

## **BUILDING A STRONG BAHAI IDENTITY IN YOUNG CHILDREN:**

### **A CONCRETE APPROACH**

By Linden Qualls (Revised August 2nd, 2009)

In order to provide direction, inspiration, and an energizing force in Baha'i parenting and teaching, it is extremely helpful to have goals to strive towards. So, with that in mind, what are the goals Baha'i parents and educators might strive to accomplish in raising their children? At the risk of oversimplifying this incredibly complex task of parenthood and teaching, I'd like to generalize and list them:

- 1) To bond our children's hearts to Baha'u'llah, The Bab, Abdu'l-Baha, and the beloved Guardian
- 2) To build a strong spiritual/Baha'i identity
- 3) To develop a strong character, well endowed with virtues

Fortunately, a virtuous character usually is the natural outcome of achieving goals one and two. So for reasons of brevity, I will focus primarily on bonding the hearts and building the identity in this particular document. Goals 1 and 2 are also very interrelated and tend to reinforce each other beautifully. (If you are looking for ideas to develop virtues using music, drama, arts and crafts, stories, and games, that document is still in handwritten form only, but I can share ideas verbally on the phone.)

First, I would like to briefly explain the rationale behind the approach I take: In 1982, I had the wonderful good fortune of being a Baha'i children's classes assistant teacher with a Montessori teacher named Keith Boehme. (He inspired me so much, I have been teaching Baha'i children's classes ever since!) He taught me several unorthodox approaches to educating children, all of which I have adopted in my own current classes with great success. The most powerful idea Keith taught me was that we need to convey Baha'i principles, values, concepts, and information concerning the Central Figures to children's hearts. Attract their hearts. It is not so much the factual, rational information, its the spirit of the instruction, of the class, of the teacher, of the interpersonal atmosphere, the physical environment, and the beautiful, joyful experiences which touch and bond children's hearts to the Baha'i Faith. These are the impressions which will remain with them, which will influence them most deeply and ground them in the Faith. It is a very similar process to teaching the Faith to adult non-Baha'is. It is essentially a spiritual process (which is facilitated by the concrete). How often the Baha'i Writings emphasize this aspect concerning teaching the Faith: It is not so much the words, its the spirit of the fireside, its not so much the intellect which draws people to Baha'u'llah, its the attraction of the heart to the unity, love, spiritual warmth and beauty present in the interaction. (See The Individual and Teaching compilation.)

The second most potent concept Keith taught me is that if one wants to reach children's hearts, one must use concrete means. This not only increases the children's receptivity, it also elucidates spiritual subtleties and truths, (as well as factual and intellectual information.) Children's hearts are like sponges; they soak up spiritual concepts, but most effectively through the tangible.

To illustrate the power of the concrete in influencing people, just contemplate Christmas time in December in America. During every month of the year, however, our children are bombarded with physical (concrete) images via movies, billboards, store windows, books, TV shows and commercials, and posters. And it works; they do indeed become the reflection of the values and attitudes contained in these mediums.

The popularity of the current human and material idols of our culture and the values which they represent can also be attributed to the fact that they all appeal to the more developed, dominant, culturally reinforced, and more easily succumbed to, side of children (and adults): the ego-self. Precisely that side which the more delicate, subtle, tenuous, spiritual side, is supposed to help us overcome through Divine education. With the Baha'i Central Figures, and with God, it is far more difficult to be so concrete, so irresistible to children; so few visual aids exist and They do not appeal to the egotistical side of human nature, either.

But then, how on earth can we have Baha'u'llah seize possession of our children's hearts as completely as our cultures' idols have succeeded in doing? Just think of, just imagine the spiritual intensity and depth of devotion Baha'i adults would possess if as children their hearts had felt this level of fascination and attraction towards the Baha'i Central Figures and God! How then, can we attract Baha'i children to Baha'u'llah and to God? How can we nurture that love, devotion, that longing, that possession of the heart toward the Baha'i Central Figures, which children are so capable of feeling given their ability to feel so deeply? How can we achieve this without reducing the Baha'i Faith's dignity, sanctity, and spiritual purity, without relying upon the powerfully culturally reinforced themes of sexiness, power, glamour, materialism--which make the idols of our society so attractive and seductive? We cannot, for example, pay our children to attend Feast or to pray. Nor should we, in my opinion, use attractive familiar concrete images from children's media to lure them to loving and finding comfort in Baha'u'llah. (I see this technique used in Bible classes for Christian children. For example, a sign on a classroom door showed a smurf and said "Jesus loves you". To associate these Holy and Sanctified Beings with cartoon characters, I think, is irreverent.)

In this essay, I would like to propose that we ardently strive to make the Baha'i Central Figures and the Faith itself attractive to our children's hearts, not their egos, via the concrete. We must not attract them through tantalizing the passions and their self-centered sides, as Christmas does, but through stimulation of their spiritual faculties via beauty, love, joy, happy warm feelings, attractive metaphors, and the five senses.

OK, enough of the theoretical stuff. Let's move onto the practical, the how to do it part....

Through my own experiences, I have found that one of the most efficient and beautiful opportunities to bond children's hearts to the Central Figures and create a strong Baha'i identity occurs on Holy Days and other Baha'i festivals.

Here are some general principles one might wish to follow when celebrating and observing, or teaching Baha'i concepts at any time, (all of which can bond the heart, build a strong spiritual identity, as well as deepen and clarify understanding.) To transmit through the concrete to the heart, attempt to adhere to the following approaches:

**STIMULATE AS MANY OF THE 5 SENSES AS POSSIBLE.** The imagery in the Baha'i Writings lends itself to this beautifully. Just browse through a prayer book, The Hidden Words, Gleanings, The Kitab-i-Iqan by Baha'u'llah or any Baha'i prayer or scripture books for children such as: Tablet of the Heart, or Baha'i Prayers and Tablets for the Young and see how frequently one encounters words such as:

- sweet(ness), bitter---taste
- scents/fragrance, perfume---smell
- light/dark, radiant, flame, luminous, flowers, hearts (especially roses and hyacinths)---sight
- soft flowing, warmth, gentle or cool breezes---touch
- melodies, warble, rustling---hearing

The stimulation of the senses will also greatly increase how much a child pays attention and remembers. One can incorporate this experience into the environment such as by having sweet food (the most commonly used approach at all Baha'i functions, I must say), flowers, and candles. But don't stop there! Integrate this principle into the children's activities and materials themselves. For example:

The children reverently remove, one at a time, the soft red velvet letters of Baha'u'llah's name from a gold satin-covered, perfumed gift box. Then they gently place the letters in order on a royal blue satin scroll for everyone to see. Mention how Baha'u'llah's teachings soften people's hearts as the children feel the soft red velvet letters. After carefully replacing the letters, the children gingerly pass the open rose scented, velvet-lined box to each other. Simultaneously, share the idea that Baha'u'llah is God's most great Gift to us for this day. Talk about how one should receive a gift, treat a gift, and how the sweet fragrance of his teachings are perfuming the world. (Original idea by Keith Boehme). See pages 30 and 321 Gleanings, and p.197 Selections from the Writings of The Bab, for quotes relating to fragrance and perfume.

**TEACH SPIRITUAL AND ABSTRACT CONCEPTS THROUGH CONCRETE ACTIONS AND OBJECTS.** We must be careful not to reduce the sanctity or import of the teachings. The goal is to illumine and elucidate by the use of metaphors and physical experiences. (The metaphors listed previously are full of possibilities.) In Chapter 16 of Some Answered Questions by Abdu'l-Baha, and in the book The Purpose of Physical Reality by John Hatcher, teaching abstract and spiritual truths through the concrete and the physical is much elaborated upon: "*Therefore, to explain the reality of the spirit, its condition, its station, one is obliged to give explanations under the forms of sensible things ....*" (Abdu'l-Baha, p.84, Some Answered Questions). "*The world of matter is an outer expression or facsimile of the inner kingdom of spirit.*" (Abdu'l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 270) "*The spiritual world is like unto the phenomenal world. They are the exact counterpart of each other. Whatever objects appear in this world of existence are the outer pictures of the world of heaven.*" (Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 10) So does it not make sense to use things from this world of matter to illustrate the inner kingdom of the spirit, the world of heaven?

(The use of the computer programs such as MARS (older version) or OCEAN can be of tremendous assistance in locating writings which use particular metaphors such as candles, flames, light, stars, darkness, sweetness, flowers, gardens, gems, hearts, mirrors, etc.)

Here are some brief examples:

To teach the beauty and application of virtues such as courtesy and kindness, make small little cards with one virtue written in gold on the inside. On the outside of the card place a pretty flower sticker or draw one yourself. On the inside flap draw or stick on a smiling face. Explain that like flowers, virtues bring joy and beauty to the world, and produce happiness in ourselves and others (hence the smiling face). You can also have a star sticker to symbolize that when we express virtues we shine spiritually like stars in the darkness of the world. Heart stickers can symbolize that the expression of virtues shows love for others and for God's beauty. The children choose from an attractive basket or hat a card and then explain or act out the virtue written inside. Other children can try to guess which virtue is being demonstrated if the children are acting it out. Acting out a virtue turns it into a very concrete and practical behavior.

Another way to reinforce the beauty and expression of virtues is to buy glow in the dark stars. Every time child expresses a virtue, the parents put a new star on the ceiling, which represents how a child's soul shines like a "brilliant star" whenever they express the attributes of God. Explain how beautiful they are when they shine with a virtue, how they can be a source of light to a world in spiritual darkness, etc. Imagine the impact this can have on a child as they drift off to sleep--gazing at a ceiling filled with glowing stars, each one representing a beautiful act on their part! Very young children can perhaps earn stars with simple acts of courtesy and sharing. Older children should have to work a little harder--in other words, every time they say "thank you" is not enough. In order to increase their repertoire, you might want to make a rule that the same act can not earn a star twice. Relate to quote on p. 305 Gleanings: *"Let your acts be a guide unto all mankind .....It is through your deeds that ye can distinguish yourselves from others. Through them the brightness of your light can be shed upon the whole earth"*-- Baha'u'llah.

Here's one more way to reinforce the beauty of virtues: Have the children make candles using beautiful papers. Glue these onto a nice piece of 8½x11 paper. Use a gold foil or other shiny paper for the flame. Give them each a small red heart made out of special shiny or soft paper. They glue the heart onto the candlestick and then a photo of their faces is placed on the heart. This represents the candle of their hearts (a metaphor frequently used by Abdu'l-Baha and also by Baha'u'llah in the Hidden Words, Persian, #32). Every time a child expresses a virtue, either in class or during the week at home, a ray of light is drawn with gold ink radiating from the flame. In a finer tipped pen the name of the virtue is written in gold along the length of the ray. When the candle flame is completely surrounded with rays of light, an iridescent or glittery confetti is sprinkled over the rays and the activity is finished. The beauty of virtues and the idea that the expression of virtues makes our souls radiant and luminous is reinforced through this activity in a very visible way. (*"The light of a good character surpasseth the light of the sun and the radiance thereof,"* and *"Well is it with him who is illumined with the light of courtesy"* p. 36 and p. 88 Tablets of Baha'u'llah and *"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."*~ Abdu'l-Baha: Excellence in All Things, page 376, *".....man must strive that his reality may manifest virtues and perfections, the light whereof may shine upon everyone."* ~ Abdu'l-Baha: Will and Testament, page 13. are some examples of the many writings which relate virtues to radiance and light.) Also children love sharing how they expressed a virtue and they get recognition for positive behaviors. It also teaches them to be aware of their behavior and encourages the active and willful expression of virtues, providing practice along with the confidence that they are truly capable of being virtuous and radiant. See the books Divine Therapy and Divine Art of Living which are compilations containing many references to specific virtues, or look up "character" and "virtues" or individual virtues using a computer reference program.

Teach reverence by showing how to handle objects associated with the Manifestation such as prayer books and the letters of Baha'u'llah's name (mentioned previously), how to behave in a place of worship, etc. Always insist children are not eating, chewing gum, etc. and that they sit up while reciting the Creative Word. I always write the Writings with gold ink, readers at holy day events have their Writings in a fancy font on a decorated card, and guests at feasts and holy days are always given the Writings on pretty papers with elegant borders. Books with prayers and Writings are held up between beautiful bookends in our classroom. Never throw prayer books or let children step on them. All these physical things reinforce the specialness of the Writings..

To illustrate the impact on the soul when one turns to God, prays, reads the writings, and obeys His teachings, as opposed to when one violates Baha'i principles or ignores the teachings, we can present the following metaphors: Vibrant, fresh flowers and wilted dead ones,--or 2 potted flower plants, both initially healthy, but then over the course of month, one receives plenty of sun and water, and one receives neither. Children's prayers by Abdu'l-Baha contain copious references to God's gifts symbolized by clouds, rain, showers, the sun, the light, and rays. Also, children are repeatedly referred to as plants and flowers in the prayers and Writings of Abdu'l-Baha. See references under Naw-Ruz for quotes relating the heart to a garden.

Another example is the use of a clean heart-shaped mirror to represent their hearts. (You can make one by inserting any shape mirror in between two cardboard hearts with a hole cut in the top one). Have children hold it to reflect a candle or the sun. Explain that their hearts are like mirrors. (Use quotes from Promulgation of Universal Peace by Abdu'l-Baha pages 14-15, Gleanings p. 262, and The Seven Valleys pgs. 21-22). When they pray, deepen, are loving and obedient, etc., they can reflect the beauty of God's light. They are radiant, luminous. But when they lie, hurt others, etc., the light of God cannot shine so brightly in their hearts. These behaviors act as a barrier to the Holy Spirit, to God's grace. Each child can give an example of un-spiritual behavior, and as they do, they create a dark smudge on a portion of the mirror with an oil pastel or dark crayon. This is done until the whole mirror is filled and cannot reflect any light. Then each child provides examples of spiritual behaviors, (praying, deepening, teaching, virtue expression, etc.) and as they do, they get to wipe a portion of the mirror clean until it is "pure" again. (Just make sure that the crayon or pastel wipes off before you do this--baby wipes are pretty effective.)

**MAKE THE ACTIVITIES AND CONCEPTS CONCRETE BY MAKING THEM PERSONALLY RELEVANT TO THE CHILDREN.** Do this by involving the children actively, asking them questions, asking for examples from their own experience, making associations and bridges from the unknown, (abstract-spiritual) to the known (concrete-physical).

