**An Introduction to the Bahai Faith**

Compiled by Julie Iraninejad from a variety of sources

NOTES TO ACCOMPANY POWERPOINT

(hand out sticky notes and pencils for participants to write their questions)

SLIDE 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BAHAI FAITH

Thank you so much for inviting me to be with you and talk with you a little bit about the Bahai Faith. There is no clergy in the Bahai Faith so, I’m just a very average Bahai that is going to share with you a drop of the ocean that is the Bahai Writings and Teachings.

SLIDE 2: THE BAHAI FAITH (Picture of diverse community)

The Bahai Faith is a world religion with around 8 million followers. The Encyclopedia Brittanica says that it is the second-most widespread religion geographically in the world, after Christianity.

A Bahai is a follower of Baha’u’llah, Who we believe is the Promised One of all ages. As you know the traditions of almost every people include the promise of a future when peace and harmony will be established on earth and humankind will live in prosperity. We believe that Baha’u’llah is that great personage Whose Teachings will enable humanity to build a new world. Baha’u’llah is a title that means the Glory of God. He came to Persia in the mid 1800s and promulgated teachings that were very contrary to the established norms of that country. The Bahai Faith is the largest religious minority in Iran and is still very heavily persecuted as the Muslim clergy that rule Iran see it as a threat to their power. The Bahai Faith has no clergy, promotes the independent investigation of the truth and not just following blindly what has been passed down, teaches the equality of women and men and believes in a Messenger of God that came after Muhammad, which is a crime in the Islamic Republic of Iran that is punishable by death.

SLIDE 3: BAHA’U’LLAH (map of His exiles)

Baha’u’llah’s sufferings began the moment He arose to proclaim the Cause of God. His life was one of exile, imprisonment and persecution. He was put in chains in a dark and dismal dungeon in Tehran. He was exiled four times from land to land, finally being sent to the prison city of Akka in the Ottoman Empire, which is now in Israel. Every effort was made by two powerful courts- those of the king of Iran and the Ottoman emperor- to oppose Baha’u’llah and His teachings. But the light of truth is not easily extinguished and nothing was able to stop Baha’u’llah’s growing influence. The farther the authorities banished Him, the greater the number of people who were attracted to His teaching and recognized His power and majesty.

Beginning in Adrianople and continuing in Akka, Baha’u’llah wrote to the kings and rulers of the world, including Emperor Napolean III, Queen Victoria, Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany, Tsar Alexander II of Russia, Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria, Pope Pius the 9th, Sultan Abdul-Aziz of Turkey and Nasirdin Shah of Persia. In these letters, Baha’u’llah openly proclaimed His station as a Messenger of God and urged the leaders to pursue justice and disarmament, among other things. Most of the kings and rulers ignored or rejected His Message.

There was only one that gave Him a neutral reply. Who do you think that was? It was Queen Victoria. And you know what, her granddaughter, Queen Marie of Romania, became a Bahai.

Of the Bahai teachings, Queen Marie of Romania said…

SLIDE 4: Quote

Would someone read this please

“The Bahai teaching brings peace and understanding. It is like a wide embrace gathering together all those who have long searched for words of hope. It accepts all great Prophets gone before, it destroys no other creeds and leaves all doors open. Saddened by the continual strife amongst believers of many confessions and wearied of their intolerance towards each other, I discovered in the Bahai teaching the real spirit of Christ so often denied and misunderstood. Unity, instead of strife, Hope instead of condemnation, Love instead of hate, and a great reassurance for all men…if ever the name of Baha’u’llah or Abdu’l-Baha comes to your attention, do not put their writings from you. Search out their Books, and let their glorious, peace-bringing, love-creating words and lessons sink into your hearts as they have into mine.” –Queen Marie of Romania

SLIDE 5: Bahji

In spite of constant persecution, Baha’u’llah continued to reveal the Word of God for more than forty years (we have hundreds of volumes of His Writings) and His Words continue to bring love and spiritual energy into the world, inspiring His followers and many others throughout the world.

If you are interested in learning more about the life of Baha’u’llah, there is a

one hour film called “Light to the World” which is an engaging story, told by His followers in a really beautiful way, that highlights His impact. It is accessible on the bottom right of the first page of [www.bahai.org](http://www.bahai.org) . It was made for the 200th anniversary of His birth in 2017

SLIDE 6: THE CORE BELIEFS OF THE BAHAI FAITH

The core beliefs of the Bahai Faith are:

The oneness of God

The oneness of Religion

The oneness of Humanity

SLIDE 7: THE ONENESS OF GOD (put quote in)

Baha’u’llah taught that there is only one God. We may name Him different names- God, Allah, Jehovah, Dios, but there is only one Creator whose Essence is beyond our comprehension. Our mind is like a tea cup while the knowledge of God is as vast as the ocean. Our mind cannot fully contain it.

