

# Facilitating Spiritual Joy: Workshop on Christianity

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Facilitating Spiritual Joy

Part I

Purpose

"Facilitating Spiritual Joy" is a curriculum designed to help Bahá'í teachers introduce the person and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to people of Christian background. Its methods are modeled after the loving example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In his talks to Christian audiences, such as those recorded in Promulgations of Universal Peace, `Abdu'l-Bahá was kind, cautious and passionate. He served the cause of religious unity by lavishing praise on the Bible as the Word of God and Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

Like a skilled farmer, he prepared the soil before planting the seed. He took great pains to establish a rapport with his listeners. He did not rush to proclaim the station of Bahá'u'lláh, but first built common ground with Christians by speaking at length about Moses and Christ and by general discussion of Biblical themes, such as unity, reverence for God and divine education. His approach was gradual, gently unfolding the verities of

the Faith in a warm and logical manner. His expositions on the station of Bahá'u'lláh incorporated proofs from the Bible, especially the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

This curriculum seeks to follow Abdu'l-Bahá's methods and to build skills that will allow Bahá'í teachers to follow suit. Through the use of individual and interactive group exercises, it provides instruction in how to locate verse in the Bible, identifies verses useful for teaching and provides practice in their use.

"Facilitating Spiritual Joy" has four distinct goals:

- \* To help Bahá'ís appreciate the spiritual value of Christ and the Christian Bible as revealed in the Bahá'í Writings.
- \* To help familiarize Bahá'í teachers with the various parts of the Old and New Testaments and help them acquire the skills needed to locate key Bible verses.
- \* To explain basic doctrines of modern Christian Churches and to show where they parallel and where they contrast with the teachings of the Bahá'í Revelation.
- \* To examine `Abdu'l-Bahá's teaching methodology and assist in the others to develop the attitudes and skills necessary for a productive Bahá'í / Christian dialogue,

It is truly hoped that these materials will assist Bahá'í teachers to cultivate a joy in teaching the Faith as well to grow in capacity to bring the joy of knowing and serving Bahá'u'lláh to others.

#### Bahá'í View of the Christian Bible

When Abdu'l-Bahá visited America in 1912 he had the opportunity to speak in various Christian Churches. Invariably he would use such opportunities to praise the Bible.

Fifty years ago no one would touch the Christian Bible in Persia. Bahá'u'lláh came and asked, "Why?" They said, "It is not the Word of God." He said, "You must read it with understanding of its meanings, not as those who merely recite its words." Now Bahá'ís all over the East read the Bible and understand its spiritual teaching. Bahá'u'lláh spread the Cause of Christ and opened the book of the Christians and Jews. (The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 212)

Likewise Bahá'u'lláh Himself taught that the Bible, as we have it today, contains the Word of God.

We have also heard a number of the foolish of the earth assert that the genuine text of the heavenly Gospel doth not exist amongst the Christians, that it hath ascended unto heaven. How grievously they have erred!...How could God, when once the Day-star of the beauty of Jesus had disappeared from the sight of His people... cause His holy Book, His most great testimony amongst His creatures, to disappear also? What would be left to that people to cling to

from the setting of the day-star of Jesus until the rise of the sun of the Muhammadan Dispensation? What law could be their stay and guide? How could such people be made the victims of the avenging wrath of God, the omnipotent Avenger? How could they be afflicted with the scourge of chastisement by the heavenly King? Above all, how could the flow of the grace of the All-Bountiful be stayed? How could the ocean of His tender mercies be stilled? (The Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 89-90)

### Exercises

1) In your own word, explain the Bahá'í view of the Christian Bible.

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2) What reasons does Bahá'u'lláh give for believing that the teachings of Jesus are accurately presented in the Bible?

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### Focusing Questions

A useful technique for studying quotations in a group is by the use of focusing questions. These are questions that are answered verbatim in the quotation. Their purpose is to direct or focus attention on the specific wording of the quotation. Such questions are useful as a first step toward memorizing key phrases in a quotation.

In the first quotation on the preceding page, Abdu'l-Bahá comments on the value of the Christian Bible. Here are some examples of focusing questions and answers. Notice how the wording of the questions and the wording of the answers come directly out of the quotation.

Q: What was the situation in Persia fifty years ago?

A: In Persia, fifty years ago, no one would touch the Christian Bible.

Q: Why did people in Persia refuse to read the Bible?

A: They believed that it was not the Word of God.

Q: How did Bahá'u'lláh say that the Bible should be read?

A: It must be read with understanding of its meanings.

Q: What is the situation now?

A: Bahá'í all over the East read the Bible.

Exercises

1) Create a series of focusing questions and answers from the following quotation.

Once in about a thousand years shall this City be renewed and re-adorned ...  
That city is none other than the Word of God revealed in every age and  
dispensation. In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus  
the Gospel; in the days of Muhammad the Messenger of God the Qur'án.  
(The Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 199)

Q:

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A:

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Q:

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A:

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Q:

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A:

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Q:

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A:

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Brief Overview of Christian Bible

The word "Bible" means "library." Originally, the Bible was written on scrolls. The entire collection of divine scrolls constituted the

Holy Library. In the first or second century after Christ, Christians popularized the "codex" or book format in the course of teaching their Faith. It was easier to use a bound book to flip quickly from one verse to another than to locate the verses in scrolls.

The Christian Bible is divided into two main sections; the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament contains the sacred writings of Judaism. Starting with the creation of the world, it relates the origin of the Israelite nation, the revelation of the Law to Moses and subsequent history of Israel up to approximately 400 BC (four hundred years before Christ). The writings of over a dozen prophets, such as Isaiah and Ezekiel, and sacred literature, such as the Psalms and Proverbs, make up the remainder of the Old Testament.

The New Testament is comprised of the additions to the sacred library made by Christians. The Gospels describe the life and teachings of Jesus and the spread of early Christianity up to about 60 AD. A large part of the New Testament contains letters which the apostles Peter, Paul and others wrote to various new Christian congregations in the major cities such as Ephesus, Corinth and Rome. One prophetic work, the Revelation of St. John, completes the New Testament collection.

#### Timeline of Key Events in Bible History.

(Traditional rather than modern scholarly dates are given).

- \* Creation of Adam. (4000 BC)
- \* Noah's flood. (2400 BC)
- \* The nomadic wanderings of the Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (2000 BC)
- \* The enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt. (1600 BC)
- \* Their liberation from slavery under Moses. (1500 BC)
- \* The revelation of the Ten Commandments. (1500 BC)
- \* The conquest of Canaan. (1450 BC)
- \* The Kingdom of Israel under Kings David and Solomon. (1050 BC)
- \* The division of the Kingdom into Judah and Israel. (1000 BC)
- \* The histories of their kings until conquest and exile of Jewish nation to Assyria & Babylon. (1000 BC to 580 BC)
- \* The return from exile. (530 BC)
- \* Malachi, last of Hebrew prophets. (400 BC)
- \* Birth of Jesus (1 BC)
- \* Crucifixion (33 AD)
- \* Imprisonment of St. Paul in Rome. (60 AD)
- \* Destruction of Jerusalem by Roman armies. (70 AD)
- \* Writing of last books of New Testament. (98 AD)

#### Exercise

1. Rearrange the following list and put it into chronological order.

- \* Jesus
- \* David
- \* Adam
- \* Paul

- \* Noah
- \* Moses
- \* Malachi

2. Describe the contents of the Old Testament.

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3. Describe the contents of the New Testament.

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### Becoming Familiar with the Bible

The charts on the following pages list the various books of the Old and New Testaments.

As you examine the charts, do the following exercises.

1. Identify the five books of Moses, (also known as the Torah or Pentateuch).
2. Notice the description of the contents of the various books in the right hand column.
3. Using the column labeled "Literary Type" identify the divisions of the Old Testament into three categories, historical, instructional and prophetic books.
4. List the starting and ending books of each category.
5. Using the Pronunciation column as a guide, read aloud the names of the OT books.
6. Notice that some books have a 1 or a 2 in front of them, such as 1 Kings and 2 Kings. These are pronounced "First Kings" and "Second Kings". Originally these books were too long to fit on one scroll, so they were divided into two. List all the books which are split into part I and part II in this way.
7. Repeat for New Testament.
8. Notice there are 4 books called John. There is the gospel of John, which has no number in front of it, located between Luke and Acts. Almost at the end of the New Testament there are three books which are letters written by John called, 1 John, 2 John and 3 John. When looking up verses in "John" be sure to use the correct book.

9. Most Bibles contain a table of contents in the front showing the starting page number for each book. What is the starting page number in your Bible for:

- a. The Gospel according to John \_\_\_\_\_
- b. The first letter of John \_\_\_\_\_
- c. The second letter of John \_\_\_\_\_
- d. The third letter of John \_\_\_\_\_

#### Books of the Old Testament

In the Christian Bible, there are 39 books of the Old Testament. Originally, written in Hebrew with small sections in Aramaic, they are organized into three groupings; historical books, poetic and instructional writings and prophetic books.

The histories begin with a narrative of the creation of the world and span the history of Israel up to about 400 BC (Before Christ). The first five books of this section are the Torah (Hebrew for "law"), also called the Pentateuch (Greek for "five rolls") or the Five Books of Moses. They are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

The poetic and instructional books include Psalms and Proverbs. The prophetic books contain the writings of over a dozen divine prophets.

Name of Book

Pronunciation

Traditional

Author

Traditional

Date

Literary

Type

Contents

/ Highlights

Genesis

jen-e-sis

Moses

c.

1500 BC

History

Creation,

flood, Abraham, Joseph

Exodus

ek-se-dus

Moses

c.

1500 BC

History

Israelite

slavery and salvation from Egypt, Moses receives ten commandments & other divine laws at Sinai

Leviticus

li-vit-i-kus

Moses

c.

1500 BC

History

Law

especially those concerned with priests & Levites

Numbers

Moses

c.

1500 BC

History

Israelites

wandering in the wilderness

Deuteronomy

doo-te-ron-o-my

Moses

c.

1500 BC

History

Summary

of law, Song of Moses, Death of Moses

Joshua

Joshua

c.

1450 BC

History

Conquest  
of Canaan

Judges

Samuel

(?)

c.

1100 BC

History

Tribal  
affairs before Israelite Kings

Ruth

Samuel

(?)

c.

1100 BC

History

Tale  
related to ancestry of David

1

Samuel

Samuel

& others

c.

1100 BC

History

Samuel's  
affairs, Saul, David & Goliath

2

Samuel

Nathan

& others

c.

1050 BC

History

Kingship  
of David

1

Kings

Jeremiah

c.

580 BC

History

King

Solomon, division of kingdom, kings of Judah and Israel

2

Kings

Jeremiah

c.

580 BC

History

Later

kings, Elijah, conquest of kingdoms

1

Chronicles

Ezra

c.

450 BC

History

Genealogy

of Israel, history of Israel and Judah until Solomon

2

Chronicles

Ezra

c.

450 BC

History

Histories  
from Solomon through conquest of Judah and exile

Ezra

Ezra

c.  
450 BC

History

Restoration  
after Babylonian exile

Nehemiah

ne-uh-mi-ah

Nehemiah

c.  
400 BC

History

Restoration  
of Jerusalem

Esther

Mordecai

c.  
400 BC

History

Salvation  
of Jews in Persian Empire

Writings:  
Poetic and Instructional and Poetic Books

Job

jôb

Moses

c.

1500 BC

Poetic  
epic

Sufferings  
of Job, why the innocent suffer

Psalms

salmz

David  
& others

c.  
450 BC

Poetry

Prayers  
and songs

Proverbs

Solomon  
& others

c.  
450 BC

Poetic  
essay, wise sayings

Wise  
advice to "son"

Ecclesiastes

i-klee-zee-as-tes

Solomon

c.  
1000 BC

Essay

Futility  
and the Meaning of life

Song  
of Solomon

Solomon

c.

1000 BC

Love  
poetry

Allegory  
for the love of God

Prophetic  
Books

Isaiah

ii-zay-uh

Isaiah

c.

700 BC

Prophecy

Denunciation  
of corruption, prophecies of Messiah and Israel's redemption

Jeremiah

jer-uh-mi-uh

Jeremiah

c.

580 BC

Prophecy

Denunciation  
of corruption, prophecies of Messiah and Israel's redemption

Lamentations

Jeremiah

c.

580 BC

Poetry

Lament  
over destruction of Jerusalem

Ezekiel

ee-zee-kee-el

Ezekiel

c.

600 BC

Prophecy

Denunciation

of corruption, prophecies of Messiah and Israel's redemption

Daniel

Daniel

c.

500 BC (?)

Prophecy

Tales

of Daniel and Three Hebrews, end time prophecies

Hosea

hō-zay-uh

Hosea

c.

750 BC

Prophecy

Denunciation

of corruption, prophecies Israel's redemption

Joel

Joel

c.

800 BC

Prophecy

Denunciation

of corruption in Judah, end time prophecies

Amos

Amos

c.

800 BC

Prophecy

Denunciation  
of corruption in Israel

Obadiah

ô-buh-die-uh

Obadiah

c.

600 BC

Prophecy

Denunciation  
against Edomites

Jonah

Jonah

c.

800 BC (?)

Prophecy

Tale  
of wayward prophet, denunciation against Nineveh

Micah

mi-cuh

Micah

c.

700 BC

Prophecy

Denunciation  
against Judah, end time prophecies

Nahum

nay-hum

Nahum

c.

600 BC

Prophecy

Denunciations

against Judah

Habakkuk

ha-back-kuk

Habakkuk

c.

600 BC

Prophecy

Denunciations  
against Judah

Zephaniah

zef-uh-nii-uh

Zephaniah

c.

600 BC

Prophecy

Denunciations  
against Judah

Haggai

hag-guy

Haggai

c.

500 BC

Prophecy

Post-exilic  
exhortation, restoration prophecies

Zechariah

zek-uh-rii-uh

Zechariah

c.

500 BC

Prophecy

Post-exilic  
exhortation, restoration prophecies

Malachi

mal-uh-kii

Malachi

c.

400 BC

Prophecy

Post-exilic

exhortation, restoration prophecies

Books

of the New Testament

The New Testament contains 27 books, originally written in Greek. They are organized into the same groupings as the Old Testament. The four gospels and the Acts of the Apostles make up the history books. The letters of the Apostles Paul, Peter and others make up the instructional writings. Revelation is the only prophetic book in the New Testament.

Name of Book

Pronunciation

Traditional

Author

Traditional

Date

Literary

Type

Contents

/ Highlights

History

Matthew

Matthew

c.

40 AD

History

Gospel

(history of Jesus' ministry)

Mark

Mark

c.

