

A group of children are standing in a lush green cornfield under a bright blue sky. The children are dressed in simple, colorful clothing. The scene is vibrant and natural, with tall corn stalks and green grass. The text 'BELIEF in Action' is overlaid on the image in a large, white, serif font. 'BELIEF' is in all caps, 'in' is in a smaller, lowercase, italicized font, and 'Action' is in a large, lowercase, italicized font.

BELIEF *in* Action

In the Bahá'í teachings, refining one's inner character and offering service to humanity are inseparable. This twofold moral purpose helps to shape the endeavors of Bahá'ís in all areas of life.



“We must strive unceasingly and without rest to accomplish the development of the spiritual nature in man, and endeavor with tireless energy to advance humanity toward the nobility of its true and intended station.”

—‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ

Character and conduct

Central to our spiritual journey is the development of qualities that assist each of us in our progress towards God. In this world, the cultivation of such qualities requires an ongoing refinement of our conduct so that our actions increasingly reflect the nobility and integrity with which every human being is endowed. As we allow the knowledge of God to increase in our minds and hearts, the qualities of our higher nature begin to flourish. With greater and greater clarity, we discern that which leads to nobility and that which leads to abasement.

Each Manifestation of God, as a Divine Educator, brings a new set of laws governing the spiritual and social aspects of life for humanity’s particular stage of evolution. Bahá’u’lláh revealed laws governing personal behavior in such areas as prayer, fasting, marriage, and the avoidance of alcohol and drugs. He condemned backbiting, set out the importance of engaging in a trade or profession, and emphasized the importance of educating children. He underscored the virtues of truthfulness, trustworthiness, hospitality, courtesy, forbearance, justice, and fairness.

Bahá’ís understand that divine law cannot be reduced to a simple list of do’s and don’ts. Rather, they strive to focus on the transformative power of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings to bring joy, refine character, and revitalize society.

Walking a spiritual path

The Bahá’í teachings emphasize that each person is in charge of his or her own spiritual development. There is no clergy in the Bahá’í Faith. The Bahá’í community can neither be described in terms of a pastor and congregation, nor as a body of believers led by learned individuals endowed with



authority to interpret scriptures. While Bahá’í institutions offer guidance and support, and the Bahá’í community is a source of love and encouragement, the responsibility for engaging with the Word of God and for spiritual growth ultimately rests with each individual.

Bahá’ís have come to describe the individual journey as walking a path of service towards God. It is a path open to all of humanity—a path, Bahá’ís believe, that will allow us to build a better world together. Certain aspects are clear: that simply focusing on oneself proves counterproductive; that the path is to be walked in the company of others—each giving and receiving love, assistance, and encouragement; that the tendency to allow self-righteousness to take hold needs to be conscientiously resisted; and that humility is a requisite of progress. No one walking this spiritual path can claim perfection.



Consultation: A collective approach to decision making

In order to build unity and make decisions, Bahá'ís employ the principles and methods of “consultation,” a non-adversarial process understood as a collective search for truth. The consultative spirit is one of loving encouragement and respect for all voices, where participation is both frank and courteous. It is animated by a selflessness that discards the notion of ownership of ideas. Once an idea is offered, it belongs to the group.

Members of elected Bahá'í institutions, couples, families, and other groups consult in order to reach a decision or to come to a deeper understanding of a question. Any group seeking to build consensus while strengthening unity may discover new insights through consultation. Consultation does not raise mere opinion to the status of fact or define truth as the compromise between opposing interest groups.

In an elected Bahá'í body, if a unanimous conclusion cannot be reached, a vote may be taken. All members then wholeheartedly support implementation of the decision, regardless of their original view. Without a lingering “opposition,” the wisdom of the decision will readily become apparent and the matter may be reconsidered as necessary.

The ideals of consultation call for continually developing one's personal qualities conducive to listening, reflection, and expression. Bahá'u'lláh wrote, “The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.”

“Let each morn be better than its eve and each morrow richer than its yesterday.”

