

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR PLANNING A SUCCESSFUL BAHA'I HOLY DAY OR AYYAM-I-HA WITH KIDS**

By Linden Qualls (Revised and expanded August 3rd, 2009)

If you have never hosted an event with much child involvement, I highly recommend that you start small and simple, using a home space (where you can often control more variables). I had hosted celebrations for over 15 years in my home before moving out into a large public space, with crowds of 75-120. If you need guidance on developing a program, please feel free to call—*at least 5 weeks before your event*. My phone is 937-767-7079. I can give you some suggestions on games, music, activities, songs, format of program, writings, performing arts pieces, etc., based on your people and material resources, space size, expected attendance, nature of event, and size and age range of children's class. However, you may also find sufficient guidance in the document entitled Building a Strong Baha'i Identity on this website.

Involve children as much as possible in the list below. The order of this list is not deliberate.

Say lots of prayers for guidance and assistance, children, and teaching, ask students, their parents, and community members to do the same. I usually put out a group email 5 days before the event beseeching everyone to pray.

Develop program, seek input from people with experience working with groups of children. If program is interactive and visually stimulating it can last up to an hour and 45 minutes, otherwise, if it is mostly sitting and listening, I suggest it should be no more than an hour from actual start to finish of structured portion. Always leave at least an hour for socializing and refreshments. Some themes we use for Ayyam-i-Ha are world unity, inner beauty, unity in diversity and the oneness of humanity. For Ridvan---the light of Revelation illumining the world and spiritual springtime in the garden of humanity's hearts. For the Day of the Covenant, rainbows (covenant symbol from the flood) or stars or candles b/c there are so my writings by Abdu'l-Baha using the star and candle metaphor. I have copies of all the writings for these themes if you ever need them.

If you use a theme, ways to enhance it's message abound: in the paper design you use for the writings, the decorations, the table settings, the picture on the invitations the children make, the gifts, the performing arts piece, games and activities, the songs, the design on the reader's cards and on the programs.

Choose relevant writings. Make copies in large print of individual selections for children to take home and practice at least a week in advance if they are to be reading in program.

Propose a budget of costs to the LSA or group sponsoring the event, keep receipts.

Create concise and effective introduction, explanation of games, gifts, activities, etc. Practice out loud and time it.

Find people to help with

- decorating
- clean up
- rehearsals
- videotaping (its really helpful to videotape the final rehearsal before guests arrive, and that can be used for training future students—w/o all the heads in the way.)
- taking pictures (It's a good idea to give the photographer a list of what you want. Otherwise, you may get a lot of photos you don't want or are missing ones you wish you had. My list asks that all the hosting roles are photographed, in addition to the performances and games. I have a sample list if you are interested. I send it to the volunteer photographer via email before the party, and bring a hard copy to the party in case they forget.)
- counting guests
- organizing refreshments

- running the sound system
- assisting with baking/refreshment making with children
- transportation if necessary
- giving an intro to Ayyam-i-Ha, Ridvan, the Baha'i Faith (keep it really short (under 5 minutes) b/c guests have come to party, not a lecture, and there are lots of children. Focus on the 3 oneness. The one we use is below, on pages 6-7.)
- singing a prayer for children or world peace, etc. after the intro at Ayyam-i-Ha
- singing songs for or with the guests while kids change into costume

Call parents to ascertain who can commit to rehearsals and of course, to the event. Provide parents with typed schedule of rehearsals, and timing on day of event.

Determine hosting role (greeters, readers, servers, etc.) each child will have at event and rehearse/role play appropriate behavior and manners. They can also distribute song sheets, game materials, programs, copies of the Writings, light candles (using a special lighter), take coats, open the event with a formal welcome and thank guests for joining in the celebration, hand out party gifts, serve the cookies they baked by mingling in the audience with a platter, etc..