60 AD

History

Gospel

Luke

Luke

c.

55 AD

History

Gospel

John

John

c.

100 AD

History

Gospel

Acts

Luke

c.

60 AD

History

History

of early Christian Church

Letters

Romans

Paul

c.

60 AD

Letter/essay

Wide  
discussion of Christian teachings; e.g. sin & salvation

1

Corinthians

kuh-rin-thee-ans

Paul

c.

55 AD

Letter/essay

Unity,  
cleanness of Church

2

Corinthians

Paul

c.

60 AD

Letter/essay

Warning  
against false teachers and apostates

Galatians

guh-laa-shunz

Paul

c.

50 AD

Letter/essay

Abrogation  
of law of Moses

Ephesians

i-fee-zhunz

Paul

c.

60 AD

Letter/essay

Unity  
of believers

Philippians

fi-lip-peenz

Paul

c.

60 AD

Letter/essay

Humility  
of Christ

Colossians

kuh-losh-enz

Paul

c.

60 AD

Letter/essay

Love  
as perfect bond of union

1

Thessalonians

thes-uh-lô-neenz

Paul

c.

50 AD

Letter/essay

Endurance  
through tribulation

2

Thessalonians

Paul

c.

50 AD

Letter/essay

Warning  
against apostasy

I  
Timothy

Paul;

c.  
60 AD

Letter/essay

Instructions  
for appointments of Church leaders

2  
Timothy

Paul;

c.  
65 AD

Letter/essay

Urgency  
of teaching

Titus

ti-tus

Paul

c.  
60 AD

Letter/essay

Warning  
against sectarian divisions

Philemon

ffi-lee-mon

Paul

c.  
60 AD

Letter

Personal  
forgiveness & reconciliation

Hebrews

Paul

(??)

?

Essay

Typology  
of Christ in Law of Moses

James

James

c.

60 AD

Letter/essay

Faith

without works

1

Peter

Peter

c.

65 AD

Letter/essay

Christ

as exemplar

2

Peter

Peter

c.

65 AD

Letter/essay

End

time prophecies

1

John

John

c.

100 AD

Letter/essay

Warning

against antichrist, God is love

2

John

John

c.

100 AD

Letter/essay

Exhortation

to love God & Christ, warning against antichrist

3

John

John

c.

100 AD

Letter

Exhortation

to love God & Christ, warning against antichrist

Jude

Jude

c.

65 AD

Letter/essay

Warnings

against antichrist

Prophecy

Revelation

John

c.

100 AD (?)

Prophecy

Prophetic

visions and end time prophecies

How

to Find Bible Verses

When speaking with Christians who are serious Bible students and who readily quote chapter and verse, it is often helpful for the Bahá'í teacher to know a few Bible verses and know how to look them up and read them from the Christian's own copy of the Bible.

In the front of most Bibles there is a Table of Contents that lists the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, either in alphabetical or traditional order. Memorizing these books in traditional order may be helpful, but it is not necessary. Our goal at this time is to learn how to locate a few key passages and this can be accomplished by knowing whether the verse you seek is toward the front, back or middle.

Let's say we want to find John 16:12-13, where Christ foretells the coming of the Promised One. Open the Bible and locate the Table of Contents. Often there are two, one that lists the books in consecutive order and another that uses alphabetical order.

Find the page number in your Bible where the gospel of John starts. (The one with no number in front of it.) Turn to that page.

Now we want chapter 16. (John 16:12-13 indicates the sixteenth chapter, verses twelve through thirteen.) The chapter numbers are large and located at the beginning of each chapter. The verse numbers are smaller and begin anew in each chapter. After you have located the beginning of chapter 16, scan down the columns until you find the smaller 12, indicating verse 12.

Read the verse aloud.

Next practice by looking up the following Bible verses. Identify each one a pertaining to a) Prophecies that foretell to the Coming of the Promised One, b) Verses that teach the unity of mankind, c) Verses that provide guidance in distinguishing true and false prophets. Indicate your choice by marking the list below or create notes on the back inside cover of your Bible.

- 1) Ezekiel 43:4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Matthew 7:15-20 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Luke 6:32, 35 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Titus 2:11 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Jeremiah 49:38 \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) 1 John 4:1-4 \_\_\_\_\_

- 7) Isaiah 11:6-9 \_\_\_\_\_
- 8) Revelation 3:12 \_\_\_\_\_
- 9) Isaiah 35:1-2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 10) 1 John 4:20-21 \_\_\_\_\_

### The Promised One of the New Testament

In the Gospel of John, we find Jesus' promise that someone would come after Him who would further His teaching.

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak. He shall show you things to come. (John 16:12-13)

This promised teacher would come after Christ. His teachings would be new, things that Jesus' disciples had not heard and were not ready for yet. This new teacher would guide the people into "all truth." He would be faithful to God and teach God's word in truth. He would be no false prophet. He would give reliable prophecies about things yet to come. Notice Abdu'l-Bahá's comments on this verse from John:

Now consider carefully that from these words, "for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak," it is clear that the Spirit of truth is embodied in a Man Who has individuality, Who has ears to hear and a tongue to speak. (Some Answered Questions, p. 109)

Shoghi Effendi identified Bahá'u'lláh as the one who fulfilled Jesus' promise:

Did not Christ Himself, addressing His disciples, utter these words: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth"? ... from the words of Christ, as attested by the Gospel, every unprejudiced observer will readily apprehend the magnitude of the Faith which Bahá'u'lláh has revealed, and recognize the staggering weight of the claim He has advanced. (The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 25)

Bahá'u'lláh also referred to John 16:12-13 and publicly proclaimed that the prophecy has been fulfilled in Himself.

Announce thou unto the priests: Lo! ... Verily, He Who is the Spirit of Truth is come to guide you unto all truth. He speaketh not as prompted by His own self, but as bidden by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. Say, this is the One Who hath glorified the Son and hath exalted His Cause. (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 12)

### Exercises on John 16:12-13

1) I have \_\_\_\_\_ many things to say unto you, but ye cannot \_\_\_\_\_ them now. Howbeit when He, the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_, is come, He will \_\_\_\_\_ you into all \_\_\_\_\_: for \_\_\_\_\_ shall not \_\_\_\_\_ of Himself; but whatsoever

He shall \_\_\_\_\_, that shall \_\_\_\_\_ speak. He shall show you \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

2) Memorize these verses.

3) Paraphrase the meaning of these verses in your own words:

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4) Explain how we can tell that these words apply to a new revelation to come after Jesus:

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5) What phrases in the verse indicate that these words must refer to a human prophet?

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### Teaching by Using Questions

Questions can be powerful teaching tools. Instead of directly explaining a point to a seeker, the use of questions can involve the seeker in the discussion. These questions can be focusing questions, that highlight key phrases in the sacred Word, or they can be teaching questions that involve the seeker in the discussion and help to uncover the spiritual meaning of the verses.

What impact does the uses of questions have on the mind and heart of the seeker? When we use questions to draw out our seekers, we help them discover

the truth for themselves. Also, we learn what she is thinking and can address her concerns more precisely.

Note the following examples which contrast straight forward explanation with teaching by using questions.

Explaining:

Bahá'í: Jesus was a divine educator. He taught the way of salvation and eternal life. However, he knew that the spiritual capacity of his disciples was limited. He told them that there were many things that He wanted to tell them, but that they were not ready to hear those things yet. He foretold another one, who would come after Him, who would reveal those things.

In John 16:12-13 Jesus said: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However when He, the Spirit of Truth has come, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears, He will speak."

We can tell that Jesus was referring to another prophet, because He hears and He speaks. He has a will of His own. When the time is right, He uses His free will to teach the people the things that Jesus wants them to learn.

Teaching with questions:

Bahá'í: Did you know that Jesus spoke about a divine teacher who would come after Him?

Seeker: No, I have always believed that Jesus was the only one.

Bahá'í: No spiritual teacher could ever replace Jesus, but He explained that there were things He wanted to tell His disciples that they were not ready to learn yet. Are you familiar with that scripture?

Seeker: Not really! Where is that in the Bible?

Bahá'í: In the 16th chapter of John it says, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However when He, the Spirit of Truth has come, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears, He will speak." Isn't it logical that God would continue to give us the guidance we need through the centuries?

Seeker: I guess so, but I never thought about how that would happen.

Bahá'í: When we read these words carefully, we notice that it says that the one called the Spirit of Truth would hear, speak and accurately give God's message. He would prophesy about the future. Wouldn't that have to be a person?

Seeker: I guess so.

Bahá'í: Here's a compilation of what the Founders of the Bahá'í Faith had to say about this prophecy.

Seeker: Thanks! I'll read it later.

## Exercise on Focusing Questions and Teaching Questions

The next exercise works with two distinct types of questions, focusing questions and teaching or leading questions.

Focusing questions direct the seeker's attention to a particular key word or phrase in a quote. Teaching or leading questions help the seeker reason on the quote and leads them to the teaching point that will help them see the Bahá'í perspective. Read carefully Jesus' description of the Promised One and Bahá'u'lláh's fulfillment of that description.

He will glorify me for He will take what is mine and declare it to you.  
(John 16:14)

Know thou that when the Son of Man (Christ) yielded up His breath to God, the whole creation wept with a great weeping. By sacrificing Himself, however, a fresh capacity was infused into all created things... We testify that when He came into the world, He shed the splendor of His glory upon all created things. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 85-86)

Below there is a series of questions that draws the connection between the words of Christ and Bahá'u'lláh. (It is not necessary to answer the questions.) Mark each question to indicate what type of question it is. Use either an F for focusing questions and a T for teaching questions.

1. Who would the Promised One glorify? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Would the Promised One belittle Christ? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What happened to creation when the Son of Man died? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What did Christ's sacrifice accomplish? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Did Bahá'u'lláh glorify Christ? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Would the Promised One replace Christ or be independent of Him? \_\_\_\_\_

## Worksheet for Teaching by Using Questions on Specific Texts

Fill out the following worksheet based on John 16:12-14.

1. Identify two or three teaching points you want to make about the verse:

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2. Select key phrases from the verse that support your teaching points.

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3. Write an explanation of your teaching points based on the key phrases you have selected.

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4. Create questions based on the text that lead the seeker to understand the points you want to make.

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5. Write out the answers to your questions.

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6. On the reverse side of this sheet, create a dialogue between a Bahá'í teacher and a seeker based on the above questions and answers. Allow students the opportunity to present their answers and their dialogue to the class.

#### The Role of Rational Proofs in Spiritual Growth

Recognizing the station of Bahá'u'lláh is like falling in love. It is a magical experience that goes beyond thought or reason. Mysterious feelings excite the heart and unequalled passions are stirred up.

When the true lover... reacheth to the presence of the Beloved, the sparkling beauty of the Loved One and the fire of the lover's heart will kindle a blaze and burn away all veils. (The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys, p. 36)

What then is the role of the spiritual teacher? In some ways, it is like the role of a matchmaker, who introduces the prospective bride and groom. The matchmaker sets the stage, create expectation about the first encounter, boasts about the wonderful qualities of the proposed partner, arranges a romantic meeting place and explains why this would be a good match. Eventually, the matchmaker must step aside and allow the relationship between the couple to develop.

Similarly, spiritual teachers must do more than simply explain the station of Bahá'u'lláh or give rational proofs of His Sovereignty. The seeker needs to be introduced to the person and grandeur of the Blessed Beauty. Rational reasons for accepting Bahá'u'lláh as Lord play only a partial, but necessary, role in effecting a match.

When Abdu'l-Bahá presented proofs, he often set the stage with words

that exalted the person of Bahá'u'lláh in ways that would aid the seeker to fall in love with Him. Notice in the passages below, how Abdu'l-Bahá accomplishes this.

Let us speak for a little of proofs. If you had come to this blessed place in the days of the manifestation of the evident Light, if you had attained to the court of His presence, and had witnessed His luminous beauty, you would have understood that His teachings and perfection were not in need of further evidence.

Through the honor of entering His presence, many souls became confirmed believers; they had no need of other proofs. Even those people who rejected and hated Him bitterly, when they had met Him, would testify to the grandeur of Bahá'u'lláh, saying, "This is a magnificent man." (Some Answered Questions, p. 36)

1. What was it like to be in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh?

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2. How does `Abdu'l-Bahá's description of Bahá'u'lláh help the seeker to fall in love with God's new messenger?

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Abdu'l-Bahá continued...

There are some people who, even if all the proofs in the world be adduced before them, still will not judge justly! ...

The state in which one should be to seriously search for the truth is the condition of the thirsty, burning soul desiring the water of life, of the fish struggling to reach the sea, of the sufferer seeking for the true doctor to obtain the divine cure, of the lost caravan endeavoring to find the right road, of the lost and wandering ship striving to reach the shore of salvation...

Furthermore, he must be able to endure all hardships. He must be absolutely pure and sanctified, and free from the love or the hatred of the inhabitants of the world. Why? because the fact of his love for any person or thing might

prevent him from recognizing the truth in another, and, in the same way, hatred for anything might be a hindrance in discerning truth. (Some Answered Questions, p. 36-38)

3. What does Abdu'l-Bahá say about the necessary attitudes of the seeker?

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4. Why does Abdu'l-Bahá speak about the obstacles to recognizing truth before presenting proofs?

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#### More Prophecies Concerning Bahá'u'lláh

1) Jeremiah foretold that God's throne would be established in the last days in Elam, that is, in Persia. (Jeremiah 49:38, 39) Bahá'u'lláh was born and began his ministry in Persia. His kingdom was, like Christ's kingdom, a kingdom over the hearts of men.

2) Ezekiel foretold that the glory of God would appear from the East, coming to the house of God by way of the gate. (Ezekiel 43:4) The prophet appears in the form of man (43:6) and speaks the message of God (43:7). Bahá'u'lláh was born and began his ministry in Persia, and came to Israel from the East of Israel. Bahá'u'lláh's name means the "Glory of God."

3) Isaiah foretold that the region of Israel around Mount Carmel would be especially blessed with the glory of God. (Isaiah 35:1-2)

Shoghi Effendi explained the fulfillment of these prophecies in Ezekiel 43 and Isaiah 35 in terms of Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in the Holy Land at the fortress city of Akká. "Akka, itself, flanked by the "glory of Lebanon," and lying in full view of the "splendor of Carmel," at the foot of the hills which enclose the home of Jesus Christ Himself... and alluded to by Ezekiel as "the gate that looketh towards the East," whereunto "the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the East," His voice "like a noise of many waters." (God Passes By, p. 184)

The prophet Isaiah also foretold that God would raise up a conquering king from the direction of the sunrise, the east. (Isaiah 41:2) The king would give his enemies to the sword (the word of God). Like Jesus, Bahá'u'lláh conquered his enemies with the sword of the Word of God (John 16:33, Romans 12:21, Hebrew 4:12) and renounced the use of physical weapons. (Matthew 26:52)

Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual conquests have been great. Despite forty years of persecution, imprisonment, exile and trials, he never showed any hatred to his enemies. He kept conquering evil with good. As a result, many victories have been won over the hearts of men. Now there are over 5 million followers of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh living in 300 nations, islands and territories.

