

Releasing the Powers of Junior Youth

Unit 3

**PRE-PUBLICATION EDITION
MATERIAL IN DEVELOPMENT**

VERSION I

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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 third 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

In the previous unit, we stated that social environment plays a highly significant role in the lives of young people and that, accordingly, the program for the spiritual empowerment of junior youth recommended by the Ruhi Institute is organized around the concept of a junior youth group. A junior youth group, we have said, is not a children's class. It has some of the features of a study circle, but its primary function is to serve as an environment of mutual support for its members, one in which they can develop the spiritual perception and patterns of thought and behavior that will characterize them throughout their lives.

Normally, a junior youth group participating in the program meets weekly and studies materials that have been specifically developed for ages between 12 and 15. Studying occupies only a portion of the time the youth spend together. During the rest of the time, they engage in artistic activities, consult on and plan service projects and participate in sports. In addition to these weekly meetings, the group attends special events and comes together to perform acts of service. While the Ruhi Institute recommends a set of study materials that has proven its effectiveness in diverse cultures, it can only provide an overview of the other components of the program, which will vary from place to place.

The material being recommended is organized in three levels, which correspond roughly to the ages of 11 to 13, 12 to 14, and 13 to 15. Ideally, junior youth should enter the program around the age of 12 and complete it by the time they are fifteen. It is hoped that the experience will prepare them intellectually and spiritually for the Institute's main sequence of courses and the paths of service it opens before them.

When the junior youth of a community show interest in the program, it is not always possible to divide them according to age from the beginning. A group of some 10 to 15 members is often formed with all interested youth, and distinct levels emerge only gradually as new groups enter the program each year. In addition to differences of age, there are also variations in intellectual ability, in upbringing and degree of maturity. Groups are never homogeneous and animators consistently face the challenge of responding to the varied interests of the youth. A great deal of flexibility and creativity is required to address this challenge and you need to be prepared for it each time you and the group meet. How would you, for example, deal with the following situations?

- Some members of the junior youth group you are assisting experience difficulty in their reading comprehension.
- Younger members of the group feel belittled when you try to work with them separately.
- One or two older members find some of the activities of the group boring.
- Some members of the group decline to participate in a particular activity.
- A few members of the group show the capacity to go through the material at a quicker pace than the rest.
- Girls and boys in the group are reluctant to participate in certain activities together.
- Some members do not have sufficient means to contribute, say towards a group outing.
- One or two of the members are irregular in their attendance.

sad and perplexing situation is not to be found in traditional and ecclesiastical religion. The dogmatism of the Church has been discarded once for all. What can control youth and save it from the pitfalls of the crass materialism of the age is the power of a genuine, constructive and living Faith such as the one revealed to the world by Bahá'u'lláh. Religion, as in the past, is still the world's sole hope, but not that form of religion which our ecclesiastical leaders strive vainly to preach. Divorced from true religion, morals lose their effectiveness and cease to guide and control man's individual and social life. But when true religion is combined with true ethics, then moral progress becomes a possibility and not a mere ideal.

Let us look at an extract from one of the lessons of *Spirit of Faith*— one among some eight units belonging to the first category of materials being developed for the ages 12 to 15. This particular unit covers themes that are philosophical in nature, for it is well-known that young people in this age range grapple with fundamental questions of existence, questions that must be answered properly if confusion and even loss of faith is to be avoided later. It is in the teachings of the Faith that answers are to be found to the many puzzles baffling the human mind: the true nature of human beings, good and evil, free will and destiny, evolution and the appearance of the spirit of man, human intellect and the spirit of faith. *Spirit of Faith* draws on the insights gained from the Sacred Writings, particularly from the penetrating explanations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in *Some Answered Questions* in order to shed light on these themes. It develops each theme through the conversations of a group of junior youth during their weekly meetings. The following section is taken from a lesson in which the youth are discussing the question of fate with their animator, Natalia Petrovna:

“Let us see what we have understood up to now,” says Natalia Petrovna. “We have the free will to do good or bad and we have to use our volition to lead a noble life. But to have free will does not mean we can control everything. There are things that are bound to happen to us over which we have little control. Now I want to ask you about another idea. What do you understand by the word ‘fate’?”

“I think fate is something we cannot change no matter what,” says Igor.

“That sounds good. Can anyone give a few examples?” asks Natalia.

“We do not choose our parents,” says Nadya.

“We cannot choose where we are born,” says Anton.

“My parents keep saying it is my fate to become a great pianist,” says Vadik.

“But you don't have to. You can choose to become something else,” says Marina.

“That is right. Fate is not that simple,” says Natalia. “There is a good analogy that explains how fate works. Has any of you ever seen how a carpet is woven?”

There is a blank look on everyone's face, so Natalia continues: "Well, there is a frame. On this frame, parallel strands of yarn are stretched tightly from one end to the other. The weaver uses a variety of yarns of different colors to weave through these strands and create a pattern. One of the early believers heard 'Abdu'l-Bahá saying that we are like weavers. We have been given the frame and the strands. We have also been given the yarns to weave with, which you could say are all the talents and powers we are born with. This is our fate. But we choose the design that is to be woven on the loom. We have freedom over our actions. Each action creates a small part of the pattern. The complete work is who we grow up to be. Through free will and volition we develop the powers and talents God has bestowed upon us."

Reflections:

God has given us different capacities. Somebody may be good at biology, while someone else may have a talent for music. But we all have been given what is necessary to develop as noble beings. It is not correct, therefore, to blame fate for our shortcomings. When we do that, we stop trying to improve ourselves. For each case below, select the thought that helps the individual to change his or her situation:

Someone gets sick often because he usually eats unhealthy food. He thinks:

It is my fate to be weak and sickly.

I should stop making excuses and change my eating habits.

Someone does not study, so she performs poorly in her exams. She thinks:

I may not be the top student, but with diligence I will improve.

It is not my fate to succeed in school.

Someone gets drunk each time he faces a difficulty. When he is sober he thinks:

Life forces me to get drunk.

I can handle the problems in my life; I don't need alcohol.

Someone is in the habit of criticizing her friends. So they avoid her. She thinks:

No one likes me.

I should stop criticizing and see the good in my friends.

Someone cheats on an exam and gets caught. He thinks:

This is my luck. Others cheat and never get caught.

How could I possibly do such a thing? I am supposed to be adorned with the robe of honesty.

“Are we saying that it is no one’s fate to become a criminal?” asks Ivan.

“Of course not,” replies Natalia Petrovna. In the analogy I just used, every one can weave beautiful patterns with the frame and the yarns they have been given. Though different, we all have the capacity to grow up to be good.”

Ivan agrees with all that is being said. Yet, something is bothering him and he does not exactly know what it is. Then, all of a sudden he hears himself saying: “But this is all too hard.”

No one quite understands what Ivan means.

“What is so hard?” asks Natalia.

“Making so much effort all the time to be strong, to be good,” answers Ivan.

“You are right Ivan,” says Natalia with a smile on her face. “But remember that God is aiding us all the time. He never leaves us alone. It is like a sailing boat; the power to move comes from the wind and not from the boat itself. But it is the captain who uses the wind to take the boat to its destination. All power comes from God. Without His aid we are powerless. When we only look at ourselves, all we see is weakness. But when we turn to God and implore His aid and assistance, we find the strength to do what is pleasing to Him.

The group is then divided into pairs to memorize the following passages:

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

The contrast between the diminishing influence of traditional religion referred to by the Guardian and the power of a living Faith that would save the youth from “the pitfall of the crass materialism” of the day should be reflected in the content of what young people are taught and in the way their spiritual capacities are developed. Although you will study the entire text of “*Spirit of Faith*” later, it would be helpful for you to pause and examine the content of the above extract by discussing the following points:

1. How does the material present the concept of fate? Is it dogmatic?

2. What would a dogmatic presentation of the concept be like?
3. Does the material place the proper emphasis on assisting the youth to explore spiritual concepts, or are ideas presented rigidly?
4. How does the material assist them to see the implication of the Writings related to fate and free will in their lives?
5. Is there tolerance for the differing views and emotions of the junior youth who are trying to understand the concepts? If so, how is it shown?
6. What would happen if junior youth were not allowed to express their ideas freely in this respect?
7. How does Natalia Petrovna assist junior youth to develop clarity of thought?
8. Are the questions discussed between the members of the group relevant to all junior youth, irrespective of their backgrounds?

SECTION 3

The second category of material recommended by the Ruhi Institute to be studied by junior youth groups may be called Bahá'í-inspired. In general, educational materials of this kind are created with the conviction that, in the Ocean of the Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, there are innumerable pearls of wisdom that should be offered to interested individuals, even when they do not yet recognize His station. You are already familiar with this concept, as in the third unit of Book 2, *Introducing Bahá'í Beliefs*, you studied passages based on the talks and tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in order to acquire the ability to integrate spiritual knowledge and insight gained from them into your daily conversations.

As you know from your own experience, in explaining to others the themes you explored in that unit in a natural way, you may either mention the source of your insights or find it prudent not to do so, this according to the demands of each circumstance. In the same way, Bahá'í-inspired materials are developed under the direct influence of the Teachings. The nature of each set of materials and its intended use dictates the extent to which the Faith is to be explicitly mentioned. In some, it is quite appropriate to incorporate exact passages from the Sacred Texts. In others, Bahá'í teachings may be explained without any direct quotations. In either case references to original sources may or may not be included. It is important to realize, however, that even in cases where no explicit mention of the Faith is made, the context of teaching-learning experience makes it clear that material is indeed inspired by the teachings.

The Bahá'í-inspired materials being considered here draw extensively on the power of the Word of God, both by quoting directly from the Writings and by weaving the teachings of the Faith into the presentations of intellectual, moral and spiritual themes. Although the texts themselves do not provide references, in most cases when they are used, the animator or the sponsoring institute specify the sources of the quotations. Below is an extract from a lesson of "*Breezes of*

Confirmation”, usually the first book being studied by junior youth groups. Read it and decide if you would categorize it as Bahá’í- inspired.

Godwin has a classmate and close friend whose name is Chishimba. He often visits the Mulengas, and tonight he is staying for dinner. The conversation at the table jumps from one subject to another. Musonda wants to bring up the subject of confirmation, and she is impatient. Finally, there are a few moments of silence. “Rose and I have been talking about confirmation,” says Musonda.

“There goes my little sister,” says Godwin, clearing his throat. But to his surprise, Chishimba looks interested.

“What does the word mean to you?” he asks Musonda.

“Musonda, also surprised, looks at Rose, hoping that she will answer.

“Confirmation...God confirms us and help us in what we do,” says Rose.

Chishimba does not say anything for a while. There is sadness in his eyes. “A few months ago, he slowly begins, “my father lost his job. He is honest and responsible, and everyone knows it. For eighteen years he worked as a guard in a company, and then, all of a sudden, they fired him. We all know the reason. If they had kept him two more years, he would have retired and the company would have had to pay him his pension. We don’t have a lot of savings. Even though my older brother helps us, it looks like I cannot go back to school next year because I cannot pay for my room and board. I really love school. I wonder why God does not help me.”

