

COURSE OF STUDY

prepared by

Mrs. Gertrude Robinson

Based on

"Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era"

by

J. E. Esslemont

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Designed as preparation
for teaching the
Bahá'í Faith

Approved by Bahá'í Reviewing Committee

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This course has been planned to meet the particular needs of Bahá'í communities in preparing all members to face the task of teaching their Faith.

Much supplementary work can be added according to the can be added according to the needs of study groups, but the course has been based almost entirely on "Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era", for it is realized that this book is the most convenient teaching text-book of the Bahá'í Faith, and teachers should be thoroughly familiar with its content.

Two methods of expression have been suggested in each lesson, written and oral. The object is to reach the capacities of individual members of the student group and develop them to as high a degree of teaching ability as possible.

This course may also be used in fireside groups that are endeavoring to present the Faith to new inquirers who are ready to begin reading and study.

COURSE OF STUDY

for

"Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era"

Chapter I.

Subject: Glad Tidings

Write out answers to the following questions and bring them to class:

1. What is the "greatest event" in human history?
Discuss it briefly.

2. What are proofs of Prophethood? Give reasons for your answers. What proofs of Bahá'u'lláh's Prophethood can you give?

3. Name several great living religions and approximate time of their Dispensations. What is the difference, do you think, between a great world religion and a sect?(see p. 142)

Supplementary questions for group discussion:

1. "The leading factor in human progress is the advent of men who pass beyond the accepted ideas of their time." Name some of these men.

2. Tell something about Thomas Carlyle, who is quoted on pages 1 and 4.

3. Discuss world changes in the last century.

4. What is the Cause of these changes?

5. If humanity is having a world awakening, how can you explain the present world turmoil?

6. Literal interpretation of Scripture blinded Jews to the reality of Christ, just as it is blinding Christians today to the reality of Bahá'u'lláh. To Whom must we turn for the curing of this blindness?

7. What qualities are of greatest assistance to the seeker after Truth?

8. What should follow the finding of a new Truth?

Chapter II.

Subject: Báb, the Forerunner

Write out answers to the following questions and bring them to class:

1. Tell briefly of the life of the Báb. What is His Divine Station?

2. Explain in clear sentences the teachings of the Báb In regard to (1) Resurrection, (2) Day of Judgment, (3) Paradise, (4) Hell.

3. Illustrate by the lives of at least two Prophets how the ability to endure suffering aided the manifestation to demonstrate His Divinity.

Supplementary Questions for group discussion:

1. Why was the Bahá'í faith born in Írán? (See "The Advent of Divine Justice", pp. 14-15.)

2. Explain the difference between Shi'ih and Sunní Muhammadans.

5. What is meant by the term, "Letters of the Living"?

4. the Báb claimed to be the return of the twelfth Imám, whom Muhammadans claimed had disappeared. What does such a "return" mean? (See "The Kitáb-i-Íqán", pp. 159-161.)

5. Explain how the Bábís interpreted many of the prophecies figuratively?

6. What is meant by "Primal Point", a title which the Báb claimed?

7. Why does persecution help to spread a religion?

8. Describe the miracle that occurred at the time of the Báb's martyrdom.

9. What was the sole aim of the life and teachings of the Báb?

Chapter III.

Subject: Bahá'u'lláh, the Glory of God

Write out answers to the following questions and bring them to class:

1. Tell briefly of the life of Bahá'u'lláh and of His divine Station.
2. What would you consider the greatest single accomplishment of His life? Why?
3. How did His followers demonstrate the Bahá'í spirit?
4. As we view the world conditions, what do we now see is the great significance of Bahá'u'lláh's Letters to the Kings. (See "The Promised Day is Come", pp. 18-19., 28, 44-48, 50, 116.)