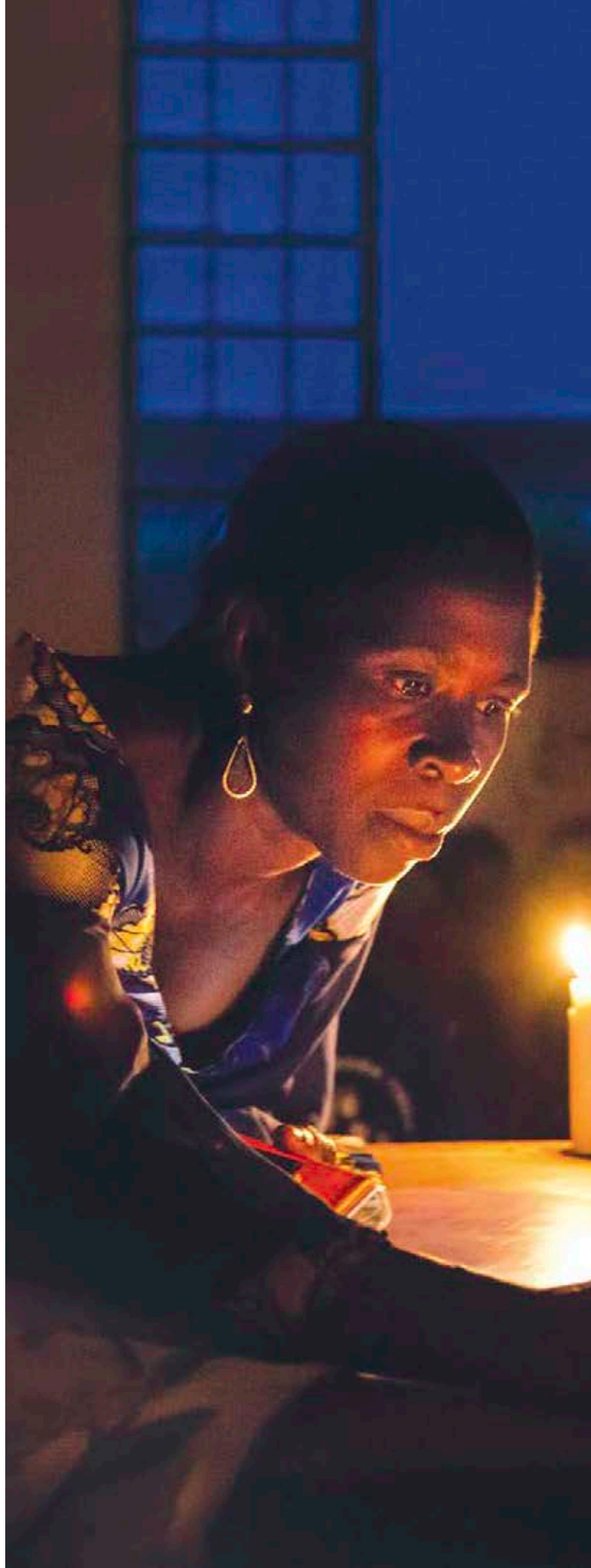
—BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

Community building infused with spirit

Around the world, people of all ages, faiths, and backgrounds are engaged in a process of community building based on the unifying teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Through a process of prayerful study, consultation, action, and reflection, children, youth, and adults engage in their own spiritual development. They explore spiritual concepts together and apply them in their own communities. Capacities for service are developed and increasingly complex collective action becomes possible. Transformation of self and society go hand in hand.

Devotions in the Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi, India



Devotional life

The spirit of fellowship and harmony that binds us together is strengthened through acts of worship. Bahá'ís consider daily prayer as essential for spiritual sustenance and growth, just as food is essential for physical sustenance. Through prayer, one praises God, expresses love for Him, or beseeches Him for insight or assistance.

The writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá include many beautiful, expressive, and spiritually powerful prayers which are recited both in private and at devotional gatherings.

It is a common practice for Bahá'ís to gather with their friends and neighbors to offer prayers. Devotional gatherings are held in community centers or in one another's homes and consist largely of reading prayers and passages from holy scriptures in an informal, yet respectful, atmosphere. Uplifting music and song are often included. There are no rituals; no individual has a special role. These simple gatherings bring people of all backgrounds and beliefs together in prayer and generate a unifying spirit that begins to permeate the community.

“Gather ye together with the utmost joy and fellowship and recite the verses revealed by the merciful Lord. By so doing the doors to true knowledge will be opened to your inner beings, and ye will then feel your souls endowed with steadfastness and your hearts filled with radiant joy.”

—BAHÁ'U'LLÁH



“As a person cultivates the habit of study and deep reflection upon the Creative Word, this process of transformation reveals itself in an ability to express one’s understanding of profound concepts and to explore spiritual reality in conversations of significance.”

—THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

The training institute

The words of the Manifestations of God, as found in the world’s sacred scriptures, have a creative and transformative effect on the human soul. Interaction with the Word of God—both individually and collectively—releases powerful spiritual and moral forces that inevitably find expression in new social relations, revitalized institutions, and a vibrant community life. A process of personal and social transformation begins with deep reflection on the Creative Word linked with acts of service to humanity. To systematically foster these processes and enable the participation of ever-larger numbers of people, the concept of the “training institute” was adopted worldwide in the mid-1990s.

The nature of the training institute can be understood by imagining an ongoing conversation taking place among friends in thousands upon thousands of social spaces—neighborhoods, villages, schools, universities, and workplaces. The training institute functions as a system of distance education to fuel and facilitate this evolving conversation. The principal elements of the system include the study circle, the tutor, and a set of materials grounded in the Bahá’í writings that express the spiritual insights and knowledge gained in the process of translating Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings into reality.

Study circles

A study circle is a small group that meets perhaps once a week for a few hours, usually in the home of one of its members, to study the course materials. The materials include passages from the Bahá’í writings related to specific themes and acts of service. Among the questions participants explore are how to create environments that put people in contact with the spiritual forces released through prayer and devotion; how to strengthen bonds of friendship and establish meaningful patterns of communication among people of various backgrounds; how to make the education of children an integral part of community life; how to help young people develop their intellectual and spiritual capacities; and how to generate dynamics within the family unit that give rise to material and spiritual prosperity.

