

XIV. EDUCATION

Compiled from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l

Original English



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A. Academic and Spiritual

1. Education of Man

"Man is even as steel, the essence of which is hidden: through admonition and explanation, good counsel and education, that essence will be brought to light. If, however, he be allowed to remain in his original condition, the corrosion of lusts and appetites will effectively destroy him."

(Bahá'u'lláh: Bahá'í Education, A Compilation, p. 5)

1. Education of the Physical and Intellectual, Spiritual and Ethical Aspects of Man

"...Bahá'u'lláh considered education as one of the most fundamental factors of a true civilization. This education, however, in order to be adequate and fruitful, should be comprehensive in nature and should take into consideration not only the physical and the intellectual side of man but also his spiritual and ethical aspects. This should be the program of the Bahá'í youth all over the world."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, July 9, 1931)

1. Man Said to be Greatest Representative of God

"Man is said to be the greatest representative of God, and he is the Book of Creation because all the mysteries of beings exist in him. If he comes under the shadow of the True Educator and is rightly trained, he becomes the essence of essences, the light of lights, the spirit of spirits; he becomes the centre of the divine appearances, the source of spiritual qualities, the rising-place of heavenly lights, and the receptacle of divine inspirations. If he is deprived of this education he becomes the manifestation of satanic qualities, the sum of animal vices, and the source of all dark conditions."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Bahá'í World Faith, 1971 ed., p. 332)

1. Modern Education Lacking in Ability to Produce a Mature Mind

"People today indeed do tend to be very superficial in their thinking, and it would seem as if the educational systems in use are sorely lacking in ability to produce a mature mind in a person

¹. (See also: XLVI. Social and Economic Development, LII. Youth)



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who has reached supposedly adult life! All the outside influences that surround the individual seem to have an intensely distracting effect, and it is a hard job to get the average person to do any deep thinking or even a little meditation on the problems facing him and the world at large. Over and over again Bahá'u'lláh cried out against the heedlessness of humanity, and warns of the fate such an attitude must lead to. Did we not know what God plans to [pg 212] do, and will do, with the world in the future, we should certainly be as hopeless as many of the best thinkers of our generation have become."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, September 22, 1948)

1. Each Should Be Educated According to His Needs and Deserts

"Among other teachings and principles Bahá'u'lláh counsels the education of all members of society. No individual should be denied or deprived of intellectual training although each should receive according to capacity. None must be left in the grades of ignorance, for ignorance is a defect in the human world. All mankind must be given a knowledge of science and philosophy; that is, as much as may be deemed necessary. All cannot be scientists or philosophers but each should be educated according to his needs and deserts."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, 1982 ed., p. 108)

1. Education Extended to Prisoners

"...Kindness, training and education extended to prisoners is exceedingly important. Therefore as thou has exerted an effort in this, has awakened some of them, and hast been the cause of the turning of their faces to the divine Kingdom, this praiseworthy deed is highly acceptable. Assuredly persevere. Convey on my behalf to the two prisoners in San Quentin the utmost kindness, and tell them: 'That prison in the sight of wise souls is a school of training and development. Ye must strive with heart and soul that ye may become renowned in character and knowledge.'"

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 116-117)

1. Humankind Are as Children in School, and Prophets Are Their Teachers

"O true companions! All humankind are as children in a school, and the Dawning-Points of Light, the Sources of divine revelation are the teachers, wondrous and without peer. In the school of realities they educate these sons and daughters, according to teachings from God, and foster them in the bosom of grace, so that they may develop along every line, show forth the excellent gifts and blessing of the Lord, and combine human perfections; that they may advance in all aspects of human endeavour, whether outward or inward, hidden or visible, material or spiritual, until they make of this mortal world a widespread mirror, to reflect that other world which dieth not."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Ibid., p. 128)

1. Learning is the Greatest Bestowal of God

"It is clear that learning is the greatest bestowal of God; that knowledge and the acquirement thereof is a blessing from Heaven. Thus it is incumbent upon the friends of God to exert such an effort and strive with such eagerness to promote divine knowledge, culture and the sciences, that ere long those who are school children today will become the most erudite of all the fraternity of the wise. This is a service rendered unto God Himself, and it is one of His inescapable commandments."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Bahá'í Education, A Compilation, Wilmette, 1977 ed., p. 38) [pg 213]



B. Universities and Colleges

1. The Academic Life

"...The academic life also has its fashions and fads, even though they are of a different nature from the fads of the man on the street."

"These fashions are not permanent; they are bound to change. Today the fad is a materialistic view of life and of the world. A day will soon come when it will become deeply religious and spiritual. In fact, we can discern the beginning of such a change in the writings of some of the most eminent souls and liberal minds. When the pendulum will start its full swing then we shall see all such eminent men turn again to God."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, October 18, 1932)

1. There is No Bahá'í Curriculum as Yet

"...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 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, June 7, 1939)

1. Three Cardinal Principles

"First: Whole-hearted service to the cause of education, the unfolding of the mysteries of nature, the extension of the boundaries of pure science, the elimination of the causes of ignorance and social evils, a standard universal system of instruction, and the diffusion of the lights of knowledge and reality."

"Second: Service to the cause of morality, raising the moral tone of the students, inspiring them with the sublimest ideals of ethical refinement, teaching them altruism, inculcating in their lives the beauty of holiness and the excellency of virtue and animating them with the excellences and perfections of the religion of God."