4) The returned king would have a new, strange name, one that God would give him. (Isaiah 62:2-3) The name of Bahá'u'lláh certainly sounds strange to many people and this strangeness has been like a cloud that blocks the vision of the beauty of the sun. Yet whoever receives the name recognizes that the kingly spirit of Christ has returned in the clouds with His new name. (Revelation 3:12)

When the King returns, he makes available "hidden manna", which is new spiritual food. (Revelation 2:17)

#### Worksheet for Teaching by Using Questions on Specific Texts

Break the group up into pairs. Assign one of the following verses to each pair.

1) Jeremiah 49:38; 2) Ezekiel 43:4; 3) Isaiah 35:1-2; 4) Isaiah 62:2-3; 5) Revelation 3:12. Fill out the following worksheet based on the assigned verses.

1. Text Source: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Identify two or three teaching points you want to make about the verse:

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3. Select key phrases from the verse that support your teaching points.

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4. Memorize those key phrases.

5. Create two or three questions based on the text that lead the seeker to understand the points you want to make:

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6. Write out the answers to your questions.

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7. On the reverse side of this sheet, create a dialogue between a Bahá'í teacher and a seeker based on the above questions and answers. Allow students the opportunity to present their answers and their dialogue to the class.

#### Identifying True and False Prophets

Whenever God sends a new prophet, the majority of people oppose Him. Christ came with a message of love but only a few uneducated men put faith in Him. He offered divine healing to a world that was bruised and battered, but the followers of the established religion of that age called Him a false prophet.

It is easy to close our eyes to God's new messengers and to stay with the old established ways. But if everyone did that there would be no Christians today. It took courage to be an early disciple of Christ, just as it took courage to follow Moses when all the armies of Egypt were arrayed against Him. To follow God's new prophet means avoiding blind imitation of the beliefs of our family and friends. We must investigate reality for ourselves. Not every new prophet is false. God promises that He will continue to send messengers to "guide us into all truth."

The Bible provides the key to separating the true from the false prophets. The essential identifying mark of a true prophet is belief in Christ. False prophets make themselves known by disowning the LORD.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you will know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus has come in the flesh is not of God. (1 John 4:1-3)

No one can say that Jesus is LORD except by the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3)

Bahá'u'lláh glorified and honored Christ throughout His life. He could never be a false prophet. He clearly affirmed everything that the Bible teaches about Christ, stating that Jesus was the Son of God, the Word of God made flesh and LORD of creation. Thus Bahá'u'lláh clearly meet the qualifications for true Prophethood.

Therefore Christ... for man needs from time to time a voice upon earth to

bring God to him... had to become flesh, so that with our earthly ears we should be able to hear and understand." (God Passes By, p. 391)

The Lord of the Kingdom, Jesus Christ... (God Passes By, p. 151)

Another clear sign testifying to the divine spirit behind Bahá'u'lláh's mission is the impact that His teachings have had on people. They have fostered a spirit of divine love and brotherhood that now spans the globe. False prophets cannot bear such fruit.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits... every good tree bears good fruit but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit... Therefore by their fruits you will know them. (Matthew 7:15-20)

A true prophet will promote reverence for God, love of neighbor, honesty, kindness, and forgiveness. Bahá'u'lláh consistently affirmed the divine principles that Jesus taught. In return He was persecuted and imprisoned, just as Christ had been. Despite the hatred of His enemies, He always responded by showing love and mercy.

Exercises

1) Beware of \_\_\_\_\_ prophets, who come to you in \_\_\_\_\_ clothing, but inwardly they are \_\_\_\_\_ wolves. You will know them by their \_\_\_\_\_... every good \_\_\_\_\_ bears good \_\_\_\_\_ but a bad \_\_\_\_\_ bears \_\_\_\_\_ fruit. A good tree \_\_\_\_\_ bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit... Therefore by their fruits you will \_\_\_\_\_ them.

2) Memorize Matthew 7:15-20.

3) What two signs does the Bible give for identifying true prophets?

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4) How did Bahá'u'lláh manifest those two signs?

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The Fruitage of Love and Religious Unity

St. Paul wrote that "the fruitage of the spirit is love, joy, peace..." (Galatians 5:22) and Jesus Christ taught the power of universal love, a love that goes beyond those who think or look like ourselves. It extends to every human being, since all are made in the image of God. Even our enemies are to be treated with love and kindness.

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them... But love your enemies. Do good... and your reward will be great and you will be sons of the Most High." (Luke 6:32, 35)

Obedience to Christ means to do good to all. If everyone on earth would live up to that high moral standard, love and peace would cover our planet. There would be no more prejudice, injustice or war. This is precisely what the Bible foretells for the future, a transformed world where everybody will get along.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb...  
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,  
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6, 9)

Nevertheless, the modern world still contains much hatred and division. People are divided by race, religion and nationality. Racial and national differences continue to provoke tensions all around the globe. But the most intense troubles seem to center around religion, which should rather be a force for peace. The various religious sects and denominations continue to fight verbal and bloody wars over theological differences. Each one claims to be the true path to God. Yet, Protestants fight Catholics, Muslims fight Jews, Hindus fight Muslims. Even Protestant denominations often bitterly disagree and question one another's loyalty to God. Religious disputes do not honor God but rather cause people to doubt the value of religion. Distrust, estrangement and death are the bitter fruitage of disobedience to the divine law of love.

Bahá'u'lláh brought a message of love applies the teachings of Christ to the situation in the world today. Bahá'u'lláh called upon the religious leaders of the world to give up their claims to supremacy and to work together for the common good. The power of the Sacred Word to heal and bring about real change in the lives of people is one of the surest signs that a message is truly of God. Just as Christ broke with the tradition of His day by associating with Samaritans and Gentiles, Bahá'u'lláh taught that we should set past animosities behind us and freely associate with peoples of all religions in a spirit of friendship,

The doors of love and unity have been unlocked and flung open to the face of men. We have erewhile declared --and Our Word is the truth--: "Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship."

Whatsoever hath led the children of men to shun one another, and hath caused dissensions and divisions amongst them, hath, through the revelation of these words, been nullified and abolished... "It is not his to boast who loveth his country, but it is his who loveth the world." (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 95)

What have been the practical results of these inspirational teachings? Peoples of all backgrounds have set aside their rivalries and established a worldwide brotherhood under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh.

Reflect also that in the short time since Bahá'u'lláh has appeared, people from all countries, nations and races have entered under the shadow of this Cause. Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Hindus and Persians all associate together with the greatest friendship and love, as if indeed these people had been related and connected together, they and theirs, for a thousand years; for they are like father and child, mother and daughter, sister and brother. This is one of the meanings of the companionship of the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, and the lion and the calf. (Some Answered Questions, p. 64-65)

The fruitage of peace is a great testimony to the spiritual potency of Bahá'u'lláh.

### Questions for Discussion

1) What did Bahá'u'lláh teach about inter-religious fellowship?

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2) How did Christ and Bahá'u'lláh break with the religious traditions of their day?

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3) What was the fruitage of Bahá'u'lláh's teaching in terms of furthering the cause of love and peace?

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### The Veil of Imitation

Blocks the Light of the Son of God

(Paraphrase from The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 198-200)

If Christians of all denominations would investigate reality, the foundations of Christ will unite them. No enmity or hatred will remain, for they will all be under the one guidance of reality itself. Likewise, in the wider field if all the existing religious systems will turn away from ancestral imitations and investigate reality, seeking the real meanings of the Holy Books, they will unite and agree upon the same foundation, reality itself. As long as they

follow counterfeit doctrines or imitations instead of reality, animosity and discord will exist and increase.

Let me illustrate this. Moses and the prophets of Israel announced the advent of the Messiah but expressed it in spiritual language, in symbols. When Christ appeared, the Jews rejected Him, although they were expecting His manifestation and in their Temple and synagogues were crying and lamenting, saying, "O God, hasten the coming of the Messiah!" Why did they deny Him when He announced Himself? Because they had followed ancestral forms and interpretations and were blind to the reality of Christ. They had not perceived the inner significances of the Holy Bible.

They voiced their objections, saying, "We are expecting Christ, but His coming is conditioned upon certain fulfillments and prophetic announcements. Among the signs of His appearance is one that He shall come from an unknown place, whereas now this claimant of Messiahship has come from Nazareth. We know his home, and we are acquainted with his mother.

"Second, one of the signs or Messianic conditions is that His scepter would be an iron rod, and this Christ has not even a wooden staff.

"Third, He was to be seated upon the throne of David, whereas this Messianic king is in the utmost state of poverty and has not even a mat....

And so they spoke infamous words regarding Him. Now inasmuch as the Jews were submerged in the sea of ancestral imitations, they could not comprehend the meaning of these prophecies. All the words of the prophets were fulfilled, but because the Jews held tenaciously to hereditary interpretations, they did not understand the inner meanings of the Holy Bible; therefore, they denied Jesus Christ, the Messiah. The purpose of the prophetic words was not the outward or literal meaning, but the inner symbolical significance. For example, it was announced that the Messiah was to come from an unknown place. This did not refer to the birthplace of the physical body of Jesus. It has reference to the reality of the Christ--that is to say, the Christ reality was to appear from the invisible realm--for the divine reality of Christ is holy and sanctified above place. (John 3:13)

His sword was to be a sword of iron. This signified His tongue which should separate the true from the false (Hebrews 4:12) and by which great sword of attack He would conquer the kingdoms of hearts (Luke 17:21). He did not conquer by the physical power of an iron rod; He conquered the East and the West by the sword of His utterance. (Revelation 19:15)

He was seated upon the throne of David, but His sovereignty was neither a Napoleonic sovereignty nor the vanishing dominion of a Pharaoh. The Christ Kingdom was everlasting, eternal in the heaven of the divine Will. (Acts 2:34-36)

The purport is that all the meanings of the prophecies were fulfilled, but because the Jews were captives of ancestral imitations and did not perceive the reality of the meanings of these words, they denied Christ; nay, they even went

so far as to crucify Him. Consider how harmful is imitation. These were interpretations handed down from fathers and ancestors, and because the Jews held fast to them, they were deprived.

It is evident, then, that we must forsake all such imitations and beliefs so that we may not commit this error. We must investigate reality, lay aside selfish notions and banish hearsay from our minds...

The truth is that Christ fulfilled the Mosaic law and in every way upheld Moses; but the Jews, blinded by imitations and prejudices, considered Him the enemy of Moses.

#### Questions for Discussion

1) What is a spiritual veil?

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2) What blessing does one who is veiled lose?

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3) How is the Christian today who is hearing about Bahá'u'lláh for the first time like a Jew in the first century who heard about Christ?

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4) Write a dialogue between a first-century Jew and Christian to illustrate the obstacles blocking the recognition of a new prophet?

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#### Teaching About the Return of the Spirit of Christ

The Bahá'í teachings about the return of Christ should be introduced to seekers with special care. To some, the entire subject is "flaky" and associated with fanatical predictions of the end of the world. To others, who interpret the Bible literally, Christ is to descend from Heaven on a Cloud, so that "every eye will see Him." Such preconceived notions about the way God will fulfill His promises can serve as a thick veil blocking the

illuminating light of the New Revelation.

`Abdu'l-Bahá's "cautious and gradual" approach to teaching the Faith is especially appropriate when discussing the subject of return of Christ. How can adequate groundwork be laid? It is often effective to refer to Bahá'u'lláh as the return of the spirit of Christ, since it was not the soul of Christ but His prophetic role that returned. The only other example of the "return" found in the Bible, that is the return of the spirit of Elijah.

#### The Return of Elijah

The Old Testament book Malachi refers to the return of prophet Elijah. Elijah had lived several hundred years previously. At the end of his prophetic mission, he was seen ascending to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:9-11), much as the disciples saw Jesus ascending in the clouds. Malachi wrote that Elijah was to return before the day of the LORD.

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet  
Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.  
And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children  
And the hearts of the children to their fathers. (Malachi 4:5,6)

The New Testament reports the fulfillment of this prophecy. However the fulfillment was much different from what the people had expected. When Jesus was asked when Elijah would come, he answered that Elijah had already come but the people had not been aware.

I say to you that Elijah has come already and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished... And the disciples understood that they spoke to them of John the Baptist. (Matthew 17:12-13)

How strange Jesus' answer must have seemed to his disciples. The people had expected the same Elijah to return as had ascended to heaven. They expected that Elijah as a mature man would descend from the sky. Instead a different person was born into the world. How can this be understood? 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains:

The explanation is this: not the personality, but the reality of the perfections, is meant--that is to say, the same perfections that were in Elias existed in John the Baptist and were exactly realized in him. Therefore, John the Baptist was the promised Elias...

When spring comes, we say... spring has come back because all that was found in last year's spring exists in this spring. That is why Christ said, "You will see all that happened in the days of the former Prophets." (Some Answered Questions, p. 133)

John the Baptist returned in the spirit of Elijah. He was Elijah-like in a number of important ways. He arose in the wilderness of Judah to preach an unpopular message. During both Elijah's and John the Baptist's time Israel's leaders had turned away from God. Both John and Elijah issued a call for

repentance and healing. Thus God's promise for the return of Elijah was fulfilled according to God's will, by another individual with a mission and message similar to Elijah. This fulfillment was completely different from what one might anticipate from reading the original prophecy. (Compare Isaiah 55:9.)

Now the question confronts us... What about Jesus' promised return? Could his return follow the scriptural pattern of Elijah? Could it be that another individual, born of women, would come and symbolically fulfill all the prophecies of the second coming of Christ? Could it be that like the return of Elijah, people would be unaware of his arrival? Christ had after all said that he would come as a thief in the night. Could it be that he has come and gone and that we slept through the whole thing?

### Exercise on Spiritual Return

1. What Biblical example do we have of a prophet that returned centuries after his death?

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2. Read 2 Kings 2:9-11. Describe how Elijah went away.

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3. Read Malachi 4:5-6. What do these verse say about the return of the prophet?

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4. Read Matthew 17:10-13. How was the prophecy of Malachi fulfilled.

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5. In your own words, briefly describe the spiritual meaning of "return".

