

# Revelation: Spiritual and Material Progress

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It's a pleasure to be here again. It's a great bounty and opportunity. I've enjoyed the past couple of days with the various friends who were invited to the pre-conference Development Seminar. We all learned from each other. Bahá'í social and economic development is really all about learning, and we've been greatly enriched by these opportunities. I want to express my love to the Rabbani Charitable Trust. I can't describe how we feel being here for our eighth year. It's become a family tradition for us to be at the conference at this time, and I'm sure that it is the same for other people that are here. We look forward to it because it is a source of inspiration to us. No doubt it is all the sacrificial services of the individuals that serve the Trust that inspires our hearts and moves us to want to do more as they themselves do more. We thank you so much for all that you have done for us.

My next most important task is to bring the love of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada to this gathering. They send their deep love and of course their appreciation for all the initiatives that people are taking around the world to raise the quality of human life, which is the theme of this conference. This is a noble aspiration and we're certain many, many tremendous steps will be made at this gathering, both small and large, but all very important.

The subject that I chose to speak about tonight is '*Revelation: Spiritual and Material Progress*'. This subject was chosen because I was privileged to be a representative at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in August. That experience certainly highlighted for me a number of the issues that we've been facing in trying to implement development based on the principles of the revelation of God. The experience at the summit really affected my understanding of the role of religion in development, and I hope that you'll have the opportunity to attend Peter Adriance's workshop during this time as well, because it will help to familiarize us all with development from a Bahá'í perspective.

In *Century of Light* the House of Justice stated, "*The collapse of society's moral foundations has left the greater part of humankind floundering without reference points in a world that grows daily more threatening and unpredictable.*"<sup>1</sup> We know September 11<sup>th</sup> was a terrible tragedy with over 3,200 people dying. However, each day an estimated 5,000 people die in Africa because of AIDS, and each day 5,000 more die in India because of poverty, and every three seconds a child dies because of poverty. One has to ask what condition the soul of humankind is in that could allow these things to happen. This evening I would like to look at a principle in the Faith expressed beautifully in '*The Prosperity of Humankind*': "*What is true of the life of the individual has its parallels in human society. The human species is an organic whole, the leading edge of the evolutionary process.*"<sup>2</sup> Just as the individual and his soul grow and develop through different stages so is humanity growing and developing. "*What the peoples of the world are today experiencing,*" Bahá'u'lláh said, "*is*

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<sup>1</sup> Commissioned by The Universal House of Justice, *Century of Light*

<sup>2</sup> Bahá'í International Community; *The Prosperity of Humankind*, p. 5

*their collective coming of age, and it is through this emerging maturity of the race that the principle of unity in diversity will find its full expression.”*<sup>3</sup>

There are different stages in the development of the soul and the first stage is the concupiscent soul. This stage occurs when *“..the soul is in the depths of degradation and lowest grades of animal passion, takes pleasure in evil and ephemeral diversions, becomes hardened by the coldness of this world of existence and dull and neglectful of the warmth and love of its creator, the Merciful, the Bountiful. Then on account of its degradation in the wasteland of death and perversity and its occupation with rebellious pursuits it is characterized as the concupiscent soul.”*<sup>4</sup> It seems that humanity is going through this stage of development now. Some may have made it through this stage, however when we look at humanity as a whole, we recognize that the kinds of things we are suffering from occur because we have not moved beyond our personal lusts or desires and sacrificed these in order to move on to the next stage.

There is a great aspiration on the part of humanity to deal with the social ills, and more and more of the people of the world are striving to come together and solve these problems. When I was at the World Summit the media was continually reporting on its activities. We participants were looking at some of the reports, but it didn't seem as though they were describing the same event. I thought this was very odd because it was a gathering of all the peoples of the world coming together to talk about the issues of development. To me it was very exciting. These people were really, in whatever ways they could, striving to make some difference, as was stated in *Century of Light*: *“Only a person blind to the intellectual and social capacities latent in the human race and insensitive to humanities desperate needs could fail to take deep satisfaction from the advances that society has made during the past hundred years.”*<sup>5</sup> We see that society is making tremendous advances, and we're working very, very hard to make a difference but still it doesn't seem to be enough.

