



Bahá'í Resources for the Children's Sabbath

This section provides suggestions for learning activities for children, youth and adults, devotional and fellowship activities for the Nineteen Day Feast for the Month of 'Ilm (Knowledge), selections from the Bahá'í Writings on the theme of this year's Children's Sabbath, and resources for continuing the community's

involvement in the themes of the Children's Sabbath beyond the event itself. Please utilize these as appropriate for your community. A brief Glossary is provided at the end of this section to acquaint the reader with terms that may be unfamiliar.

Suggestions for Observances and Related Activities

- **Feast of 'Ilm (Knowledge):** Because this Nineteen Day Feast falls within the timeframe of the national Children's Sabbath observance, consider using the program described, and/or including the readings and prayers about faith in action reprinted in this section, for the devotional, consultative and fellowship portions of Feast. Include a diversity of readers, including children and youth. Consider inviting others to serve refreshments to the children and youth, and/or to those who work to fill the needs of children and youth, such as teachers, parents, grandparents, social workers and health care providers. During the administrative portion of Feast, encourage consultation about specific needs and hopes of children and youth in your community.
- **Devotional meetings:** Encourage community and individual devotional meetings during the Children's Sabbath weekend to focus on the theme of "Blessed to Be a Blessing: Lifting Up the Next Generation" with a focus on ending child poverty, , perhaps including some of the readings and prayers reprinted in this section. Consider inviting children and youth to be involved in planning and presenting a devotional meeting on the subject of creating a better world.
- **Children's and youth classes:** Encourage children's and youth classes in the community to utilize the materials in this manual for their participation in observing the Children's Sabbath.
- **Ongoing community learning through local study groups or weekend workshops:** Consider beginning study circles in your community that help develop strong, vibrant communities and families, in which children and youth can thrive. Many Bahá'í curricula support the themes of providing for the needs of children, creating a more just and prosperous world and developing nurturing communities. For a variety of educational resources, see www.ruhiresources.org and www.core-curriculum.org.
- **Encourage families in your community to subscribe to, and read together, *Brilliant Star*** (a magazine for children ages 6-12 that emphasizes character development), *Tabula Rasa* (a Bahá'í arts magazine) or *Bahá'í Parenting* (an electronic newsletter that supports spiritual parenting). For more information visit www.brilliantstarmagazine.org, www.tabularasaarts.com, or www.bahaiparent.com.
- **Deepen your personal understanding about the principles of justice and peace by perusing the Bahá'í Writings** through books from the Bahá'í Distribution Service at www.BahaiBookstore.com/index.cfm or talks and web resources available at www.Bahai.us/Bahai-multimedia. Of special interest: the series *In Service to the Common Good*, prepared by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States in 2004, 2005 and 2006, with stories about effective service projects around the world. Download from: www.Bahai.us/in-service-to-the-common-good or purchase from the Bahá'í Distribution Service (BDS).

Passages and Prayers from the Bahá'í Writings “Related to Children and Poverty”

O CHILDREN OF DUST! Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, Persian No. 49

O YE RICH ONES ON EARTH! The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own ease.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, Persian No. 54

They who are possessed of riches, however, must have the utmost regard for the poor, for great is the honor destined by God for those poor who are steadfast in patience. By My life! There is no honor, except what God may please to bestow, that can compare to this honor. Great is the blessedness awaiting the poor that endure patiently and conceal their sufferings, and well is it with the rich who bestow their riches on the needy and prefer them before themselves.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 202

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.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 285

God has created all, and all return to God. Therefore, love humanity with all your heart and soul. If you meet a poor man, assist him; if you see the sick, heal him; reassure the affrighted one, render the cowardly noble and courageous, educate the ignorant, associate with the stranger.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 290

The fourth principle or teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the readjustment and equalization of the economic standards of mankind. This deals with the question of human livelihood. It is evident that under present systems and conditions of government the poor are subject to the greatest need and distress while others more fortunate live in luxury and plenty far beyond their actual necessities. This inequality of portion and privilege is one of the deep and vital problems of human society. That there is need of an equalization and apportionment by which all may possess the comforts and privileges of life is evident. The remedy must be legislative readjustment of conditions. The rich too must be merciful to the poor, contributing from willing hearts to their needs without being forced or compelled to do so. The composure of the world will be assured by the establishment of this principle in the religious life of mankind.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 107