Everyone looks in the direction of Mr. Mulenga, expecting him to answer his question.

Mr. Mulenga smiles and says, “That God confirms us when we make an effort does not mean that life is easy. Your lives will be full of difficulties, and unfortunately, many of them will be caused by injustice. But you will have to work hard, and even though things may not go the way you wish for a while, you should be sure of God’s confirmation. He will especially confirm you in your efforts to do away with injustice.” He turns to Chishimba and says, “Your family is united and hardworking. My heart tells me that things will change for you. You will finish your studies. Take my word for it.”

Discuss the following questions:

1. What is the main spiritual concept discussed in the above conversation?
2. Is the concept presented in a way that can be understood by junior youth?
3. In Unit II of this book we discussed the dangers of placing too much emphasis on self-confidence, self-realization and self-discovery. How does striving and attracting God’s

confirmation differ from trying to develop greater and greater confidence in one's own self? Which of the two are encouraged in the Writings?

4. Do all junior youth irrespective of their backgrounds, including those from Bahá'í families, benefit from the study of such material? Why?

SECTION 4

Early adolescence is a period of life during which we greatly enhance our capacity to go beyond outer appearances and seek a deeper understanding of what we witness and what we experience. This implies that junior youth are in need of spiritual perception and should be assisted to recognize spiritual forces, to see the spiritual reality of every condition and to identify relevant spiritual principles. In the Writings, there are many references to seeing with the “eye of the soul”, opening “the inner vision” and developing “inward sight”. In the passage below, for example, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gives this counsel to the Tarbiyat School in Tehran:

Let them make the greatest progress in the shortest span of time, let them open wide their eyes and uncover the inner realities of all things, become proficient in every art and skill, and learn to comprehend the secrets of all things even as they are – this faculty being one of the clearly evident effects of servitude to the Holy Threshold.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá names spiritual perception as one of the powers that distinguish human beings from animals:

It is clearly evident that while man possesses powers in common with the animal, he is distinguished from the animal by intellectual attainment, spiritual perception, the acquisition of virtues, capacity to receive the bestowals of Divinity, lordly bounty and emanations of heavenly mercy. This is the adornment of man, his honor and sublimity. Humanity must strive toward this supreme station.

In another passage, He refers to our inner vision and inner hearing as spiritual graces:

He has given us material gifts and spiritual graces, outer sight to view the lights of the sun and inner vision by which we may perceive the glory of God. He has designed the outer ear to enjoy the melodies of sound and the inner hearing wherewith we may hear the voice of our creator.

The following statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reminds us how essential it is to open our inward sight:

In the spiritual world, the divine bestowals are infinite, for in that realm there is neither separation nor disintegration which characterize the world of material existence. Spiritual existence is absolute immortality, completeness and unchangeable being. Therefore we must thank God that He has created for us both material blessings and spiritual bestowals. Our spiritual perception, our inward sight must be opened, so that we can see the signs and traces of God's spirit in everything. Everything can reflect to us the light of the Spirit.

You will find it useful to reflect on the following passage from the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá which describes one instance of spiritual perception:

The conception of annihilation is a factor in human degradation, a cause of human debasement and lowliness, a source of human fear and abjection. It has been conducive to the dispersion and weakening of human thought, whereas the realization of existence and continuity has upraised man to sublimity of ideals, established the foundations of human progress and stimulated the development of heavenly virtues; therefore, it behooves man to abandon thoughts of non-existence and death, which are absolutely imaginary, and see himself ever-living, everlasting in the divine purpose of his creation. He must turn away from ideas which degrade the human soul so that day by day and hour by hour he may advance upward and higher to spiritual perception of the continuity of the human reality.

Can you describe in the space below how spiritual perception brings new dimensions to human understanding that are not accessible through the exercise of ordinary mental powers alone?

SECTION 5

Having explored the necessity of possessing spiritual perception, we must now ask ourselves how we can develop it. The question, of course, does not admit a simple answer, and we can only explore here a few relevant ideas.

It is clear that spiritual perception is an attribute of pure hearts. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

The more pure and sanctified the heart of man becomes, the nearer it draws to God, and the light of the Sun of Reality is revealed within it. This light sets hearts aglow with the fire of the love of God, opens in them the doors of knowledge and unseals the divine mysteries so that spiritual discoveries are made possible.

That the knowledge of God is vital for the development of spiritual perception is also evident:

For in the existing knowledge of the reality of things there is material advantage, and through it outward civilization progresses; but the knowledge of God is the cause of spiritual progress and attraction, and through it the perception of truth, the

exaltation of humanity, divine civilization, rightness of morals and illumination are obtained.

And, the love of God is clearly indispensable if inner sight is to be developed:

By the fire of the Love of God the veil is burnt which separates us from the Heavenly Realities, and with clear vision we are enabled to struggle onward and upward, ever progressing in the paths of virtue and holiness, and becoming the means of light to the world.

You should find the following exercises helpful as you reflect on the significance of the above passages.

1. Write a few sentences describing how each condition enhances spiritual perception:

Purity of heart:

Knowledge of God:

Love of God:

2. Decide whether the following statements are true or false:
 - a. Through reasoning alone, without the aid of the Teachings of God, we are able to distinguish right from wrong. T F
 - b. It is the knowledge of the Manifestations of God and obedience to their teachings that enable us to perceive truth. T F
 - c. Purity of heart makes a human being naïve. T F
 - d. The more pure the heart, the more faithfully it reflects divine attributes, the light of which enables it to perceive the inner reality of things. T F

- e. The fire of the love of God burns away the veil of self, thus enabling the inner sight to behold the truth. T F
- f. The power of the love of God assists us to strive with a clear vision to fulfill His will and purpose. T F
- g. Fear of extinction weakens our intellectual and spiritual abilities and therefore our spiritual perception is sharpened when we are convinced of the continuity of our existence. T F
- h. Selfless service to the Divine Threshold will assist us to see the inner reality of things. T F
- i. With inner sight, we can see divine confirmations. T F

SECTION 6

The last quotation of the previous section points to a fundamental concept of particular relevance to our exploration, namely that numerous veils hinder the inner eye from seeing the reality of things. The development of spiritual perception requires the removal of such veils. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

The bestowals of God which are manifest in all phenomenal life are sometimes hidden by intervening veils of mental and mortal vision which render man spiritually blind and incapable, but when those scales are removed and the veils rent asunder, then the great signs of God will become visible, and he will witness the eternal light filling the world. The bestowals of God are all and always manifest. The promises of heaven are ever present. The favors of God are all-surrounding, but should the conscious eye of the soul of man remain veiled and darkened, he will be led to deny these universal signs and remain deprived of these manifestations of divine bounty. Therefore, we must endeavor with heart and soul in order that the veil covering the eye of inner vision may be removed, that we may behold the manifestations of the signs of God, discern His mysterious graces and realize that material blessings as compared with spiritual bounties are as nothing.

Material senses, literal interpretation, vain imaginings, imitation, egotism and pursuit of passion and desire are among the veils mentioned by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

My prayer for you is that your spiritual faculties and aspirations may daily increase, and that you will never allow the material senses to veil from your eyes the glories of the Heavenly Illumination.

One of the veils is literal interpretation. To penetrate the inner significances a mighty effort is needed.

Praise thou God that thou hast found thy way into the Kingdom of Splendours, and hast rent asunder the veil of vain imaginings, and that the core of the inner mystery hath been made known unto thee.

Verily I beseech God, with all humbleness, to remove the covering from thine insight and to show unto thee His great signs, and to make thee a banner of guidance, severed from all else save Him, enkindled with the fire of His love, engaged in His praise and apprehending the realities of things; so that thou mayest see with thine eyes, hear with thine ears and not imitate any of the fathers and ancestors; have perception in the matter of thy Lord, for the people are in dark veils.

For, no veil is greater than egotism and no matter how thin that covering may be, yet it will finally veil man entirely and prevent him from receiving a portion from the eternal bounty.

Yet the pursuit of passion and desire will wrap the eyes in a thousand veils that rise out of the heart to blind the sight and the insight as well.

In one of the passages quoted above, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that “should the conscious eye of the soul of man remain veiled and darkened”, he will be led to deny the universal signs of God’s bestowals and promises of heaven.

1. Mention some of the universal signs to which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá may be referring:

2. Now describe how the veils mentioned below deprive us from beholding these signs.

Literal interpretation of the sacred texts

Vain imaginings

Imitation

Egotism

Pursuit of passion and desire

3. Decide whether the following statements are true or false:

- a. Our inner eye perceives even without the aid of our mental and mortal eyes. T F
- b. Our physical senses and mental faculties always hinder us from perceiving spiritual reality. T F
- c. Purifying our material senses of all that does not pertain to God assists our inner faculties to perceive the truth. T F

4. Finally, reflect on this statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s to gain further insight into the nature of the veils that can inhibit spiritual perception. Memorize it if you wish.

Know thou, verily, there are many veils in which the Truth is enveloped: gloomy veils; then delicate and transparent veils; then the envelopment of Light, the sight of which dazzles the eyes, as doth the sun which is enveloped only in its own light and, as we look at it, the sight is blinded and eyes are dazzled.

I beg of God to remove all the veilings and familiarize the light with all eyes, so that man may not be veiled from witnessing the Sun of Truth.

SECTION 7

Below is one of the lessons from *Glimmerings of Hope*, another Bahá’í-inspired text studied by junior youth. It is the story of Kibomi a twelve-year-old boy who, after the loss of his parents, embarks on a journey in search of his sister. Kibomi belongs to the Adumba tribe. His parents were killed by the Kungu tribe in the midst of civil strife. The previous lesson has described his encounter with an old man from the Kungu tribe who treats him with great kindness. In this lesson he meets a group of soldiers from his own tribe.

With some food in him, Kibomi has more energy and moves faster. When he ran from his village, he felt mostly fear and anger. Now he is beginning to recover the good feelings he has always had about people. The old man was a Kungu, but he was kind and wise. He shared his food. The words he spoke were beautiful and full of hope: “We have to make choices.” “We were created to love, not to hate.”

Kibomi continues to follow the river towards Nangata. After walking for a while, he hears voices and quickly hides behind a large tree. A group of young men are approaching. They are speaking the Adumba language. Kibomi is happy to hear his language and slowly steps out from behind the tree. The men are wearing uniforms. They are soldiers of the Adumba rebel army. Some of them are quite young, and one looks the same age as Kibomi. The soldiers stop as soon as they see him and hold up their guns. “Wait!” says Kibomi. “I am Adumba like you!”

“What are you doing out here alone?” asks their leader impatiently.

“The Kungu attacked our village and killed my parents. I had to run away,” answers Kibomi.

