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CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS – MOTIVATION FOR SERVICE TO HUMANITY

Beloved friends and fellow servants to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh,

Alláh'u'Abhá!

It is a great honor for me to be addressing this distinguished audience. This conference gathers some of the most pure-hearted and dedicated promoters of human honor and champions of justice from around the world. So I would like to thank the Rabbani Trust and all of you for this rare opportunity, and for the hope that your work in service to humanity brings into our darkened world. I feel deeply privileged to be a part of this process of learning together how to translate Bahá'u'lláh's world-embracing call into action in a world ever more deeply divided by the widening gap between wealth and poverty.

Friends, in September 1911, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, upon whom Bahá'u'lláh conferred the title 'Mystery of God', addressed an unsuspecting audience in the City Temple in London with these visionary words:

This is a new cycle of human power. All the horizons of the world are luminous. . . . You are loosed from ancient superstitions which have kept men ignorant, destroying the foundation of true humanity. The gift of God to this enlightened age is the knowledge of the oneness of mankind and of the fundamental oneness of religion. War will cease between the nations, and by the will of God the Most Great Peace shall come; the world will be seen as a new world¹.

Now, almost a hundred years later, we find ourselves immersed in the labor pains and death throes of this transition to a new cycle of human power. We are struggling to “break off the shackles of this nether world”², so that we can become willing, capable, and ready vehicles for “the revolutionary change in the very structure of society” that eventually will bring about international peace and prosperity. The Universal House of Justice calls upon us to model “*the willing submission of human nature to Divine Law that, in the final analysis, can alone produce the necessary changes in attitude and behaviour*”.³

The Bahá'í Revelation calls humanity to a new level of actualization of its spiritual potential. The Writings call to a new level of integration of heart and mind, of the intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual aspects of every human being, so that the reality of the oneness of humanity can be fully realized, and a peaceful and sustainable global civilization can be established.

Since Bahá'u'lláh's call was released into the world in the middle of the 19th century, progressively minded people from all backgrounds have begun to feel quickened, albeit unknowingly, by this Divine energy, and remarkable and unprecedented worldwide grassroots movements for ending

¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, pp. 19–20

² Bahá'í Prayers for Women, pp. 15-16

³ Century of Light, Commissioned by The Universal House of Justice, p. 25

various forms of oppression, and encouraging participatory development have emerged. Some examples are the movements for national liberation, the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the peace movement, the environmental awareness movement, and more recently the movement for sustainable development.

What do all these movements share in common? In essence, they all call for a new kind of consciousness, one that understands the systemic nature of contemporary social problems, feels responsible and empowered to seek solutions in collaboration with others, has the skills to work for concrete positive social change and to develop creative ways to address systemic problems locally, and is motivated by a principled vision of how things should be. In essence, all these liberation movements call for critical consciousness.

Among the thinkers on the forefront of these diverse progressive movements was the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire who coined the term "critical consciousness". As the editor of *One Country*, Brad Pokorny, pointed out, Freire's notion of critical consciousness as the state of in-depth understanding about the world and resulting freedom from oppression, has greatly influenced thinking about participatory development.

Today, I would like to speak about critical consciousness as a way to operationalize what the Bahá'í Revelation calls humanity to do. I would like to suggest that critical consciousness can be used as a working concept that we as Bahá'is can take into the larger world in order to unite diverse efforts and spearhead large-scale transformation.

The very notion of critical consciousness reflects the vision released into the world by Bahá'u'lláh. "*Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self.*"⁴ In addition, the concept of critical consciousness has already gained significant influence and credibility among a wide range of secular and religious, educational, social, and international circles, and it has the potential to unite global workers of otherwise divergent convictions around the necessity for a unitary approach to education and social change.

While it has influenced participatory development efforts around the world, the profound implications of the concept of critical consciousness are yet to be fully understood. Educators and developers use the notion of critical consciousness as a dialogical, essentially consultative approach to education and social change. However, many have begun to realize in varying degrees that critical consciousness implies a certain purity and strength of moral motivation which indicates "a state of mental and spiritual development that confers upon its subject a morally progressive, engaged, and holistic view of life."⁵ In essence, critical consciousness implies the kind of new mind that Paul Lample⁶ describes as the collective metamorphosis to which Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation calls humanity.

