTION 17

Service is an all-embracing theme that touches every facet of our lives. When we are animated by a spirit of selfless service, every interaction we have, every action we take—in our professional lives, in our dealings with others, as members of the Bahá’í community—is influenced by it. Yet, no matter what services we render, we remain ever conscious of the fact that there is a structured plan for the propagation of the Faith delineated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself, a plan which unfolds in distinct stages and to which we should dedicate ourselves—that is, the Divine Plan. To it the Guardian referred as the **“mightiest Plan ever generated through the creative power of the Most Great Name”**<sup>47</sup>. It is **“forging ahead,”** he told us,

**“... gaining momentum with every passing day, tearing down barriers in all climes and amidst divers peoples and races, widening irresistibly the scope of its beneficent operations, and revealing ever more compelling signs of its inherent strength as it marches towards the spiritual conquest of the entire planet.”**<sup>48</sup>

We know that, through the Divine Plan, the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation will become infused in all parts of the world, transforming individual and collective lives. Shoghi Effendi has affirmed, moreover, that the

**“... final and crowning stage in the evolution of the Plan wrought by God Himself for humanity will, in turn, prove to be the signal for the birth of a world civilization, incomparable in its range, its character and potency, in the history of mankind—a civilization which posterity will, with one voice, acclaim as the fairest fruit of the Golden Age of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh.”<sup>49</sup>**

In words such as the following did he appeal to the friends to contribute their share to the progress of the Plan:

**“All must participate, however humble their origin, however limited their experience, however restricted their means, however deficient their education, however pressing their cares and preoccupations, however unfavorable the environment in which they live.”<sup>50</sup>**

And again:

**“The field is indeed so immense, the period so critical, the Cause so great, the workers so few, the time so short, the privilege so priceless, that no follower of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh worthy to bear His name, can afford a moment's hesitation.”<sup>51</sup>**

Each stage in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan is marked by one of the global teaching plans launched by the Head of the Faith. Every plan has certain requirements, and we know that the current series of global plans are focused on advancing the process of the entry of humanity into the Cause of God by troops. In this light, the Universal House of Justice has urged Bahá'í youth:

**“At every stage of the growth of the Faith, young people have played a pivotal role in its propagation and consolidation. You have the bounty of being youth at a unique time in history. Like the generations before you, you must seize the opportunities that the hour has thrust upon you. These are the years during which the Bahá'í community must make a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. Now is the time to teach. It is imperative that you take up your responsibility to lead not only your peers but all people towards the world civilization of Bahá'u'lláh.”<sup>52</sup>**

To one youth conference, the House of Justice has written the following regarding participation in the global plans:

**“The Five Year Plan, which will undoubtedly be the focus of your consultations over the next few days, requires concentrated and sustained attention to two essential movements. The first is the steady flow of believers through the sequence of courses offered by training institutes, for the purpose of developing the human resources of the Cause. The second, which receives its impetus from the first, is the movement of geographic clusters from one stage of growth to the next. That Bahá'í youth must be intensely involved in both of these—indeed, that they must be a driving force behind**

**them—goes without saying. We urge you, then, to cast your deliberations in the framework of these two pressing requirements. Ask yourselves how, as individuals, as members of your local and national communities, and as the vanguard of an entire generation in your region, you can ensure that the advancement in the process of entry by troops, called for by the Five Year Plan, is achieved in each of your countries.”<sup>53</sup>**

The above quotations can leave little doubt in your mind of the imperative need for young people to move to the front ranks of those serving the Divine Plan. To end this section, it would be helpful for you to reflect on the following message written by the Universal House of Justice to a series of youth gatherings held across Latin America:

**“As this generation of youth assumes the responsibilities of conducting the affairs of society, it will encounter a landscape of bewildering contrast. On the one hand, the region can justly boast brilliant achievements in the intellectual, technological and economic spheres. On the other, it has failed to reduce widespread poverty or to avoid a rising sea of violence that threatens to submerge its peoples. Why—and the question needs to be asked plainly—has this society been impotent, despite its great wealth, to remove the injustices that are tearing its fiber apart?**