“Come and join us then,” says the leader. “We must teach the Kungu a lesson. Make them pay for what they did to your family.”

Kibomi is tempted. He thinks a little and is about to accept. The soldier boy comes forward and extends to him his hand. Kibomi looks into his eyes and is disturbed by the despair he sees in them. He hesitates. “I may join you later,” he says with his voice shaking. “But now I must go and find my sister.”

As the soldiers walk away, one turns and says, “Remember, fighting back is the only way.” Kibomi does not answer.

Questions

What did Kibomi feel when he left his village?

Why has his feeling changed after seeing the old man?

Why does Kibomi hide behind the tree?

Who are the young men in uniforms that he meets?

What does the leader ask Kibomi to do?

What does Kibomi see in the eyes of the boy soldier?

Activities

1. Kibomi sees despair in the eyes of the young boy soldier who, fearful and angry like himself, has made a choice to fight and kill. We all have moments of sadness and despair. In such times, we should not choose dark paths, but should look for the light that restores hope. Read the following prayer and meditate on its words:

He is the Compassionate, the All-Bountiful!

O God, my God! Thou seest me, Thou knowest me; Thou art my Haven and my refuge. None have I sought nor any will I seek save Thee; no path have I trodden nor any will I tread but the path of Thy love. In the darksome night of despair, my eye turneth expectant and full of hope to the morn of Thy boundless favor and at the hour of dawn my drooping soul is refreshed and strengthened in remembrance of Thy beauty and perfection.

Now try to memorize the prayer.

2. In the following situations, decide which actions will bring despair and which will restore hope:

- | | | | |
|----|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. | You do poorly in one of the subjects in an exam. | Hope | Despair |
| | You give up studying and spend most of your time playing. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | You tell yourself that you are stupid. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | You ask another student to help you. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | You are patient with yourself and try harder to understand the subject. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | You blame your teacher for not helping you more. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. | You feel lonely and it seems that you do not have any friends. | Hope | Despair |
| | You keep to yourself and feel sad most of the time. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | You spend less time thinking about yourself and care more for others. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | You think about the faults of others all the time. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | You look for the good in others. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | You take the first step to speak and be friendly to others. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. | You see jealousy and fighting among some of your relatives. | Hope | Despair |
| | You, too, feel jealous and fight with them. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | You try to be more generous to them. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | You pray for the member of your family to become united. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | You teach the children in your family about love and generosity. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | You tell yourself there is nothing you can do to change your relatives. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

strive to dedicate our mental and spiritual powers to building a new world, implies a higher state of consciousness than a life focused on material concerns. One of the main challenges of an animator of junior youth groups is to help the youth reach higher and higher levels of consciousness. To do so, the youth need to understand the concepts that generate the central themes of a spiritual life and increase their capacity to reflect on, to analyze and to apply them. What are some of these themes and how is such a capacity enhanced?

SECTION 9

During adolescence the powers inherent in the human soul increasingly manifest themselves. Among these the powers of thought and expression are of particular importance and nurturing them is vital to the expansion of consciousness. There is an intimate connection between language and thought. The power of thought is revealed through utterance, and the enhancement of the power of utterance is indispensable to the cultivation of understanding. Developing the power of expression and deepening one's understanding of reality go hand in hand. Bahá'u'lláh states:

O people of Baha! The source of crafts, sciences and arts is the power of reflection. Make ye every effort that out of this ideal mine there may gleam forth such pearls of wisdom and utterance as will promote the well-being and harmony of all the kindreds of the earth.

In another passage He says:

He hath come for your salvation, and hath borne tribulations that ye may ascend, by the ladder of utterance, unto the summit of understanding....

The enhancement of the power of expression involves more than the mere acquisition of the mechanical skills of reading, writing and speech. It requires the ability to read with good comprehension, to describe ideas with clarity and eloquence and to articulate concepts with reasonable precision. In the exercise of these abilities junior youth learn to apply relevant scientific, moral and spiritual concepts to the analysis of the world around them and to the formulation of personal convictions upon which a future social ideology can be built.

'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that **"the mass of the population is uninformed as to these vital agencies which would constitute an immediate remedy for society's chronic ills"** and that at present **"because of their inadequate schooling, most of the population lack even the vocabulary to explain what they want."** How fortunate, then, are those who, in early youth,

have been able to develop the power of expression and have become conscious of the divine remedy for the chronic ills of humankind.

In the lesson below from *Drawing on the Power of the Word*, a Bahá'í-inspired text often used with junior youth that have already advanced through a number of books, the group is discussing the concept of “the word”. Study it and then try to explain how it raises the consciousness of young people.

VI

One of the most exciting activities carried out by the Alegrías youth group in the first months of its existence was a tree-planting project. Once the youth had planted fifty fruit trees on the land surrounding their school, they invited their parents, friends and neighbours to a ceremony during which Elisa gave a short talk on the importance of improving the environment. The community appreciated this project because the trees they planted would bear fruit and beautify the village.

The day after the ceremony, before leaving Alegrías, Elisa asked for a special meeting with the youth. “Today I would like us to talk about a theme which will be at the center of our discussions for months to come,” she told them with great enthusiasm. “To introduce it, let me ask you a question: Why do you think God created us?”

Mariela answered immediately, “God created us because He loves us. ‘I loved thy creation, hence I created thee.’ I learned this quote when I was a child and have never forgotten it.”

“Excellent,” responded Elisa. “God has created us out of His infinite love for us. And because of this love, He has bestowed upon each of us the most wonderful gifts. One of His greatest gifts to us is the ability to use the ‘word’. No other living creature has been given the ability to speak words, read words, write words, and understand them. Through words, we communicate with each other and let each other know what we think and feel. Above all, it is in words that the divine teachings are expressed. We understand these teachings by listening to and reading the Word of God revealed through His Manifestation. The theme that I have in mind for our discussions, then, is the power of the word.”

“I have heard that the word is more powerful than the sword,” said Carlota.

“That’s true,” added Antonio. “But for words to have power, they must be accompanied by deeds. If not, words are empty and are easily swept away by the wind. One of my favorite quotes says: ‘Beware, O people of Bahá, lest ye walk in the ways of them whose words differ from their deeds.’”

“Yes,” added Ana Maria. “You can tell someone she’s your best friend, but if you don’t help her when she needs you, then perhaps you are not such a good friend after all.”

Ana Maria’s comment sparked everyone’s imagination, and they all began to give examples of both empty words and words that are accompanied by deeds.

Finally Elisa said, “Good. You are all convinced that words accompanied by deeds are extremely powerful. Words have an incredible power—they can change the world. That is why you, who want to build a better world, should learn to use words well. This means thinking the word, understanding the word, speaking the word, spreading the word, and putting the word into practice.”

For a while the youth remained quiet, reflecting on what Elisa had said. Then Diego suddenly had an idea. Excited, he jumped up in front of the group and said, “Now I know how we will achieve material and spiritual progress: by the power of the word accompanied by pure deeds.”

Silence. No one said anything. Diego ended up just standing there, feeling uncomfortable. He did not know whether to sit down or remain standing. He looked to Elisa for help. Elisa got up slowly, went towards him, and took his hand. “You have discovered a very profound truth,” she said to him. “Over time you will learn how important it is.”

EXERCISES

1. Use the following words to complete the sentences below:

accompany, imagination, express, deeds, communicate,
improve, bestowed, create, environment, surrounding,
gift, revealed, convince, profound

- a. It is through the power of the word that we are able to _____ ourselves.
- b. Julia did not want her younger brother to go to the store alone, so she decided to _____ him.
- c. The doctor was happy to see that the young girl’s health was beginning to _____.
- d. Only by asking her several times did Luis Enrique finally _____ her to speak at the meeting.
- e. God has given us the _____ of life, and we should not waste it.
- f. Whenever Juan Carlos makes a promise, he tries his best to keep it. His words are always followed by _____.
- g. Because of His love for us, God has given us many gifts. The ability to use the word is one of the greatest gifts. He has _____ upon us.

- h. The short story was written entirely from the author's _____.
- i. In order to _____ with others, we should learn to listen.
- j. Cecilia is concerned about the _____ and decided to give a course at her community center on sanitation.
- k. Whenever there is a project to be done, Diego is able to get everyone excited about it. He is able to _____ enthusiasm.
- l. Roberto was so tired after working hard all day that he went to bed and no one could wake him. He was in a _____ sleep.
- m. My grandmother never liked to tell anyone how old she was, but when she turned 100 she finally _____ her age.
- n. Anna planted a garden all round her house, so there were beautiful flowers of many different colors and shapes _____ it.

2. Write a sentence using each of the phrases below.

pure deeds: _____

improving the environment: _____

with great enthusiasm: _____

putting words into practice: _____

reflecting on what had been said: _____

3. Words have the power to lead to good or to bad, and depending on the words we use, we can give good advice or bad advice to others. Place a “G” in front of the expressions below which are good advice and a “B” in front of those which are bad advice.

- ___ We should be united and never fight.
- ___ If you need it, take it. So what if the owner minds.
- ___ Don't backbite.
- ___ We all feel lazy once in a while; when you have one of those days, it's better not to do anything.
- ___ Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today.
- ___ It doesn't matter if you go to meetings a little late.
- ___ No matter how small the task, it should be done with excellence.
- ___ It is all right to tell a little white lie every once in a while.
- ___ Don't do anything for anybody; it doesn't pay.
- ___ The only purpose of life is to have fun.
- ___ We should make daily effort to improve ourselves.
- ___ Work is punishment.
- ___ Why should we obey the law; we all know what is best for ourselves.
- ___ Our purpose in this world is to know and to worship God.
- ___ We are worshipping God when we do our work in the spirit of service.
- ___ We should each worry about our own life and not be bothered by other people's problems.
- ___ Your parents are old; what do they know about life today!
- ___ A little alcoholic drink every once in a while never hurt anyone.
- ___ Life is short. Why kill yourself working!

May your souls be illumined by the light of the Words of God, and may you become repositories of the mysteries of God, for no comfort is greater and no happiness is sweeter than spiritual comprehension of the divine teachings. If a man understands the real meaning of a poet's verses such as those of Shakespeare, he is pleased and rejoiced. How much greater his joy and pleasure when he perceives the reality of the Holy Scriptures and becomes informed of the mysteries of the Kingdom!

The passages presented below are from the book *Drawing on the Power of the Word*. The theme of progress runs through the entire text. The material strives to assist young minds gain an understanding of the concept of progress that is in accord with the Teachings of the Faith. You are asked to try to identify the differences between the meaning of progress, say, as conveyed in mass media today, and its significance as expressed in the following extract:

Some time ago, the people of the village received a visit from a respected teacher who told them, “Alegrías can become a model community, where we can achieve both material and spiritual progress.” At the beginning, Diego did not exactly understand what “material and spiritual progress” meant, but he shared the excitement of his entire community. Since then, he has learned a great deal about this matter. He has become aware that, although physically small, he is no longer a child and is capable of helping his village achieve the desired material and spiritual progress.

