

12 FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES FOR the SPIRITUAL & MORAL EDUCATION OF CHILDREN:  
A BAHAI PERSPECTIVE  
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*“The proper education of children is of vital importance to the progress of mankind, and the heart and essential foundation of all education is spiritual and moral training.”*

*“Children are the most precious treasure a community can possess, for in them are the promise and the guarantee of the future.”*

- Universal House of Justice (Baha'i International Governing Body)

Unfortunately, these precious treasures are being raised in a world immersed in a sea of crass materialism, a world that is trampled and torn asunder by greed, hedonism, passionate individualism and self interest.

How do we protect their tender spiritual natures from all the powerful forces that promote selfishness, aggression, insatiable consumerism, corruption, shallow and superficial values, domination of others, a sense of entitlement & superiority, and obsessive self-centeredness?

How do we raise vibrant spiritual beings in a culture permeated with such rampant negative characteristics? In other words, how do we nurture the higher nature of children in a world that is so drenched in the influence of the lower nature? How do we cultivate virtues such as generosity, honesty, service, respect, courtesy, kindness, and justice in such a way that children consistently express them in their daily lives?

Today, I would like to share 12 guiding principles that I believe, if followed, begin to answer these questions.

In this gathering I will share only a few brief concrete examples of putting the fundamental principles in practice. If interested, after the presentation, people can peruse the numerous photo albums on display in the other room which document activities in Baha'i children's classes and in our family life and give myriads of examples of concrete ways of teaching virtues and spiritual concepts to children.

Also, I will provide a handout at the end of the talk that contains numerous Baha'i quotations on moral education in addition to the ones used in this presentation, and 3 examples from parent letters I wrote describing activities and techniques used in the classroom to promote virtue development.

#### PRINCIPLE #1

All beings are born with 2 natures, the higher, divine nature, and the lower animal nature.

*In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone. Signs of both these natures are to be found in men. In his material aspect he expresses untruth, cruelty and injustice; all these are the outcome of his lower nature. The attributes of his Divine nature are shown forth in love, mercy, kindness, truth and justice, one and all being expressions of his higher nature. Every good habit, every noble quality belongs to man's spiritual nature, whereas all his imperfections and sinful actions are born of his material nature. ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Paris Talks, page 60*

This is a middle way of viewing children—we don't believe they are born sinful. The Baha'i Writings state that children are born pure.

*The hearts of all children are of the utmost purity. They are mirrors upon which no dust has fallen. But this purity is on account of weakness and innocence, not on account of any strength and testing, for as this is the early period of their childhood, their hearts and minds are unsullied by the world. ~Abdu'l-Baha*

That said, we don't believe that this purity, this inner beauty in children, will just naturally be the dominating force in a child. There are just too many influences feeding the lower nature. Thus, the Baha'i writings are full of guidance on how parents can actively counteract the negative impacts of the world, how they can nurture the higher nature in children.

The higher nature is an expression of the divinely created soul, and is endowed with divine attributes, also known as virtues. Our higher nature is the image of God within us. But it does not manifest itself w/o deliberate and sustained effort on the part of a soul and the parents and teachers who are responsible for that soul. The higher nature must be cultivated, strengthened, brought forth. Two of most common metaphors used to describe this process in the Baha'i writings are that the soul is a mine, and its attributes are the gems, or that the heart is a garden, and the virtues are the flowers. Think about how much effort it takes to mine gems, how they need to be discovered, brought out of the depths of the earth, cut, and polished. And for all you gardeners in the audience, you all know what effort it takes to create and maintain a beautiful garden. Think of weeds as negative traits such as greed, anger, prejudice, etc. Another metaphor is the one of light, radiance, and illumination in reference to virtues.

(3 examples of interactive materials used in children's classes are shared, each of which reflects one of these 3 metaphors.)

*The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom. ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, page 260*

*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. ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 287*

*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 Hidden Words, # 33*

*Man is a child of God; most noble, lofty and beloved by God his creator. Therefore he must ever strive that the divine bounties and virtues bestowed upon him may prevail and control him. Just now the soil of human hearts seems like black earth, but in the innermost substance of this dark soil there are thousands of fragrant flowers latent. We must endeavor to cultivate and awaken these potentialities, discover the secret treasure in this very mine and depository of God, bring forth these resplendent powers long hidden in human hearts. Then will the glories of both worlds be blended and increased and the quintessence of human existence be made manifest. ~Abdu'l-Baha, Foundations of World Unity, p. 76*

*.....let each one of you be as a lamp shining forth with the light of the virtues of the world of humanity. ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 453*

*The light of a good character surpasseth the light of the sun and the radiance thereof. Whoso attaineth unto it is accounted as a jewel among men. ~Baha'u'llah: Tablets of Baha'u'llah, page 36*

*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: Gleanings, page 305*

*.....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*

The lower nature is much easier to express and if left untrained, a soul will sink in its depths and become a prisoner of self and passion. If we examine the affairs of the world, we can readily perceive that the animal nature is often dominating the spiritual nature--wherever there is suffering, violence, abuse, the animal or lower side of human nature is dominating the higher or spiritual side. Think about all our obsessions with sex, food, and territory. These are exactly what animals obsess about. The lower nature is much louder and more easily heeded, especially in children. For example: It is easier for a child (and for many adults) to be attached than detached, to be angry than to forgive, to be selfish than to be generous, to cling than to sacrifice.

*O MY SERVANT! Free thyself from the fetters of this world, and loose thy soul from the prison of self. Seize thy chance, for it will come to thee no more. ~Baha'u'llah: Persian Hidden Words, # 40*

*Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created.* ~Baha'u'llah: Arabic Hidden Words, # 22

Regarding the questions you asked: self has really two meanings, or is used in two senses, in the Baha'i writings; one is self, the identity of the individual created by God. This is the self mentioned in such passages as "he hath known God who hath known himself", etc. The other self is the ego, the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature that can develop into a monster of selfishness, brutality, lust and so on. It is this self we must struggle against, or this side of our natures, in order to strengthen and free the spirit within us and help it to attain perfection. (Shoghi Effendi: Living the Life, pages 18-19)

Because its usually much harder to heed the higher nature over the lower, parents and teachers need to provide their children with a darn good reason to submit to and cultivate their higher nature. This is where having a spiritual outlook is really important and helpful. A very compelling reason to heed and nurture the higher nature is found by having a spiritual definition of the meaning and purpose of life. That brings us to

#### PRINCIPLE #2A

Providing children with a spiritual definition of the meaning and purpose of life is one of the most powerful tools parents and educators have in forming the characters of children and in transforming the world for the better.

One's belief, or lack thereof, in a meaning and purpose for their life is a fundamental force in their life and in the world as a whole. This is b/c the answers to the question: "What is the meaning and purpose of my life?" will immensely determine how our children live, the answers will determine the goals they set, the means they choose to achieve those goals, the values and beliefs they adopt, their standards of behavior, the choices they make, and how they treat themselves and others..... *Thus, if we define a human as just a higher animal, here primarily to acquire material possessions and to gratify all personal desires, we will have one type of world. If however we define a human as primarily a spiritual being, here to acquire spiritual attributes and serve humanity, we will have another, very different world indeed.*

I am afraid that too many of our children and youth via the media and many other out spoken sources are behaving as if they believed in the first definition. And this leads to profound unhappiness—when we are alienated from our spiritual reality, our souls, we cannot help but be miserable and spread misery. We are prisoners of self and ego. Basically, all the destructive and negative forces we see assailing us from every side are the direct result of a loss of spiritual purpose, vision, goals, and guidance.

#### PRINCIPLE #2B

Parents and spiritual educators should undertake the task of consciously formulating the basic definition of the meaning and purpose of life that we want our children to adopt. This includes supporting beliefs and how to implement them. Otherwise, how can we clearly and consistently convey that meaning and purpose to our children?

We need to be able to effectively model, illustrate, and express that meaning and purpose in a way that is attractive, age appropriate, joyful, beautiful, vivid and meaningful to children's hearts and minds. Being clear and consistent also means not being a hypocrite and always being mindful that how we live, our daily choices, the values we abide by, the behaviors we model, do not conflict with what we espouse to be our meaning and purpose. When we define our meaning and purpose, we are also choosing myriads of supporting and implied beliefs and ramifications. These also need to be utilized and honored when raising and educating children.

As a Baha'i, I obtained my definition of the meaning and purpose of life from researching the writings of the Founder of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah, and His son, Abdu'l-Baha. I did not want to teach my daughters and students Linden's philosophy—I wanted to be true to the higher spiritual authority that I had embraced.

So I would like to share an outline of what I believe to be an accurate depiction of Baha'i fundamentals on the meaning and purpose of life, and how to concretely achieve that purpose. This includes supporting beliefs. This outline can serve as a clear example of just how detailed and specific we need to be in formulating the meaning and purpose of life that we wish to teach our children---no matter what our spiritual beliefs and traditions may be.

