

## A PEP TALK FOR PARENTS

By Linden Qualls

When we embrace the teachings of Baha'u'llah, we find ourselves confronted with a rather awesome set of fresh obligations, standards, values, and goals. And to make matters even more overwhelming, we also automatically inherit a whole new array of goals for our now-Baha'i children. As we engage in deepening our knowledge and understanding of our Faith, (one of our many primary new goals), we soon discover that our goals for our children should be very high indeed! A brief perusal of the compilations on Baha'i Education, and Baha'i Marriage and Family Life, Foundations for a Spiritual Education, and Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha will abundantly confirm this:

*"...From their earliest days, thoroughly train them, rear them to have a goodly character and good morals, guide them to all the virtues of humankind, prevent the development of any behaviour that would be worthy of blame, and foster them in the embrace of Baha'i education. Thus shall these tender infants be nurtured at the breast of the knowledge of God and His love. Thus shall they grow and flourish, and be taught righteousness and the dignity of humankind, resolution and the will to strive and to endure. Thus shall they learn perseverance in all things, the will to advance, high mindedness and high resolve, chastity and purity of life. Thus shall they be enabled to carry to a successful conclusion whatsoever they undertake."*

~Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha, pages 124-125

These idealistic goals are indeed attainable--in degrees-- and are very powerful tools for raising children; they are guiding lights capable of becoming an energizing force in our roles as parents. Because the external social and cultural environment relentlessly beckons all ages to ignore or transgress the teachings and principles of our Faith, we must pursue our spiritual parental goals and duties with intense, focused, willful, deliberate, steadfast determination and unswerving perseverance. Many exhortations of Abdu'l-Baha express this:

*"O maid-servants of the Merciful! It is incumbent upon you to train the children from their earliest babyhood! It is incumbent upon you to beautify their morals! It is incumbent upon you to attend to them under all aspects and circumstances, inasmuch as God - glorified and exalted is He! - hath ordained mothers to be the primary trainers of children and infants. This is a great and important affair and a high and exalted position, and it is not allowable to slacken therein at all!"* ~Abdu'l-Baha: Education, page 290

(In many Baha'i writings, fathers are informed that it is also their sacred duty to educate their children in morals, reading, writing, and the sciences and arts.)

Just as the embryo needs a very protected, pure, and healthy maternal environment in which to develop its physical aspects so that the child can function fully and capably in the outer world--without becoming incapacitated when subjected to the toxins inherent in the environment--the Baha'i child needs a similar spiritual environment, in the womb of the family.

*"...rear them so that from their earliest days, within their inmost heart, their very nature, a way of life will be firmly established that will conform to the divine Teachings in all things."* ~Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, page 126

The Baha'i Family is the womb world in which these goals are realized. It is there to buffer and protect, to nurture and develop our children's spiritual natures. If this womb world is vigilantly attended to, when our

children emerge into the outer prevailing dominant non-Baha'i culture, they are strong and healthy spiritually, capable of withstanding most of the destructive values, attitudes, and habits which will continually bombard them. (This process of exposure is, of course, happening gradually all the time, but it is especially pronounced at the onset of formal schooling and intensifies thereafter).

*"In a time to come, morals will degenerate to an extreme degree. It is essential that children be reared in the Baha'i way, that they may find happiness both in this world and the next. If not, they shall be beset by sorrows and troubles, for human happiness is founded upon spiritual behaviour."* ---Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, page 127

In other words, we want our children to possess such a strong Baha'i identity, for their spiritual attributes to be so well developed, that to even consider engaging in an activity or to contemplate adopting a value or attitude which contradicts the Baha'i principles in any way, would cause intense emotional discomfort and be perceived as totally incompatible with their basic identity and self image. Doing anything that is fundamentally at variance with Baha'u'llah's teachings should cause Baha'i children to cringe and to feel as if they are betraying their inner core, a betrayal too painful to bear:

*"Good character must be taught. Light must be spread afar, so that, in the school of humanity, all may acquire the heavenly characteristics of the spirit, and see for themselves beyond any doubt that there is no fiercer hell, no more fiery abyss, than to possess a character that is evil and unsound; no more darksome pit nor loathsome torment than to show forth qualities which deserve to be condemned.*

*The individual must be educated to such a high degree that he would rather have his throat cut than tell a lie, and would think it easier to be slashed with a sword or pierced with a spear than to utter calumny or be carried away by wrath.*

*Thus will be kindled the sense of human dignity and pride, to burn away the reappings of lustful appetites. Then will each one of God's beloved shine out as a bright moon with qualities of the spirit, and the relationship of each to the Sacred Threshold of his Lord will be not illusory but sound and real, will be as the very foundation of the building, not some embellishment on its facade."*

~Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, pages 136-137

Both you and your children will grow together and teach each other, and many times it will not be easy, pleasant, or fun. The virtues of steadfastness, determination, and perseverance will be required to a great degree. These virtues are referred to extensively in the Baha'i Writings. In addition to those 3 particular ones, you will be compelled to call on and develop a large variety of other virtues to succeed. So if we want to develop spiritually, quicken the pace of achieving our purpose in life,\* and grow nearer to God\*\*, then one powerful way is to dedicate ourselves to the education of children. Children are a precious gift from God, and we benefit from our training of them as much as they do.

\*When someone asked: "What is the purpose of our lives?" ~`Abdu'l-Baha replied: "To acquire virtues." Paris Talks, p. 177

\*\*.....nearness to God is..... is dependent upon.....acquisition of praiseworthy virtues..... ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 148