* * *

It was during one of these conversations that Diego decided to ask everyone what they thought of material and spiritual progress. Mariela, who always has something interesting to say, answered immediately: “I know exactly what material progress means. It means we are poor and we need more money to be able to get the things that will make us happy.”

Mariela’s comment excited everyone, and they all began to share their opinions. This is more or less what they said:

Antonio: “I don’t believe that to be happy you have to be rich. I know many poor people who are happy.”

Carlota: “My brother is on vacation from the university, and he says that the rich invented the idea of ‘the happy poor’ to keep us content working for them.”

Ana Maria: “That may be true, but I know that happiness comes from inside and does not depend on how many things a person owns.”

Diego: “But still, it sure isn’t much fun to be poor. We should do our best to improve our lives.”

Antonio: “But we should be happy while we are trying to do this. I want to work hard for myself and for my community, but I also want to feel happy doing it. I used to enjoy spending time with Carlota’s brother, but ever since he started talking about the rich and the poor I don’t like to listen to him. He’s so full of anger.”

Roberto: “I know that real happiness comes from being close to God and from obedience to His laws.”

Diego: “That’s true, but we can’t forget that to love God we should love our fellow human beings and help them.”

Carlota: “And we should remember that obeying the laws of God also means working together to build a better world where people will not be poor anymore.”

Then, all of a sudden, Diego realized that so far they had spoken mostly about material progress. “What happened to spiritual progress?” he asked. But everyone was already tired, and they decided to continue the discussion the next time.

* * *

The youth dedicated several meetings to the discussion of material and spiritual progress. One month later, just before Elisa’s visit, they arranged a special meeting to go over their conclusions. When the youth presented their ideas to Elisa, she was delighted. She helped them to organize their conclusions clearly and to write the following declaration:

Youth Declaration

We are no longer children and should seriously think about our future. The world in which we live is filled with suffering and afflicted with disunity. We want to build a new world where people live in harmony and where war and poverty no longer exist. In order to build a new world we should begin with our own community. That is why we now speak about material and spiritual progress in our small village, Alegrías. To progress materially, we should improve our agriculture, take better care of our health, have more schools and be active in business and industry. With the fruits of our labors, we should turn our homes, our village and our surroundings into places of great beauty, where we can all enjoy a clean and sanitary environment.

Material progress for all people is not attainable if we do not achieve spiritual progress. Without spirituality, a few become rich while the rest continue to live in poverty. To reach our goals as a community we should be united, act with justice, cooperate and be friendly with one another, and be generous, honest and trustworthy. Justice, generosity, love and kindness, honesty and trustworthiness are spiritual qualities through which we achieve both material and spiritual progress.

It is not only to build a better world that we need spiritual qualities. We also need them for the life of our soul which does not end on this earth. Material and spiritual progress means that each day we strive for excellence in the material and spiritual aspects of our lives, that we work hard to build a just and peaceful world, and that we prepare ourselves for an eternal life of joy and happiness.

* * *

Diego had spent many hours thinking about his speech. Naturally, “The Material and Spiritual Progress of Alegrías” was the subject he wished to address. Yet, he did not want to give a heavy talk on the subject, and he did not want to preach to his friends. So this is the way he went about expressing his ideas:

Being part of the Alegrías youth group has meant a lot to me. Its members are the best friends I have ever had, and some of my happiest moments are when I am with them. I think we have all changed since we began meeting and doing things together. We were more or less children when we started, and our coming together has helped us enter the next stage of our lives in a meaningful way. Thanks to our activities and discussions, we are not entering the stage of youth in a state of confusion and hopelessness. We know we have a purpose in life, and we will help one another achieve our goals. I think we will be friends forever.

One of the ideas we have thought about often since we formed our group is the spiritual and material progress of Alegrías. I think at the beginning we were just curious about what it meant. But now, for most of us, the progress of our community is something to which we wish to dedicate our energies. We hope that our enthusiasm is contagious and will affect everyone in the village.

Thanks to Elisa who has lovingly guided us, we know some important things about progress. We know that we should always be united, otherwise all our efforts will be wasted. We know we should strive for excellence; every day should be better than the day before. We also know that enlightened words and pure deeds have the power to bring about change. But why do words have such power? One of the most important reasons is that through them we discover, gain and communicate knowledge. At the heart of progress is knowledge.

SECTION 11

In the Writings, utterance is qualified by words and phrases as “crystal clear”, “eloquent”, “penetrating”, “impressive”, “moderate”, “wise” and laden with “excellent meanings.” Words possessing these qualities are expected to have such extraordinary effects as “consuming the veil of self and passion” and “quenching the fire of enmity and hatred”. Further, words exert influence in accordance to the spiritual qualities of the one who utters them.

Say: Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation. As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure.

Moreover words and utterances should be both impressive and penetrating. However, no word will be infused with these two qualities unless it be uttered wholly for the sake of God and with due regard unto the exigencies of the occasion and the people.

I ask God to adorn your heads with the pearls of His favor, to ignite in your hearts the fire of the love of God, to free your tongues in utterance of eloquent words and excellent meanings and mysteries in the gathering of the pious, to make ye roses of the paradise of El-ABHA, angels of heaven, united in opinions, harmonious in thoughts and to manifest in your faces signs of holiness of the Kingdom among the people.

If thou wishest thy speech and utterance to take effect in the hardened hearts, be thou severed from all attachment to this world and turn unto the Kingdom of God.

1. Identify from the above passages some of the qualities that endow human speech with power.

2. How can you assist junior youth to develop these spiritual qualities?

SECTION 12

In the Writings we are told that the power of speech should be directed towards the realization of lofty goals:

Now is the moment in which to cleanse thyself with the waters of detachment that have flowed out from the Supreme Pen, and to ponder, wholly for the sake of God, those things which, time and again, have been sent down or manifested, and then to strive, as much as lieth in thee, to quench, through the power of wisdom and the force of thy utterance, the fire of enmity and hatred which smouldereth in the hearts of the peoples of the world.

This servant appealeth to every diligent and enterprising soul to exert his utmost endeavour and arise to rehabilitate the conditions in all regions and to quicken the dead with the living waters of wisdom and utterance, by virtue of the love he cherisheth for God, the One, the Peerless, the Almighty, the Beneficent.

Every word is endowed with a spirit, therefore the speaker or expounder should carefully deliver his words at the appropriate time and place, for the impression which each word maketh is clearly evident and perceptible. The Great Being saith: One word may be likened unto fire, another unto light, and the influence which both exert is manifest in the world. Therefore an enlightened man of wisdom should primarily speak with words as mild as milk, that the children of men may be nurtured and edified thereby and may attain the ultimate goal of human existence which is the station of true understanding and nobility. And likewise He saith: One word is like unto springtime causing the tender saplings of the rose-garden of knowledge to become verdant and flourishing, while another word is even as a deadly poison. It behoveth a prudent man of wisdom to speak with utmost leniency and forbearance so that the sweetness of his words may induce everyone to attain that which befitteth man's station.

1. Decide if the following statements are true or false:

The power of expression should be directed towards:

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. winning an argument. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. expounding the truth by putting forth clear arguments. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. extinguishing the fire of enmity and hatred in the hearts of the people. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. manipulating others. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |

- e. hiding the truth. T F
 - f. explaining the mysteries of the universe. T F
 - g. illustrating complex matters. T F
 - h. clarifying misunderstandings and building unity of vision. T F
 - i. demonstrating the superiority of one’s opinions. T F
 - j. investigating reality. T F
 - k. improving the conditions of the people. T F
 - l. defending the rights of the oppressed. T F
2. Say a few words about how developing the power of expression would assist junior youth in their path of personal transformation as well as in their efforts to contribute to the transformation of society:

SECTION 13

In assisting junior youth to develop the power of expression, we should never forget that it is the Word of God that infuses power into human speech and endows the human heart and mind with true understanding. This is a theme with which you are well familiar; nevertheless, you are asked to pause here and reflect on the passages below:

The Day-Star of utterance, shining resplendent from the dayspring of divine Revelation, hath so illumined the Scrolls and Tablets that the kingdom of utterance and the exalted dominion of understanding vibrate with joy and ecstasy and shine forth with the splendour of His light.

Say: We have caused the rivers of Divine utterance to proceed out of Our throne, that the tender herbs of wisdom and understanding may spring forth from the soil of your hearts.

Through the breaths of Thine utterance the heaven of understanding hath been adorned, and by the effusions of Thy pen every moldering bone hath been quickened.

It is clear and evident, therefore, that the first bestowal of God is the Word, and its discoverer and recipient is the power of understanding. This Word is the foremost

instructor in the school of existence and the revealer of Him who is Almighty. All that is seen is visible only through the light of its wisdom. All that is manifest is but a token of its knowledge. All names are but its name, and the beginning and end of all matters must needs depend upon it.

You may wish to memorize the above quotations if you do not already know them by heart.

SECTION 14

We live at a time when humanity is facing moral bankruptcy. The standards that guided human beings for centuries are steadily losing their influence and are being replaced by the values of rampant materialism, of an ideology built on extreme relativism and of the demands of unbridled individualism. In this climate, youth are increasingly left without moral guidance and have difficulty distinguishing between right and wrong. Nothing but the Word of God can regenerate the spiritual senses that enable the human being to make the distinction. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us the Word of God illumines the realm of thought and morals:

...in the spiritual realm of intelligence and idealism, there must be a center of illumination, and that center is the everlasting, ever-shining Sun, the Word of God. Its lights are the lights of reality which have shone upon humanity, illumining the realm of thought and morals, conferring the bounties of the divine world upon man.

To be able to make moral choices, one needs more than a set of rules; an entire moral structure has to be built in the mind and the heart of a young person with a strong social purpose—a structure that connects spiritual concepts, patterns of behavior, and the knowledge of consequences, and stands up by the forces of volition and courage. Such a moral structure seems to be intimately connected with the structure of language that operates in the mind of the individual. This language, as stated in the previous few sections, should be rich enough to enable the youth to understand the powerful social, cultural, and ideological forces that are shaping people’s values, and the spiritual powers that are needed to change them.

Intimate connection between the structure of language in which a person expresses thought and the moral structure that governs his or her thoughts and behavior has important implications for the way both language and morality should be taught. The content of materials used to teach language will necessarily vary according to the values of those who prepare them. It can convey moral concepts, be morally ambivalent, or even cause spiritual harm. The content of moral education, too, can vary according to the conception of morality being propagated. One can identify, for example, volumes of educational material in which moral concepts are presented as a series of virtues, obligations, rules and facts aimed at improving behavior without the elements of language and thought that enhance spiritual perception and foster commitment to social transformation. The approach suitable for a program dedicated to the spiritual empowerment of junior youth will necessarily pay attention to the role of language in the creation of moral structure. For one thing, the language of the material used in the program will be open and explorative, yet it will avoid the kind of relativism that has plagued moral education in recent decades.