We know as Bahá'ís that the principle of justice is the most important principle and that it is the foundation for unity and justice. Social justice is really going to be the format of the next twenty years of the work in the Bahá'í community, as well as the world at large. But this justice, Bahá'u'lláh says, comes about through consultation. *“Viewed in such a light consultation is the operating expression of justice in human affairs.”*<sup>6</sup> This is a really important principle, because it is fundamental to the development process. We must be consulting with the people, trying to identify what the needs are and moving in that direction, because *“Justice is the one power that can translate the dawning consciousness of humanity's oneness into a collective will through which the necessary structures of global community life can be confidently erected.”*<sup>7</sup>

At the Summit there were more than 104 Heads of State, more than 8,000 NGO's and a large contingent of volunteer youth. It's wonderful to see the youth rising up all over the world and doing things that will make a difference. At this gathering there were thousands of youth volunteers. You can imagine that the 40,000 people who were converging on Johannesburg had to be guided to different places and they didn't know where they were going. The youth were dressed up in special outfits so you could find them and they'd help guide the way. Lots of them didn't know where they were going at first, so that made it very interesting! They would help you though. They would say, “I'll take you,” and they'd go and

<sup>3</sup> Bahá'í International Community, 1995 Jul 16, Realization of Economic, Social Cultural Rights

<sup>4</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá; Makatib-'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. I, pp. 62-102, translation notes - unreviewed

<sup>5</sup> Commissioned by The Universal House of Justice, *Century of Light*, para 12.15

<sup>6</sup> Bahá'í International Community, 1995 Jul 16, Realization of Economic, Social Cultural Rights

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

get lost with you if necessary. You got to know somebody from another place as you were walking along, lost together. Gradually you'd find your way back. As time went on they got better and better, but the spirit of willingness to serve and do something was really outstanding.

One of the priority strategies of the United Nations was to try to combine our efforts by working on partnerships between government, business, religions and all the different organizations that were there. Many religions have lots of claims about how wonderful they are. The question is, how does that play out in terms of the interests of humanity? As someone that has done marriage therapy, I know that when there's a divorce the most important consideration is how we look after the children. How can we do things in a way that will help? We definitely agree we have differences, but how do we take steps for the development of the children? Ultimately, the summons of the Universal House of Justice to religious leaders is to really work together to make a difference for the entire human race.

UNESCO stated in 1997: *"To the extent that the global crisis facing humanity is a reflection of collective values and lifestyle, it is above all a cultural crisis."* So there's recognition at a world level that we're in a cultural crisis. We have learned somewhat to appreciate diversity, but what we haven't really learned is how to combine that diversity to solve some of the problems that we actually have as a human race. UNESCO went on to state: *"It's necessary now to focus on changing values, behaviour and lifestyle."* South Africa has its challenges to develop workers and their economy. North America also has its challenges too, but we have different lessons to learn. We consume 80% of the world's energy as 20% of its population. That's not the problem that Africa has. We have a different set of problems and we need a different type of education. UNESCO is working on understanding the complexity and interconnectedness between poverty, wasteful consumption, environmental degradation, population, health, conflict and human rights.

The issue is that world leaders are not prepared at this time to recognize the spiritual implications of the problems. In *Century of Light* it states: *"It would be unrealistic to imagine that the challenges lying ahead may not exact an even greater toll of the human race that still seeks by every means in its power to avoid the spiritual implications of the experience it is undergoing."*<sup>8</sup> We face a world that is not willing to recognize the spiritual nature of our reality. This is, incidentally, one of the developmental levels of the soul.

Some of you may have heard this story. There was once a monk that took a vow of silence. In accordance with this vow of silence he was walking in a garden, deep in prayer. He wasn't paying attention to where he was going and he fell over a cliff. He fell about forty feet and grabbed hold of a root. He was hanging on, thinking, "Can I call out for help? I've taken this vow of silence, and I may not be on the right side of God if I break that vow. After all, He must know I'm hanging here." Anyway, he decided that God didn't want him dead, so he called out, "Is anybody up there?" and a voice answered, "Yes." The monk called out, "Who is it?" and the voice replied, "It's God." Well he became a little bit concerned and he asked, "Can you help me?" and God said, "Yes." He was getting a little tired now. "What must I do?" he asked. God said, "Let go of the branch." He thought for a few minutes and asked, "Is there anybody else up there?" This is humanity always checking out its options. Not sure that we actually want to commit