Baha'i Writings teach that if children are effectively spiritually educated, they will likely live spiritually motivated and virtuous lives. They will be a dynamic source of goodness and beauty in the world and bring joy and benefit to others. Here are some basics of what children are to be taught:

- We are primarily spiritual beings with an eternal soul and the **meaning and purpose of life** is to develop that soul through the knowledge and love of God. The daily obligatory prayers of Baha'is state this emphatically.

*Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him -- a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation.... ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 64*

*I have breathed within thee a breath of My own Spirit, that thou mayest be My lover. Why hast thou forsaken Me and sought a beloved other than Me? ~Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, #19*

*Is it not astonishing that although man has been created for the knowledge and love of God, for the virtues of the human world, for spirituality, heavenly illumination and eternal life, nevertheless, he continues ignorant and negligent of all this? Consider how he seeks knowledge of everything except knowledge of God. ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 227*

*.....from the very beginning, the children must receive divine education and must continually be reminded to remember their God. Let the love of God pervade their inmost being, commingled with their mother's milk. ~Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 127*

#### **Supporting beliefs and ramifications:**

- The more we know and love God, the more spiritually alive, enlightened, and beautiful we become.

*I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life. ~Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words #4*

*Thou art My lamp and My light is in thee. Get thou from it thy radiance and seek none other than Me. For I have created thee rich and have bountifully shed My favor upon thee. ~Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words #11*

- The Divine Creator is ultimately an unknowable essence, but we can attain relative understanding of Him and His will through studying and meditating on the teachings of His Divinely ordained Messengers such as Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Muhammad, & Baha'u'llah.

*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*

*He Who is everlastingly hidden from the eyes of men can never be known except through His Manifestation, and His Manifestation can adduce no greater proof of the truth of His Mission than the proof of His own Person.*

*The door of the knowledge of the Ancient Being hath ever been, and will continue for ever to be, closed in the face of men. No man's understanding shall ever gain access unto His holy court. As a token of His mercy, however, and as a proof of His loving-kindness, He hath manifested unto men the Day Stars of His divine guidance, the Symbols of His divine unity, and hath ordained the knowledge of these sanctified Beings to be identical with the knowledge of His own Self. Whoso recognizeth them hath recognized God. Whoso hearkeneth to their call, hath hearkened to the Voice of God, and whoso testifieth to the truth of their Revelation, hath testified to the truth of God Himself. Whoso turneth away from them, hath turned away from God, and whoso disbelieveth in them, hath disbelieved in God. Every one of them is the Way of God that connecteth this world with the realms above, and the Standard of His Truth unto every one in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. They are the Manifestations of God amidst men, the evidences of His Truth, and the signs of His glory. ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, pages 49-50*

*The source of all learning is the knowledge of God, exalted be His Glory, and this cannot be attained save through the knowledge of His Divine Manifestation. ~Baha'u'llah: Tablets of Baha'u'llah, page 156*

*And since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between the transient and the Eternal, the contingent and the Absolute, He hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. Unto this subtle, this mysterious and ethereal Being He hath assigned a twofold nature; the physical, pertaining to the world of matter, and the spiritual, which is born of the substance of God Himself..... These Essences of Detachment, these resplendent Realities are the channels of God's all-pervasive grace. Led by the light of unfailing guidance, and invested with supreme sovereignty, They are commissioned to use the inspiration of Their words, the effusions of Their infallible grace and the sanctifying breeze of Their Revelation for the cleansing of every longing heart and receptive spirit from the dross and dust of earthly cares and limitations. Then, and only then, will the Trust of God, latent in the reality of man, emerge, as resplendent as the rising Orb of Divine Revelation, from behind the veil of concealment, and implant the ensign of its revealed glory upon the summits of men's hearts. ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 64*

- We also can gain knowledge of God and develop and show love for Him through:

1. Prayer

*The wisdom of prayer is this: That it causeth a connection between the servant and the True One, because in that state man with all heart and soul turneth his face towards His Highness the Almighty, seeking His association and desiring His love and compassion. The greatest happiness for a lover is to converse with his beloved, and the greatest gift for a seeker is to become familiar with the object of his longing.... ~Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i World Faith p. 368*

2. Acknowledging His Oneness

*That which is of paramount importance for the children, that which must precede all else, is to teach them the oneness of God and the laws of God. ~Baha'u'llah: Baha'i Education, page 248*

3. Obedience to the laws and teachings set forth by His chosen Messengers. Baha'u'llah says:

*The Tongue of My power hath, from the heaven of My omnipotent glory, addressed to My creation these words: "Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty." Happy is the lover that hath inhaled the divine fragrance of his Best-Beloved from these words, laden with the perfume of a grace which no tongue can describe. ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 332*

*True belief in God and recognition of Him cannot be complete save by acceptance of that which He hath revealed and by observance of whatsoever hath been decreed by Him and set down in the Book by the Pen of Glory. ~Baha'u'llah: Tablets of Baha'u'llah, page 50*

*The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation..... It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration. ~Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 19*

4. Developing and expressing the attributes of God within us, the virtues.
5. Sharing His beautiful and healing teachings with the rest of humanity so that, as Baha'u'llah so eloquently puts it; *the ecstasies of Thy revelation may fill the souls of all the dwellers of Thine earth.* ~Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 117

*Teach ye the Cause of God, O people of Baha, for God hath prescribed unto every one the duty of proclaiming His Message, and regardeth it as the most meritorious of all deeds.*

~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, page 278

*Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty.* ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 137

6. Loving and serving humanity and making the world a better place

*Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression.*

~Baha'u'llah: Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, page 93

*Thou didst bring mankind into being to know Thee and to serve Thy Cause, that their station might thereby be elevated upon Thine earth and their souls be uplifted by virtue of the things Thou hast revealed in Thy Scriptures, Thy Books and Thy Tablets.* ~Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 111

*And the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men? No, by the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight.*

~`Abdu'l-Baha: Secret of Divine Civilization, pgs. 2-3

7. Struggling to subordinate our own will to the will of God. This is the higher vs lower dynamic discussed earlier.

*O friends! Prefer not your will to Mine, never desire that which I have not desired for you....*

~Baha'u'llah: Persian Hidden Words, #19

*.....My will and the will of another than Me, even as fire and water, cannot dwell together in one heart.*

~Baha'u'llah: Persian Hidden Words, #31

Self-sacrifice means to subordinate this lower nature and its desires to the more godly and noble side of our selves. Ultimately, in its highest sense, self-sacrifice means to give our will and our all to God to do with as He pleases. Then He purifies and glorifies our true self until it becomes a shining and wonderful reality. (Shoghi Effendi: Living the Life, pages 18-19)

Children learn love for, and obedience and submission of their will to a higher authority via their relationship with their parents. That relationship paradigm should eventually be transferred to God and His Messengers. (This is a great example of how God set up human life so that we can learn spiritual laws and truths through physical existence).

- And one more supporting belief: True and lasting happiness is ultimately achieved only through striving to manifest spirituality in our lives. This not only means a strong relationship with God, but all that implies, such as developing virtues and loving and serving humanity, not domination and material possessions.

That brings me to

PRINCIPLE #3

A powerful and basic motivating force in life is the pursuit of happiness and contentment and thus it is imperative that we model and teach spiritual and wholesome sources of happiness. Three examples from the Baha'i writings:

*The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth.* ~Baha'u'llah: Proclamation of Baha'u'llah, page 116

*Man is, in reality, a spiritual being, and only when he lives in the spirit is he truly happy.* ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Paris Talks, page 72

*.....the happiness and greatness, the rank and station, the pleasure and peace, of an individual have never consisted in his personal wealth, but rather in his excellent character, his high resolve, the breadth of his learning, and his ability to solve difficult problems.* ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Secret of Divine Civilization, pages 23-24

Children, as do adults, yearn to be happy and fulfilled. This yearning is exploited by the commercial media and lack of happiness and fulfillment promote alcohol and drug abuse, among other addictions and harmful behaviors. This is why our children's class did a lengthy unit on sources of true happiness. A list of many of the sources of true happiness that are found in the Baha'i writings are in the handout with the quotes. (See end of this document) The contrast between the sources in those quotes and what our culture promotes through the media is truly stunning.

That said, we must be careful not to let our love and desire for our children's happiness to spoil them. We always need to look at the long term consequences when formulating parenting styles. Our children will not be happy in the long term if they feel entitled to being happy all the time and do not know how to persevere in adversity. Actually, a great source of happiness and fulfillment is achieving high goals that take tremendous effort and sacrifice. Raising our children to be wimpy and dependent, with little faith in their God given strengths, is a recipe for depression and misery.

*Give them (the children) the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art. Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship. Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.* ~Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha, page 129

#### PRINCIPLE #4

Both boys and girls should thoroughly understand that males and females are equal in worth and abilities. This does not mean they are the same, just that they are both equally endowed with marvelous virtues, abilities and potential. The oppression and/or devaluing of females is harmful to the progress of everyone.

*Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God.*~ Baha'u'llah, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 379)

*Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other.*~Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words #68)

*Among the teachings of Baha'u'llah is the principle of equality of man and woman. Baha'u'llah has said that both belong to humankind and that in the estimation of God they are equal, for each is the complement of the other in the divine creative plan.* ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 280

*The happiness of mankind will be realized when women and men coordinate and advance equally.....*  
~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 182

*And among the teachings of Baha'u'llah is the equality of women and men. The world of humanity has two wings -one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible.* ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha, page 302

*As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs.* ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Paris Talks, page 133

*And let it be known once more that until woman and man recognize and realize equality, social and political progress here or anywhere will not be possible. For the world of humanity consists of two parts or members: one is woman; the other is man. Until these two members are equal in strength, the*

oneness of humanity cannot be established, and the happiness and felicity of mankind will not be a reality. ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 77

*The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals, or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced.* ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Women, page 369

#### PRINCIPLE #5

It's nearly impossible to succeed in raising a child to maintain and express a spiritual definition of the meaning and purpose of life w/o the reinforcing support of a like-minded network such as extended family or spiritual community. Cultivating spiritual values needs constant reinforcement from multiple sources, especially in a culture that undermines parental authority and corrodes spiritual values. A fabulous book on this subject is called:

The Shelter of Each Other, Rebuilding our Families by Mary Pipher. (She also wrote Reviving Ophelia, about how this culture poisons adolescent girls.)

#### PRINCIPLE #6

We need to constantly analyze influences when exposing our children to the things of this world, such as a movie, book, song, toy, game, relationship, or event. We need to ask ourselves: "What beliefs, values, & attitudes are being modeled or promoted through this? What underlying messages are being conveyed directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly? Do they undermine or support my spiritual beliefs and values?"

Beliefs, attitudes, and values are all intimately connected and related and they are also directly responsible for how we live our lives and the condition of our world. They guide and shape our lives and the lives of others in very profound ways, ---ways that are sometimes graphic, sometimes subtle.

If we examine closely the root cause of all environmental problems, crime, corruption, violence, oppression, war, hunger, injustice, poverty, conflict, etc., we find certain negative attitudes—especially those of greed, self-exaltation and self gratification as a primary motive. These attitudes reflect a core belief that the purpose of life is to gratify the self under all conditions. This belief and these attitudes generate destructive, materialistic and selfish values, --values which ultimately translate into the under-development of virtues essential to happiness, unity and justice. For ex., virtues such as service, respect, humility, and generosity find barren soil in the human heart which worships & values the self and things above all else.

We live in a culture that worships self and things at the expense of spirituality. We therefore must be a hyper-vigilant watch dog on what our children are exposed to. They are highly absorbing sponges and have not yet developed the critical and detached thinking skills to shield themselves.

#### PRINCIPLE #7

Because educating children to develop their virtues is the highest priority, it must be deliberately and systematically approached.

*The purport is this, that to train the character of humankind is one of the weightiest commandments of God, and the influence of such training is the same as that which the sun exerteth over tree and fruit. Children must be most carefully watched over, protected and trained; in such consisteth true parenthood and parental mercy.* ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Education, page 263

*...favour character and conduct above the sciences and arts. Good behaviour and high moral character must come first, for unless the character be trained, acquiring knowledge will only prove injurious.*

*Knowledge is praiseworthy when it is coupled with ethical conduct and virtuous character; otherwise it is a deadly poison, a frightful danger. ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Education, page 278*

*But the indispensable basis of all is that he (the child) should develop spiritual characteristics and the praiseworthy virtues of humankind. This is the primary consideration. If a person be unlettered, and yet clothed with divine excellence, and alive in the breaths of the Spirit, that individual will contribute to the welfare of society, and his inability to read and write will do him no harm. And if a person be versed in the arts and every branch of knowledge, and not live a religious life, and not take on the characteristics of God, and not be directed by a pure intent, and be engrossed in the life of the flesh - then he is harm personified, and nothing will come of all his learning and intellectual accomplishments but scandal and torment.*

*If, however, an individual hath spiritual characteristics, and virtues that shine out, and his purpose in life be spiritual and his inclinations be directed toward God, and he also study other branches of knowledge -then we have light upon light: his outer being luminous, his private character radiant, his heart sound, his thought elevated, his understanding swift, his rank noble. ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Education, page 282*

*....know ye that in God's sight, the best of all ways to worship Him is to educate the children and train them in all the perfections of humankind; and no nobler deed than this can be imagined. ~Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha, page 139*

Even if children have a passionate and firm spiritual belief in the meaning and purpose of life, they still need to know how to concretely act on that belief by showing forth virtues.

Thus, children need to become intimately familiar with the virtues, they need to understand that all of these beautiful qualities have been imbedded in their soul and that they have been given the power to bring them forth and illumine their lives and the world with them. We want our children's primary identity to be a spiritual one, as a luminous child of God. Children need to understand that they have the choice and ability to express any virtue.

*Upon the reality of man.... He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty. ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 65*

*Thou art My lamp and My light is in thee. Get thou from it thy radiance and seek none other than Me. For I have created thee rich and have bountifully shed My favor upon thee. ~Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words #11*

*Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created. ~Baha'u'llah: Arabic Hidden Words, # 22*

The language and reinforcement of virtues needs to be interwoven into the fabric of children's lives. They must become so familiar with them that these divine powers are readily accessible in their repertoire of responses. Especially in emotionally charged or stressful situations the lower self is likely to take over, so it is so critical that the child have a solid awareness of how to express virtues and which ones are appropriate for the situation. Otherwise impulses will have no resistance. Eventually the experience/memory of the positive impact of virtues etches itself firmly into a child's consciousness and then the child begins to more consistently choose to apply higher over the lower nature expressions based on the knowledge of the joy and positive feelings this creates, rather than based on fear of sinning, shame, etc..... the child is becoming wise and experienced.

#### PRINCIPLE #8

Applying virtues to our parent-child relationship is the best parenting and child psychology there is.

Same goes with the teacher-child relationship. Good parenting and teaching is the thoughtful application of virtues in our interactions and expectations. For example, the virtues of responsibility, wisdom, compassion, justice, patience, detachment, and sacrifice are all required to be an effective parent or teacher.

#### PRINCIPLE #9

The virtue of Moderation is essential in applying the virtues.

For example, children of parents who show too much mercy and not enough justice, end up being spoiled, self-centered, and unable to accept accountability for their actions. It is not merciful in the long run if we regularly rescue them from suffering the consequences of their actions. On the other hand, children of parents who show too much justice and not enough mercy, often are insecure and fearful or feel victimized, misunderstood, and oppressed. And if parents show too much loyalty and not enough justice, they may defend their child unwisely and unfairly and blame the teacher when they learn of their child's misbehavior. In the amount of time we spend with our children, moderation is needed. Too much time and they become dependent and self-centered, thinking they are the center of the universe and can't entertain or solve problems by themselves. Too little and they do not feel loved and miss out on all the guidance and pleasures we can bestow.

*In all matters moderation is desirable. If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a source of evil.*  
~Baha'u'llah: Tablets of Baha'u'llah, page 69

#### PRINCIPLE #10

Children are much more likely to develop their full potential spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and even physically if they feel w/o a doubt that they are loved and cherished.

This is best achieved through our actions. Children need to be cuddled, verbally affirmed, played with, firmly but lovingly disciplined, and given boundaries to know that they are loved. We need to spend lots of meaningful time with them. They feel valued when we do--- it means so much to them if we take the time to show them the wonders of nature, read a story, or help them acquire a skill or teach them how to accomplish a task. Its important to tell them how much we love them every day, but its even more potent if we prove our love through actions. Children who are raised with abundant love tend to be givers. Children who never felt enough love tend to be takers. Demonstrating our love in concrete ways is like shedding sunlight on the garden of their hearts. Gardens can not reach their full potential in darkness.

#### PRINCIPLE #11

Teaching children the preeminence of the principles of oneness is essential to achieving our highest spiritual and social potential on this planet:

The 3 principles of oneness in the Baha'i Faith: A) God is One, B) Humanity is one, and C) all the world religions are from the same one source.

If children learn these 3 deceptively simple sounding truths, it has profound implications for not only the daily practice of their morality, but for the organic structure of society as a whole. Just imagine what civilization could be like if parents and educators not only devoted themselves to developing the virtues in children, but also taught them that all the world's religions were valid & that we are all connected in the spiritual world, we are one family biologically and spiritually, created from the one same God. Metaphors used in the Baha'i writings for this concept are that we are all waves of one sea, flowers of one garden, or leaves of one tree. And the different religions that we practice are just different chapters in the unfolding book of God's revelation to humanity. Baha'u'llah calls this progressive revelation. God progressively reveals His wisdom as humanity evolves in its capacity to understand that wisdom. The different Messengers are the divine teachers , and the peoples of the world are the students. Students in first grade can not possibly grasp many of the concepts taught in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Remember that Christ said He had many things more to tell the people of His day, but that they could not bear them yet. Though older kids learn more and new things, the fundamentals learned in elementary school are not discarded. In religion, these are the unchanging, universal truths, such as God's love for us, His desire for us to know, love, and serve Him, His love of Justice, honoring one's parents, and the need for souls to seek out truth and develop the virtues of God in order to evolve.

