

# Courses and Curriculum:

Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi

Original English



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...he sincerely trusts that these summer courses will serve to deepen the knowledge and the understanding of the friends and enable them to diffuse the teachings of the Faith to the struggling and almost hopeless world.

The wide range of the topics that are to be discussed and studied by the friends cover most of the important aspects of the Cause and such a plan will undoubtedly give them a broad and a sound knowledge of the essentials of the Faith. Special stress, however, should be put on the history of the Movement as well as on the guiding principles of Bahá'í Administration; for on these two points most of the believers are not adequately informed. It is, therefore, a great opportunity for them to strengthen the basis of their beliefs and to try to deepen their understanding of the basis of the present-day Bahá'í administrative system.

From a letter 5 August 1932 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

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Definite courses should be given along the different phases of the Bahá'í Faith and in a manner that will stimulate the students to proceed in their studies privately once they return home, for



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the period of a few days is not sufficient to learn everything. They have to be taught the habit of studying the Cause constantly, for the more we read the Words the more will the truth they contain be revealed to us.

From a letter 24 November 1932 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

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The basic purpose of all Bahá'í summer schools, whether in East or West, is to give the believers the opportunity to fully acquaint themselves, not only by mere study but through whole-hearted and active[pg 33] collaboration in various Bahá'í activities, with the essentials of the Administration and in this way enable them to become efficient and able promoters of the Cause. The teaching of the Administration is, therefore, an indispensable feature of every Bahá'í summer school and its special significance can be better understood if we realize the great need of every believer today for a more adequate understanding of the social principles and laws of the Faith. It is now, when the Cause is passing through some of the most difficult stages of its development, that the friends should equip themselves with the necessary knowledge of the Administration. The Guardian wishes you, therefore, to stress again, in all the coming summer schools, this vital point and in this way add to the effectiveness and success of your efforts along this line.

[Postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi:]

I certainly advise you to concentrate next year on "The Dawn-Breakers" as well as on the needs, the principles and the purpose of Bahá'í Administration. The Cause in your land is still in its formative period. It needs men and women of vision, of capacity and understanding....

From a letter 25 September 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers,  
'Bahá'í News' 78, November 1933, p. 4

He feels that in your next summer meetings continued emphasis should be laid upon the teaching of the administration, especially in its relation to the outside world, so as to impress the non-Bahá'í attendants at the School with the nature, character and world significance of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. The teaching of the Administration should, indeed, be considered as forming a permanent and vital feature of every Bahá'í summer school. For upon its thorough and intelligent understanding by the entire community of the believers must inevitably depend the effectiveness and continued expansion of Bahá'í activities throughout [pg 34] the world.

From a letter 6 November 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

With regard to the School's programme for the next summer: the Guardian would certainly advise, and even urge the friends to make a thorough study of the Qur'án, as the knowledge of this Sacred Scripture is absolutely indispensable for every believer who wishes to adequately understand, and intelligently read the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Although there are very few persons among our Western Bahá'ís who are capable of handling such a course in a scholarly way yet, the mere lack of such competent teachers should encourage and stimulate the believers to get better acquainted with the Sacred Scriptures of Islám. In this way, there will gradually appear some distinguished Bahá'ís who will be so well versed in the teaching of Islám as to be able to guide the believers in their study of that religion.

From a letter 2 December 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Central States Summer School Committee and an individual believer

As regards the study courses for the next year's session: the Guardian wishes you to cover the same subjects, namely the Administrative Order and Islám, but feels that these should be studied through more detailed and concentrated examination of all their aspects. An effort

should be made to raise the standard of studies, so as to provide the Bahá'í student with a thorough knowledge of the Cause that would enable him to expound it befittingly to the educated public.

From a letter 8 November 1937 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

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The course on character building, ... the Guardian feels, is particularly important and should be given due emphasis and studied carefully and thoroughly, especially by the young believers in attendance at the school. These standards of Bahá'í conduct, which he himself has set forth in his last general epistle, "The Advent of Divine Justice", and which it should be the paramount duty of every loyal and conscientious believer to endeavour to uphold and promote, deserve serious study and meditation, and should constitute the main central theme of this year's programme at all the three Bahá'í Summer Schools in the States.