"Third: Service to the oneness of the world of humanity; so that each student may consciously realize that he is a brother to all mankind, irrespective of religion or race. The thoughts of universal peace must be instilled into the minds of all the scholars, in order that they may become the armies of peace, the real servants of the body politic — the world. God is the Father of all. Mankind are His children. This globe is one home. Nations are the members of one [pg 214] family. The mothers in their homes, the teachers in the schools, the professors in the college, the presidents in the universities, must teach these ideals to the young from the cradle up to the age of manhood."

(From notes taken of talks given by Abdu'l-Bahá, as quoted in: Star of the West, Vol. IX, No. 9, p. 98)

1. Characteristics of Bahá'í College Students

"You must become the shining candles of moral precepts and spiritual ideals and be the means of the illumination of others. Clothe your bodies with the robes of virtues. Characterize yourselves with the characteristics of the people of divine morality. Shun all manner of vices as you shun a poisonous snake or a leper. Let the corps of professors and the students be impressed with the purity and holiness of your lives so that they may take you as paragons of worthiness, examples of nobility of nature, observers of the moral laws, holding in subordination the lower element by the higher spirit, the conquerors of self and the masters of wholesome, vital forces in all the avenues of life. Strive always to be at the head of your classes through hard study and true merit. Be always in a prayerful state and appreciate the value of everything. Entertain high ideals and stimulate your intellectual and constructive forces."

(Ibid.)

1. Abdu'l-Bahá Enjoins Bahá'ís to Excel All Other Students — Emphasis on Truthfulness

"I hope that while you are studying in this college you may so excel all other students in the various branches of knowledge taught therein that all of them may testify that the Bahai (Bahá'í) students have another power, are inspired with another effort, are imbued with a nobler ambition, are stimulated by higher motives and make wider and deeper exertions than others. If you do not surpass the others, then what distinction will there remain for you? Therefore, you

must strive to be superior to them, so that everyone may bear testimony to this fact. You are now like the tender plants that are trained according to the knowledge and wisdom of the gardener. From now on, you must strive to beautify the moral aspect of your lives. Advise one another with utmost consideration, watch daily your words and deeds; thus from the very beginning you may characterize yourselves with divine ideals."

"The divine ideals are humility, submissiveness, annihilation of self, perfect evanescence, charity and loving-kindness. You must die to self and live in God. You must be exceedingly compassionate to one another and to all the people of the world. Love and serve mankind just for the sake of God and not for anything else. The foundation of your love toward humanity must be spiritual faith and divine assurance."

"Again: be ye most careful that, God forbid, not one single word contrary to truth issue from your mouths. One falsehood throws man from the highest station of honour to the lowest abyss of disgrace. Always guard yourselves against this enemy so that all you state may correspond with reality. Forever supplicate and entreat at the Court of Majesty and beg confirmation and assistance...."

(Ibid., pp. 98-99) [pg 215]

1. Challenge to Persian Students

"I hope that through the favor and bounty of the Blessed Beauty, His Holiness the Bab, and the ineffable blessings which hallow this holy Shrine,² the confirmations of the Kingdom of Abha may encircle you, and that you may be characterized with the shining qualities and brilliant attributes of the Bahá'í life. May your morality become more defined day by day! May your faith and assurance be increased day by day! May your attraction to the Kingdom of Abha be intensified day by day! May your attainment in sciences and arts become more universal day by day! Perchance, God willing, you may become perfect and accomplished from every standpoint and be the means of the enlightenment of Persia."

(Ibid., pp. 99-100)

1. Teaching in Universities and Colleges

"As to teaching work in colleges and universities, this is very important, for students as a whole are open-minded and little influenced by tradition. They would easily enter the Cause if the subject is properly presented and their intellect and sentiments properly satisfied. This, however, should be attempted only by persons who have had university training and are, therefore, acquainted with the mind of the intelligent and educated youth..."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, February 3, 1932)

1. When Studying at School or University

2. (The students were visiting the Tomb of the Bab)

"For any person, whether Bahá'í or not, his youthful years are those in which he will make many decisions which will set the course of his life. In these years he is most likely to choose his life's work, complete his education, begin to earn his own living, marry and start to raise his own family. Most important of all, it is during this period that the mind is most questing and that the spiritual values that will guide the person's future behaviour are adopted. These factors present Bahá'í youth with their greatest opportunities, their greatest challenges, and their greatest tests — opportunities to truly apprehend the Teachings of their Faith and to give them to their contemporaries, challenges to overcome the pressures of the world and to provide leadership for their and succeeding generations, and tests enabling them to exemplify in their lives the high moral standards set forth in the Bahá'í Writings. Indeed the Guardian wrote of the Bahá'í youth that it is they 'who can contribute so decisively to the virility, the purity, and the driving force of the life of the Bahá'í community, and upon whom must depend the future orientation of its destiny, and the complete unfoldment of the potentialities with which God has endowed it.'"

"When studying at school or university Bahá'í youth will often find themselves in the unusual and slightly embarrassing position of having a more profound insight into a subject than their instructors. The Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh throw light on so many aspects of human life and knowledge that a Bahá'í must learn, earlier than most, to weigh the information that is given to him rather than to accept it blindly. A Bahá'í has the advantage of the divine Revelation for this Age, which shines like a searchlight on so many problems that baffle modern thinkers; he must therefore develop the ability to learn everything from those around him, showing proper humility before his teachers, but always relating what he hears to the Bahá'í teachings, for they will enable him to sort out the gold from the dross of human error."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to Bahá'í Youth in every land, June 10, 1966) [pg 216]