Walking the Straight Path is another text the Ruhi Institute recommends to be studied by junior youth. It comprises of twenty stories, each related to a moral theme. In most cultures, stories are used as a means of transmitting wisdom from one generation to the next. In this text, some of the well-known stories have been rewritten in such a way as to remove some of the ambiguities associated with the messages they have traditionally conveyed. Each lesson also incorporates exercises in language to enhance linguistic skills and abilities so crucial to a sound development of moral structures. The lesson below begins with a fable with which you are well familiar. It has been rewritten with the purpose of fostering a mode of thought and behavior which is explicitly ethical. Read it and discuss how the moral message it conveys is free from the standard of relativism and the tendency to accept negative cultural norms:

The wise are not fooled by flattery. Everyone, of course, is encouraged by praise. But let us remember that longing for praise weakens our judgment.

A fox once saw a crow fly off with a piece of cheese in his beak. “I must get that cheese,” the fox said to himself and so followed the shadow of the bird until he settled on the branch of a tree.

“Good day, my dear friend,” said the fox, putting on his best behavior. “You look so beautiful today. Your feathers are glossy and your eyes shine like jewels. Surely, you have an excellent voice as well. Oh! If only I could hear you sing.”

These words were like fresh water satisfying the crow’s thirst for praise. So he lifted his head with pride and set out to offer a song in honor of his charming friend.

Of course, the moment he opened his beak, the piece of cheese fell. The fox snapped it up before it hit the ground and ran away, while the crow’s not so pleasant voice filled the air.

COMPREHENSION

Answer the questions below in complete sentences.

1. What did the fox see? _____

2. What did the crow have in his beak? _____

3. What did the fox do to get the cheese? _____

4. Did the crow really have a pleasant voice? _____

5. Was the fox sincere in his praise of the crow? _____

6. Did this story occur in a city, village, or forest? _____

VOCABULARY

Complete each of the sentences below using one of the following words:

encouraged, longing, charming,
shadow, praise, satisfied, pride,
pleasant, judgment, weakened

1. The teacher thought her students were hardworking and was always full of _____ for them.
2. Armando and his brother spent a _____ day together, working in the fields and talking about their future plans.
3. Hong Mei liked to travel and had a _____ to see new places.
4. She had a beautiful voice, and her teacher _____ her to study music.
5. The farmer showed good _____ in planting his seeds right after the first rainfall.
6. Chandu was not _____ with the mark he received on his examination, so he decided to study harder.
7. Zhong Jiang was in trouble, but because he had too much _____, he would not let anyone help him.
8. At the end of the day, the long _____ of the tree falls over the garden.
9. It was a _____ story, and the children wanted to listen to it again and again.
10. He was greatly _____ by the illness, but soon began to work again, knowing that he would become stronger in time.

DISCUSSION

How do we make sure that we are not fooled by flattery?

MEMORIZATION

“Protect yourselves with utmost vigilance, lest you be entrapped in the snare of deception and fraud.”

Discuss the following questions in your group:

1. If one is not careful, this story can be told—and it has been told—in a way that implies admiration for the apparent cleverness of the fox. How does this version of the story avoid such an impression?

2. What is the main moral theme the story addresses?

3. What are the other concepts related to this main theme being conveyed?

4. How effective a tool is a fable like this in helping junior youth to understand moral concepts?

5. What abilities do the exercises develop in junior youth?

6. How does the discussion exercise contribute to the development of the power of thought and reflection? How does it enhance the power of expression?

7. What is the role of memorization at the end of the lesson?

SECTION 15

To assist junior youth to recognize the moral issues underlying the choices they make, it is important to present them with situations that are close to their reality. This does not mean, however, that, in the name of being realistic, attention is drawn to the manifestations of the lower nature of the human being. The situations examined, while accessible to the junior youth, need not be the most common in a decaying society, but should represent those standards of thought and conduct that would inspire them to strive for excellence. This is only possible if paternalism, childish chatter, and the language of sermons on good behavior are avoided. Consider the following lesson from another text for junior youth called *Learning about Excellence*. In the lesson below Mrs. Chen is describing the concept of purity to her grandchildren and assisting them, with the aid of a few exercises, to gain a fuller grasp of its significance:

Mrs. Chen mentions that the second condition of excellence is a chaste and holy life, which implies modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness. She begins by describing purity, the foundation on which a chaste life must be built:

“Picture a mirror. If you clean it of all dust, it reflects the light. In the same way, when a heart is cleansed of such imperfections as envy, hate and pride, it becomes pure and can reflect heavenly light. Mencius has said that a noble man does not lose his childlike heart. This is true of course, but we must remember that a child’s heart is pure out of innocence and weakness, and that a child’s purity has not yet been tested. You are now at an age when you cannot be considered children any more. As you grow up, you will become wise and strong. Yet, you will each have to be watchful and take great care not to lose the purity of your heart. You should not allow the mirror of your heart to become stained with the impurities of this world. But this you should do through the power of reason and faith. You can remain pure only through effort and the exercise of will.”

Mrs. Chen then explains that the concept of purity is often misunderstood and asks the youth to identify from the list below those attributes that imply purity and those that are wrongly associated with it:

Being genuine
Being sincere
Being naïve
Being free from hypocrisy
Having a clean mind
Having a clean body
Being stupid
Being free from pride
Being fanatical
Being simple-minded
Being free from deceit
Being selfless
Being weak
Being emotional
Being intelligent
Being kind
Not being pretentious

The youth memorize the quotations below and discuss with their grandparents the questions that follow:

My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting.

First in a human being's way of life must be purity, then freshness, cleanliness, and independence of spirit. First must the stream bed be cleansed, then may the sweet river waters be led into it.

1. A hypocrite is one who pretends to be upright when he is not. What is worst, having many weaknesses or being a hypocrite?
2. What are some of the impurities from which we should cleanse our thoughts?
3. Who actually accomplishes more in this world, the pure in heart or the insincere?

Discuss in your group the following questions:

How does the lesson help dissipate common misunderstandings about the concept of purity?

What are some of the characteristics of the language that is used by Mrs. Chen?

How does this lesson help junior youth to strive for spiritual excellence?

SECTION 16

Developing spiritual perception, enhancing the power of expression, and building a sound moral structure all lead to spiritual empowerment. Unfortunately, to possess power is often associated with values that contradict the spiritual nature of the human being. Images that usually come to mind when the concept is introduced are those of control, manipulation, domination, rule, supremacy and subjugation. Your aim, however, is to assist the junior youth to develop a different kind of power. Moral power springs from love, justice, knowledge, understanding, keen perception, and service. The process of empowerment we are exploring here is one that makes a gnat into an eagle, a drop of water into rivers and seas and an atom into lights and suns. Reflecting on excerpts from some of the prayers of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá in which we supplicate God for certain attributes give us significant insights into the nature of spiritual and moral empowerment:

I pray Thee, O Thou Who art the Lord of all names and the Ruler of both earth and heaven, to grant that all who are dear to Thee may each become a cup of Thy mercy in Thy days, that they may quicken the hearts of Thy servants. Empower them also, O my God, to be as the rain that poureth down from the clouds of Thy grace, and as the winds that waft the vernal fragrances of Thy loving-kindness, that through them the soil of the hearts of Thy creatures may be clad with verdure, and may bring forth the things that will shed their fragrance over all Thy dominion, so that every one may perceive the sweet smell of the Robe of Thy Revelation.

Empower us, then, O my God, to spread abroad Thy signs among Thy creatures, and to guard Thy Faith in Thy realm.

Empower me, then, O my God, to be reckoned among them that have clung to Thy laws and precepts for the sake of Thee alone, their eyes fixed on Thy face.

Empower us, then, O my God, to forsake ourselves and cleave steadfastly to Him Who is the Manifestation of Thy Self, the Most Exalted, the Most High.

I entreat Thee, by Him Who is the Dayspring of Thy names and the Dawning-Place of Thine attributes, to ordain for me what will enable me to arise to serve Thee and to extol Thy virtues.

Enable me to be one of Thy maidservants who have attained to Thy good pleasure.

Protect these children, graciously assist them to be educated and enable them to render service to the world of humanity.

Send down, then, upon me, O my Beloved, that which will enable me to be steadfast in Thy Cause, so that the doubts of the infidels may not hinder me from turning towards Thee.

Enable me, then, to obtain a seat of truth in Thy presence, bestow upon me a token of Thy mercy and let me join with such of Thy servants as shall have no fear nor shall they be put to grief.

O my God, aid Thou Thy servant to raise up the Word, and to refute what is vain and false, to establish the truth, to spread the sacred verses abroad, reveal the splendors, and make the morning's light to dawn in the hearts of the righteous.

Enable them to distinguish themselves amongst Thy people, that they may exalt Thy word and promote Thy Cause. Aid them, O my God, to do Thy will and pleasure.

SECTION 17

Let us now examine in some detail two of the books recommended by the Ruhi Institute to be studied by the junior youth during the first year. *Breezes of Confirmation* is normally the first text a group selects. It tells the story of Musonda, a young girl who has just turned 13, and her older cousin Rose, who has come to visit for the school holidays. Together with Musonda's brother Godwin and his friend Chishimba, the girls think about their future and discuss their hopes and possibilities. There are a number of ideas your group needs to discuss about this book, but before, you should read the book through and then read it again carefully and carry out the exercises. Once you are well familiar with the book, consider the following:

As you have no doubt noticed, the theme that runs through the entire text is "confirmation". Below are those passages in the book which address the theme either through discussion among the main characters in the story or through events that demonstrate divine confirmation at work. Each section is an extract from one of the lessons in the order that they appear in the book. Write in the spaces provided how the concept of confirmation is treated in each and how the participants' understanding of the subject may develop as they go through the lessons:

"I think about service. I want to do something that can help other people. I would like to become a nurse, but you have to study hard. It also costs and I don't think my parents have enough money," Musonda explains.

"Yes, but you can try, Musonda," says Rose. "There is a word, 'confirmation', that I learned a few weeks ago in one of my classes. My teacher says that God confirms us and helps us in what we do. I like this word very much now. I'm sure you will receive God's confirmation if you set your heart on becoming a nurse."

Later that night when the girls are in bed, Musonda whispers to Rose, "Rose, you said the word 'confirmation'. Does that mean that if I do the best I can in my schoolwork, God will send us money so that I can study nursing?"

Rose rolls over and looks at Musonda. “Well, not exactly. I mean, I don’t know. We have to try things and see what doors open. But I do know that God gives each of us talents. We must find out what our talents are and then learn how to use them,” answers Rose.

Godwin has a classmate and a close friend whose name is Chishimba. He often visits the Mulengas, and tonight he is staying for dinner. The conversation at the table jumps from one subject to another. Musonda wants to bring up the subject of confirmation, and she is impatient. Finally, there are a few moments of silence. “Rose and I have been talking about confirmation,” says Musonda.