Would someone please read this quote from Baha’u’llah about the nature of God

“To every discerning and illuminated heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the Divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress. Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery. He is, and hath ever been, veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men. ‘No vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision; He is the Subtle, the All-Perceiving.’” –Baha’u’llah

God is neither male nor female, although the limitations and conventions of our language have led us to refer to Him in the masculine. The Bahai Writings say that God is personal, meaning that He is conscious and rational and has a will and a purpose. Although He is not a person, He is also not some mindless force in the universe. He is our Creator and the purpose behind our creation is love.

SLIDE 8: Quote with heart in background

“I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit.”

So even though God’s existence is far beyond our understanding, His love still touches our lives and our beings ceaselessly. The way this love flows to us is through something that Bahais call “The Eternal Covenant”. According to this Eternal Covenant, God never leaves us alone and without guidance.

Whenever humanity moves away from Him and disregards His Teachings, a Manifestation of God appears and makes God’s Will and Purpose known to us.

SLIDE 9: THE MANIFESTATIONS OF GOD (pic of progressive revelation and sun)

What does the word “manifest” mean? (PAUSE) To reveal, to bring forth something that was not know before. The Manifestations of God are those special Beings Who reveal to humanity the Word and the Will of God, so to listen to them is to respond to the call of our Creator.

Baha’u’llah teaches that a Manifestation of God appears every 500-1000 years and they are like perfectly polished mirrors that are pointed to the sun and they reflect that light of God in all its splendor. All the mirrors reflect the same light. While God is beyond our reach, these perfect Beings come to us from time to time, live among us, give us guidance and fill us with the energy we need to progress, materially and spiritually.

Some of the Manifestations are…Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Zoroaster, Buddha, Krishna, Muhammad and the two most recent ones- the Bab, which means Gate, who was the forerunner to Baha’u’llah, and Baha’u’llah.

Baha’u’llah says:

SLIDE 10: (quote) “There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God.”

He explains that the Founders of the world religions, the great universal Educators of humanity, share a common purpose to unite humanity and ensure the advancement of civilization. He writes, “They all abide in the same tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech, and proclaim the same Faith.” He urges the peoples of the world to “consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship.” And He furthers states:

SLIDE 11: (quote)

Maybe someone else besides me could read this quote

“That the divers communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief, should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is, in this Day, of the essence of the Faith of God and His Religion. These principles and laws, these firmly established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source, and are the rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated.” –Baha’u’llah

SLIDE 12: (rose garden with quote)

The Bahai Faith teaches… “…the divine religions of the holy Manifestations of God are in reality one though in name and nomenclature they differ. Man must be a lover of the light no matter from what day-spring it may appear. He must be a lover of the rose no matter in what soil it may be growing. He must be a seeker of the truth no matter from what source it come. Attachment to the lantern is not loving the light…” –Abdu’l-Baha

SLIDE 13: (picture of a clear spring)

So we see religion as one educating process from God to humanity that is renewed in each age.

Why do you think that there is a need for a Messenger of God to come every 500-1000 years? I mean, if they are bringing truth, why does it need to be revoiced? (PAUSE)

**CLEAR SPRING ANALOGY- *Like a clear spring welling up from an invisible source- you drink the water- cleans out your system and helps you to be healthy- then later down the stream- people are washing their clothes in that water, etc. and you get to the end of the stream and it is polluted- looks different- you drink it and it makes you sick. This happens to religion too***

Part of our job in seeking truth is to distinguish between that which is man-made and that which rings true to our hearts as something coming from the Divine.

There are eternal truths that are voiced by all the Manifestations of God- such as the Golden Rule, the importance of prayer and fasting, the eternal nature of the soul, etc. and then there are social laws that change in each age.

Baha’u’llah says that humanity has a collective life like an individual- infancy, various stages of childhood, adolescence, maturity. Just like in the life of a human being- each of these stages has different needs and requirements. So it is with humanity as a whole. These Messengers of God, one in each age, come as Divine Physicians knowing exactly what is making the world sick, and prescribing the exact remedy.

 “The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth in His unerring wisdom, the remedy. The remedy the world needeth in its present day afflictions can never be the same as that which a subsequent age may require. Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.” –Baha’u’llah

Baha’u’llah says that we are in our adolescence as a humanity, approaching the age of maturity. Baha’u’llah’s teachings are geared towards moving humanity to its maturity.

SLIDE 14: THE ONENESS OF HUMANITY

Another central teaching of Baha’u’llah is the oneness of humanity and the need to eliminate prejudice. In fact, all of the teachings of the Bahai Faith revolve around this central principle- that all of humanity was created as a single unit, like a family. Divisions, hierarchies, and inequities based on ethnicity, gender or social class are entirely manmade.