Supplementary questions for group discussion:

1. What results followed the attempt on the life of the Shah by a demented follower of the Báb?
2. What was the purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's two years in the wilderness of Sulaymaniyyih?
3. Tell something of the life of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí.
4. What great message did Bahá'u'lláh give to Professor Edward G. Browne when he visited Bahjí?
5. What arrangement was disclosed in the Will of Bahá'u'lláh which provides against division in the Cause?
6. "A Divine Prophet has two stations, that of essential unity and that of distinction." Explain this statement.
7. What distinguishes a Manifestation in His human personality from other men? (For additional reading see "Some Answered Questions", Chapter 39.)
8. What is Bahá'u'lláh's mission in the world?
9. What were the prophecies of Zoroaster concerning the "Coming of the Lord"? Of Moses? Christ? Muhammad?
10. Why is such destruction taking place in the world today? (Read Matt. 21:33 to 44.)
11. How was the divinity of the knowledge of Bahá'u'lláh made manifest in His Writings?

Chapter IV.

Subject: 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Servant of Bahá.

Write out answers to the following questions and bring them to class:

- Station.**
1. Tell briefly of the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His
 2. Explain the need for a "Center of the Covenant".
 3. "Those who rally to the support of the banner of Unity shall be inspired by the Spirit of the New Day" is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's promise. Expand this thought into a paragraph.

Supplementary questions for group discussion:

1. 'Abdu'l-Bahá always exemplified humility, yet He was called "Master". What does this signify?
2. Horace Holley speaks of "the unifying sympathy of the Master of the house", meaning that of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. We know we should show the same spirit, but in what definite ways can it be done?
3. With that spirit did 'Abdu'l-Bahá meet His imprisonment? What were the Commissions of Investigation and what were the results of their endeavours?
4. How did 'Abdu'l-Bahá spend His time during the war years in Haifa? How was He rewarded?
5. Why did 'Abdu'l-Bahá attend Muhammadan services all His life?
6. Tell something of the tributes paid to 'Abdu'l-Bahá at His funeral services.
7. What light did 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will throw upon the meaning of the station of the Báb? Of Bahá'u'lláh? Of His own station?
8. What definite details of the Administrative Order did 'Abdu'l-Bahá establish during His lifetime?
9. Why did 'Abdu'l-Bahá visit America? (See "World Order of Baha'u'llah", pp. 85-87.)
10. Discuss how unity of belief is preserved in the Bahá'í Faith.

Chapter V.

Subject: What is a Bahá'í

Write out answers to the following questions and bring them to class:

1. If the human race is to grow strong, is it necessary to know God's Manifestations? Why? Why do we need to know the most recent Manifestation?
2. "Truthfulness is the foundation of all the virtues of mankind." Discuss this statement.
3. How can the attributes of character stressed in the Bahá'í Faith be acquired?

Supplementary questions for group discussion:

1. "True religion has never yet been fashionable." Enlarge upon this subject.
2. What does it mean to be God's lover? How do you think this attitude can be developed?
3. In "Hidden Words", look up passages on the subject of severance. Why do you think this quality is so stressed in the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith?
4. Why is implicit obedience demanded of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh? Is this a difficult requirement for Americans? Why?
5. Name various ways of serving the Faith.
6. Discuss the requirement of "courtesy" in the Faith.
7. What is the Bahá'í attitude toward the sins of others? Toward the sins of self?
8. What is meant by self-realization?
9. Read from "The Kitáb-i-Íqán", p. 192 (But, O my brother") to p. 195 ("as utter nothingness". Make a list of attributes which should be developed by followers of Bahá'u'lláh.

Chapter VI.

Subject: Prayer

Write out answers to the following questions and bring them to class:

1. What is prayer?
2. Why should we pray? Is prayer always a matter of words?
3. Does the answering of prayer break natural laws?