Below in *italic* is a description taken from a parent letter of how I rehearse roles for an Ayyam-i-Ha party:

*First, I told all students they are not to chew gum during their skits or hosting roles.*

*Next, we rehearsed the readers: What order readers line up, how to stand up, (in unison or one after another) placement of arms and cards, walk to the center of the room, and turn to face the audience, all in domino fashion, how to stand, (with dignity and poise, i.e. no slouching, hands in pockets, or leaning to one side, etc.) to step forward when reading, to be quiet and still, not to read as you are stepping forward or back, how to hold the microphone, not to pass the microphone until you are completely back in line, how to pronounce certain words, to read slowly, remember to say the author of the writing's name, how to return to seats in a dignified orderly fashion, to sit down in unison (or in a domino fashion), etc. At the party, they hold fancy decorated cards with the verse on them, and we had to work on not bending them up with nervous twitching, holding them in the same respectful position—i.e. both hands on the cards unless holding the microphone. Always to be mindful that you are reciting to other souls the Words of God. I also asked each student to tell me in their own words what they thought was the basic meaning of their verse. I tried to clarify it with them if they were unsure. There is something insincere about reading writings in public to share their beauty and wisdom when one doesn't have a clue what they are saying!*

*Then we rehearsed the greeters: how to welcome arriving guests, various greetings to say, (Thank you for coming to our party, Happy Ayyam-i-Ha, Welcome to our party, etc.) body language, use of manners—i.e. when you say, "please take a program", if they say thank you, you say you're welcome, etc. I reminded them that they will be the guests' first encounter with the party and with the class. They need to be radiant, attentive, warm, and courteous. No casual leaning in the doorway!*

*Then we rehearsed the writings givers: how to stand, (no leaning on the wall, look dignified, etc.) to smile, and what to say: Please take the writings used in the program, say your are welcome if thanked, etc. I reminded these students that they are giving the most sacred gift of the party—the Words of God as revealed through Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha.*

*Then we rehearsed the welcomer's opening statement: "Welcome family and friends to Rays of the Sun Baha'i Children's class 2006 Ayyam-i-Ha party! Thank you so much for joining us in our celebration." I encourage this person to smile, to sound enthusiastic, and to know the script well enough to make eye contact with the audience.*

*Then we rehearsed how to hand out the gifts, using manners (saying "you're welcome" to those who thank), saying Happy Ayyam-i-Ha, etc.*

*Then finally the servers practiced manners in offering cookies: Would you like some cookies, please have some cookies, you're welcome, etc. How to quietly stand in the line of vision of two people having a conversation, don't interrupt, if people stop talking to acknowledge you, say excuse me, etc. I reminded them how Abdu'l-Baha' would always serve the servants of God when He was hosting.*

Determine performing arts piece and roles of children in that piece, and rehearse, rehearse, and rehearse a few hours before the event. Some ideas to consider: Creative movement/dramatics to Baha'i themed poetry, to the Creative Word, (with or w/o music) or to a Baha'i themed song, a choreographed dance, short plays or skits based on Baha'i writings or themes or virtues. If you have some adults who are natural actors and can work with kids, improvisational intergenerational skits on virtues or Baha'i writings can be immensely successful and fun. These of course do not need to be rehearsed much at all. Assign groups of 2-3 children with adult or older youth, have them choose a writing from a compilation you have ready, give them 15 minutes, and then present. These make great activities for groups under 50 in more intimate settings. I would be afraid to do it with very large groups. It could go on too long and the lack of professionalism would eventually wear on the attention spans of the guests.

Order or choose Baha'i literature for display on table. Make it attractive, with a table cloth and small sign inviting guests to help themselves.

Have children make invitations, copy them onto color paper, color(s) chosen by child. Have children make a list of who to invite then check it off, or fill in a blank on the invitation that says something like: Dear \_\_\_\_\_ & Family, please come to....."

Make & copy flyers for those who miss making the invitations or do not have children in the class/community.

Make copies of the readings onto special paper, preferably paper which relates to the theme. For ex., rainbows for unity in diversity, earth for world unity, roses for Ridvan, etc. Or you can create a border and children or youth can decorate within the borders.

Also make copies of programs, song sheets, coloring sheets, etc.

If you are inclined, make attractive cards for the readers.

Prepare game, performance art piece and activity materials. Avoid competitive games with losers and winners—cooperative games are much more in keeping with Baha'i spirit and teachings. Call me if you need ideas of activities and cooperative games with Baha'i themes which have worked great with large and small groups at events.

Prepare gifts for children at the party---see [Building a Strong Baha'i Identity](#) document on this website for ideas.

Decorate name badges for children. We used little gems for our Inner Beauty theme, rainbows for Unity in Diversity, "Peace be with You" badges for World Unity theme from Special Ideas. I make a habit of bringing extra badges and a metallic marker to the party for kids whose badges don't stick b/c they re-position them once too often or lose them. They are proud to wear them and it supports their Baha'i class identity. I just hope and pray that they all behave themselves b/c each one is now an identifiable mascot for the class and for our Faith.