The oneness of humanity sounds simple, but it has profound implications for the way that society functions and is arranged. All forms of systemic exploitation- like racism, sexism and classism- are contrary to oneness. Baha’u’llah taught that the reality that humanity is one people must be the starting point for a new order. The vast array of relations among nations- and within them- all need to be re-envisaged in this light. The principle of the oneness of humankind implies an organic change in the very structure of society.

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| Baha’u’llah said, “Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead.” We are seeing that disintegrating process before us and maybe less perceptively, there is an integrating process at work building up a new way of interacting with each other across individuals, institutions and communities.  |
| Traditionally interactions among these three have been fraught with difficulties at every turn, with the individual clamouring for freedom, the institutions demanding submission, and the community claiming precedence. In the Bahai Faith, the relationships among the individual, the institutions and the community are being shaped under the direct influence of the Revelation of Baha’u’llah and a new conception of each, appropriate for a humanity that is coming of age, is emerging. At a fundamental level, these relationships are characterized by cooperation and reciprocity, manifestations of the interconnectedness that governs the universe.What I want to state plainly here is that Bahá’ís do not believe the transformation envisioned will come about exclusively through their own efforts. Nor are they trying to create a movement that would seek to impose on society their vision of the future. Every nation and every group—indeed, every individual—will, to a greater or lesser degree, contribute to the emergence of the world civilization towards which humanity is irresistibly moving.  |
| The chief instrument for the transformation of society and the achievement of world unity, Bahá’u’lláh asserts, is the establishment of justice in the affairs of humankind. The subject has a central place in His teachings…Slide 15: Justice (quote)Can someone please read this quote |
| “The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men.” –Baha’u’llah |
|  |
| Baha’u’llah teaches that the advancement of civilization requires that society organizes its affairs as to give full expression to this. The earth’s resources are the property of all humanity, not of any one people. Different contributions to the common economic welfare deserve and should receive different measures of reward and recognition, but the extremes of wealth and poverty which afflict most nations on earth, regardless of the socio-economic philosophies they profess, must be abolished. |

SLIDE 16: quote with music notes in background

In regards to unity and the oneness of humanity, the diversity that characterizes the human family, far from contradicting its oneness, endows it with richness.

Abdu’l-Baha, the Son of Baha’u’llah, in the early 1900s said…

Could someone read this please

“The diversity of the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord. If you meet those of a different race and colour from yourself, do not mistrust them and withdraw yourself into your shell of conventionality, but rather be glad and show them kindness. Think of them as different coloured roses growing in the beautiful garden of humanity, and rejoice to be among them.” –Abdu’l-Baha

Unity, in its Bahai expression, contains the essential concept of diversity, distinguishing it from uniformity.

Slide 17: Quote

The Universal House of Justice, the governing body of the Bahai Faith, writes,

 “It is through love for all people, and by subordinating lesser loyalties to the best interests of humankind, that the unity of the world can be realized and the infinite expressions of human diversity find their highest fulfillment. Fostering unity, by harmonizing disparate elements and nurturing in every heart a selfless love for humankind, is the task of religion.” –The Universal House of Justice

Baha’u’llah said, “Take pride not in love for yourselves but in love for your fellow-creatures. Glory not in love for your country, but in love for all mankind.”

While great possibilities to cultivate fellowship and concord are open to religious leaders, these same leaders can also incite violence by using their influence to stoke the fires of fanaticism and prejudice. Writing of religion, Baha’u’llah’s words are emphatic: “…make it not”, He warns, “the cause of dissension and strife.”

Baha’u’llah actually says that religion must be the cause of fellowship and love and if it becomes the cause of estrangement then it is not needed, for religion is like a remedy; if it aggravates the disease then it becomes unnecessary.

intro to next slide-

So in addition to religious fanaticism and extremism, what are some of the other problems facing the world right now?- just name them out.

Do you know what Baha’u’llah says is the root cause of these afflictions and problems? (Pause) DISUNITY. Baha’u’llah said, “The well-being of mankind its peace and security are unattainable, unless and until its unity is firmly established.” And then He says… “this unity can never be achieved so long as the counsels which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed are suffered to pass unheeded.”

Do you know what the root cause of prejudice is? Abdu’l-Baha tells us.

SLIDE 18: The harmful effects of prejudice

“And the breeding-ground of all these tragedies is prejudice: prejudice of race and nation, of religion, of political opinion; and the root cause of prejudice is blind imitation of the past- imitation in religion, in racial attitudes, in national bias, in politics. So long as this aping of the past persisteth, just so long will the foundations of the social order be blown to the four winds, just so long will humanity be continually exposed to direst peril.” –Abdu’l-Baha

The Universal House of Justice in a recent Message wrote, “A heart that has embraced love for the whole of humanity will certainly be pained when confronted by the suffering that so many endure because of disunity. But the friends of God cannot shut themselves off from the increasing turmoil of the society that surrounds them; they must guard themselves, too, from becoming enmeshed in its conflicts or falling into its adversarial methods. No matter how bleak conditions may appear at any given time, no matter how dismal the immediate prospects for bringing about unity, there is no cause for despair. The distressing state of the world can only spur us to redouble our commitment to constructive action.”