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## Will Every Eye See the Thief in the Night?

Jesus told his disciples to stay awake and to watch for His return. He said He would come as a thief in the night. Those who were spiritually asleep would be unaware that the "thief" had come and gone.

But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man (Christ) is coming at an hour that you do not expect. (Luke 12:39-40)

In contrast to this description of a "quiet" second coming, Christians often speak of Christ's return as a public event accompanied by great fanfare. Certain verses, when first read, seem to support the idea of a "loud" second coming.

The stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken... Then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and they will see the Son of Man (Christ) coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (Matthew 24:29-30)

Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him. (Revelation 1:7)

What, then, are we to expect? Will there be a "quiet" or a "loud" return of Christ? How can these two representations be reconciled? Consider: would a thief to sneak into a home and then turn on the lights and announce his presence? Hardly! If the householder were asleep, he would come in, do the "job" and go out quietly.

When Jesus spoke of earth-shaking events, he was speaking in symbolic language that must be understood spiritually. Note how 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains the deep meaning of Christ's symbols.

Among other things it is said that the stars will fall upon the earth. The stars are endless and innumerable, and modern mathematicians have established and proved scientifically that the globe of the sun is estimated to be about one million and a half times greater than the earth, and each of the fixed stars to be a thousand times larger than the sun. If these stars were to fall upon the surface of the earth, how could they find place there? It would be as though a thousand million of Himalaya mountains were to fall upon a grain of mustard seed. (Some Answered Questions, p. 111-112)

What is the meaning of the "stars" falling from Heaven? The stars represent religious leaders who should be guiding lights for the people. (Compare Daniel 12:3) The loss of proper guidance in this secular age is fittingly pictured by stars falling out of the sky.

'Abdu'l-Bahá sheds further light on true meaning of the prophecies by pointing out that Christ's first coming was described with many of these same symbols.

At His first coming Christ also came from heaven, as it is explicitly stated in the Gospel. Christ Himself says: "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." (John 3:13)

It is clear to all that Christ came from heaven, although apparently He came from the womb of Mary. At the first coming He came from heaven, though apparently from the womb; in the same way, also, at His second coming He will come from heaven, though apparently from the womb. The conditions that are indicated in the Gospel for the second coming of Christ are the same as those that were mentioned for the first coming. (Some Answered Questions, p. 110-111)

Heaven is a spiritual place, not a location in outer space. No one can travel from earth to heaven by flying up into the sky. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom." (1 Corinthians 15:50) Word-pictures that portray humans ascending into the sky, or descending on clouds are spiritual expressions for transcending the barriers of the flesh and entering the divine presence. The spiritual heaven, the throne of God, is not literally up or down. Christ on his first coming did not physically descend from the sky. Neither does he physically descend on his second coming. Christ's "coming down from Heaven" is meant to indicate that the reality of Christ comes, not from earth, but from God.

The description of Christ's first coming matches the second coming in another way. The prophecies say that "every eye" would see Christ's return. With reference to the first coming it was also written that "all flesh" would "see the salvation of God". (Isaiah 40:3-5) St. Luke reports that fulfillment at Luke 3:3-6 and St. Paul confirmed that this universal "seeing" had already taken place when he wrote that "salvation has appeared to all men'." (Titus 2:11)

These verses could not mean that every single individual on the surface of the planet recognized Christ for who He truly was. That simply was not the case. There were thousands who saw Him, but did not believe Him when He claimed to be Messiah. Instead, the real meaning is that Jesus had a public ministry. His work was not secretive. He was known to all kinds of men, both believers and opposers. (Compare the usage of "all" in Ezekiel 20:48; Joel 2:28; John 12:32; Philippians 4:5; 1 Peter 2:17.) His appearance would bring joy to the believers but "mourning" to those who opposed His divine message.

Finally, what is the meaning of "coming on clouds"? Bahá'u'lláh explained that clouds represent all obstructions that block the people from recognizing their returned Lord.

And now regarding His words, that the Son of man shall "come in the clouds

of heaven." By the term "clouds" is meant those things that are contrary to the ways and desires of men...They mean the appearance of that immortal Beauty in the image of mortal man, with such human limitations as eating and drinking, poverty and riches, glory and abasement, sleeping and waking, and such other things as cast doubt in the minds of men, and cause them to turn away. All such veils are symbolically referred to as "clouds."

(Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 71-72)

### Exercise on Symbols of Christ's Return

Write out the answers to the following questions. Then pair off and use role-playing to create a discussion between a Bahá'í and a Christian. Either read the questions and answers from your papers or ad-lib.

Q: Doesn't the Bible say that Christ will return by descending from Heaven? But Bahá'u'lláh was born from the womb of His mother. How can you explain that?

A:

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Q: What about the fact that "every eye" will see Him? How can you explain that?

A:

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Q: How do you understand the scripture that says, "The stars will fall"?

A:

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Q: How do you understand the scripture that says, "He will come on clouds"?

A:

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## Time Prophecies of Christ and Bahá'u'lláh

One of the most intriguing evidences of Bahá'u'lláh's divine mission are the time prophecies in the book of Daniel. These time counts pinpoint the year for the coming of Christ as well as the coming of Bahá'u'lláh.

In the sixth century BC, the Jerusalem Temple lay in ruins. The ninth chapter of Daniel appoints seventy prophetic weeks from the rebuilding of Jerusalem to the martyrdom of Christ. Prophetic time is calculated in terms of "a day for a year" (Ezekiel 4:6), so that seventy weeks work out to 490 (7 x 70) years. The time count would start with the re-establishment of regular sacrifices at the sacred altar in 457 BC, when the Persian King Artaxerxes decreed that the priests and Levites should take the captured utensils and animals for sacrifice to the house of God and diligently do "whatever is commanded by the God of Heaven," as recorded in the seventh chapter of Ezra. The 490 years would run until the martyrdom of Christ in 33 AD when the sacrifice was accomplished and the altar's purpose fulfilled (457 years + 33 years = 490 years).

The third edict of Artaxerxes was issued four hundred and fifty-seven years before the birth of Christ, and Christ when He was martyred and ascended was thirty-three years of age. When you add thirty-three to four hundred and fifty-seven, the result is four hundred and ninety, which is the time announced by Daniel for the manifestation of Christ. (Some Answered Questions, p. 40-41)

After speaking about the death of Messiah, Daniel goes on to predict the final destruction of Jerusalem, "the city and the sanctuary" (Daniel 9: 26-27). In 66 AD the inhabitants of Jerusalem rebelled against the Romans. Four years later the Roman armies recaptured Jerusalem and destroyed its Temple.

Now that the appearance of Christ has been proved by the prophecies of Daniel, let us prove the appearance of Bahá'u'lláh and of His forerunner, the Báb.

It is noteworthy that the death of Messiah and the destruction of the Temple are so closely linked. For Jesus compared His own body to the Temple of God.

Jesus answered and said unto them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."

Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple and will you raise it up in three days?"

But He was speaking of the temple of His body. (John 2:19-21)

Here we can see that Jesus was referring to the temple as a symbol of God's presence where people gather to worship. Jesus as God manifest in the flesh likewise represented the presence of God. Thus the return of Christ is

inseparably connected with the restoration of a spiritual Temple.

In the eighth chapter of the Book of Daniel, we find another time count that identifies the year of Christ's return which is symbolically depicted as the day that the temple is restored. In a vision, Daniel overheard a conversation between two holy ones or angels. The question was asked, 'When will the temple be returned to its proper condition?' meaning when would the LORD return and re-establish pure worship.

Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to that certain holy one who was speaking, 'How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled under foot?' Then he said to me, 'For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.'  
(Daniel 8:13-14)

'Abdu'l-Bahá explained that the 2,300 days ended at the dawn of the Bahá'í era when the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh's forerunner appeared.

Briefly, the purport of this passage is that he appoints two thousand three hundred years, for in the text of the Bible each day is a year. Then from the date of the issuing of the edict of Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem until the day of the birth of Christ there are 456 years, and from the birth of Christ until the day of the manifestation of the Báb there are 1844 years. When you add 456 years to this number it makes 2300 years. That is to say, the fulfillment of the vision of Daniel took place in the year A.D. 1844, and this is the year of the Báb's manifestation according to the actual text of the Book of Daniel. Consider how clearly he determines the year of manifestation; there could be no clearer prophecy for a manifestation than this. (Some Answered Questions, p. 42)

A full understanding of this topic requires much study as it corresponds to many other Biblical prophecies. For example, Malachi 3:1 depicts the LORD coming to His Temple to cleanse it as follows:

Behold, I will send my messenger. And He will prepare the way before Me.

And the LORD, whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple,  
Even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight.

'Behold, He is coming,' says the LORD of hosts...

He will purify the sons of Levi (the tribe of temple servants)

And purge them as gold and silver,

That they may offer to the LORD

An offering in righteousness. (Malachi 3:1,3)

In the years before 1844, these time calculations had been made. Many Christian groups in Europe, such as the German Templars, and in America, such as the Millerites, were expecting Christ to return in that year. Likewise, Shiite Muslim tradition had a time count that fixed 1844 as the date of the return of

the Imam. Other religious traditions had similar expectations about the arrival of a spiritual liberator.

When the LORD returns, the Bible describes Him wearing many crowns. (Revelation 19:11-13) He comes to unify the peoples of the world just as the world was on the verge of becoming a global village through rapid transportation and communication. God's new messenger was bringing food in due season.

The Jews await the Messiah, the Christians the return of Christ, the Moslem the Mahdi, the Buddhists the fifth Buddha, the Zoroastrians Sháh Bahran, the Hindoos the reincarnation of Krishna, and the Atheists - a better social organization! Bahá'u'lláh represents all these, and thus destroys the rivalries and the enmities of the different religions; reconciles them in their primitive purity, and frees them from the corruption of dogmas and rites. (Introduction to Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá)

### Review Questions

1. Which chapter in Daniel contains the prophecy about the first coming of Christ? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How long is the "70 weeks"? \_\_\_\_\_
3. In what year did the 70 weeks begin? \_\_\_\_\_
4. In what year did they end? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Which chapter and verse in Daniel contains the prophecy about the coming of the Báb? \_\_\_\_\_
6. How long are the 2,300 days? \_\_\_\_\_
7. In what year did the 2,300 days begin? \_\_\_\_\_
8. In what year did they end? \_\_\_\_\_

### Bahá'í Resources on the Topic of Prophecy

The topic of prophecy is enormous and inexhaustible. In this course, we have only scratched the surface. As you have the opportunity to dialogue with Christians, many questions will come up which may be difficult to answer. This will prove to be a real blessing as it will give you the opportunity to do further study.

In general, you will find that among Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, Kitáb-i-Íqán contains the most information on Biblical prophecy. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks in Some Answered Questions and Promulgations of Universal Peace are also a wonderful source especially since they were given to American audiences of predominately Christian background. Shoghi Effendi's The Promised Day Has Come is likewise valuable.

Of course, it is best if we can find answers to our questions in the Sacred Writings themselves but it can also be helpful to read Bahá'í secondary books. It should be kept in mind, however, that these authors often express their own private interpretations which are not authoritative. Helpful secondary works include Christ and Bahá'u'lláh by George Townshend, Understanding Biblical Prophecy and Prophecies of Jesus by Michael Sours, Thief in the Night by William Sears and

He Cometh with Clouds by Gary Matthews.

Below find some topics and references that should prove useful for further study and Bahá'í / Christian Dialogues.

1. Prophecies about the coming of Bahá'u'lláh, the Glory of God.

In *God Passes By* (184), Shoghi Effendi identifies several Biblical prophecies that speak of the advent of Bahá'u'lláh. (E.g. Isaiah 35:1-2; Ezekiel 43:4; Psalms 24:9-10)

In *Thief in the Night*, William Sears explores dozens of Biblical references to the Glory of God such as Ezekiel 43:4, Isaiah 35:1-2, etc.

2. Prophecies about the coming of Christ parallel prophecies about Bahá'u'lláh.

In *Promulgations of Universal Peace* 198-200, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains the veils that hindered the Jews from accepting Christ. These were expectations that the prophecies would have a material rather than a spiritual fulfillment, such as the Messiah being a political king rather than a spiritual king.

3. Time prophecies pointing to the date that Christ, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh would appear.

In *Some Answered Questions* 36-44, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains the time prophecies from Daniel. He shows that the seventy weeks of years (Daniel 9) pointed to Messiah's coming in 30AD, the 2,300 years (Daniel 8) that pointed to the Báb's arrival in 1844 AD, and the 1,290 years (Daniel 12) points to Bahá'u'lláh's advent in 1863 AD .

In *Thief in the Night* (16-31) William Sears discusses various prophecies that point to the spiritual significance of the date 1844.

4. The prophecy in Revelation 1:7 that Christ upon His return will descend in the clouds and every eye will see Him.

In *Some Answered Questions* 103, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains the meaning of descending from Heaven.

In *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 71, Bahá'u'lláh explains that clouds represent veils.

In *Understanding Bible Prophecy* 119-122, Bahá'í author Michael Sours comments on the meaning of "every eye."

5. The prophecy in Matthew 24 concerning Christ's return and the end of the age.

In *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 24-42, Bahá'u'lláh dedicates many page to explain a single verse (verse 29) where it is written that the sun would grow dark and the stars would fall

from heaven.

The entire book *Prophecies of Jesus* by Michael Sours is a verse-by-verse discussion of Matthew 24 which contains Christ's description of the sign of His return. Of particular note, is the discussion of verse 14, "The Gospel will be preached in all the inhabited earth and then the end (of the age) will come." On pages 55-60, Sours shows how the Christian Gospel had penetrated the heart of Africa, Asia and the other remote corners of the earth by the time of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration.

[+CHAPTER2]

Facilitating Spiritual Joy

Part II

Defining the Purpose and Path of Dialogue

Note how one Bahá'í writer explains the process of dialogue:

Dialogue generally involves a collective process or a conversation, a two-way communication or a reciprocal process in which two or more parties holding significantly different beliefs endeavor to express to dialogue partners what they mean and to learn from each other in the process. But dialogue is more than just an exchange of views and has come to mean a personal process of refining the beliefs and values of one's own faith vis-à-vis the insights that one has gleaned from others.

Three goals of dialogue are (1) to know oneself more profoundly, just as one learns more about one's native land as a result of living abroad; (2) to know the other more authentically; and (3) to live ever more fully, a process described as "mutual transformation." Furthermore, a sharp distinction should be made between dialogue and "evangelistic witness." While the latter aims at conversion, the former does not. The goal is rather mutual understanding, appreciation and transformation. (Adapted from Seena Fazel, "Interreligious Dialogue and the Bahá'í Faith: Some Preliminary Observations, *Revisioning the Sacred: New Perspectives on Bahá'í theology*. Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í Religions vol. 8 (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1997).