“There goes my little sister,” says Godwin, clearing his throat. But to his surprise, Chishimba looks interested.

“What does the word mean to you?” he asks Musonda.

Musonda, also surprised, looks at Rose, hoping that she will answer.

“Confirmation... God confirms us and helps us in what we do,” says Rose.

Chishimba does not say anything for a while. There is sadness in his eyes. “A few months ago,” he slowly begins, “my father lost his job. He is honest and responsible, and everyone knows it. For eighteen years he worked as a guard in a company, and then, all of a sudden, they fired him. We all know the reason. If they had kept him two more years, he would have retired and the company would have had to pay him his pension. We don’t have a lot of savings. Even though my older brother helps us, it looks like I cannot go back to school next year because I cannot pay for my room and board. I really love school. I wonder why God does not help me.”

Everyone looks in the direction of Mr. Mulenga, expecting him to answer this question.

Mr. Mulenga smiles and says, “That God confirms us when we make an effort does not mean that life is easy. Your lives will be full of difficulties, and unfortunately, many of them will be caused by injustice. But you will have to work hard, and even though things may not go the way you wish for a while, you should be sure of God’s confirmation. He will especially confirm you in your efforts to do away with injustice.” He turns to Chishimba and says, “Your family is united and hardworking. My heart tells me that things will change for you. You will finish your studies. Take my word for it.”

The following Monday the two girls go with Mrs. Phiri to the clinic. When the time comes for the mothers to begin their class, Musonda and Rose take the children outside and sit with them in the shade of a tree. They sing songs and play games together, and Rose tells them a story. Just as the story is ending, the mothers arrive to pick up their children. Everyone is happy. Mrs. Phiri and the other health workers are pleased and ask the girls to come back the next week.

On their way home, Musonda is very thoughtful. Finally she breaks the silence and says to Rose, “Do you think that what happened today has something to do with ‘confirmation’? You want to be a teacher and I want to be a nurse, and here we were in a clinic teaching and taking care of children.”

In the weeks since Rose has come to be with her, the two girls have talked about many things, and Musonda’s head is full of ideas. So one morning she decides to go to her favorite place. As she lies on the rock, she remembers the day at the clinic. “It was good to do something useful,” she thinks to herself. She remembers what her father often says, that trees should bear fruit. Then she wonders, “How will I make sure that my life bears good fruits?” She thinks immediately of the word “confirmation”.

Just then there is a strong gust of wind. It blows some leaves into the air. Among the leaves Musonda sees a small yellow bird. After the wind dies down, the leaves all fall into the water, but the bird continues flying. As she watches the bird, a thought comes to her mind. The wind has given the little bird a push, and now it is flying higher and higher. Maybe that is what confirmation means. The bird made the effort to fly and the wind helped it.

“Do you think about your future, Godwin?” Musonda asks. “What do you want to be?”

Godwin continues working on the bicycle. “I don’t know. I want to make money. I want to help our parents and have a family someday,” he answers.

“But do you ever think about your talents and how you can use them?” asks Musonda. “Rose and I talk about this a lot.”

“I know, I know,” he says as he picks up a wrench. “And you *always* talk about ‘confirmation’ ... ‘God helps us when we make an effort.’”

“But Godwin, it is true.” Then she tells him the story of the yellow bird and the wind. She also tells him about the work she and Rose have been doing with the children at the clinic.

Just then Chishimba arrives. “Hello,” he says. “How is the bicycle? Did you figure out the problem?” he asks.

“The problem was in the gears. I’m still working on it,” answers Godwin as he tightens a bolt.

“I knew you could fix it!” Chishimba says, and then looks at Musonda. “Do you know that your brother is a mechanic?”

Rose comes out of the house and hears part of the conversation. “Godwin,” she says, “that is one of your talents! You are good at fixing things. You could be a good mechanic!”

“Just because I can fix a bicycle,” Godwin says, “does not mean I am a mechanic. I would need training.”

The other three smile and say, “So, make an effort!” Everyone laughs, even Godwin.

“Godwin, why don’t you talk to Mr. Chiyesu, the mechanic with the shop near the market? Maybe he would teach you,” says Chishimba with excitement in his voice.

“Yes, that could be a way to start,” adds Rose.

“What?” asks Godwin. “I can’t just go and ask him like that. I don’t even know him.”

“I know him. I can introduce you. We can go together tomorrow,” says Chishimba.

Later, when they are alone, Rose says to Musonda, “Tomorrow Godwin will understand the meaning of confirmation.” They laugh, but decide not to say anything to the boys.

Mr. Chiyesu, a short, elderly man, is sitting outside of his shop. He is cleaning the pieces of a small engine and humming a melody while he works. His face lights up when he sees Chishimba, and they shake hands.

Chishimba introduces Godwin and explains that he is good at fixing things. Godwin is nervous, but he finds the courage to speak up. He clears his throat and says, “Mr. Chiyesu, I am interested in becoming a mechanic. So I was thinking maybe I could help you in your shop and learn from you.”

“Well, I could use the help,” responds Mr. Chiyesu. “But, I don’t have the money to pay you.”

“It does not matter. I just want to learn,” says Godwin. “When can I start?”

“There’s no time better than now!” answers Mr. Chiyesu. “Can you stay this morning? These pieces need oiling, and then we have to put the engine back together.”

“Now? I can start right now?” asks Godwin with surprise.

“Of course!” laughs Mr. Chiyesu. “Roll up your sleeves and get working!”

Godwin eagerly begins his new work. After a few minutes Chishimba stands up to leave. He says goodbye to Mr. Chiyesu. He leans over and whispers “confirmation” in Godwin’s ear.

On his way home, Chishimba passes the clinic and sees Rose and Musonda helping with the children. The girls are curious to know what happened. “How did it go?” they ask.

“Godwin made an effort and it worked. He is there right now. I think Mr. Chiyesu wanted to test him out,” answers Chishimba.

One morning Chishimba is on his way to the market to buy fish for his mother. He has been thinking for days about how to earn money for school. He thought of growing a crop to sell, but the planting season is over. He thought about selling charcoal at the roadside, but many people are doing this. “Try to do something that no one else is doing,” he remembers Rose saying.

When he arrives at Mrs. Musole’s stand to buy the fish, he finds out that she is not there. “She went to town to bring the fish,” says the woman in the next stand. “She goes twice a week.” Chishimba knows that Mr. Chiyesu also goes to town sometimes to buy car parts.

This gives him an idea. “Maybe I could offer to go to town for people,” he thinks to himself, “and bring the things they need. By staying and working then, they would not lose money.”

That night at home Chishimba consults with his parents, and they like the idea. So the next day he returns to the market and talks with Mrs. Musole and Mr. Chiyesu. “If you both pay me the money you would normally spend on bus fare, I will use half of it to go to town and bring you what you need. The other half I will save for school.” They agree that it is worth a try and ask him to come back in two days. “If this idea works well,” says Mr. Chiyesu, “then you have found yourself a job!”

On his way home to tell his parents the good news, Chishimba stops to see Godwin and his family. He is eager to share his plan with them. After listening to his story, Mrs. Mulenga gives Chishimba some more good news. She explains that Mr. Mulenga had to go to Kabwe the day before and spoke to her cousin. He said that Chishimba was welcome to stay with him and his family, about one kilometer from the school. “In exchange for meals and a place to sleep,” she says, “you can help in their fields.”

“That is great!” says Chishimba. “Thank you, Mrs. Mulenga.”

“Chishimba,” says Mr. Mulenga, “It seems that you will soon be making some money. You will have to make sure that you save it for school, even though sometimes that may seem difficult. Don’t be tempted to spend it on silly little things.”

“Don’t worry, Mr. Mulenga,” replies Chishimba, his face beaming with a smile. “I promise I will not let that happen.” As he waves goodbye and turns to leave, he looks over at Rose and Musonda and says, “Doors are opening!”

The holidays are coming to an end. It is time for Rose to go home and start school again. As she prepares to leave, she and Musonda talk.

“I wish you did not have to go,” says Musonda.

“Me, too,” says Rose. “It was really a wonderful holiday. I cannot believe all the things that have happened.”

“Yes,” says Musonda. “Look at Godwin. He liked his job so much that now he is talking about getting technical training after he finishes school. And Chishimba’s idea really worked well. He ended up with so many clients that he was going into town almost every day.”

“And look at us,” says Rose. “Working at the health clinic was a great experience. I am even more convinced that I want to be a teacher. My village council arranges weekly classes for children of different ages, and almost all the children go. This year I plan to offer to teach one of the classes.”

“And I will try to keep working at the clinic,” says Musonda. “I can’t go on Mondays anymore because of school, but maybe I can help out some afternoons. You know, Rose, that first day we talked about ‘confirmation’, I couldn’t have imagined how important it was and how understanding it would change our lives.”

“It is true,” agrees Rose. “Look at how much we have all changed because we learned about making effort and expecting confirmations.”

On the way back home, Musonda asks if she can go down by the river. She runs to her special place, climbs on the rock and lies on her back, looking up at the sky. Many thoughts are going through her mind. She thinks about the school holidays and wonders what the coming year will bring. It is a windy day, and she remembers the yellow bird. “Whatever I try,” she whispers to herself, “God will help me.” As she gets up to leave, the wind blows against her back and gives her strength.

SECTION 18

Being well familiar with the content of the book and having a good understanding of how it tries to accomplish its aims help you assume your responsibilities as the animator of a junior youth group with confidence. In addition, you need to reflect on the methods you will use to help the group study the book and benefit from what it offers. The skills and abilities you need for this purpose will develop gradually as you act as an animator for group after group. But there are a few ideas that you need to consider from the beginning:

- The readings in the book try to maintain a certain level of simplicity in terms of sentence structure and flow. However, when needed, difficult words and phrases are readily employed. The lessons draw out the meaning of such words by placing them in different contexts, and through exercises. By allowing for a rich vocabulary in this way, the story avoids the tendency of becoming childish and superficial. Injustice, for example, is not an easy concept although it is used often in ordinary speech. The context and the exercises in

lesson 6 assist junior youth in acquiring some grasp of the concept. Do you find this way of treating certain concepts effective for young people of this age, or do you think it is necessary for you to go through every lesson and define for them difficult words?

- The lessons of this book were written to be studied at a sprightly pace, in an atmosphere of joy and thoughtful reflection. It is assumed that the youth will read the story and carry out the exercises more or less quickly. What happens if you try to accomplish more than the intended goal of each lesson and belabor every point it makes?

- The attention span of junior youth is not short, as is often assumed. While maintaining the ability to enjoy the simple things of life, they are also able to think deeply about ideas that challenge them. If the atmosphere of the group is one of trust and is free from the kind of tension that permeates classrooms in so many schools of the world, reflection will occur naturally and will begin and end according to the needs and capacities of the junior youth in each group. What are some of the steps that you can take to create the desired atmosphere?