For example: when talking about God's love, ask the children when they feel this. When talking about the power of unity, have them experience it in a way which is clear and meaningful to them. For example: have them each sing a different song at once; contrast to singing one song together. Have them attempt to lift a prone adult up by themselves, then together. Concerning patience, dramatize waiting for dinner.

**USE CONCRETE POSITIVE ASSOCIATIONS WHEN CELEBRATING HOLY DAYS OR EXPLAINING BAHAI TEACHINGS.** This is what our media does, of course, when advertisers pair an attractive woman, a lovely nature scene, or romantic couples with a product. This is also what Abdu'l-Baha was probably doing when He held up a chocolate sweet next to a black boy's cheek for all to see. He wanted people to see the child's dark color as something positive, to associate it with something sweet and desirable.

When we serve yummies at Feast, we are utilizing this approach, too, but we can go beyond that: We can make sure our children associate Baha'i Holy Days and Feasts with joy, love, beauty, and stimulating thoughts. This is facilitated by prayer, conversations and interactions that promote unity and happy thoughts, genuine displays of affection, lovely and cheerful decorations, flowers, uplifting and pretty music, potpourri, interesting stories. We can avoid arguments, complaining, and grudges.

We can write the prayers young children have memorized with special gold ink, in blank books with attractive covers. The children can also decorate the borders around the prayers. See Sunflower Book #2 My Favorite Prayers and Passages for blank pages with pretty borders to color. I let my students and daughters use fabric decorating paints which have sparkles or iridescent shine for accenting the borders. They love doing this and it emphasizes how special the Writings are. Consider it a form of illumination! Older children can write their own memorized passages. (The candle of the heart activity on page 3 is also an example of using concrete positive associations to explain a Baha'i concept.)

**USE SEVERAL DIVERSE CONCRETE MEDIUMS TO TEACH 1 CONCEPT.** Different children learn best through different mediums and different sensory modes. Diversifying the mediums enables each child to absorb something. For example use:

- Music and stories---auditory medium
- dance, creative dramatics, formal drama, games---physical, bodily
- pictures, films, arts and crafts, symbols---visual
- discussion, questioning---auditory and verbal
- arts and crafts, the handling and placement of materials and objects in a structured way-(for ex. timeline items, the letters in the gift box mentioned previously)---tactile
- Scents and fragrant materials---olfactory

**PRAY EVERY DAY FOR AND WITH THE CHILDREN.** Be sure to make this time a positive experience, with pleasant associations. We turn off the phone. We often light a rose scented heart shaped candle, (*Let the flame of the love of God burn brightly within your radiant hearts,* --Gleanings p. 325 and *"The candle of thine heart is lighted by the hand of My power, quench it not with the contrary winds of self and passion."*--The Hidden Words, Persian #32). We also play pretty music such as Celtic harp and allow our children to choose some of the Writings and prayers. We have a special place that is clean and attractive to say our prayers in. Something else we did which made our children really look forward to prayer time was write the subjects of all our pilgrimage stories on little slips of paper. They were folded and put in a pretty pot. Every night each child got to choose from the pot a slip of paper and eagerly opened up the slip to discover the story. We then shared with them these wonderful gems from our pilgrimage. You can use stories from the history of faith or ones heard at conferences, etc., if you haven't been on pilgrimage.

## **Some concrete general ideas for the preparation of Holy Days designed to involve children as much as possible:**

Clean and tidy up the house to show this is a special day--if this can be accomplished without tensions and arguments. (Remember, its the spirit of the atmosphere which is the most important).

Have family meeting, plan games, food, and other activities. Ask children what activities they would like. Plot the agreed upon activities on the calendar to provide orderliness to the upcoming busy time. We place special stickers or pictures on a giant family calendar so to accent its importance and increase the children's' anticipation of the celebration. For example: we use butterflies for Naw-Ruz, rainbows for Ayyam-i-Ha, and flowers for Ridvan.

Make refreshments together. Allow the children some say in the choice. Use an international children's cookbook.

Plan to serve food you do not normally eat. For us, popcorn, juice sparklers, and bakery delicacies are special.

Make decorations together.

Turn putting up decorations into a family event, with joyful Baha'i music in the background. For example, for Ayyam-i-Ha, we let our children choose which Festival Figures to put up and where to place them (within limits). These are cardboard figures of children from different countries dressed in traditional festival attire. They are very colorful, and there are lots of them representing many different countries. I also bought large letters, (gold for Ridvan because it is so special) and laminated them to declare Happy Ayyam-i-Ha!, Joyous Naw-Ruz! and Happy Ridvan! These we put up in our living room along with the decorations to emphasize the occasion and to encourage teaching opportunities.

With your children, go buy some international decorations from your local import shop. Paper garlands from China can be found in many party supply stores and catalogs. A beautifully decorated living room invites teaching opportunities, as well as inspiring the festive spirit for Ridvan, Naw-Ruz, and Ayyam-i-Ha.

Try to individualize each Holy Day by not using all the same decorations for each one. We have special objects we use only with certain Holy Days, such as green candles for The Bab (to emphasize His lineage to Mohammed), red candles for Baha'u'llah (red is considered to be a royal color, the color of kings, and He was the King of Glory), and butterflies for Naw-Ruz (the association with Spring, and the idea of the renewal and transformation of this spiritual springtime.) We also use lots of silk and real flowers in vases and in garlands for Ridvan, (the garden theme) and many, many candles to symbolize the light of Baha'u'llah's revelation. Long 9 foot different colored strips of cloth called silk essence from the local fabric store have myriads of uses for holy days, and we have used them to decorate and conceal in hundreds of ways. They are also used in costuming.

Children can accompany you to the florist and choose flowers. For Holy Days and Feasts only, I allow my children to go into my garden to choose and pick flowers. This is a big thrill for them, and since I reserve this privilege for Baha'i events only, it accents the importance and special-ness of these times.

In our family, to make it a little less demanding, (given the quantity of Baha'i Holy Days), we decorate elaborately only on Ridvan, Naw-Ruz, and Ayyam-i-Ha. Two of these events last many days, so the effort is more economical time wise, given the number of days it will be useful. On the other Holy Days, we also purchase real flowers, put out lots of candles, photographs of holy places related to the relevant Central Figure which are in really ornate frames with stands, use potpourri, and have 6 or 7 vases of silk flowers to adorn the living room with. It would be a bit overwhelming to decorate the entire house on any Holy Day so we choose to focus only on the living and dining rooms. Each family needs to develop their own unique expression of the special-ness of the Holy Day and of how it touches their hearts, of what it means to them.

If you enjoy perfuming your environment, try using simmering potpourri or an oil ring which is quick and easy to use: Buy some rose oil (or whatever you like) and drop 3 or 4 drops onto the ring with an eye dropper and place onto a lit light bulb in the room you want perfumed. It really enriches the positive associations, and is a wonderful symbol for the infusion and beauty of the fragrance of Baha'u'llah's revelation---one He uses over and over in His Writings. When one enters The Shrines of The Bab and Baha'u'llah, the fragrance of rose greets them.

Try to plan and provide experiences that are special and unique to Holy Days. For ex., we make it a point to build a fire in the colder months, (something we don't do very often) and gather round it and sing songs or read stories about the Central Figure Whose Day we are observing. We have four very lovely dishes given to us by a dear Baha'i friend who moved away, which we never use except on Holy Days. We might plan a special outing in nature or to a place which won't distract us too much from the purpose of the day.

Invite seekers or old friends from out of town for dinner. Allow children to have input into the menu, invite them to help prepare the food, or at least the table.

Plan a celebration and use some of the children's ideas where appropriate. Children usually love to make and deliver invitations. Say teaching prayers together before the event.

Keep a scrap book of photos of Baha'i events and celebrations in order of their occurrence. Write descriptions to go with the pictures and relate what happened on that day. Make the book as pretty as possible, using fancy stickers, colored markers,

samples of programs, etc. Include pictures of the days of preparation too--the messy kitchen during baking, the wrapping of presents, the decorating, etc.

Buy children a new outfit for a Baha'i Celebration. Have the children dress up. This is a very concrete way to show respect and specialness.

Keep a list of successful activities from past celebrations so that you always have ideas ready and accessible each year. A lot of Holy Days can slip by unobserved because we are so busy and tired out, and do not have the time to invent new activities.

Prepare a tape of songs about the Central Figures or about topics related to Baha'i teachings such as peace, copied from your collection. Narrate it and embellish it with explanations and loving thoughts. Use it for bedtime listening. It will plant lovely ideas and images into the children's hearts as they drift off to sleep.

Create elegant cards using a computer. Use special computer paper and giant non-ruled index cards. Decorate one side of the card using markers, fancy wrapping paper, pretty stationery, whatever. Use a computer program to retrieve Writings. Print out on special paper, with fancy fonts. Cut out and glue Creative Word on the other side of the card. If you don't have a reference program or a computer, photocopy onto pretty paper and then cut that out and glue onto card. Or you can print (or photocopy) the Writings out on fine paper with a border and have children decorate border with especially nice markers. Gold ink is special. Read at Holy Day Observance. Give as gifts. Each Writing can have its own card, or you can print a whole page of Writings. Children decorate the borders of every copy and these are the program which everybody receives.

When preparing a program, always try to have some form of music. Live is preferable, but recorded can also be very effective on a good sound system. There are several Baha'i songbooks available with lyrics that are suitable for all kinds of gatherings. Prayers and Writings can be recited to soft background music, sung, signed, said in different languages, and chanted. There are many wonderful Baha'i CDs and tapes with prayers, writings, and songs which promote Baha'i Principles. Reading stories to appropriate background music can also enhance the effect. Some of my favorite Baha'i recordings to use for Holy Days are: *We Have Come to Sing Praises* by the Baha'i Gospel Choir, *On the Wings of Prayer* by Mary Davis, (available only through Special Ideas, phone: 800-326-1197) *Songs of the Ancient Beauty vol. 1*, *To the Glory of God* by Eric Dozier, *Music of the Baha'i World Congress*, *Lift Up Your Voices and Sing*, volumes 1-3, *Happy Ayyam-i-Ha* with Bill Sears, *Sacred Verses* by Grant Hindin Miller, *Selections from the Baha'i Writings* by Paul Parrish, *The Greatest Moments*, *We are Baha'is*, and *We are Baha'is Too*, (all 3 by Jack Lenz), *City of Love* by Minarets of the West, and *Immerse Yourselves* by Joe Crone. Red Grammer's *Teaching Peace* and the Van Manen's *Barley Bread and Reindeer Milk* are both full of Baha'i concepts and are great for children's parties and Ayyam-i-Ha. The Baha'i compilation on music entitled Baha'i Writings on Music contains many quotes supporting the use of music to increase spiritual receptivity and to intensify the impact of words.

In our Community, at large parties, contra-dances, etc., when the adults want to socialize or when the children's activities are over, we have found it very helpful and much appreciated to have an arts and crafts table for the children. We provide a supply table with all materials neatly organized in trays and boxes which no one is to sit at; (it blocks access to the materials). Tables with chairs are provided on both sides of the supply table. Only children and involved adults should sit there. No food or drink is allowed on those 3 tables. Children are asked to not remove materials from tables, except their own creations. We supply glue sticks, scissors, pencils with erasers and a few sharpeners, lots of markers, (including skin color markers), many colors of paper—solid color and patterned, (including hair colors), photo copies of children around the world with Baha'i slogans such as "unity in diversity" or "we are all one family," and pre-cut paper dolls and faces in 8 different skin colors. Kids can choose to just color on the photocopied sheets or decorate the paper dolls or design faces. It is also helpful to have samples of finished dolls as guides. (We have them all over our banners). The skin color markers, paper dolls and faces are all available through Holcomb's Educational Materials Catalog. Phone: 800-362-9907, web address [www.holcombs.com](http://www.holcombs.com). I have the photocopies of the international children if you need them. Special Ideas catalog also sells an excellent coloring book with lots of Baha'i themed pictures. Phone: 1-800-326-1197. This activity is ALWAYS a BIG hit!

**Here's an example of some specific ideas which we use during our family observance on most Holy Days.** (We do this whether there is a community observance or not, mainly because many community observances are not geared towards children).

Turn off the phone--taking phone calls during observances and interruptions kill the reverent atmosphere and give children the message that this is not that important. Cue tapes, have books, camera, lighter, and all materials ready so as to avoid losing their attention and distracting from the beauty and dignity of the event. (*This is also very important for community and public celebrations.*)

We each choose a prayer. We try to use our loveliest, most ornate books for use on Holy Days only. For example, there is an incredibly elegant and highly illuminated Hidden Words that we reserve for Holy Days and Feasts. We read the Writings to beautiful background Celtic harp music. Music opens the hearts. (See Baha'i compilation on music to explore this further.) We

tend to keep the Writings short in order to avoid boredom or frictions concerning sitting still and listening quietly. If the parents get irritated or up-tight about disruption, and the kids are feeling resentful, bored, and trapped, the spirit vanishes mighty quick. The importance of a happy, loving, pleasant atmosphere cannot be overemphasized in attempting to attract and bond hearts. (We don't want to expect too little, underestimate our children's capacity to sit still, nor make the program totally catered to their desires, either, however. If this happens, they will believe that they cannot behave and should not have to.)

After the prayers and Writings, we read a story related to the Holy Day. The book Nine Holy Days tells a story for each Day. Try to make the story as exciting and interesting as possible by drawing the children into it, and using actions or props to support the content.

Sometimes, we use something called a question box. It is a little wooden box decorated with ribbon, and stickers. Inside the box are tabs of paper with words written on them. Special words, such as Bahji, are written with gold ink. The names of the Central Figures are on tabs covered with velvet (red for Baha'u'llah, green for The Bab, etc.) perfumed, and written in gold also. (Original idea by Keith Boehme). The children close their eyes and pick a tab out of the box. The word on the tab will be explained if necessary, and an activity related to it will be shared. For example, a song, game, drama, arts and craft, or another story. Sometimes we just present a picture or an object that relates to or is a symbol of the word on the tab. For example, eighteen little green gems strung behind a larger darker green one to symbolize the Eighteen Letters of the Living following The Bab. An arts and crafts example: Prayer #21, p.14 of Prayers and Tablets for the Young can easily be turned into a picture rich in imagery. Try to use more than just paper and markers; use sandpaper for tree trunks, fabric for leaves, sequins for stars, notary seals for suns, ribbon for stems, cotton for clouds, mylar for streams, felt for grass, glitter for radiance, pretty stickers or flowers from flower catalogs for blossoms, frayed strands of satin for wind, rose oil for fragrance, etc. Since this book is probably out of print, here is the prayer, which can be illustrated in 3 separate scenes:

Panel One: *O Thou pure God! Let these saplings which have sprouted by the stream of Thy guidance become fresh and verdant through the outpourings of the clouds of Thy tender mercy;*

Panel Two: *cause them to be stirred by the gentle winds wafting from the meads of Thy oneness*

Panel Three: *and suffer them to be revived through the rays of the Sun of Reality, that they may continually grow and flourish and burst into blossoms and fruit. ~ Abdu'l-Baha*

(The question box and related activities seems to be appealing to the under age 10 child.)