*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, page 250)

*Close your eyes to racial differences, and welcome all with the light of oneness."*  
~Baha'u'llah as quoted by Shoghi Effendi: The Advent of Divine Justice, page 37

*The utterance of God is a lamp, whose light are these words: Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. He Who is the Day-Star of Truth beareth Me witness! So powerful is the light of unity that*

it can illuminate the whole earth. The One true God, He Who knoweth all things, Himself testifieth to the truth of these words. ~Baha'u'llah: Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, page 14

Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Baha'u'llah: Arabic Hidden Words, # 68

And among the teachings of Baha'u'llah is the equality of women and men. The world of humanity has two wings -one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible. Not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they ought to be. ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha, page 302

Your souls are as waves on the sea of the spirit; although each individual is a distinct wave, the ocean is one, all are united in God.

Every heart should radiate unity, so that the Light of the one Divine Source of all may shine forth bright and luminous. We must not consider the separate waves alone, but the entire sea. We should rise from the individual to the whole. The spirit is as one great ocean and the waves thereof are the souls of men. `Abdu'l-Baha: Paris Talks, page 84

“World order can be founded only on an unshakable consciousness of the oneness of mankind, a spiritual truth which all the human sciences confirm.... Recognition of this truth requires abandonment of prejudice--prejudice of every kind--race, class, color, creed, nation, sex, degree of material civilization, everything which enables people to consider themselves superior to others.... Universal acceptance of this spiritual principle is essential to any successful attempt to establish world peace. It should therefore be universally proclaimed, taught in schools, and constantly asserted in every nation as preparation for the organic change in the structure of society which it implies.” From The Promise of World Peace, Bahá'í World Center, 1985

All humankind are as children in a school, and the Dawning-Points of Light, the Sources of divine revelation, are the teachers, wondrous and without peer. ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha, page 128

We recognize in the manifestation of each one of them, whether outwardly or inwardly, the manifestation of none but God Himself, if ye be of those that comprehend. Every one of them is a mirror of God, reflecting naught else but His Self, His Beauty, His Might and Glory, if ye will understand..... These Mirrors will everlastingly succeed each other, and will continue to reflect the light of the Ancient of Days.....

.....I testify before God that each one of these Manifestations hath been sent down through the operation of the Divine Will and Purpose, that each hath been the bearer of a specific Message, that each hath been entrusted with a divinely-revealed Book and been commissioned to unravel the mysteries of a mighty Tablet. ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, pages 73-74

These principles and laws, these firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source, and are the rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated. ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, pgs. 287-288

There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God. The difference between the ordinances under which they abide should be attributed to the varying requirements and exigencies of the age in which they were revealed. All of them, except a few which are the outcome of human perversity, were ordained of God, and are a reflection of His Will and Purpose. Arise and, armed with the power of faith, shatter to pieces the gods of your vain imaginings, the sowers of dissension amongst you. Cleave unto that which draweth you together and uniteth you. ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 217

The Great Being saith: O ye children of men! The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the

*spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and enmity. ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 215*

## PRINCIPLE #12

Parents, educators, and children should learn to rely on and constantly use the Creative Word, also known as the Word of God. Baha'is consider it to be the greatest force on earth to uplift, guide, and transform individuals and the world.

There are multitudes of creative, beautiful, and fun ways to nurture spirituality in children. However, as a Baha'i, we are taught in our sacred scriptures that the revealed Word is a superior mystical force that operates on human souls and that has the power to educate and enlighten like nothing else on earth.

Baha'i parents and educators strive to immerse themselves and their children in the revealed words of God every day. Here are just a few of the myriad of references to the power of the Creative Word found in the Baha'i Writings:

*The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it? .....the.....task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish..... The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change. ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 200*

*Were any man to ponder in his heart that which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed and to taste of its sweetness, he would, of a certainty, find himself emptied and delivered from his own desires, and utterly subservient to the Will of the Almighty. Happy is the man that hath attained so high a station, and hath not deprived himself of so bountiful a grace. ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 343*

*Peruse ye every day the verses revealed by God. Blessed is the man who reciteth them and reflecteth upon them. He truly is of them with whom it shall be well. Gather ye together with the utmost joy and fellowship and recite the verses revealed by the merciful Lord. By so doing the doors to true knowledge will be opened to your inner beings, and ye will then feel your souls endowed with steadfastness and your hearts filled with radiant joy. Peruse My verses with joy and radiance. Verily they will attract you unto God and will enable you to detach yourselves from aught else save Him. Thus have ye been admonished in God's Holy Writ and in this resplendent Tablet. ~Baha'u'llah: The Importance of Deepening, page 188*

*The fruits of the human tree are exquisite, highly desired and dearly cherished. Among them are upright character, virtuous deeds and a goodly utterance.... Were the trees of men's lives to be adorned in this divine Springtime with the fruits that have been mentioned, the effulgence of the light of Justice would, of a certainty, illumine all the dwellers of the earth and everyone would abide in tranquillity and contentment beneath the sheltering shadow of Him Who is the Object of all mankind. The Water for these trees is the living water of the sacred Words uttered by the Beloved of the world. In one instant are such trees planted and in the next their branches shall, through the outpourings of the showers of divine mercy, have reached the skies. A dried-up tree, however, hath never been nor will be worthy of any mention. ~Baha'u'llah: Tablets of Baha'u'llah, page 257*

*We prescribe unto all men that which will lead to the exaltation of the Word of God amongst His servants, and likewise, to the advancement of the world of being and the uplift of souls. To this end, **the greatest means is education of the child.** To this must each and all hold fast. We have verily laid this charge upon you in manifold Tablets as well as in My Most Holy Book. ~Baha'u'llah: Baha'i Education, pages 245-246*

*Teach ye your children so that they may peruse the divine verses every morn and eve. ~Baha'u'llah: The Arts, pages 1-2*

## **HANDOUT & SUMMARY OF THE 12 PRINCIPLES FOR THE SPIRITUAL AND MORAL EDUCATION OF CHILDREN: A BAHÁ'Í PERSPECTIVE**

1. All beings are born with 2 natures, the higher, divine nature, and the lower animal nature. The lower nature is constantly being fed by culture & is powerful, thus the higher must be actively nurtured and strengthened.
- 2a. Providing children with a spiritual definition of the meaning and purpose of life is one of the most powerful tools parents and educators have in forming the characters of children and in transforming the world for the better.
- 2b. Parents and spiritual educators should undertake the task of consciously formulating the basic definition of the meaning and purpose of life that they want their children to adopt. This includes supporting beliefs and how to implement them.
3. A powerful and basic motivating force in life is the pursuit of happiness and contentment and thus it is imperative that we model and teach spiritual and wholesome sources of happiness.
4. Both boys and girls should thoroughly understand that males and females are equal in worth and abilities.
5. It's nearly impossible to succeed in raising a child to maintain and express a spiritual definition of the meaning and purpose of life w/o the reinforcing support of a like-minded network such as extended family or spiritual community.
6. We need to constantly analyze influences when exposing our children to the things of this world, such as a movie, book, song, toy, game, relationship, or event. We need to ask ourselves: "What beliefs, values, & attitudes are being modeled or promoted through this? What underlying messages are being conveyed directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly? Do they undermine or support my spiritual beliefs and values?"
7. Because educating children to develop their virtues is the highest priority, it must be deliberately and systematically approached. The language and modeling of virtues needs to be interwoven into the fabric of children's lives. They must become so familiar with them that these divine powers are readily accessible in their repertoire of responses.
8. Applying virtues to our parent-child relationship is the best parenting and child psychology there is.
9. The virtue of Moderation is essential in applying the virtues.
10. Children are much more likely to develop their full potential spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and even physically if they feel w/o a doubt that they are loved and cherished.
11. Teaching children the preeminence of the principles of oneness is essential to achieving our highest spiritual and social potential on this planet. (Oneness of God, of humanity, of Religion)
12. Parents, educators, and children should learn to rely on and constantly use the Creative Word, also known as the Word of God.

### **Following are 3 examples of developing virtues in action—i.e. the concrete application.**

*(These are excerpts from former parent letters and refer to activities in Rays of the Sun Baha'i children's classes).*

1. At the lunch table many children nominated each other for virtues and so, many decorated their virtue crowns with new jewels. I love listening to the children describe the good in their fellow classmates. I also nominate students, but as I can not possibly be aware of all the virtuous acts of all the students, I encourage them to notice the inner beauty in each other and share this. This also teaches them to see the good in others, which can be less obvious than our faults. Focusing on the good in others promotes unity, harmony, kindness, and creates an atmosphere of security and positive feelings. Focusing on the negative breeds insecurity, anxiety, disunity, criticism, exclusivity, judgmentalism, negative acting out, and distrust. One of the most frequent exhortations of the Baha'i Faith is to focus on the good in others and try to ignore the bad. I believe that that when children feel loved and respected, they strive to be better and to live up to the positive image they see reflected in the eyes of others, and that the opposite is also true. Backbiting, fault-finding, put downs, criticism and cliques are very popular activities in schools and I do not want this spiritually poisonous influence in our class!!! I also want children to be reinforced for their inner beauty, to get plenty of practice with the virtues, and to experience how good it feels to express the attributes of God and to perceive the positive impact virtues have on relationships. Eventually, of course the goal is to have

them internalize the value of being virtuous in and of itself and to realize that being kind and loving, etc, feels wonderful, and that feeling, along with the unity and harmony it promotes in relationships is reward enough. But they need reinforcement and practice to learn the power of virtues, especially in a society that exalts and reinforces selfishness, materialism, and hedonism above spirituality. As I have said before, I explain to the students again and again that just because someone did not notice you expressing a virtue, doesn't mean it was not worth it—God notices and your soul grows more luminous each time you polish it with a virtue. That is the true reward, not the jewels on the crown—these are only symbols.