Here is another quote from the Universal House of Justice that I hope you will find inspiring, giving us a glimpse of how the disintegrating process occurring in the world and the integrating one are BOTH leading us towards maturation as a human race.

SLIDE 19: Quote

“Bahá’ís are encouraged to see in the revolutionary changes taking place in every sphere of life the interaction of two fundamental processes. One is destructive in nature, while the other is integrative; both serve to carry humanity, each in its own way, along the path leading towards its full maturity. The operation of the former is everywhere apparent—in the vicissitudes that have afflicted time-honoured institutions, in the impotence of leaders at all levels to mend the fractures appearing in the structure of society, in the dismantling of social norms that have long held in check unseemly passions, and in the despondency and indifference exhibited not only by individuals but also by entire societies that have lost any vital sense of purpose. Though devastating in their effects, the forces of disintegration tend to sweep away barriers that block humanity’s progress, opening space for the process of integration to draw diverse groups together and disclosing new opportunities for cooperation and collaboration. Bahá’ís, of course, strive to align themselves, individually and collectively, with forces associated with the process of integration, which, they are confident, will continue to gain in strength, no matter how bleak the immediate horizons. Human affairs will be utterly reorganized, and an era of universal peace inaugurated.” –The Universal House of Justice

Religion is meant to bind together, not separate, and in this day, Baha’u’llah is calling for that circle of unity to encompass all mankind. He says things in His Writings like, “The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens.” And “Let your vision be world-embracing rather than confined to your own self.”

The Bahai Writings also say…“Let your heart burn with loving-kindness for all who may cross your path.” “See ye no strangers, rather see all men as friends, for love and unity come hard when ye fix your gaze on otherness.”

Some people have asked, “Do we have as much of an obligation to help strangers as we have to our friends and relatives?” The quick answer, from a Bahai perspective, is yes- and this should be given without distinction for class, race, religion, etc..

SLIDE 20: The DIVERSITY of the BAHAI COMMUNITY (picture of bahais gathered for election of UHJ in 2018)

The worldwide Bahai community attracts people of all faith backgrounds, races, social-economic class, etc. and to me it is a real symbol of hope that unity is possible. Actually the Universal House of Justice, the governing body of the worldwide Bahai community, actually says that world peace is not only possible but inevitable. It is the next stage in the evolution of this planet. Obviously this is something that will take work and time, and it is a process, but it is part of what is destined by God for our world. The Universal House of Justice recently released on January 18, 2019 a statement about the process towards world peace, which you may want to read. It is accessible at [www.universalhouseofjustice.bahai.org](http://www.universalhouseofjustice.bahai.org) under the Letters and Statements that relate to the Life of Society.

Here is a picture of the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies of most countries in the world gathered in the Holy Land- in Haifa, Israel, at the Bahai World Center, to elect in a rarified and spiritual atmosphere, the members of the UHJ. You can see that beautiful diversity and unity in that picture. A Widening Embrace is a short film available on the bottom right of the home page on [www.bahai.org](http://www.bahai.org) that will give you a feeling for the rich diversity of the Bahai international community.

I think that the unity of the global Bahai community is a powerful indicator of its effectiveness to bring people together from all races and religions to work towards the betterment of the world in a way that harnesses the power of unity while at the same time safeguarding diversity.

I just want to touch briefly on some of the teachings and principles brought by Baha’u’llah which are geared exactly to the age in which we live.

SLIDE 21: The Independent Investigation of Truth (quote)

Can someone read this one

“God has not intended man to imitate blindly his fathers and ancestors…God has given man the eye of investigation by which he may see and recognize truth. He has endowed man with ears that he may hear the message of reality and conferred upon him the gift of reason by which he may discover things for himself. This is his endowment and equipment for the investigation of reality. Man is not intended to see through the eyes of another, hear through another’s ears nor comprehend with another’s brain. Each human creature has individual endowment, power and responsibility in the creative plan of God. Therefore, depend upon your own reason and judgment and adhere to the outcome of your own investigation; otherwise, you will be utterly submerged in the sea of ignorance and deprived of all the bounties of God. Turn to God, supplicate humbly at His threshold, seeking assistance and confirmation, that God may rend asunder the veils that obscure your vision.”

No clergy- we are all obligated to investigate truth, including religious truth, and abide by the outcome of our own earnest and sincere investigation. That is something we are responsible to God for and is really between us and God.