Dialogue by its nature is much less confrontational than "evangelistic witness." Since it respects the views of all participants, the atmosphere is congenial and no one's views are undermined or attacked. Each individual is responsible for what they learn from other participants and for the shaping of their own faith.

Topic for discussion:

1. What is dialogue?
2. What are the benefits of dialogue?

3. What are the differences between dialogue and "evangelistic witness"?

4. Is engaging in dialogue easier or harder than "witnessing"?

#### Following the Example of the Master

"Let us too bear in mind the example which our beloved Master has clearly set before us. Wise and tactful in His approach, wakeful and attentive in His early intercourse, broad and liberal in all His public utterances, cautious and gradual in the unfolding of the essential verities of the Cause, passionate in His appeal yet sober in argument, confident in tone, unswerving in conviction, dignified in His manners--such were the distinguishing features of our Beloved's noble presentation of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh."

(Shoghi Effendi in *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 35)

Put the following phrases, which Shoghi Effendi used to describe Abdu'l-Bahá's method of teaching, into your own words and explain the importance of each.

"wakeful and attentive" \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

"broad and liberal" \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

"cautious and gradual" \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

"passionate" \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

"noble presentation" \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

#### Brief History of Christianity

Christianity is a faith centered on the person and teachings of Jesus Christ. To Christians, Jesus of Nazareth was the Promised One of God whose coming was foretold in the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible. Jesus walked the land of Israel and taught publicly. After his death, his twelve disciples carried on the work. The Apostle Paul was instrumental in bringing the message of Christ to Asia Minor and Europe. Thereafter, Christianity quickly spread through the Mediterranean world. In the 4th century, it became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Christians have a long history of dividing into rival groups. Numerous sects sprang up during the second and third centuries, notably the Gnostics, the Arians and the Athenasians. In the fourth century efforts were made to establish unity by the Roman emperor Constantine. This resulted in the

formation of the Catholic (from the Greek word *Katholikos*, meaning "universal.") Church. Bishops debated differences of belief at Church Councils, such as the Council of Nicea in 325 AD, and produced statements of belief, called creeds, that sought to settle doctrinal disputes and to unite the various factions.

During the 11th century, when all of Europe became Christianized, this main church divided into a Latin (Western European) and a Greek (Byzantine or Orthodox) branch over disputes about the role of the Roman Pope and church governance.

The Western church was in turn divided during the Reformation of the 16th century into the Roman Catholic church and a large number of smaller Protestant churches: Lutheran, Anglican, Calvinist, etc. These divisions centered around differences of opinion about the authority of the Pope, the Catholic Church's policy of granting dispensation for sins in exchange for monetary contributions, the role of faith versus works in salvation and the role of the Bible. Since that time sectarian divisions have continued and multiplied. There are now approximately 2,000 distinct Christian denominations worldwide.

#### Main Christian Denominations

Adapted From Grolier's Multimedia Encyclopedia

Roman Catholic Church, (1 billion members) the largest of the Christian churches, although present in all parts of the world, is identified as Roman because of its historical roots in Rome and because of the importance it attaches to the worldwide ministry of the bishop of Rome, the pope.

Orthodox churches (between 100 and 200 million members) are a fellowship of administratively independent regional or national churches, united in faith, sacraments, and canonical discipline, each enjoying the right to elect its own head and its bishops. Traditionally, the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople (Istanbul) is recognized as the "first among equal" Orthodox bishops. Other orthodox church leaders include the patriarch of Russia; the archbishop of Cyprus; the archbishop of Greece and the archbishop of North America. The Orthodox Churches split with the Roman Catholic Church in 1054 AD over dispute about Church leadership.

The Church of England or Anglican Communion or Episcopal Church (27 million members) in its modern form, dates from the English Reformation of the 16th century, when royal supremacy was established and the authority of the pope repudiated. With the advent of British colonization, the Church of England established churches on every continent and achieved international importance.

Protestantism is a movement in Western Christianity whose adherents reject the notion that divine authority is channeled through one particular human institution or person such as the Roman Catholic pope. Protestants look elsewhere for the authority of their faith. Most of them stress the Bible--the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament--as the source and the norm of their

teaching. Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians also stress the authority of the Bible, but they also look to tradition, and, in the case of Catholics, to the pope as a source of authority.

Lutheran Church (70 million members) is the branch of Protestantism that generally follows the teachings of the 16th-century reformer Martin Luther. Luther is famous for posting his 95 theses (points of disagreement with the Catholics) on the door of the castle church at Wittenberg on Oct. 31, 1517. His theses dealt principally with the corruption in the Roman Catholic church and his message of salvation by faith alone. The Lutheran movement diffused after 1517 from Saxony through many other German territories into Scandinavia. In the 18th century it spread to America and, thereafter, into many nations of the world.

Fundamentalism is a term popularly used to describe strict adherence to Christian doctrines based on a literal interpretation of the Bible. This usage derives from a late-19th- and early-20th-century transdenominational Protestant movement that opposed the accommodation of Christian doctrine to modern scientific theory and philosophy. Many Baptists, most Pentecostals and many smaller denominations are fundamentalists. With some differences among themselves, fundamentalists insist on belief in the inerrancy of the Bible, the virgin birth and divinity of Jesus Christ, the vicarious and atoning character of his death, his bodily resurrection, and his second coming as the irreducible minimum of authentic Christianity. This minimum was reflected in such early declarations as the 14-point creed of the Niagara Bible Conference of 1878.

Baptist Churches (35 million members) form one of the largest Protestant denominations. The following distinguish the Baptists from other Protestant communions: (1) their insistence on baptism of adult believers only; (2) their concern for freedom of speech and conscience and for freedom from interference by any civil or ecclesiastical authority; (3) the primacy they seek to give to Scripture in matters of faith, doctrine, and morals; and (4) the authority they give to the congregation in church affairs.

Pentecostal Churches, (over 25 million) a worldwide Protestant movement that originated in the 19th-century United States, takes its name from the Christian feast of Pentecost, which celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. Pentecostalism emphasizes a postconversion experience of spiritual purification and empowering for Christian witness, entry into which is signaled by utterance in unknown tongues.

Mormons (7.7 million members) is the common name given to members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). Two-thirds of the church's membership is in the United States, especially in Utah, where its chief administrative body is located. Members are also found in many other countries, particularly in Latin America. The LDS Church was founded by Joseph Smith in Fayette, N. Y., in 1830. Earlier he reported having visions of God and other heavenly beings in which he was told that he would be the instrument to establish the restored Christian church. The Book of Mormon, which is

considered an addition to the Bible, tells the history of God's people and the ancient appearance of Christ in America.

Jehovah's Witnesses (5 million members) are a society of Christians who preach door to door and actively promote home study of the Bible. They expect an early end to the present world system in a "great tribulation" from God that will soon rid the earth of suffering and restore the earth to its original Garden of Eden-like condition. Because they claim citizenship in the Kingdom of God, they refuse to salute any flag, serve in any army or vote. The modern movement was organized in Pennsylvania during the 1870s by Charles Taze Russell. They deny the Trinity and the existence of a literal hellfire.

1. Describe and discuss the beliefs of the main religious groups in your local area.

### Biblical & Bahá'í Texts on Salvation

Personal salvation is a central concern for many Christians and will undoubtedly be a theme that will come up repeatedly in dialogues with Christians. It makes sense therefore for Bahá'ís to have a clear understanding of just what the Bible, especially the New Testament, says about the requirements for salvation and also what various Church creeds have added to those requirements. This section sets out the Biblical position. Subsequent sections will explore the creeds.

Bahá'í beliefs are fully in harmony with Bible teachings. Therefore Bahá'ís can whole-heartedly affirm and agree with much of what Christians say. However, often it necessary to give further explanation of Bahá'í beliefs so that a Christian seeker does not walk away with a wrong impression. A wonderful way to dialogue with Christians may be called "Affirm and Explain." First, affirm Bahá'í agreement with the text of the Bible and then explain the way it is understood in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation.

#### Affirm that Christ Brings Spiritual Life

Bible quote:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Bahá'í quotes:

Christ is the cause of the spiritual life of man, and with regard to the spirit, His was the spiritual fatherhood... Adam is the cause of man's physical life; but the Reality of Christ--that is to say, the Word of God--is the cause of spiritual life. (Some Answered Questions, p. 119)

Christ, Who is the Word of God, sacrificed Himself... Christ's intention was to represent and promote a Cause which was to educate the human world...a Cause which was antagonistic to all the people of the world and all the nations and

kingdoms-- meant that He would be killed and crucified, so Christ in proclaiming His mission sacrificed His life. He regarded the cross as a throne, the wound as a balm, the poison as honey and sugar... He perished in body so as to quicken others by the spirit. (Some Answered Questions, p. 120-121)

1. What does John 3:16 say is necessary for salvation?

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2. Identify the phrases from the Bahá'ís quote that show agreement with John 3:16.

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Affirm that Salvation is Impossible Without Jesus

Bible quotes:

Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must get saved. (Peter's words in Acts 4:12)

Bahá'í quote:

The supreme love and unity is witnessed in the divine Manifestations. Among Them unity is indissoluble, changeless, eternal and everlasting. Each One is expressive and representative of all. If we deny One of the Manifestations of God, we deny all. (The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 208)

1. What is salvation requirement is specified in these verses?

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2. Can Bahá'ís agree with Christians that salvation is impossible without faith in Christ? How so?

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Explain that the Word of God is Older and More Widespread than Christianity

In the beginning was the Word... and the Word became flesh (Jesus) and dwelt among us. (John 1:1, 14)

The Bible clearly teaches that the Word of God is ancient, much older than the Christian religion. When the Prophet Micah wrote about Christ's birth in Bethlehem, he shows that Christ has been repeatedly "going forth" to mankind

throughout history.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me, the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old. (Micah 5:2)

The Bible teaches and Bahá'ís believe that the Word of God has been active throughout human history, dealing with all the inhabitants of the earth.

That was the true Light, that gives light to every man coming into the world. (John 1:9)

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. (Titus 2:11)

Thus the Bible shows that God's message of salvation has not been limited to just one portion of the earth or to just the last 2,000 years. It is universal and has appeared to all peoples at all times. The Bahá'í writings concur.

He hath in every age and cycle, in conformity with His transcendent wisdom, sent forth a divine Messenger to revive the dispirited and despondent souls with the living waters of His utterance, One Who is indeed the Expounder, the true Interpreter, inasmuch as man is unable to comprehend that which hath streamed forth from the Pen of Glory and is recorded in His heavenly Books. Men at all times and under all conditions stand in need of one to exhort them, guide them and to instruct and teach them. Therefore He hath sent forth His Messengers, His Prophets and chosen ones that they might acquaint the people with the divine purpose underlying the revelation of Books and the raising up of Messengers, and that everyone may become aware of the trust of God which is latent in the reality of every soul. (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 161)

### Worksheet for Teaching by Using Questions on Specific Texts

Fill out the following worksheet based on John 1:1 & 14; Titus 2:11 or Micah 5:2.

1. Identify two or three teaching points you want to make about the verse:

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2. Select key phrases from the verse which support your teaching points.

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3. Memorize those key phrases.

4. Create questions based on the text that lead the seeker to understand the points you want to make:

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5. Write out the answers to your questions.

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6. On the reverse side of this sheet, create a dialogue between a Bahá'í teacher and a seeker based on the above questions and answers. Allow students the opportunity to present their answers and their dialogue to the class.

#### Focusing, Leading and Dialogue Questions

This exercise will examine three distinct types of questions based on their use in teaching. They may be called focusing, leading and dialogue questions.

Focusing questions direct the seeker's attention to a particular key word or phrase in a quote. For example, if you were discussing Titus 2:11 with a friend. First read the quote. "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." You might ask, "According to this verse who receives God's grace? This would be a focusing question because its purpose is to focus the seeker's attention on the phrase "all men".

Leading questions help the seeker reason on the quote and leads them to the teaching point that will help them see the Bahá'í perspective.

For example, again concerning Titus 2:11, you might ask, "Is salvation limited to people from just one part of the world or is it restricted to those who lived after Christ?" This question is designed to lead your listener to the conclusion that that salvation has been available to mankind in all times and all places.

Focusing and leading questions are teaching tools that aid us to get our point across. In contrast to simply explaining Bahá'í views they help the seeker to see the logic behind what Bahá'u'lláh taught.

Questions for dialogue are genuine requests for information. They are listening tools in contrast to teaching tools. When we don't know what the seeker

believes about a topic, we can ask them directly. Thus we might say, "The Bible says that the grace of God has appeared to all men. Yet many millions in China, Africa and America never heard about Jesus Christ during their life times. How do you believe that the grace of God appeared to them?" Then be prepared to listen and to ask follow up questions to get a clear understanding of their beliefs.

Exercise: Mark each of the following F for focusing question, L for leading question, D for dialogue question. Do not answer the questions, rather determine what type of questions they are. There is not always one correct answer. Some of these questions may be combined types with a dual purpose. (Answer the first three questions as a group and the remainder individually. Then discuss the answers.)

1. What does salvation mean to you? \_\_\_\_\_
2. According to Titus 2:11, what has appeared to all men? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Could people who lived before Christ receive God's grace? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What does the grace of God bring? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How could people living in Tahiti 500 years before Christ gain salvation?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Would it make sense for God to condemn people if they never had the opportunity to hear God's word or to learn about salvation? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Bahá'ís believe that God has made a covenant with mankind to never leave them without divine instruction. So the Chinese, Indians and Islanders, all peoples in whatever age they lived, were all recipients of God's Word. What do you believe about that? \_\_\_\_\_
8. According to Titus 2:11, who are denied the opportunity to hear the Word of Salvation? \_\_\_\_\_
9. If you agree that God's Word appeared to all peoples in ancient times, how did that work? Did God send prophets to every nation and people? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What do Baptists believe happens to all the people who lived before Christ? Are they all condemned to hell? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Would it be just for God to bring a person into existence and give them life but fail to give them an opportunity to know and worship Him? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Opening Conversations with Dialogue

One of the simplest and most effective ways to open conversations with people is by asking questions to find out what they believe.

Bahá'í: Did you see that article in the paper today about the situation in Kosovo?

Friend: Yes, it is awful how inhuman people can be.

Bahá'í: The sad thing is that much of the problem centers around differences of religion.

Friend: That's true all around the world; Ireland, Israel, India.