Other activities include:

- 1) Perusing and discussing a homemade book made from a silk-covered photo album of pictures of places and important figures of the Faith. We have descriptions written in gold and included petals from the Shrines. We also put in an illumined tablet of Baha'u'llah's extracted from The Dawnbreakers.
- 2) On the more festive occasions, we play cooperative games and dance to Baha'i music as a family, (its more meaningful to young children if the songs are accompanied with actions, for ex., hugging when "love" is mentioned, holding hands for the word "together", i.e., pantomiming any concrete actions or objects. A more elaborate example: To the song "We are Building the Kingdom of God" on the *To the Glory of God* CD by Eric Dozier (gospel) we provided a box full of different colored and sizes of blocks (relate to diversity) and each block had a heart sticker on it. We explained that the Kingdom of God is not really a building, not really physical, but a world where diverse people's hearts are connected through the love and teachings of Baha'u'llah. So knowing that the phrase "we are building the kingdom of God" is mentioned approx. 37 times in the song, we asked everyone present to choose a block and going around the room, when that phrase was sung, a person would get up and place their block on the coffee table, connected or touching at least one other block (unless of course one was the first). An elaborate block "kingdom" is created by the end of the song, and you hope nobody knocks it down with their addition. (We gave the younger ones the tip that large blocks do best on the bottom, smaller on top). The kids loved it.
- 3) We also have sharing time when we share thoughts like: What I like best about this Holy Day or about being a Baha'i, or how I can serve the Faith best, or what I love about my family, sister, etc.
- 4) If you think your children can handle it, provide them with a long stemmed lighter and let them light the candles. One of my children's favorite activities is blowing out the candles. Most young children get a big kick out of this. (Invest in a candle snuffer or teach them to blow gently or you will have wax all over your tables and walls!)

The Baha'i Distribution Service (BDS) sells many excellent children's books for all ages on the Central Figures of the Baha'i Faith and many fine cassettes of children's music as well. (Phone: 800-999-9019, [www.bahai bookstore.com](http://www.bahai bookstore.com)) Canada's Baha'i Distribution Service (formerly Unity Arts) is also an excellent Baha'i resource and may have some materials that the U.S. doesn't. (Phone: 800-465-3287, [www.bahai booksonline.com](http://www.bahai booksonline.com)). Brilliant Star Magazine is another excellent resource for stories on the Central Figures and so much more. (Phone: 800-999-9019 to subscribe, call the Baha'i Distribution

Service to obtain back issues.) Another good resource is the Enlighten Curriculum by Lea Iverson. This is a 7 book set for K-6th grade. Also, the cassette Let It Be This Generation is extremely well done. One side of this tape is a moving and powerful narrative on The Bab's life, told from the perspective of people who knew him. His childhood, declaration, and death are described in extremely interesting detail. Not for kids under 7. Also, Louhelen and the BDS sell Core Curriculum story books on the Central Figures—the number of titles available keeps growing, so call them for more information. They are beautifully illustrated.

### **Some excerpts from letters to parents about holy days and Ayyam-i-Ha:**

Thank you for supporting all the extra activities surrounding this Ayyam-i-Ha event. I know from listening to former students who are now adolescents that they will never forget these experiences and that happy and warm memories of Baha'i life form a solid foundation for their Baha'i identity-- which will be tested as they grow older. The more interesting, beautiful, emotionally powerful, interactive, and joyful experiences we can provide our children in Baha'i contexts, the more this spiritual identity will be woven into the very core of their beings and personalities. The children are also learning practical skills such as speaking in public, cooking, art, cooperation and many other virtues, hospitality and hosting, goal setting, drama, etc. which can all be used in service to humanity and to God. By actively contributing to Baha'i events children feel empowered and valued as Baha'i community members, not just as passive recipients of their parent's religion. And that is what this Faith is all about: Developing the will, the potential, the skills, and the spiritual attributes of individuals so that they can transform themselves and the world. We want to raise children who feel that they can make a difference, who feel that their efforts and contributions are important and valued, who have the confidence and faith that they can be a catalyst for positive spiritual and social change. The more we actively involve our children in our Faith, the more personally relevant and meaningful their religion becomes. Yes, it takes a lot more work on our part to involve them in processes than to just do it ourselves for them or to them--but they just learn to be passive recipients and bystanders rather than creators and doers if we do not. It is also a lot less exciting and a lot more dull if one just watches from the sidelines rather than participates in the creation.

I want our children to love this Faith with a passion and to express this love in deeds. And they will love their religion if it is a means by which their inner beauty and their own unique endowment are expressed and developed and appreciated--because every child craves in their inmost being to grow into that God-given creation they were meant to be, to express and manifest those God-given attributes and gifts, to be loved and acknowledged for their spiritual beauty. Our culture does not generally do this, our schools often can not or do not, so it is up to the parents and the religious community to nurture the spiritual urges and spiritual inclinations of children.

In the Baha'i Writings it says that when we serve, we attract confirmations like a magnet. Confirmations inspire certitude and love of God and Baha'u'llah, which in turn inspires more service. Let's start our children on this cycle by giving them plenty of opportunities to serve.

Service is the magnet which draws the divine confirmations. Thus, when a person is active, they are blessed by the Holy Spirit. When they are inactive, the Holy Spirit cannot find a repository in their being, and thus they are deprived of its healing and quickening rays. ~Shoghi Effendi (Living the Life, page 23)

(About Ridvan:).....for children to put so much effort into a program and to witness adults who do also, to see how much attention was placed on the environment, how so many different people lent their skills and talents to help, is a very important consolidation experience. Hopefully when they are older and are designing programs, events like these will be their frame of reference and they will create even more beautiful Holy day celebrations which will touch the hearts of many people.

It is so very vital that our children and youth play an active role in community life and in Holy Day gatherings. It is these experiences which not only develop their skills, (such as hospitality, eloquent speech, reverence, discipline, self-abnegation, and grace) but also--contribute to their self worth, enable them to feel as though their abilities and efforts count and are valued, reinforce their Baha'i identities, and make their religion a living, vibrant, meaningful, and personally relevant central aspect of their lives. The music, the sweet tastes, the flowers, the candles, the dances, the rose scents, the richly colored fabrics, the extra special decorated cards they held as they read, the games and laughter, the personal affirmations, the gifts to take home, the excitement and anticipation, and the power of the Creative Word will linger in their hearts and minds and create deep and positive associations with their Faith. These strong and positive associations, these warm, vivid, visual, and dramatic memories nurture ineffable feelings of loyalty, assurance, love, and attachment to their religion which will be a source of certitude and steadfastness when they enter the tumultuous stage of adolescence, with all its seductive distractions and spiritually damaging situations and messages.

I feel confident to share this perception with you because of the feedback from my own 2 daughters, now grown. Time and again they have shared with me their fond memories of Holy Days and Ayyam-i-Ha and how much they meant to them. They spontaneously reminisce about these occasions, and I know that by the look in their eyes and the smile on their lips, that these memories have played a major role in solidifying their Baha'i identities. They associate their religion with wonderful feelings and beautiful, fun experiences and events and automatically assume that their faith will be the foundation of their family life. And of

course daily prayer by Roi and myself and God's grace played a major role in this, but God confirms and assists us through our own actions, so let's keep acting in ways that beseech God to guide and protect our children!!! Let's never take the faithfulness of our children for granted, for as you are all aware, there are a million forces in our world which seek unwittingly or deliberately to undermine spirituality in children and youth. I pray every day for my daughters and my students, but I need the actions of parents to reinforce their spiritual growth. I am deeply grateful for your active support.

### **Here are some specific ideas for Ayyam-i-Ha and particular Holy Days:**

(Many of the activities described for a specific Holy Day or Ayyam-i-Ha can be slightly altered to fit with almost any Baha'i celebration or Holy Day.) Always have Baha'i literature handy or if appropriate on a display table if you are expecting non-Baha'i guests.

### **Ayyam-i-Ha**

Buy and/or make gifts together. Some ideas for gifts to numerous people are: Baha'i Wall calendars (good consolidation tool), cookies, homemade playdoh, homemade prayer beads, a card which lists the reasons the friend is loved, or lists all the attributes your family notices in that person.

Choose a day to be special wrapping, mailing or personal delivery day and bring gifts to (Baha'i and non-Baha'i) friends and visit old friends who you don't get to see too much.

Make Happy Ayyam-i-Ha cards, or invitations to a party.

Make decorations together. A favorite one for Ayyam-i-Ha is crumpling up or folding several times a coffee filter and dipping sections of it into different colors of food coloring (diluted just a little bit) in different bowls. Use as many as you can handle then flatten them out to dry. When dry, cover with clear contact paper, trim, and punch with a hole punch and string up as banner or vertical hanging.

Roast marshmallows in the fireplace or outside.

Open gifts around a fire, or in a circle, after sharing affirmations of the people present.

Read stories illustrating Baha'i principles or virtues around the fire.

Do a service project.

Have children make good deed coupons as gifts for parents or relatives, etc. The recipients can fill out the desired deed and redeem. Decorating the coupons with markers and stickers is fun.

Make a family video or cassette tape to send to a pioneering family or youth on a year of service.

With your children and their friends make a banner for your home, school, the local Baha'i center or party location.

Have children choose a "special place", mark it with a folded bed spread or other cloth. Place gifts, special foods, and beverages on it overnight for them to gleefully discover in the morning. Better yet, create a tent. Children adore forts & such.

Send children on a treasure hunt to find their gifts.

Host a party for children, include cooperative games (they teach unity in diversity). So many cooperative games can be metaphors for principles in the Faith and children **love** them.

I rotate among 3 different themes every year for Ayyam-i-Ha: World Unity, Unity in Diversity & the Oneness of Humanity, and Inner Beauty. They are very appropriate for non-Baha'is and since they are used only once every 3 years, don't get stale with my students. Also, preparing a successful theme party takes a lot of work, and this way, I don't have to re-invent every year.

At the party, you can also try a treasure hunt, with the clues using virtue definitions or information from the Writings for answers. (If non-Baha'i children are present use clues to teach about the Faith which they can easily deduce.) For example: "Baha'u'llah came to unite the world. Go to an object that represents the answer (Globe) or "Courtesy means I make sure you're happy before I take care of me. Go to something that rhymes with me." (Tree) "Perseverance means not giving up. Go to a place in the house where we can go up." (Stairs) For Baha'i children: "The first 18 people to believe in and find The Bab were called The Letters of the Living. Go to where Letters are received in this house." (Mailbox). "The Bab said: I am the Lamp which the Finger of God hath lit. Go to one." (Lamp). See the Games Manual, (also on this web-site) "Graduates' Treasure Hunt" for more clues. Really emphasize courtesy and walking, otherwise you will have a stampede on your hands! Also, don't just let children who find the clues read them--this encourages competition and pushing. Make sure every reading child gets to read one; ask the finders who have already read to give their clue to someone who hasn't found one yet. Non reading children can open up the clue or hold it while it is being read, so they do not feel left out.

Make the treasure something meaningful, relate it to the Faith, for example:

- 1) Heart magnets (attract the hearts, or pure hearts attract the Holy Spirit)
- 2) children's' books illustrating the beauty of human diversity
- 3) heart-shaped boxes in which to keep \$ for the funds, (to show our love for God)
- 4) glow in the dark sticker stars (talk about brilliant stars, shining with virtues)

5) Rainbow Bouncers (little plastic discs with a reflective surface on one side which when placed in sunlight creates rainbow splashes on the ceiling and walls.) Relate to Writings on unity in diversity, how the different colors combined make a rainbow beautiful, and how the world is more beautiful because of all the different colored people. (Available at [www.rainbowsymphony.com](http://www.rainbowsymphony.com) . Type *rainbow bouncer* in the search box to find them.) Goes well with rainbow stickers which can be given to children in pinched bottom bags of many different colors. (*Rainbow Bags* available from Bender-Burkot East Coast School Supply, item #BJ7210, ph. 800-682-2638. Web address: [www.bender-burkot.com](http://www.bender-burkot.com). To make the bags even more attractive, you can paste on one sheet from Frank Schaffer's Write Ons Note Pads #FS 46029 Friends design which shows different colored children holding hands on top of and below the earth with North and South America)

6) smile vials which are film vials decorated with contact paper, smile stickers & shiny stars, with little good deed or chores written in gold on clear tape on ribbon strips inside, (when we do good deeds and serve others we shine, bring smiles and happiness to them and ourselves.)

7) little crystal hearts (they radiate beautiful light when the light of the sun enters them, and our real hearts radiate God's light to others when His light enters)

8) a new prayer or Baha'i children's book

9) a new Baha'i children's tape

10) a heart shaped candle to represent the candle of the heart, to be lit during prayers--**with parents**, --goes very well with Writings of Abdu'l-Baha on pages 24 and 26 in Tablet of the Heart

11) Glass or plastic rhinestone "gems" from your local arts and crafts or sewing store to represent the gems of divine virtue. Discuss what they symbolize, how virtues are like gems in a mine. Ask children to label each gem a virtue they would like to develop or parents and children can discuss which virtues each gem represent in each child. Parents can also take this opportunity to affirm their kids by sharing which virtue-gems are particularly "polished" in their children. Relate to Baha'u'llah's words: "*Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value...*" Gleanings p. 260. (Even more meaningful if you have the gems in miniature heart boxes, b/c the best way to show love for God and others is through virtues). Heart boxes are really cheap after Feb. 14 at many stores. Oriental Trading Co. Catalog often carries reasonably priced miniature heart boxes. Phone: 800-228-2269 or [www.orientaltrading.com](http://www.orientaltrading.com) This company also carries small heart-shaped tins with a clear opening in the lid. I like these b/c they are not too feminine for boys nor too suggestive of valentine's day. They are about \$8.95 for 12. Item # IN-65/90091. Also less feminine and often even more appealing than the plastic faceted rhinestones are real polished un-drilled gemstones. Some great sources (i.e. cheaper w/ assortment options) I found on the internet in 2007 are the following: [wire-sculpture.com](http://wire-sculpture.com), [www.veychek.safeshopper.com](http://www.veychek.safeshopper.com), and [stores.ebay.com/MINE-2-ROCK](http://stores.ebay.com/MINE-2-ROCK). (In addition to a nice assortment of gemstones, the ebay store carries mini nuggets of iron pyrite, which is fool's gold. No other place I could find offered anywhere near affordable prices. The shipment that I got from the Veychek source had more colorful stones than the Wire-sculpture source, but was also a bit more pricey.) Choose the *small* sizes of the pyrite and gemstone sizes if you want to give a variety and to keep the cost down. 9 easily fit in the heart tins described above. See the Creative Dramatics Manual, "Digging for Diamonds" activity on this website for a presentation dialogue to go with the gems and with Red Grammer's Digging for Diamonds song. Another nice addition to the gems is the gold cardboard "I am a Noble Soul" Crown of Virtues available through Special Ideas, 1-800-326-1197. [www.BahaiResources.com](http://www.BahaiResources.com). Kids can paste their plastic rhinestone gems on the crown above the virtues named.