Those of us familiar with Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation know that this consciousness can only be achieved to the extent to which human nature submits to Divine Law, and therefore becomes purified, hence manifesting a change in attitude and behavior. We all are governed by Divine Law, whether we know and believe it or not. Pure hearts often unknowingly and untuitively submit to

⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 94

⁵ Brad Pokorny, *One Country*, July-September, 2003, p. 16

⁶ Paul Lample, *Creating a New Mind*

this reality as they seek more truth, love and justice. In this way progressive movements arise. When we are genuinely guided by religion, we submit knowingly to Divine Law, and draw from this submission the strength to engage the world in ever more expansive and responsible ways. In an age when religion has so deeply compromised itself, and when the spiritual impulse of people often causes them to seek answers away from religion, we have to find unifying ways to help guide humanity toward that ultimate knowing submission to Divine Law which will allow us to build a peaceful and sustainable global civilization.

In search of such unifying ways, twelve years ago I turned to the concept of critical consciousness and undertook a systematic study to fully explore and operationalize this concept from a psycho-social and psycho-spiritual developmental perspective. I felt that if we could fully articulate for ourselves, and for a wider world what allows people to become so fully empowered that they become, in the worlds of Paolo Freire, “Subjects”, rather than merely the objects of history, we would have *a unifying foundational understanding that we could offer to the world* as a practical path to accelerating the advancement of civilization toward a sustainable future.

In 1973, Freire wrote:

As men amplify their power to perceive and respond to suggestions and questions arising in their context, and increase their capacity to enter into dialogue not only with other men but with their world, they become “transitive. . . .” Transitivity of consciousness makes man “permeable.” It leads him to replace his disengagement from existence with almost total engagement. . . . As men emerge from time, discover temporality and free themselves from “today,” their relationships with the world become impregnated with consequence. . . . As men create, re-create, and decide, historical epochs begin to take shape. . . . Whether or not men can perceive the epochal themes and above all, how they act upon the reality within which these themes are generated will largely determine their humanization or dehumanization, their affirmation as Subjects or their reduction as objects. . . . If men are unable to perceive critically the themes of their time, and thus to intervene actively in reality, they are carried along in the wake of change.⁷

This empowered way of being, which fully integrates mind and heart, and leads to the enlightened exercise of will and expansive agency in the world, is not unknown in human history. There have always been individuals who have exhibited this qualitatively different consciousness. But in this age, Bahá’u’lláh defined this new state of mind as *the attainable goal of maturity for all of humanity*. With the global trends toward universal education and lifespan development, information networks, and the growing appreciation for the vast reservoirs of untapped human potential, all unleashed through His Revelation, we now face the task to understand and embrace ever more deeply this transformation, and to foster it as educators and servants to all of humanity.

What is the nature of this new way of being to which we are called by Bahá’u’lláh? Individuals who exhibit critical consciousness strike us as both independent and original thinkers, yet deeply connected to the rest of humanity, individuals with presence and integrity but not individualists. They identify with no one particular ideology, class, group, or philosophy—they draw on the best in all; yet their personal understanding is not eclectic but deeply integrated. These are people who recognize truth in whatever shape or form it appears. They respond to life with wisdom and compassion and enter into an ongoing dynamic dialogue with it. These people always stand out,

⁷ Paolo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, pp. 3-17

and others are attracted to them and threatened at the same time, because these people fit no easy mold and are not guided by personal interest. These soul's lives are about truth and service, but they are not moralists. If anything, they are lovers, lovers of humanity, lovers of life. Their hearts embrace and respond deeply to the human condition. Their minds powerfully cut through the rubble of detail and the smoke of words and reach for inner meanings, harnessing knowledge into true understanding, never just caught in the trimmings of knowledge. These rare souls are loved and feared and sometimes hated; but whether we like them or resent them, they represent our best hope for ourselves, that hope that we often do not even dare entertain. These are people who know deep in their hearts, beyond all intellectual debate, that Truth exists, even though they will never fully understand it; people whom the trends of the times leave untouched. About these pure-hearted souls Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

*This people have passed beyond the narrow straits of names, and pitched their tents upon the shores of renunciation*⁸.

Yet, most of us get caught in names; our hearts struggle to cleanse themselves from “the dust of acquired knowledge”⁹ and conditioning; our minds struggle with fearful walls.