Bahá'í: (to her himself, whispered to the side: "I could start talking about the Unity of Religions now and how Abdu'l-Bahá taught that religions should unite rather than divide, but I think I'll find out more about my friend's beliefs first...)

Bahá'í (to friend): I know what you mean. Do you mind if I ask what religion you are?

Friend: I'm Baptist.

Bahá'í: Baptists are pretty serious about the Bible, aren't they?

Friend: Oh, yes, we have Bible studies in my Church several times a week.

Bahá'í: I've been taking a class on the Bible, myself.

We've been studying various denominations and what they believe. Do you mind if I ask you a question?

Friend: No, sure. Go ahead.

Bahá'í: Why do you think there are so many different Churches and why can't they get along better? What about the Catholics and Protestants, etc?

Friend: People just have different opinions and interpretations of the Bible, I guess.

Bahá'í: Do you feel that belief correct doctrine is the basis for salvation? Can't people be saved even if they have different understandings of the Bible?

Friend: Salvation is based on repentance and faith in the blood of Christ.

Bahá'í: Yes, salvation is based on faith, not perfect knowledge. Even if people are mistaken about some of their beliefs, I believe that God will forgive them as long as they have faith.

Friend: That's a very interesting thought. If everyone felt like that it would put an end to a lot of fighting and arguing.

Bahá'í: Yes! People are divided up in too many different ways. By religion, race, nationality and so forth. Have you seen this booklet, *Uniting the Human Family*?

Friend: No!

Bahá'í: I was reading this last night and found a quote I really like. (Turn to picture from page 8.) Notice how Bahá'u'lláh taught that peoples of all races and religions should set aside their differences and love one another. Would you like to look through this booklet?

Friend: Sure!

Bahá'í: Here. Let me know what you think.

Christian Beliefs and Creeds

Creeds are a summary of essential Christian teachings. They were devised at various times in the history of the Church as tools against heresy. True believers were expected to affirm the truth of the creeds and thus to be identified as loyal Christians. Those who failed to affirm the creeds were considered heretics and apostates. Modern, individual Christians may vary as to their familiarity with these creeds and their personal understanding of them. Nevertheless the creeds represent the traditional statements of belief of the Catholic and many Protestant Churches.

### Apostle's Creed

The Apostle's Creed is the most popular creed in Western churches, both Protestant and Catholic, but it is relatively unknown in Eastern churches. Legend has it that the Apostles composed it; however, this is false. It was merely a creed that was used by the early Christians and passed down by word of mouth.

It initially appeared in the second century to refute the teachings of Marcion. Marcion held mystical beliefs about Christ and the nature of man that were viewed as contrary to the central teachings of the Church. Therefore, the Apostle's Creed was a re-statement of those central beliefs that Church leaders felt were vital. It was written down when there was no longer danger of it falling into the wrong hands.

Now, it reads as follows:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. (Amen)

1. List the teachings of the Apostle's Creed.

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)
- f)
- g)

### Selections from the Athanasian Creed

Definition of the Trinity:

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the

catholic faith; .Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son and such is the Holy Spirit.

The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Spirit uncreate. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated nor three incomprehensibles, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible.

So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty; And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; And yet they are not three Gods, but one God....

So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.

1. In your own words, describe what most Christian Churches teach about the Trinity.

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### Bahá'í Concept of the Trinity

Adapted From 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Explanation in Some Answered Questions

Question. -- What is the meaning of the Trinity, of the Three Persons in One?

Answer. -- The Divine Reality is purified and sanctified from the understanding of human beings and can never be imagined by the people of wisdom and of intelligence. That Lordly Reality cannot be divided into parts; for division

and multiplicity are properties of creatures which are contingent existences.

God is pure perfection, and creatures are but imperfections. For God to descend into the conditions of existence would be the greatest of imperfections; on the contrary, when the Word of God is made flesh, His appearance is like the reflection of the sun in a clear, pure, polished mirror. That reflection is the Manifestation of God in creation. All the creatures are evident signs of God, like the earthly beings upon all of which the rays of the sun shine. But upon the plains, the mountains, the trees and fruits, only a portion of the light shines, through which they become visible, and are reared, and attain to the object of their existence.

The Manifestation of God is the Perfect Man. He is in the condition of a clear mirror in which the Sun of Reality becomes visible and manifest with all its qualities and perfections. So the Reality of Christ was a clear and polished mirror of the greatest purity and fineness. The Sun of Reality, the Essence of Divinity, reflected itself in this mirror and manifested its light and heat in it; but from the exaltation of its holiness, and the heaven of its sanctity, the Sun did not descend to dwell and abide in the mirror. No, it continues to subsist in its exaltation and sublimity, while appearing and becoming manifest in the mirror in beauty and perfection.

Now if we say that we have seen the Sun in two mirrors-- one the Christ and one the Holy Spirit--that is to say, that we have seen three Suns, one in heaven and the two others on the earth, we speak truly. And if we say that there is one Sun, and it is pure singleness, and has no partner and equal, we again speak truly.

The Holy Spirit is the Bounty of God which becomes visible and evident in the Reality of Christ. The Sonship station is the heart of Christ, and the Holy Spirit is the station of the spirit of Christ. Hence it has become certain and proved that the Essence of Divinity is absolutely unique and has no equal, no likeness, no equivalent.

This is the signification of the Three Persons of the Trinity. If it were otherwise, the foundations of the Religion of God would rest upon an illogical proposition which the mind could never conceive, and how can the mind be forced to believe a thing which it cannot conceive? A thing cannot be grasped by the intelligence except when it is clothed in an intelligible form; otherwise, it is but an effort of the imagination.

It has now become clear, from this explanation, what is the meaning of the Three Persons of the Trinity. The Oneness of God is also proved. (Some Answered Questions, p. 113-115)

Exercises

Based on the above reading fill in the blanks and answer the following questions.

1. So the Reality of \_\_\_\_\_ was a clear and polished \_\_\_\_\_ of

the greatest purity. The \_\_\_\_\_ of Reality reflected itself in this mirror and manifested its \_\_\_\_\_ and heat in it; but from the exaltation of its holiness, and the \_\_\_\_\_ of its sanctity, the Sun did not \_\_\_\_\_ to dwell and \_\_\_\_\_ in the mirror. The Holy Spirit is the \_\_\_\_\_ of God which becomes \_\_\_\_\_ and evident in the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.

Now if we say that we have seen the Sun in \_\_\_\_\_ - one the \_\_\_\_\_ and one the Holy \_\_\_\_\_ --that is to say, that we have seen three Suns, \_\_\_\_\_ in heaven and the \_\_\_\_\_ others on the earth, we speak truly. And if we say that there is one \_\_\_\_\_, and it is pure singleness, and has no partner and equal, we again speak \_\_\_\_\_.

2. What is the Sun of Reality?

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3. Where is the Sun?

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4. How is God seen on earth?

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5. What two mirrors reflect the glory of the sun?

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6. How many "suns" can we see?

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7. How many suns are there?

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8. Express Abdu'l-Bahá's explanation of the Trinity in your words.

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Bible Verse Review

Match the verses in the left-hand column to the phrases in the right-hand column.

1. John 16:12-13

A. I am the way and the truth and the life

2.

Revelation 3:12

B. He will guide you into all truth.

3.

Titus 2:11

C. New name

4.

Ezekiel 43:4

D. Test the spirits to identify false prophets.

5.

Isaiah 35:1-2

E. Carmel shall see the Glory of the LORD.

6.

Matthew 7:15-20

F. Throne of God to be established in Elam.

7.

John 1:14

G. You will know them by their fruits.

8.

Jeremiah 49:38

H. The Word became flesh.

9.

1 John 4:1-4

I.

Grace of God has appeared to all men.

10. John 14:6

J. Glory of God will come from the east.

The Resurrection of Christ

Adapted From 'Abdu'l-Bahá's

Explanation in Some Answered Questions

Question.--What is the meaning of Christ's resurrection after three days?

Answer.--The resurrections of the Divine Manifestations are not of the body. All Their states, Their conditions, Their acts, the things They have established, Their teachings, Their expressions, Their parables and Their instructions have a spiritual and divine signification, and have no connection with material things. For example, there is the subject of Christ's coming from heaven: it is clearly stated in many places in the Gospel that the Son of man came from heaven, He is in heaven, and He will go to heaven. So in chapter 6, verse 38, of the Gospel of John it is written: "For I came down from heaven"; and also in verse 42 we find: "And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?" Also in John, chapter 3, verse 13: "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."

Observe that it is said, "The Son of man is in heaven," while at that time Christ was on earth. Notice also that it is said that Christ came from heaven, though He came from the womb of Mary, and His body was born of Mary. It is clear, then, that when it is said that the Son of man is come from heaven, this has not an outward but an inward signification; it is a spiritual, not a material, fact. The meaning is that though, apparently, Christ was born from the womb of Mary, in reality He came from heaven, from the center of the Sun of Reality, from the Divine World, and the Spiritual Kingdom. And as it has become evident that Christ came from the spiritual heaven of the Divine Kingdom, therefore, His disappearance under the earth for three days has an inner signification and is not an outward fact. In the same way, His resurrection from the interior of the earth is also symbolical; it is a spiritual and divine fact, and not material; and likewise His ascension to heaven is a spiritual and not material ascension.

Beside these explanations, it has been established and proved by science that the visible heaven is a limitless area, void and empty, where innumerable stars

and planets revolve.

Therefore, we say that the meaning of Christ's resurrection is as follows: the disciples were troubled and agitated after the martyrdom of Christ. The Reality of Christ, which signifies His teachings, His bounties, His perfections and His spiritual power, was hidden and concealed for two or three days after His martyrdom, and was not resplendent and manifest. No, rather it was lost, for the believers were few in number and were troubled and agitated. The Cause of Christ was like a lifeless body; and when after three days the disciples became assured and steadfast, and began to serve the Cause of Christ, and resolved to spread the divine teachings, putting His counsels into practice, and arising to serve Him, the Reality of Christ became resplendent and His bounty appeared; His religion found life; His teachings and His admonitions became evident and visible. In other words, the Cause of Christ was like a lifeless body until the life and the bounty of the Holy Spirit surrounded it.

Such is the meaning of the resurrection of Christ, and this was a true resurrection. But as the clergy have neither understood the meaning of the Gospels nor comprehended the symbols, therefore, it has been said that religion is in contradiction to science, and science in opposition to religion, as, for example, this subject of the ascension of Christ with an elemental body to the visible heaven is contrary to the science of mathematics. But when the truth of this subject becomes clear, and the symbol is explained, science in no way contradicts it; but, on the contrary, science and the intelligence affirm it.

#### Exercises

1. Based on Abdu'l-Bahá's explanation of Christ's resurrection, fill in the blanks.

It is said that Christ came from \_\_\_\_\_, though He came from the \_\_\_\_\_ of Mary. When it is said that the Christ is come from heaven, this has not an \_\_\_\_\_ but an \_\_\_\_\_ signification; it is a \_\_\_\_\_, not a material, fact. The meaning is that though, apparently, Christ was \_\_\_\_\_ from the womb of Mary, in reality He came from \_\_\_\_\_, from the \_\_\_\_\_ World.

Therefore, we say that the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ's \_\_\_\_\_ is as follows: The Reality of Christ, which signifies His \_\_\_\_\_, His bounties, His \_\_\_\_\_ and His spiritual power, was hidden and \_\_\_\_\_ for two or three days after His \_\_\_\_\_, and was not resplendent and manifest. For the believers were \_\_\_\_\_ in number and were \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. The Cause of Christ was like a \_\_\_\_\_ body; and when after three days the disciples became \_\_\_\_\_ and steadfast, and began to \_\_\_\_\_ the Cause of Christ, the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ became \_\_\_\_\_; His religion found \_\_\_\_\_.

Such is the meaning of the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ, and this was a \_\_\_\_\_ resurrection.

## Meaning of Resurrection in the Bible

Many Christians believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ. They say that Christ was put to death on the cross. He lay in the tomb for three days and then his body was raised to life again. For the next forty days, he appeared to the disciples on several occasions as recorded in the Gospel of John (chapters 20 and 21). Finally, he ascended to heaven in a cloud and sat down at the right hand of God's throne to await Judgment Day. (Acts 1; Psalms 110; Acts 2:22-36) When Christ returns, the dead are raised and judged. (2 Timothy 4:1)

The Bible uses the term "resurrection" in two ways. 1) Resurrection refers to the continuation of life after death. The burial of the body is compared to planting a seed which then grows and is given spiritual life. 2) The spiritual awakening that comes with actively living by the teachings of God. This regard to life after death, note the New Testament's explanation.

Someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?"... So also is the resurrection from the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body... Now I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 15:35, 42-44, 50)

Thus for Christians, denying the resurrection of the dead is the same as denying life after death.

If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. (I Corinthians 15:17-19)

In view of the meaning that Christians attach to resurrection, Bahá'ís need to be careful in their explanation of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. In the sense of life after death, Bahá'ís believe in a literal resurrection. If we say that we do not believe in a literal resurrection we may give the wrong impression for Bahá'u'lláh clearly taught that life literally continues in the next world.

The second meaning the Bible gives to "resurrection" refers to a spiritual reawakening. This is the symbolic resurrection. Those who are heedless of spiritual things are spiritually dead. When they turn their hearts to the glory of God, they are given a new life which is compared to being raised from the dead. Christian baptism, being dipped under the water, is compared to death and burial of the old self. Coming up out of the water is compared to spiritual rebirth.

As many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death. Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4)

This concept of symbolic resurrection is used throughout the Bible. The prophet Ezekiel lived while Israel was in exile in Babylon. It was as if the nation were dead. He had a vision of the restoration of Israel that compares the restoration to a mass resurrection.

In vision, Ezekiel sees a valley of dry bones. He sees the bones come to life as their bodies regain sinew, flesh, skin and breath. God explains the meaning of the vision as follows:

These bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the LORD God, "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves and bring you into the land of Israel.'" (Ezekiel 37:11-12)

In this case, exiled Israel was without hope. It was as if they were dead, dry bones. God gave them hope and renewed spiritual life, just as if dry bones were transformed into living bodies.

### Exercises

In your own words, explain the two meanings of resurrection in the Bible.

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### The Rapture and the Spiritual Resurrection

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul describes how the believers become united with the LORD at the time of His return. We read:

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

"For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in

the night.... "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:6)

How are these words meant to be understood? Conservative Christians generally believe that upon Christ's return the living believers will bodily ascend to heaven. According to this view, millions of believers who have died during the centuries while faithfully awaiting the LORD'S return will be raised from the dead in mass and ascend into the clouds to meet the LORD. Sometime later, the living believers will follow.

