

2. Spiritual Preparation

A The spiritual nature of the child.

30 mins

10 mins

Explain that a purely materialistic view of the nature of man sees the individual as an otherwise empty vessel, having only the knowledge that has been acquired during its lifetime. Educators may therefore treat the child as a receptacle to be filled with knowledge. Bahá'u'lláh tells us that the true nature of man is quite different from this. There are huge implications here for the way we educate the children. We are going to study the following passage with a view to gaining some understanding of this.

Have someone read the passage slowly and then answer the questions, allowing consultation and comments.

“Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him - a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation.... Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty.

These energies with which the Day Star of Divine bounty and Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust and dross which cover the mirror. Neither the candle nor the lamp can be lighted through their own unaided efforts, nor can it ever be possible for the mirror to free itself from its dross. It is clear and evident that until a fire is kindled the lamp will never be ignited, and unless the dross is blotted out from the face of the mirror it can never represent the image of the sun nor reflect its light and glory.....

Led by the light of unfailing guidance, and invested with supreme sovereignty, They (the Manifestations of God) are commissioned to use the inspiration of Their words, the effusions of Their infallible grace and the sanctifying breeze of Their Revelation for the cleansing of every longing heart and receptive spirit from the dross and dust of earthly cares and limitations. Then, and only then, will the Trust of God, latent in the reality of man, emerge, as resplendent as the rising Orb of Divine Revelation, from behind the veil of concealment, and implant the ensign of its revealed glory upon the summits of men's hearts.”

(Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, pages 65-67)

1. What is the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation?

2. What is the unique capacity conferred upon man by God?
3. 'He hath shed the light of one of His names.... upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing'. What does this make it able to receive?
4. What, then, is man able to receive?
5. What does this make man the mirror of?
6. These energies are latent within man. What will make them develop and become revealed?

When everyone has said all they wish, explain that you are going to read the passage again, and there will be several minutes afterwards for quiet contemplation. Play gentle music while this happens.

20 mins

Divide the group into 2s or 3s. Ask them to read the following quotations, and think about what implication each one has for the way we educate the children. Allow 2 or 3 minutes for each, and then a feedback of ideas to the group.

Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.

(Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, page 260)

Thou art even as a finely tempered sword concealed in the darkness of its sheath and its value hidden from the artificer's knowledge. Wherefore come forth from the sheath of self and desire that thy worth may be made resplendent and manifest unto all the world.

(Baha'u'llah: Persian Hidden Words, page 72)

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.

(Baha'u'llah: Baha'i Education p3 ,CofC page 247)

“Man is said to be the greatest representative of God, and he is the Book of Creation because all the mysteries of beings exist in him. If he comes under the shadow of the True Educator and is rightly trained, he becomes the essence of essences, the light of lights, the spirit of spirits; he becomes the center of the divine appearances, the source of spiritual qualities, the rising-place of heavenly lights, and the receptacle of divine inspirations. If he is deprived of this education, he becomes the manifestation of satanic qualities, the sum of animal vices, and the source of all dark conditions.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá Some Answered Questions p236)

“The hearts of all children are of the utmost purity. They are mirrors upon which no dust has fallen.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá Promulgation of Universal Peace p53)

B Spiritual preparation of the Teacher

25 mins

Why do the Bahá'í Writings give such importance to the education of children? 15 mins
We can answer this if we look again at the following passage, which is also at the beginning of the section.

“Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him - a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation.”

(Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, pages 65)

1. What is the ‘generating impulse underlying the whole of creation’?
2. What then should be the over-arching aim of the entire educational process?

The following extracts underline the importance given to the act of teaching the children. Ask people to take turns reading them, with pauses for reflection between each.

“Blessed is that teacher who remaineth faithful to the Covenant of God, and occupieth himself with the education of children. For him hath the Supreme Pen inscribed that reward which is revealed in the Most Holy Book.

Blessed, blessed is he!”

(Baha'u'llah: Baha'i Education p8, CofC page 251)

“We prescribe unto all men that which will lead to the exaltation of the Word of God amongst His servants, and likewise, to the advancement of the world of being and the uplift of souls. To this end, the greatest means is education of the child. To this must each and all hold fast. We have verily laid this charge upon you in manifold Tablets as well as in My Most Holy Book. Well is it with him who deferreth thereto.