The next stage in the development of the soul is the irascible soul. *"Then from this dark and dreary baseness the soul progresses to a point where it occasionally receives an indication of its abasement in the abyss of error of the path it is treading, of the ignorance veiling it from its Creator and of its forgetfulness in the remembrance of God. From time to*

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<sup>8</sup> Commissioned by The Universal House of Justice, *Century of Light*, para. 12.4

*time the breeze of awareness passes over it and stirs it momentarily to wakefulness. Because of its lowliness and baseness for having fallen to such depths of passion and abasement, for being hindered by accumulated veils from attaining to higher spiritual degrees and because of its remorse and its reproachfulness and for blaming itself, it is called the irascible soul.”<sup>9</sup> This irascible soul is a soul that really suffers from a lot of anger and confusion. This developmental level is one in which we know something has to change, but we don't quite know what or how to change it. Sometimes we're not changing the right things. We're not working on what's really important.*

At a recent meeting we were talking about the challenges of accomplishing something in the world. This was in a very sleepy little community that began to stir to action. They wanted to do things! One of the people said, “Well, you know, I heard that at the World Summit people were drinking Champagne, having parties, eating a lot, wasting money and using a lot of trees for paper. Doesn't that really annoy you?” I said, “Well, yes, probably all that did happen. I wouldn't doubt it. But of course other people's inaction or excesses wouldn't be an excuse for us not to take action, would it?” I think that sometimes our cynicism about what's going on paralyzes us. This is another challenge. We can't just simply denounce materialism. In the letter to the religious leaders of the world the House of Justice said, *“Denunciations of materialism or terrorism are of no real assistance in coping with the contemporary moral crisis if they do not begin by addressing candidly the failure of responsibility that has left the believing masses exposed and vulnerable to these influences.”<sup>10</sup> “Religion as we are all aware,” the House of Justice states, “reaches to the roots of motivation. When it has been faithful to the spirit and example of the transcendent figures who gave the world its great belief systems it has awakened in world populations capacities to love, to forgive, to create, to dare greatly, to overcome prejudice, to sacrifice for the common good and to discipline the impulses of animal instinct. Unquestionably the seminal force in the civilizing of human nature has been the influence of the succession of these Manifestations of the divine that extends back to the dawn of recorded history.”<sup>11</sup> From a Bahá'í perspective we want all of the faiths to work together in this development process, and we are willing to work with everyone to do that. I visited a country recently where they really value you if you are someone who believes in God. They welcome you and are so happy that you have come. I was visiting a Hindu gentleman, and he recounted a story, saying, “There was a Muslim clergyman preaching on the radio who said that while he was in India he met a man who was ill and wanted to be healed. He held his hands over the sick man's head, saying, ‘Heal this man in the name of Jesus!’ and the man was not healed. He held his hand over the man's head again and said, ‘Heal this man in the name of Mohammad!’ and he was healed. Now what would a Bahá'í say about that?” I said, “Well I think he'd say that the man was very sick, and he had to call on two Manifestations to heal him.” We're very happy to be inclusive. We believe in all the divine Messengers of God, and we recognize that they brought important things to transform humanity to new levels of development. Religion binds the world together. *“From its counsels the rational soul has derived encouragement in overcoming limits imposed by the world and in fulfilling itself. As the name implies religion has simultaneously been the chief force binding diverse peoples together in ever greater and more complex societies through which the individual's capacities thus released can find expression.”<sup>12</sup> This is the purpose of religion, to release the latent human potential within us. The Creative Word brings forth capacities from our souls and demonstrates these truths in action. We're really a ‘show me’, not a ‘tell me’, kind of Faith.**

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<sup>9</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá; Makatib-'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. I, pp. 62-102, translation notes - unreviewed

<sup>10</sup> Letters of The Universal House of Justice, 2002 April, To the World's Religious Leaders, p. 3

<sup>11</sup> Letters of The Universal House of Justice, 2002 April, To the World's Religious Leaders, p. 3

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 6

'Abdu'l-Bahá says, *"This power of the Covenant shall heat every freezing soul, shall bestow light upon everything that is dark and shall secure for the captive in the hand of nature the true freedom of the Kingdom."*<sup>13</sup> Now the world is still flirting with religion. It's not sure about the place of religion in society. In fact, it wants to call it spirituality, because it's uncomfortable with the fact that it's religion. At the World Summit we had to deliver the statement that was called *"Religion and Development: Convergence or Divergence"*. The title of the statement itself seemed a very bold challenge at a gathering of the peoples of a world that is still struggling with whether or not it wants to deal with the concept and implications of religion.