In response to the materials they study and with support from their institutions, participants arise to carry out specific acts of service. Men and women, young and old alike, come to recognize that they have the power to re-create the world around them. As more and more people become committed to the vision of individual and collective transformation fostered by the institute courses, capacity is gradually built in the community to reflect a pattern of life that places at its heart service and worship.

A selection of courses from the training institute that focus on building capacity to walk a path of service

Reflections on the Life of the Spirit

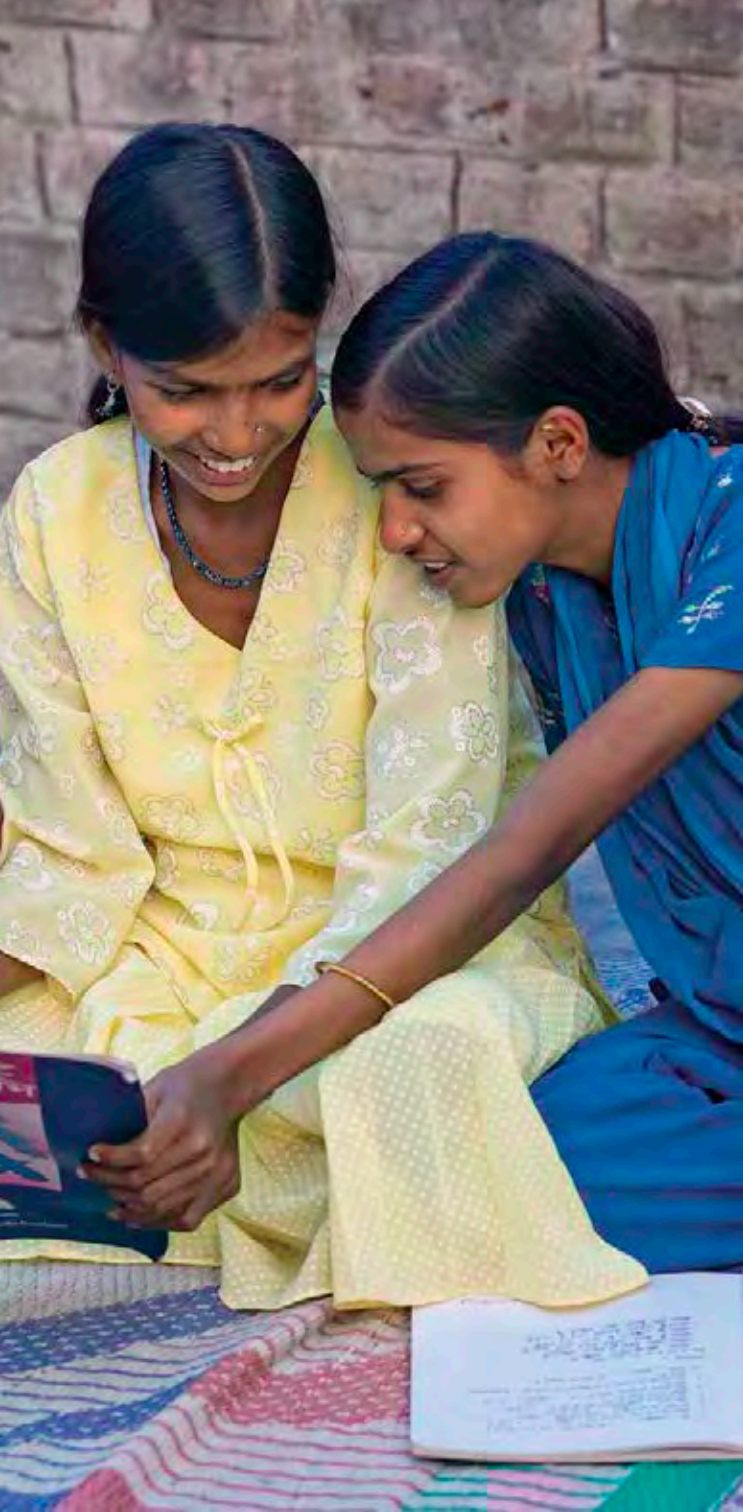
The Creative Word, the nature of prayer, and the mystery of life after death

Arising to Serve

The path of service and the essential features of community life

Teaching Children’s Classes

The transformative effect of the spiritual education of children



Releasing the Powers of Junior Youth

The spiritual empowerment of adolescents ages 12 to 15

Walking Together on a Path of Service

The training of tutors who assist others to advance through the sequence of courses

Building Vibrant Communities

Accompanying one another on a path of service and consultation



“The light of a good character surpasseth the light of the sun.”

—BAHÁ’U’LLÁH

The period of youth

Youth have played a vital role in Bahá’í history from its very start. The Báb declared His mission when He was only 25 years old, and many of His followers were in the prime of their youth when they embraced His teachings.

Likewise, young people were at the forefront of efforts to proclaim the message of Bahá’u’lláh and to share His teachings with others. The Bahá’í teachings encourage young people to see this dynamic period of their lives as a time to make decisive contributions to their communities.