**“The answer to this question, as amply evidenced by decades of contentious history, cannot be found in political passion, conflicting expressions of class interest, or technical recipes. What is called for is a spiritual revival, as a prerequisite to the successful application of political, economic and technological instruments. But there is a need for a catalyst. Be assured that, in spite of your small numbers, you are the channels through which such a catalyst can be provided.”<sup>54</sup>**

1. The message asks why a society with such intellectual, technological, and economic wealth has been unable to remove the injustices tearing it apart, indicating that the answer is not to be found in political passion, conflicting expressions of class interest, or technical recipes. Think of the society in which you live and give an example of each of the following:

- a. A political passion that characterizes the society: \_\_\_\_\_

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- b. Some of the conflicting expressions of class interest in the society: \_\_\_\_\_

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- c. A technical recipe that the society has followed: \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What, according to the Universal House of Justice, is needed for the successful application of political, economic, and technological instruments in society? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What does that Universal House of Justice tell us is needed to bring about the spiritual revival of society? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Who does the House of Justice say constitutes a channel through which the Message of the Faith can be provided? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How does participating in the execution of the Divine Plan enable young people to act as channels for the spiritual revival of society? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## SECTION 18

No doubt the final question in the last section caused you to think further about the essential role young people are to play in the onward march of the Cause. In the passage below from *God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi presents a picture of the early champions of the Faith, whose heroic deeds are to inspire Bahá'ís throughout the ages. Given that many of them were young people themselves, we would do well to reflect here on the words the Guardian employed to describe their outstanding qualities. Before doing so, you may find it useful to read through the following glossary:

**Meteor-like:** like a meteor, a luminous trail that appears in the sky and moves quickly across

**Traverse:** travel across

**Somber:** dark and gloomy

**Satellite:** a celestial body orbiting another of a larger size

**Galaxy:** a very large group of stars

**Irradiate:** send out rays of light

**Incandescent:** glowing with intense heat, strikingly bright

**Nascent:** having recently come into existence

**Contest:** a struggle for victory

**Trailbreakers:** pioneers

**Intrigue:** secret scheme

**Depravity:** corruption, wickedness

**Sweeping:** of wide range, overwhelming

**Piety:** reverence for God and devotion to religious duty

**Fervor:** intensity of feeling

**Leonine:** like a lion

**Abnegation:** renouncing, giving up

**Resolve:** strong purpose

**Granite-like:** unyielding in firmness and endurance

**Stupendous:** of amazing greatness

**Veneration:** respect and awe

**Disconcerting:** bewildering, perplexing

The Guardian writes:

**“We behold, as we survey the episodes of this first act of a sublime drama, the figure of its Master Hero, the Báb, arise meteor-like above the horizon of Shiraz, traverse the sombre sky of Persia from south to north, decline with tragic swiftness, and perish in a blaze of glory. We see His satellites, a galaxy of God-intoxicated heroes, mount above that same horizon, irradiate that same incandescent light, burn themselves out with that self-same swiftness, and impart in their turn an added impetus to the steadily gathering momentum of God’s nascent Faith....**

**“The heroes whose deeds shine upon the record of this fierce spiritual contest, involving at once people, clergy, monarch and government, were the Báb’s chosen disciples, the Letters of the Living, and their companions, the trail-breakers of the New Day, who to so much intrigue, ignorance, depravity, cruelty, superstition and cowardice opposed a spirit exalted, unquenchable and awe-inspiring, a knowledge surprisingly profound, an eloquence sweeping in its force, a piety unexcelled in fervor, a courage leonine in its fierceness, a self-abnegation saintly in its purity, a resolve granite-like in its firmness, a vision stupendous in its range, a veneration for the Prophet and His Imams disconcerting to their adversaries, a power of persuasion alarming to their antagonists, a standard of faith and a code of conduct that challenged and revolutionized the lives of their countrymen.”<sup>55</sup>**

1. Complete the following sentences:
  - a. The Letters of the Living and their companions were engaged in a \_\_\_\_\_ contest.