You know, it is religion that moves the hearts of people. It is religion that causes people to sacrifice. *"There can be no doubt whatever,"* says Bahá'u'lláh, *"that the peoples of the world of whatever race or religion derive their inspiration from one heavenly source and are the subjects of one God."*<sup>14</sup> *"Today the pulsating power in the arteries of the body of the world is the spirit of the covenant the spirit, which is the cause of life. Whosoever is vivified with this spirit the freshness and beauty of life become manifest in him."*<sup>15</sup> When you look at the quote you recognize that religion is essential for this motivation. Dr. Hanna Newcombe, who started a peace institute in Canada, said, "You know, the United Nations and other organizations have done a wonderful job of articulating a world vision that is spiritual and has many components in it that are wonderful. But the problem is the motivation of the people. This is the issue." In the days of the Báb the second of the seven martyrs of Tehran was Mirza Qurban-'Ali. Mirza Qurban-'Ali was a brilliant scholar. He was renowned for being a scholar of Islam, and he was worshipped by many. The grand Vizier said to him, "Please don't say that you are a follower of the Báb. Say that you are the Báb, the Promised One. If you say this tomorrow a thousand people will follow you, and I will be able to free you." Mirza Qurban-'Ali said, "You're right. I could do that and a thousand people would follow me, perhaps more. There's just one problem. I do not possess the power to change the human heart. This only the Báb possesses." The Grand Vizier was quite struck by that, and he paused and thought. He didn't want to kill him. Mirza Qurban-'Ali said, "Why do you hesitate? My name is Mirza Qurban-'Ali. Qurban means sacrifice. Ali is the name of the Báb. I was destined to be the sacrifice for the Báb. The sooner you strike off my head, the happier I will be." Then the Vizier said, "Take this man away. He's starting to influence me." Mirza Qurban-'Ali said to him, "Have no fear of that. This message is only for the pure in heart," at which point the Grand Vizier began to shake and said, "Take him away and do not bring the others to me. If they refuse to recant their faith, then strike off their heads." When Mirza Qurban-'Ali was taken to the site where the Uncle of the Báb had been decapitated as the first of those martyrs, he rushed to his body, picked it up and summoned the executioner saying, "Approach and strike your blow, for my faithful companion refuses to release me and calls me to my Beloved!" The executioner did execute him and from that moment threw down his sword and spent the rest of his life recounting this story of the purity of Mirza Qurban-'Ali. This is the power of Revelation. This is the power of true faith, the power that moves us to make all the sacrifices we can for humanity. So, as Bahá'ís in socio-economic development we serve everyone. Our intention is not to convert people through our social development. Our intention is to serve them so that we will improve the human condition, as is the theme for this conference. We recognize that in order to do this we have to rise to a new level.

The next level of the development of the soul is the inspired soul. *"When the soul rises from this lowly and bestial condition and ascends to a more dignified and nearer station and degree and is assisted by divine confirmations and receives signs of inspiration and is inspired by the meaning of the Book as it is said, Read thy book; it is sufficient unto thee this day; '..."*

<sup>13</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 102

<sup>14</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 217

<sup>15</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Compilations, The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 127

*nourished by the food from the heavenly paradise... it befittingly realizes its elevation and degradation, its rise and fall, judges its affairs with insight, resolves its own difficulties, inclines itself away from the ephemeral to the eternal, withdraws its sight from all created things,...*"<sup>16</sup>  
At this level we start to detach ourselves from the things of this world.

Could somebody tell me what the three core activities are in this plan (the Five Year Plan)? Study circles, devotional meetings, children's classes. I have been on four continents in the last four months, and on those four continents whenever I ask that question I get the same answer. Don't you think that's remarkable? The House of Justice, through the National Spiritual Assemblies, has divided up the whole world into sizeable areas called clusters. In these clusters social and economic development will take place, changing the condition of the people. The main means of change is the first mass education program for the spiritual and material education of the planet being undertaken through the Ruhi program. This is the focus of the clusters, and it's being carried out all over the planet. 'Abdu'l-Bahá referred to this mass education program in *'The Secret of Divine Civilization'*, and we recognize that now it is coming about, and it's happening before our very eyes. It's being done with unity of thought, and it's creating an outpouring, a great outpouring, of change.