SLIDE 22: Harmony of Science and Religion (quote)

Baha’u’llah teaches that science and religion are not mutually exclusive, but complementary. Religion which discounts science becomes superstition. Religion must be reasonable. If it does not square with reason, it is superstition and without foundation. On the other hand, science without religion can become an instrument of materialism.

“Religion and Science are inter-twined with each other and cannot be separated. These are the two wings with which humanity must fly. One wing is not enough. Every religion which does not concern itself with science is mere tradition…. Therefore science, education and civilization are most important necessities for the full religious life. –Abdu’l-Baha

There was a question that someone had- how is faith maintained if believing blindly is discouraged and there is no molecular or chemical proof of the existence of God?

I asked my friend this question. She is a scientist and actually teaches AP Biology at La Jolla Country Day, and she responded that “belief in God is not in discord with reason or science because there is no scientific evidence *against* the existence of God. When it comes to spiritual matters, my understanding is that we are encouraged to take in all of the available information, which includes scientific and ‘holy texts’, and include deep meditation on the subject with fully open hearts and minds. From this study and reasoning we are to formulate our beliefs…I think most people of Faith would not consider their Faith a ‘blind’ one, but one that has been proven to them in myriad ways that aren’t necessary measurable by physical means.

Aware of the limited time we have, if you are interested in any of these topics, such as the harmony of science and religion, I invite you to delve deeper by exploring the Bahai Writings. There is a library of authoritative texts available via bahai.org where you can put in key words and it will explore the Bahai Writings on that particular topic. The Writings of Baha’u’llah are both mystical and very logical. I think you will really enjoy exploring the ocean of His Words.

Slide 23: Equality of Women and Men-quote with bird in background

I’d like to share a few quotes on this topic from the Bahai Writings…

Could someone read this please

“The world of humanity has two wings—one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible. Not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they ought to be.” –Abdu’l-Baha

Slide 24: quote Could someone else read this please

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

Slide 25: Quote Here’s a quick read

“As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs.” –Abdu’l-Baha

Again, touching on the interconnectedness of all things!

Slide 26: Universal Education

Universal Education is also spoken of in the Bahai Writings. Here is a passage from the Universal House of Justice on the importance of universal education.

“The cause of universal education, which has already enlisted in its service an army of dedicated people from every faith and nation, deserves the utmost support that the governments of the world can lend it. For ignorance is indisputably the principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples and the perpetuation of prejudice. No nation can achieve success unless education is accorded all its citizens. Lack of resources limits the ability of many nations to fulfil this necessity, imposing a certain ordering of priorities. The decision-making agencies involved would do well to consider giving first priority to the education of women and girls, since it is through educated mothers that the benefits of knowledge can be most effectively and rapidly diffused throughout society. In keeping with the requirements of the times, consideration should also be given to teaching the concept of world citizenship as part of the standard education of every child.” –The Universal House of Justice

Slide 27: Universal Language (quote)

Baha’u’llah also taught the importance of having a universal auxiliary language. Abdu’l-Baha explains the purpose of this. He said that “This teaching was revealed from the pen of Bahá’u’lláh in order that this universal language may eliminate misunderstandings from among mankind.”

Could someone read this quote of Baha’u’llah please

“The day is approaching when all the peoples of the world will have adopted one universal language and one common script. When this is achieved, to whatsoever city a man may journey, it shall be as if he were entering his own home.”- Baha’u’llah

It is a universal AUXILIARY language- so everyone would learn their own native tongue, as well as the universal language that would be taught to children all over the world. What that language will be is something that is not mentioned in the Bahai Writings- it is something that will need to be decided upon by a more mature humanity.

What are your impressions of these Teachings? (any questions- please write down on sticky notes and hopefully we can have a chance at the end of the presentation to address some of them!)

Shifting gears a little, I would like to mention the two-fold moral purpose talked about in the Bahai Sacred Writings. What do you think that two-fold moral purpose is?

SLIDE 28: OUR TWO-FOLD MORAL PURPOSE

… to take charge of our own intellectual and spiritual growth and to contribute to the transformation of society. (There is a reciprocal relationship between these two aspects- they are not dichotomous).

Baha’u’llah says that “all men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization” as well as to develop the qualities and capacities inherent in our soul.

There is a beautiful analogy in the Bahai Writings that explains our purpose…

SLIDE 29: baby in womb with quote

If you think of the baby that is growing in the womb of its mother- what is it supposed to be doing in the womb? Developing all its faculties in preparation for this world. It really doesn’t use them much in the womb world. It doesn’t breath air there, it doesn’t open its eyes, its main job is development so that it is ready when it is born to use all that it has acquired. The same is true of this world in relation to the next. This is the womb world for all the worlds of God. We are developing our soul and its qualities in this realm.