2. You will notice in my parent letters that I consistently ask students to label and dramatize virtues. This is because I believe that in order for children to integrate the virtues into their daily lives on a regular basis, to apply them to diverse situations, to understand their relevance in healthy relationships and the power of virtues to solve conflicts and to create happiness and unity, they need to be fully aware and conscious of them. They need to understand the definition of the virtue and how it is expressed concretely in a wide variety of situations. Kids of course can express a virtue without knowing it, without being able to define it, but I am talking about children getting to the point that they are so spiritually mature that they deliberately choose to practice a virtue, that they strive in a very conscious manner to develop a virtue, that when faced with a dilemma, they have the virtue as an option and use it. Familiarity and experience with virtue expression will make it far more likely children will be able to summon a particular virtue to his/her aid in times of need. Also, I often do contrast work with virtues—showing how ugly or painful a situation can get without a particular virtue and then showing the difference with the virtue. This not only elucidates the beauty and power of the virtue, but it can also enable children to quickly recognize the symptoms and what virtue(s) are missing in a negative situation. I want children to love and cherish the virtues, to perceive and crave their beauty—to be sensitive enough that they can quickly sense the absence of a virtue and desire to express it, kind of like seeing litter in a beautiful setting inspires many of us to clean it up. The virtues are also the attributes of God, and we want our children to love Him and be attracted to His beauty. If children learn how incredibly beautiful, powerful, and rewarding virtues are, they will love and appreciate those aspects of God (and themselves) even more. The more children are attracted to the virtues, (as opposed to their opposites which are so abundantly reinforced in our culture and much easier to manifest), the more they will desire to express them in their daily lives and the closer they will grow towards God. Abdu'l-Baha said that nearness to God is likeness to God. (Promulgation of Universal Peace p. 148.) I hope that our children grow up to be so attracted to and endowed with virtues that they shed light where ever they go.

3. A note and plea on virtue development: In every class I try very hard to notice and reinforce virtue expression in the students, to point out when a virtue is needed (or ask the students to ascertain which virtues are missing in a conflict, etc.), note them in stories, ask the students questions relating to virtues, and continually associate virtues with beauty, (such as flowers) light, power, fruits, and attractiveness, and their opposites with negative metaphors such as wilting flowers, besmirched mirrors, ugliness, monsters, pollution, toxicity, sadness, disunity, darkness, etc. Hopefully, this emphasis will help prevent them from becoming spiritually callous and hard hearted as they grow older and are immersed in a culture which has such high tolerance for, and even glorifies, disrespect, violence, sexual using and immodesty, pride, ego, materialism, rudeness, selfishness, etc. It is amazing to me how often people can treat each other in insulting and degrading ways, lie, steal, maliciously gossip, swear at each other, and verbally and physically abuse others—and show no signs of remorse or embarrassment. Kids grow up so accustomed to degrading and abasing images and behavior (especially via the media) that they are no longer appalled, shocked, disgusted, or even upset and disturbed when they should be. In educating children, my goal is to increase awareness of, and sensitize the soul to, the beauty of virtues (which are the expressions of their higher nature) and also to the ugliness, danger, influence, and impact of our lower nature. I do this so that children's perceptions and judgments do not become dulled, numbed, distorted, clouded, and defective through continual exposure to our cultures' examples of models who display such little proof of the nobility and beauty of the human soul. In this way, I hope that when they perceive greed, selfishness, cruelty, etc, in themselves or in other's behavior, they will have such a strong negative association with those characteristics, that they instantly recoil, and do not continue to succumb to them or support those that do. And conversely, when they perceive the attributes of God, the virtues, they are attracted and uplifted, and strive to express those qualities in themselves and to support and associate with those who are spiritually nourishing to be around because they too are practicing the virtues.

Also, from a practical, teacher standpoint, I have learned that if I can convince the children of the beauty, power, and importance of virtues, especially the ones of courtesy, kindness and unity, the class is so much more productive, unified, peaceful, and joyful. These virtues are the foundation of the relationships in the class. Love for one another will gradually grow if they treat each other with courtesy and kindness and strive for unity. But I need your help. A measly twice a month class will not be enough to convince children that the development of virtues is the most important task of their life---unless you reinforce it in the home. Please always look for opportunities to emphasize the incredible importance of the virtues. Taking time to do this sends a clear message: You really care about virtues in their life, you really value the virtues and your children's spiritual development, their inner beauty. It is much easier to take time out to address their physical, outer beauty, (you're so cute, good at sports, etc.)—let's give equal or greater time to the inner beauty!!

**QUOTES USED OR REFERED TO IN PRESENTATION**  
**12 Fundamental Principles for the Spiritual and Moral Education of Children:**  
**A Baha'i Perspective**

(Capitalized headers are not all principles, some are just themes of the quotes below them.)

*“The proper education of children is of vital importance to the progress of mankind, and the heart and essential foundation of all education is spiritual and moral training.”*

*“Children are the most precious treasure a community can possess, for in them are the promise and the guarantee of the future.”* ~Universal House of Justice (Baha'i International governing body created by Baha'u'llah)

**CHILDREN ARE NOT BORN SINFUL**

*The hearts of all children are of the utmost purity. They are mirrors upon which no dust has fallen. But this purity is on account of weakness and innocence, not on account of any strength and testing, for as this is the early period of their childhood, their hearts and minds are unsullied by the world. They cannot display any great intelligence. They have neither hypocrisy nor deceit. This is on account of the child's weakness, whereas the man becomes pure through his strength. Through the power of intelligence he becomes simple; through the great power of reason and understanding and not through the power of weakness he becomes sincere. When he attains to the state of perfection, he will receive these qualities; his heart becomes purified, his spirit enlightened, his soul is sensitized and tender -- all through his great strength. This is the difference between the perfect man and the child. Both have the underlying qualities of simplicity and sincerity -- the child through the power of weakness and the man through the power of strength.* ~Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 52

**THE HIGHER AND LOWER NATURES**

*In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone. Signs of both these natures are to be found in men. In his material aspect he expresses untruth, cruelty and injustice; all these are the outcome of his lower nature. The attributes of his Divine nature are shown forth in love, mercy, kindness, truth and justice, one and all being expressions of his higher nature. Every good habit, every noble quality belongs to man's spiritual nature, whereas all his imperfections and sinful actions are born of his material nature. If a man's Divine nature dominates his human nature, we have a saint.* ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Paris Talks, page 60

*He has the animal side as well as the angelic side, and the aim of an educator is to so train human souls that their angelic aspect may overcome their animal side. Then if the divine power in man, which is his essential perfection, overcomes the satanic\* power, which is absolute imperfection, he becomes the most excellent among the creatures; but if the satanic power overcomes the divine power, he becomes the lowest of the creatures.* ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Some Answered Questions, pages 235-236

\* The Baha'i teachings clearly state that there is no such being as Satan or a devil and that it is a metaphor for the lower nature.

*The imperfect members of society, the weak souls in humanity, follow their natural trend. Their lives and actions are in accord with their natural propensities; they are captives of physical susceptibilities; they are not in touch or in tune with the spiritual bounties. Man has two aspects: the physical, which is subject to nature, and the merciful or divine, which is connected with God. If the physical or natural disposition in him should overcome the heavenly and merciful, he is, then, the most degraded of animal beings; and if the divine and spiritual should triumph over the human and natural, he is, verily, an angel. The Prophets come into the world to guide and educate humanity so that the animal nature of man may disappear and the divinity of his powers become awakened.*

*The divine aspect or spiritual nature consists of the breaths of the Holy Spirit. The second birth of which Jesus has spoken refers to the appearance of this heavenly nature in man. It is expressed in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and he who is baptized by the Holy Spirit is a veritable manifestation of divine mercy to mankind. Then he becomes just and kind to all humanity; he entertains prejudice and ill will toward none; he shuns no nation or people. ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 41*

*O MY SERVANT! Free thyself from the fetters of this world, and loose thy soul from the prison of self. Seize thy chance, for it will come to thee no more. ~Baha'u'llah: Persian Hidden Words, # 40*

Regarding the questions you asked: self has really two meanings, or is used in two senses, in the Baha'i writings; one is self, the identity of the individual created by God. This is the self mentioned in such passages as "he hath known God who hath known himself", etc. The other self is the ego, the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature that can develop into a monster of selfishness, brutality, lust and so on. It is this self we must struggle against, or this side of our natures, in order to strengthen and free the spirit within us and help it to attain perfection.