- So what then is critical consciousness?
- What are its psychological components that we need to cultivate in ourselves and to make central in education?
- How do we then apply those central psychological features in our educational and development programs?
- How do individuals accelerate the process of developing critical consciousness in themselves and in their families, communities, and the world at large?

One major question I sought to answer was why there appear to be so few people in the world who truly love truth and justice enough to pursue it in a whole-hearted, lifelong way. Why, ultimately, do so many people appear to be afraid of truth?

This paradoxical reality is poignantly echoed in the world's Scriptures. In His *Tablets*, Bahá'u'lláh writes: “*But where are to be found earnest seekers and inquiring minds? Whither are gone the equitable and the fair-minded?*”¹⁰

In the Shinto tradition, it is written: “*Sincerity is the single virtue that binds divinity and man in one.*”¹¹

In Sutta Nipata from the Buddhist tradition, it is written: “*Please, Man of Shakya,*” said Dhotaka, “*free me from confusion!*” “*It is not in my practice to free anyone from confusion,*”

⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 74

⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 264

¹⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 90

¹¹ Andrew Wilson, *World Scriptures: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts*, p. 514

said the Buddha. "When you have understood the most valuable teachings, then you yourself will cross this ocean."¹²

In Judaism, we find these questions: "If I am not for myself who is for me? And when I am not for myself what am I? If not us, who? And if not now, when?"¹³

Contemporary psychology and education have not yet been able to answer these questions in a soul-satisfying way. Many different partial answers have been tried, yet in 1992, when I began my work on the psycho-social phenomenon of critical consciousness and its development in the lifespan, there was yet no coherent integrative understanding of how different efforts at revisioning education and development actually come together, or what overarching paradigm would have the capacity to unite them.

Bahá'í educators have done impressive work in moral education around the globe. Yet, their efforts are often ignored because they are seen as falling outside familiar theoretical frameworks, or as insufficiently grounded in basic research. Bahá'í work in social and economic development is gaining increasing attention; yet, the question remains, *how do we systematically reconceptualize current educational and development efforts by drawing out of social science and education the best of what is already known, yet rethinking it on a paradigmatically new level, transforming it into a coherent and all-encompassing, theoretically rigorous and yet practical and systematic approach to change.*

In the many lives that I studied, this qualitatively different consciousness exhibited a much higher level of integration of cognitive, volitional, and affective capacities. Even in its early forms of development in the lifespan, *the dawning of critical consciousness is marked by a greater consistency among what one knows, what one loves, and how one exercises volition.*

Such morally evolved individuals are dismissed in social science as altruists, essentially an aberrant phenomenon, albeit a very desirable one. They are viewed as exceptions. Few scholars ask how to cultivate moral leadership. The current discourse on how to emphasize character education, citizenship, and servant leadership, often sounds externally focused, as if we are trying to train into people something that is not intrinsically there within each and every one of us. The reason is that there is not yet an understanding of how to cultivate a real harmony between minds and hearts and the exercise of will. Educators continue to focus on the acquisition of knowledge, intellectual development, and the training of discrete skills, yet unfortunately neglect to nurture the wellsprings of human motivation.

My research findings, which are confirmed by several studies of moral development as revealed in lives of service to humanity (Bembow, 1994; Coby and Damon, 1992; Daloz et al, 1996), show that critical consciousness is a developmental pathway characterized by the *synergistic interaction of primarily moral motivation with evolving cognitive structures of knowing.* This synergistic interaction in the lifespan produces increasingly expansive, empowered, and thoughtful ways of engaging an ever-larger world. Understood this way, critical consciousness, then, is a matter of critical discernment, choice and love, where the term 'critical' is used in the Kantian sense of *critique* as a process of self-reflection and self-knowledge.

¹² Andrew Wilson, *World Scriptures: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts*, p. 489

¹³ Andrew Wilson, *World Scriptures: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts*, p. 488

We know from the Bahá'í Writings that the three most fundamental capacities of the soul are: “the understanding capacity, or mind, the feeling capacity, or heart, and the desiring/acting capacity, or will”¹⁴. However, it is quite possible to develop each of them relatively independently, and historically that has mostly been the case. Education has not yet fully recognized the equal importance and interdependence of these three fundamental human capacities, nor has it implemented the principle of reciprocity and symmetry in their cultivation. Most of us are the product of a particular cultural imbalance, an emphasis on one or another combination of these capacities, or on a mere facet of these capacities; hence, most of us experience some level of split between knowledge, love, and will, and a resulting fragmentation in consciousness. Each of us is, to a certain extent, a collage of contradictions, reflected in the fragmented state of our world.