*DARK-LIMITED- narrow- time of testing- rose most pruned…*

“…Therefore, in this world he must prepare himself for the life beyond. That which he needs in the world of the Kingdom must be obtained here. Just as he prepared himself in the world of the matrix by acquiring forces necessary in this sphere of existence, likewise, the indispensable forces of the divine existence must be potentially attained in this world.” –Abdu’l-Baha

What do you think those indispensable forces of the divine existence are?

SLIDE 30: quote

“What is he in need of in the Kingdom which transcends the life and limitation of this mortal sphere? That world beyond is a world of sanctity and radiance; therefore, it is necessary that in this world he should acquire these divine attributes. In that world there is need of **spirituality**, **faith**, **assurance, the knowledge and love of God**. These he must attain in this world so that after his ascension from the earthly to the heavenly Kingdom he shall find all that is needful in that eternal life ready for him. That divine world is manifestly a world of lights; therefore, man has need of **illumination** here. That is a world of love; **the love of God** is essential. It is a world of perfections; **virtues or perfections**, must be acquired. That world is vivified by **the breaths of the Holy Spirit**; in this world we must seek them. That is the Kingdom of everlasting life; it must be attained during this vanishing existence.”

-Abdu’l-Baha

We acquire these things in this life through the knowledge of God as brought by the Manifestation of God in each age, the love of God, faith, the practice of philanthropic deeds, self-sacrifice, severance from this world, and sanctity and holiness.

It is interesting- someone asked Abdu’l-Baha, how should one look forward to death? Do you know what He said?

SLIDE 31: quote

“How does one look forward to the goal of any journey? With hope and with expectation. So it is with the end of this earthly journey. In the next world, man will find himself freed from many of the disabilities under which he now suffers…”

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahai Faith, said, “Man is destined by God to undergo a spiritual development that extends throughout eternity. His life upon this earth is only the first stage of that development. When we outgrow our physical form, and are considered by God ready to reap the fruit of our spiritual development, we proceed to the other world. We term it death only because of our short sightedness. A more proper term would be a more abundant life. It is a forward step we have taken.”

Slide 32: quote

And Baha’u’llah said, “I have made death a messenger of joy to thee. Wherefore dost thou grieve? I made the light to shed on thee its splendor. Why dost thou veil thyself therefrom?”

One of my favorites… “Thou art My dominion and My dominion perisheth not; wherefore fearest thou thy perishing? Thou art My light and My light shall never be extinguished; why dost thou dread extinction? Thou art My glory and My glory fadeth not; thou art My robe and My robe shall never be outworn. Abide then in thy love for Me, that thou mayest find Me in the realm of glory.” –Baha’u’llah

SLIDE 34: Bird leaving cage

*Bird in cage analogy*

*Tender plant uprooted…*

QUICK THINK/PAIR/SHARE activity- PROMPT- how would this concept of life after death change the way you live your life? Take a few moments to think about it and then turn and talk with someone close to you. We will take about five minutes for this activity. Please be sure each partner gets a chance to both listen and speak out. (Then once this is done- invite sharing with the whole group)

I think our purpose is so linked to our nobility as human beings… in the Bahai Writings it says

SLIDE 35: Our Nobility

“Noble have I created thee, yet thou has abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created.”

And Baha’u’llah also says…

Can someone read this please

SLIDE 36: “O Son of Spirit! I created thee rich, why dost thou bring thyself down to poverty? Noble I made thee, wherewith does thou abase thyself? Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being, why seekest thou enlightenment from anyone beside Me? Out of the clay of love I molded thee, how doest thou busy thyself with another? Turn they sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty powerful and self-subsisting.”

We really need to safeguard that nobility, through our choices in life, through the practices that we cultivate, whether that is chastity before marriage, freedom from addictions and the use of intoxicating drinks, freedom from backbiting, which the Bahai Faith strongly condemns and the importance of channeling our energies into service for the common good.

No Bahai is perfect. We all strive towards spiritual growth. It is through the application of our free will towards the elevation of our spirits that we little by little, day by day, make choices that help us grow spiritually and also help society to develop in a positive way. It is a life long process. (lotus is a beautiful metaphor used a lot in Asian art to symbolize rising above this world- represented by the mudd- and living a pure and undefiled life- represented by the flower)

Baha’u’llah says…

SLIDE 37: quote

“All that which ye potentially possess can be manifested only as a result of your own volition.” –Baha’u’llah

We have free will in this life and we have to strive to grow spiritually through the choices that we make.

WATER Demo- purifying ourselves – *see video at* [*http://www.supportingthecoreactivities.org/lesson-1-purity-of-heart/*](http://www.supportingthecoreactivities.org/lesson-1-purity-of-heart/)

*(under science demo- I used soy sauce in this demonstration)*

Slide 38: Pure intention brought into field of ACTION (quote)

How do Bahais incorporate their faith into their daily life?

Drawing strength from daily reading of the Holy Writings, prayers- which are nourishment/food for the soul and meditation, we really focus on ACTION in the world.