Young people have energy, idealism, and the desire to contribute to the betterment of the world, regardless of their social situations. They can learn to look at the environments in which they interact with others—the family, the peer group, the school, the workplace, the media, the community—and recognize the social forces that operate in them. Forces such as love for truth, thirst for knowledge, and attraction to beauty impel them towards service to humanity. Other forces, such as

spreading materialism and self-centeredness, are destructive and distort young people’s views of the world, thereby impeding individual and collective growth.

Naturally, many matters occupy young people’s time and energy: education, work, leisure, spiritual life, physical health. Failure to approach one’s life as a coherent whole can breed anxiety and confusion. Through selfless service, however, young people can learn to foster a life in which these various aspects complement each other. By developing patterns of behavior that balance the spiritual and material requirements of life, they discover both personal growth and meaning.

By developing spiritual perception, the power of expression, and a moral framework, youth are empowered to live a life free of contradictions and contribute to an ever-advancing civilization.

WELCOME

Participants of
Junior Youth Spiritual Embowerment –
– Programme Seminar
To Bihar Sharif Cluster
Community - Sibah





Junior youth spiritual empowerment program

The Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program is a global movement that motivates young people aged 12 to 15 to work together with parents and community members to contribute to the well-being of their neighborhoods and the world at large.

The program is founded on the idea that, to help young people achieve their highest potential, education needs to address both their intellectual and spiritual development. While inspired by the Bahá'í Faith, the program does not approach education in the mode of religious instruction. It affirms that young people have a vital role to play in helping communities grow.

In these groups, junior youth are mentored by older teens and young adults, referred to as “animators,” to develop their spiritual qualities, intellectual capabilities, and

capacity to serve society. Each week, animators and junior youth study materials based on moral and spiritual concepts and talk about how to navigate a complex world, resist negative forces in their lives, and promote social progress. They engage in meaningful discussions and artistic expression (through drama, cooperative games, visual arts, and storytelling) and acts of community service, all of which help them form strong moral identities.

Animators strive to awaken junior youth to their own potential, channel their energies, and develop their talents to serve their neighbors, family, and friends. Along the way, many animators discover that the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program makes an impact in their own lives as well as in the lives of the young people they serve.



Families and children

Bahá'ís view the family as the nucleus of human society and family life as the primary place to develop values and capacities essential to the betterment of society. The moral and spiritual education of children assumes vital importance in a world where the joy and innocence of childhood can so easily be overwhelmed by materialism.

The Bahá'í ideal is a family life that cultivates a loving and respectful relationship between parents and children and promotes the principles of consultation and harmony in decision making.

The teachings emphasize the importance of the education of women and girls, both for their own advancement and because it

is through educated mothers that the benefits of knowledge can be most effectively and rapidly diffused throughout society.

Ultimately, the aim is for children to increasingly grow up free from all forms of prejudice, recognizing the oneness of humanity and appreciating the innate dignity and nobility of every human being. Bahá'u'lláh called on us to regard one another as “the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch.” Inspired by this vision, Bahá'ís partner with their neighbors, friends, and colleagues to create programs for the spiritual education of children.

“Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.”

—BAHÁ'U'LLÁH





The light-filled interior dome of the Bahá'í House of Worship for South America. The center inscription is a prayer meaning "O Thou the Glory of the Most Glorious!"



A gathering at the Bahá'í House of Worship in Apia, Samoa

يا باهائى
بهت

Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá

"O Thou the Glory of the Most Glorious!"

This design is a calligraphic arrangement of the invocation "Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá," an Arabic phrase that can be translated "O Thou the Glory of the Most Glorious!" Known as "the Greatest Name," it is a reference to Bahá'u'lláh and is often displayed in Bahá'í centers and homes.

Bahá'í Houses of Worship

The Bahá'í Houses of Worship around the world are dedicated to joining the worship of God with service to humanity. There are eight regional or continental Bahá'í Temples, located in Australia, Chile, Germany, India, Panama, Samoa, Uganda, and the United States. These structures are open to all people and collectively receive millions of visitors each year.

Each House of Worship has its own distinctive architecture influenced by the local landscape and culture. Each also has elements that reflect Bahá'í belief: a circular design and nine entrances welcoming people from all directions, a single dome sheltering all under the embrace of one God, and lovely gardens that reflect unity in diversity.

The Bahá'í Faith has no clergy. No sacraments, rituals, or sermons take place in the Temple auditoriums. Instead, there are simple devotional programs that include the reciting, singing, or chanting of the Word of God from the Bahá'í sacred scriptures and from the scriptures of other world religions.

Each of these buildings is the central edifice of an institution known as a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, or "Dawning Place of the Mention of God." In the fullness of time, each Bahá'í House of Worship will be surrounded by other structures dedicated to serving the needs of the community: hospitals, universities, and other humanitarian and social service agencies.

While at present most Bahá'í worship activities take place in homes and local neighborhood centers, national and local Bahá'í Houses of Worship are now being constructed in response to the vitality of the community-building process underway in various parts of the world.

The first of the national Bahá'í Houses of Worship will be in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Papua New Guinea. The first of the local Bahá'í Houses of Worship are being constructed in Battambang, Cambodia; Bihar Sharif, India; Matunda Soy, Kenya; Norte del Cauca, Colombia; and Tanna, Vanuatu. Sites have been set aside for future Houses of Worship in more than 130 countries.