What is the correct meaning of Paul's inspired words? There are official interpretation of the rapture offered in the Bahá'í Writings.

However, many of the principles that relate to the spiritual nature of the resurrection seem applicable to a spiritual, rather than a physical, understanding of the rapture.

To test whether the expectation of a bodily ascension to heaven is consistent with the other Biblical references, consider the following questions. Look up and discuss the cited verses as appropriate.

- \* Are not the dead in Christ already in heaven with the LORD? (2 Corinthians 5:1-8) If they are already in heaven, how can they rise to meet the LORD at his return?
  - \* How can the living ascend to heaven in view of Paul's saying that there can be no resurrection to heavenly life unless the body dies first? (1 Corinthians 15:36)
  - \* How can the living ascend to heaven in view of Paul's words that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"? (1 Corinthians 15:50)
  - \* What kind of "sleep" is Paul referring to when he says, "Let us not sleep as do others"? Physical sleep or spiritual sleep?
  - \* What two kinds of death does the Bible speak of? (Matthew 8:22)
  - \* What did Jesus mean when He said, "Let the dead bury their dead"? (Matthew 8:22)
  - \* How can an understanding of spiritual death and resurrection help us to understand the rapture? (Romans 6:3-4)
  - \* How can an understanding of what it means to be "born again" help us to understand the rapture? (See next section.)
- Being Born Again and Spiritual Transformation

Some Christians call themselves "Born-Again Christians" due to the emphasis they place on the Bible's teaching about "being born again". This emphasis is particularly strong among conservative, fundamentalist, evangelical

Christians. The doctrine is based on numerous references in the New Testament, but particularly the Gospel of John, chapter 3, verses 1 through 8. (See also Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:17-24)

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

Jesus' teaching on being born again is strikingly similar to what Bahá'ís call spiritual transformation. Note Bahá'u'lláh's description of the process of spiritual rebirth:

Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker's heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubts and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being. At that hour will the mystic Herald, bearing the joyful tidings of the Spirit, shine forth from the City of God resplendent as the morn, and, through the trumpet-blast of knowledge, will awaken the heart, the soul, and the spirit from the slumber of negligence. Then will the manifold favours and outpouring grace of the holy and everlasting Spirit confer such new life upon the seeker that he will find himself endowed with a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, and a new mind. He will contemplate the manifest signs of the universe, and will penetrate the hidden mysteries of the soul. Gazing with the eye of God, he will perceive within every atom a door that leadeth him to the stations of absolute certitude. He will discover in all things the mysteries of divine Revelation and the evidences of an everlasting manifestation. (The Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 195-196)

Exercise on Being Born Again

1. Fill in the blanks:

There was a man of the Pharisees named \_\_\_\_\_. Jesus said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is \_\_\_\_\_ again, he cannot see the \_\_\_\_\_ of God. That which is born of the flesh is \_\_\_\_\_, and that which is born of the \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You \_\_\_\_\_ be born \_\_\_\_\_.' "

Only when the \_\_\_\_\_ of search, of longing \_\_\_\_\_, of

\_\_\_\_\_ devotion, is \_\_\_\_\_ within the seeker's \_\_\_\_\_ will the darkness of \_\_\_\_\_ be dispelled, the mists of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ be dissipated, and the lights of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ envelop his being. Then will the manifold \_\_\_\_\_ and outpouring \_\_\_\_\_ of the holy and everlasting \_\_\_\_\_ confer such \_\_\_\_\_ life upon the seeker that he will find himself endowed with a new \_\_\_\_\_, a new \_\_\_\_\_, a new \_\_\_\_\_, and a new \_\_\_\_\_.

One who is \_\_\_\_\_ again gains \_\_\_\_\_ life. Only the outpouring of the Holy and Everlasting \_\_\_\_\_ can confer new \_\_\_\_\_.

2. Memorize John 3:3.

3. Memorize the following words of Bahá'u'lláh:

The manifold favours and outpouring grace of the holy and everlasting Spirit confer such new life upon the seeker that he will find himself endowed with a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, and a new mind.

4. Identify the similar concepts in these two quotes and the parallel terms that are used in each.

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5. Compare being born again with a spiritual resurrection. What do they have in common?

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6. Compare being born again with the "rapture." What do they have in common?

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[+CHAPTER3]

Facilitating Spiritual Joy

A Biblical Introduction

To The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

Part III

As our world becomes a global village, there is a striking need for a vision of unity that transcends the barriers of nationalism, racism, sexism and other

forms of elitism. Human attempts to change society without personal spiritual transformation are doomed to fail. The spiritual teaching of the sovereignty of God and the brotherhood of man are essential to our eternal salvation and improving the quality of life on our planet. Love, peace and unity must be built from the bottom up, starting with personal transformation and then radiating outward into family, community, nation and ultimately the entire planet. (Romans 12:2)

The inspirational ideas presented here are by and large a compilation and distillation of the thought of spiritual teachers who have appeared on earth throughout human history. Our western heritage is Judeo-Christian, built on the teachings of Moses and the Prophets, and centered in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Accordingly, this course relies on the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments along with Bahá'í Scripture for its inspiration. In order to convey, as much as possible, the power of expression of the words of the Prophets, this course contains numerous references, both quotations from and paraphrases of the Holy Writings. The use of paraphrase is a response to modern tastes for simple and concise language.

Bible quotations are from the New King James Version. (NKJV)

This Biblical introduction to the Bahá'í Faith, of course, can only be, just that, an introduction. Spiritual growth is a life long process. To all those who long after the Spirit, it is hoped that your search will be successful. May you find peace, happiness and great joy.

The Author

Group Study

These materials may, of course, be read individually, but they are primarily intended to be used for pair study. For larger classes, divide the group up into small groups of two or three and assign several sections to each group. They should read the paragraphs aloud and discuss the underlined questions. It is generally best to finish a chapter before discussing any additional questions that come to mind. If the group is so inclined, they may opt to look up the cited Bible verses. Controversy should be strictly avoided. A loving and warm spirit should be maintained during all such discussions.

The Search For Spiritual Joy

Let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice. Let them ever shout for joy... Let them who love Thy name be joyful in Thee.

-- Psalms 5:11

A wise man once said, "Life is bittersweet." Good times are the sweet ones, filled with happiness, joy and peace. On the other hand, a measure of bitterness, sadness, anxiety and difficulty have always been part of the human experience. In recent years, life's problems seem to have multiplied. Many people feel overwhelmed by the stresses and pace of modern life.

What do you think? How can real happiness be found?

Spirituality paves the path to peace and happiness. It helps us to be thankful for the gift of life. It aids us to be at peace with ourselves, even under the most stressful circumstances. It is an anchor for the soul. (Hebrews 6:19) Without it we bob around like a toy boat on a stormy sea.

Have you ever felt like that?

The need is very great, everywhere in the world, for a true spiritual education. Spiritual education assists us to deal calmly and lovingly with economic, personal and family problems. But spirituality means more than being calm in the midst of the hurry and scurry of daily activities. It means having a good conscience; feeling good about ourselves with nothing to be ashamed of. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6)

When a person responds to the blessings of God, the heart is happy, the spirit is exhilarated. These are the spiritual responses which express themselves in the deeds and actions when his heart is filled with gratitude. Spirituality means appreciating the bounties of God and the beauties of nature; with its lofty mountain tops, azure seas, starry night skies, deep green forests and delightful animals. It means being filled with the delicious taste of being alive.

What is your personal experience? Which of these things make you feel closer to God? A calm attitude? Having a good conscience? Feeling thankful? Being in nature?

Most importantly, spirituality ennobles the human spirit and develops higher human capacities. Faith opens the door to eternal life and shows us the way to live in joy and love.

#### Prayer and Communion with God

There is nothing sweeter in the world of existence than prayer.

Prayer is communion with God; a source of great joy and training for the heart. Through devotional prayers and meditations the heart is strengthened in the love God and gains capacity to deal compassionately with fellowmen. Millions of people have found that taking a few moments each day for prayer helps to focus their thoughts on the things of the Spirit and creates a tranquillity that makes it easier to deal with the cares of the day.

Consider the following prayer for inner peace:

"O God! Refresh and gladden my spirit. Purify my heart. Illumine my powers. I lay all my affairs in Thy hand. Thou art my Guide and my Refuge. I will no longer be sorrowful and grieved; I will be a happy and joyful being. O God! I will no longer be full of anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass me. I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life. O God! Thou art more friend to me than I am to myself. I dedicate myself to Thee, O Lord." (Abdu'l-Bahá)

Over time, such prayers for joy and freedom from anxiety will transform your soul. When combined with daily study of the Word of God, each of us can acquire true wisdom. Such wisdom when put into practice in daily life builds a personal

foundation for a happy life.

What do you think? What is the value of prayer and how can it contribute to your spiritual growth? What has been your personal experience with prayer?

### Love is the Purpose of Religion

Jesus Christ identified the two most important commandments. First is the love of our Creator, who is our Heavenly Father and the source of our being. Second, but absolutely essential, is love for our fellowmen, who are made in the image of God. (Matthew 22:37-40)

Genuine spirituality is the only solution to the prejudice, hatreds and wars that divide the human family. The Apostle John wrote: "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love, does not know God, for God is love." (1 John 4:8) It simply is not possible to love God and hate our neighbor.

Why is love for fellowman essential for spirituality? How does hating other people interfere with our love for God?

What is the purpose of religion? Bahá'u'lláh, the Persian founder of the Bahá'í Faith wrote: "The purpose of religion as revealed from the heaven of God's Holy Will is to establish unity and concord amongst the peoples of the world; make it not the cause of dissension and strife. The religion of God and His divine law are the most potent instruments and the surest of all means for the dawning of the light of unity amongst men." (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 129)

What do you think? What would the world be like if mankind recognized its unity before God?

If the purpose of religion is unity, why does religion always seem to stir up controversy? Why were the Prophets of God persecuted? Why was Moses exiled? Why was Bahá'u'lláh imprisoned? Why was Jesus opposed and put to death? Why do we sometimes experience opposition when we investigate religion? The answer can strengthen the soul and teach the heart wisdom. Often opposers are sincere and do not appreciate the spiritual value of God's Word. It takes kindness and patience on our part to reassure them. For the believers, tests of faith serve to refine the heart and to build up spiritual virtues. There is great reward for sticking up for what is right despite opposition.

Have you seen people persecuted for their religion? Why does this happen?

Jesus promised, "Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:11-12) Similarly, Bahá'u'lláh promised, "Blessed is he who hath lain down his life in My path and hath borne

manifold hardships for the sake of My name." (Tablet to the Christians, XXIV)  
If our friends or family oppose the cause of unity, we can take comfort and find joy in the knowledge of God's ultimate blessing.

What do you think? How is the heart trained by opposition? What are the spiritual benefits?

We Are Leaves of One Tree, Flowers of One Garden

'Abdu'l-Bahá, one of the central figures of the

Bahá'í Faith, often compared our spiritual training to the growth of a garden. God is the gardener and humanity is the soil under divine cultivation. He wrote: "Then will the garden of your hearts bring forth its flowers of delightful fragrance to refresh the nostril of (God) the heavenly Gardener. Let your hearts reflect the glories of the Sun of Truth in their many colors to gladden the eye of (God) the divine Cultivator Who has nourished them. Day by day become more closely attracted in order that the love of God may illumine all those with whom you come in contact. Be as one spirit, one soul, leaves of one tree, flowers of one garden, waves of one ocean." (The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 24)

In what ways is mankind like God's garden?

Educators of Mankind

"Thus saith the LORD...I am the LORD thy God the one who teacheth thee to benefit thyself so that thy peace may be as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." -- Isaiah 48:17-18

Nature teaches that the world is in need of an educator. If the earth is not cultivated, it becomes a jungle where useless weeds grow; but if a cultivator comes and tills the ground, it produces crops which nourish living creatures. It is evident, therefore, that the soil needs the cultivation of the farmer.

If a man is left alone in the wilderness, he will take on the ways of the animal. If he is educated, he can reach the greatest heights of accomplishment. Were it not for educators, there would be no civilization.

What do you think? What is the value of education?

Divine education is of the Kingdom of God. It promotes honesty, righteousness, justice, wisdom and love. It leads humanity to improvement of character. Since mankind is made in the image of God, man has the potential to acquire godly qualities, divine perfections. But in order to develop that potential, a qualified teacher must show the way.

What do you think? Are people capable of educating themselves without divine teachers?

One such educator was Abraham. He was born into a society that worshipped nature as the sun god, the storm god and so forth. Alone and without help Abraham instructed the people in the worship of the True God.

Moses freed the nation of Israel from the chains of slavery, brought them out

of Egypt and into the Holy Land. He taught them to worship the One God, reject idols and obey the Ten Commandments. Throughout his life, Moses faced opposition from Egyptians and fellow Israelites, but nothing could stop him. He was guided by a supernatural power to educate the people for the challenges of those days.

It is clear that human power cannot accomplish so great a mission. How could one solitary man without help and without support overcome mighty nations and teach with such marvelous wisdom? He must depend on the help of the spiritual and divine power. One Holy Soul can change the world through the power of revelation.

What do you think? What did Abraham and Moses teach mankind?

Jesus Christ, the Son of God

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." -- John 13:34

Jesus was surely a Divine Educator. He was born of Holy Spirit. He was the Son of God. He came with lessons of love and forgiveness. He showed compassion for the weak and the sick. He taught us a lesson in God's love by shedding His blood on the cross in order to open the way to everlasting life. (John 3:16)

What do you think? What was the significance of the life of Jesus Christ? His teachings? His crucifixion?

Jesus' teaching released new creative energies. New hopes and new spiritual ideals were brought into being. As a result, the world was uplifted. He opened the way to the Kingdom of God. Historians record that Christ did more to advance human civilization than all the legislators and philosophers of past ages combined.

What were some of the lessons that Jesus Christ brought?

The early Christians spread Jesus' message of love. They taught the sacredness of life and the dignity of humanity. As soon as they could, they stopped the human sacrifice and the violence of the gladiatorial games that were common in the Roman Empire. Later they promoted education, built hospitals for the treatment of the poor, established charitable institutions and introduced juster laws into the Roman legal system. Such changes came about because of Christ's law was written on their hearts.

A new Christian civilization arose, one that was the best and most enlightened in the world at that time. Thus the transformative power of Jesus Christ as an Educator of Mankind can be clearly seen. (See Christ and Bahá'u'lláh, George Townshend, 21)

What effects do spiritual teachings effect have on society?

Jesus, like Abraham and Moses, had to deal with violent opposition. Eventually Jesus' opposers succeeded in crucifying Him. But God raised Him from the dead and His spirit is with us to this day. In life and in death, the Lord Jesus

Christ was the Greatest Teacher and set an example for us to follow.