Baha’u’llah says, “Let deeds not words be your adorning.”/”Let your acts be a guide unto all mankind, for the professions of most men…differ from their conduct. It is through your deeds that ye can distinguish yourselves from others. Through them the brightness of your light can be shed upon the whole earth.” And he says, “BEWARE, O people of Baha, lest ye walk in the ways of them whose words differ from their deeds.” He warns us to guard against hypocrisy.

The concept of service and even prayer is, like so many things, recast and clarified in the Bahai Writings.

SLIDE 39: Service is Prayer (first quote)

“Briefly, all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity. This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer. A physician ministering to the sick, gently, tenderly, free from prejudice and believing in the solidarity of the human race, he is giving praise." -Abdu’l-Baha

So work done in the spirit of service is the highest form of worship in the Bahai Faith.

Whatever work we do in our daily lives, we strive to do it in a spirit of service- whether that is as a student, or a garbage collector, or a dean of university.

In selfless service to society is the possibility for both personal growth and enhancing capacity to contribute to social progress.  'Service to humanity is service to God', 'Abdu'l-Baha has stressed. Through directing our talents and abilities to the elevation of society, the Bahai Writings say that we can become the cause of the tranquility of the world of creation'.  As we infuse our day to day activities with a spirit of generous giving, and offer voluntary acts for the well-being of others, we also attract the assistance and confirmations of God.

Bahais and their friends are also involved in 4 core activities that help to transform society.

Slide 40: Children’s Classes- Pic of children’s classes in Del Sur

This is a children’s class held in a home in the USA, with children of many faiths participating.

Children’s classes nurture the tender hearts and minds of children and offer them lessons that develop their spiritual faculties and lay the foundations of a noble and upright character. These classes are open to all and are free of charge. In Del Sur and Carmel Valley, we have classes that start for toddlers all the way up to classes for 10 and 11 year olds right before they become junior youth.

Slide 41: Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program

Junior Youth group, for young people ages 12-14, help them form a strong moral identity in their early adolescent years and empower them to contribute to the well-being of their communities. While global trends project an image of this age group as problematic, lost in the throes of tumultuous physical and emotional change, unresponsive and self-consumed, the Bahá’í community – in the language it employs and the approaches it adopts – is moving decidedly in the opposite direction, seeing in junior youth instead altruism, an acute sense of justice, eagerness to learn about the universe and a desire to contribute to the construction of a better world.

 The junior youth spiritual empowerment program helps channel the surging energies of junior youth into service to humanity. They also help them analyze the constructive and destructive forces operating in society and to recognize the influence these forces exert on their thoughts and actions, sharpening their spiritual perception, enhancing their powers of expression and reinforcing moral structures that will serve them throughout their lives.

Slide 42: Study Circles

Study circles are circles of study, open to all, that enable people of varied backgrounds to advance on equal footing and explore the application of the Bahai teachings to their individual and collective lives. What is beautiful is that study circles provide an approach to the study of the Bahai Writings that is action-oriented. Through these study circles- also referred to as the institute process- participants develop, along with others, capacity for service and then accompany one another in the exercise of what has been learned.

As human beings we have tremendous powers, and channelling them towards service to humanity is of crucial importance. There are so many forces in society that are trying to for misdirect those powers or manipulate them for selfish gain. Engaging in the programmes of the training institute enables people to see themselves as walking a path of service.  Along this path we enhance our capacity to apply Baha'llah's teachings to the life of society.  'Abdu'l-Baha has stated, that no deed in the world is "nobler than service to the common good', that 'the highest righteousness' is to 'arise and energetically devote themselves to the service of the masses.'

Slide 43: Devotional Gatherings

Bahais also establish devotional gatherings that strengthen the devotional character of the community. Responding to the inmost longing of every heart to commune with its Maker, these devotional gatherings are opportunities for collective worship, with people of all faiths, in diverse settings- to unite with others in prayer, awakening spiritual susceptibilities and shaping a pattern of life distinguished for its devotional character.

As mentioned, Abdu’l-Baha says, “Service to humanity is service to God.”

The Bahai Writings extend this concept of prayer, spiritual development and worship to other areas

SLIDE 44 : The Role of Art in the Elevation of Humanity

“I rejoice to hear that thou takest pains with thine art, for in this wonderful new age, art is worship. The more thou strivest to perfect it, the closer wilt thou come to God. What bestowal could be greater than this, that one's art should be even as the act of worshipping the Lord? That is to say, when thy fingers grasp the paintbrush, it is as if thou wert at prayer in the Temple.” –Abdu’l-Baha

I think we don’t fully understand the power of the arts to uplift, and in society we often don’t tap into that power in a way that elevates humanity. But in the Bahai Faith, arts and music, things that lift up the heart- these are important aspects to the life of a Bahai and their bringing their faith into action.