In the letter of the House of Justice to the world's religious leaders they state: *"The primary task of the soul will always be to investigate reality, to live in accordance with the truth of which it becomes persuaded and to accord full respect to the efforts of others to do the same."*<sup>17</sup> The primary task of the soul is to search for truth. We are a faith, and we work with other faith communities in a search for truth. The truth that humanity is searching for is how to generate the will and motivation to do the things that we know have to be done. That's the truth we're searching for. It isn't that we don't have the technologies. It isn't that we don't have the knowledge. It isn't that we don't have the resources to change the conditions that I talked to you about in the beginning. It is that we lack the will to do it. When I say 'we', I'm talking about humanity, which includes all of us.

The United Nations is attempting to create a world view through sustainable development without involving religion. It's a little difficult to do that. It's extremely difficult to motivate the world when you don't involve the belief systems of the people you're trying to empower. The Bahá'í International Community, in its statement to the World Summit, challenges the world by saying that religion must be brought into full partnership in the design of this new world order that the United Nations is trying to create. *"Indeed the United Nations will only succeed in establishing such a global order to the extent that it taps into the power and vision of religion. To do so will require accepting religion not merely as a vehicle for the delivery and execution of development initiatives, but as an active partner in the conceptualization, design, implementation and evaluation of global policies and programs. The historically justified wall separating the United Nations and religions must fall to the imperatives of a world struggling towards unity and justice. There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion derive their inspiration from one heavenly source. The difference between the ordinances under which they abide should be attributed to the varying requirements and exigencies of the age in which they were revealed. While religious principles have had a palpable influence on the United Nations, most notably in the human rights realm, the U.N. has yet to accept the world's religions as genuine partners in its work."*<sup>18</sup> This is the challenge that we had the bounty of offering at the world summit.

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<sup>16</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá; Makatib-'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. I, pp. 62-102, translation notes - unreviewed

<sup>17</sup> Letters of The Universal House of Justice, 2002 April, To the World's Religious Leaders, p. 5

<sup>18</sup> Bahá'í International Community: Religion and Development at the Crossroads: Convergence or Divergence? A statement to the World Summit on Sustainable Development by the Bahá'í International Community, Johannesburg, South Africa, August 26, 2002, note 10

*"The U.N. should build on such rudimentary steps to establish mechanisms and processes that will bring, in a meaningful manner, religious values, aspirations and vision into the heart of the world embracing enterprise that is the U.N."*<sup>19</sup>

The House of Justice is the sole refuge for a tottering civilization. Its goal is to provide guidance so that the world will achieve the unity that is God's purpose for the human race. The next great challenge is for humanity to recognize this great purpose, and it's quite amazing what the House of Justice has done in order to bring it about. It has sent a member of the Office of Social and Economic Development to various parts of the world to educate all of the Bahá'í communities about social and economic development. It has helped us to understand that we do not do carry out development projects for the purpose of converting people to the Bahá'í Faith. Rather, we do it for the benefit of the people. We must rise up and make a difference in the lives of people in communities where we live and in other places we may be privileged to serve.

Then in May 2002, the House of Justice wrote a letter to all the world's religious leaders throughout the entire planet. That letter challenged the history of religious interaction by stating that now must be the time that we work together. More and more religions are doing this for the development of the world. The House of Justice stated that religions should not preach prejudice and hatred between religions, but rather foster respect for freedom of choice. However, we have things to do and the world needs to change. The whole world, and especially Faith communities, should work together in facing the challenge before us. Following this action the Bahá'í International Community took a bold step announcing to the political leaders at the World Summit, through its statement, that it is necessary to bring religion into full partnership in the design of the future of the planet. More and more there is going to be greater attention given to the way in which we go about social and economic development. *"It is untenable to maintain that a regime of international human rights can replace religious purpose as the force capable of inspiring the profound sacrifices and driving the extensive changes necessary for the unification and pacification of humankind."*<sup>20</sup>