Make decorations with children--- see [Building a Strong Baha'i Identity](#) document on this website for ideas.

Find location & set date to get key. Reserve enough time to have an on-site rehearsal before the event, preferable immediately before. I usually need 3 hours of prep time with the students before the party begins, which includes a sack lunch and rehearsing performing arts piece(s) and hosting roles, prayers, pep talk on manners, etc.

Advertise in local newspaper, area Baha'i newsletter.

Mail invitations to those who children won't reach.

See if you can do a presentation in your child's school classroom, and then end the presentation with an invitation to an Ayyam-i-Ha party. An invitation to Ridvan may be seen as proselytizing b/c of its explicit religious content. Call me if you need some activities appropriate for a school presentation. I have presentations for Naw Ruz, Ayyam-i-Ha and Ridvan. They are all very interactive and multi-sensorial. Some need more preparations than others and are rather elaborate and can last up to an hour and a half—but all can be modified to be done in 30 minutes---depending on what the teacher wants. I do not have them in typed form, I would have to verbally train you.

Set up baking day, invite children, have them bring supplies which are labeled.

Buy materials for baking day, parent's gifts, and plates, cups, napkins, etc, which reflect the theme if possible.

If Ayyam-i-Ha, have kids make gifts for parents, arrange for help in working with the students to make the gifts. Make the gifts service oriented. Have them share at feast or in class what they did for those gifts. Gift ideas will be described in detail when my curriculum is posted in 2006 or 2007.

Invite community members to sing, read the writings, play a musical instrument to the creative word, recite a poem, read/tell a story, do a slide show to music, etc. --always consider children and youth for these roles. (The Wonderlamp is a great story for Ridvan).

(In our community, the big Ayyam-i-Ha celebration is very child and family centered. My students do all the on the scene formal hosting roles, reading the writings, and the major performing arts piece(s). I do the emceeing and organize the program, but my students have a huge role in it all, both in the preparation and execution of the event. For Ridvan, they mostly just rehearse hosting and dance roles, make luminarias and decorate candles for the event, and learn a lot about Ridvan in classes. The adults do the readings, some singing and music, perhaps a story, and the youth workshop often also performs in addition to my student's dance. There is also always at least one educational fun activity oriented towards children at the event. Ridvan is a more elegant, dignified, and formal affair, so it necessitates more adult control. The Ayyam-i-Ha party is specifically advertised as being hosted by the children's class, whereas Ridvan is advertised as being hosted by the Baha'i Community of Yellow Springs so adults without children will come).

*Here are several excerpts from parent letters that may be eye-opening as to what it takes to marshal and train the troops for a large public Ayyam-i-Ha celebration:*

Please let me know as soon as possible if your child is going to be in the rehearsals. If you have not confirmed that info with me yet, please email or call me soon. I need to know by 3 days *before* the class on 2/5, if your child is committed b/c I have to divide up roles and prepare materials for each child. PLEASE DO NOT SAY "YES" TO THE REHEARSALS AND THEN NOT SHOW UP!! I can not overestimate the stress and difficulties it causes in the rehearsals when performers are absent. Therefore, I will remove any child from the performance who does not attend unless the absence was caused by a family emergency or illness. Also, following through on commitments and keeping them in the face of temptation (such as a birthday party), keeping one's word, sacrificing for a cause, setting spiritual priorities, and being reliable are fabulous qualities to inculcate in our kids! There are only 3 rehearsals and the last weekend is the party. Thus, students and parents must be willing to commit every weekend in Feb. starting on the 5<sup>th</sup>, and ending with the party on the 26th.

On Feb. 11th, your children will receive the invitations they drew last class, in the color they specified. PLEASE ENCOURAGE THEM TO PONDER WHO THEY WOULD LIKE TO INVITE, FOLD THE INVITATIONS IN HALF, WRITE THAT PERSON'S NAME IN THE BLANK INSIDE, SIGN IT AT THE

BOTTOM, AND FOLLOW THROUGH ASAP because the party will be in 2 weeks from that class date! This is a planning, goal setting and goal fulfilling exercise as well as an opportunity for your child to share with others about his/her faith and/or spiritual education. Really encourage them to invite lots of friends and their families. I also would like you to emphasize that they should invite not only friends, neighbors, classmates, and relatives, but anyone they feel would appreciate an invitation to a party—to think of others who are lonely, new to the school or neighborhood, kids that are excluded by others, etc. *Please make sure they fill in the "Dear \_\_\_\_\_" blank ahead of time on the invitations and sign it, to make it more personal.*

I discussed with the children that essentially the most important purpose of the Ayyam-i-Ha party is to spread and share the beautiful teachings of Baha'u'llah so that peace and unity will come sooner to this suffering planet.