12) World Unity craft bags which are the bags mentioned above (in #5) with a set of 15 multi-skin colored miniature paper dolls called Creative Cut-Outs--Calendar size--(Available at school supply stores such as F&S School Supply in Kettering, Ohio, 937-294-1224). Put ½ a package (there are 31) of these paper dolls in a Rainbow Bag with a picture of the earth. For the picture of the earth, I use a single sheet from Carson-Dellosa's Novel Notes # CD-9376. The name of the pad is Large Round Earth. Its a round note pad with 50 sheets, and the earth will need to be folded in half to fit into the bag. I fold along the equator so it's less annoying to look at. (It is available at Holcomb's School Supply in Dayton, Ohio, phone 937-433-4653). I ask the children to make a World Unity Poster by pasting the earth sheet on a poster, detailing the dolls, pasting them touching hands encircling the earth, and then decorating with unity/peaceful images. (15 figures is a bit too many, but allows for mistakes.) It helps to have a sample, and even better, examples of people in traditional or native attire to spark ideas. And if budget allows, you can put peace and unity themed stickers in the bags too. We use some of the stickers described below in #16 from Special Ideas. The quote "*The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.*" ~*Baha'u'llah*, (Gleanings, p. 250) was printed on attractive labels and affixed to the front of the gift bag on the picture of children and the world described in #5.

13) Unity in Diversity Art Bags make a great party favor for a party with the same theme. I use the Rainbow bags (see #5, above) and inside I put 10 or more different size and different colored pom poms, 3 or more different colored 12 inch sections of yarn, and 10 or more diverse pieces of Wonderfoam, which are different shapes cut out from a soft, flat foam. Feathers are also a good idea. All kids need is a little imagination, glue and poster board, to create a work of art. I explain to the kids that good art is simply taking diverse colors and shapes and unifying them into one beautiful or interesting creation, which is what we should all strive to do in our daily lives with people. These art materials are usually available at most school supply stores such as Discount School Supply (see #17), or through Nasco Arts and Crafts catalog, [www.eNasco.com](http://www.eNasco.com). To make the bags even more attractive, you can paste on one sheet from Frank Schaffer's Write Ons Note Pads #FS 46029 Friends design which shows different colored children holding hands on top of and below the earth with North and South America)

14) Blank Cardboard Puzzles can be purchased from Nasco Arts and Crafts catalog (see #5) or Oriental Trading Company, (see #11). You can get them in sizes ranging from 4" X 4" to 12" X 12". The smallest size costs about \$4.95 for 24 puzzles. Just type in "blank puzzles" in the search box. Kids use markers to create their own design. Before giving them out you can ask "How many of you have ever worked on a puzzle? Ever notice how each piece is different and unique, but each piece is important b/c each contributes to making the puzzle whole and complete. The idea is to connect or unify all the separate pieces so we get one complete picture. People are kind of like puzzle pieces—each person is unique, different, and important b/c each contributes to our one world to make it more beautiful and complete. When we all unify and connect hearts like puzzle pieces, we will have one beautiful, unified world." Encourage kids to make pictures on the puzzles with Baha'i themes such as unity in diversity, one world, one human family, etc.

15) Rainbow Scratch Art Paper. We often use the rainbow as a symbol for unity in diversity in our Ayyam-i-Ha parties. I don't care that it's also the symbol for Gay Rights, etc. Most kids don't know this, and nobody has ever complained at our parties and we have a lot of Gay activists here in Yellow Springs, OH. There are books and children's songs about humanity consisting of Rainbow People, and we use one of the songs in our group singing. (I don't have the name of the recording, just a copy.) Nasco Arts and Crafts Catalog (see #5) carries white and black papers, which when scratched, rainbow colors appear. Item #9710365 for 50 black sheets. Black also comes in cardboard. White, item # 9716315 for 50, comes in heavyweight paper only). (Nasco also carries scratch art boards which when scratched, a sparkly multi-colored holographic surface is revealed. This can be used for a party with the theme of inner beauty. Item # 9718724 for 30 boards.) We show the kids a matted example of a lovely scene of rainbow human shapes created from the paper and encourage them to create their own at home. We do not give out the sharp sticks the catalog sells for this purpose b/c that is asking for trouble in large groups of children. We roll up the Scratch Art paper with a rubber band and a notepad paper with a picture of a rainbow and diverse kids on it. (Carson-Dellosa's item # CD-9362—available through school supply stores such as Holcomb's ([www.holcombs.com](http://www.holcombs.com))). We place it in a pretty bag with rainbow stickers, some of which come from Special Ideas Catalog, phone # 800-326-1197)

16) Stickers—kids love stickers and there are many out there that are meaningful, attractive, and relate to Baha'i principles or concepts. A good place to check out is Special Ideas. (See #11) I often put one of their stickers in the gift bags described above. The designs are creative, unique, and very attractive, with slogans such as "world citizen", "no room in my heart for prejudice", "we are 1 family", "spread the promise of peace", "the planet that prays together stays together", "be an angel of kindness", etc. They easily relate to the themes for our parties. Just type in the word stickers in their search box. Special Ideas also has some really attractive temporary tattoos that can be put on with moist paper towels. Most of them relate to Unity in Diversity, and the same themes as the stickers. Kids love these. These can be put on at the party or put in gift bags and each one comes with instructions. If you let kids put them on at the party, have a mirror handy. They love to see themselves. Find tattoos at Special Ideas by selecting that link in the left column or by typing "tattoos" in the search box.

17) Kaleidoscopes—relate to unity in diversity. Discount School Supply sells 12 kits for making your own for \$7.55. That's only 62 cents per scope. Kids can put beads, things from nature, colored tissue, whatever they like that will fit inside the lens. Just go to [www.discountschoolsupply.com](http://www.discountschoolsupply.com) and type in "kaleidoscope." Photocopy instruction sheet so every child gets one if the scopes are handed out at party to be taken home.

18) Two more options for our world unity party theme were a wooden bead earth necklace craft or a flashing earth glide ball. The center bead on the necklace is an earth and there are other beads, 2 of which are heart shaped. This goes well with: *It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens. ~Baha'u'llah, (Gleanings p. 250).* The other is a small gliding earth ball. I would prefer that the light does not flash, but earth night lights were too expensive. It goes with: *So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth. ~Baha'u'llah, (Gleanings, p. 288).* In 2009, these were both available from [www.orientaltrading.com](http://www.orientaltrading.com). The necklace craft was item# 48/5145, and a package of 8 cost \$8.69. The flashing earth glide ball was item #16/885. They cost \$14.99 for 8. The quotes were printed on attractive labels and affixed to the small organza bags that contained these items.

Some of these gifts are more appropriate for Baha'i children only or are too expensive for large groups. These gifts can also be given at the end of the party without the hassle of a treasure hunt. Call me if you need ideas for meaningful party favors for a mixed group.

Do virtue skits: Provide list of virtues on large sheet of paper or dry erase board and tabs of paper with virtues written in gold on them. Divide children into groups, with each group having an adult leader. Each group chooses a virtue with or without seeing it first. Go off into separate groups for 15 minutes. Reconvene, and perform skits. Props and words optional. Audience guesses what virtue. (Ask them to wait until skit is complete before guessing to show respect to performers.) Relate to Ayyam-i-Ha (Days of Giving) by pointing out that the best gifts we can give to the world and to others are our gems of divine virtue. These gifts make the world more beautiful and joyful more than any material gifts. This activity is more suitable for more intimate settings—very large groups of 50 or more would take too long.

Try to have live music and singing, or at least some taped music to dance or sing to or do actions to. It is helpful to have the words on handouts or on a poster or easel to encourage participation in singing.

*Loving Hands* by Jean Marks and Susan Engle, *Feast at My House* by Marie and Roger Gervais, and the *Happy Ayyam-i-Ha* recording with Bill Sears all have great Ayyam-i-Ha songs on them. (The Gervais tape can be obtain only by calling the Canadian Baha'i Distribution Service, at 800-465-3287)

Serve fruit smoothies as drinks, relate to unity in diversity. Bananas, strawberries, raspberries, or frozen fruit combinations, vanilla yogurt, and canned fruit juice make good ingredients. Children can mush them together in a large bowl. Put in blender. Store in zip-lock freezer bags if necessary.

Using the Brilliant Star 3/4/93 recipe, make different "skin " colored cookies. We made circles, and used icing squeezed from pastry bags to make faces. Also, the recipe was very bland, so I suggest increasing the spices, flavorings, butter, and sugar. Basically, we just used a really good foundational vanilla cookie, and used the Brilliant Star recipe for guidance on how to get the different skin colors and different flavors. The flavors are peanut butter, chocolate, vanilla, berry, and ginger-spice. Children love decorating the faces. When we served them at the party we talked about how we are all different on the outside (the colors and facial features) and have different personalities ( the flavors), but we are all the same essence--spirit (flour, butter, eggs, and sugar).

Two very excellent resources for writings on unity in diversity and oneness are The Power of Unity and Behold Me, both of which are compilations.

A format for parties that has worked well for me is as follows:

- Welcome and Introduction to explain the purpose of the event.
- Kindly share ground rules.
- Prayers and/or a few Writings, (more Writings if a Holy Day) recited, (soft background music and/or sign language enhances the effect) or sung live or on recorded music.
- Songs and Activities (games, dancing, treasure hunt, dramatic presentation, whatever)
- Presentation of gifts (students to parents, children to children, or host to guests, whatever)
- Closing song and Prayers
- Refreshments (cover food with cloth if it is full view during program or do not put it out until near the time, or you will have parents arguing with whining children).

For any Holy Day and Ayyam-i-Ha celebration, students or your own children can be assigned roles of greeters at door, coat takers, program givers, writings givers, opening welcome, readers, performers, servers, gift distributors (use trays and insist that guests remain seated!) and cleaner uppers. It is wise to review manners and hosting etiquette shortly before guests arrive. Rehearse how to: read one's writing with eloquence, greet people, make guests feel welcome, engage a loner in conversation, hold one's body during prayers, Writings and performances, etc.

Prepare a presentation together for school. Include cooperative games in the program and use them to discuss the power of unity. Present a class gift, teacher gift, and treats. Again, call me if you need ideas; I have done several school presentations which were really well received. Here is a sample of one using the kaleidoscopes in gift idea #17. It is appropriate for 5-8 year olds. This is why the calendar aspect and fast were not mentioned. It is designed to be given in 30-60 minutes, depending on how much you engage the students in discussion and whether you assemble the kaleidoscopes in class together or just send them home to be done there. Make sure you give a demonstration if you are not assembling as a group and that each child gets an instruction sheet with their kaleidoscope kit.

#### AYYAM-I-HA PRESENTATION FOR LOWER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AGED KIDS

(**Bolded** words may be written on board)

We (name kids in class) are **Baha'is**. Baha'is follow the teachings of **Baha'u'llah**. Baha'u'llah gave us the religion of the **Baha'i Faith**, just as Moses gave us the Jewish Faith, Christ gave us the Christian Faith, and Mohammed gave us the faith of Islam. (If there are Hindus or Buddhists in the school, mention these too). Like those religions, the Baha'i Faith is a world religion—meaning that there are Baha'is in every country of the world.

Today we are here to share about our winter holiday, **Ayyam-i-Ha**. At the end of every February, Baha'is all over the world celebrate Ayyam-i-Ha. Ayyam-i-Ha means **Days of Giving**. It is our gift giving time. It lasts 4 days and is celebrated differently all around the world. There are no traditional decorations such as a pine tree or specific activities that all Baha'is do except for 3 things: Baha'is everywhere enjoy the sharing of food, visiting with friends and family, and gift giving during Ayyam-i-Ha. Every family and Baha'i community may have their own different and unique way of celebrating Ayyam-i-Ha. (May want to share book, Maggie Celebrates Ayyam-i-Ha by Patti Rae Tomarelli at this point, explaining that this is how one child celebrates Ayyam-i-Ha. One can also give examples from their own family and community.)

Here in Yellow Springs, every year our Baha'i children's classes host a big party that is open for all. There are always games, music, singing, dancing, drama, and of course food and gifts. Ursula, Greta, Alex, Christian, Reese, Keegan, Nadia, Lucas, and Marya will all be performing at this year's party. You are all invited. It's at 1:30pm at the First Presbyterian church community hall this Sat., Feb. 23. (Make sure it is okay with the principal and teacher to give an invitation to the party to the students. Have invitations or flyers available for handing out if this is appropriate. We always gear the school presentation to the theme of the party as well.)

The greatest gift that the founder of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah, gave the world was His teachings. And one of His most important and most beautiful teachings is that we must practice **unity in diversity**. Unity is working together peacefully, with good feelings towards all. Diversity means differences. There are differences in all people. There are physical differences such as: (Ask for examples). And there are differences in opinions, beliefs, desires, tastes, etc. (Ask for examples). It's easy to be unified if we all think and act the same. But it truly takes effort to be unified when there is a lot of diversity, a lot of differences. If we want happiness and world peace, we must learn to practice this beautiful teaching, unity in diversity.