- b. This contest involved at once \_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_ ,  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ .
- c. The early heroes of the Faith opposed intrigue, ignorance, depravity, cruelty, superstition and cowardice with
- a spirit \_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ ,
  - a knowledge \_\_\_\_\_ ,
  - an eloquence \_\_\_\_\_ ,
  - a piety \_\_\_\_\_ ,
  - a courage \_\_\_\_\_ ,
  - a self-abnegation \_\_\_\_\_ ,
  - a resolve \_\_\_\_\_ ,
  - a vision \_\_\_\_\_ ,
  - a veneration for the Prophet and His Imams \_\_\_\_\_ ,
  - a power of persuasion \_\_\_\_\_ ,
  - a standard of faith and a code of conduct that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. For what purpose did the early heroes of the Faith enter into the spiritual contest described by the Guardian in the passage above? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Are the Bahá'í youth of the present age, like their predecessors, engaged in a spiritual contest? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How does their contest resemble that of the early heroes of the Faith? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. How can the Bahá'í youth of today ensure that, like their brothers and sisters in the heroic age, they are able to win the spiritual contest in which they are engaged? \_\_\_\_\_

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## SECTION 19

Through successive cycles of crisis and victory, youth of every generation have followed the trail blazed by the Dawn Breakers and have remained in the forefront of Bahá'í activity, laboring to bring Bahá'u'lláh's message to humanity. The Universal House of Justice writes:

**“From the very beginning of the Bahá'í Era, youth have played a vital part in the promulgation of God's Revelation. The Báb Himself was but twenty-five years old when He declared His Mission, while many of the Letters of the Living were even younger. The Master, as a very young man, was called upon to shoulder heavy responsibilities in the service of His Father in Iraq and Turkey; and His brother, the Purest Branch, yielded up his life to God in the Most Great Prison at the age of twenty-two that the servants of God might ‘be quickened, and all that dwell on earth be united.’ Shoghi Effendi was a student at Oxford when called to the throne of his Guardianship, and many of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, who won imperishable fame during the Ten Year Crusade, were young people.”<sup>56</sup>**

In another message, the House of Justice pays tribute to the heroes of a more recent past:

**“Consider, for example, the instances in Shiraz last summer of the six young women, their ages ranging from 18 to 25 years, whose lives were snuffed out by the hangman's noose. All faced attempted inducements to recant their Faith; all refused to deny their Beloved. Look also at the accounts of the astounding fortitude shown over and over again by children and youth who were subjected to the interrogations and abuses of teachers and mullahs and were expelled from school for upholding their beliefs. It, moreover, bears noting that under the restrictions so cruelly imposed on their community, the youth rendered signal services, placing their energies at the disposal of Bahá'í institutions throughout the country. No splendor of speech could give more fitting testimony to their spiritual commitment and fidelity than these pure acts of selflessness and devotion. In virtually no other place on earth is so great a price for faith required of the Bahá'ís. Nor could there be found more willing, more radiant bearers of the cup of sacrifice than the valiant Bahá'í youth of Iran. Might it, then, not be reasonably expected that you, the youth and young adults living at such an extraordinary time, witnessing such stirring examples of the valor of your Iranian fellows, and exercising such freedom of movement, would sally forth, “unrestrained as the wind,” into the field of Bahá'í action?”<sup>57</sup>**

Opportunities to reflect on significant events in the lives of Bahá'í youth around the world can help each generation of youth acquire a sense of mission. Close bonds are formed with



these outstanding figures at childhood through the stories that are narrated in Bahá'í children classes and at home, but a more deliberate effort is required to address this need during adolescence and, of course, throughout the entire period of youth. Carefully selected examples, some dramatic and others less so, can demonstrate such qualities as courage, determination, zeal and selflessness which the youth must strive to emulate.