What could be better before God than thinking of the poor? For the poor are beloved by our heavenly Father. When Christ came upon the earth, those who believed in Him and followed Him were the poor and lowly, showing that the poor were near to God. When a rich man believes and follows the Manifestation of God, it is a proof that his wealth is not an obstacle and does not prevent him from attaining the pathway of salvation. After he has been tested and tried, it will be seen whether his possessions are a hindrance in his religious life. But the poor are especially beloved of God. Their lives are full of difficulties, their trials continual, their hopes are in God alone. Therefore, you must assist the poor as much as possible, even by sacrifice of yourself. No deed of man is greater before God than helping the poor. Spiritual conditions are not dependent upon the possession of worldly treasures or the absence of them. When one is physically destitute, spiritual thoughts

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are more likely. Poverty is a stimulus toward God. Each one of you must have great consideration for the poor and render them assistance. Organize in an effort to help them and prevent increase of poverty. The greatest means for prevention is that whereby the laws of the community will be so framed and enacted that it will not be possible for a few to be millionaires and many destitute. One of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings is the adjustment of means of livelihood in human society. Under this adjustment there can be no extremes in human conditions as regards wealth and sustenance. For the community needs financier, farmer, merchant and laborer just as an army must be composed of commander, officers and privates. All cannot be commanders; all cannot be officers or privates. Each in his station in the social fabric must be competent—each in his function according to ability but with justness of opportunity for all.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 216

Soon will your swiftly-passing days be over, and the fame and riches, the comforts, the joys provided by this rubbish-heap, the world, will be gone without a trace. Summon ye, then, the people to God, and invite humanity to follow the example of the Company on high. Be ye loving fathers to the orphan, and a refuge to the helpless, and a treasury for the poor, and a cure for the ailing. Be ye the helpers of every victim of oppression, the patrons of the disadvantaged. Think ye at all times of rendering some service to every member of the human race.... Let him do some good to every person whose path he crosseth, and be of some benefit to him.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 1-3

As to the difference between that material civilization now prevailing, and the divine civilization which will be one of the benefits to derive from the House of Justice, it is this: material civilization, through the power of punitive and retaliatory laws, restraineth the people from criminal acts; and notwithstanding this, while laws to retaliate against and punish a man are continually proliferating, as ye can see, no laws exist to reward him. In all the cities of Europe and America, vast buildings have been erected to serve as jails for the criminals.

Divine civilization, however, so traineth every member of society that no one, with the exception of a negligible few, will undertake to commit a crime. There is thus a great difference between the prevention of crime through measures that are violent and retaliatory, and so training the people, and enlightening them, and spiritualizing them, that without any fear of punishment or vengeance to come, they will shun all criminal acts. They will, indeed, look upon the very commission of a crime as a great disgrace and in itself the harshest of punishments. They will become enamored of human perfections, and will consecrate their lives to whatever will bring light to the world and will further those qualities which are acceptable at the Holy Threshold of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 132

Children are the most precious treasure a community can possess, for in them are the promise and guarantee of the future. They bear the seeds of the character of future society which is largely shaped by what the adults constituting the community do or fail to do with respect to children. They are a trust no community can neglect with impunity. An all-embracing love of children, the manner of treating them, the quality of the attention shown them, the spirit of adult behavior toward them – these are all among the vital aspects of the requisite attitude. Love demands discipline, the courage to accustom children to hardship, not to indulge their whims or leave them entirely to their own devices. An atmosphere needs to be maintained in which children feel that they belong to the community and share in its purpose.

Ridván Messages of the Universal House of Justice, Ridván 157, 2000, p. 8

FEAST of 'ILM (Knowledge) Children's Sabbath Program

(The Nineteen Day Feast is the principal gathering in each local Bahá'í community, every Bahá'í month, for the three-fold purpose of worship, consultation, and fellowship.

This activity may also be used at other community gatherings.)

Preparation

- Prepare an environment that warmly welcomes friends of all ages. Consider adding color, through flowers or artwork; create inviting, comfortable areas and surfaces on which all ages can sit, including on the floor, with pillows and throws. As the friends enter, have cheerful music playing, such as melodies from different cultures or children's songs.
- In advance, make several photocopies of the previous pages, "Passages and Prayers from the Bahá'í Writings Related to Children and Poverty."
- See "Fellowship Portion" on the following page for suggestions of refreshments tied to the theme, as well as stories and games to prepare.