B/c Ayyam-i-Ha is our gift giving time, today, we would like to give you a gift to remind you of this beautiful teaching. The kaleidoscope would not be beautiful if when we looked inside, all we saw was all one color and one shape. It's beautiful b/c of the diversity of the colors and shapes, which are all unified inside the kaleidoscope. (Have a kaleidoscope that has just one color and one shape in it, and one that has many colors and shapes. Allow children to look into each one to compare).

If you need more ideas, or need assistance in choosing/finding cooperative games you can call me at 937-767-7079. But it would be easier if you just got friendly with my New World Order Games Manual—see last page for details, it's free.

### **Naw-Ruz:**

Listen to or sing songs, read poems and stories, do finger plays and creative dramatics all on springtime. Relate to the Baha'i concept that we are in a spiritual springtime.

Explain that the souls of people are like gardens. The Messengers of God are like the gardeners of humanity's hearts. (*"The gardeners of the world of humanity are the Prophets of God."* ~Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 194. *The holy Manifestations are the ideal Gardeners of human souls, the divine Cultivators of human hearts.* ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 466)

(Also see Promulgation of Universal Peace pages 295 and 353 for more detailed quotes on the Messengers being Divine Gardeners.)

Whenever a new messenger comes to the world, He creates a spiritual springtime in humanity's hearts. (References to seasons and religions: Gleanings, p. 167,196, Promulgation of Universal Peace: pages 10, 38-39, 54-55, 126-7, 153, 271, 278, Some Answered Questions pages 74-76 and Baha'i World Faith pages 351-2) His teachings plant spiritual seeds in the hearts of people and He wants us to do the same with ourselves and others. (*Sow the seeds of My divine wisdom in the pure soil of thy heart.....~Baha'u'llah*: Persian Hidden Words, #33) I ask what are these seeds? (His words, His teachings, laws, principles, etc). We must take care of the garden of our own and humanity's hearts like a real garden: we must nurture it by weeding out prejudice, fear, racism, apathy, materialism, hate, doubts, idle fancies, etc. The Holy Spirit, and other human beings are not attracted to gardens full of brambles, thorns, slugs, weeds. Caring for heart gardens takes a lot of patience and perseverance. Spirituality, like flowers, take time to grow. Seeds need to germinate in the soil and soul. It takes prayer, love, good deeds, sacrifice, deepening in and obedience to God's teachings.

A useful and attractive visual aid for this is a heart shaped tin, glass bowl, or box (available at cooking supply stores or around Valentines' Day), filled with dirt, topped with moss (its a lot prettier than dirt) and filled with diverse small silk flowers which have been put on green wire stems (available at most craft stores—the original stems most silk flowers come with are too flimsy).. You can decorate the box or tin with ribbon, stickers, and even faces of diverse peoples.

*Here is a description taken from a parent letter using the heart garden analogy and the heart garden described above:*

Baha'u'llah said:” *Sow the seeds of My divine wisdom in the pure soil of thy heart, and water them with the water of certitude, that the hyacinths of My knowledge and wisdom may spring up fresh and green....*

~*Baha'u'llah: Persian HW, # 33*

I asked “what might be the seeds of divine wisdom?” (The Holy Writings. We also discussed the meaning of “certitude.”) . “Whenever you study the Holy Writings, you are sowing seeds of divine wisdom in the garden of your heart.”

Next, I point out that in this quote, the virtues of wisdom and knowledge are likened to hyacinths. Then I shared a live blooming hyacinth flower and allowed all to inhale its exquisite fragrance.

Then I ask: “What might be some other spiritual flowers, besides knowledge and wisdom, that can grow in people's hearts when the seeds of God's teachings are planted?” (The virtues).

Virtues are like gorgeous flowers in the garden of our hearts. Whenever you express virtues, you are assisting it to bloom in the garden of your heart. I am going to describe 4 scenes, and you try to figure out what virtue-flowers the person is cultivating in the garden of his/her heart by their actions.

Next I described a scene and a person's behavior. Then I asked kids to guess which virtue is being demonstrated by the behavior. Who ever is called on and is correct, gets to come to the front and plant a flower in the heart garden, which should be barren for this activity.

Its kind of like a riddle game, and children are eager to participate. (As a teacher, you should do however many flowers you have in the box and the kids seem able to enjoy). Usually, several virtues are illustrated for each scene. Often kids thought of virtues I had not, and if they could explain its relevance, they got to plant a flower. (It really facilitates responses to have a list of virtues in a visible location nearby.)

*Examples of the scenes:*

Its the Baha'i fasting period, and I really want to eat that chocolate cake sitting in front of my face but I do not. (Steadfastness, self control, obedience, and patience.) I did not accept detachment b/c it is not being detached to lust after something!

I gave a presentation at school, got an A+ on it and everybody loved it. My older sibling assisted me in preparing it. When others praise me and tell me how fantastic it was, I thank them and share that my sibling helped me. (Courtesy, humility, honesty)

You got a brand new puppy and its his first few days away from his mother and litter. Your best friend suddenly invites you to his/her beach house for the weekend. It would be a lot of fun. A neighbor is willing to watch the puppy, but you say no and stay home with your new pet, who is crying a lot. (Caring, sacrifice, loyalty, kindness, responsibility, wisdom)

You are a new student at a new school and desperately want to be included and liked. It is mid year and every body has already made friends. As far as you know you are the only Baha'i in the school. A group of kids approach who have somehow got wind that you belong to this funny sounding religion. They ask very loudly and somewhat tauntingly, if you are a Bahooee. You are very tempted to say no, but instead, say, “well, not a Bahooee, I am a Baha'i, and it is my religion. It is very beautiful. Would you like to know about it?” (Courage, honesty, detachment, loyalty, self-respect, tact, and sacrifice b/c you may be giving up being popular.)

Some relevant quotes in which the human heart is related to as a garden or as a place where flowers blossom, can be found on pages 46, 61, and 211 of the Kitab-i-Iqan, #s 3 & 33 Persian Hidden Words, and pages 29-30 Tablets of the Divine Plan: message to the Northeastern States at Naw Ruz, dated 3/26 1916 ( 1959 edition, reprinted 1975), & Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 294

Put up decorations which relate to the spring theme. I use lots of butterflies and tie them into the idea of spiritual springtime means spiritual transformation. The butterfly is a great symbol for transformation. I relate the wings to spiritual qualities or virtues, which enable our souls to soar towards God. Caterpillars transform into winged butterflies, humans transform into spiritual beings with soul-wings which are the virtues. Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha frequently refer to the wings of

the soul or the heart. We grow spiritual wings when we transform ourselves with virtues. Children can make butterflies with clothes pins and tissue paper (there are even shimmering tissues available at arts and crafts stores), pipe cleaners for antenna (and legs if you want), plastic eyes—or use markers, glitter glue, metallic markers, small gems, sequins, metallic confetti, etc. for decorating wings, or one can find unfinished wooden butterflies in the spring at some arts and crafts stores, using different shaped wooden wings and spring loaded clothes pins.

*Loving Hands* by Jean Marks and Susan Engle, and *Feast at My House* by Marie and Roger Gervais both have great Naw Ruz songs on them. (The Gervais tape can be obtain only by calling the Canadian Baha'i Distribution Service, at 800-465-3287) See the Creative Dramatics Manual, Level One, for a description of using "Happy Naw Ruz to You" from *Feast at My House*. (Level Two has a more challenging version.)

Have a New Year party, invite non-Baha'is.

Ask each member of the family to devise New Year spiritual resolutions and have a family time to share these goals. For children, I gave them ideas such as: "memorize a new prayer every month, say my memory verse every day, say prayers every morning, read the Creative Word twice a day, stop calling my sibling names, be kind to someone lonely every week, do my chores w/o whining, share with someone the beautiful teachings of my religion every week, not sass my parents, pick up my bedroom every day w/o being asked, do my homework every day with excellence, obey my parents, not lose temper w/ my sibling, practice a virtue I am particularly weak in every day, etc." I urged them to ponder this and take it seriously. I also encouraged them to set a goal that is somewhat measurable and certainly one that is practical and realistic.

The goals should be written down on pretty paper, perhaps a small strip, rolled up, sealed with a flower sticker, and placed in a heart shaped box. Assess progress in a few months, perhaps on a holy day. I feel that goal setting and follow through are extremely important skills for life. This approach to growth and development is most fundamental in our religion and used constantly in our administrative order. So is evaluation of efforts. We need to train our children now to set goals and follow through, and evaluate their progress with honesty. So many virtues are fostered in this process: high resolve and determination, discipline, excellence, patience, honesty with self, perseverance, etc.---not to mention the virtues inherent in their particular resolution which may be cleanliness, or obedience or sacrifice or courage, etc. Their resolution hopefully is challenging enough to stimulate growth, but not so complex or demanding that it is impractical and doomed to extinction. A child's goal should not depend on your time or energy in any way, so they can rely only on God and themselves to achieve it.

As a family or community, share the highlights of the year. This can be very uplifting. It can be as elaborate as a slide show with music, a fancy chart with illustrations or just oral sharing. It can be personal achievements, Baha'i events, declarations, and spiritual growth.

Make New Years cards and send; give to teachers, co-workers, etc.

Make "spiritual springtime" picture or mural using Stickers of rainbows, earth, rain, clouds, suns, birds, frogs, bunnies, peace symbols, smile faces, sparkly hands, musical notes, flowers, butterflies, bugs, hearts, etc., stickers or just markers or materials from nature or cut from catalogs and magazines. Encourage children to somehow express the change in the garden of humanity's hearts. I gave my students lovely heart stickers and tiny paper dolls along with other stickers of things in nature and asked them to convey that unity and love were beginning to grow, that the world was in a spiritual springtime.

See *Ideas for public/community celebrations* under Ridvan for additional Naw Ruz ideas relating to Spiritual Springtime.

### **Ridvan--the Most Great Festival:**

Make luminarias with the family or with your students. These are small white or brown paper bags with sand in the bottom containing a candle. Trim the tops in a fancy way and decorate the bags using markers to represent the world, a natural scene, or an individual. Use gold ink to write a relevant quote on the bag such as those below, light the candles, and line your porch or walkway with them. It creates a very attractive effect. (Keep writing and design several inches above the bottom b/c the sand will block the illumination effect. Especially if the sand is moist, an extra layer of paper cut from about 2-3" of the bottom of an extra bag is a good idea. The bags can also be used inside, lighting each night of Ridvan for prayers, for example.) Relate to the light of Baha'u'llah's Revelation illumining individuals or illumining the world of humanity: "*O SON OF BEING! Thou art My lamp and My light is in thee. Get thou from it thy radiance and seek none other than Me.*"--Baha'u'llah, Arabic Hidden Words, # 11. "*.....the Day-Star of Thy presence hath shed its radiance upon Thy people.*"--Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, page 241. "*Illumine my inner being, O my Lord, with the splendors of the Day-Spring of Thy Revelation, even as Thou didst illumine my outer being with the morning light of Thy favor.*"--Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, page 251 and "*The light hath shone forth from the horizon of Revelation, and the whole earth hath been illumined at the coming of Him Who is the*

*Lord of the Day of the Covenant!" --Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pages 133-4. "The whole earth is illuminated with the resplendent glory of God's Revelation." ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 96*

Have children choose 12 flower seedlings. Plant one each day during Ridvan. Relate to the garden of Ridvan. Read them the beautiful quote on pages 320-21 in Gleanings about a Flower which symbolizes Baha'u'llah or His Revelation. Also see The Hidden Words for more flower metaphors.

Allow children to choose 12 roses for the living room.

Every Ridvan I allow my children to each choose one special candle from a store. They really relish this and so we have a lovely collection of special candles just for Ridvan. We also use twelve floating candles of different colors. Three of them are red rose candles which are reserved for the 1<sup>st</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup>, days of Ridvan. They float in a glass bowl with blue colored water. Every night one more candle is lit, until on the 12th day all are lit. Relate water to the Tigris River Baha'u'llah crossed to enter the garden of Ridvan.

Make or decorate candles with decorating wax. Melt rose oil into the wax if you are making the candles. If little fingers cannot manipulate the wax, have them make candle holders from clay or playdoh, decorated with beads, sequins, etc. Tie into the idea that Baha'u'llah's life was like a candle; He sacrificed Himself to give humanity the light of His Revelation. At Ridvan was when He first revealed His Light to the world. Read Baha'i quotes with light or candle imagery in them, especially ones referring to the Light of His Revelation, or that we should be like lights shining in darkness. The Baha'i Writings use these metaphors constantly. See page 21 for a short compilation of candle quotations if you need it. Play or sing songs which talk about Baha'u'llah's light such as "Shine Your Light on Me, Baha'u'llah" from the *We Have Come to Sing Praises* Baha'i Gospel Choir CD. Goes great with poem called "The Candles" by Janet Bixby, p. 30, Brilliant Star Magazine, Jan.-Feb. 1985, and with the song "Light the Candle" on the *Special Times* children's cassette, available from the Baha'i Distribution Service.

Tape 12 (or 19 for the Fast) red paper hearts on a wall, and child places notary seal on a heart each day after reciting a verse. Older children can be encouraged to memorize one a day, thereby earning the notary seal which symbolizes not only the light referred to in the quote, but also it can also be representative of the illumination the heart receives whenever it is exposed to and retains the Words of God. You can also cut the seals to look like a flame. Some of the following quotes with light and heart metaphors could be used: "*Let the flame of the love of God burn brightly within your radiant hearts.*" Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, page 325. "*.....kindle within your hearts the everlasting torch of divine guidance.*" Baha'u'llah, Persian Hidden Words, # 35. Look up "light," "illumine," or "flame" along with "heart" on a computer reference program for more relevant quotes. There are lots of them!

Do a dramatization of people going into the Garden of Ridvan: Have children pretend to get dressed and cleaned up, anoint them with rose oil, give them loose cloths to wrap around themselves perhaps, have the room filled with freshly cut flowers, including some roses, lots of candles, have lovely mysterious music on, pretend to get into a boat and row across the Tigris river, note swans, fish, anchor the boat, smell the flowers, notice the nightingales singing, butterflies, pick and place real roses on a special cloth in Baha'u'llah's pretend tent, say prayers, reverently leave the tent, etc. Elaborate as much as you wish, (without anyone playing Baha'u'llah, however.) I had pink, red, and white candies which were rose shaped on a plastic stem laying on a brass platter in the "tent". I told my students that these represented the roses Baha'u'llah gave to the friends in Baghdad as gifts. After placing their real rose on the cloth and saying a prayer, each student took one. Relate sweetness to Writings that use this metaphor to convey God's love, His revelation, or His Laws. Some examples can be found in Gleanings p. 84-85, 320, 343, Prayers and Meditations pages 82-83 and The Kitab-i-Aqdas p. 20).