Supplementary questions for group discussion:

1. During prayer we must be separated from all things and turn to God alone. How is it possible to attain this attitude?
2. Is a Mediator necessary in prayer? Why?
3. What is the highest type of prayer?
4. What does the Bahá'í Faith teach in regard to the reciting of prayers congregationally? Can you give reasons for this principle?
5. How can you explain grief and suffering in this world? Innocent people often suffer for the guilty. Can there be any justice in this?
6. Are there other methods of praying besides the using of prescribed forms? Why should we be grateful for prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá?
7. Search your own heart, but do not record the answers to these questions:
 - a. Do I pray every morning and evening
 - b. Do I give at least one obligatory prayer daily?
 - c. What preparation do I make to lift my prayer life to a higher level?
 - d. Do I always pray to God through the Manifestation, or do I permit some imaginary human concept of God to enter my consciousness?
 - e. Do I always pray with praise in my heart for this great privilege of communion with God?
 - f. Do I ever simply listen in reverent humility for God's answer to my prayer?

Chapter VII.

Subject: Health and Healing

Write out answers to the following questions and bring them to class:

1. What does 'Abdu'l-Bahá teach about the simple life?
2. Discuss healing by both spiritual and material means. What is the advice of Bahá'u'lláh to a physician? P. 131 and 137.
3. Write a paragraph about Bahá'u'lláh as the Great Physician of the world.

Supplementary questions for group discussion:

1. What is the true purpose of the human body?
2. What is the Bahá'í teaching in regard to intoxicants? Enjoyment? Cleanliness?
3. How would obedience to Prophetic commands in regards to health affect the mental, moral and physical life of race?
4. What are four ways of healing without medicine?
5. Is prayer for healing always answered?
6. What is meant by the "gift of healing"?
7. Is social atmosphere important to the well-being of the individual?
8. What is promised for the health of mankind in the Golden Age of this Dispensation?
9. To what purposes should good health be dedicated?

Chapter VIII.

Subject: Religious Unity

Write out answers to the following questions and bring them to class:

1. Give a word picture of the state of religious confusion in the world during the 19th and early and 20th centuries.
2. What is meant by Progressive Revelation? Is any part of a divine Revelation not eternal? Explain.
3. Bahá'u'lláh says, "Beware lest celebration hinder you from the Celebrated and worship hinder you from the Worshipped One! Explain this.

Supplementary questions for group discussion:

1. How does the message of Bahá'u'lláh answer the needs of the times? What are the results of this message in the world today?
2. Discuss the subject of "change" in this world, particularly in relation to human nature.
3. In the last Will and Testament of Bahá'u'lláh, the sentence, "Lo! All things are of God!", is called the Hallowed Word by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. How could the full realization of this concept alone transform contention into unity?
4. Discuss the problem of authority in religion. Why is the Bahá'í Faith known as a World Religion?
5. Are the Prophets of God infallible? How can this be so?
6. How is the position of Bahá'u'lláh among the Prophets unique?
7. Discuss the existence of authentic writings of the Bahá'í Faith. Why is this so important?
8. What is meant by the Bahá'í Covenant? How is it unique? What is the purpose of the International House of Justice?
9. What is the Bahá'í attitude toward priesthood?
10. Questions for personal consideration: What am I doing to promote religious unity in my own civil community? What are my obligations, if I am a Bahá'í, to the Bahá'í Covenant?

Chapter IX.

Subject: True Civilization

Write out answers to the following questions and bring them to class:

1. Why is religion the basis of civilization?
2. Explain the "Lesser Peace". Explain the "Most Great Peace". (For additional reading see "The Promised Day is Come", pp. 4, 26. 128.)
3. What is true education? How should the character of a child be developed?

Supplementary questions for group discussion:

1. What is justice? How can an individual learn to subordinate his own interests to those of humanity as a whole?
2. "True liberty consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments", says Bahá'u'lláh. How can liberty and submission be reconciled?
3. What is the Bahá'í attitude toward civil government? What is the one and only criterion for appointment to position under the Bahá'í plan?
4. Does equal justice for all do away with degrees or varying standards of living?
5. How would public finances be operated under the Bahá'í plan?
6. Why is voluntary sharing of one's property with others placed on such a high level of conduct?
7. What message does the Faith have for the laborer? For the man of wealth?
8. How are bequests to be handled?
9. Discuss equality of men and women?
10. Though we may know the need of changes we are told to defer to established customs until people become enlightened. Can you give specific illustrations of this principle?
11. Discuss the right method of treatment of criminals.
12. How do you feel that the power of the Press can be best utilized in promoting the Bahá'í Faith?