If humanity wants to reach the next stage in its development, then it could find a parallel in the stages of the development of the soul by becoming a contented soul. Here *"It will reach the stage of submission and contentment and will leave its desires behind. It will deliver its affairs into the hands of God, the Most Great King, place its trust in Him and recline upon the cushion of His Grace and Generosity."*<sup>21</sup> His guidance that streams from the World Centre is the grace and generosity of God to humanity that relieves us and alleviates us. We must work hard to study that guidance and implement it. *"This is a station that, if thou attainest it, thou shalt acquire such joy that sorrows can not reach thee and such happiness as cannot be affected by any unpleasantness. Such ease and comfort will not be changed into hardship and distress and a tranquility that will not be followed by agitation or difficulties, because the reigns of affairs are in the Mighty grasp of thy Lord and the whole earth is in His grasp. He who walks upon this exalted plane has no will, no rest, no movement, destiny nor decree save that which God ordaineth. He becometh entirely selfless in his essence, his attributes and his very being through the effulgence of the signs of unity, just as the shadows vanish before the shining forth of the ancient daystar."*<sup>22</sup>

In the writings it is clear where the motivation for change originates. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, *"Know thou for a certainty that today the penetrative power in the arteries of the world of humanity is the power of the covenant. The body of the world will not be moved through*

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., note 12

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., note 8

<sup>21</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá; Makatib-'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. I, pp. 62-102, translation notes - unreviewed

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

any power except through the power of the covenant. There is no other power like unto this. The spirit of the covenant is the real centre of love and is reflecting its rays to all parts of the globe which are resuscitating and regenerating man and illuminating the path to the divine Kingdom."<sup>23</sup> This is the effect of the words of God streaming forth from the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh and all of the Manifestations of the past. The House of Justice proclaimed that, "Humanity's crying need will not be met by a struggle among competing ambitions or by protest against one or another of the countless wrongs afflicting a desperate age." Protest is a choice many people are making. However the Bahá'í community asserts that "the root cause of wrongdoing is ignorance", and therefore we learn through a process of reflection following action. The House of Justice states that this change, "... calls rather for a fundamental change of consciousness, for a wholehearted embrace of Bahá'u'lláh's teaching that the time has come when each human being on earth must learn to accept responsibility for the welfare of the entire human family. Commitment to this revolutionizing principle will increasingly empower individual believers and Bahá'í institutions alike in awakening others to the Day of God and to the latent spiritual and moral capacities that can change this world into another world."<sup>24</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá says that, "Just as the earth attracts everything to the center of gravity, and every object thrown upward into space will come down, so also material ideas and worldly thoughts attract man to the center of self. Anger, passion, ignorance, prejudice, greed, envy, covetousness, jealousy and suspicion prevent man from ascending to the realms of holiness, imprisoning him in the claws of self and the cage of egotism. The physical man, unassisted by the divine power, trying to escape from one of these invisible enemies, will unconsciously fall into the hands of another. No sooner does he attempt to soar upward than the density of the love of self, like the power of gravity, draws him to the earth. The only power that is capable of delivering man from this captivity is the power of the breaths of the Holy Spirit."<sup>25</sup> There are four ways that you attract the power of the Holy Spirit: "These gifts of the spirit are received through prayer, meditation, study of the Holy Utterances and service to the Cause of God."<sup>26</sup> When you do any of these four things you are being transformed and you are helping to transform others, because you are becoming a magnet for the power of the Holy Spirit and it is flowing through you. What are those three core activities again? Devotional meetings. What do we do at devotional meetings? Pray and meditate. Are those not two ways that we draw down the power of the Holy Spirit, which is the only power capable of transforming the world? What about children's classes? This is teaching spiritual education, and the study of the sacred writings. Isn't that another way in which we draw down that power of the Holy Spirit? When we look at these core activities we see that they create the spiritual foundation needed to transform civilization, if we multiply them. In Canada, wherever the friends have embraced the institute training process with its Ruhi curriculum, study circles, devotional meetings and children's classes, all kinds of energy is released. In one cluster in Canada we have an intensive area of growth and we're very excited to learn about growth as that cluster moves to a new stage of development. We should not, then, see these activities as separate from development. They are at the core of development. These three activities are core activities because they attract the power of the Holy Spirit to each of us.

The House of Justice said, "Where a training institute is well established and constantly functioning, three core activities -- study circles, devotional meetings, and children's classes -- have multiplied with relative ease. Indeed, the participation of seekers in these activities, at the invitation of their Bahá'í friends, has lent a new dimension to their purposes, consequently effecting new enrolments. Here, surely, is a direction of great promise for the teaching work."