We ask of God that He will assist each and every one to obey this inescapable command that hath appeared and been caused to descend through the Pen of the Ancient of Days.”

(Baha'u'llah: Baha'i Education p2, CofC page 246)

“The education and training of children is among the most meritorious acts of humankind and draweth down the grace and favour of the All-Merciful, for education is the indispensable foundation of all human excellence and alloweth man to work his way to the heights of abiding glory. If a child be trained from his infancy, he will, through the loving care of the Holy Gardener, drink in the crystal waters of the spirit and of knowledge, like a young tree amid the rilling brooks. And certainly he will gather to himself the bright rays of the Sun of Truth, and through its light and heat will grow ever fresh and fair in the garden of life.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections ... `Abdu'l-Baha, pages 129-130)

“Today the training and education of the believers' children is the pre-eminent goal of the chosen. It is the same as servitude to the Sacred Threshold and waiting upon the Blessed Beauty. Joyously, therefore, canst thou pride thyself on this.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Education p36, CofC page 274)

“Blessed art thou, since thou art engaged in rendering a service which will make thy face to shine in the Abha Kingdom, and that is the education and training of children. If one should, in the right way, teach and train the children, he will be performing a service than which none is greater at the sacred Threshold. According to what we have heard, you are succeeding in this. You must, however, struggle unceasingly to perfect yourself and win ever higher achievements.

At all times, I implore Almighty God to make you the means of illuminating the minds of those children, of bringing their hearts to life and sanctifying their souls.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Education p33, CofC page 272)

“You must attach the greatest importance to the education of children, for this is the foundation of the Law of God, and the bedrock of the edifice of His Faith.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Education p30, CofC page 269)

C Qualities of the teacher

15 mins

Divide the group into 2s or 3s. Ask each group to list the qualities that are mentioned in the following quotations:

When everyone is ready, bring the group together and draw from their findings a list of qualities on the filp-chart.

“The Sunday school for the children in which the Tablets and Teachings of Baha'u'llah are read, and the Word of God is recited for the children is indeed a blessed thing. Thou must certainly continue this organized activity without cessation, and attach importance to it, so that day by day it may grow and be quickened with the breaths of the Holy Spirit. If this activity is well organized, rest thou assured that it will yield great results. Firmness and steadfastness, however, are necessary, otherwise it will continue for some time, but later be gradually forgotten. Perseverance is an essential condition. In every project firmness and steadfastness will undoubtedly lead to good results; otherwise it will exist for some days, and then be discontinued.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections ... `Abdu'l-Baha, pages 143-144)

“Make ye inquiries as to a woman teacher. She must be extremely modest, even-tempered, forbearing, and well bred, and she must be expert in the English language.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Education p34, CofC page 272)

“Make every effort to acquire the advanced knowledge of the day, and strain every nerve to carry forward the divine civilization. Establish schools that are well organized, and promote the fundamentals of instruction in the various branches of knowledge through teachers who are pure and sanctified, distinguished for their high standards of conduct and general excellence, and

strong in faith; scholars and educators with a thorough knowledge of sciences and arts.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: *Education* p34-5, *CofC* page 273)

At the end of the activity ask each one how they feel about this.

D Relationship between the teacher and the children 20 mins

Establish the understanding that this relationship is probably going to be different from what the children are used to in their every-day schools.

Ask someone to read each quote, then allow a few minutes after each for people to jot down their thoughts in answer to the questions. 15 mins

“In thy school, instruct thou God's children in the customs of the Kingdom. Be thou a teacher of love, in a school of unity. Train thou the children of the friends of the Merciful in the rules and ways of His loving-kindness. Tend the young trees of the Abha Paradise with the welling waters of His grace and peace and joy. Make them to flourish under the downpour of His bounty. Strive with all thy powers that the children may stand out and grow fresh, delicate, and sweet, like the ideal trees in the gardens of Heaven.

All these gifts and bounties depend upon love for the Beauty of the All-Glorious, and on the blessings in the teachings of the Most High, and the spiritual instructions of the Supreme Concourse, and on ecstasy and ardour and diligent pursuit of whatsoever will redound to the eternal honour of the community of man.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: *Education* p34, *CofC* page 273)

- 1) How can we make our classroom a “school of unity”?
- 2) What are the “rules and ways of His loving-kindness”?
- 3) How can we train the children in these ‘rules and ways’?