What do you think? Why was Jesus persecuted? How did He treat His enemies?

When Bahá'u'lláh was on earth, He glorified Jesus in the most poetic terms and encouraged the people to be awake to Christ's voice. The Bahá'í Writings make clear the unsurpassed station of Jesus in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation:

As to the position of Christianity, let it be stated without any hesitation or equivocation that its divine origin is unconditionally acknowledged, that the Sonship and Divinity of Jesus Christ are fearlessly asserted, that the divine inspiration of the Gospel is fully recognized...

"Know thou," Bahá'u'lláh has moreover testified, "that when the Son of Man yielded up His breath to God, the whole creation wept with a great weeping. By sacrificing Himself, however, a fresh capacity was infused into all created things. Its evidences, as witnessed in all the peoples of the earth, are now manifest before thee.

The deepest wisdom which the sages have uttered, the profoundest learning which any mind hath unfolded, the arts which the ablest hands have produced, the influence exerted by the most potent of rulers, are but manifestations of the quickening power released by His transcendent, His all-pervasive and resplendent Spirit.

We testify that when He came into the world, He shed the splendor of His glory upon all created things. Through Him the leper recovered from the leprosy of perversity and ignorance. Through Him the unchaste and wayward were healed. Through His power, born of Almighty God, the eyes of the blind were opened and the soul of the sinner sanctified.... He it is Who purified the world. Blessed is the man who, with a face beaming with light, hath turned towards Him." (The Promised Day is Come, p. 109-110)

What do the Bahá'í Writings say about Christ?

Bahá'u'lláh, the Glory of God

"The wilderness... shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God." -- Isaiah 35:1-2

Bahá'u'lláh a spiritual teacher who lived about 150 years ago. He was the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. He brought the same message as Jesus Christ and taught how it should be applied to modern times. He proclaimed the nearness of an age of worldwide peace and brotherhood between all peoples. As a result He was severely persecuted and spent His life in prison and in exile.

His message emphasized three eternal truths. The Oneness of God, the Oneness of Humanity and the Oneness of Religion. During the past two thousands years, verbal battles have raged over religious differences. Often such conflicts lead to bloody wars. Each sect and denomination claimed to be the only path to God. Religious wars do not honor God but rather cause people to doubt the value of religion. Bahá'u'lláh called upon the religious leaders of the world to give up their claims to supremacy and to work together. By following in the footsteps of the Divine Educators, they could glorify God and benefit of all the people.

Are you familiar with the name of Bahá'u'lláh? What have you heard about him?

Bahá'u'lláh was an extraordinary individual who radiated love and warmth to all people. He spent His life teaching the love of God and His name means the glory of God in Arabic.

"Those who beheld Him were assured of His great happiness, for no trace of sadness or sorrow was ever visible upon His face. Even in prison He was like a king enthroned in majesty and greatness, and He ever bore Himself with supreme confidence and dignity." (The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 383)

Bahá'u'lláh was born in 1817, the son of a Persian nobleman. He brought a divine message of love and righteousness to a nation that had lost its way. The original teachings of Judaism, Christianity and Islam had been abandoned over the centuries. Their governmental and religious institutions were corrupted. All elements of society were at odds. Yet even at that low point of history, a new age began. Bahá'u'lláh would instill life into a spiritually dead people and bring them back to life. He writes:

"This is the Day in which God's most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things. It is incumbent upon all the peoples of the world to reconcile their differences, and, with perfect unity and peace, abide beneath the shadow of the Tree of His care and loving-kindness...Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead. Verily, thy Lord speaketh the truth, and is the Knower of things unseen. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 6-7)

What do you think? Has present day society lost sight of the spiritual values? Are we in need of a modern day renewal? What sort of a renewal would you like to see?

The Claims of Bahá'u'lláh  
and Independent Investigation of Truth

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak. He shall show you things to come. (John 16:12-13)

When He was on the earth, Bahá'u'lláh made some extraordinary claims. He said that came to fulfill Christ's promise about the coming of the Spirit of Truth. He claimed to bring the divine teachings that the early disciples could not bear to hear, namely that all the major religions of the world have a divine origin. He claimed to have a new Revelation from God that could unite all mankind.

How can you determine if these claims are true? How can you determine if Bahá'u'lláh is the Divine Educator for this day?

The first principle of Bahá'u'lláh is independent investigation of truth. It is up to each individual to examine the facts for themselves with a prayerful heart and an open mind. Blind imitation of the past must be replaced by a willingness to follow the teachings of God into a new way of life. Only in this way can the divisions and hatreds of the past be overcome. Only in this way can unity and love reign supreme among all peoples regardless of race, religion or nationality.

How can you determine if Bahá'u'lláh's teachings are really from God and if he is the divine messenger that he claimed to be? How can you decide if His writings are the Word of God? One important step is to read His writings and experience the love and beauty they contain. Jesus said that His sheep would know his voice. In the spirit of love and devotion found in Bahá'u'lláh's writings we can hear the voice of the Shepherd.  
(John 10:27)

Another step that can be taken is to review the evidence that Jesus Christ fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament. For a Jewish person, living at the time of Christ, accustomed to the law of Moses, Temple worship and Jewish festivals, it would have been an incredibly large change to accept Christ. However, becoming a Christian did not mean abandoning Moses or giving up Judaism. Rather it meant investigating the claims of Christ to be the promised one that Moses foretold. Perhaps you were raised to believe in Christ, but what if you had not been? How would you know if Jesus the Nazarene was the Messiah?

This same pattern applies to investigating Bahá'u'lláh's claims to be the promised one that Christ foretold.

What promise did Jesus make? How is that promise similar to the one that Moses made? If you had been alive at the time of Christ how could you have determined if those claims were true. What claims did Bahá'u'lláh make? How can we determine if those claims are true?

Proofs of Christ

"And (Jesus) said unto them...'All things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.'" -- Luke 24:44

1) The prophet Micah foretold that the future king would be born in Bethlehem.  
(Micah 5:2)

- 2) The prophet Hosea foretold that God's son would be called out of Egypt. (Hosea 11:1)
- 3) The prophet Isaiah foretold that the Jesus would be rejected. Many would not believe on him. Others would hate and persecute him. Finally, he would be put to death as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. (Isaiah 53:1-12)
- 4) The prophet Malachi foretold that Elijah, who had been dead for many centuries, would return before the day of the Lord. (Malachi 4: 5) Elijah returned in a symbolic sense in the form of John the Baptist. (Matthew 11:13-14)
- 5) The Prophet Daniel foretold the time that Messiah would appear and die as 70 weeks of years or 490 years after the word went out to restore the Jerusalem Temple. (Daniel 9:25-27) The time count started with the edict of Artaxerxes in 457 BC and ended with Jesus' death in 33 AD.

Many more proof, in fact hundreds of proofs of this same sort, can be given that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and the Divine Educator for his day. Now, let's turn our attention to the proofs of Bahá'u'lláh.

What do you think? What reasons were there to believe that Jesus was who He said He was? Which do you think are the strongest proofs?

Proofs of Bahá'u'lláh

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." -- Isaiah 55:8-9

Several wonderful books have been written that go into great detail on the subject of proofs of Bahá'u'lláh's mission. Christ and Bahá'u'lláh by George Townshend and The Prophecies of Jesus by Michael Sours contain a wealth of evidence. In order to confirm Bahá'u'lláh's divine mission to your own satisfaction, you are encouraged to prayerfully study all the available evidence and make a fully informed decision. Only a few, brief examples of proofs of Bahá'u'lláh's claims are given here.

- 1) Jeremiah foretold that God's throne would be established in the last days in Elam, that is, in Persia. (Jeremiah 49:38, 39) Bahá'u'lláh was born and began his ministry in Tehran, Persia. His kingdom was, like Christ's kingdom, a kingdom over the hearts of men.
- 2) Ezekiel foretold that the glory of God would appear from the East, coming to the house of God by way of the gate. (Ezekiel 43:4) Persia lies due east of Jerusalem.
- 3) Isaiah prophesied that the glory of God would appear in the northern part of Israel, around Mount Carmel (Isaiah 35:1-2). After a series of exiles, Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in 'Akka, now part of Haifa, Israel in the region of Carmel The Bahá'í World Center is located on Mount Carmel.

The prophet Isaiah also foretold that God would raise up a conquering king from the direction of the sunrise, the east. (Isaiah 41:2) The king would give his enemies to the sword (the word of God). He would do no harm but would pursue his enemies in peace. (41:3) Like Jesus, Bahá'u'lláh conquered his enemies with the sword of the Word of God (John 16:33, Romans 12:21, Hebrew 4:12) and renounced the use of physical weapons. (Matthew 26:52)

Bahá'u'lláh's conquests have been great. Despite forty years of persecution, imprisonment, exile and trials, he never showed any hatred to his enemies. He kept conquering evil with good. As a result, many victories have been won over the hearts of men. Now there are over 5 million followers of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh living in 300 nations, islands and territories.

4) The returned king would have a new, strange name, one that God would give him. (Revelation 3:12, Isaiah 62:2-3) The name of Bahá'u'lláh certainly sounds strange to many people and this strangeness has been like a cloud that blocks the vision of the beauty of the sun.

5) The Gospels speak of Bahá'u'lláh in a symbolic way. Because Bahá'u'lláh was so Christ-like in his teaching and suffering, his ministry could be called the return of the spirit of Christ. The Bible contains many examples of symbolic returns of past prophets. For example, John the Baptist was the return of Elijah. (Matthew 11:13-14) And Jesus was like the return of Moses. (Deuteronomy 18:15) In a similar way, prophecies that speak of the return of Christ find their fulfillment in Bahá'u'lláh.

6) The prophet Daniel foretold 2,300 years which would include defilement of the "sanctuary." The 2,300 years would end with the victory of a spiritual king, "the Prince of Princes" (Daniel 8:13-14, 25-26). Once again the sanctuary is the congregation of believers who were "defiled" and in darkness by the lack of divine education and the Prince is Bahá'u'lláh. The time counted started in 457BC and ended in 1844.

The parallels between the life of Christ and the life of Bahá'u'lláh are truly amazing. The fulfillment of so many details of so many prophecies, of which we have mentioned only a few, provide sound evidence that God was backing the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. Perhaps you are already convinced that Bahá'u'lláh is the Promised One of God for this day. If so, you are a Bahá'í in your heart and are invited to join the Bahá'í community for worship, study and fellowship. If you still have questions or these things sound strange to you, recall that Christianity sounded very strange when it was first preached. (Acts 17:19-10) You are invited to investigate further through personal reading and discussion with local Bahá'ís. It is vital to study these things for yourself that you too may be personally convinced of the glories of God's latest messenger. The spiritual benefits and joys of doing so are well expressed in Bahá'u'lláh's own words.

"Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its

secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths. Take heed that ye do not vacillate in your determination to embrace the truth of this Cause--a Cause through which the potentialities of the might of God have been revealed, and His sovereignty established. With faces beaming with joy, hasten ye unto Him. This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. Let him that seeketh, attain it; and as to him that hath refused to seek it--verily, God is Self-Sufficient, above any need of His creatures. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 136)

What do you think? How similar are the proofs of Christ with the proofs of Bahá'u'lláh? Which do you feel are the strongest proofs? What books can you read to further investigate Bahá'u'lláh?

### The Bahá'í Writings

"By their fruits you will know them." -- Matthew 7:20

The best evidence for the new Divine Educator can be seen by the fruits of His teachings. Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount that every good tree produces good fruit and every bad tree produces worthless fruit. A rotten tree cannot produce good fruit. (Matthew 7:15-20) This is the true scriptural test of the divine origin of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

The beauty and spiritual wisdom of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings make them a joy to read. By studying them and observing the effects they have on ourselves and other readers, the fruits of righteousness can clearly be seen. Bahá'u'lláh wrote tens of thousands of books and letters. Two good books to begin with are the Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh and the Book of Certitude. You can obtain these either at the public library or from the local Bahá'is.

Below find short selections from these and other Bahá'í works that will give you a taste of their inspirational style and ethical content. You may like to use these quotations to create your own mini worship service." Set a reverent mood, by lighting a candle or playing background music. Then read the Words of Bahá'u'lláh aloud..

"O Son of Spirit! I created thee rich, why dost thou bring thyself down to poverty? Noble I made thee, wherewith dost 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 dost thou busy thyself with another? Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting. (The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 7)

"But, O my brother, when a true seeker determineth to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all

acquired knowledge, and the allusions of the embodiments of satanic fancy. He must purge his breast, which is the sanctuary of the abiding love of the Beloved, of every defilement, and sanctify his soul from all that pertaineth to water and clay, from all shadowy and ephemeral attachments." (Book of Certitude, p. 192)

"Religion, moreover, is not a series of beliefs, a set of customs; religion is the teachings of the Lord God, teachings which constitute the very life of humankind, which urge high thoughts upon the mind, refine the character, and lay the groundwork for man's everlasting honour.

"Note thou: could these fevers in the world of the mind, these fires of war and hate, of resentment and malice among the nations, this aggression of peoples against peoples, which have destroyed the tranquillity of the whole world ever be made to abate, except through the living waters of the teachings of God? No, never!

"And this is clear: a power above and beyond the powers of nature must needs be brought to bear, to change this black darkness into light, and these hatreds and resentments, grudges and spites, these endless wrangles and wars, into fellowship and love amongst all the peoples of the earth. This power is none other than the breathings of the Holy Spirit and the mighty inflow of the Word of God. (Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 53)

"Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to the countenance of truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the tree of humility.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh CXXX)

"Release yourselves, O nightingales of God, from the thorns and brambles of wretchedness and misery, and wing your flight to the rose-garden of unfading splendor. O My friends that dwell upon the dust! Haste forth unto your celestial habitation. Announce unto yourselves the joyful tidings: "He Who is the Best-Beloved is come! He hath crowned Himself with the glory of God's Revelation, and hath unlocked to the face of men the doors of His ancient Paradise." Let all eyes rejoice, and let every ear be gladdened, for now is the

time to gaze on His beauty, now is the fit time to hearken to His voice. Proclaim unto every longing lover: "Behold, your Well-Beloved hath come among men!" and to the messengers of the Monarch of love impart the tidings: "Lo, the Adored One hath appeared arrayed in the fullness of His glory!" O lovers of His beauty! Turn the anguish of your separation from Him into the joy of an everlasting reunion, and let the sweetness of His presence dissolve the bitterness of your remoteness from His court. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 319-320)

— Facilitating Spiritual Joy: Workshop on Christianity (Used by permission of the curator)