The ringstone symbol

This design, usually called the ringstone symbol, is frequently engraved on jewelry and may appear on Bahá'í buildings. While the symbol in its entirety is a calligraphic arrangement of the word "Bahá," its vertical line can be interpreted to represent the Holy Spirit proceeding from God through His Manifestations to humanity. The twin stars represent the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.



Nine-pointed star

A simple nine-pointed star is generally used as a symbol of the Bahá'í Faith. The number nine represents unity, perfection, and completion.



A life of generous giving

The purpose of our lives is to recognize, love, and grow closer to God. We strive to do so, in part, by mirroring God's attributes, such as love, compassion, generosity, justice, and mercy. We fulfill our highest purpose by living a life of service in which we are generous with our love and compassion, and, practically speaking, give freely of our time, energy, knowledge, and financial resources. The impulse to give springs naturally from our gratitude to and love for God. As this gratitude and love fills our hearts, generosity comes to characterize the pattern of our conduct. When we serve others for the love of God, we are motivated neither by the hope of recognition and reward nor by fear of punishment. A life of service to humanity implies humility and detachment, rather than self-interest and ostentation.

Serving humanity

Bahá'ís strive to participate fully in the life of society, working shoulder to shoulder with diverse groups in a wide variety of settings to contribute to the social, material, and spiritual advancement of civilization. Whatever particular form their efforts take, Bahá'ís participate motivated by concern for the common good and with a spirit of humble service to humanity.



Sharing Bahá'í beliefs

When a Bahá'í shares his or her beliefs with another, the act is not an attempt to convince or otherwise prove a particular point. Proselytization is forbidden. Rather, discussing beliefs is an expression of a sincere desire to engage in meaningful conversation about the basic questions of life. "If ye be aware of a certain truth," Bahá'u'lláh has stated, "if ye possess a jewel, of which others are deprived, share it with them in a language of utmost kindness and goodwill." And further, "A kindly tongue is the lodestone of the hearts of men. It is the bread of the spirit, it clotheth the words with meaning, it is the fountain of the light of wisdom and understanding."

Giving to the Bahá'í funds

Bahá'u'lláh's vision is that humanity will reorganize its affairs to ensure that the vast resources of the planet can be used to bring about spiritual and material prosperity for the entire human race. Within the affairs of their communities, Bahá'ís are learning about how voluntary giving and the moral stewardship of resources can contribute

to development. When Bahá'ís contribute to the funds of the Faith, they see it as a practical way of contributing to constructive processes in the world.

Within the Bahá'í community, funds are established at the local, national, continental, and international levels to which only registered members of the Faith may contribute. This allows the Bahá'í community both to sustain its activity and to channel financial resources in ways that promote the common good. The administration of these funds is entrusted to Bahá'í institutions responsible for making decisions about the allocation of resources on behalf of the community.

Individual Bahá'ís strive to give selflessly and joyfully to the various funds of the Faith, each according to his or her circumstances and means. Contributions are private and voluntary, and soliciting money from individuals is not permitted. Voluntary giving fosters an awareness that managing one's financial affairs in accordance with spiritual principles is an indispensable dimension of a coherently lived life.

"We must be like the fountain or spring that is continually emptying itself of all that it has and is continually being refilled from an invisible source."

— SHOGHI EFFENDI



The Bahá'í Chair for World Peace is an endowed academic program established at the University of Maryland in 1993.



Contributing to the life of society

Bahá'ís are collaborating with an ever-increasing number of movements, organizations, and individuals who further the cause of unity, promote human welfare, and contribute to world solidarity. In choosing areas of collaboration, Bahá'ís bear in mind the principle, enshrined in their teachings, that means should be consistent with ends; noble goals cannot be achieved through unworthy means.