- The study of the book does not envision “homework.” Exercises are to be done in the meetings of the group and discussed with the help of the animator. How would treating group meetings like a class, for example by leaving the exercises as homework, change the nature of the program?

- Most lessons in this book include an activity in which the participants have to write a few sentences either about the section of the story they have studied or on how a given idea can be applied in their lives. How would you assist the junior youth to carry out this type of activity, helping them to develop the ability to express themselves with clarity without turning the meeting of the group into a class on writing?

- Lessons 2, 5, 9, 10, 13 and 14 of the book each end with a quotation from the Writings. You may find it helpful to refer to one or two of these in order to examine how the last activity reinforces the concepts being conveyed in the lesson.

- In addition to the main theme, the book touches on many moral concepts, and tries to reinforce praiseworthy qualities and attitudes. Rose, for example, shares her food with a child on the bus. The youth help a woman carry firewood. Rose and Musonda teach children while the mothers are attending classes at the clinic. The football game is a friendly event in which “winning” is not the overarching purpose. How much attention should be given to these points? Should every one of them be identified and discussed in detail? Or, is it sufficient to allow them to come up naturally during discussion?

- The story unfolds in an African village. The books being recommended for a spiritual empowerment of junior youth program do portray reality in a number of cultural and social settings in various continents. This adds to the richness of the program. Is there any need to “adapt the books to the reality of the youth in each country”, for example, by changing the names? People have read books from cultures other than their own for centuries, have enjoined them and learned from them. But, of course, they have done so consciously. How would you make the junior youth aware of this dimension of the program? What are your thoughts on the belief held by some that children and youth learn only from materials written in the context of their own culture?

SECTION 19

Spirit of Faith, developed by the Ruhi Institute itself, is another unit being recommended for a junior youth spiritual empowerment program. It belongs to that category of materials in which Bahá’í belief is discussed explicitly. We have already mentioned before that adolescence is a stage in life when an individual is highly interested in exploring questions of a philosophical character, especially those related to the purpose and nature of human existence. *Spirit of Faith* begins by asking the question, “What does it mean to be a human being?”. In trying to answer this question, the various sections of the unit examine a series of related ideas: the nobility of man, man’s higher and lower nature, the non-existence of evil, free will, volition, fate, the power of the intellect, scientific investigation, physical evolution, spirit of man and, finally, the spirit of faith.

As was the case with *Breezes of Confirmation*, you need to go through the unit once, and then read it again paying particular attention to the sections referred to as “reflections”. You should then examine how the unit achieves its purpose by answering the following questions:

- What insights regarding their true identity do the junior youth acquire from the images brought about by the Writings quoted in lesson 1? How does each of the reflections in this lesson reinforce their understanding of the subject?

- How do the junior youth gain an appreciation of God’s creation and the nobility of human being from the first part of lesson 2?

- How does the first reflection of this lesson help them see the application of the concept of nobility in their lives?

- In the next part of the lesson they discover the main cause for which people abase themselves. What is that?

- What understanding do you hope a junior youth would derive from this brief study of the higher and lower natures of a human being?

- What do the junior youth learn about the development of their higher nature through the second reflection of this lesson?

- How does realizing that the lower nature of the human being is not evil help the junior youth to avoid feelings of guilt each time they make a mistake? What examples are used to help deepen their understanding of the theme?

- What insights do the latter part of lesson 2 and the last two reflections offer on how to control the dictates of the lower nature?

- How is the concept of volition described in lesson 3? Do you find the situation described in the lesson relevant to the lives of young people?

- What do the junior youth learn in lesson 3 in relation to the role of free will in the development of their higher nature?

- In which areas of their lives do the junior youth discover that they can exercise free will? Why is it important for them to know the limitations of their free will?

- What further insights do they gain into the operation of their free will from the second reflection in this lesson?

- Why is it important for junior youth to see the difference between controlling others and exerting positive influence on them? How do you think the discussions generated in the third reflection help them in their efforts to exert a positive influence on their environment?

- What does lessons 3 teach junior youth about fate?

- What misconceptions related to the concept of fate does the lesson try to remove?

- How effective is the metaphor of the sailing boat in helping junior youth gain the proper perspectives on the value of their own efforts and the power of divine assistance in their lives?

- In what way does the first part of lesson 4 help junior youth discover the limitations of nature?

- What does the lesson say about the way human beings transcend these limitations?

- What does the statement that “God has created or deposited this love for reality in man” mean? In what sense does science belong to all humanity?

- How is the power of observation described for the junior youth?

- How does the example provided in lesson 4 assist the junior youth to appreciate the role of observation and experimentation in the advancement of science?

- Does the lesson imply that they can use their power of observation in every aspect of life? Why do you think the examples chosen in the third reflection only mention positive signs in individuals, families and society?

- The examples provided in the fourth reflection imply that experimentation cannot be used in every aspect of life. How do they help the junior youth see the significance of this principle?

- How do the various examples used in lessons 5 and 6 help the junior youth gain insights into the very complex theory of evolution of species?

- How is the appearance of spirit of man described in this evolutionary process?

- There are two quotations from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in lesson 6 with little explanation; Natalia is said to help her group study and understand them. How would you do the same?

- What is the distinguishing feature of the spirit of man as described in the first section of lesson 7?

- How is consciousness introduced in the first reflection in this lesson? How relevant are the two exercises in this reflection to the lives of junior youth?

- How can the power of human mind become an instrument of the higher nature? Is presenting contrasts, as is done in the second reflection, a useful way of demonstrating that human intellect needs to be guided?

- What is the spirit of faith?

- How do the examples and exercises in the last two reflections of lesson 7 help the junior youth see the operation of the spirit of faith in their lives?

SECTION 20

Harmony of science and religion is a core principle that has guided the development of the *Spirit of Faith*. You may find the following paragraphs about the relationship between science and religion helpful.

In principle, a number of relationships can exist between religion and science. It can be claimed, for example, that whatever truth is expounded by religion about spiritual phenomena today will some day be explained by science, and that religion, a very necessary aspect of human experience, simply gives partial answers to mysteries that will be understood later as science advances. It can also be argued that since religion is the result of God's Revelation, and God knows everything, religion already contains all scientific truth, albeit in ways that are sometimes difficult to discover. The first view, of course, would be rejected by many a religious person as it seems to minimize the role of God and revelation in the creation of religion. The second view seems to confuse the knowledge available to the Manifestation of God with what we human beings can understand by studying His Revelation.

Another possibility is to argue that science and religion are so distinct that there is no possibility of significant conflict between them. Science studies the material universe. The knowledge it generates becomes the basis for technological progress, and technology can be employed either for the good of humanity or to its detriment, for building civilization or for its destruction. Science in itself does not have the ability to determine the uses to which its products should be put. Religion, on the other hand, is concerned precisely with the spiritual dimension of human existence. Its task is to throw light on the inner life of the individual, to touch the roots of motivation, to engender a code of ethics and morality that can appropriately guide human behavior. So long as each remains within the sphere of its own genius, there is no reason for them to come into conflict with each other.

This view of the harmony between science and religion is valid, but only at the level of application. Ultimately, in this approach, science and religion are separated and allowed to pursue their own ways, and what assumes importance is the interaction between technology and morality. But such an analysis of the relation between science and religion soon reaches its limits, for in reality, there are numerous phenomena which they both try to understand and explain. While this is less noticeable in relation to the physical world, it is evident in the study of the human being and society. Moreover, there are many commonalities between science and religion in the way they approach reality. For example, both have faith in the existence of order in creation and believe that, at least to some extent, the human mind is capable of understanding this order. The methods of science have proven extremely effective in discovering the workings of the universe. But religion too has to use these methods as it tries to guide human beings to contribute to an ever-advancing civilization. Science and religion are not the same, but they have enough in common to be able to speak to each other, to be in harmony, to influence and to complement one another.

- The relationship between science and religion described in the above statement envisions areas of knowledge which both science and religion explore. Among these are issues related to the powers of the human mind, the origins of the human being, and intellectual and moral development. Discuss how the unit treats such matters in a way that respects the validity of science and at the same time illumines understanding with the light of religion.

- The principle of the harmony of science and religion implies that, when appropriate, educational materials may integrate spiritual and scientific concepts, of course in a manner that avoids superficiality and that is not haphazard. Such integration of knowledge enhances the understanding of the participants and removes false dichotomies. Examine how *Spirit of Faith* achieves this level of integration. You may refer specifically to reflections in lessons 5 and 6.

- You may wish to examine *Spirit of Faith* again and determine the extent to which it engenders certain attitudes that are deemed necessary for one who is to be a seeker of

truth and an investigator of reality. What are some of these attitudes and how successfully does the material explore them?

SECTION 21

It was mentioned earlier in this unit that studying takes only a portion of the time junior youth spend together; the rest of the time is dedicated to dramatic, artistic and service activities. In the previous unit of this book, you had an opportunity to consider to some degree the influence of social environment on young people. Special emphasis was given then to some of the predominantly negative effects. Such an emphasis should not obscure the fact that many elements of the environment, if used properly, enhance the power of expression, the ability to analyze social processes and the will to serve society. The following is a story from the *Guardian* newspaper. It illustrates an instance in which the media was used to promote social good:

Voice of the Voiceless

In West Africa the transistor radio still speaks for the community.

Huddled around a microphone in the tiny studio of N’Zerekore rural radio station in the forest region of Guinea, three young people are discussing girls’ education.

“Girls should go to school, because they’ll become mothers one day, and if they are educated, they’ll educate their own children and will be able to look after them better,” says Moriko Kake. “When you educate a girl, you educate an entire nation,” he adds emphatically. Lancei Toure, the programme’s 16-year old host, nods in agreement, although his parents want him to leave school to work in the fields.

The young people’s clear, articulate arguments are broadcast live to neighboring villages near the Liberian and Ivory Coast borders. It is dusk, and kerosene lamps flicker inside mud huts. Villagers are back from the fields or the market. They all listen to the radio while cooking dinner and preparing for the night.

Fifty years ago, the first transistor radio made its way into people’s houses, turning a bulky piece of furniture into a cheap, small personal device that can be listened to by anyone, anywhere. . .

In countries such as Guinea—where a large part of the adult population is illiterate, many children don’t have access to school and electricity is rare—generator-powered rural and community radio stations are a lifeline.

“Radio is everything here,” says Gnouma Camara, programme director at N’Zerekore rural radio station which broadcasts six days a week in one of five regional languages and

in French within a radius of 100km. Two out of three families in the region have a transistor, and when the station broadcasts early in the morning and in the evening, the whole village listens.

“We speak their own language, we know their traditions and customs, we transmit their messages, announce births and deaths, discuss farming and agriculture issues and community problems,” Camara adds. “We are the voice of the community. The voice of the voiceless.” ...