1. Identify either from the early history of the Faith or from more recent times a few episodes upon which you feel youth should reflect. \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Give your reason for selecting these particular episodes. \_\_\_\_\_

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## SECTION 20

Even from the small sampling of passages quoted above, it is possible to see that the lives of the early champions of the Faith and the heroic souls that followed them were distinguished by a sense of purpose. It is equally evident that they each must have possessed an understanding of the significance of the historical moment in which they were living, as well as a vision of the magnitude of the change which humanity was being called upon to make. That this sense of purpose found expression in a life dedicated to the diffusion of the Divine message is also clear. Yet, as we reflect on the heroic deeds that they performed, and on the ultimate sacrifice that many of them made, we cannot believe that these attributes alone distinguished such sanctified beings. What was it that characterized their lives most? What passion possessed them, and what drove them to reach such heights of selfless service? Was it not the love of God that burned so brightly in their hearts? Were not they intoxicated by the beauty of their Beloved? Can we ever hope to contribute to the spiritual empowerment of the next generation of youth if we do not foster in them an attraction to beauty and perfection and help them develop an intimate relationship with their Creator? Let us end this course by immersing ourselves in the following words:

**“For when the true lover and devoted friend reacheth to the presence of the Beloved, the sparkling beauty of the Loved One and the fire of the lover's heart will kindle a blaze and burn away all veils and wrappings. Yea, all he hath, from heart to skin, will be set aflame, so that nothing will remain save the Friend.”<sup>58</sup>**

**“O Friends! Abandon not the everlasting beauty for a beauty that must die, and set not your affections on this mortal world of dust.”<sup>59</sup>**

**“Know thou that he is truly learned who hath acknowledged My Revelation, and drunk from the Ocean of My knowledge, and soared in the atmosphere of My love,**

**and cast away all else besides Me, and taken firm hold on that which hath been sent down from the Kingdom of My wondrous utterance. He, verily, is even as an eye unto mankind, and as the spirit of life unto the body of all creation. Glorified be the All-Merciful Who hath enlightened him, and caused him to arise and serve His great and mighty Cause. Verily, such a man is blessed by the Concourse on high, and by them who dwell within the Tabernacle of Grandeur, who have quaffed My sealed Wine in My Name, the Omnipotent, the All-Powerful.”<sup>60</sup>**

**“O Ye Cohorts of God! If you observe that a soul has turned his face completely toward the Cause of God, his intention is centralized upon the penetration of the Word of God, he is serving the Cause day and night with utmost fidelity, no scent of selfishness is inhaled from his manners and deeds, and no trace of egotism or prejudice is seen in his personality—nay rather is he a wanderer in the wilderness of the love of God, and one intoxicated with the wine of the knowledge of God, occupied wholly with the diffusion of the fragrances of God, and attracted to the signs of the Kingdom of God; know ye of a certainty that he is confirmed with the powers of the Kingdom, assisted by the heaven of Might; and he will shine, gleam, and sparkle like unto the morning star with the utmost brilliancy and splendor from the horizon of the everlasting gift. If he is alloyed with the slightest trace of passion, desire, ostentation or self-interest, it is certain that the results of all efforts will prove fruitless, and he will become deprived and hopeless.”<sup>61</sup>**

**“Know thou verily, the hand of divine Providence hath attracted thee to the Throne of the Kingdom, and the divine glad-tidings hath caused such joy and happiness in thee, that thou hast removed the covering and lifted the veiling from the Countenance of the Divine Beauty, beheld the Brilliant Face through thine insight, and became cognizant of the mysteries of purity and sanctity in this divine Cause!**

**“Now, with a heart overflowing with the love of God, supplicate to God with all joy, and thank thou God for this guidance and this high gift. And know thou, that verily, the vanguards of the gifts of thy Lord shall overtake thee from all sides when thy feet become firm in the Path.”<sup>62</sup>**

**“O my God! O my God! This, Thy servant, hath advanced towards Thee, is passionately wandering in the desert of Thy love, walking in the path of Thy service, anticipating Thy favors, hoping for Thy bounty, relying upon Thy kingdom, and intoxicated by the wine of Thy gift. O my God! Increase the fervor of his affection for Thee, the constancy of his praise of Thee, and the ardor of his love for Thee.**

**“Verily, Thou art the Most Generous, the Lord of grace abounding. There is no other God but Thee, the Forgiving, the Merciful.”<sup>63</sup>**

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