

SCHOLARSHIP, SERVICE & SOCIAL ACTION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DIVINE PLAN

A Participatory Workshop for Students and Young Adults

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“True Learning is that which is conducive to the well-being of the world.” – Bahá’u’lláh

PREFACE

This workbook, *Scholarship, Service & Social Action in the Context of the Divine Plan*, was first prepared by the Association for Bahá'í Studies, North America, as part of a workshop for young adults held in Seattle in November 2005. It responds to the urging of the Universal House of Justice to foster new models of scholarship and to encourage a greater level of appreciation among students and young adults of the value of intellectual pursuits as pathways to service.

The workbook is now being circulated more widely with the hope that it might serve as a resource for local communities and groups of Bahá'í students and young adults to begin their own focused study of these themes.

This material can be used in a number of ways. At its simplest, it can be used in small study groups that meet regularly in homes, on college campuses, or elsewhere. It can also be incorporated into one or two day conferences where participants work through parts or all of the workbook in small-group study sessions, interspersed with other presentations, panel discussions, mentoring workshops, or the study of other material. Individuals who have already been deeply engaged in Bahá'í scholarship might be invited to participate in, and enrich, small study groups or serve as resource people for related conference presentations and workshops.

The aim of the workbook is to promote continued reflection on and discussion of the transforming purpose of Bahá'í scholarship and the distinctive qualities that characterize it. It is intended as a modest attempt to open the door to more profound study of the guidance on scholarship offered in the Bahá'í Writings and in other publications on the subject, such as those listed on page 12.

The Association for Bahá'í Studies, North America, will be evaluating this workbook in an ongoing manner to refine it over time. The Association is therefore eager to receive your feedback. After you finish the workbook, or any parts of it, please take a few minutes to email your feedback to the Association for Bahá'í Studies at:

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For additional copies of the workbook, or for further information regarding Association for Bahá'í Studies membership, conferences, and publications, refer to:

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

The material that follows seeks to foster an understanding that scholarship, service, and social action can be elements of a single, integrated, coherent pattern of Bahá'í life, pursued within the context of the global plans of the Bahá'í Faith. Toward this end, it encourages a process of mutual exploration and inquiry into the following six themes: *What is Bahá'í Scholarship? Bahá'í Scholarship in the Context of the Divine Plan. Integrating Bahá'í Scholarship into the Pattern of One's Life. Overcoming Spiritual and Intellectual Tests. Initiating and Supporting Campus Activities. Orienting Oneself Toward a Life of Service.*

The study process is intended to be participatory, flexible, and enjoyable. For each section of this workbook, read and discuss the text out loud in your group, clarifying the meaning of unfamiliar words as you go, but trying not to stray off topic. When you encounter a ► symbol, this is a cue that you are being asked to discuss, consult, or write – usually in response to a question. Please read these requests carefully and strive to respond in a focused manner to what is being asked of you, without wandering off on too many tangents, so that you can complete each section in a reasonable period of time.

Most of the questions do not have single “correct” answers. Rather, most are open-ended questions designed to encourage collective inquiry as well as individual self-reflection in the context of your unique life circumstances. If you cannot understand or answer any question, relax and move on. Your curiosity will have been peaked and the question may take on more meaning in the future. You might also seek out knowledgeable and experienced individuals who can help you with the questions that you find most difficult.

Finally, this workbook's references to academic environments should not be interpreted as a dismissal or a denigration of the valuable paths of training, work, and service that many youth and young adults will decide to pursue outside of an academic environment. As the reference on page 11 of this workbook clarifies, the Bahá'í community needs and values people with diverse skills and qualifications, including people working in the trades, crafts, business, and all other fields. It should also be noted that believers in all of these fields can participate in Bahá'í scholarship. Indeed, many of the Bahá'í community's most brilliant scholars did not receive formal academic training. Bahá'í scholarship is open to everyone.

I – WHAT IS BAHÁ'Í SCHOLARSHIP?