Do an arts and crafts afterwards relating to a garden. Here is a description of 2 such a possible art activities, the first one was taken from a parent letter written to explain what my students did during a special Ridvan class:

I read the students the following quote:

*Arise, and proclaim unto the entire creation the tidings that He Who is the All-Merciful hath directed His steps towards the Ridvan and entered it. Guide, then, the people unto the garden of delight which God hath made the Throne of His Paradise.* ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 31

I gave them the option of writing the quote in gold on their finished picture or using ones which I had printed on paper. They could cut it out as a thin strip using fancy trim scissors and paste it on the picture. The students were given the following materials with which to create their picture: Many different kinds of flower, heart, bug, butterfly, bird and animal stickers, plus miscellaneous stickers of crowns, candles, sparkly hands, musical notes, and smiley faces, gold notary seals, thin strips of blue mylar for streams or a river, white or different shades of blue card stock, metallic markers in gold and other colors, regular markers, iridescent glitter, regular and fancy trim scissors, and glue sticks. I showed them a picture that one of my former students had made the day before to inspire ideas, but encouraged them to be totally unique and creative. I explained that the notes could symbolize the birds singing, the Nightingale of Paradise (a metaphor for Baha'u'llah in the Baha'i Writings), the divine melodies which Baha'u'llah often refers to which I think mean His Revelation and teachings, and that the glitter could be

used to show radiance and luminosity coming from Baha'u'llah's tent in the garden or symbolizing the light of His Revelation, and the crown could symbolize His station as the King of Glory. The only restrictions I gave them was that they must make room for the quote and to not use animals that one would not find the real garden of Ridvan, like a sheep, cow, or dog.

A more elaborate and expensive project is to create a miniature Ridvan garden: Provide an attractive container which is at least 2 inches deep and let children fill with sand or dirt, (potting soil is too fluffy with the peat moss to hold stems) top with moss (available from arts and crafts stores, Walmarts, or JoAnne Fabrics-- moisten moss to flatten if too bushy or use real moss from outside), provide decorative smooth and shiny miniature rocks, (bags of decorative stones are available at Frank's nursery's and crafts), decorative potting bark, lots of miniature silk flowers—(cut apart from the bunches and made shorter with wire cutters), tiny branches topped with deer moss for miniature trees (it comes in formed bunches—available from JoAnne Fabrics) or provide cut up, tiny leafed silk or plastic plants to look like trees, tiny animals, a small clay or ceramic container which can be sunken in and filled with blue food coloring and water, or use shiny blue cloth cut into a meandering stream shape to simulate a stream or the river Tigris, a small cardboard rectangle folded in half with pretty fabric glued on it to represent Baha'u'llah's tent, and perhaps a miniature rectangle of cloth for a rug inside the tent. This activity is beloved by all children and adults. Read story about the significance of the Ridvan garden first, and invite kids to create a beautiful image of it.

### Description of Ridvan Metaphor Table

(Suitable only for classroom or family, or small community gathering)

Create a special Ridvan table: Cover table with pretty tablecloth (I use vinyl simulated lace because it's washable). Scent the room with rose oil. (Relate fragrance to quotes on page 30 &/or 321 in Gleanings.) Place lots of beautiful candles in elegant holders (with silk flowers at the base, perhaps), fresh cut flowers and objects which can be metaphors for spiritual truths or for Ridvan all over the table. For ex., a clear glass heart with flowers and a rose inside of it, or a heart shaped vase with red colored water with flowers in it, glow in the dark polyester glitter (it makes the table sparkle in a subtle way in the light, like light on snow), brass star garland (stars linked by a gold string,) pretty little mirrors, rose shaped floating candles, Heart shaped chocolate sweets, etc. Have writings available that support the metaphors you have, for example, ones using garden, flower, candle, and light metaphors. (For ex., Hidden Words Persian 3, 32 & 33, and Kitab-i-Iqan p. 46.) Then take children to the table and after giving a few examples, challenge them to find as many metaphorical/symbolic meanings as possible represented on the table with the objects. For ex: The **glass heart with the flowers inside** or **heart shaped vase with flowers**, relate to any quote which has the heart as a garden metaphor, such as those mentioned above. **Stars** shine in darkness-- we should be brilliant stars shining in the darkness of ignorance. (*"Ye are the stars of the heaven of understanding..."* ~Baha'u'llah, p. 196 Gleanings, plus many, many Writings use the star metaphor). **Mirrors** symbolize the Manifestations as perfect Mirrors (see Gleanings p. 74 and the Kitab-i-Iqan, pgs. 99-100), They reflect the light of the Sun of Reality flawlessly and people are also like mirrors, but we need polishing (Gleanings p. 262 and Baha'i World Faith p. 218, or Promulgation of Universal Peace pgs. 14-15). **Stars on a string** symbolize community, or that when we act like "brilliant stars" i.e. virtuous, we are unifying. (*"The brightness of the fire of your love will no doubt fuse and unify the contending peoples and kindreds of the earth . . ."* p. 88 Tablets of Baha'u'llah.) **Glow in the dark glitter** represents shining in darkness, being luminous and radiant (lots of quotes relate to this). **Candles** represent Baha'u'llah's sacrifice to give the light of His revelation, or enkindlement of the candle of the heart. A **heart shaped candle** goes with: *"Let the flame of the love of God burn brightly within your radiant hearts."* ~Baha'u'llah p. 325, Gleanings. (Also The Hidden Words, Persian #32, plus many other Writings use this analogy). A **heart shaped oil lamp** also goes well with the quote on p. 325 of Gleanings, and also ties into the second part of this quote: *Feed it with the oil of Divine guidance.....* **Flowers** evoke garden of Ridvan or are a symbol for the soul which needs the light of God's teachings, the showers of His mercy and bounties (see Baha'i children's prayers and tablets by Abdu'l-Baha for relevant quotes). A **crystal bowl with 12 floating rose flower shaped candles**, 3 of which are extra special, (different colored or golden) of course symbolizes the 12 days of Ridvan, and the 3 holy days. The **water** can symbolize the river Tigris, or one can relate the water to a quote such as: *"Blessed the sore athirst who hasteneth to the soft-flowing waters of My loving-kindness."*, ~Baha'u'llah: Tablets of Baha'u'llah, page 16. **Sweets** go with: *Cause me to taste, O my Lord, the divine sweetness of Thy remembrance and praise. I swear by Thy might! Whosoever tasteth of its sweetness will rid himself of all attachment to the world and all that is therein, and will set his face towards Thee, cleansed from the remembrance of any one except Thee.* ~Baha'u'llah: Prayers and Meditations, pages 82-83.

A beautiful small inlaid red **treasure box** made in India filled with Austrian crystals, gems, and pearls goes with: *This is the Treasure of God; if only thou couldst understand!* ~Baha'u'llah: The Kitab-i-Aqdas, page 87. And: *Make My love thy treasure and cherish it even as thy very sight and life.* ~Baha'u'llah: Persian Hidden Words, # 32 And: *By the righteousness of God! The Hidden Treasure, the Impenetrable Mystery, hath been uncovered to men's eyes, causing all things, whether of the past or of the future, to rejoice.* ~Baha'u'llah: Tablets of Baha'u'llah, page 77. And finally: *Couldst thou but know the things sent down by My Pen, and discover the treasures of*

*My Cause, and the pearls of My mysteries which lie hid in the seas of My names and in the goblets of My words, thou wouldst for longing after His glorious and sublime Kingdom, lay down thy life in the path of God.* ~Baha'u'llah: Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pages 58-59.

They love this activity and are naturally good at it. I have a compilation of quotes ready that relate to the metaphor tables, which I refer to if kids need inspiration for finding metaphors.

Next, ask each child to choose a candle they would like to light. (Make sure you have a long fire place or grill lighter to prevent burns). Have them think of a friend they would like to teach, and that this candle represents the candle of that person's heart. (There are heart shaped candles available.) Then turn off the lights, put on some Baha'i or mystical music and begin lighting all the candles. This should be done in a dark room, if possible, for effect. Children love this experience. After all candles are lit, stand around the table holding hands and sing "Shine Your Light on Me Baha'u'llah" from the Baha'i Gospel Choir CD *We Have Come to Sing Praises* or "Light the Candle" from the *Special Times* children's cassette, which also has quotes in the song extremely relevant to this activity. Before or after the candle song read the poem called The Candles, p. 30 *Brilliant Star*, Jan. 1985. Blow out all the candles, discuss how spiritually dark the world is and how each one of us has the duty of spreading the light of Baha'u'llah's revelation all over the world, (see p. 12 Tablet of the Heart and Tablets of the Divine Plan for quotes using the analogy of light and teaching) or how each one of us has the light of God in us, (Hidden Words, Arabic #11) and we need to shine this light on others by being loving, kind, etc. (Gleanings p. 305: "*Let your acts be a guide unto all mankind .....It is through your deeds that ye can distinguish yourselves from others. Through them the brightness of your light can be shed upon the whole earth*"). Talk about how others may try to put out our light, but we will be steadfast. Explain how Baha'u'llah's teachings and principles bring light to the world, then present them with a basket full of glow sticks. Each child has to name a teaching, law, or principle that illuminates the souls of humanity, or that guides us in the darkness of these times, and then they get to choose a glow stick. If they run out of principles, so they don't start just copying each other, have them recite any writings or prayers of Baha'u'llah's, noting that His words bring light to our souls. Then turn out the lights and play and sing to the old spiritual "This Little Light of Mine". Raffi has a fun version on his *Rise and Shine* recording. (The best price for glow sticks are available from Chemical Light, ph. 800-446-3200 or [www.chemlite.com](http://www.chemlite.com)). They will have a wonderful time dancing and waving and tossing their glow sticks in the air. The room must be quite dark for this to work.

#### **Ideas for public/community celebrations:**

At a community (or family observance), in a dark room, have children light all the candles during the song "*See the Light*" from the World Congress CD. (It is best to rehearse who lights what, and have the kids somewhat choreographed in their movements, or you get swarms at one candle, etc.) Before beginning the song, say something like: "Whenever a new Divine Messenger appears, His Revelation brings a powerful new light to the world. His teachings ignite and illumine the souls of humanity and gradually transform civilization. The lighting of the candles symbolizes the spiritual effect of Divine Revelation on the human world."

Give children soap hearts after relating them to the writing on p. 67 in Gleanings about Manifestations using Their Revelation "*for the cleansing of every longing heart and receptive spirit from the dross and dust of earthly cares and limitations.*" You can also read that quote and the 3 following ones and ask children to guess what the gift is: 1) Hidden Word # 59 Arabic, 2) "*Cleanse from your hearts the love of worldly things..*"--Gleanings, page 275, and 3) "*...love of God and spiritual attraction do cleanse and purify the human heart.*"--Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, page 202. They seem to enjoy guessing and then dipping their hands into a sack or some receptacle and retrieving their gift. Its always best to share the writings *before* handing out the related gift--otherwise children's attention is focused on what is in their hand, not what's coming out of your mouth!

You can also give the children rhinestone gems (see page 9 #11 gift). Relate to Baha'u'llah's announcement at Ridvan by using the quote on p. 287 in Gleanings: "*The Purpose of the one true God, exalted be His Glory, in revealing Himself unto men is to lay bare those gems that lie hidden within the mine of their true and inmost selves.*" The quote on p. 299 (1st full paragraph) in Gleanings supports that these gems are virtues. If you need the specific dialogue that accompanies this presentation, call me. It involves audience participation with question and answers, relating the gems to virtues and people as divine mines.

When Baha'i and non-Baha'i children take home a concrete object from a Holy Day celebration they have something to reinforce their fond memory of their experience and of the knowledge they acquired. Here's a detailed description of a gift presentation using the garden of the heart metaphor which was used for the 12th Day of Ridvan in 1997, with a group of about 100--with approximately 30 children: (The dialogue was oriented more towards adults).

"The Baha'i Teachings frequently use nature and the phenomenal world to explain spiritual truths. An example of this is comparing the spiritual effect of a new Divine Messenger to that of springtime and the souls of humanity to that of a garden.

Thus, Baha'is believe that the coming of Baha'u'llah has generated a spiritual springtime in the garden of humanity's hearts and that spiritual seeds are being planted in hearts and minds through the spreading of His teachings. Like gardens in spring, souls are gradually being renewed, revitalized, and re-adorned with fresh blossoms. Baha'u'llah often refers to these blossoms as virtues: He talks about the "hyacinths of knowledge and wisdom", the "tulips of understanding", the "myrtles of unity" and the "rose of love." He says: "*In the garden of thy heart plant naught but the rose of love.*" So, as a Ridvan gift for all the children, we would like to give each of you a little perfumed rose to wear over your heart--to remind you of this spiritual springtime and also that whenever you show love, its like having a rose bloom in the garden of your heart." (Distribute miniature roses with little pins in them. The roses can be found at any fabric store, they come in many different colors, and are glued to a small green ribbon. We put tiny pins on the back and a drop of rose oil on each one. We put them all in a beautiful engraved silver heart-shaped box from India. It had a hinged lid and was lined in purple velvet. When I opened the box, the scent of rose filled the area.) Then I said: "And finally, we would like to invite everybody here to choose any real flower from any of the vases to take home with you when you leave tonight. Now we'll close with a final quote from Baha'u'llah and then let's enjoy each other and the refreshments. Thank you. " (With a few modifications this presentation could be used for **Naw-Ruz** also.)

*"O friends! It behoveth you to refresh and revive your souls through the gracious favors which in this Divine, this soul-stirring Springtime are being showered upon you... How high the reward of him that hath not deprived himself of so great a bounty, nor failed to recognize the beauty of his Best-Beloved in this, His new attire. " ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 94*

A nice touch during this presentation to provide a concrete visual illustration: Have a child stand next to the presenter while holding a heart-shaped tin or box which is decorated For ex: glue a red ribbon around the outside, paste different colored children's faces on notary seals and paste these on top of the ribbon encircling the heart, with flower stickers in between the seals. Fill the heart with dirt, then top with moss. Take many different kinds of small silk flowers and put them on strong wire stems (available in the silk flower section of craft stores.) Arrange them in the heart.