Self-sacrifice means to subordinate this lower nature and its desires to the more godly and noble side of our selves. Ultimately, in its highest sense, self-sacrifice means to give our will and our all to God to do with as He pleases. Then He purifies and glorifies our true self until it becomes a shining and wonderful reality. ~Shoghi Effendi: Living the Life, pages 18-19

*How lofty is the station which man, if he but choose to fulfill his high destiny, can attain! To what depths of degradation he can sink, depths which the meanest of creatures have never reached! ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 206*

*Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created. ~Baha'u'llah: Arabic Hidden Words, # 22*

*Upon the reality of man.... He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty. These energies with which the Day Star of Divine bounty and Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust and dross which cover the mirror. ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 65*

METAPHORS REGARDING THE HIGHER NATURE: A MINE OF GEMS, A GARDEN, --& VIRTUES HAVE RADIANCE

*The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom. ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, page 260*

*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. ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 287*

*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 Hidden Words, # 33*

*Man is a child of God; most noble, lofty and beloved by God his creator. Therefore he must ever strive that the divine bounties and virtues bestowed upon him may prevail and control him. Just now the soil of human hearts seems like black earth, but in the innermost substance of this dark soil there are thousands of fragrant flowers latent. We must endeavor to cultivate and awaken these potentialities, discover the secret treasure in this very mine and depository of God, bring forth these resplendent powers long hidden in human hearts. Then will the glories of both worlds be blended and increased and the quintessence of human existence be made manifest. ~Abdu'l-Baha, Foundations of World Unity, p. 76*

*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: Gleanings, page 305

*The light of a good character surpasseth the light of the sun and the radiance thereof. Whoso attaineth unto it is accounted as a jewel among men.* ~Baha'u'llah: Tablets of Baha'u'llah, page 36

*.....let each one of you be as a lamp shining forth with the light of the virtues of the world of humanity.*

~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 453

*.....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

#### MEANING AND PURPOSE OF LIFE—THE BAHAI VIEW

*Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him -- a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation....* ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 64

*Is it not astonishing that although man has been created for the knowledge and love of God, for the virtues of the human world, for spirituality, heavenly illumination and eternal life, nevertheless, he continues ignorant and negligent of all this? Consider how he seeks knowledge of everything except knowledge of God.* ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 227

*I have breathed within thee a breath of My own Spirit, that thou mayest be My lover. Why hast thou forsaken Me and sought a beloved other than Me?* ~Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, #19

*Thou didst write as to the children: from the very beginning, the children must receive divine education and must continually be reminded to remember their God. Let the love of God pervade their inmost being, commingled with their mother's milk.* ~Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 127

#### SUPPORTING BELIEFS REGARDING KNOWING AND LOVING GOD

*I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life.* ~Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words #4

*Thou art My lamp and My light is in thee. Get thou from it thy radiance and seek none other than Me. For I have created thee rich and have bountifully shed My favor upon thee.* ~Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words #11

*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

*He Who is everlastingly hidden from the eyes of men can never be known except through His Manifestation, and His Manifestation can adduce no greater proof of the truth of His Mission than the proof of His own Person.*

*The door of the knowledge of the Ancient Being hath ever been, and will continue for ever to be, closed in the face of men. No man's understanding shall ever gain access unto His holy court. As a token of His mercy, however, and as a proof of His loving-kindness, He hath manifested unto men the Day Stars*

of His divine guidance, the Symbols of His divine unity, and hath ordained the knowledge of these sanctified Beings to be identical with the knowledge of His own Self. Whoso recognizeth them hath recognized God. Whoso hearkeneth to their call, hath hearkened to the Voice of God, and whoso testifieth to the truth of their Revelation, hath testified to the truth of God Himself. Whoso turneth away from them, hath turned away from God, and whoso disbelieveth in them, hath disbelieved in God. Every one of them is the Way of God that connecteth this world with the realms above, and the Standard of His Truth unto every one in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. They are the Manifestations of God amidst men, the evidences of His Truth, and the signs of His glory. ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, pages 49-50

And since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between the transient and the Eternal, the contingent and the Absolute, He hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. Unto this subtle, this mysterious and ethereal Being He hath assigned a twofold nature; the physical, pertaining to the world of matter, and the spiritual, which is born of the substance of God Himself..... These Essences of Detachment, these resplendent Realities are the channels of God's all-pervasive grace. Led by the light of unfailing guidance, and invested with supreme sovereignty, They are commissioned to use the inspiration of Their words, the effusions of Their infallible grace and the sanctifying breeze of Their Revelation for the cleansing of every longing heart and receptive spirit from the dross and dust of earthly cares and limitations. Then, and only then, will the Trust of God, latent in the reality of man, emerge, as resplendent as the rising Orb of Divine Revelation, from behind the veil of concealment, and implant the ensign of its revealed glory upon the summits of men's hearts. ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, page 64

The source of all learning is the knowledge of God, exalted be His Glory, and this cannot be attained save through the knowledge of His Divine Manifestation. ~Baha'u'llah: Tablets of Baha'u'llah, page 156

The wisdom of prayer is this: That it causeth a connection between the servant and the True One, because in that state man with all heart and soul turneth his face towards His Highness the Almighty, seeking His association and desiring His love and compassion. The greatest happiness for a lover is to converse with his beloved, and the greatest gift for a seeker is to become familiar with the object of his longing.... ~Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i World Faith p. 368

That which is of paramount importance for the children, that which must precede all else, is to teach them the oneness of God and the laws of God. ~Baha'u'llah: Baha'i Education, page 248

The Tongue of My power hath, from the heaven of My omnipotent glory, addressed to My creation these words: "Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty." Happy is the lover that hath inhaled the divine fragrance of his Best-Beloved from these words, laden with the perfume of a grace which no tongue can describe. ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 332

True belief in God and recognition of Him cannot be complete save by acceptance of that which He hath revealed and by observance of whatsoever hath been decreed by Him and set down in the Book by the Pen of Glory. ~Baha'u'llah: Tablets of Baha'u'llah, page 50

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation..... It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration. ~Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 19

*I beseech Thee, O my Lord, by the name of Him round Whom circlet in adoration the kingdom of Thy names, that Thou wilt graciously assist them that are dear to Thee to glorify Thy word among Thy servants, and to shed abroad Thy praise amidst Thy creatures, so that the ecstasies of Thy revelation may fill the souls of all the dwellers of Thine earth.*

~Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 117

*Teach ye the Cause of God, O people of Baha, for God hath prescribed unto every one the duty of proclaiming His Message, and regardeth it as the most meritorious of all deeds.*

~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, page 278

*Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty.* ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 137

*Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression.*

~Baha'u'llah: Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, page 93

*Thou didst bring mankind into being to know Thee and to serve Thy Cause, that their station might thereby be elevated upon Thine earth and their souls be uplifted by virtue of the things Thou hast revealed in Thy Scriptures, Thy Books and Thy Tablets.* ~Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 111

*And the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men? No, by the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight.*

~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Secret of Divine Civilization, pgs. 2-3

*.....My will and the will of another than Me, even as fire and water, cannot dwell together in one heart.*

~Baha'u'llah: Persian Hidden Words, #31

*O friends! Prefer not your will to Mine, never desire that which I have not desired for you....*

~Baha'u'llah: Persian Hidden Words, #19

Self-sacrifice means to subordinate this lower nature and its desires to the more godly and noble side of our selves. Ultimately, in its highest sense, self-sacrifice means to give our will and our all to God to do with as He pleases. Then He purifies and glorifies our true self until it becomes a shining and wonderful reality. (Shoghi Effendi: Living the Life, pages 18-19)

*If thou lovest Me, turn away from thyself; and if thou seekest My pleasure, regard not thine own; that thou mayest die in Me and I may eternally live in thee.* ~Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words #7

GIVE CHILDREN SPIRITUAL DEFINITIONS OF SOURCES OF HAPPINESS, AND LET THEM STRUGGLE TOO

(A more extensive list of Baha' guidance on sources of true happiness is provided later in this document).

*The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth.* ~Baha'u'llah: Proclamation of Baha'u'llah, page 116

*Man is, in reality, a spiritual being, and only when he lives in the spirit is he truly happy.* ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Paris Talks, page 72

*Give them (the children) the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art. Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship. Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.* ~Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha, page 129

.....the happiness and greatness, the rank and station, the pleasure and peace, of an individual have never consisted in his personal wealth, but rather in his excellent character, his high resolve, the breadth of his learning, and his ability to solve difficult problems. ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Secret of Divine Civilization, pages 23-24

## BOYS AND GIRLS ARE EQUAL

Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God.~ Baha'u'llah, The Compilation of Compilations vol II, p. 379)

Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other.~Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words #68

Among the teachings of Baha'u'llah is the principle of equality of man and woman. Baha'u'llah has said that both belong to humankind and that in the estimation of God they are equal, for each is the complement of the other in the divine creative plan. ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 280

The happiness of mankind will be realized when women and men coordinate and advance equally..... ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 182

And among the teachings of Baha'u'llah is the equality of women and men. The world of humanity has two wings -one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible. ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha, page 302

As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs. ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Paris Talks, page 133

And let it be known once more that until woman and man recognize and realize equality, social and political progress here or anywhere will not be possible. For the world of humanity consists of two parts or members: one is woman; the other is man. Until these two members are equal in strength, the oneness of humanity cannot be established, and the happiness and felicity of mankind will not be a reality. ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 77

The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals, or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced.