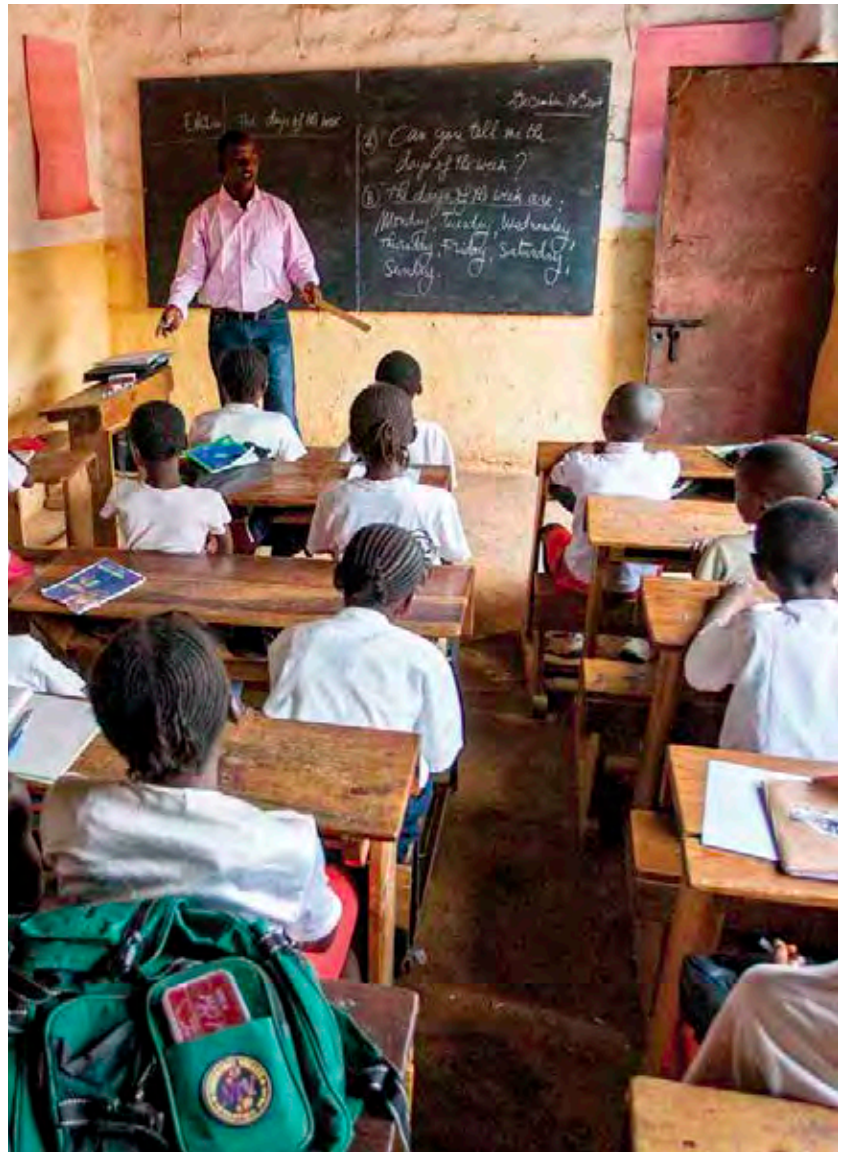
Specifically, it is not possible to build enduring unity through endeavors that require contention or the assumption that inherent conflicts of interest underlie



Community agriculture project in Mongolia

“Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.”

—BAHÁ'U'LLÁH



human interactions. Thus, Bahá'ís are not permitted to take part in partisan politics, civil disobedience, or violent or seditious activity.

There are no shortages of opportunities for collaboration; so many people in the world today are working intensely towards one or another aim which Bahá'ís share. Bahá'ís have been particularly active in advocacy and education in the areas of human rights, the advancement of women, and sustainable development.

Community school in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The majority of Bahá'í initiatives for social and economic development are modest in scale and scope and are sustained by resources in the local communities that are carrying them out.

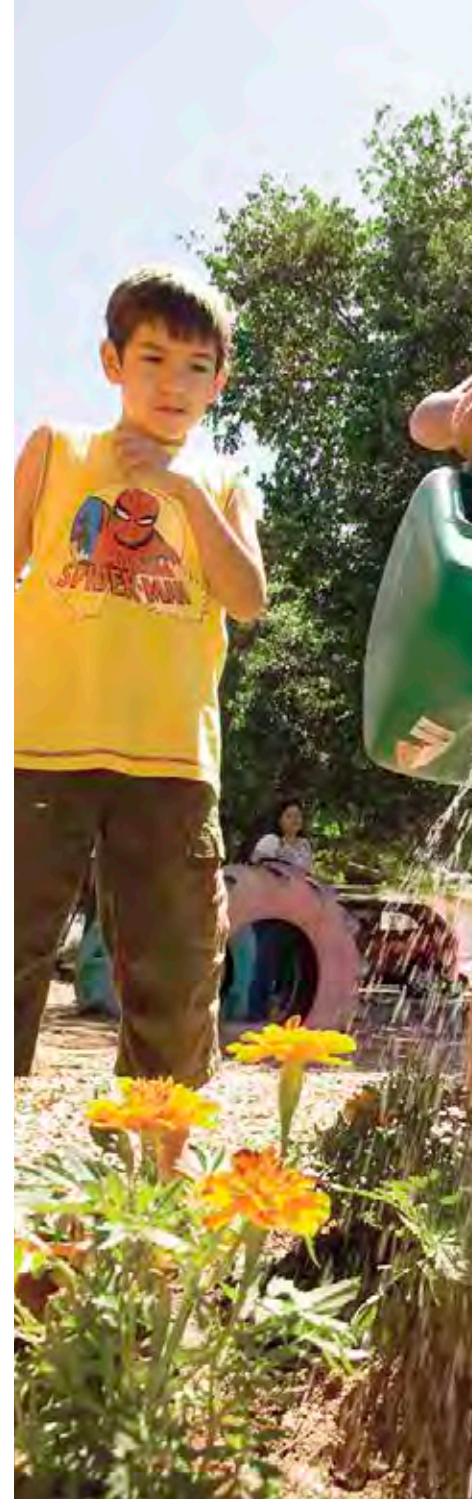
Social action

Bahá'ís engage in social action to promote the social and material well-being of people of all walks of life, whatever their beliefs or background. Such efforts are motivated by the desire to serve humanity and contribute to constructive social change. Social action is pursued with the conviction that every population should be able to mark out the path of its own progress. Social change is not a project that one group of people carries out for the benefit of another.