To support this claim, I also shared the following quote:

*Everyone who truly seeks and justly reflects will admit that.... the teachings of Baha'u'llah are the very healing of the sick world, the remedy for every need and condition. In them may be found.....the cause of the happiness of the world of humanity, .....the basis of unity for all nations, the fountain source of love amongst mankind, .....the means of peace and harmony, the one bond which will unite the East and the West. `Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 440*

After devotions, we talked about the party and about making good on their commitments to rehearsal. I asked them to think of what main virtues are relevant to keeping a commitment, and they got them all: reliability, responsibility, trustworthiness, and sacrifice and detachment if one has to give up a party or outing to attend class. The students also came up with these, which we agreed can indeed play a part: respect, caring, contentment, discipline, enthusiasm, excellence, flexibility, loyalty, service, and steadfastness.

Then we all went into the dining room and I asked them what sacred task will they be engaging in when they deliver invitations? (Teaching) and what virtues are needed?: Steadfastness, courage, friendliness, responsibility in remembering to do it in a timely fashion, caring, courtesy, detachment from disapproval, enthusiasm, determination, wisdom, and service. I gave examples of some of the expression of some of these virtues in relation to delivering the invitations. For example, if the first 3 kids you invite can't or don't want to come, or tease you about the weird name, show detachment, steadfastness, and determination and continue to deliver the rest, don't give up! I also explained that for every act of service to God one does, there are unseen things happening in the spiritual world. I told them to show the virtue of respect if someone did not want anything to do with their invitation and to not get huffy about their negativity. I encouraged them to invite lots of friends and their families. But I also emphasized that they should invite not only friends, neighbors, classmates, and relatives, but anyone they feel would appreciate an invitation to a party—to think of others who are lonely, new to the school or neighborhood, kids that are excluded by others, etc. I reminded them of Abdu'l-Baha's great kindness towards all people. I urged them to say prayers before writing in the names on the invitations and before handing them out.

I know some of the students are self-conscious about being different and insecure about inviting their friends to a party related to their "weird" religion. So I shared these **quotes** with them:

*Unloose your tongues, and proclaim unceasingly His Cause. This shall be better for you than all the treasures of the past and of the future, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth. ~Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 330*

*IT is better to guide one soul than to possess all that is on earth, for as long as that guided soul is under the shadow of the Tree of Divine Unity, he and the one who hath*

*guided him will both be recipients of God's tender mercy, whereas possession of earthly things will cease at the time of death. ~The Bab: Selections from the Bab, page 77*

*Verily, We behold you from Our realm of glory, and shall aid whosoever will arise for the triumph of Our Cause with the hosts of the Concourse on high and a company of Our favoured angels. ~Baha'u'llah: The Kitab-i-Aqdas, page 39*

Hosting Rules to be shared last class before party and day of party:

- Be models of courtesy and friendliness with guests: This may require a level of selflessness that is challenging to some. For example, instead of just hanging with those we know, seeking out a lonely or bored looking individual for socializing.
- Participate in all activities enthusiastically
- Be obedient to their parents and to me
- Show respect and kindness to all
- Be reverent during the prayer and the reading of the writings
- Students will be last to get the party gifts (as hosts, this is proper) I have only 100 gifts, so if I run out, they will not get any—but I will order new ones after the party for them
- Show self control and detachment by not running to the refreshment table and putting themselves first, but to allow their guests to go ahead of them.
- Hands off decorations
- No running
- Do not leave room w/o permission
- Use bathroom before performance
- Be careful not to pinch fingers in chairs (Students are sitting in a line of chairs, with their name on a card, and each one stands up as I list their role.)
- Stay off stage
- Do not leave room except to use the bathroom (We have had issues with children running wildly in the hallways of our rental space, provoking a complaint from the director of the building. We now post a hall monitor to discourage this.)
- Listen when others are at the microphone
- Coloring tables—avoid food and drink, replace marker's caps, sit there only if coloring

After a student officially opens the celebration with a welcome, I give a very brief talk (below) acknowledging the service of the students. Then a person other than me gives a brief intro to Ayyam-i-Ha and the Baha'i Faith. Then a member of the LSA welcomes the guests on behalf of the LSA and gives an abbreviated version of the above rule list for the guest children and points out where the bathrooms and tissue boxes are located. (Although students also have hosting roles at Ridvan, they are not introduced and acknowledged for this event—the focus should be on Baha'u'llah's declaration. They have practiced hosting at Ayyam-i-Ha, and now at Ridvan they get to serve their community in a more selfless manner, w/o public acknowledgement of their contributions.)