Even the concept of true fellowship and loving communion with other souls is elevated.

SLIDE 45: Quote

One of my favorite quotes is “Of all pilgrimages, the greatest is to relieve the sorrow-laden heart.” So it really has the potential to spiritualize all of our interactions.

Baha’u’llah teaches that prayer is conversation with God. AND that doesn’t have to just be at a church or synagogue or mosque. Abdu’l-Baha says that we should strive that our ACTIONS day by day may be beautiful prayers.

*I have brought some copies of a recent publication called For the Betterment of the World, that also highlights some of the work in social and economic development that Bahais are involved in, so you can take that home and look at it if you want.*

It’s interesting, the Universal House of Justice says that “every aspect of a person’s life is an element of his or her service to Baha’u’llah: the love and respect one has for one’s parents, the pursuit of one’s education; the nurturing of good health; the acquiring of a trade or profession; one’s behavior towards others and the upholding of a high moral standard…” and obviously there are many other ways we can incorporate our faith into our life.

Developing one’s talents and capacities enables us to lead a life of service to society. And we need to think beyond ourselves to our neighbors, family, friends, coworkers…and help them build capacity, through training and accompaniment as well. If you watch more of the Widening Embrace film- you will see that in action.

\*\*The Bahai Faith is much less about converting others to their religion and much more about advancing the Cause of Peace through our activities.\*\*

SLIDE 46 :Quote

 “…peace must first be established among individuals, until it leadeth in the end to peace among nations. Wherefore, O ye Bahais, strive ye with all your might to create, through the power of the Word of God, genuine love, spiritual communion and durable bonds among individuals. This is your task.” –The Bahai Writings

Slide 47: Bahai Houses of Worship

Even the Bahai Houses of Worship incorporate this concept of service and worship going hand in hand. A Bahai House of Worship is not meant solely as a place to pray. Baha’u’llah envisioned a number of dependencies dedicated to social, humanitarian, educational and scientific pursuits- such as a hospital, school, university, dispensary and hospice and these will gradually appear around each House of Worship- providing education, healthcare and other services to support the social and economic progress of the community, and afford shelter, relief and assistance to those in need. This is a picture of the Bahai House of Worship in New Delhi, India.

Slide 48: Bahai House of Worship in Panama

Here is the Bahai House of Worship for Central America in Panama City, Panama. It is on the top of a big hill and overlooks the city. It is a really beautiful place.

Slide 50: PIC of diverse Bahais

Here are a picture of some Bahai tribal people from the Amazon in Brazil and some Bahais from the city of San Diego coming together at the opening of the First Bahai House of Worship in South America.

There was a three day celebration with such beautiful diversity of music, art, and people.

Slide 52: Chilean Temple

Here is the Bahai House of Worship for South America on the foothills of the Andes mountains in Santiago, Chile

The first Bahai Houses of Worship were built one per continent and then just recently, the Bahais have, under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, begun to build national and local Bahai houses of worship. They are different from Bahai centers which you may see in many communities. Bahai Houses of worship are built using only funds from Bahais and are a gift from the Bahais to the people of the world for them to find solace.

Slide 53: Wilmette

This is the Bahai House of Worship for North America outside of Chicago, in Wilmette, IL.

Slide 55: Us in front of Battambang House of Worship

Here is first local Bahai house of worship in the world…in Battambang, Cambodia.

New Bahai Houses of Worship are soon to be raised in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Papua New Guinea, Bihar Sharif India, Matunda Soy, Kenya and the island of Vanuatu in the village of Tanna. All of these areas have very vibrant Bahai communities.

Slide 53: Youth at the Forefront- pic of youth from Battambang and Quote

These are some of the Cambodian Bahai youth. They were having a youth conference with many youth from the surrounding villages during our visit there.

Youth are really at the forefront of the spread of the Bahai Faith in the world, as they arise to be protagonists for building a new world, channeling their energies in service to the greater good.

“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. Blessed are the steadfast and well is it with those who are firm.” –Baha’u’llah

Bahais and their friends, and especially the youth, are striving to bring about spiritual and material well-being for all through the systematic application of the divine teachings of Baha’u’llah.

LAST SLIDE 54:

Want to learn more or become involved side by side with the Bahais in our efforts to build united communities by serving as an animator of a junior youth group or helping with children’s classes or even participating in a study circle, please feel free to reach out. You don’t have to be a Bahai to participate.

*(put contact info into slide- and maybe have a flier of current core activities/firesides, etc.)*

Here are two excellent websites for learning more about the Bahai Faith…

[www.bahai.org](http://www.bahai.org) the international website of the Bahai community worldwide and

[www.us.bahai.org](http://www.us.bahai.org) , the official website of the Bahai community in the US

Thank you SO much for your attention and open minds. It has been such a pleasure to be with you!

Let’s take a few minutes break and then we can discuss some of your questions.