Over one hundred years ago, Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

*This Wronged One hath, at all times, proclaimed before the face of all the peoples of the world that which will serve as the key for unlocking the doors of sciences, of arts, of knowledge, of well-being, of prosperity and wealth.*¹

Broadly speaking, Bahá'í scholarship can be understood as the process described above: unlocking the doors of knowledge with the keys of revealed spiritual truths. This requires pure motives and mature spiritual qualities and attributes.² It also requires the systematic and focused attention of the human mind. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains:

*So long as the thoughts of an individual are scattered he will achieve no results, but if his thinking be concentrated on a single point wonderful will be the fruits thereof.*³

Bahá'í scholarship often involves correlating spiritual truths with contemporary thought and problems – across all disciplines. As Shoghi Effendi explains:

*The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world.*⁴

► What does it mean to “correlate”? In your group, discuss the meaning of this term and explore its relationship to the quote from Bahá'u'lláh above.

The scope of Bahá'í scholarship is very broad. As the Universal House of Justice explains:

diversity should characterize the endeavors pursued by Bahá'í scholars, accommodating their interests and skills as well as the needs of the Faith. The course of world events, the development of new trends of thought and the extension of the teaching work all tend to highlight attractive and beneficial areas to which Bahá'í scholars might well direct their attention. Likewise, the expansion of the activities of the Bahá'í International Community in its relationship with United Nations agencies and other international bodies creates attractive opportunities for scholars to make a direct and

highly valued contribution to the enhancement of the prestige of the Faith and to its proclamation within an influential and receptive stratum of society. As the Bahá'í community continues to emerge inexorably from obscurity, it will be confronted by enemies, from both within and without, whose aim will be to malign and misrepresent its principles, so that its admirers might be disillusioned and the faith of its adherents might be shaken; Bahá'í scholars have a vital role to play in the defense of the Faith through their contribution to anticipatory measures and their response to defamatory accusations leveled against the Faith.

*Thus, there should be room within the scope of Bahá'í scholarship to accommodate not only those who are interested in theological issues and in the historical origins of the Faith, but also those who are interested in relating the Bahá'í Teachings to their field of academic or professional interest, as well as those believers who may lack formal academic qualifications but who have, through their perceptive study of the Teachings, acquired insights which are of interest to others.*⁵

► Bahá'í scholarship is therefore a multi-dimensional activity that encompasses the historical, social, scientific, artistic, and spiritual dimensions of human experience. Discuss some possible Bahá'í scholarship endeavors that you might be interested in pursuing in the future.

Bahá'í scholarship is most valuable, of course, when its fruit is shared with others. In the passage below, 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggests one way we can do this:

*It is... urgent that beneficial articles and books be written, clearly and definitely establishing what the present-day requirements of the people are, and what will conduce to the happiness and advancement of society. These should be published and spread throughout the nation, so that at least the leaders among the people should become, to some degree, awakened, and arise to exert themselves along those lines which will lead to their abiding honour. The publication of high thoughts is the dynamic power in the arteries of life; it is the very soul of the world.*⁶

► What is a “dynamic power”? In addition to publishing, brainstorm other ways that we might share the fruits of our scholarship.

II - BAHÁ'Í SCHOLARSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DIVINE PLAN

What is the Divine Plan? The growth of the Bahá'í community and the spread of the Cause of God proceed through a series of systematic global plans that are currently guided by the Universal House of Justice. These plans derive from the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, a series of letters that were written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Center of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, to serve as the charter for the propagation of the Bahá'í Faith throughout the planet. The unfolding pattern of these plans was subsequently established by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, as a means of focusing the entire Bahá'í community on the most pressing developmental needs and opportunities that characterize each stage in the progress of our Faith. Our active support and participation in these plans can therefore be understood as an expression of our commitment to the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.

As you read the following two passages, from Bahá'u'lláh and the Universal House of Justice, respectively, reflect on your personal relationship to the Divine Plan during this stage in your life.

Blessed is he who in the prime of his youth and the heyday of his life will arise to serve the Cause of the Lord of the beginning and of the end, and adorn his heart with His love. The manifestation of such a grace is greater than the creation of the heavens and of the earth. ⁷

The period of youth represents a special time in the life of any Bahá'í. During this time, an individual will make decisions with far-reaching consequences for his or her future professional pursuits and will formulate attitudes toward the Faith and the application of its Teachings to the advancement of society that will be carried forward into adulthood, as well as some of the habits required to engage in the serious study of the Writings. It is also during this period that those who display scholarly interests will begin to adopt the conceptual framework within which they can pursue such activities throughout their lives. What is important is that all of these challenges be addressed in the context of the unreserved participation in the global plans of the Faith and in a spirit of dedication to promoting the Cause. ⁸

► In the latter passage above, what does the phrase “unreserved participation” mean to you? Discuss this as a group.

► After this discussion, identify as many elements as you can of the current plan that the Bahá'í community is pursuing, and write them down in the space below. (If you cannot identify many, please complete this as homework.)

Bahá'ís of every age have a range of duties and responsibilities they need to tend to, and every Bahá'í must find their own way of balancing all of these duties and responsibilities. Moreover, the Universal House of Justice states that “a unity in diversity of actions is called for, a condition in which different individuals will concentrate on different activities, appreciating the salutary effect of the aggregate on the growth and development of the Faith, because each person cannot do everything and all persons cannot do the same thing.”⁹

► In this context, identify, as a group, some elements of the current plan that youth and young adults might be especially capable of supporting and participating in. Then discuss some of the specific challenges you face in this regard, and brainstorm strategies for overcoming some of these challenges.

III - INTEGRATING BAHÁ'Í SCHOLARSHIP INTO THE PATTERN OF ONE'S LIFE

At the beginning of His ministry, Bahá'u'lláh posed a question which we would do well to reflect upon today. "Consider," He wrote,

how can he that faileth in the day of God's Revelation to attain unto the grace of the "Divine Presence" and to recognize His Manifestation, be justly called learned, though he may have spent aeons in the pursuit of knowledge, and acquired all the limited and material learning of men?

"It is surely evident," He answered,

*that he can in no wise be regarded as possessed of true knowledge. Whereas, the most unlettered of all men, if he be honoured with this supreme distinction, he verily is accounted as one of those divinely-learned men whose knowledge is of God; for such a man hath attained the acme of knowledge, and hath reached the furthest summit of learning.*¹⁴

Toward the end of His life, Bahá'u'lláh re-affirmed that "he is truly learned who hath acknowledged My Revelation, and drunk from the Ocean of My knowledge."¹⁵ "Weigh not the Book of God," He explained, "with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men."¹⁶

► In light of these preceding statements, discuss some of the reasons why we might strive to integrate Bahá'í scholarship into our life-long learning, including our academic studies, and then discuss some of the challenges we might need to overcome in order to achieve this goal.

After this discussion, read the following passage:

*In the simultaneous endeavour to pursue their studies and to delve deeply into the Bahá'í Teachings, believers are enjoined to maintain a keen awareness that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the standard of truth against which all other views and conclusions are to be measured.*¹⁷

► In the preceding passage, what does the phrase "simultaneous endeavor" imply? Discuss with your group what this might look like, in practice, for you. Be as specific and concrete as possible.

► In the definition of Bahá'í scholarship that we examined earlier, we learned that *correlating* the Bahá'í Teachings to contemporary thought and problems is an important aspect of Bahá'í scholarship. How does the "simultaneous endeavor" that Shoghi Effendi refers to in the preceding passage support this correlation process?

The Universal House of Justice describes the Bahá'í Writings as a light that can "illuminate all areas of human endeavour and all academic disciplines."¹⁸ Elaborating on this point, the House has written:

*When studying at school or university Bahá'í youth will often find themselves in the unusual and slightly embarrassing position of having a more profound insight into a subject than their instructors. The Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh throw light on so many aspects of human life and knowledge that a Bahá'í must learn, earlier than most, to weigh the information that is given to him rather than to accept it blindly. A Bahá'í has the advantage of the divine Revelation for this Age, which shines like a searchlight on so many problems that baffle modern thinkers; he must therefore develop the ability to learn everything from those around him, showing proper humility before his teachers, but always relating what he hears to the Bahá'í teachings, for they will enable him to sort out the gold from the dross of human error.*¹⁹

► Discuss two or three examples, drawn from the experience of those in your group, that illustrate the point above. (Can you think of an example from the natural sciences?)

► In addition to illuminating our respective fields of study, there are other reasons that we should "not let our studies detain us from deepening our knowledge of the literature of the Cause."²⁰ Read the following guidance from Shoghi Effendi and discuss some of the other reasons why we should not let our studies detain us:

*Young men and women in the Faith must be deep and thoughtful scholars of its teachings, so that they can teach in a way that will convince people that all the problems facing them have a remedy. They must grasp the Administration, so that they can wisely and efficiently administer the ever-growing affairs of the Cause; and they must exemplify the Bahá'í way of living.*²¹

IV - OVERCOMING SPIRITUAL AND INTELLECTUAL TESTS

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice have all warned the North American believers that, unlike our fellow Bahá’ís in the East, we would primarily face “*intellectual, rather than physical, tests*” on our path toward spiritual development.²⁶ Many of these tests stem from the increasingly materialistic interpretations of reality that now dominate Western societies. In *One Common Faith*, we read that “*early in the twentieth century, a materialistic interpretation of reality had consolidated itself so completely as to become the dominant world faith insofar as the direction of society was concerned.*”²⁷ This worldview has exerted a deep influence on every contemporary social institution, and it has been especially influential within institutions of higher education. According to this worldview:

*Reality – including human reality and the process by which it evolves – is essentially material in nature. The goal of human life is, or ought to be, the satisfaction of material needs and wants. Society exists to facilitate this quest, and the collective concern of humankind should be an ongoing refinement of the system, aimed at rendering it ever more efficient in carrying out its assigned task.*²⁸

In contrast to this materialistic worldview:

*The mainspring of Bahá’u’lláh’s message is an exposition of reality as fundamentally spiritual in nature, and of the laws that govern that reality’s operation. It not only sees the individual as a spiritual being, a “rational soul”, but also insists that the entire enterprise that we call civilization is itself a spiritual process, one in which the human mind and heart have created progressively more complex and efficient means to express their inherent moral and intellectual capacities.*²⁹

Of course, Bahá’ís do not deny the material dimension of our existence on this earth. Rather, we recognize a “*dynamic coherence*” between the spiritual and material dimensions of human existence.³⁰ The problem is that the purely materialistic worldview described above denies the existence of the spiritual dimension.

In addition to the ruinous consequences that this materialistic worldview has had within human societies, it represents a fundamental test to our

spiritual and intellectual development as individuals. Indeed, materialism can be understood as “*a disease of the human soul.*”³¹ Its consolidation within institutions of higher education therefore poses a fundamental test of faith to young Bahá’ís.

► How can we safeguard ourselves from the spiritually corrosive influence of intellectual materialism? How can we pursue the education and training that our Faith calls us to pursue without succumbing to the materialistic interpretation of reality that dominates our educational environment? Discuss these questions in your group. In the process, try to identify a few strategies that might help young students and scholars overcome this test of faith.

One strategy you may or may not have identified in your group is developing the capacity to recognize the materialistic assumptions that underlie much contemporary scholarship and many popular beliefs. Assumptions are taken-for-granted beliefs upon which we construct complex lines of reasoning, such as theories and interpretations of the world around us. When we encounter lines of reasoning that cannot be reconciled with Revealed truths, we would do well to ask probing questions such as these:

- 1) Does this theory or interpretation derive from materialistic assumptions about human nature?
- 2) Does it derive from materialistic assumptions about the forces at play in human history?
- 3) Does it derive from materialistic assumptions about the nature and function of social institutions?
- 4) Does it derive from materialistic assumptions about the fundamental forces that shape and define our reality?

If the answer to any of the questions above is yes, then we might ask whether some aspect of the theory or interpretation can still be reconciled with a spiritual interpretation of human existence. In this regard, we should keep in mind that the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh has had a universal impact on human reality and consciousness, even when the Source of this impact is not always known. Therefore, we need to approach all theories and interpretations of reality with a degree of openness and humility, knowing that many materialist schools of thought still contain valuable (albeit partial) insights into reality.

► In your groups, identify one or two important theories, or interpretations of reality, that you have encountered in your studies, or in your wider social or professional interactions, and probe these via the questions posed above. (For the purpose of this exercise, think of a theory as an interpretive framework, or a conceptual model, that is used to make sense out of phenomena in the world around us – much like a lens through which we view the world. Theories are employed not only in formal academic discourse, but in other contexts as well. Theories guide human thought, behavior, and perception within a wide range of social arenas, such as public policy discourse, mass media coverage, and even coffee-house conversations. The challenge is, first, to recognize the operation of theories and, second, to probe their underlying assumptions.)

A closely related set of tests that youth and young adults face today, particularly (but not exclusively) on university campuses, are those challenging questions that Bahá'ís are often asked regarding specific tenets of our Faith that diverge from prevailing social norms and attitudes. In general, the Western world has embraced many of the broad social principles that 'Abdu'l-Bahá promulgated so eloquently during his travels throughout the West. But some of Bahá'u'lláh's specific laws and prescriptions are not so easily digested by our contemporaries.

Answering these challenging questions in open, honest, and convincing ways can take a great deal of courage and wisdom. Indeed, the fear of rejection or denunciation on these issues can inhibit us from the act of teaching the Faith to our peers. Teaching the Faith, of course, is a fundamental duty and a sacred obligation of every Bahá'í – so this is a very serious test of faith.

► In your groups, identify one or two of these challenging questions that Bahá'ís can be asked, and try to role play effective responses to them. In your role playing, keep in mind the preceding discussion about the materialistic interpretation of reality that has consolidated itself in our society, and explore ways to respond to these types of questions by probing the assumptions about human nature and reality that underlie them.

Another related test that many youth and young adults face today is the accusation of not being sufficiently engaged in fighting the gross inequities and injustices that are the cause of suffering for millions of people around the world today. As the Universal House of Justice comments:

Bahá'ís are often accused of holding aloof from the “real problems” of their fellow men. But when we hear this accusation let us not forget that those who make it are usually idealistic materialists to whom material good is the only “real” good, whereas we know that the working of the material world is merely a reflection of spiritual conditions and until the spiritual conditions can be changed there can be no lasting change for the better in material affairs.³²

► After reflecting on this passage in your group, role play a potential response to the accusation referred to above. In the process, consider probing and addressing the assumptions that underlie the accusation.

Shoghi Effendi warns us of another related test:

It is surely very necessary that the Friends should keep in touch with the modern social movements, but their main objective should be to draw more people to the spirit and teachings of the Cause. They should learn from the experience of others and not permit themselves to go at a tangent, and finally be so absorbed in other movements as to forget the Cause of God.³³

► How does the statement above relate to the last quote in Section II of this workbook? After you have discussed this, consider the following statement from the Universal House of Justice:

In the field of Bahá'í scholarship... the fundamental core of the believers' faith should be strengthened by an increasing awareness of the cardinal truth and vital importance of the Covenant, and an ever-growing love for Bahá'u'lláh”³⁴

► In your group, take a moment to make sure that everyone has a basic grasp of the concept of the *Covenant*, and then discuss the following question: How is firmness in the Covenant essential to the process of overcoming the tests discussed above?

► Another test that is particularly acute for scholars is the test of ego and “*intellectual pride*.”³⁵ How does firmness in the Covenant aid us as we face this test? How does the Covenant provide constructive and unifying ways to approach differences of opinion? And how does the Covenant ensure that Bahá'í scholarship is carried out in a spirit of openness, tolerance, mutual encouragement, and unity of purpose?

V – INITIATING AND SUPPORTING CAMPUS ACTIVITIES

College and university campuses are among the most important arenas for advancing and serving the Cause of God. Even if you are not a student, you can still support Bahá'í initiatives on campuses.

- Read the two passages below and identify, as a group, some of the reasons why college and university campuses are such important arenas of service.

*As to teaching work in colleges and universities, this is very important, for students as a whole are open-minded and little influenced by tradition. They would easily enter the Cause if the subject is properly presented and their intellect and sentiments properly satisfied.*³⁶

*For any person, whether Bahá'í or not, his youthful years are those in which he will make many decisions which will set the course of his life's work, complete his education, begin to earn his own living, marry, and start to raise his own family. Most important of all, it is during this period that the mind is most questing and that the spiritual values that will guide the person's future behaviour are adopted.*³⁷

Continuing on from the statement immediately above, the Universal House of Justice writes:

*These factors present Bahá'í youth with their greatest opportunities, their greatest challenges, and their greatest tests – opportunities to truly apprehend the teachings of their Faith and to give them to their contemporaries, challenges to overcome the pressures of the world and to provide leadership for their and succeeding generations, and tests enabling them to exemplify in their lives the high moral standards set forth in the Bahá'í writings.*³⁸

- In your group, identify and discuss a few concrete things you can do, either individually or with others, to (a) cultivate these opportunities, (b) meet these challenges, and (c) pass these tests. Write some of these ideas down in the spaces that follow.

- In the first quotation on this page, Shoghi Effendi encourages us to present the Cause to our peers so that “*their intellect and sentiments*” are “*properly satisfied.*” This seems to imply the value of integrating systematic Bahá'í studies into one’s wider studies, as discussed in Section III of this workbook, as a means of preparation for teaching others on college and university campuses. In the passage below, how does the Universal House of Justice echo this same encouragement?

