



Understanding the Bahá'í Writings

Purpose

To develop the capacity to read the Bahá'í Writings
and to meditate on their meaning in order to fulfill
the obligation of studying the Writings every day.

Practice

Read daily, in the morning and evening,
some of the Writings of the Faith.

SECTION 1

In this unit you will study short passages from the Writings of the Faith and think about how you can apply them to your life. You will begin at the simplest level, by reading a one-sentence statement from the Writings and then by responding to a question, the answer to which is the statement itself. For the purpose of this exercise, it will be useful for you to study the sentence with the aid of another participant in the course. In that case, one of you would pose the question and the other reply. You would then change roles. This type of exercise is not one that you will repeat throughout the courses of the Ruhi Institute, although, in the future, there might be passages that lend themselves to the use of this technique. While simple, the exercise will help you to reflect on the meaning of passages and to memorize them.

“The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct.”¹

1. How can the betterment of the world be accomplished?
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“Beware, O people of Bahá, lest ye walk in the ways of them whose words differ from their deeds.”²

2. In whose ways should we not walk?
-

“O Son of Being! Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning . . .”³

3. What should we do before we are summoned to a reckoning?

“Say: O brethren! Let deeds, not words, be your adorning.”⁴

4. What should be our true adorning? _____

“Holy words and pure and goodly deeds ascend unto the heaven of celestial glory.”⁵

5. What do holy words and pure and goodly deeds do?

SECTION 2

Below are a number of exercises related to the quotations you have just studied. Some of the questions are easy to answer, and it is not worthwhile to spend too much time discussing them. When the exercise is challenging, however, you should pause and, with the help of your tutor, explain it thoroughly.

1. Commendable means something that merits praise. Which of the following are commendable?
- a. To be a good worker? _____
 - b. To respect others? _____
 - c. To be studious? _____
 - d. To be a liar? _____
 - e. To be lazy? _____
 - f. To help others progress? _____

2. What does the phrase “ere thou art summoned to a reckoning” mean? _____

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

- a. There are so few good people in the world that their actions do not have any effect. T F

- b. Something is correct when it is in agreement with the opinions of other people. T F
- c. Something is correct when it is in agreement with the teachings of God. T F
4. The following are pure and goodly deeds:
- a. Teaching the Faith. T F
- b. Stealing. T F
- c. Taking care of and teaching children. T F
- d. praying for the progress of others. T F
- e. Telling a small lie to get out of trouble. T F
- f. Helping others and expecting a reward. T F
5. The following actions are in agreement with the words of a Bahá'í:
- a. Having an alcoholic drink. T F
- b. Being kind. T F
- c. Treating everyone equally. T F
- d. Having sexual relations outside of marriage. T F
6. Is it permissible for a Bahá'í to confess to another person?

7. What should we do instead of confessing? _____

8. What does “the heaven of celestial glory” mean? _____

9. What is the effect of bad deeds on the world? _____

10. What effect do bad deeds have on those who commit them? _____

SECTION 3

In this section you are again asked to study quotations from the Writings. Note that for some passages it is possible to formulate more than one question. But this should not be overdone; do not try to think of every question possible.

“Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues.”⁶

1. What is the foundation of all human virtues?

“Without truthfulness progress and success, in all the worlds of God, are impossible for any soul.”⁷

2. What is impossible without truthfulness?

“Beautify your tongues, O people, with truthfulness, and adorn your souls with the ornament of honesty.”⁸

3. With what should we beautify our tongues?

4. With what should we adorn our souls?

“Let your eye be chaste, your hand faithful, your tongue truthful and your heart enlightened.”⁹

5. How should our eye be? _____ Our hand? _____
Our tongue? _____ Our heart? _____

“They who dwell within the tabernacle of God, and are established upon the seats of everlasting glory, will refuse, though they be dying of hunger, to stretch their hands and seize unlawfully the property of their neighbor, however vile and worthless he may be.”¹⁰

6. What would a Bahá'í refuse to do even if he were dying of hunger?

SECTION 4

As you probably noticed in Section 2, some of the exercises require precise answers. In such cases, if there is doubt about the answer, your tutor will be able to help you arrive at the desired conclusion. For other exercises, it is the discussion itself that is valuable, and the tutor may accept various answers from the participants. In the following, question number 4, while complex, is of the first kind, and question number 6 of the second.

1. Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues. List five virtues.

2. Can we acquire these virtues without truthfulness?

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

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. A person can be just, even if he tells lies. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Someone who steals has a faithful hand. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. A faithful hand never touches what does not belong to it. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. To read pornographic books and magazines is contrary to Bahá'u'lláh's counsel to have an eye that is chaste. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. Truthfulness means not lying. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. Honesty is an ornament of the soul. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g. A person who is not truthful can progress spiritually. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| h. It is alright to tell lies now and then. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| i. Stealing is acceptable before God, if one is hungry. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| j. To take something without permission from its owner, thinking that we will return it later, is not stealing. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| k. If a friend has a tree with a lot of fruit on it, taking some without asking permission is all right. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| l. When we act honestly and are fair and truthful, our heart is enlightened. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |

4. Is it possible to lie to oneself?

5. What do we lose when we tell a lie?

6. What would the world be like if we were all truthful and honest _____

SECTION 5

Study the following quotations and try to learn them by heart. Memorizing quotations from the Writings is highly rewarding, and you should make every effort to do so. Yet there are some people who, for various reasons, find memorization almost impossible. If you happen to have such a difficulty, then you should try to learn the quotations so well that you can express the ideas with words as close to the original text as possible.