Since the purpose of the Summer School is not only to impart knowledge of the Teachings, but to infuse in the hearts of all those present such spirit as will enable them to translate the ideals of the Cause into [pg 35] daily deeds of constructive spiritual living, it is more than fitting therefore that this year's meetings should be principally devoted to the study of Bahá'í morals, not only in their theoretical aspect, but first and foremost in their relation to the present-day needs and requirements of Bahá'í community life.

The principles and methods laid down by the Guardian in his "Advent of Divine Justice" on the vital subject of Bahá'í ethics should indeed prove of valuable inspiration and guidance to all the students and friends attending the Summer School classes, and thus prepare them to better appreciate the privileges, and more adequately discharge the responsibilities, of their citizenship in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

From a letter 20 May 1939 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

...there is as yet no such thing as a Bahá'í curriculum, and there are no Bahá'í publications exclusively devoted to this subject, since the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá do not present a definite and detailed educational system, but simply offer certain basic principles and set forth a number of teaching ideals that should guide future Bahá'í educationalists in their efforts to formulate an adequate teaching curriculum which would be in full harmony with the spirit of the Bahá'í Teachings, and would thus meet the requirements and needs of the modern age.

These basic principles are available in the sacred writings of the Cause, and should be carefully studied, and gradually incorporated in various college and university programmes. But the task of formulating a system of education which would be officially recognized by the Cause, and enforced as such throughout the Bahá'í world is one which [the] present-day generation of believers cannot obviously undertake, and which has to be gradually accomplished by Bahá'í scholars and educationalists of the future.

From a letter 7 June 1939 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

He feels ... that some of the courses are not sufficiently Bahá'í in nature, but carry the student off into an unnecessary study of special techniques — history, psychology or whatever it may be, which however [pg 36] valuable these topics may be in training the human mind and fitting the individual for contact with others, are a waste of time, in view of the very limited period that most of the Bahá'ís spend at a Bahá'í summer school.

The friends should concentrate on deepening their grasp of the Teachings, particularly on studying what has already been done, and what must be done to fulfil the goals of this World Crusade.

From a letter 11 May 1954 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States

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He thinks the less time spend on such topics as “Current Events in the Light of the Bahá’í Faith”, and “*The Bahá’í Faith and Modern Science*”, the better. There is no harm in having an evening lecture by a qualified speaker once on each of these subjects, but he certainly does not feel that much time should be spent on them, for the very simple reason that there is so little that can be said on the subject. The Bahá’ís are not scientists, and cannot very well go into details of the relation of the Bahá’í Faith to modern science; and “Current Events in the Light of the Bahá’í Faith” is also a topic which can be dealt with briefly.

He feels that the most important thing for the Bahá’í Schools all over the world at present to do is to strongly impress upon the Bahá’í attendants the urgency of arising, not only to fulfil pioneer goals and to consolidate the work on the home front, which is getting weaker every year instead of stronger, but also to bring home to the friends the necessity of dispersing.

The Bahá’ís must realize that they belong to a world-wide Order, and not an American civilization. They must try and introduce the Bahá’í atmosphere of life and thought into their Summer Schools, rather than making the Summer School an episode and a pleasant vacation period, during which they learn a little more about the Faith.

From a letter 23 May 1954 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Green Acre Program Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States

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Through the intensive study of Bahá’í Scriptures and of the early history of the Faith; through the organization of courses on the teachings and history of Islám; through conferences for the promotion of [pg 37] inter-racial amity; through laboratory courses designed to familiarize the participants with the processes of the Bahá’í Administrative Order; through special sessions

devoted to Youth and child training; through classes in public speaking; through lectures on Comparative Religion; through group discussion on the manifold aspects of the Faith; through the establishment of libraries; through teaching classes; through courses on Bahá'í ethics and on Latin America; through the introduction of winter school sessions; through forums and devotional gatherings; through plays and pageants; through picnics and other recreational activities, these schools, open to Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís alike, have set so noble an example as to inspire other Bahá'í communities in Persia, in the British Isles, in Germany, in Australia, in New Zealand, in India, in 'Iráq and in Egypt to undertake the initial measures designed to enable them to build along the same lines institutions that bid fair to evolve into the Bahá'í universities of the future.

Shoghi Effendi, 'God Passes By', p. 341