Chapter X.

Subject: The Way to Peace

Write out answers to the following questions and bring them to class:

1. Spiritually many men are ignorant, many are immature and many are sick. How should these different classes be treated?
2. We have had one League of Nations in the world and it failed. What right have we to think that another would succeed?
3. "Unity of East and West means not a cessation of hostilities, but a fertilizing union which will bear much precious fruit." Discuss this statement, naming the greatest fruit which will develop from this union.

Supplementary questions for group discussion:

1. Discuss the principle of "the survival of the fittest" in relation to the world of nature, and also in relation to the world of man.
2. What is the meaning of "peace on earth, good-will among men"?
3. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "Any religion which is not a cause of love and unity is no religion". Enlarge upon this subject.
4. Discuss equality of races as a principle of the Bahá'í Faith.
5. How can love of country be transformed into love of the whole world? How would you still love your country? (See "The Promised Day Is Come", pp. 126-127.)
6. Discuss man's true relationship to land which he has tried to possess.
7. How can true lovers of God offset thoughts of war, hatred and murder?
8. Unity of language is the "seventh candle" of unity. What does this statement mean?
9. 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses the term, "unity of conscience". What does this mean?
10. Do individual Bahá'ís take up arms in self-defense? Are Bahá'ís pacifists? What is the difference between the attitude of the individual and that of the community in the matter of defense? (Read "Bahá'í Procedure", pp. 15-16.)

Chapter XI.

Subject: Various Ordinances and Teachings

Write out answers to the following questions and bring them to class:

1. From what Source did the Administrative Order spring? What is meant by "Spiritual Assembly"? Name its most important duties.
2. What are three worlds of God? Does man ever progress of his own state?
3. How may we become "vivifiers of the world"?

Supplementary questions for group discussion:

1. What does the Bahá'í Faith teach about monastic seclusion? About marriage? About divorce?
2. Explain the Bahá'í calendar. Why should a new calendar be necessary?
3. What should be the spirit of Bahá'í Feasts and anniversaries? Name the most important ones. At what hours should these observances be held? (See "Bahá'í Procedure", pp. 9-10.) Should work be suspended on these days? (See Bahá'í World", Bahá'í Calendar.)
4. What is the purpose of the Bahá'í fast?
5. Explain the Nineteen-Day Feast.
6. Tell about the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Wilmette, Ill.
7. What are the teachings concerning life after death?
8. Do we, the living, have any connection with those who have passed into the next world?
9. What is evil?
10. What would result upon the earth if mankind followed the ordinances and teachings of this Faith?

Chapter XII.

Subject: Religion and Science

Write out answers to the following questions and bring them to class:

1. What is a miracle?
2. How may we find truth? (pp. 244, 245.)
3. Discuss nicety of balance between religion and science as the means of progress for men. (pp. 255, 256.)

Supplementary questions for group discussion:

1. How can the age-long conflict between so-called science and so-called religion be explained?
2. Prophets of science have been persecuted for their advanced ideas as well as Prophets of religion. Name some of these scientists.
3. Can God in His Essence be comprehended by man? How, then, can we know God?
4. Did the universe have a beginning in time? Do stars and planets have beginning or end?
5. Explain the evolution of man from the Bahá'í viewpoint. Was man always a distinct species?
6. Is the story of Adam and Eve literally true?
7. Does scientific research support religious belief in life after death?
8. Discuss the policy of "each for all and all for each" in human relationships. What will be distinctive about the new world era we are now entering?
9. Tell something of the lives of Charles Darwin, Tomas Huxley and Herbert Spencer, mentioned in this chapter.

Chapter XIII.