This presentation was the last part of an hour long observance which included several musical selections, ("See The Light" from the *World Congress* CD, during which children draped in silk cloth gracefully lit all the candles in the room, (this has to be rehearsed) and "I Have Found Baha'u'llah" live with the children and a guitarist, a Hidden Word solo, reading scripture--printed in a fancy font on rose bordered paper for all the guests, a short dramatic presentation by my students using the Gift Box (mentioned earlier in this compilation), an expressive reading of The Wonderlamp story-poem --the illustrations of which we had made into slides, A Baha'i Youth Workshop Dance called Progressive Revelation, and my students in a choreographed dance to "In This Day Baha'u'llah" from the Baha'i Gospel CD *We Have Come to Sing Praises*". It was quite an elaborate affair, even non-Baha'is were moved to tears, and the children will remember it for a long time! If you ever need suggestions for a Holy Day program, feel free to call me.

Instead of rose pins you can also provide ½ of a miniature heart box (Heart boxes are really easy to find and cheap after Valentine's Day. I used gold leaf coated ones that I got for 75 cents --75% off) Make perfumed green playdoh using rose oil and a standard playdoh recipe. The fragrance is stronger if you put it in after the playdoh is done cooking and cooled. Estimate how many children will be at your celebration and make sure you have ½ box for each and figure out how much playdoh you will need to fill each half to the top. Buy a myriad of diverse miniature silk flowers—they usually come in bunches so you will have to use a wire cutter and cut them apart. Place the flowers in large trays because kids love to sift through the diversity, put the playdoh in plastic ziplock bags to keep soft and transfer to a more attractive container before the event. Also have heart boxes in pretty basket or an attractive larger box. Say same dialogue as above except say "So as a Ridvan gift for all the children, we would like to give each of you a little golden heart box to be filled with little flowers to remind you that the garden of your hearts are all in a spiritual springtime because Baha'u'llah has come and planted the seeds of a new revelation in them." You can simplify the wording if necessary or adapt to be acceptable to your non-Baha'i guests. We had over 20 seekers and none of them complained! The children loved filling their heart gardens with playdoh, which smelled like roses, and then "planting" the designated number of flowers. The older ones even made patterns and designs with their flowers. (Can be used for **Naw-Ruz** also.)

And here is yet another, shorter presentation that can follow this quote at the end of the structured part of a Ridvan (**or Naw Ruz**) celebration:

*"O friends! It behoveth you to refresh and revive your souls through the gracious favors which in this Divine, this soul-stirring Springtime are being showered upon you... How high the reward of him that hath not deprived himself of so great a bounty, nor failed to recognize the beauty of his Best-Beloved in this, His new attire. " ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 94*

The Baha'i Writings state that "*the coming of a Manifestation of God is the season of spiritual spring*"\* and that the human heart is like a garden.

Beautiful new values, insights, and virtues are the flowers of the human heart that gradually begin to blossom in a spiritual springtime.

Baha'u'llah refers to the hyacinths of knowledge and wisdom, the tulips of understanding, the myrtles of unity and the rose of love.

So, as a symbol of this spiritual springtime and as a Ridvan gift for all guests, we would like to invite each of you to choose one flower from any vase to take home before you leave tonight.

\* (^Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 54)

One year, using the heart garden described previously, I gave a 15 minute child oriented presentation which elaborated on how our hearts are like gardens, how the Messengers are like the Divine gardeners of the human heart (Promulgation of Universal Peace, pages 295, 353, 466), and that when they come, They plant new spiritual seeds (Their teachings) causing new flowers to bloom in the garden of humanity's hearts. (There are many writings relating the coming of a new Messenger to spiritual springtime such as Some Answered Questions page 74, Promulgation of Universal Peace pages 10-11, 54). Also using the Writings, I related those flowers to virtues (an excerpt from the Persian Hidden Words #s 3, 33 & 78). (The Kitab-i-Iqan page 46 also supports this concept, but it is not as child friendly a quote.) A child standing next to me was holding the empty heart garden, (except for dirt and moss) another one was holding a heart shaped box full of silk flowers on short wire stems. After the explanation, I described the expression of a virtue, and a child in the audience would raise their hand and try to guess it. If correct, that child would come up to the front of the room and choose a flower to plant in the heart garden and stick it in. Kids really got involved in this, but you have to be careful to keep it positive if a child answers incorrectly. Some audiences may need bigger hints, even providing the first letter sound of the virtue's name. Here is the gist of the dialogue:

"Baha'u'llah wrote many, many books. In these books, He often said that the hearts of people are like gardens. He did not mean the heart inside of us that beats and pumps blood. He meant our \_\_\_\_\_?" (Talk about gardens, ask who has ever planted one, if they start out beautiful, how much work they are, etc. show heart garden tin) "Baha'u'llah's teachings also explain that the Messengers of God are like the Gardeners of peoples hearts all over the world." (Talk about gardeners and the functions they perform). "So, whenever a new Messenger from God comes to the world, that Messenger's teachings, His Words, plant spiritual seeds in the hearts of people." (Have child plant some real seeds, but explain that spiritual seeds are invisible but the result is visible, such as unity and good deeds). "Slowly, these spiritual seeds grow and then new flowers blossom in the garden of people's hearts, their souls. Baha'u'llah said: ".....*Sow the seeds of My divine wisdom in the pure soil of the heart, .....that the hyacinths of knowledge and wisdom may spring up fresh and green.....*" Persian Hidden Words, #78 (Show a real hyacinth flower, pass it around for children to smell, explain that here Baha'u'llah says that knowledge and wisdom are like a hyacinth.) "What might be some other spiritual flowers that can grow in peoples' hearts?" (Virtues—at this point the guessing game begins, with you describing the expression of a virtue —except love—save that one for later---which would be meaningful to a child from their daily life, then call on someone who has raised their hand. Have a list handy of concrete virtues. If they are basically right ---some situations you describe will reflect more than one virtue, for example generosity also involves sacrifice and detachment--- that child gets to choose a silk flower to plant. After the flowers are gone, or it is obviously time to move on, say something like:) "So what this means is that when a new Messenger like Baha'u'llah comes, His teachings cause a spiritual springtime in the souls of humanity b/c virtues begin to blossom like flowers in the garden of our hearts. Gardeners also remove weeds. Baha'u'llah tells us that His teachings can remove the weeds in the hearts of people. What are some weeds in the hearts of people?" (prejudice, materialism, selfishness, etc.) "In closing, can you tell me the name of the virtue that is the answer to these 4 clues: The world needs a lot more of it, if everyone practiced it every day all day, we would have no war, fighting, or people hurting other people in any way, you all have given and received it, and its a four letter word." (=Love, and whoever you call on and gets it right, gets to plant a tall rose in the center of the heart tin, which you have kept separate from the supply of flowers. As they are doing so, you can say something like:) "In one of His books, Baha'u'llah talks about the rose of love. (Persian Hidden Words, #3) The rose is considered by many to be the most beautiful flower on earth, and the Ridvan Garden was full of them. Followers of Baha'u'llah gave Him so many roses from the garden of Ridvan the pile in His tent was too big to see across! And during Ridvan, Baha'u'llah sent roses to His friends in the city of Baghdad. So, as a Ridvan gift for all the children and youth, we would like to give each of you a little perfumed rose to wear over your heart, to remind you that a new spiritual springtime has begun with the coming of Baha'u'llah, and also, that whenever you show love, its like having a rose bloom in the garden of your heart."

The above presentation gives a more educational, less formal feel to the holy day, and should not be used with groups over 50. I don't do it often, b/c we generally have a very elegant and structured program for our big public Ridvan celebration. But there are always 3 holy days in Ridvan, and for the other 2, we usually have more casual and intimate observances—which are more appropriate circumstances for this kind of activity. A home or classroom venue are ideal.

Also instead of rose pins or heart gardens you can give out 4 or 6 inch glow sticks and relate to the light of Baha'u'llah's revelation illumining the world. There are hundreds of quotes which relate to this. I always wrap the sticks in pretty paper to make them more elegant and to prevent kids from obsessing over what color to choose. If your event is not at night, this might not be a good idea, unless you can darken a room. At one Ridvan the children gleefully opened their light sticks, traded for their favorite colors, and then danced to "This Little Light of Mine" in the dark waving their sticks wildly. (A nice version of this song is

on Raffi's *Rise and Shine* recording. The best price for glow sticks are available from Chemical Light, ph. 800-446-3200 or [www.chemlite.com](http://www.chemlite.com)). Some children even did impromptu choreography together. They will have a wonderful time dancing and waving and tossing their glow sticks in the air. The room must be quite dark for this to work. It's also extra visually appealing if you provide many different colors. Chemical Light has 9 different colors. Some brands also come with cords. Its a good idea to warn kids not to swing the sticks that are on a cord around while dancing b/c someone will get hit in the eye. You can, however, teach them to hold the glow stick with just an inch of cord and spin it in the air like a lasso, one hand doing the spinning, one hand holding the rest of the cord. This technique keeps the stick spinning in a very small controlled space and will help prevent collisions. Just for precaution, have kids spread out. One year, we got 100 6 inch sticks for 60 cents each. So the adults got them too. There were just enough for everyone. It was a really joyful ending to our celebration. The following is the dialogue that preceded the giving of the glowsticks:

*We'd like to conclude tonight's program with a group dance to "This Little Light of Mine". The Baha'i Writings state that: God sent His Prophets into the world to teach and enlighten man, to explain to him the mystery of the Power of the Holy Spirit, to enable him to reflect the light, and so in his turn, to be the source of guidance to others. The Heavenly Books, the Bible, the Qur'an, and the other Holy Writings have been given by God as guides into the paths of Divine virtue, love, justice and peace. (Abdu'l-Baha: Paris Talks, pages 61-62) When we turn towards God's Prophets, the mirrors of our hearts reflect Their light. When we follow Their teachings, we become spiritually luminous and radiant, shining with virtues like love, unity, trustworthiness, and wisdom. Its as if we have a beautiful light inside. So with that in mind, we would like to give all our guests a glow stick to dance with.*

### **Day of the Covenant:**

Say Tablet of Visitation. This is also beautifully done on the *Wings of Prayer* cassette, (see p. 7).

Have children memorize passages from Tablet of the Heart, especially ones mentioning Abdu'l-Baha. Let them share their new verses and write them in gold ink, let children decorate borders. (Pages from the Sunflower Book #2 "My Favorite Prayers and Passages" can be copied and used for this purpose. They have a variety of borders surrounding a blank space for the Writings.)

Dance to songs about Abdu'l-Baha from the *Happy Ayyam-i-Ha*, *Artists for the Arc*, or *Loving Hands* tapes, use musical instruments, point to picture of Him when His name is mentioned in the songs as part of the dance. Or have your children or students choreograph and perform for the Holy Day.

Discuss who Abdu'l-Baha is and why He is so special and important, what His name means. Mention His station as Center of the Covenant, infallible interpreter, and perfect exemplar. Talk about covenants and promises.

Read stories or poems about Him. Ask children what virtues He expressed in the story. Brilliant Star Magazine May 1985 issue has a beautiful poem about Abdu'l-Baha.

Children love this arts and crafts activity: Provide an abundance of miscellaneous materials and illustrate in 3D any of the Writings from Tablet of the Heart children's book, which is an incredibly beautiful compilation of Abdu'l-Baha's Writings which are really relevant to children's daily lives.

Give the children situations to act out, behaving as they think Abdu'l-Baha would. Or, do the virtue skits described on page 10, noting that Abdu'l-Baha was the perfect example of virtues in action, that we are to strive to be like Him and that He said that the purpose of our lives was to acquire virtues (Paris Talks p. 177).

Talk about how Abdu'l-Baha gave us a wealth of guidance on how to live our lives, and how He particularly loved children and wrote many tablets on how to educate them so they would be spiritual beings and transform the world. Then hand out to everyone a sheet with 10-15 selections from Tablet of the Heart. Next, present a basket which contains these same selections on separate pieces of folded paper. Divide those willing to participate into groups of 2-4 children with an adult or youth. Each group chooses a piece of paper and in separate rooms develops a pantomime skit (props optional) and reconvenes in 10 minutes. (If the group can't think of how to express their writing, let them choose another). Using the sheet with the selections, audience guesses which selection is being acted out. (Ask them to wait until the skit is done to show respect, and to read in full the writing so this becomes like a deepening also.) This activity has always been a big success.

Teach young children the following fingerplay, explaining how we should use our physical bodies to serve humanity and express virtues, relate to Abdu'l-Baha's behavior: Two eyes to see nice things to do, 2 lips to smile the whole day through, 2 ears to hear what others say, 2 hands to put our toys away, a tongue to speak sweet words each day, a loving heart for work or play, 2 feet that errands gladly run, make happy days for everyone. (By Louise Oglevee).

Give children a bookmark with 4 stickers on it: A star to represent shining spiritually like a brilliant star when we are virtuous like Abdu'l-Baha, a butterfly to represent how we become spiritually transformed when we try to be like Abdu'l-Baha as a caterpillar does, a heart to represent the love Abdu'l-Baha had for all people, especially children, and how we should do the

same, and a flower to represent the beauty we bring to the world when we are virtuous and spiritual like Abdu'l-Baha. Suggest that children put it in a book from which they are memorizing passages to help them grow spiritually.

On one particular Day of the Covenant we decorated our house with stars every where. Stars of all sizes and colors (including gold, silver, iridescent, & holographic) can be obtained from Stumps Party catalog (phone 800-348-5084). Kinkos and Office Depot often carry papers with the star motif. I just recently learned from Lights of Guidance that it is the 5 pointed, not the 9 pointed star which is the symbol for our Faith, so these stars are perfect. Any way, since both Abdu'l-Baha and Baha'u'llah use the star metaphor extensively, I decided to take advantage of this and go all out to create a magical atmosphere for our holy day. My twin sister and I decorated until wee hours of the morning and this was the end result: Flat stars on the ceiling and lampshades, fold out cardboard stars on the walls, luminaria bags with star shaped holes lining the outdoor walkway, star floating candles, 3 dimensional stars hanging from various places, the Writings on paper covered with stars, the programs had stars, plates, cups, and napkins with stars, star shaped plastic ice cubes, and for a gift for the children, small party bags with stars on the outside and all sorts of stars on the inside for arts and crafts (sequins, confetti, rhinestone stars in a film vial wrapped in gold contact paper, star stickers, puffy fabric stars, shiny cardboard stars, star tissue paper etc. Star items are always cheap and on sale after Christmas. The program heading after the title of the holy day was "*Ye must shine as stars radiating the light of love toward all mankind.*" Abdu'l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 348 The program included prayers by Abdu'l-Baha for children to music, Writings about Abdu'l-Baha and Writings using the star metaphor by Abdu'l-Baha, short stories about Him, virtue skits (see pages 11-12), gifts for the kids, and of course refreshments. We talked about what it means to shine in darkness, that it is the virtues which make us radiant and luminous in this darksome world. We also pointed out that Abdu'l-Baha was the perfect exemplar of virtues—the stories reinforced this awareness. The skits were hilarious and touching and we all had a blast. The children loved the decorations—they oohed and ahed as they came in and the whole evening was filled with cheerful and warm feelings.