“According to the explicit divine Text, teaching the children is indispensable and obligatory. It followeth that teachers are servants of the Lord God, since they have arisen to perform this task, which is the same as worship. You must therefore offer praise with every breath, for you are educating your spiritual children.

The spiritual father is greater than the physical one, for the latter bestoweth but this world's life, whereas the former endoweth his child with life everlasting. This is why, in the Law of God, teachers are listed among the heirs.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: *Education* p35, *CofC* pages 273-274)

- 4 While we are teaching, what should we offer with every breath?
- 5 What do you think this means?

“ If a child be trained from his infancy, he will, through the loving care of the Holy Gardener, drink in the crystal waters of the spirit and of knowledge, like a young tree amid the rilling brooks. And certainly he will gather to himself the bright rays of the Sun of Truth, and through

its light and heat will grow ever fresh and fair in the garden of life.

Therefore must the mentor be a doctor as well: that is, he must, in instructing the child, remedy its faults; must give him learning, and at the same time rear him to have a spiritual nature. Let the teacher be a doctor to the character of the child, thus will he heal the spiritual ailments of the children of men.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: *Selections ...`Abdu'l-Baha, pages 129-130)*

6 Whilst teaching, what should we be constantly attending to?

Preparing for classes

5 mins

Later we will be looking at the preparation of material for teaching, and making plans etc. But even more important is the spiritual preparation of the teacher.

Spend a few minutes brainstorming and listing any ways people can think of to help them prepare.

On waking on the morning of the class....

Before leaving home.....

On arriving in the classroom.....

E Assistance

15 mins

Some of the ideas we've been looking at are very daunting.

Explain that we are never alone. Divine assistance is always at hand when we are trying to do the right thing.

Play gentle music while these quotes are read slowly. Allow at least 2 minutes between each for reflection.

“O thou teacher of the children of the kingdom!

Thou hast arisen to perform a service which would justly entitle thee to vaunt thyself over all the teachers on earth. For the teachers of this world make use of human education to develop the powers, whether spiritual or material, of humankind, whilst thou art training these young plants in the gardens of God according to the education of Heaven, and art giving them the lessons of the Kingdom.

The result of this kind of teaching will be that it will attract the blessings of God, and make manifest the perfections of man.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: *Education p36, CofC page 274)*

“ O thou who art steadfast in the Covenant!

Thou hast exerted strenuous efforts for the education of children and I have been, and am, infinitely pleased with thee. Praise God, thou hast been enabled to serve in this field, and it is certain that the confirmations of the Abha Kingdom will encompass thee, and thou shalt achieve prosperity and success.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: *Education p36, CofC page 274)*

“At all times, I implore Almighty God to make you the means of illuminating the minds of those

children, of bringing their hearts to life and sanctifying their souls.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Education p33, CofC page 272)

“Among the greatest of all great services is the education of children, and promotion of the various sciences, crafts and arts. Praised be God, ye are now exerting strenuous efforts toward this end. The more ye persevere in this most important task, the more will ye witness the confirmations of God, to such a degree that ye yourselves will be astonished.

This verily is a matter beyond all doubt, a pledge that shall certainly be redeemed.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Education p38, CofC page 276)

“Praised be God, a school for girls hath now been established in Hamadan. Ye who are the teachers thereof must devote more of your efforts to character training than instruction, and must raise up your girl children to be modest and chaste, of good character and conduct - and in addition must teach them the various branches of knowledge.

If ye follow this course, the confirmations of the All-Glorious Kingdom, in a great rolling swell, will rise and surge above that school.

My hope is that ye will succeed in this.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Education p48-9, CofC page 285)

“O ye servants of the Sacred Threshold! The triumphant hosts of the Celestial Concourse, arrayed and marshalled in the Realms above, stand ready and expectant to assist and assure victory to that valiant horseman who with confidence spurs on his charger into the arena of service.”

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Selections ... `Abdu'l-Baha, page 264)

F Conclusion

10 mins

Ask each participant to summarise very briefly what they feel they've learned from this part of the programme.