Subject: Prophecies Fulfilled

Write out answers to the following questions and bring them to class:

1. Discuss the "Coming of the Lord" from the prophetic viewpoint.
2. Explain the meaning of "sun", "moon" and "stars" in prophecy.
3. "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise, with healing in his wings." (Malachi 3:4.) Do you think this prophecy is being fulfilled in Bahá'í circles? In what ways?

Supplementary questions for group discussion:

1. Who has the right to interpret prophecies?
2. Read Isaiah 9:2-7. Could this passage possibly refer to Christ? To whom does it apply?
3. What is meant by "The Day of God"?
4. Read the 11th chapter of Isaiah. According to Bahá'í teachings, to whom does the "Branch" refer? (See "Some Answered Questions" for correct answer - Chapter 12.)
5. Are prophecies regarding the Jews being fulfilled today? Give illustrations.
6. What is the explanation of the phrase, "end of the world"?
7. What is true life to man? What is death to man?
8. What is meant by the return of Christ?
9. What things did Christ say must come to pass before the coming of the Son of Man?
10. What is meant by "heaven"? "Clouds"? "Angels"?
11. How do you account for the remarkable similarity in the various Scriptures concerning the signs of this age?

Chapter XIV.

Subject: Prophecies of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Write out answers to the following questions and bring them to class:

1. What proofs do we have of Bahá'u'lláh's Prophethood?
2. What appeals did Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá make to America? Have these appeals been answered as yet?
3. What, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is the prime cause of the world's turmoil today? P.298.
4. Give the principles which are to adjust social troubles after the great world conflict.

Supplementary questions for group discussion:

1. Discuss the creative power of God's Word. Give specific examples in the principles Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed.
2. What did Bahá'u'lláh prophecy for Napoleon III?
3. What prophecy came true concerning Germany?
4. How is Tihrán represented in prophecy?
5. What did Bahá'u'lláh say would happen to Turkey? Did this come true?
6. What prophecy is to be fulfilled before the end of this century?
7. How did 'Abdu'l-Bahá envision the future of 'Akká and Haifa?
8. Is prophecy the strongest proof of a Manifestation of God? Give reasons for your answer.

Chapter XV

Subject: Retrospect and Prospect

Write out answers to the following questions and bring them to class:

1. Write several paragraphs, if necessary, stating evidences of the progress of the Bahá'í Faith in the world today.

Do you consider this progress a proof of the divine nature of Bahá'u'lláh, or could it be explained otherwise?

2. Name the three elements in the Administrative plan as revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and describe the purpose of each one in the New World Order.
3. "The keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority, but humble fellowship." (Shoghi Effendi.) Enlarge upon this theme.

Supplementary questions for group discussion:

1. What is the prospect for humanity under the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh?
2. Explain the universality of the principles of the Bahá'í Faith.
3. What is the great significance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's "Will and Testament"?
4. Explain the position of the Guardian of the Faith. What are the duties of the "Hands of the Cause of God"?
5. Why does the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh develop rather slowly as regards numbers? (p.318) What will cause more rapid growth? (p. 319.)
6. What are the requirements of Bahá'í membership?
7. Read the quotations, p.328 to p.340. Report on one principle found in these readings, presenting it before the group as you would present it for the first time to an interested inquirer.
8. Present, also, to the class several reasons for the acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith by people of the entire world.

Chapter XV.

Supplementary questions for group discussion: (Continued)

9. Consider thoughtfully, perhaps as another lesson, the following topics:
 - a) The authority of Local Spiritual Assemblies
 - b) The relationship of local Assemblies to their National Spiritual Assembly.
 - c) Nature of consultation in a Bahá'í Assembly. (pp. 320-321)
 - d) Nature and function of Bahá'í Conventions.
 - e) Relation of the National Spiritual Assembly to its appointed committees.
 - f) Relation of the N.S.A. assembled delegates of Convention.
 - g) Character and functions of the International Spiritual Assembly, or House of Justice.
10. In what Bahá'í Book can we find the Guardians's exposition of the Bahá'í Administrative Order? In what book his description of the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh? In what book his analysis of the process of world change taking place in this day?