#### **Teacher's "talk":**

My name is Linden Qualls and i have the privilege of being the teacher of the students in the Rays of the Sun Baha'i Children's Class, who are hosting today's party. They are the kids wearing name tags which say "Peace be with you".

These students have been hard at work and play making their parents gifts, invitations to this party, the cookies and fruit smoothies, the Ayyam-i-Ha banner, and rehearsing the performance pieces. Several also helped to decorate this room, and assisted in putting the gift bags together.

Now, I'd like to introduce them to you and what they'll be doing, please hold applause until the end of the introductions. (Name students after their roles, each rises then sits after their name is called.)

Greeters/program givers

Writings

Welcomer

Readers

Song sheets

Gift givers

Servers

Before beginning the program, for those of you who may be experiencing a bahai event for the first time, \_\_\_\_\_ will give a brief 5 minute description and explanation of this particular holiday and of our religion.

The days of Ayyam-i-Ha happen every year Feb. 26-March 1<sup>st</sup> and are known as the Baha'i Days of Giving. They are also called Intercalary Days b/c the Baha'i calendar consists of 19 months with 19 days, and that leaves 4 days left over—5 on a leap year. Ayyam-i-Ha occurs during those 4 or 5 days.

During that time Baha'is all over the world have parties, give gifts to their families and friends, engage in lots of fellowship, and increase acts of service and charity. However, b/c the Baha'i Faith is a world religion, in the particulars, Ayyam-i-Ha is celebrated differently every where. There are no traditional decorations or rituals as in Christmas—such as the pine tree or Santa. Some Baha'is decorate, some do not, --each culture, town, and family has their own unique expression. Eating, socializing, and gift-giving are the only universal characteristics we tend to find at Ayyam-i-Ha time.

After Ayyam-i-Ha, our fast begins on March 2. All Baha'is who are 15 and older and not exempt, do not eat or drink from sunrise to sunset for 19 days.

**About the Baha'i Faith:** The Bahai faith began in 1844 in Persia, now known as Iran. There are now over 5 million members from virtually every country in the world.

The religion was founded by Baha'u'llah and His name means The Glory of God.

### **3 of His most fundamental Teachings are what Baha'is refer to as the 3 Onenesses:**

**1<sup>st</sup>: God is One.** We may call Him by different names such as Allah, Jehova, The Absolute, the Divine Spirit, or Lord, but there is only one God.

**2<sup>nd</sup>: All Major Religions are one and divine in origin.** They come from the same Source. They are like different chapters in the same book from God. We call this Progressive Revelation---meaning that God reveals His teachings progressively through His Divine Messengers as humanity evolves in its spiritual capacity to understand His wisdom. We believe that the Baha'i Revelation is the most recent chapter in the God's book of religion and has teachings most relevant for this stage of our development.

**And 3<sup>rd</sup>: Humanity is One.** We are one family. Spiritually we are all sisters and brothers b/c we come from the same source. We are one in spirit, and we are connected in the spiritual world. Baha'u'llah describes our oneness using the metaphors that we are waves of one ocean, or the leaves of one tree.

### **Some of Baha'u'llah's other teachings include:**

The equality of women and men  
Elimination of racism and all forms of prejudice

Independent investigation of truth  
Need for a world government and international tribunal  
The unity of religion and Science  
And finally, that the purpose of life is to know and love God—and we do this by acquiring the virtues of God, by serving humanity, and by applying God’s teachings and laws for this day and age---and it is through this process that we will transform ourselves, our communities, and eventually, the whole world.