<sup>23</sup> Compilations, NSA USA - Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities

<sup>24</sup> Letters of The Universal House of Justice, 2001 May 24, To Believers Gathered for Terrace Events

<sup>25</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá; Compilations, Bahá'í Scriptures, p. 546

<sup>26</sup> Shoghi Effendi: Living the Life, Pages: 24-25

<sup>27</sup> Bahá'u'lláh says, *“Could the people but taste that choice Wine of the mercy of their Lord, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, which lieth in store for them in the world beyond, they would assuredly cease their censure, and seek only to win the good pleasure of this Youth. For now, however, they have hidden Me behind a veil of darkness, whose fabric they have woven with the hands of idle fancy and vain imagination. Erelong shall the snow-white hand of God rend an opening through the darkness of this night and unlock a mighty portal unto His City. On that Day shall the people enter therein by troops, uttering what the blamers aforesaid exclaimed, that there shall be made manifest in the end that which appeared in the beginning.”*<sup>28</sup> So Bahá'u'lláh is saying there'll be a portal opened for entry by troops. *“These core activities, which at the outset were devised principally to benefit the believers themselves, are naturally becoming portals for entry by troops. By combining study circles, devotional meetings and children's classes within the framework of clusters, a model of coherence in lines of action has been put in place and is already producing welcome results. Worldwide application of this model, we feel confident, holds immense possibilities for the progress of the Cause in the years ahead.”*<sup>29</sup> The House of Justice refers to these core activities as portals. These words of the House of Justice in the last Ridván message are a fulfillment of the prophecy of Bahá'u'lláh that these portals would be opened. *“The power of the covenant is as the heat of the sun which quickeneth and promoteth the development of all created things on earth. The light of the covenant in like manner is the educator of the minds, the spirits, the hearts and the souls of men.”*<sup>30</sup>

When the soul goes to the next stage of development it becomes an approved soul. *“Through the outpourings of such bounties and being surrounded with luxuries and delicacies ... clothed in the robe of generosity and favour, dressed in the raiment of submission and contentment, the soul will be addressed by the Supreme Concourse: Blessed art thou for having traversed the whole way and pursued the path until thou arrived at the stream of faithfulness and drank from the pure waters of dedication and contentment, left behind thy desires, submitted to the decree of thy Lord, offered up all thou didst possess and sacrificed thy heart, thy spirit and thy being in the path of thy Lord.”*<sup>31</sup> When we see the challenge facing us we know that it is not the problems of the world that inspire us. It is the covenant of God and the teachings of God that inspire us to rush forward. The problems of the world, backbiting and undermining unity, will take away our energy. Those things that will give us energy and restore energy within us are the processes of devotion and prayer, study of the sacred Writings and service. These will cause us to be uplifted and press onward.

When I used to read the following writing, I thought it was about just one person. I thought, “It would be impossible for a person to be like this.” Then I suddenly realized this writing isn't about a person. This writing is about a people. This is the people that will rise up and make a difference in the lives of the inhabitants of the world. We'll do whatever we can, however limited, whether small or great, to make a difference in the quality of life of people. Bahá'u'lláh states, *“These shall labour ceaselessly, by day and by night, shall heed neither trials nor woe, shall suffer no respite in their efforts, shall seek no repose, shall disregard all ease and comfort, and, detached and unsullied, shall consecrate every fleeting moment of their lives to the diffusion of the divine fragrance and the exaltation of God's holy Word. Their faces will radiate heavenly gladness, and their hearts be filled with joy. Their souls will be inspired, and their foundation stand secure. They shall scatter in the world and travel throughout all regions. They shall raise their voices in every assembly and adorn and revive every gathering. They shall speak in every tongue and interpret every hidden meaning. They shall reveal the*

<sup>27</sup> The Universal House of Justice; Ridván 2002/159 BE

<sup>28</sup> Bahá'u'lláh; The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, pp 134-35

<sup>29</sup> The Universal House of Justice; Ridván 2002/159 BE

<sup>30</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in “God Passes By”, pp. 238-39

<sup>31</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá; Makatib-'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. I, pp. 62-102, translation notes - unreviewed

*mysteries of the Kingdom and manifest unto everyone the signs of God. They shall burn brightly even as a candle in the heart of every assembly and beam forth as a star upon every horizon. The gentle breezes wafted from the garden of their hearts shall perfume and revive the souls of men, and the revelations of their minds, even as showers, will reinvigorate the peoples and nations of the world."*<sup>32</sup>

Thank you for your attentiveness.

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<sup>32</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 251