~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Women, page 369

TRAINING CHILDREN TO BE VIRTUOUS IS THE HIGHEST PRIORITY IN EDUCATION. IT HELPS FOR THEM TO KNOW THAT THEY HAVE BEEN INNATELY ENDOWED WITH THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD.

“The proper education of children is of vital importance to the progress of mankind, and the heart and essential foundation of all education is spiritual and moral training.”

~Universal House of Justice (Baha'i International governing body created by Baha'u'llah)

The purport is this, that to train the character of humankind is one of the weightiest commandments of God, and the influence of such training is the same as that which the sun exerteth over tree and fruit. Children must be most carefully watched over, protected and trained; in such consisteth true parenthood and parental mercy. ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Education, page 263

...favour character and conduct above the sciences and arts. Good behaviour and high moral character must come first, for unless the character be trained, acquiring knowledge will only prove injurious. Knowledge is praiseworthy when it is coupled with ethical conduct and virtuous character; otherwise it is a deadly poison, a frightful danger. ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Education, page 278

But the indispensable basis of all is that he (the child) should develop spiritual characteristics and the praiseworthy virtues of humankind. This is the primary consideration. If a person be unlettered, and yet clothed with divine excellence, and alive in the breaths of the Spirit, that individual will contribute to the welfare of society, and his inability to read and write will do him no harm. And if a person be versed in the arts and every branch of knowledge, and not live a religious life, and not take on the characteristics of God, and not be directed by a pure intent, and be engrossed in the life of the flesh - then he is harm personified, and nothing will come of all his learning and intellectual accomplishments but scandal and torment.

If, however, an individual hath spiritual characteristics, and virtues that shine out, and his purpose in life be spiritual and his inclinations be directed toward God, and he also study other branches of knowledge -then we have light upon light: his outer being luminous, his private character radiant, his heart sound, his thought elevated, his understanding swift, his rank noble. ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Education, page 282

.....know ye that in God's sight, the best of all ways to worship Him is to educate the children and train them in all the perfections of humankind; and no nobler deed than this can be imagined. ~Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha, page 139

Upon the reality of man.... He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty. ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 65

Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created. ~Baha'u'llah: Arabic Hidden Words, # 22

MODERATION MUST GUIDE ALL THAT WE DO

In all matters moderation is desirable. If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a source of evil. ~Baha'u'llah: Tablets of Baha'u'llah, page 69

TO REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL, WE MUST TEACH CHILDREN THE ONENESS OF GOD, HUMANITY, AND RELIGION

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, page 250

Close your eyes to racial differences, and welcome all with the light of oneness. ~Baha'u'llah as quoted by Shoghi Effendi: The Advent of Divine Justice, page 37

The utterance of God is a lamp, whose light are these words: Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. He Who is the Day-Star of Truth beareth Me witness! So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth. The One true God, He Who knoweth all things, Himself testifieth to the truth of these words. ~Baha'u'llah: Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, page 14

Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. ~Baha'u'llah: Arabic Hidden Words, # 68

*Your souls are as waves on the sea of the spirit; although each individual is a distinct wave, the ocean is one, all are united in God.*

*Every heart should radiate unity, so that the Light of the one Divine Source of all may shine forth bright and luminous. We must not consider the separate waves alone, but the entire sea. We should rise from the individual to the whole. The spirit is as one great ocean and the waves thereof are the souls of men. ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Paris Talks, page 84*

“World order can be founded only on an unshakable consciousness of the oneness of mankind, a spiritual truth which all the human sciences confirm.... Recognition of this truth requires abandonment of prejudice--prejudice of every kind--race, class, color, creed, nation, sex, degree of material civilization, everything which enables people to consider themselves superior to others.... Universal acceptance of this spiritual principle is essential to any successful attempt to establish world peace. It should therefore be universally proclaimed, taught in schools, and constantly asserted in every nation as preparation for the organic change in the structure of society which it implies.” From The Promise of World Peace, Bahá'í World Center, 1985

*All humankind are as children in a school, and the Dawning-Points of Light, the Sources of divine revelation, are the teachers, wondrous and without peer. ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha, page 128*

*We recognize in the manifestation of each one of them, (The Messengers, also known as Manifestations) whether outwardly or inwardly, the manifestation of none but God Himself, if ye be of those that comprehend. Every one of them is a mirror of God, reflecting naught else but His Self, His Beauty, His Might and Glory, if ye will understand..... These Mirrors will everlastingly succeed each other, and will continue to reflect the light of the Ancient of Days.....*

*.....I testify before God that each one of these Manifestations hath been sent down through the operation of the Divine Will and Purpose, that each hath been the bearer of a specific Message, that each hath been entrusted with a divinely-revealed Book and been commissioned to unravel the mysteries of a mighty Tablet. ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, pages 73-74*

*These principles and laws, these firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source, and are the rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated. ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, pages 287-288*

*There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God. The difference between the ordinances under which they abide should be attributed to the varying requirements and exigencies of the age in which they were revealed. All of them, except a few which are the outcome of human perversity, were ordained of God, and are a reflection of His Will and Purpose. Arise and, armed with the power of faith, shatter to pieces the gods of your vain imaginings, the sowers of dissension amongst you. Cleave unto that which draweth you together and uniteth you. ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 217*

*The Great Being saith: O ye children of men! The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and enmity. ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 215*

#### THE POWER OF THE CREATIVE WORD

*The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it? .....the.....task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish..... The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change. ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 200*

*The fruits of the human tree are exquisite, highly desired and dearly cherished. Among them are upright character, virtuous deeds and a goodly utterance.... Were the trees of men's lives to be adorned in this divine Springtime with the fruits that have been mentioned, the effulgence of the light of Justice would, of a certainty, illumine all the dwellers of the earth and everyone would abide in tranquillity and contentment beneath the sheltering shadow of Him Who is the Object of all mankind. The Water for these trees is the living water of the sacred Words uttered by the Beloved of the world. In one instant are such trees planted and in the next their branches shall, through the outpourings of the showers of divine mercy, have reached the skies. A dried-up tree, however, hath never been nor will be worthy of any mention. ~Baha'u'llah: Tablets of Baha'u'llah, page 257*

*Were any man to ponder in his heart that which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed and to taste of its sweetness, he would, of a certainty, find himself emptied and delivered from his own desires, and utterly subservient to the Will of the Almighty. Happy is the man that hath attained so high a station, and hath not deprived himself of so bountiful a grace. Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 343*

*Peruse ye every day the verses revealed by God. Blessed is the man who reciteth them and reflecteth upon them. He truly is of them with whom it shall be well. Gather ye together with the utmost joy and fellowship and recite the verses revealed by the merciful Lord. By so doing the doors to true knowledge will be opened to your inner beings, and ye will then feel your souls endowed with steadfastness and your hearts filled with radiant joy. Peruse My verses with joy and radiance. Verily they will attract you unto God and will enable you to detach yourselves from aught else save Him. Thus have ye been admonished in God's Holy Writ and in this resplendent Tablet. ~Baha'u'llah: The Importance of Deepening, page 188*

*We prescribe unto all men that which will lead to the exaltation of the Word of God amongst His servants, and likewise, to the advancement of the world of being and the uplift of souls. To this end, the greatest means is education of the child. To this must each and all hold fast. We have verily laid this charge upon you in manifold Tablets as well as in My Most Holy Book. ~Baha'u'llah: Baha'i Education, pages 245-246*

*Teach ye your children so that they may peruse the divine verses every morn and eve. ~Baha'u'llah: The Arts, pages 1-2*

## **More Baha'i Sacred Scripture Relating to Spiritual Education**

*My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting. ~Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words, #1*

*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.*

*Teach ye your children so that they may peruse the divine verses every morn and eve. God hath prescribed unto every father to educate his children, both boys and girls, in the sciences and in morals, and in crafts and professions.... ~Baha'u'llah: The Arts, pages 1-2*

*Children are even as a branch that is fresh and green; they will grow up in whatever way ye train them. Take the utmost care to give them high ideals and goals, so that once they come of age, they will cast their beams like brilliant candles on the world, and will not be defiled by lusts and passions in the*

way of animals, heedless and unaware, but instead will set their hearts on achieving everlasting honour and acquiring all the excellences of humankind. ~Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, page 136

*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.