### **LIST OF NECESSARY AND ALSO POSSIBLE MATERIALS NEEDED FOR EVENT**

(Some of these materials are more appropriate for Ridvan than for Ayyam-i-Ha—for ex. candles, and if you have your own Baha’i center, not necessary)

notes and supplies for your performing arts piece(s)  
programs  
writings  
song sheets  
reader’s cards  
introduction and activity notes  
hosting rules to go over with students at party site (see bulleted items above)  
CD’s or cued tapes if necessary, appropriate side marked and numbered for person doing the sound  
camera-video and regular, charge video batteries the night before, have tape ready to go and labeled  
tripod for camera  
activity/game materials  
sound system  
refreshments  
table cloths (plus extras for covering up refreshments so guest children are not pestering for them before its time)  
plates, napkins, cups, forks, etc.  
pitchers  
serving spoons and a large knife (someone always brings something that needs these)  
gifts  
prayer books and one to music for praying with children before guests arrive  
name badges for children if they are hosting (just a nice touch)  
if you plan to have kids sit in a specific order in chairs: index cards with each student’s name & tape  
Baha’i literature with a folded index card indicating it is free  
flyer or brochure advertising children’s spiritual education program  
paper towels (there is usually a spill)  
extra trash bags in case your facility does not have extra  
soap and toilet paper in case there is none or it runs out  
carpets for the children to sit on, it also really improves a gym atmosphere—use duct tape on corners  
tables for literature and refreshments unless your facility has plenty  
a large water bottle b/c you will probably get really thirsty during the event, especially if you are emcee  
extension cords—you never know  
Baha’i themed coloring sheets and markers in trays—works great for any down time or for parents who want to socialize—also make sure you have different skin color markers  
trays for passing out gifts (ask kids to remain seated or you will have mayhem!)  
tissue box for runny noses, teary eyes from moved hearts  
lighter if using candles  
books for story telling if part of the program  
for before guests/parents arrive: medical release forms for students, parent contact numbers  
snack food

**items possibly needed for decorating and set up prior to party:**

if you have them, photos of last year's set up so decorators can replicate quickly and efficiently, if not then bring a camera to take pictures—helpers have always expressed appreciation for these visual aids in decorating. (Of course this only works if you are using the same space as the year before.)

cloths of all sizes and colors for draping and covering eyesores, safety pins for securing if necessary (also for costume problems)

scotch and masking tape

duct tape for hanging heavy things, or for walls which things won't stick on and for taping down the corners of sliding carpets and for covering cords of sound system

puddy for walls on which tape won't stick

decorations such as banners (kids can make these), candles, strings of stars or beads, flowers and vases, Baha'i themed posters, paper suns, decorations from other cultures, shiny cardboard stars, chinese lanterns, garlands, and plants can really help a room

ladder or step ladder

string

pushpins and tacks (only if ok with facility—some surfaces such as corkboard or particle board won't be damaged)

scissors

glue stick

hammer

signs guiding people to location or proper entrance

potpourri or rose oil

if using fireplace, bring necessary fuel

turn off or down ringers on nearby phones

if hosting event in home, have sign made for entrance welcoming and politely requesting latecomers not to knock or ring bell but to come in quietly

earth or beach ball for kids to play with during socializing if have a large open space

IN SUMMARY, TO CAPTURE THE HEARTS OF CHILDREN, REMEMBER TO INVOLVE THEM AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE IN THE PREPARATION, PLANNING, PERFORMANCES, HOSTING, AND ACTIVITIES USED IN THE PROGRAM. Other ingredients for success: Always use the Baha'i Writings to inspire you, pray a lot with children for teaching and assistance, be organized, creative, draw as much of the community as possible into some aspect of the event and work together in unity. Also, perseverance and determination are required to a major degree.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I feel confident to share this perception with you because of the feedback from my own 2 daughters, now grown. Time and again they have shared with me their fond memories of Holy Days and Ayyam-i-Ha and how much they meant to them. They spontaneously reminisce about these occasions, and I know that by the look in their eyes and the smile on their lips, that these memories have played a major role in solidifying their Baha'i identities. They associate their religion with wonderful feelings and beautiful, fun experiences and events and automatically assume that their faith will be the foundation of their family life. And of course daily prayer by Roi and myself and God's grace played a major role in this, but God confirms and assists us through our own actions, so let's keep acting in ways that beseech God to guide and protect our children!!! Let's never take the faithfulness of our children for granted, for as you are all aware, there are a million forces in our world which seek unwittingly or deliberately to undermine spirituality in children and youth. I pray every day for my daughters and my students, but I need the actions of parents to reinforce their spiritual growth. I am deeply grateful for your active support.