Devotional Portion

- Lovingly introduce the theme of the evening/day's devotions: Blessed to Be a Blessing: Lifting Up the Next Generation. Invite readers to intone selections from the photocopied "Passages and Prayers."
- Consider using music to help set the tone, such as: "It Takes a Village," *It Takes a Village*, Joe Crone; "Care for the Stranger," "O God! Educate these Children," *Immerse Yourself, Prayers and Writings for the Young at Heart*, Joe Crone; "Behold a Candle," *Lift Up Your Voices and Sing, vol.1*

Consultative Portion

- Open the consultative portion of Feast (or other gathering) by reading aloud the last selection of "Passages and Prayers from the Bahá'í Writings," from the Universal House of Justice.

- Introduce the theme and purpose of the Children's Sabbath and suggest that consultation be centered on the needs of our children and youths and how we may respond, creating change for children today in our daily acts of justice and compassion for the poor, vulnerable, and oppressed. How can our Bahá'í communities create an atmosphere in which children, "our most precious treasure," feel that they belong and share in its purpose, and thus ensure the character of our future society?
- Refer to "Suggestions for the Observances and Related Activities" for ideas and possible action steps or tools your community may wish to pursue after identifying issues.
- Divide into three multi-age consultation groups to address some of the issues facing children and youths and how we might respond:
 - Give each group several copies of The Bahá'í International Community's Statement on Poverty — *Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward as One*, with discussion questions.
 - Give each group several copies of "A Child Poverty Primer"
- Ask each group to read these documents aloud together, consider the discussion questions, and appoint someone to record their findings and suggestions. Allow groups about 30 minutes to read and consult before returning to the large group for sharing ideas.
- Ask each group's spokesperson to summarize the issue they studied and the results of their consultation.
- Together, plan action steps that can be completed in three to six months. Decide how progress will be evaluated, and who will communicate needs and encouragement to others. Celebrate your collective dedication to our children and youths!

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Fellowship Portion

■ Refreshments:

- Consider making a “friendship soup” or “friendship salad,” with many diverse vegetables or fruits representing how we each bring a special sweetness and flavor to the community. If possible, ask each person or family to bring one ingredient – these can be added to the simmering soup pot, or to the salad bowl, or salad bar, as each arrives.

■ Activities:

- Read or tell the folktale, *Stone Soup*, prior to serving the “friendship soup” or “friendship salad.” You may ask your children’s librarian for a copy of this Swedish folktale.
- Play a cooperative game such as “Hidden Treasures” from *Brilliant Star* Nov/Dec 2008.
- Invite a Bahá'í Youth Workshop dance group to perform the “Poverty Dance” or another performance arts piece about overcoming social injustice.



Glossary of some Bahá'í terms:

'Abdu'l-Bahá: (1844–1921) Son of Bahá'u'lláh, designated His successor and authorized interpreter of His writings. Named Abbas after His grandfather, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was known to the general public as Abbas Effendi. Bahá'u'lláh gave Him such titles as “the Most Great Branch,” “the Mystery of God,” and “the Master.” After Bahá'u'lláh's passing, He chose the name 'Abdu'l-Bahá, meaning “Servant of Bahá'u'lláh.” 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited the United States, on an extensive speaking tour, in 1912.

Báb, the: The title, meaning “Gate,” assumed by Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad, who was the Prophet-Founder of the Bábi Faith and the Forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh. Born 20 October 1819, the Báb proclaimed Himself to be the Promised One of Islam and announced that His mission was to alert the people to the imminent advent of “Him Whom God shall make manifest,” namely, Bahá'u'lláh. Because of these claims, the Báb was executed by order of Náziri'd-Dín Shah on 9 July 1850.

Bahá'í Writings: The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá constitute Bahá'í Sacred Scripture.

Bahá'u'lláh: Title assumed by Mírzá Husayn-Ali, Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. Born on 12 November 1817, He declared His mission as the Promised One of all Ages in April 1863 and passed away in

Akka, Palestine, on 29 May 1892 after 40 years of imprisonment, banishment, and house arrest. Bahá'u'lláh's writings are considered by Bahá'ís to be direct revelation from God.

Local Spiritual Assembly: The local administrative body in the Bahá'í Faith, ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The nine members are directly elected by secret ballot each year at Ridvan from among the adult believers in a community.

Nineteen Day Feast: The principal gathering in each local Bahá'í community, every Bahá'í month, for the threefold purpose of worship, consultation, and fellowship. The Bahá'í calendar is composed of nineteen months of nineteen days each. The names of the months are attributes of God, such as Glory, Mercy, Knowledge, etc. The months are referred to by both their Arabic names and the English translation.

Social and Economic Development (SED)

Project: An initiative designed to upraise the quality of human life. For Bahá'ís, this involves efforts to develop the capacity of the community to address its own needs and ensure the well-being of all its members through the application of spiritual principles including education, consultation, and reflection.