Traditionally, Western civilization has emphasized the development of the mind and its abilities to know and to understand. It has particularly favored rational-analytical, linear, conscious processes of knowing, neglecting to a significant degree other, less conscious and more direct forms of knowing such as intuition, insight and inspiration. In contrast, Eastern cultures have traditionally emphasized the love-knowledge of the heart referred to in the ancient language of Pali as *cita*, translated as “heart-mind”, or the seat of ultimate understanding. There are, of course, limitations inherent in each particular emphasis. As we know from the Writings, a strong heart, unless disciplined by the relentless critical examination of an ever stronger rational mind, can easily become prone to fanaticism. And a strong mind, unless tempered by the humility that the love-knowledge of the heart confers, is easily prone to arrogance.

So the journey of integration of heart and mind on an individual and on a collective level constitutes the story of our painful and compelling emergence toward critical consciousness, toward becoming the Subjects of history. This emergence characterizes the very global historical processes that provide the context for our development. Collective human civilization itself, with all its history of dignity and betrayal, as we know, manifests stages in the evolution of this process, and is now poised on the brink of a true integration in the midst of profound collective angst and polarization. Therefore, understanding the individual potential for critical consciousness, for a powerful unity of mind and heart and the lifelong transformations in this capacity, is essential in creating the kinds of educational, social, and international institutions that can foster individual empowerment and peaceful global integration. This is what I understand to be at the heart of all our Bahá'í efforts in social and economic development.

The question of critical consciousness, understood as the full and integrated development of mind, heart, and will, encompasses questions about character, integrity, critical thinking, discernment, moral reasoning, global citizenship, empathy, permeability, motivation, altruism and prosocial behavior, moral commitment, social responsibility, faith, and agency. It is the personal and social expression of the fully actualized human spiritual faculties, which function together at each stage of development. As Bill Hatcher points out, “in order to gain self-insight, we must will to know the truth about ourselves, and we must be attracted toward the truth.”¹⁵

This process is reflected in one of Bahá'u'lláh's *Hidden Words*:

¹⁴ William Hatcher, *Love, Power, and Justice*, p. 38

¹⁵ William Hatcher, *The Law of Love Enshrined*, p. 228

O son of Spirit! The most beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbour. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behoveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.

This Hidden Word makes a compelling claim: that we have the capacity to choose to discern justice in our hearts, and that if we were to *love truth and justice enough*, we would learn to see through the veils of reality. How, then, do we cultivate so powerful a love for truth and justice that allows people to fully come into their powers, and yet that is tempered by a deep awareness of the limitations in our understanding of truth, and our interdependence in the pursuit of justice?

Bahá'is know that the love of ultimate truth and justice is the love of God. The genuine love of God as the Seat of Absolute Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, is the purest human motivation. Yet, in most of us, motivation is a much more mixed bag. In addition, in education, as well as in social and economic development, we cannot yet speak publicly of the love of God as the ultimate motivation for all positive human endeavors.

In previous ages, the solution resorted to in trying to purify human motivation was to strive to suppress the impulses and desires of our animal nature. Out of this suppression of natural impulses as “evil” resulted numerous distortions of human character. In this age, Bahá'u'lláh teaches us that our animal nature is not inherently evil but is intended to serve higher aspirations. Our impulses provide the raw material that can be channeled into spiritual strivings, or can grow to become self-serving and ultimately self-destructive.

In creation there is no evil; all is good. Certain qualities and natures innate in some men and apparently blameworthy are not so in reality. For example, from the beginning of his life you can see in a nursing child the signs of greed, of anger and of temper . . . greed, which is to ask for something more, is a praiseworthy quality provided it is used suitably. So if a man is greedy to acquire science and knowledge, or to become compassionate, generous and just, it is most praiseworthy. If he exercises his anger and wrath against the bloodthirsty tyrants . . . it is very praiseworthy . . . but when the natural qualities of man are used in an unlawful way, they are blameworthy¹⁶.

While children carry this spiritual potential, this innate yearning toward truth, beauty, and goodness, and it manifests itself in moments of flow as profound intuitions and glimpses into the mystery of life, their minds have yet to be developed and cultivated in order to attain the strength of a fully manifested spiritual potential. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us, there is a significant difference between the purity of heart of a child and the purity of heart each adult needs to strive for in order to fully actualize his or her spiritual potential.