*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.....* ~Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, page 136

*.....the purpose of religion is the acquisition of praiseworthy virtues, the betterment of morals, the spiritual development of mankind.....* ~`Abdu'l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 152

*It is the bounden duty of parents to rear their children to be staunch in faith....* ~Baha'u'llah: Baha'i Education, page 248

*For you I desire spiritual distinction - that is, you must become eminent and distinguished in morals. In the love of God you must become distinguished from all else. You must become distinguished for loving humanity, for unity and accord, for love and justice. In brief, you must become distinguished in all the virtues of the human world - for faithfulness and sincerity, for justice and fidelity, for firmness and steadfastness, for philanthropic deeds and service to the human world, for love toward every human being, for unity and accord with all people, for removing prejudices and promoting international peace. Finally, you must become distinguished for heavenly illumination and for acquiring the bestowals of God. I desire this distinction for you.* ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 190

*Teach ye your children the verses that have been divinely revealed, that they may recite them in most melodious voices. This is what hath been set down in His mighty Book. As to the children: We have directed that in the beginning they should be trained in the observances and laws of religion; and thereafter, in such branches of knowledge as are of benefit, and in commercial pursuits that are distinguished for integrity, and in deeds that will further the victory of God's Cause or will attract some outcome which will draw the believer closer to his Lord. We beg of God to assist the children of His loved ones and adorn them with wisdom, good conduct, integrity and righteousness. He, verily, is the Forgiving, the Clement.* ~Baha'u'llah: Baha'i Education, pages 250-251

*God's purpose in sending His Prophets unto men is twofold. The first is to liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance, and guide them to the light of true understanding. The second is to ensure the peace and tranquillity of mankind, and provide all the means by which they can be established.* ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, pages 79-80

*Address yourselves to the promotion of the well-being and tranquillity of the children of men. Bend your minds and wills to the education of the peoples and kindreds of the earth, that haply the dissensions that divide it may, through the power of the Most Great Name, be blotted out from its face, and all mankind become the upholders of one Order, and the inhabitants of one City. Illumine and hallow your hearts; let them not be profaned by the thorns of hate or the thistles of malice. Ye dwell in*

one world, and have been created through the operation of one Will. Blessed is he who mingleteth with all men in a spirit of utmost kindness and love. ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, pages 333-334

### **Baha'i references to sources of true happiness**

*The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth.* ~Baha'u'llah: Proclamation of Baha'u'llah, page 116

*Man is, in reality, a spiritual being, and only when he lives in the spirit is he truly happy.* ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Paris Talks, page 72

*Happy is the man that heedeth My counsel, and keepeth the precepts prescribed by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.* ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 305

*Whoso keepeth the commandments of God shall attain everlasting felicity.*  
~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 289

*.....the happiness and greatness, the rank and station, the pleasure and peace, of an individual have never consisted in his personal wealth, but rather in his excellent character, his high resolve, the breadth of his learning, and his ability to solve difficult problems.* ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Secret of Divine Civilization, pages 23-24

*The honor of man is through the attainment of the knowledge of God; his happiness is from the love of God; his joy is in the glad tidings of God; his greatness is dependent upon his servitude to God.*  
~`Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 335

*....man's supreme honor and real happiness lie in self-respect, in high resolves and noble purposes, in integrity and moral quality, in immaculacy of mind.*  
~`Abdu'l-Baha: Secret of Divine Civilization, page 19

*I want you to be happy....to laugh, smile and rejoice in order that others may be made happy by you.*  
~`Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 218

*Gather ye together with the utmost joy and fellowship and recite the verses revealed by the merciful Lord. By so doing the doors to true knowledge will be opened to your inner beings, and ye will then feel your souls endowed with steadfastness and your hearts filled with radiant joy.*  
~Baha'u'llah: The Importance of Deepening, page 188

*In truth, knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and a source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him. Happy the man that cleaveth unto it, and woe betide the heedless.* ~Baha'u'llah: Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, page 27

*We ask God to endow human souls with justice so that they may be fair, and may strive to provide for the comfort of all, that each member of humanity may pass his life in the utmost comfort and welfare. Then this material world will become the very paradise of the Kingdom, this elemental earth will be in a heavenly state and all the servants of God will live in the utmost joy, happiness and gladness. We must all strive and concentrate all our thoughts in order that such happiness may accrue to the world of humanity.* ~`Abdu'l-Baha: Foundations of World Unity, page 43

*.....happy are they that judge with fairness in all matters.....* ~Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 62

*Happy is the man that pondereth in his heart that which hath been revealed in the Books of God.....*  
~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, pages 12-13

*Happy is the faithful one who...hath arisen to serve this Cause.*

~Baha'u'llah: Tablets of Baha'u'llah, page 257

*May your souls be illumined by the light of the Words of God...for no happiness is sweeter than spiritual comprehension of the divine teachings.*

~`Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, pages 459-460

*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.*

`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha, page 127

"In considering the effect of obedience to the laws on individual lives, one must remember that the purpose of this life is to prepare the soul for the next. Here one must learn to control and direct one's animal impulses, not to be a slave to them. Life in this world is a succession of tests and achievements, of falling short and of making new spiritual advances. Sometimes the course may seem very hard, but one can witness, again and again, that the soul who steadfastly obeys the law of Baha'u'llah, however hard it may seem, grows spiritually, while the one who compromises with the law for the sake of his own apparent happiness is seen to have been following a chimera: he does not attain the happiness he sought, he retards his spiritual advance and often brings new problems upon himself." (From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, excerpts from a letter to all National Spiritual Assemblies, February 6, 1973, Lights of Guidance, page 361)

*As to spiritual happiness, this is the true basis of the life of man, for life is created for happiness, not for sorrow, for pleasure, not for grief. Happiness is life; sorrow is death. Spiritual happiness is life eternal. This is a light which is not followed by darkness..... This great blessing and precious gift is obtained by man only through the guidance of God..... This happiness is but the love of God.*

~Abdu'l-Baha, The Divine Art of Living, page 29, compiled by Mabel Hyde Paine

*Nothing makes a man so happy as love.* ~Abdu'l-Baha as quoted in Memories of Abdu'l-Baha, page 47, by Ramona Allen Brown

*...the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men? No, by the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight.*

~`Abdu'l-Baha: Secret of Divine Civilization, pages 2-3

*Know ye, verily, that the happiness of mankind lieth in the unity and the harmony of the human race....* ~Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 286

Based on the quotes above, here is a

## RECIPE FOR TRUE HAPPINESS

Virtues in general

Spiritual behavior and living in the spirit-- for example, prayer, reading of sacred scripture, virtuous conduct

Promoting the best interests of all peoples

Obedying God's counsels

Keeping God's teachings and laws

Recitation of the sacred verses

Knowledge

Excellent character

High resolve

Breadth of learning

Ability to solve difficult problems

Love of God

Glad tidings of God

Self respect

Noble purposes

Integrity  
Cleanliness of mind  
Laughter, smiles, rejoicing = source of happiness for others  
Guidance of God  
Love  
Justice  
Judging with fairness  
Being faithful and arising to serve the Cause of God  
Spiritual comprehension of the divine teachings  
Pondering the contents in the Books of God  
Become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to others—be a source of social good  
Unity and harmony

## **SIX PRAYERS FOR CHILDREN**

*O God! Educate these children. These children are the plants of Thine orchard, the flowers of Thy meadow, the roses of Thy garden. Let Thy rain fall upon them; let the Sun of Reality shine upon them with Thy love. Let Thy breeze refresh them in order that they may be trained, grow and develop, and appear in the utmost beauty. Thou art the Giver. Thou art the Compassionate. ~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá*

*O Thou kind Lord! These lovely children are the handiwork of the fingers of Thy might and the wondrous signs of Thy greatness. O God! Protect these children, graciously assist them to be educated and enable them to render service to the world of humanity. O God! These children are pearls, cause them to be nurtured within the shell of Thy loving-kindness. Thou art the Bountiful, the All-Loving. ~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá*

*O Thou kind Lord! I am a little child, exalt me by admitting me to the kingdom. I am earthly, make me heavenly; I am of the world below, let me belong to the realm above; gloomy, suffer me to become radiant; material, make me spiritual, and grant that I may manifest Thine infinite bounties. Thou art the Powerful, the All-Loving. ~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá*

*Thou peerless Lord! Let this suckling babe be nursed from the breast of Thy loving-kindness, guard it within the cradle of Thy safety and protection and grant that it be reared in the arms of Thy tender affection. ~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá*

*O God, guide me, protect me, make of me a shining lamp and a brilliant star. Thou art the Mighty and the Powerful. ~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá*

*O My Lord! O my Lord! I am a child of tender years. Nourish me from the breast of Thy mercy, train me in the bosom of Thy love, educate me in the school of Thy guidance and develop me under the shadow of Thy bounty. Deliver me from darkness, make me a brilliant light; free me from unhappiness, make me a flower of the rose garden; suffer me to become a servant of Thy threshold and confer upon me the disposition and nature of the righteous; make me a cause of bounty to the human world, and crown my head with the diadem of eternal life. Verily, Thou art the Powerful, the Mighty, the Seer, the Hearer. ~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá*