

## Strategies for Spiritualization\*

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### Abstract

Like the ability to use language, possession of spiritual attributes and qualities is a defining characteristic of the human species. Evidence from the Bahá'í writings suggests that, similar to the capacity to learn one's first language, spiritual qualities and virtues exist innately in the young child as easily activated potential states that are subject to critical period constraints as the child matures. In the adult, although the innate capacity to manifest spiritual attributes is still present, its activation appears to occur more through an information-processing approach similar to the way other new skills are learned. Educational research has found that students who use learning strategies are more successful in developing new skills than those who do not report strategy use. If the spiritualization process in adults is similar to other learning tasks, then active use of learning strategies may facilitate the development of spiritual virtues. This article discusses a possible cognitive, language-based pathway for spiritualization and then examines the application of learning strategies to the spiritualization process.

### Résumé

Le présent article explore le parallèle entre le processus de développement spirituel et l'apprentissage d'une langue. L'évidence présentée dans les Écrits bahá'ís suggère que tout comme l'enfant détient la capacité d'apprendre une langue première, les qualités spirituelles et les vertus existent de façon innée chez l'enfant en tant qu'états potentiels facilement activés mais soumis à des contraintes de temps critiques, et ce, au fur et à mesure que l'enfant mûrit. Chez l'adulte, toutefois, la spiritualisation semble plutôt prendre place à travers une approche de traitement d'information, semblable à la manière d'acquiescer d'autres nouvelles habiletés. La recherche, pédagogique sur l'application de stratégies d'apprentissage à diverses compétences a permis de constater que les apprenants qui utilisent des stratégies ont davantage de succès que ceux qui indiquent n'en utiliser aucune. Aussi, si le processus de spiritualisation chez l'adulte a des points en commun avec l'apprentissage d'une langue seconde et l'acquisition d'autres compétences, il s'ensuit que l'usage de stratégies pourrait faciliter le développement de vertus spirituelles.

### Resumen

Tal como la facultad del uso de idiomas, poseer cualidades y atributos espirituales es una característica que define el género humano. Los escritos bahá'ís presentan señales que sugieren que, parecido a la capacidad de aprender el primer idioma del individuo, existen innatas en el niño cualidades y virtudes espirituales en forma de condiciones latentes fácilmente activadas pero expuestas a constreñimientos periódicos críticos mientras llega a la madurez. En el adulto, aunque la capacidad para manifestar atributos espirituales sigue en pie, su activación parece ocurrir más por la vía de procesar información semejante a la forma en que se adquieren otras habilidades. La investigación educacional ha descubierto que los estudiantes que se valen de estrategias de aprendizaje experimentan más éxito en el desarrollo de habilidades que los que no los usan. Si el proceso de espiritualización en los adultos es similar a otras tareas de aprendizaje, entonces el uso activo de estrategias de aprendizaje podrá facilitar el desarrollo de virtudes espirituales. Este artículo presenta la posibilidad de un camino conocible hacia la espiritualización basado en lenguaje y después examina las estrategias de aprendizaje correspondientes al proceso de espiritualización.

**B**ahá'u'lláh writes that “He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes” on us as human beings (*Gleanings* 65). In addition to this ability to manifest spiritual virtues and qualities, the ability to use language is a second defining characteristic of the human species. As an applied linguist, I will approach the process of actualizing our spiritual potential by comparing it to the way children learn first languages and adults learn second languages. Of course, the basic question here is the extent to which spiritualization and language learning are similar and, consequently, the extent to which findings from Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research can be used to

inform the process of becoming spiritual. Our current understanding of SLA is that the immature brain is “wired” for rapid and unconscious language acquisition until physiological changes occur at puberty, at which point attention and effort are necessary to learn languages—usually a second language since most of us acquire our first language in childhood. I see a parallel to the spiritualization process in children and will present quotations from the Bahá’í writings supporting this view. This article will argue for the possibility of easy and unconscious activation of innate spiritual virtues and qualities in the young, provided they receive moral education and can see examples of virtuous conduct in the behavior of others around them.

This article then suggests that in the adult the ability for rapid and unconscious spiritualization may be lost, much as the ability to learn a language easily is lost. Although the capacity to manifest these virtues is still present—just as the capacity to learn other languages is a fundamental human ability regardless of age—the activation of this capacity undergoes a change. In the adult, spiritualization appears to take place in the same way as other skills are acquired, through conscious attention and effort. This article will therefore present two cognitive pathways for spiritual development—a restructuring pathway and a practice pathway—with special reference to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s identification of knowledge, volition, and action as the three essential steps for goal attainment.

Observing that educational research has demonstrated that students who actively use strategies to support their learning processes are more successful than students who do not report strategy use (see Pintrich, *Student Motivation*), this article will then introduce learning strategies that have been investigated extensively in the language acquisition context (see the literature review in Oxford, *Language Learning Strategies*) and will describe how these strategies might be adapted to facilitate the spiritualization process in adults.

As a caveat, I note that research has demonstrated that intelligence is not a monolithic construct but is composed of at least seven components (see Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences*), and learning styles are therefore varied. Thus, particular strategies will appeal to some but not be useful to others, depending on personality factors.

### **Understanding Spiritualization through an Interdisciplinary Approach**

The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh emphasizes the central role of spiritual transformation for the closely linked processes of individual regeneration and the advancement of humankind. Shoghi Effendi wrote:

One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely, the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh. (*Bahá’í Administration* 66)

It is therefore necessary to investigate the nature of spiritualization—the “mirroring forth” of eternal spiritual principles in our actions and character—and to identify possible mechanisms that facilitate the process. Although there is lack of agreement among religious scholars as to what the term spiritualization means and how it is achieved (see Helminiak, *Spiritual Development* 29), this article uses the definition developed in an investigation of the acquisition of spiritual virtues in two groups of religious believers, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and members of the Bahá’í Faith (Fotos and Hansen-Strain, “Investigating Spiritualization”). Building on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s identification of knowledge and love of God, faith, philanthropic deeds, self-sacrifice, severance from this world, and sanctity and holiness as essential qualities to develop in this life (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 226), spiritualization is defined as the process whereby individuals develop and manifest those inherent qualities and attributes identified by the world’s religions as characteristic of the intrinsically spiritual human nature.

A key element in this definition is the suggestion that spiritual qualities are inherent. People are considered to be basically spiritual entities naturally endowed with divine qualities and attributes. Bahá’u’lláh asserts that “[t]he whole duty of man in this Day is to attain that share of the flood of grace which God poureth forth for him. Let none, therefore, consider the largeness or smallness of the receptacle” (*Gleanings* 8). Bahá’u’lláh thus establishes the existence of variation in innate capacity but notes the absolute requirement to express what is present fully. Such a view is quite different from the perception of humankind as being innately sinful and requiring salvation from an external source.

Although inherent in human nature, spiritual qualities and attributes are not expressed automatically; education is essential, as the following quotations indicate:

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. (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 260)

Man is even as steel, the essence of which is hidden: through admonition and explanation, good counsel and education, that essence will be brought to light. (*Bahá'í Education*, no. 10, 3)

When asked about the purpose of physical life, 'Abdu'l-Bahá replied that it is to "acquire virtues" (*Paris Talks* 177). This statement clearly shows the importance of spiritual development through education. Bahá'u'lláh writes:

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.... (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 19)

Thus, after recognition of and love for the Manifestation of God, the goal of human existence is to reflect those divine attributes embodied by the Manifestation.

To understand what this might mean in psychological terms, it is useful briefly to examine findings from an investigation of the spiritualization process in Christian believers (Helminiak, *Spiritual Development*). Although this research is not particularly current, it indicates the usefulness of an interdisciplinary approach.

Treating spiritual development as both a psychological and a theological phenomenon, three stages have been identified in the development of a spiritual life: (1) the purgative stage of moving away from sin; (2) the illuminative stage of developing spiritual virtues and attributes; and (3) the unitive stage of becoming one with the Creator. When these stages are compared with Jungian and other psychological models of life transition, a parallel three-stage progression is apparent: (1) a period of disintegration characterized by the individual's separation from former attitudes and modes of behavior; (2) a period of painful transition and awkward behavior; and (3) a period of integration around a new way of organizing one's life. Because of the striking similarity between theist approaches and Jungian psychology in their interpretation of the process of transformation, an interdisciplinary approach has been recommended for the study of spiritualization (Helminiak, *Spiritual Development* xii). Within this framework, the goal of the religious experience is also the goal of psychology: the development of wholeness and the integration of the human personality. In a real sense, spiritual growth is psychological integration.

### **Knowledge, Cognition, and Language**

Building on an approach that uses psychology to inform the spiritualization process, this article suggests spiritual development is linked to language-based cognitive processes. To develop this suggestion, this article will examine 'Abdu'l-Bahá's views of understanding and comprehension and relate them to cognition and then to language—essentially showing that comprehension occurs through language and that both are causally related to spiritualization. The following overview is necessarily brief and is meant to be a signpost to future research rather than an exhaustive survey of the complex fields of memory and cognition.

Regarding human understanding, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has said that there are four accepted methods of comprehension: (1) through the senses, (2) through reason, (3) through tradition, and (4) through the Holy Spirit (*Some Answered Questions* 297–99). Since cognition is defined as the processing of information (see discussions in Eysenck, *Cognitive Psychology*; Jackencloff, *Consciousness*, "Conceptual Semantics," and Semantic Structures), it can be suggested that these four processes are fundamentally cognitive (Fodor, "information and Representation" 175–76).<sup>1</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá further identifies five outer and five inner powers, which are linked through the interfacing function of one of the inner powers (*Some Answered Questions* 210–11). Individuals perceive the physical world by the five outer Powers, the senses. Sensory input is transmitted to the inner powers of thought, comprehension, imagination, and memory through an inner power called the "common faculty," which, it is suggested, appears to refer to short-term or working memory in its current usage (see Cohen, *Memory*).<sup>2</sup> Thought, comprehension, and imagination, however, are functions that involve long-term or permanent memory as well as working memory. The following discussion of memory and knowledge draws on the theories of 1972 Nobel Prize-winning neurobiologist Gerald Edelman (*The Remembered Present* and *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire*) and on the work of cognitive psychologist and information-processing researcher John Anderson (*Learning and Memory*).

Memory can be viewed as enduring neural representations for encoding or storing information in the brain. The stored information is "knowledge." Thus, the terms "knowledge" and "memory" can be used somewhat interchangeably. Sensory input ('Abdu'l-Bahá's five outer powers) is processed and organized into existing information hierarchies (also called schemata) for long-term memory storage. What is stored is usually not an exact replication of the particular sensory input but rather its meaning, although special schemata for images are suggested to exist (see the discussion in Jackencloff, *Semantic Structures*).<sup>3</sup>

There are two general forms of stored knowledge, perceptual and conceptual. Perceptual knowledge is defined as “selective discrimination of an object or event from other objects or events” (Edelman, *Bright Air* 87), whereas conceptual knowledge builds upon the results of perceptual information and involves the dynamic organization of this information into hierarchies of meaning, or schemata. Thus, memory is not a unitary mental function but has distinct components, and different researchers have proposed numerous taxonomies for memory. For example, memory of specific events (biographical or episodic memory) is separate from semantic memory, this referring to meaning-based information (see Tulving, “How Many Memory Systems Are There?”). In addition, declarative memory (“knowing that”—those things which can be recalled consciously) is distinct from nondeclarative or procedural memory (“knowing how”—the memory of how to do things) (Anderson, *Learning and Memory* 308). Another taxonomy makes a distinction between explicit memory (consciously recallable knowledge) and implicit memory (unconscious knowledge) (Anderson, *Learning and Memory* 307–9). These distinctions are important for spiritualization and will be discussed again later.

Although imagination often involves sensory traces such as vision and smell, it and the other inner powers described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are cognitive since they involve manipulation of encoded information. Comprehension through the operation of reason<sup>4</sup> or through declarative knowledge of previous traditions is also cognitive. These processes involve deductive reasoning or the “propositional calculus of the logic system” (Eysenck and Keane, *Cognitive Psychology* 406), as well as the need for processing language and the storage and possible reorganization of semantic propositions within existing schemata, as well as the creation of new schemata. This is a dynamic process, so memory is seen as a continually emerging property of the mind. Regarding the final type of knowledge, understanding through the Holy Spirit, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

...without the Holy Spirit he [man] would have no intellect, he would be unable to acquire his scientific knowledge.... The illumination of the Holy Spirit gives to man the power of thought, and enables him to make discoveries by which he bends the laws of nature to his will. (*Paris Talks* 59)

This statement implies consciousness, awareness of a problem, observation of data, and subsequent analytical processes resulting in the reorganization of knowledge hierarchies. Thus, while the Holy Spirit is often linked to inspiration and intuition, it also appears to operate through the problem-solving approach embodied in scientific methodology, science being characterized as “the first emanation from God toward man” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 49). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá further notes that human powers and attributes are “human and hereditary in origin—outcomes of nature’s processes—except the intellect, which is supernatural,” that is, derived from the Holy Spirit (*Promulgation* 49).<sup>5</sup>

### **The Relationship between Language and Cognition: Four Views**

Cognitive processes are thus involved in all aspects of human comprehension, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has repeatedly said that the function of the human intellect (cognition) is God’s greatest gift to humankind (*Paris Talks* 41). He also refers to that “precious, priceless bestowal of God—the human mind...”(*Promulgation* 28).

If it is accepted that most human understanding operates through cognitive processes, then the facilitating role of language becomes evident. Of the various cognitive domains, language is the most distinctive characteristic of human learning, for language is the process of creating meaning. As the noted linguist Halliday has said, when children learn a language, they are actually learning the foundations of learning itself (“Towards a Language-Based Theory of Learning” 95). Language is not merely a domain of human knowledge, it is the *essential condition* for the creation of knowledge. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá identifies the central role of language in cognition:

...the function of language is to portray the mysteries and secrets of human hearts. The heart is like a box, and language is the key. (*Promulgation* 60)

Most linguists agree that there are four main views of the relationship between language and cognition. One view, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of the 1950s, held that culture determines both language and thought. This is a highly deterministic view, which has been largely rejected in its strong form. Other researchers, such as the famous child psychologist Jean Piaget (*Six Psychological Studies*), argue that cognition precedes language, which is learned cognitively like any other skill. However, the currently accepted view is that language is an innate human capability (for details, see arguments in Chomsky, *Lectures*; Jackendoff, *Semantic Structures*, “Conceptual Semantics”; White, “Second Language Acquisition”) and develops separately from cognition. When an infant is exposed to its first language, many aspects of grammar are not obvious from normal input alone, yet are learned quickly and completely, given minimum linguistic exposure.<sup>6</sup> Thus, it is impossible to explain naturalistic language acquisition

in children without mediation by principles of Universal Grammar (UG) (see Chomsky, *Lectures*). UG may be conceived of as an innate mental pattern for the rapid acquisition of language. When language forms are perceived from input, they are slotted into preexisting grammatical structures in the developing brain.<sup>7</sup> However, once the child passes through puberty and physiological changes<sup>8</sup> occur in the brain neurons, it appears that UG may no longer be available, or may be quite limited.<sup>9</sup> It has therefore been suggested that after a biologically determined critical period, languages are most likely learned cognitively, like any other skill, either through an information-processing approach (see Jackendoff, *Consciousness, Semantic Structures*) or through a connectionist model<sup>10</sup> (see McClelland, “Connectionist Models”).

A very important fourth view of the relationship between language and cognition holds that language shapes thought through the process of interaction. This view will be discussed below.

### **Is There an Innate, Age-Sensitive System for Spiritualization?**

Based on the arguments for the existence of innate age-sensitive mental categories for both grammar and meaning, the case can be made that a number of Bahá'í writings suggest that the easy activation of latent spiritual virtues may be under similar critical-period constraints:<sup>11</sup>

It is extremely difficult to teach the individual and refine his character once puberty is [*sic*] passed. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 137)

Encourage the children from their earliest years to master every kind of learning.... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, qtd. in *Bahá'í Education* 27–28)

Truly, if a babe did not live at all it were better than to let it grow ignorant, for that innocent babe, in later life, would become afflicted with innumerable defects. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 3:579)

Elsewhere, 'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasizes the need to train children from early childhood to “acquire the divine perfections latent in the heart of man” (*Promulgation* 53). Such statements indicate that virtues probably exist as highly responsive potential states in the child and that, similar to language acquisition, a critical period exists for their activation. As with the ability to learn languages, after childhood, the ability for rapid and unconscious development of virtues appears to be lost. This suggestion is further supported by the many passages in the Bahá'í writings that refer to the need for conscious attention and effort—key cognitive learning mechanisms—in the spiritualization process of adults. Thus, virtue acquisition in the adult appears to proceed cognitively through an information-processing approach in much the same way as does the acquisition of other skills, such as playing the piano or learning a second language. This does not imply that the ability to become spiritualized has been lost, only that the means for activating spiritual potential may have altered. Adults can still learn languages, only learning requires conscious attention and effort. In the same way, adults can manifest their spiritual potential, again through conscious effort. The next section presents a cognitive model outlining two possible pathways for adult spiritualization.

## **The Adult Spiritualization Process**

### ***Developing Explicit Knowledge as the First Step***

In cognitive psychology, a distinction is made between explicit or declarative knowledge (consciously knowing about something, such as knowing the rules and forms of a language) and implicit or procedural knowledge (unconsciously knowing how to do something, such as being able to speak a language). Although Anderson presents a detailed discussion of the differences between the explicit—implicit and the declarative—procedural typologies, they can be considered to be similar in this brief article (*Learning and Memory* 308–9).

A cognitive model of spiritualization has been proposed (see Fotos, “Spiritual Transformation”) which suggests that it is important for individuals first to become consciously aware of the virtues and qualities they wish to manifest. An initial step in the spiritualization process is the development of explicit knowledge about the virtue or quality: what it is and how it is manifested in behavior. One way to develop such explicit knowledge is through prayer and personal study of the holy writings. Explicit knowledge may also be developed through social interaction, for example, by participating in the Bahá'í Institute Process, informal discussions, consultation, and group study activities.

### ***Consultation: Creating Knowledge through Interaction***

Whereas the principle of consultation has characterized Bahá'í social and administrative processes since their inception, collaborative learning (learning through group interaction and feedback) has become a significant component of pedagogy only within the last two decades. One reason for the current emphasis on an interactionist perspective in education is the work of Vygotsky (1896–1934), a Russian psychologist whose research (see Vygotsky, *Mind in Society, Thought and Language*; Wertsch, *Vygotsky*) has only recently become available to the West, yet has had a significant impact on the current appreciation of the role of interaction in cognition and language development. In Vygotsky's view, learning and development are necessarily mediated by language, which is seen to be the basis of human intellect (see Vygotsky, *Mind in Society, Thought and Language*; Wertsch, *Vygotsky*)<sup>12</sup> All higher-order<sup>13</sup> cognitive functions are suggested to be developed from language-based social interactions, and Vygotsky suggests that it is through interaction that meaning is created.<sup>14</sup> Language, therefore, has two functions: communication and the interpretation of experience “by organizing it into meaning” (Halliday, “Towards a Language-Based Theory” 95).

Vygotsky's work represents a highly significant fourth view of the relationship between language and cognition. He views language and cognition as originating separately, but becoming interdependent in the complex process of creating knowledge. The importance of interaction for knowledge creation is repeatedly emphasized throughout the Bahá'í writings. When speaking of consultation, Bahá'u'lláh writes, “In all things it is necessary to consult ... it is and will always be a cause of awareness and of awakening” (*Consultation: A Compilation* 2). ‘Abdu'l-Bahá refers to consultation as a “potent instrument” and one of the “explicit ordinances of the Lord of Mankind” (*Consultation* 5–6). He further says that “the light of reality becomes apparent when two opinions coincide” (*Promulgation* 72) and that “cooperation and association are essential ... [t]o find happiness and development, individual and collective” (*Promulgation* 35). Therefore, the role of group study of the Bahá'í writings, particularly through collaborative methodology such as is used by the Institute Process, in developing explicit knowledge of desirable virtues cannot be underestimated.

### **Restructuring and Practice: Two Pathways for Spiritualization**

*Noticing and Restructuring.* Once the individual has developed explicit knowledge of virtues and qualities by prayer and studying the Bahá'í writings as well as through social interaction, this knowledge results in focused awareness or consciousness of the virtues. In studies of language acquisition, consciousness of language properties developed through explicit instruction is often positively correlated to successful learning outcomes if communicative encounters with the target language are also present (see Fotos, “Integrating Grammar”; Robinson, “Learning”; Schmidt, “Psychological Mechanisms”). Similarly, it also appears to be important for people to see examples of spiritual qualities and virtues in the behavior and deeds of others. A number of passages in the Bahá'í writings indicate that observation of others is of great importance (see the review in Jordan, “Becoming Your True Self”) to provide input on how others operationalize desired spiritual qualities. It has also been suggested (Fotos, “Spiritual Transformation” 155–56) that when individuals repeatedly notice in the behavior of others the virtues and qualities that they wish to develop, such noticing can act as a trigger for the unconscious restructuring of the individuals' internal value systems. Such a role for noticing and attention in the area of second-language learning has been indicated by several researchers (see Fotos, “Consciousness-Raising”; Robinson, “Learning”; Schmidt, “Psychological”), and it is suggested that an analogous role for noticing may exist in the spiritualization process, particularly when supported by personal effort to manifest the noticed virtue.

Some empirical support for this point is provided by a study (Fotos and Hansen, “Investigating Spiritualization”) of 179 members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and 49 Bahá'ís. Nearly half of both religious groups reported they noticed virtues in the behavior of others that they wished to develop in themselves, and interaction with those possessing the desired virtues was mentioned as important for the development of spiritual qualities.

*Practice.* Automatization is seen as a second important pathway for virtues development (Fotos and Hansen-Strain, “Investigating Spiritualization”). Here, the individual consciously practices a desired virtue until its production has become automatic. In language learning, the point has been made that production of formal knowledge in the form of language which has been memorized and then automatized by frequent usage cannot be distinguished empirically from naturalistic language productions (see Gregg, “Krashen's Model”), and in cognitive psychology, proceduralization or automaticity coming from the repeated use of declarative knowledge (“knowing what”) is a demonstrated way of transforming it into procedural knowledge (“knowing how”) (Anderson, *Learning and Memory* 308). Extending this argument, if an individual behaves as though she has a particular virtue and her behavior becomes automatized, then it is functionally as though she has acquired the virtue. This assumption also

underlies a popular virtues curriculum for children and their families—that instruction which is followed by observation and deliberate modeling of a virtue will facilitate its acquisition (Popov, Popov, and Kavelin, *Virtues Guide*) and also supports the application of educational strategies shown to promote automaticity to the process of spiritualization.

In either case, whether restructuring of the individual's internal spiritual system takes place first, or whether the individual practices the virtue until it becomes automatically manifested, the initial requirement is that the individual must become conscious of the need to manifest virtues in her own behavior.

### ***Consciousness as Knowledge, Volition, and Action***

At this point, it is necessary to examine the concept of consciousness since it is a vital component of the above-presented cognitive model of spiritualization. Consciousness will be discussed from the perspectives of cognitive psychology, organizational research, and the Bahá'í writings.

Earlier it was suggested that conscious knowledge or awareness of a virtue or quality is the first step in its acquisition. In this case, consciousness refers to *awareness* of the problem—the fact that a quality exists which the individual wishes to have. However, awareness alone is not sufficient. Consciousness must also include *intentionality* (see discussions in Bialystock, “Dangers”; Bogdan, *Grounds for Cognition*), or a planned course of action for applying strategic behavior to produce a desired goal. In the Bahá'í writings, this has been termed *volition* (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 157). Further examination of the term yields consciousness as *control*, referring to the ability to automatize frequent actions. This step requires effort, and the need for intentional effort toward attainment of spiritual virtues is emphasized in the Bahá'í writings:

You must endeavor day and night to become worthy of a generous portion of these gifts [bestowals and bounties of the Lord] and realize full capacity of attainment. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 196)

Bahá'u'lláh promises that “[w]hoso maketh efforts for Us” will be guided and confirmed (*Gleanings* 266). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes:

Mere knowledge of principles is not sufficient. We all know and admit that justice is good, but there is need of volition and action to carry out and manifest it. (*Promulgation* 121)

Extensive organizational research on motivation and skill development (summarized in O’Neil and Drillings, *Motivation*) also indicates that three stages are essential for goal attainment: the establishment of a goal, development of motivation or will to achieve that goal, and, finally, taking appropriate action toward attainment of the goal. These stages again parallel the cognitive idea of consciousness as awareness, intentionality, and control presented above and reflect the following often-quoted statement by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

The attainment of any object is conditioned upon knowledge, volition and action. Unless these three conditions are forthcoming, there is no execution or accomplishment. (*Promulgation* 157)

Thus, from the diverse perspectives of cognitive psychology, organizational research, and the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the key requirements for successful goal attainment are identical: awareness or knowledge, motivation or volition, and individual effort or action.

Sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and educational research<sup>15</sup> has established the favorable results from use of strategies to attain both communicative and instructional goals. When learners are aware of their goal, are motivated to learn and take action, and are supported by active employment of strategies, very positive learning outcomes are achieved.

### **Using Learning Strategies to Facilitate Spiritualization**

It has been repeatedly demonstrated that knowledge gains occur when learners are engaged, active, in control of their learning, and self-regulating through the use of strategies (Karabenick, “Social Influences” 689). Strategies are broadly defined as conscious techniques used to achieve a goal, and a recent study of their use in the language classroom (see Donato and McCormick, “Sociocultural”) identifies strategies as important higher-level mental processes that mediate cognitive change. Regarding a strategy taxonomy, several systems have been proposed (see Wenden and Rubin, *Learner Strategies*, and Kaspar and Kellerman, *Communication Strategies*, for reviews), but this article will follow Oxford’s classification (*Language Learning Strategies* 17) since it provides a clear discussion of the types and gives recommendations for their use that can be extended to the spiritualization process. Oxford

identifies two broad categories of strategies, direct and indirect. Direct strategies (Oxford, *Language* 37–38) are those that directly involve the target item to be learned. All strategies require mental processing; however, direct strategies involve conscious manipulation of the target itself. In contrast, indirect strategies do not deal directly with the target but rather involve the learner’s approach to learning. Such metastrategies enable learners to take control of the nature and rate of their own learning. Direct and indirect strategies are complementary in nature and are often used in tandem.

### **Direct Strategies**

The category of direct strategies includes memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies.

1. *Memory Strategies.* Memory strategies are aimed at facilitating the storage and retrieval of new information (Oxford, *Language* 58). The first type of strategy involves linking and subsuming new information within a framework of previously learned material and is achieved through grouping, associating, and placing new information in context. Such procedures enhance the development of explicit knowledge through formal study and memorization of prayers and sacred writings.<sup>16</sup>

A useful strategy for remembering written text is to visualize the location of the item on the page. Using images and sounds (for example, chanting prayers or singing) also assists memorization of sacred writings by serving to focus the cognitive processes. Research on the use of imagery in education (for a review, see Ney, “Imagery”) indicates that imagery both facilitates the habitual aspects of learning new information and promotes creativity. Regarding the use of imagery to support prayer, Shoghi Effendi wrote:

If you find you need to visualize someone when you pray, think of the Master. Through Him you can address Bahá’u’lláh. Gradually try to think of the qualities of the Manifestation, and in that way a mental form will fade out, for after all the body is not the thing. His Spirit is there and is the essential, everlasting element. (*Lights of Guidance* 487)

In virtues development, the individual can imagine herself successfully exhibiting a virtue or quality in a particular situation. Using imagery, she can mentally rehearse instances where operation of the virtue is appropriate, imagining herself successfully displaying the virtue in much the same way as professional athletes mentally rehearse their performance in forthcoming games.

Review reinforces processing of recently studied material and facilitates analysis of situations. Since the sequencing of these three memory strategies is important, review should take place after the subsumption of the new material. A spiral pattern is recommended, meaning that review is conducted repeatedly at regular intervals until knowledge of the desired virtue has been acquired (Oxford, *Language* 66–67).

2. *Cognitive Strategies.* Useful cognitive strategies for spiritualization include (a) practicing, (b) analyzing and reasoning, and (c) organizing or creating structure for new material (Oxford, *Language* 69–70). Practice is one of the most important overall strategies as it facilitates the automatization of spiritual behavior; it refers to acting out the possession of a virtue repeatedly, even to the extent of seeking or creating situations that require it. Throughout the Bahá’í writings, people are urged to take positive action. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “Without action nothing in the material world can be accomplished (*Paris Talks* 80).

Practice also includes the mental imaging discussed earlier.<sup>17</sup> Through practice, consciously controlled behavior consistent with the possession of specific virtues eventually becomes automatic. At this point, the ability to manifest the virtue has become part of the internal spiritual system.

Analyzing and reasoning are cognitive activities used to understand the meaning of new material. The application of analysis and reasoning to the Bahá’í writings and to descriptions of the lives of the central figures can indicate what actions appropriately manifest spiritual virtues and qualities. Using deductive reasoning or top-down analysis, it is possible to determine how a general virtue such as patience might be applied to various situations and then, using visualization, rehearsal, and practice strategies, to imitate the behavior of a patient person. Such action can be reinforced by memorized repetitions of appropriate sacred writings and prayers. Contrastive analysis of one’s failure to display the virtue, compared with more appropriate behavior, is also informative for identifying specific behaviors and attitudes that must be changed.

Organization is a primarily written means for establishing hierarchies to aid the integration of new knowledge into previously developed schemata. Here, the individual takes notes, perhaps keeping a Virtues Diary to record incidents involving the target behavior. Other types of organization include summarizing and highlighting appropriate Bahá’í writings. A systematic approach to the study of the Bahá’í Faith is recommended for,



[t]here is no limit to the study of the Cause. The more we read the Writings the more truths we find in them (Shoghi Effendi, qtd. in *The Importance of Deepening—A Compilation* 93)

3. *Compensation Strategies*. In second-language learning, the use of compensation strategies enables the learner to comprehend and produce the target language despite limitations in knowledge (Oxford, *Language* 47, 90). In the spiritualization process, the individual attempts to control her behavior in various situations so that either the target virtue is displayed or a contrary trait is *not displayed*. For example, justice is a very important virtue. Bahá'u'lláh says, “The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice ...” (*Hidden Words* 3). If the individual were unsure how to exemplify this virtue, she could study the Bahá'í writings, for example, these words of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá: “Desire for others only that which you desire for yourselves” (*Paris Talks* 159). The individual then surmises that one way to manifest justice is to enact the Golden Rule. Conversely, selfish behavior or ill will toward others is not manifesting justice, so such limiting behavior must be overcome.

### **Indirect Strategies**

Indirect strategies involve controlling the learning process itself. As Oxford notes (*Language* 135), they are indirect because they support and manage learning but do not directly involve manipulation of what is to be learned. Although indirect strategies are often used in conjunction with direct strategies, research suggests that it is not the number of direct and indirect strategies employed which is important for success but rather the learner's orchestration of them (see Ehrman and Oxford, “Cognition Plus”). Careful use of metacognitive strategies such as overviewing, paying attention, goal setting, and self-evaluation can increase the effectiveness of direct strategy use. Additional indirect strategies are affective strategies for managing emotions and providing self-encouragement, and social strategies for structuring interaction.

1. *Metacognitive Strategies*. The term “metacognitive” means “beyond, beside or with the cognitive” (Oxford, *Language* 136). The first of these, overviewing, comes from the work of cognitive psychologist David Ausubel (see Ausubel, Novak, and Hanesian, *Educational Psychology*) regarding the advantage of approaching a new learning task at a higher level of generality. This step aids the learner in processing the new material. Called the Advance Organizer, it is an orientation to the coming activity, explaining its purpose and procedures.

Within the Bahá'í context, overviewing new sacred writings to be studied, asking oneself questions, and trying to understand the content of the new information promotes subsequent comprehension of new material. An excellent example of this is the interactive approach used in the Bahá'í Institute Process. Here, group-based study of the Bahá'í writings allows the collaborative creation of knowledge through Vygotskian social interaction. Bahá'í prayers and writings are often difficult to understand, not only because of their linguistic complexity but also because of their cultural grounding in Islam and the stylistic features of the Persian and Arabic languages. Reading about or discussing the Bahá'í writings assists the learner's comprehension. Furthermore, such overviewing not only will enhance the establishment of links between what is already known and the new material but also will reinforce the individual's ability to notice desired virtues in the actions of others around her.

Goal setting, the second type of metacognitive strategy, is one of the most important determinants of success. Psychological research (see Pintrich, Brown, and Weinstein, *Student Motivation*) indicates that goal setting is a major factor in successful task performance, and educational studies have found that groups which set goals outperform all other types of groups (see Punnett, “Goal Setting and Performance” and “Goal Setting: An Extension”; Morgan, “Self-Monitoring”). Thus, setting goals for spiritual development and working toward those goals is essential. In addition, individuals should make use of the power of prayer to support their efforts:

We must supplicate Bahá'u'lláh to assist us to overcome the failings in our own characters, and also exert our own will power in mastering ourselves. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, January 27, 1945, qtd. in *Unfolding Destiny* 442)

Regular self-appraisal is a critical step in determining the extent to which spiritual goals have been achieved. In *The Hidden Words* (Arabic 31), Bahá'u'lláh admonishes individuals to engage in daily reflection on their actions (11). The writings of Shoghi Effendi, in particular, refer to the need for “daily vigilance” (*Advent of Divine Justice* 30). Such evaluation includes both self-monitoring during attempts to behave in ways that exemplify virtues as well as assessment and reflection afterwards. Through careful and realistic self-appraisal, the feelings of remorse and regret that accompany the failure to manifest virtues and qualities can become feedback which facilitates successful behavior in the future. In cognitive psychology, appraisal theory is a well-researched new area (see Lewis, “Self-Organizing” for a survey) demonstrating that self-appraisal resulting from emotion as well as emotion resulting from appraisal provide significant feedback for cognitive restructuring.

2. *Affective Strategies*. As used in the social sciences, the term “affective” refers to an individual’s “affect” or emotional state, Included are attitudes, feelings, motivations, and values. In second-language learning, affective strategies enable learners to gain control of their emotional condition during the learning process (Oxford, *Language* 164–66). Individuals often become frustrated and discouraged because of failure to manifest spiritual qualities, and management of these feelings is an important component of success. Individuals must be patient with themselves, realizing that transformation occurs slowly and is subject to internal processing constraints. As Shoghi Effendi notes:

... not everyone achieves easily and rapidly the victory over self. What every believer ... should realize is that the Cause has the spiritual power to re-create us if we make the effort (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, January 27, 1945, qtd. in *Unfolding Destiny* 442)

Furthermore, the Bahá’í writings urge individuals to look away from themselves and, rather than brooding on their lack of success, to rise to action and move forward:

Regarding your own condition: He strongly urges you not to dwell on yourself. Each one of us, if we look into our failures, is sure to feel unworthy and despondent, and this feeling only frustrates our constructive efforts and wastes time. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 13, 1947, qtd. in *Unfolding Destiny* 447)

When developing spiritual qualities and virtues, the best course is to avoid excessive self-preoccupation and to continue to work toward specific goals and objectives.

Specific affective strategies to control negative emotions are the use of prayer, meditation, music, and laughter, as well as frequent readings of prayers and sacred writings that emphasize the nobility of human nature and the ever-present forces of divine confirmation waiting to assist those who make efforts. Writing in a diary or journal is useful to keep track of events and feelings and to manage an overly severe appraisal cycle. Participation in Bahá’í study groups and deepenings can lead to the sharing of feelings and the support of friends.

3. *Social Strategies*. Social strategies mediate communication and are of particular importance since the manifestation of many virtues takes place during interaction with others. As one Bahá’í educator has noted, the Bahá’í Faith represents a massive paradigm shift in the concept of human relations (Diehl, “Exploration and Integration” 38). In cultures such as the United States, competition is the basis for many aspects of human relationships, yet the Bahá’í view is based on cooperation and consultation, and the core of the Bahá’í teachings regarding human relationships is love. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá instructs:

You must be exceedingly kind and loving toward each other, willing to forfeit life in the pathway of another’s happiness. You must be ready to sacrifice your possessions in another’s behalf.... Your utmost desire must be to confer happiness upon each other. (*Promulgation* 215)

In order to manifest virtues associated with love, such as kindness, compassion, courtesy, forgiveness, friendliness, and helpfulness<sup>18</sup> during interpersonal relations, strategies such as asking questions to facilitate mutual understanding and approaching interaction in a cooperative spirit are essential. Successful consultation and other forms of interaction are enabled when individuals practice the strategies of empathizing with others and of becoming aware of others’ thoughts and feelings through asking questions and direct observation. Keeping silent so as to process fully what the other person is saying is another important strategy that receives support in the Bahá’í writings.

### **Strategy Training**

In strategy training, learners are taught specific direct and indirect strategies and then urged to apply these strategies to their situation. Although many strategies take place mentally and cannot be directly assessed (Oxford, *Language* 194), cooperation with others, consulting during decision making rather than competing, and asking questions for clarification and understanding of the other person’s views are observable. The individual can observe herself putting these strategies into operation and can also notice them in the actions of others. Oxford suggests six steps that can be applied to the spiritualization process (*Language* 204):

1. *Determining One’s Needs*. What are the virtues and qualities the individual most wants to develop? These should be identified and written down so as to focus attention. Passages from the Bahá’í writings dealing with the selected virtues should be collected and reviewed regularly. Specific prayers for the attainment of virtues should be said.

2. *Determining Appropriate Strategies and Combining Them in a Program of Strategy Use.* The individual's conscious commitment and effort are involved during this important step. Research indicates that learners who actively use a combination of strategies tend to be more successful than those who do not report planned strategy use (see Oxford and Leaver, "A Synthesis").

3. *Considering Individual Preferences.* The learner's cultural background, dominant intelligence type, and individual learning style preference may predispose some types of strategies to be more successful than others. Several large projects have investigated individual differences such as personality type,<sup>19</sup> attitudes, strategy use, aptitude, and motivation, and confirm their relationship to learning success (summarized in Carrell, Prince, and Astika, "Personality Types"). Positive correlations were observed between personality types and preference for certain strategies. In the spiritualization process, this is a valid consideration. Individuals should be aware of their personality type and should select strategies that are easy and appealing to use.

4. *Preparing Materials and Activities.* Preparation of materials and activities can include the preparation of Bahá'í writings on desirable virtues, the organization of study groups, participation in the Bahá'í Institute Process, and the keeping of a Virtues Diary.

5. *Actively Applying Strategies to a Learning Situation.* This article has suggested that practicing strategy use is a critical step in the spiritualization process.

6. *Evaluating and Revising Strategy Use.* The individual should evaluate the effectiveness of strategies and, if necessary, revise their use. Research indicates that strategy training is most effective when learners understand why a particular strategy is useful, how it can be transferred to different tasks, and how they can evaluate success (see the summary in Oxford and Leaver, "A Synthesis"). The research on appraisal discussed above provides empirical support for the significance of evaluation and accompanying emotional factors in self-organization.

## Conclusion

This article has presented an analysis of the spiritualization process and has presented evidence from the Bahá'í writings that suggests it may be age-sensitive, occurring easily in the child through appropriate moral education and training, but only by attention and effort in the adult. In attempting to describe the cognitive nature of spiritualization in adults, perhaps more questions have been raised than answered. However, this report is exploratory and hypothesis generating rather than hypothesis testing, and it has identified important areas for future research, particularly investigations of strategy use during the study of Bahá'í writings, participation in community and administrative activities, and in personal development.

As an aid to spiritualization, specific learning strategies from the field of education have been presented, with suggestions for their application to the development of virtues. These strategies can provide individuals with a powerful, active means to control their own spiritualization process.

## Notes

1. For a layperson's overview of cognitive psychology, see Eysenck and Keane's excellent *Cognitive Psychology: A Student's Handbook*.

2. For a discussion of the controversial history of memory research, see Schwartz and Reisberg, *Learning and Memory*. See Smyth, et al., *Cognition in Action* for descriptions of the processing pathways for various sensory inputs.

3. Jackendoff is a leading researcher linking the field of generative linguistics and cognitive psychology. He investigates the relationship of language structure (syntax) to meaning (semantics) and suggests that the two are usually linked. He also argues that meaning is stored in the mind in two ways: An algebraic format for concepts (i.e., [HAS-A-BACK] for chair), and a three-dimensional geometric format for perceptual information.

4. For a technical presentation of research on the creation of semantic knowledge and representations, see the theme issue of *Memory* 3 (1995): 3, 4.

5. 'Abdu'l-Bahá cautions that both inspiration and satanic promptings are the "influx of the human heart" (*Promulgation* 22), so an important question is how they can be differentiated. The Holy Spirit is "light and knowledge itself" (*Promulgation* 22) and only it can provide the necessary knowledge to distinguish between inspiration and erroneous thinking. "Through it [the Holy Spirit] the human mind is quickened and fortified into true conclusions and perfect knowledge" (*Promulgation* 22). Elsewhere, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that the "spirit of man is the meeting between man and God" (*Promulgation* 239). This suggests that there is an interface between cognition and the Holy Spirit whereby the latter guides and informs the former (*Promulgation* 21). The nature of this interface is an important area for future psychological investigation.

6. Interestingly, a strong body of evidence supporting the existence of innate, age-sensitive linguistic parameters, which are “set” upon receiving minimum input, comes from studies of songbirds. Between the ages of ten and fifteen days, the hatchlings of birds such as chaffinches must be exposed to the song of the mate of their species in order to acquire song ability. After this period, they are unable to learn to sing (see Demers, “Linguistics and Animal Communication”). Additional arguments supporting an innate human linguistic system are the existence of regular syntax in pidgin and Creole languages (simplified languages for communication between two or more linguistic groups), and the new field of genetic linguistics, which investigates inherited language disabilities (see Harley, *The Psychology of Language*). Furthermore, recent neurobiological results obtained from brain scans indicate that languages learned in childhood are actually located in a different part of the brain from languages learned by adults (*Nature* [July 12, 1997]).

7. A similar nativist argument for cognition itself has been proposed (see Jackendoff, *Semantic Structures*) whereby the language of thought already exists in the mind as preexisting semantic categories. Such considerations derive from philosophic rationalists such as Plato and Descartes, who maintained that certain fundamental ideas are innate. Opposing this argument are the ideas of the empiricists such as Locke and Hume, who maintain that all knowledge is derived from experience—the *tabula rasa* (blank tablet) concept.

8. It is suggested that myelination of neuron connections is responsible for critical period effects (see Pulvermuller and Schumann. “Neurobiological Mechanisms”). Here, the cell axons become coated with a protective cover of myelin to facilitate the flow of electricity and preserve automatized behavior, but the plasticity of the cell in forming new connections is thereby severely limited. Thus, new learning takes place more slowly.

9. For a thorough review of the evidence supporting the critical-period hypothesis in language learning, see Long, “Maturational Constraints on Language Development.” For a discussion of critical-period effects on UG, see Johnson and Newport, “Critical Period Effects on Universal Properties of Language.”

10. Connectionism, considered by many to be an important new paradigm explaining psychological function, is a theory based on the activation and interaction of a large number of simple, neuron-like processing units. Connectionist models are also referred to as neural networks or parallel distributed processing (PDP) models.

11. The biological basis for many forms of behavior is now well established for a range of organisms, including humans. For example, various mental disorders have been shown to be mediated by chemical imbalances in the brain, and in the field of sociobiology, researchers such as Wilson (*Sociobiology*) have argued for the existence of genetically determined behavior such as altruism, suggesting that it confers survival advantages for a species, although not for the individuals who sacrifice themselves so that their offspring can live. However, arguments for the importance of free will over biological determinism emphasize that undesirable human behavior such as war, violence, and aggression are not inevitable and can be changed. For further discussion, see Avila, *Biology: Investigating Life on Earth*.

12. In fairness, it should be mentioned that some researchers reject this type of psychosemantic model of cognition, suggesting that it reduces cognition to linguistic limitations (see Bogdan, *Grounds for Cognition*). However, it will be seen that Vygotsky’s view is quite different from the arguments of linguistic determinism used at the turn of the century to suggest that groups who spoke more concrete languages, such as Native American languages, were mentally less developed than those linguistic groups whose languages commonly expressed abstractions.

13. The term “higher order/level mental processes” refers to cognitive functions such as logical memory, selective attention, reasoning, and analysis, as well as metacognitive activities such as problem solving (see Donato and McCormick, “A Sociocultural Perspective”).

14. See the 1992 theme issue of *Educational Psychologist* 27.4 on the neurobiology of the creation of meaning through interaction.

15. See the interdisciplinary articles in Kaspar and Ketlerman, *Communication Strategies*.

16. Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) presents a view of cognitive development that is similar to Vygotsky’s interactionist perspective, suggesting that learning is assimilation of others’ discourse. Bakhtin writes, “Internally persuasive discourse... is, as it is affirmed through assimilation, tightly interwoven with ‘one’s own word.’ In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else’s” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 345). Thus, memorization of prayers and sacred writings empowers the individual with the discourse of the Manifestation. The Holy Word enters the individual’s language of thought, transforming it and thereby becoming her “own word.”

17. Popov, Popov, and Kavelin, *Virtues Guide* gives specific exercises for practicing fifty-two virtues.

18. A list of social values (virtues) found in the Bahá’í writings appears in Allen, “Centering a Secular Education” 28.

19. Personality type is usually measured by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers, *The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*). This instrument has four bipolar scales based on Jungian psychology: Extroversion/Introversion; Sensing Perception/Intuitive Perception; Thinking Judgment/Feeling Judgment; Judging/Perceiving Styles for Dealing with the Outside World (Myers and McCaulley, *Manual*). An individual is described by the combination of her positions on these four scales.

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