“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. . . .”¹¹

1. How can a kindly tongue be described?

2. What effect does a kindly tongue have on words?

“O ye beloved of the Lord! In this sacred Dispensation, conflict and contention are in no wise permitted. Every aggressor deprives himself of God’s grace.”¹²

3. According to this quotation, what is not permitted in this Dispensation?

4. What does the aggressor do to himself?

“Nothing whatever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause than dissension and strife, contention, estrangement and apathy, among the loved ones of God.” ¹³

5. What conditions inflict the greatest harm to the Cause of God?

“Do not be content with showing friendship in words alone, let your heart burn with loving-kindness for all who may cross your path.” ¹⁴

6. What type of friendship should not satisfy us?

7. What should burn brightly in our heart? _____

“When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love.” ¹⁵

8. What should oppose a thought of war?

9. What should destroy a thought of hate?

SECTION 6

Carry out the following exercises:

1. Lodestone is another word for magnet. In what way does a kindly tongue act like a lodestone? _____

2. Decide if the following phrases proceed from a kindly tongue:
- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. "Don't bother me!" | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. "Why don't you understand this?" | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. "Would you care to wait, please?" | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. "What terrible children!" | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. "Thank you, you're very kind." | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. "I don't have any time now. I'm busy." | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
3. Decide whether or not the following situations present conflict:
- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. Two people express different opinions during Bahá'í consultation. | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Someone does not go to a Bahá'í meeting because he is not on speaking terms with the owner of the house. | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Some of those who are staying at the Bahá'í Institute during a course constantly complain that the others are not doing their duties. | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Two Bahá'í teachers cannot agree on where they want to go on a teaching trip. | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
4. Decide whether or not the following represent estrangement and apathy:
- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. A friend arrives at the Bahá'í Institute and no one greets him warmly. | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. At the Bahá'í Institute, the students divide themselves into small groups, and each group keeps to itself. | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. At the Institute, during study hours, everyone is studying and not talking. | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Two teachers, although they do not fight, refuse to go out teaching together. | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
5. Decide if the following phrases are true or false:
- | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. One should say exactly what one thinks of others; it does not matter if their hearts are offended. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. It is alright to tell lies to avoid conflict. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Conflict can be overcome with love and kindness. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Words are more effective when they are said with love. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. It is alright to fight with someone if he starts it. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. One has the right to be sharp with others when one is sick or sad. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g. It is not kind to laugh at others when they do something wrong. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |

- h. Mentioning the faults of others is all right because it is not backbiting. T F
- i. When hard feelings exist between friends, each one should make a special effort to become closer to the other. T F
- j. When hard feelings exist between friends, each one should wait until the other makes an effort to move closer. T F

SECTION 7

Study the quotations below and memorize them:

“ . . . backbiting quencheth the light of the heart, and extinguisheth the life of the soul.”¹⁶

“Breathe not the sins of others so long as thou art thyself a sinner.”¹⁷

“Speak no evil, that thou mayest not hear it spoken unto thee, and magnify not the faults of others that thine own faults may not appear great . . .”¹⁸

“O Son of Being! How couldst thou forget thine own faults and busy thyself with the faults of others? Whoso doeth this is accursed of Me.”¹⁹

1. What effect does backbiting have on the one who backbites?

2. What should we be aware of before thinking about other people’s sins?

3. What will happen to us if we magnify the faults of others?

4. What should we remember when we think of other people’s faults?

SECTION 8

Carry out the following exercises:

1. What happens to the progress of the soul of a person who focuses on other people's faults?

2. What effect does backbiting have on the Bahá'í community? _____

3. What do you do when a friend starts to talk about another person's faults? _____

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

- | | | |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. If we talk about someone's real faults, we are not backbiting. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. If we talk about a person's good qualities and his faults at the same time we are not backbiting. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Backbiting has become a custom in our society and we should develop the discipline to avoid it. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. If the listener promises not to repeat what we say about another person, there is no harm in backbiting. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. Backbiting is one of the greatest enemies of unity. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. If we acquire the habit of talking about other people all the time, we are in danger of falling into backbiting. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g. When the capacities of different people are discussed in a Local Spiritual Assembly meeting in order to assign certain tasks, this is backbiting. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| h. When we feel the urge to backbite, we should think about our own faults. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| i. When we know a person is doing something which harms the Faith or the community, we should discuss it with the rest of the Bahá'ís. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| j. When we know of someone who is doing something that harms the Faith or the community, we should only inform the Local Spiritual Assembly. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| k. It is not wrong for a married couple to talk about other people's faults since they should not have secrets from each other. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |

The course you have just completed has a very special purpose. Bahá'u'lláh teaches that each person should read from the Holy Writings every morning and every evening. During this course, you have already begun to form this habit which is extremely important for your spiritual progress. Now you may wish to acquire a book of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and read parts of it every day. *The Hidden Words* is a good first choice.

REFERENCES

1. Bahá'u'lláh, cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), pp. 24-25.
2. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994), CXXXIX, p 305.
3. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994), Arabic no. 31, p. 11.
4. *Ibid.*, Persian no. 5, p. 24.
5. *Ibid.*, Persian no. 69, p. 46.
6. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 26.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
8. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXVI, p. 297.
9. *Ibid.*, CXXXII, p. 289.
10. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXVII, p. 298-99.
11. *Ibid.*, CXXXII, p. 289.
12. *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 13.
13. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, V, p. 9.
14. *Paris Talks: Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), p. 2.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
16. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXV, p. 265.
17. *The Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 27, p. 10.
18. *Ibid.*, Persian no. 44, p. 37.
19. *Ibid.*, Arabic no. 26, p. 10.