*Now is an opportunity to awaken the interest, set afire the hearts and enlist the active support of young people of every nation, class and creed in that continent. The key to success in this endeavour is, firstly, to deepen your understanding of the Teachings of the Cause so that you will be able to apply them to the problems of individuals and society, and explain them to your peers in ways that they will understand and welcome; secondly, to strive to model your behaviour in every way after the high standards of honesty, trustworthiness, courage, loyalty, forbearance, purity and spirituality set forth in the Teachings; and, above all, to live in continual awareness of the presence and all-conquering power of Bahá'u'lláh, which will enable you to overcome every temptation and surmount every obstacle.*³⁹

- In the passage above, what is the relationship between our intellectual preparation, the behavioral qualities we manifest, and our reliance on the power of Bahá' u'lláh?

The House of Justice has written:

*Experience has shown that youth can render valuable service in many activities of the community, and particularly in taking the message to the members of their own generation. Those in schools and universities have many opportunities to teach their fellow students and faculty members.*⁴⁰

- Identify and discuss opportunities that youth might have to teach faculty on their campuses, as the above quote suggests. Given the frequent exhortations in our Writings to exercise moderation, tact, and wisdom, what might be some appropriate and inappropriate ways of trying to reach and teach faculty members? Could any of these approaches involve efforts to pursue Bahá'í scholarship?

The quote above also refers, of course, to teaching fellow students – an encouragement that is echoed in the quote below:

*Bahá'í youth, now rendering exemplary and devoted service in the forefront of the army of life, must be encouraged, even while equipping themselves for future service, to devise and execute their own teaching plans among their contemporaries.*⁴¹

- With your group, discuss possible strategies and lines of action for systematic teaching among youth and young adults, and write your ideas in the spaces below. Keep in mind the discussion of the Divine Plan in Section II of this workbook, and consider the important position that college and university campuses should occupy within cluster planning processes. Also, keep in mind the many other responsibilities and time constraints that you must balance in your lives – including attention to your own studies and/or work – and try to generate ideas that are doable, sustainable, and attractive.

Integrating and balancing all of the responsibilities and opportunities in our lives is no easy task. As the House of Justice writes, it “*requires resolve, spiritual discipline, energy, reliance on the power of divine assistance, and constant immersion in the Word of God.*”⁴² In addition, the House states that

*Bahá'ís must increasingly stand out as pillars of righteousness and forbearance. The life of a Bahá'í will be characterized by truthfulness and decency; he will walk uprightly among his fellowmen, dependent upon none save God, yet linked by bonds of love and brotherhood with mankind; he will be entirely detached from the loose standards, the decadent theories, the frenetic experimentation, the desperation of present-day society, will look upon his neighbors with a bright and friendly face, and be a beacon light and haven for all those who would emulate his strength of character and assurance of soul.*⁴³

- How do you understand the phrase “*assurance of soul*” in the preceding quote? How can we nurture and cultivate this assurance of soul in ourselves?

- After reading the final quote below, discuss ways that youth and young adults might “*elevate the very atmosphere in which they move.*”

*Rejecting the low sights of mediocrity, let them scale the ascending heights of excellence in all they aspire to do. May they resolve to elevate the very atmosphere in which they move, whether it be in the school rooms or halls of higher learning, in their work, their recreation, their Bahá'í activity or social service.*⁴⁴

–RESOURCES AND QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND STUDY

To continue your exploration of the nature and purpose of Bahá'í scholarship, the following two pages contain resources and questions for further reflection and study.

As with previous questions throughout this workbook, many of the questions on the next page do not have single “correct” answers. Rather, they are intended to stimulate deeper ongoing reflection, consultation, and learning.

The questions are also not listed in any necessary order. You may wish to work through all of them systematically over time, or you may focus on those that you are most interested in examining at any given time. These questions, moreover, could represent a life-time of study and they are not presented here as material that could all be “completed” in a weekend or some fixed or limited amount of time.

To ensure that your reflection on these questions has a solid Bahá'í grounding, the resources in the adjacent column will be helpful.

What might Bahá'í Scholarship look like?

Bahá'í scholarship can take many forms. It can include academic work such as university papers, research reports, conference presentations, journal articles, books, or book reviews. It can include artistic work in diverse fields such as poetry, literature, drama, painting, sculpture, music, cinema, and dance. It can include educational workshops and presentations at conferences, summer schools, and other venues. It can include study materials and programs for deepening our knowledge of the Faith and related issues. It can also include professional applications such as Bahá'í-inspired management tools, pedagogical methods, codes of ethics, therapy programs, and so forth.

Resources:

Ocean Research Library.

This is an extensive software compilation of Bahá'í Writings and other sacred texts, along with related reference materials. The compilation is searchable by keyword. It can be downloaded for free at www.bahai-education.org/ocean.

Compilation on Scholarship.

This is a compilation prepared by the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Center. It is available in electronic form within the *Ocean Research Library* (above) as well as in printed form through various Bahá'í book distribution services. This compilation can be downloaded directly at www.bahai-studies.ca/resources.php

Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith.

This compilation, also prepared by the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Center, is available in the same forms as the *Compilation on Scholarship* referred to above.

14 Nov 2005 letter from the House of Justice.

This letter elaborates further on issues addressed in the preceding compilation. It can be downloaded directly at: www.bahai-studies.ca/resources.php

Some Aspects of Bahá'í Scholarship.

This is an essay by Dr. Peter Khan, published in the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 1999, Vol. 9, No. 4. An expanded version of this essay was published in *The Bahá'í World 1999-2000*. This essay can be downloaded at: www.bahai-studies.ca/resources.php

Knowledge and the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.

This is an essay by Mr. Ian Semple, published in the *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 1999/2000, Vol. 9. This essay can also be downloaded directly at: www.bahai-studies.ca/resources.php

Questions:

- ▶ How is the station of the “learned” described in the Bahá’í Writings?
- ▶ What are the characteristics, standards, and qualities of the “learned”?
- ▶ How does one attain excellence in the pursuit of knowledge?
- ▶ In the pursuit of knowledge, what type of excellence should be our goal?
- ▶ What might be the most significant fruits of achieving distinction and excellence in the pursuit of knowledge?
- ▶ How do we acquire knowledge?
- ▶ What do the Bahá’í Writings say about the types of knowledge that we should seek?
- ▶ What are the methods, resources, values, concepts, and attitudes that we can draw on in this endeavor?
- ▶ How does the principle of the unity and interconnectedness of the “reality of things” impact our efforts to gain knowledge?
- ▶ What does it mean to be “systematic” in one’s approach to acquiring knowledge?
- ▶ Are any fields of study or inquiry more important or more relevant to the needs of humanity or the needs of the Cause of God, than others?
- ▶ Why is it unreasonable to try to narrowly define or delimit the scope of Bahá’í scholarship?
- ▶ What are some of the different forms that Bahá’í scholarship might take?
- ▶ How does a deeper understanding of the Bahá’í Revelation clarify or refine scientific and intellectual activity? Conversely, how does intellectual training provide us with tools to gain deeper insights into the meaning and implications of the Bahá’í teachings?
- ▶ How does the principle of the harmony of science and religion influence our intellectual undertakings?
- ▶ What is the role of individual conscience in scholarly inquiry? What is conscience?
- ▶ How do you understand the call of the Universal House of Justice to develop “a new model of scholarly activity,” “more integrative paradigms of scholarship,” and “new scholarly methodologies capable of coming to grips with spiritual, moral, cultural, and social phenomena not hitherto encountered”?
- ▶ Is it possible for one to have a truly objective view of reality? Why or why not?
- ▶ What is the role of consultation in pursuing knowledge and understanding?
- ▶ How might a consultation approach to scholarship related to specific research methodologies?
- ▶ What might be the benefits of a consultative approach to scholarship?
- ▶ What might a consultative approach to scholarship look like, in practice?
- ▶ Given humanity’s expanding rational and interpretative powers, how does consultation ground our perceptions of reality?
- ▶ The House of Justice has stated that “the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh is the standard of truth against which all other views and conclusions are to be measured.” How does this principle impact the process of knowledge generation and application?
- ▶ What is a “standard of truth?”
- ▶ How might we understand the central position of the Creative Word in the acquisition of knowledge?
- ▶ How does the progressive nature of Bahá’í law relate to Bahá’í scholarship?
- ▶ What is the organic nature of the relationship between Bahá’í scholarship and the Covenant?
- ▶ What are the implications of the Covenant for Bahá’í scholarship?

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