The hearts of children are of the utmost purity. They are mirrors upon which no dust has fallen. But this purity is on account of weakness and innocence, not on account of any strength and testing . . . whereas the man becomes pure through his strength. Through the power of intelligence he becomes simple; through the great power of reason and understanding and not through the power of

¹⁶ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 215

*weakness he becomes sincere . . . his heart becomes purified, his spirit enlightened, his soul is sensitized and tender—all through his great strength.*¹⁷

The growth toward fully empowered maturity involves the cultivation of the unique human potentiality – the rational soul:

*[T]he spirit is connected with the body, as this light is with this mirror . . . the rational soul is the substance through which the body exists. The personality of the rational soul is from its beginning; it is not due to the instrumentality of the body, but the state and the personality of the rational soul may be strengthened in this world.*¹⁸

What does it mean to strengthen the personality of the rational soul in this world? Here's how 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes it:

*God has created in man the power of reason, whereby man is enabled to investigate reality. God has not intended man to imitate blindly his fathers and ancestors. He has endowed him with mind, or the faculty of reasoning, by the exercise of which he is to investigate and discover truth, and that which he finds real and true he must accept. . . . The greatest cause of bereavement and disheartening in the world of humanity is ignorance based upon blind imitation. It is due to this that wars and battles prevail; from this cause hatred and animosity arise continually among mankind. . . . Each human creature has individual endowment, power and responsibility in the creative plan of God. Therefore, depend upon your own reason and judgment and adhere to the outcome of your own investigation; otherwise, you will be utterly submerged in the sea of ignorance and deprived of all the bounties of God.*¹⁹

Fundamental components of the cognitive aspect of critical consciousness are

- critical thinking
- an understanding of causality
- a grasp of the processes of history, which are currently leading us toward a global civilization
- as well as the ability to translate understanding into action.

However the epitome of the capacity to know is spiritual knowledge, which, as Nader Saiedi points out, “concerns the totality of being and metaphysical reality”. It means seeing and appreciating people and things fully, as they actually are, and not as may suit our interests or needs in the moment. It is manifested in “a sense of unity with nature, other humans and transcendental reality.” “Such knowledge necessarily becomes inseparable from committed practice and encompassing love.”²⁰

¹⁷ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 53

¹⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 208-9

¹⁹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 291-93

²⁰ Nader Saiedi, *Logos and Civilization*, pp. 108-9)

To cultivate this kind of knowledge, then, or to cultivate critical consciousness, means to cultivate what Bill Hatcher, Mary K. Radpour, Michael Penn, and others have called authentic moral development.²¹

In my empirical research on the lifespan developmental dynamics of this process, I have found that there are *four central dimensions around which moral motivation unfolds* to the extent to which it is fostered by environments; around which it engages the structural intellectual capacities of mind, and grows progressively toward spiritual integration. These are:

1. The formation of a primarily moral sense of identity, anchored in universal moral values and moral character, which predominates over, and mediates the sense of identity derived from various social configurations, such as class, race, gender, ethnic or other group membership.
2. The negotiation of external moral authority in significant others, which is first intuitively and then increasingly rationally scrutinized, as the individual constructs her understanding of what constitutes authentic moral authority, and internalizes that as personal moral authority and responsibility.
3. The experiencing of oneself in relationships, rather than just in contact with others, which fosters empathic concerns with others, with good and bad, with being loyal and not hurting. With role-taking opportunities, these concerns gradually expand beyond interpersonal relationships, into larger social concerns with justice and equity.
4. The tendency to ask and value questions regarding the meaning of life and the life-long search for authentic meaning. Such a search is amplified by explicitly or implicitly spiritual environments, characterized by faith in the wisdom of life, and acceptance of the responsibility it imposes. The search for truth provides a larger frame of reference from which to reflect on ourselves and our experience, and spurs intense self-reflection and critical examination of reality, expanding toward principled, philosophical, historical and global vision.

These central dimensions of moral motivation are none other than the unique characteristics of Bahá'í-inspired educational or developmental projects that non-Bahá'ís so often experience as they become involved in children's classes, dance workshops, community projects, summer schools or other activities! People seem to feel uplifted, nobler – i.e. their sense of identity begins to shift. People sense in most Bahá'í initiatives an appropriate presence of authority and a clear source of authentic moral authority. They experience a deeper and broader sense of relatedness, and become motivated to work with others towards a greater goal. They experience greater meaningfulness in the presence of the Bahá'í vision of life, and feel drawn to become part of this way of life.