Fundamentally, Bahá'ís view knowledge as central to social existence, and the perpetuation of ignorance as a severe form of oppression. Every human being has the right of access to knowledge, and the responsibility to participate in its generation, application, and diffusion, according to his or her talents and abilities. The primary concern of social action is to build capacity in individuals and communities to participate in creating a better world.

Bahá'í endeavors for social and economic development fall along a spectrum. The majority of such initiatives are modest in scale and scope and are sustained by resources in the local communities that are carrying them out. Development efforts are usually carried out by small groups of individuals and emerge out of a growing collective consciousness. They are often related to education, health, sanitation, agriculture, or environmental protection. In a few cases, those engaged in grassroots social action are able to extend the range of their activities in an organic fashion, and their efforts evolve into projects of a more sustained nature, with an administrative structure.

Some examples of social action projects around the world, including youth activities, community banks, education, and media.



Zambia





Brazil



Canada



Bolivia



Mongolia



Papua New Guinea



Contributing to public discourse

One aspect of the Bahá'í community's efforts to contribute to the betterment of the world is through participation in the discourses of society.

At any given moment, in social spaces at all levels of society, there are ongoing conversations concerned with various aspects of humanity's well-being and progress: discourses on such subjects as the equality of women and men, peace, governance, public health, and development, to name but a few. Bahá'ís strive to learn with and from others and offer their personal insights, informed by the Bahá'í teachings, to the unfolding discussions.

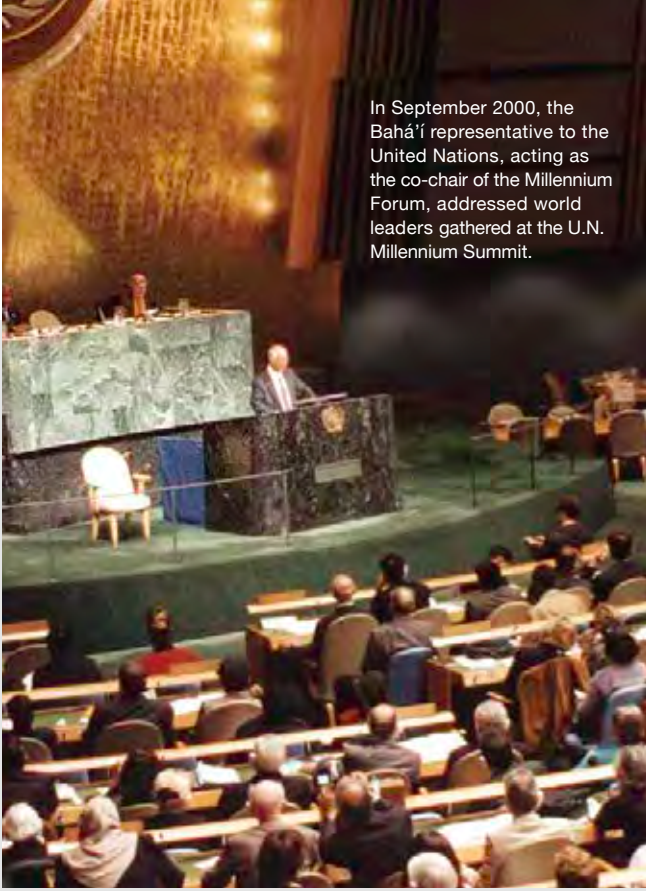
Individual Bahá'ís—whether through their involvement in the local community, their efforts of social action, or in the course of their studies, occupations, or professional activities—strive to participate fruitfully in such discourses. Bahá'í-inspired agencies

contribute to discourses relevant to their work. Bahá'í institutions at the local, national, and international levels engage with governmental and non-governmental bodies to promote ideas conducive to public welfare.

For more than a century, Bahá'ís have contributed to processes of global governance. With the founding of the League of Nations in 1920, Bahá'ís began to establish more formal relations with international organizations. In 1948, the Bahá'í International Community (BIC), representing the Bahá'ís of the world, registered as an international non-governmental organization with the United Nations. The BIC is an active participant in many of the United Nations' major conferences and commissions, frequently presenting papers and statements on such diverse subjects as minority rights, the status of women, crime prevention, and the welfare of children and the family.

At whatever level it occurs, the purpose of Bahá'í participation in discourses is not to persuade others to accept a Bahá'í position on a particular subject. Bahá'ís do not set out to offer any specific solutions to the problems that face humanity, such as climate change, women's health, food production, or poverty alleviation. Nor are efforts pursued as public relations activities or academic exercises. Rather, Bahá'ís strive to learn and engage in genuine conversation. Bahá'ís are eager to share what they are learning in their own efforts to apply Bahá'u'lláh's teachings towards the advancement of civilization and to learn with and from other like-minded individuals and groups.

In September 2000, the Bahá'í representative to the United Nations, acting as the co-chair of the Millennium Forum, addressed world leaders gathered at the U.N. Millennium Summit.