Here are the Writings we used referring to Abdu'l-Baha:

*Render thanks unto God, O people, for His appearance; for verily He is the most great Favor unto you, the most perfect bounty upon you; and through Him every mouldering bone is quickened. Whoso turneth towards Him hath turned towards God, and whoso turneth away from Him hath turned away from My beauty, hath repudiated My Proof, and transgressed against Me. He is the Trust of God amongst you.... We have sent Him down in the form of a human temple. Blest and sanctified be God Who createth whatsoever He willeth through His inviolable, His infallible decree. ~Baha'u'llah, (referring to Abdu'l-Baha)*

*Blessed, doubly blessed, is the ground which His footsteps have trodden, the eye that hath been cheered by the beauty of His countenance, the ear that hath been honoured by hearkening to His call, the heart that hath tasted the sweetness of His love, the breast that hath dilated through His remembrance, the pen that hath voiced His praise, the scroll that hath borne the testimony of His writings. ~Baha'u'llah, (referring to Abdu'l-Baha)*

*He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Center and Pivot of Baha'u'llah's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Baha'i ideal, the incarnation of every Baha'i virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God, the Being "round Whom all names revolve," the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation - styles and titles that are implicit and find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name Abdu'l-Baha. He is, above and beyond these appellations, the "Mystery of God" - an expression by which Baha'u'llah Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of Abdu'l-Baha the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized. ~Shoghi Effendi*

I chose the following Writings with star metaphors because many can be understood by children and seekers not that familiar with Baha'i Writings.

### *The Writings and Words of Abdu'l-Baha*

*God has crowned you with honour and in your hearts has He set a radiant star; verily the light thereof shall brighten the whole world!*

*All those who seek truth in the Heavenly Kingdom shine like the stars; they are like fruit trees laden with choice fruit, like seas full of precious pearls.*

*Let the love and light of the Kingdom radiate through you until all who look upon you shall be illumined by its reflection. Be as stars, brilliant and sparkling in the loftiness of their heavenly station.*

*It is incumbent upon you to ponder in your hearts and meditate upon His words, and humbly to call upon Him, and to put away self in His heavenly Cause. These are the things that will make of you signs of guidance unto all mankind, and brilliant stars shining down from the all-highest horizon, and towering trees in the Abha Paradise.*

*He whom the grace of Thy mercy aideth, though he be but a drop, shall become the boundless ocean, and the merest atom which the outpouring of Thy loving-kindness assisteth, shall shine even as the radiant star.*

*Erelong ye will, with your own eyes, witness how brilliantly every one of you, even as a shining star, will radiate in the firmament of your country the light of divine Guidance, and will bestow upon its people the glory of an everlasting life.*

*Strive, therefore, with heart and soul that ye become..... glittering stars on the horizon of Truth and may become the cause of the propagation of the light of the Kingdom...*

*Be ye assured with the greatest assurance that, verily, God will help those who are firm in His Covenant in every matter, through His confirmation and favor, the lights of which will shine forth unto the east of the earth, as well as the west thereof. He will make them the signs of guidance among the creation and as shining and glittering stars from all horizons.*

*O God, guide me, protect me, make of me a shining lamp and a brilliant star.*

*O my Lord and my Hope! Help Thou Thy loved ones to be steadfast in Thy mighty Covenant, to remain faithful to Thy manifest Cause, and to carry out the commandments Thou didst set down for them in Thy Book of Splendours; that they may become banners of guidance and lamps of the Company above, wellsprings of Thine infinite wisdom, and stars that lead aright, as they shine down from the supernal sky. Verily art Thou the Invincible, the Almighty, the All-Powerful.*

*Bestow upon us the breath of the Holy Spirit, so that we may be assisted in Thy service and, like unto brilliant stars, shine in these regions with the light of Thy guidance. Verily, Thou art the Powerful, the Mighty, the Wise and the Seeing.*

(The page references were removed to give the document a more elegant and less academic look and to save space).

Another theme you can use is candles. Abdu'l-Baha used this metaphor very frequently in His Writings, and the World Congress CD has a beautiful song about Abdu'l-Baha using the candle image.

Here are some related quotes:

*They must disperse themselves in every land, pass by every clime, and travel throughout all regions. Bestirred, without rest, and steadfast to the end, they must raise in every land the triumphal cry "Ya Baha'u'l-Abha!" (O Thou the Glory of Glories), must achieve renown in the world wherever they go, must*

*burn brightly even as a candle in every meeting and must kindle the flame of Divine love in every assembly; that the light of truth may rise resplendent in the midmost heart of the world, that throughout the East and throughout the West a vast concourse may gather under the shadow of the Word of God, that the sweet savor of holiness may be diffused, that faces may shine radiantly, hearts be filled with the Divine spirit and souls be made heavenly. ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Will and Testament, page 10*

*Beg thou God to make thee a lighted candle, so that thou mayest guide a great multitude through this darksome world. ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, page 100*

*Every morning at dawn I supplicate the Kingdom of God and ask that you may be filled with the breath of the Holy Spirit, so that you may become brilliant candles, shine with the light of guidance and dispel the darkness of error. ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Baha'i World Faith, page 429*

*The world of humanity is filled with darkness; you are its radiant candles.  
~`Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 337*

*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.  
~`Abdu'l-Baha: Excellence in All Things, page 376*

*Like a candle must ye shed your light,.... Illumine the hearts of humankind....In the darkness of the world be ye radiant flames.... Now is the time to serve, now is the time to be on fire.  
~`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, pages 266-267*

*I pray in your behalf, seeking heavenly confirmations for you that each one may become a radiant candle, shedding light in the world of humanity. ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 320*

*It is religion, to sum up, which produces all human virtues, and it is these virtues which are the bright candles of civilization. ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Secret of Divine Civilization, page 98*

*So far as ye are able, ignite a candle of love in every meeting, and with tenderness rejoice and cheer ye every heart. ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, page 34*

And here is yet another program used for the Day of the Covenant, geared mostly for Baha'is on the power of the Covenant:

1. *Musical Selection:*

*When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root. ~Baha'u'llah: The Kitab-i-Aqdas, page 63 (From Joe Crone's Immerse Yourselves...)*

2. *O ye beloved of God, know that steadfastness and firmness in this new and wonderful Covenant is indeed the spirit that quickeneth the hearts which are overflowing with the love of the Glorious Lord; verily, it is the power which penetrates into the hearts of the people of the world! Your Lord hath assuredly promised His servants who are firm and steadfast to render them victorious at all times, to exalt their word, propagate their power, diffuse their lights, strengthen their hearts, elevate their banners, assist their hosts, brighten their stars, increase the abundance of the showers of mercy upon them, and enable the brave lions to conquer. ~Abdu'l-Baha: Baha'i World Faith, page 357*

3. *Hasten, hasten, O ye firm believers! Hasten, hasten, O ye steadfast! Abandon the heedless, set aside every ignorant, take hold of the strong rope, be firm in this Great Cause, draw light from this Evident Light, be patient and be steadfast in this wise Religion! Ye shall see the hosts of inspiration descending*

successively from the Supreme World, the procession of attraction falling incessantly from the heights of heaven, the abundance of the Kingdom of El-Abha outpouring continually and the teachings of God penetrating with the utmost power, while the heedless are indeed in evident loss..... ~Abdu'l-Baha: Baha'i World Faith, page 357

4. Were it not for the protecting power of the Covenant to guard the impregnable fort of the Cause of God, there would arise among the Baha'is, in one day, a thousand different sects as was the case in former ages. But in this Blessed Dispensation, for the sake of the permanency of the Cause of God and the avoidance of dissension amongst the people of God, the Blessed Beauty (may my soul be a sacrifice unto Him), has through the Supreme Pen written the Covenant and the Testament; He appointed a Center, the Exponent of the Book and the annuller of disputes. Whatever is written or said by Him is conformable to the truth and under the protection of the Blessed Beauty. He is infallible. The express purpose of this last Will and Testament is to set aside disputes from the world. ~Abdu'l-Baha: Baha'i World Faith, pgs. 357-358

5. Suffer the friends to become firm in the Covenant and give the message of the Kingdom of Abha to other souls. Praise be to God that the believers in America are steadfast but the firmer they are the better that no one might be able to intrude and introduce disputes, for disputes destroy the foundation of God's Institution. ~Abdu'l-Baha: Baha'i World Faith, page 358

6. Musical Selection:

Earth and heaven cannot contain Me; what can alone contain Me is the heart of him that believeth in Me, and is faithful to My Cause. ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 186 (From Joe Crone's Immerse Yourselves...)

7. His Holiness Abraham, on Him be peace, made a covenant concerning His Holiness Moses and gave the glad-tidings of His coming. His Holiness Moses made a covenant concerning the Promised One, i.e. His Holiness Christ, and announced the good news of His Manifestation to the world. His Holiness Christ made a covenant concerning the Paraclete and gave the tidings of His coming. His Holiness the Prophet Muhammad made a covenant concerning His Holiness the Bab and the Bab was the One promised by Muhammad, for Muhammad gave the tidings of His coming. The Bab made a Covenant concerning the Blessed Beauty of Baha'u'llah and gave the glad-tidings of His coming for the Blessed Beauty was the One promised by His Holiness the Bab. Baha'u'llah made a covenant concerning a promised One who will become manifest after one thousand or thousands of years. He likewise, with His Supreme Pen, entered into a great Covenant and Testament with all the Baha'is whereby they were all commanded to follow the Center of the Covenant after His departure, and turn not away even to a hair's breadth from obeying Him. ~Abdu'l-Baha: Baha'i World Faith, page 358

8. As to the most great characteristic of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, a specific teaching not given by any of the Prophets of the past: It is the ordination and appointment of the Center of the Covenant. By this appointment and provision He has safeguarded and protected the religion of God against differences and schisms, making it impossible for anyone to create a new sect or faction of belief. To ensure unity and agreement He has entered into a Covenant with all the people of the world, including the interpreter and explainer of His teachings, so that no one may interpret or explain the religion of God according to his own view or opinion and thus create a sect founded upon his individual understanding of the divine Words. The Book of the Covenant or Testament of Bahá'u'lláh is the means of preventing such a possibility, for whosoever shall speak from the authority of himself alone shall be degraded. Be ye informed and cognizant of this. Abdu'l-Baha: The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pages 455-456

9. The purpose of the Blessed Beauty in entering into this Covenant and Testament was to gather all existent beings around one point so that the thoughtless souls, who in every cycle and generation have been the cause of dissension, may not undermine the Cause. He hath, therefore, commanded that

*whatever emanateth from the Centre of the Covenant is right and is under His protection and favour, while all else is error. ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha, page 209*

*10. Today, the Lord of Hosts is the defender of the Covenant, the forces of the Kingdom protect it, heavenly souls tender their services, and heavenly angels promulgate and spread it broadcast. If it is considered with insight, it will be seen that all the forces of the universe, in the last analysis serve the Covenant. In the future it shall be made evident and manifest.*

*~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha, page 228*

*11. O my Lord and my Hope! Help Thou Thy loved ones to be steadfast in Thy mighty Covenant, to remain faithful to Thy manifest Cause, and to carry out the commandments Thou didst set down for them in Thy Book of Splendours; that they may become banners of guidance and lamps of the Company above, wellsprings of Thine infinite wisdom, and stars that lead aright, as they shine down from the supernal sky. Verily art Thou the Invincible, the Almighty, the All-Powerful.*

*~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha, page 259*

*12. Musical Selection: Look at Me, Follow Me (From the World Congress CD) or "First Condition" from Barb Qualls' King of Days CD. Available at [www.BahaiResources.com](http://www.BahaiResources.com)*

**IN CONCLUSION**, every parent or teacher can create experiences which are meaningful to their particular children or students using the imagery in the Writings. I tend to use flower, garden, light, star, candle, mirror, gem, and heart metaphors a lot. But you may be attracted to and find it easier to employ different symbols. (Water, wings and soaring, and sweetness are others). The key is beauty, joy, love, unity, and dignity in implanting the Baha'i reality and spirit into their hearts and souls forever.

## **OTHER DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE on the website:**

My current email address is [lqualls@earthlink.net](mailto:lqualls@earthlink.net). I never charge for my documents, but I do request that you do not forward or make copies of your own printed hard copy for distribution of them—just give others who are interested my website address. (<http://home.earthlink.net/~lqualls/>) I continually update and revise my documents and always want the most recent versions sent out, and also this way I get feedback. Also, if you want clarification/elaboration of any project or event or activity in any of these documents, I would rather that you call me at 937-767-7079--I hate typing and spend way too much time at the computer creating curriculum and doing LSA secretarial work as it is. Then I get neck spasms—so unless the answer is very short—please call instead of email if you want information in more detail.

You may find it helpful to peruse the following companion document: A COMPILATION OF WRITINGS USED FOR ACTIVITIES DESCRIBED IN BUILDING A STRONG BAHAI IDENTITY IN YOUNG CHILDREN: A CONCRETE APPROACH. This 40+ page compilation contains hundreds of Writings which incorporate the metaphors I refer to so abundantly in this document. It is by no means exhaustive, but most of the metaphorical Writings were chosen because they are relatively more simple than others—though there are almost no Writings which don't have big words in them. Part 2 of the document contains Writings our community has used at various holy days—most of which are appropriate with non-Baha'i guests in attendance.

An extensive *to-do list* for hosting a public event with a lot of child involvement, which includes details like a supply list to steps in the planning process.

If you are interested in *virtue development*, there is a 6 page document outlining the theory and practice of virtue education in my Baha'i children's class.

A manual of over 150 mostly *cooperative games* to teach Baha'i principles, unity in diversity, and virtues, which is called the New World Order Games Manual.

A 275 page Creative Dramatics Manual for teaching Baha'i concepts and virtues to children which is full of skits, puppetry, public performance ideas, musical drama, and interactive drama activities for kids.