“I listen to the programmes because it is children who present them and because they speak in my own language,” says Mamadou Malic, a fifteen year old youth in Pular, a local tongue. ...“When the programmes start, I call all my brothers and sisters and we listen together. I learn a lot that way.”

Parents and community leaders are listening too, says Camara. “In our culture, children are not often heard, but now adults start to listen to them. Children advise their parents on basic hygiene, for example. ... If a father hits his child, his neighbors will now say: “Don’t you listen to the radio?”

This story points to only one of the myriad ways in which the various elements of today’s social environment can be used to direct the talents and abilities of young people towards service to their communities. Music, media and technology are increasingly affecting the lives of young people in every part of the world. As the animator of the group, you will need to figure out how to employ these powerful elements of social environment to create appropriate activities. Discuss your ideas in this respect and write down some of your conclusions in the spaces provided below:

Music

Media

Technology

SECTION 22

If the junior youth are to be empowered to take charge of their own development and contribute to the progress of their communities, they need to participate effectively in the formulation and implementation of meaningful activities of their own groups. Special events in which the junior youth from an entire region or cluster come together to make dramatic presentations, sing, recite poetry, and give talks; ecological camps in which passages from the Writings about the environment are read, appreciation of nature is fostered, and activities such as planting trees are carried out; special sessions in which newspaper and magazine articles are discussed and current events are analyzed—these are a few examples of the kind of activity that the youth may find highly stimulating. You will always be interested in discussing with other animators of junior youth groups how you can motivate the youth to take part in the design and execution of activities that train their intellectual and spiritual faculties, help them translate some of their ideals into practical expressions of service, and reinforce their efforts to strive towards excellence. The kinds of questions you will need to discuss among yourselves include: How do you choose appropriate newspaper articles and how do you organize discussions about them? How do you help the junior youth write scripts and act out simple dramas? How do you ensure that childish games are not presented as a substitute for arts and crafts and that young people are assisted to gain a true appreciation of “arts, crafts and sciences” that “uplift the world of being, and are conducive to its exaltation”? How do you help the junior youth design, carry out and evaluate a service project?

SECTION 23

If complementary activities are used imaginatively, they can actually reinforce the lessons the junior youth are learning from the study of the material being provided to them. The content of these activities could be either directly based on the texts themselves or merely inspired by them. You may wish to choose one of the lessons from the text *Breezes of Confirmation* and design an activity that reinforces the concepts presented in it.

SECTION 24

The system of delivery for a program aimed at the spiritual empowerment of junior youth may include weekly gatherings held over the course of a year, as well as intensive sessions lasting several weeks each. Experience has shown that an animator wishing to start a group can easily begin with one or two junior youth who have shown an innate ability to rally their friends around a cause. Successful identification of such individuals can naturally lead to the formation of a group composed of some fifteen to twenty members. In some parts of the world, inviting the young members of a village or neighborhood to a series of events before the formal establishment of the groups has also proven to be successful. Another approach is to introduce the program to a school. When the school shows receptivity to the idea, one or more presentations to the students and teachers of the relevant grades usually results in the formation of groups of junior youth. Often the groups are able to meet in the premises of the school, and to undertake their activities as extra curricular endeavors. The school in turn recognizes the valuable contribution of the program to the sound development of the moral and intellectual capabilities of its students.

Think about your own circumstances and write down some of the approaches you could adopt to form a junior youth group.

SECTION 25

An important requirement for maintaining a dynamic junior group is building trust and friendship with the parents. Animators need to visit them either before or soon after the junior youth have formed their group and explain to them the purpose of the program. They should continue to visit the parents regularly thereafter, share with them the various themes related to the lives of the junior youth that the program explores as outlined in unit II, and consult with them about the well-being and progress of their children. In the space below, write how you would describe the program to the parents of a young person, and some of the ideas that you would share with them subsequently:

SECTION 26

It is essential that in the first few meetings the purpose of the group and some of the goals it wishes to establish for itself be fully discussed. The youth should also reach an agreement on the nature of the activities they wish to undertake. The concepts of excellence and service need to be emphasized. Many experienced animators find that their conversations during the first four meetings are particularly significant. The content of these meetings, of course, will change from group to group. Yet there are a number of ideas that seem to run through all of them. The

following points are to help you organize the first conversations you will have with each group you form.

- Often, the first question posed by the animator after the opening prayers is “what is the purpose of a junior youth group and why is it important to have such groups in the community?” If the youth have difficulty answering such a general question, the animator may ask individual members such specific questions as “why do you like participating in the activities of the group?” or “what kinds of things do you think the group should do?”. This line of questioning should gradually lead to a list of goals and activities for the group.
- Several animators have found it useful to describe the goals identified by the group in terms of spiritual and intellectual excellence. To strive for spiritual excellence, they have explained, we need to develop qualities that belong to our higher nature such as love, generosity, honesty and humility. To strive for intellectual excellence, we need to acquire knowledge and practical skills that would help us improve our lives and the lives of others. The memorization of quotations such as “**Let each morn be better than its eve and each morning better than its yesterday**” is, of course, effective in enhancing the understanding of the concept of excellence.
- A topic of great importance for the early conversations of the group is service. In this respect, you would have to remind the youth that as human beings we all depend on each other. You may ask them to imagine how it would be for us if we did not receive help from anyone at all, and emphasize that we are all members of the human family and must try our best to improve the conditions in which we live. One way of making the concept of service accessible to the junior youth is to state that everything we do in the spirit of helping others is considered service.
- Your conversation about service will have to go beyond the discussion of the concept and of what we can do individually to serve others, to identify acts of service that the youth can carry out as a group. Some salient characteristics of cooperation in this context can also be discussed. Although you may have to suggest one or two acts of service such as tree planting or offering classes to small children, if you are patient, the group itself will be able to identify areas in which it can plan and carry out service projects. Once the youth have formulated a vision of service, you will need to let them know that in subsequent meetings, you will dedicate some time to plan the first service project the group is to carry out.
- Healthy recreation, particularly sports, is another topic that has to be discussed during the first meetings of a junior youth group. Once again, in addition to an examination of the concepts and issues involved, you will want to help the group identify the kind of recreational activities they can undertake either during its meetings or on special occasions. A word of caution is necessary in this regard. Intense physical activity is a natural expression of the energy that junior group possess. To ignore it, say in order to emphasize painting or crafts which are extremely important in their own right, has been the cause of a decrease in the male membership in a number of junior youth groups throughout the world.

- As in most other educational activities promoted by the Ruhi Institute, memorization of passages from the Writings is to be given due importance in the program for the spiritual empowerment of junior youth. The importance of memorization, then, needs to be the topic of conversation in one of the early meetings of the group. You will need to help the youth to become aware of the power of the Word of God, its effect on our lives, and the benefits of knowing many passages from the Writings by heart.
- You will need to emphasize in the first few meetings that, for the group to strive for spiritual excellence, they need to develop strong bonds of friendship and achieve greater and greater unity. You, of course, know a number of quotations from the Writings on the subject and you should select a few for the youth to discuss and memorize. You will find it highly rewarding if you can help the youth to express their own ideas on themes of love, unity and harmony. The concept of friendship often proves to be an excellent one for a first conversation of this kind.
- The question of language, of course, will have to be discussed to some extent before you begin the study of the first book usually read by the group, *Breezes of Confirmation*. In order to achieve higher and higher levels of intellectual and spiritual excellence, you will want to explain, we need to develop our own power of expression. We should be able to read and understand the meaning of what we have read, and we should learn to express our thoughts with clarity. Ask the group to make a serious pact that they will listen to each other, that they will try to understand what each one of them means even when he or she has difficulty expressing it, and that they will never make fun of what any one of them says. You will, of course, have to remind the group gently of this pact every once in a while.
- In relation to the ability of reading well, a number of animators have encouraged the junior youth to read the books they study in their meetings or other appropriate material to younger children. Discussions that would assist the members of the group to reflect on their experience in this activity deepen the youth's awareness of the power of expression.

With respect to all the points presented above, it is important to realize that as animators gain more experience they are able to assist the junior youth to devise and carry out activities that complement each other and are the practical expression of the high ideals with which they have been imbued and the insights they have gained through their study of various texts. The story below provides a good example:

The junior youth group “Promise of Future” has nine participants—three Bahá'ís, and six members of the larger community who had also attended Bahá'í children's classes when they were younger. Three youth who are studying the main sequence of courses visit the group and assist the animator in order to gain the experience and the confidence necessary to conduct junior youth groups of their own, as they themselves have not participated in the program.

The group was formed in 2006 and started its study of *Breezes of Confirmation*, meeting every Saturday morning for two and a half hours. Chishimba's story about how he could find a way to earn money to pay for school inspired them. They too decided to undertake activities during their holiday that would allow them to earn the money to buy stationery, uniforms, and other needed items for the upcoming school year. Two of the junior youth got part-time jobs—one in a shop and the other in an office; another two sold onions at the market; three others made necklaces and

earrings to sell; and two junior youth who are from a nearby village and have access to land prepared vegetable gardens.

When their study of the book *Breezes of Confirmation* came to an end, the group, with the guidance of the animator, started planning a service project that could benefit the entire community. They came up with many suggestions on various projects. They consulted at length and decided to organize, with the aid of the older youth, a children's class to which they would invite the children from the neighborhood. They planned to work in pairs—each pair would take a different age group and teach the children songs, games and prayers. They talked about who should welcome the children when they first arrived, who would tell a story, and who could lead group games at the end of the class. The junior youth also decided to bring refreshments to share with the children. Once all the details were decided, they went enthusiastically from house to house to get permission from the parents for their children to come to their class on the following Saturday. They explained to the parents that they were going to teach their children prayers, songs, and games, and were going to offer them lunch.

It was raining heavily on the day the classes were to begin. But the junior youth all showed up bringing refreshments and deliciously prepared dishes. They thought that the children would not come because of the rain, but by ten o'clock 25 children had arrived at the gate, all clean and well dressed. They received the children and seated them. One of the 14-year-old youth confidently welcomed the children, outlined the program for the morning and also led the prayers. The classes for the various groups led by teams of two all went well. The children had a wonderful time and were happy to learn. After the class, lunch was served by the group and the youth who were helping them. The parents had also brought in some extra dishes to share.

The junior youth invited the children to continue coming to the class on Saturdays and nineteen children are indeed participating regularly. The children happily share with their parents the wonderful lessons they are taught every week. Parents of those children attending the class are becoming friends of the Faith. When the junior youth group starts studying the next book, those members who live on the street where the children's class is held will continue giving the class on Sundays. The parents of some of the junior youth have been attending firesides and devotional meetings; the next step is to invite them to a study circle.

The children greet the junior youth by their names whenever their paths cross. The class has brought the children of the neighborhood together and made them friends. The junior youth and their friends have been seriously reflecting on the Bahá'í Faith and its wonderful Teachings. They are experiencing how "God confirms them and helps them in what they do."