THE BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The Bahá'í International Community (BIC) is a non-governmental organization that represents the worldwide Bahá'í community. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Over the past 70 years, the BIC has supported and

contributed to UN efforts in the areas of social and sustainable development, gender equality, human rights, and UN reform, among others.

The BIC is also coming to play a more active part in discussions at the regional level and, to this end, has established offices in Addis Ababa, Brussels, and Jakarta.



SCHOLARLY AND PROFESSIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO DISCOURSE

One of the ways in which the Bahá'í community is building capacity to contribute meaningfully to public discourse is through seminars for undergraduate and graduate university students. Conducted by the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP) at the national and international levels, these seminars explore subjects especially relevant to students and young professionals.

Around the world, several Associations for Bahá'í Studies provide forums for interested people of all ages and from every field to correlate the Bahá'í teachings with contemporary thought. The Bahá'í Chair for World Peace, established at the University of Maryland in 1993, is an endowed academic program that advances interdisciplinary examination of and discourse on global peace.





Creativity and resilience: The Bahá'ís in Iran

A hopeful vision of the transformations underway in the world can seem naive or utopian to some people. Bahá'ís, however, offer more than a vision in words. They offer the testimony of decades of deeds of faith and sacrifice, demonstrating that obstacles can be overcome by bringing to bear spiritual resources of creativity, resilience, and perseverance. This reality is nowhere more evident than in the experience of the Iranian Bahá'í community since the mid-1800s.

From the time of the Báb's announcement of His mission in 1844, the government and clergy of Persia endeavored by every means to stamp out the movement, which has grown to become the largest religious minority in Iran today, with more than 300,000 members. The claims of progressive religious truth and the continuation of divine revelation after Muhammad were seen as heretical. The new Faith's vision of universal education, of decentralized and consultative decision making, of the empowerment of women, and of the mingling of people of all races and religions was seen as deeply disruptive and threatening to the established order. Thus, throughout its history, the Iranian Bahá'í community experienced waves of executions, imprison-

ments, mob violence, confiscation of property, destruction of cemeteries, denial of access to education and many professions, and other forms of systematic repression.

After Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution, the suppression of the Bahá'í community became official government policy, with a documented system of repression chillingly reminiscent of Nazi Germany's Nuremberg Laws that targeted the Jews. In the years following the Islamic revolution, thousands of Bahá'ís, including most of the elected leadership at the local and national levels, were rounded up and imprisoned. Many were tortured and more than 200 were executed.

Yet, Bahá'ís have refused to accept the role of victimhood, or to return violence with violence. The principles of their Faith require obedience to government and forbid violence, sedition, and involvement in partisan political activity. Bahá'ís have instead found creative and resilient ways to put their beliefs into practice. In the early 1900s, Bahá'í schools were established in the capital, as well as in provincial centers—including the Tarbiyat School for Girls, which gained national renown. With the assistance





Left: Street murals are part of an international campaign, "Education is Not a Crime," that calls for education equality in Iran.

Right: American physician, Dr. Susan Moody, with Bahá'í women in Tehran, 1910. Some of these women were among the first to appear in public in Iran without veils.

of American and European Bahá'í helpers, clinics and other medical facilities followed. At the international level, Bahá'ís have worked to strengthen the framework of human rights law and defend the rights of Bahá'ís through education, advocacy, and diplomatic channels.

After the 1979 Islamic revolution, all Bahá'í students and faculty were expelled from Iranian universities. The Bahá'í community appealed to the new Iranian government to ask for justice and redress for the violations of their rights, but the conditions did not change.

In response, the Iranian Bahá'í community started an informal system of college-level education, which has since evolved into the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE). Initially classes were taught in living rooms and kitchens of homes across Iran by Bahá'í academics, many of whom had themselves been barred from teaching professionally. Now taught primarily online, BIHE represents the only chance that Bahá'í youth in Iran have for higher education.

In May 2011, the Iranian government launched a coordinated attack against BIHE, raiding dozens of homes, confiscating computers and materials, and detaining professors and administrators. Since 2011, 16 BIHE educators have been sentenced to four- or five-year prison terms; seven of them remain in prison. Their only crime: educating the youth in their community.

This spirit of constructive resilience is captured in a letter from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'í youth in Iran, dated January 29, 2014:

You surely see how throughout the world the light of true religion is fading. Yet, you are the very examples of what illumination this light can bring. You are living proofs that religion promotes upright character, instills forbearance, compassion, forgiveness, magnanimity, high-mindedness. It prohibits harm to others and invites souls to the plane of sacrifice, that they may give of themselves for the good of others. It imparts a world-embracing vision and cleanses the heart from self-centredness and prejudice. It inspires souls to build unity, to endeavour for material and spiritual betterment for all, to see their own happiness in that of others, to advance learning and science, to be an instrument of true joy, and to revive the body of humankind. It burnishes the mirror of the soul until it reflects the qualities of the spirit with which it has been endowed. And then the power of the divine attributes is manifested in the individual and collective lives of humanity and aids the emergence of a new social order. Such is the true conception of religion set forth in the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. ●

“You are living proofs that religion promotes upright character, instills forbearance, compassion, forgiveness, magnanimity, high-mindedness.”

—THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