While our study of the Bahá'í Writings and our experience in Bahá'í-inspired social and economic development have already taught us a great deal about how to effect real and lasting positive change, the research on the ontogenesis of critical consciousness provides empirical data on the centrality of these four dimensions in the formation of moral motivation. It helps operationalize the developmental processes through which children's spiritual potential becomes amplified and nurtured into moral and spiritual motivation.

²¹ Michael Penn, *Overcoming Violence Against Women and Girls*, chapter 6, The Authenticity Project

My study of moral development as it unfolds in individual lives shows that different critically conscious people embark on this development as children, adolescents, or adults, drawn by one or another of the above four motivational dimensions. But regardless of whether they start with questions of identity, questions about authentic moral authority, questions about relating, or questions about meaning, the dimension that leads the way eventually engages all the other dimensions, and the process snowballs, leading to a qualitative shift in consciousness.

Such an understanding helps explain the multiple pathways toward critical consciousness. In some people, this transformation in the quality of consciousness begins in childhood, amidst genuinely and consistently ethical and spiritual environments, which amplify and help give meaning to the child's inherent yearning toward truth, beauty, and goodness. In others, it is propelled by a deep philosophical hunger for meaning, which may be evident from childhood even in apparently uncondusive environments, or may be awakened by extreme life circumstances. In yet others, it may be the outcome of a therapeutic exploration of relationships and relatedness. In others, it may be spurred by a deep love for nature, which leads to questions of stewardship. In others, it may be propelled by extreme experiences of injustice. There is an infinite range of possibilities, but once the process begins, it expands organically into increasingly empowered, responsible, and engaged ways of being in the world.

What does that mean in practical terms? In my mind, it means that it is possible to revision our educational efforts across the curriculum, as well as our development efforts in the world, around fostering reflection on four central questions:

1. Who am I?
2. Who or what do I see as sources of authentic authority?
3. What do I feel in relationship to?
4. What is the meaning of my life?

These four simple and profound questions have the capacity to organize and engage systematically all subject areas of study, from elementary school to graduate and continuing education.

They can become organizing themes in children's classes, study circles, deepenings, devotional meetings, and Bahá'í Summer Schools. They can be consistently reintroduced and explored around different topics at our community centers, where seekers come to explore the meaning of a spiritual life. They have the potential to be at the heart of our proposal for education for sustainable development, which we take into the larger world.

These questions are charged enough that they cannot simply be explored intellectually; they will invariably involve all three human capacities of knowledge, love, and will. Moreover, these questions cannot be answered once and for all. Rather, engaging them thoughtfully requires continuous reconstructing with growth and development, with the introduction of new knowledge, new love, and new levels of experience.

Recently, educators are beginning to recognize that service learning needs to be viewed as a central component of successful education. The most progressive researchers in various fields are increasingly speaking about the need to rely primarily on participatory action research for an accurate understanding of reality. Successful development projects around the world are finding

that at the heart of their success is a process of simultaneously engaging hearts and minds while fostering empowerment. In recent years there have been an increasing number of proposals that speak to the need to re-orient education towards the cultivation of hearts.^{22 23} While the debate around the role and nature of spiritual education continues, the four dimensions of moral motivation offer a way to operationalize the revisioning of education without becoming mired in inter-religious or religious/secular conflict.

Critical consciousness represents a dynamic and often precarious balance between mind and heart, where each serves as a corrective to the other, as a result of which the faculties of love, knowledge, and will function in relative unity. ***Such a balance is something that educators can agree to make a central goal.***

People who manifest critical consciousness are not guided by fear and its by-products - prejudice, rationalizations, skepticism, and hostility. They understand and transcend their fears, because the spiritual yearning for truth, beauty, and goodness has been magnified to such an extent that the love-knowledge and attraction of the heart and the understanding of the mind have entered into synergy. Through this dialectic of heart and mind, critically conscious people continuously face, understand, and re-define fear as an inescapable part of the human condition, while they are moved by expanding circles of love. They are far from perfect human beings, but their powers to know and to act are in the process of becoming fully released. They are what Freire calls 'Subjects of history'.

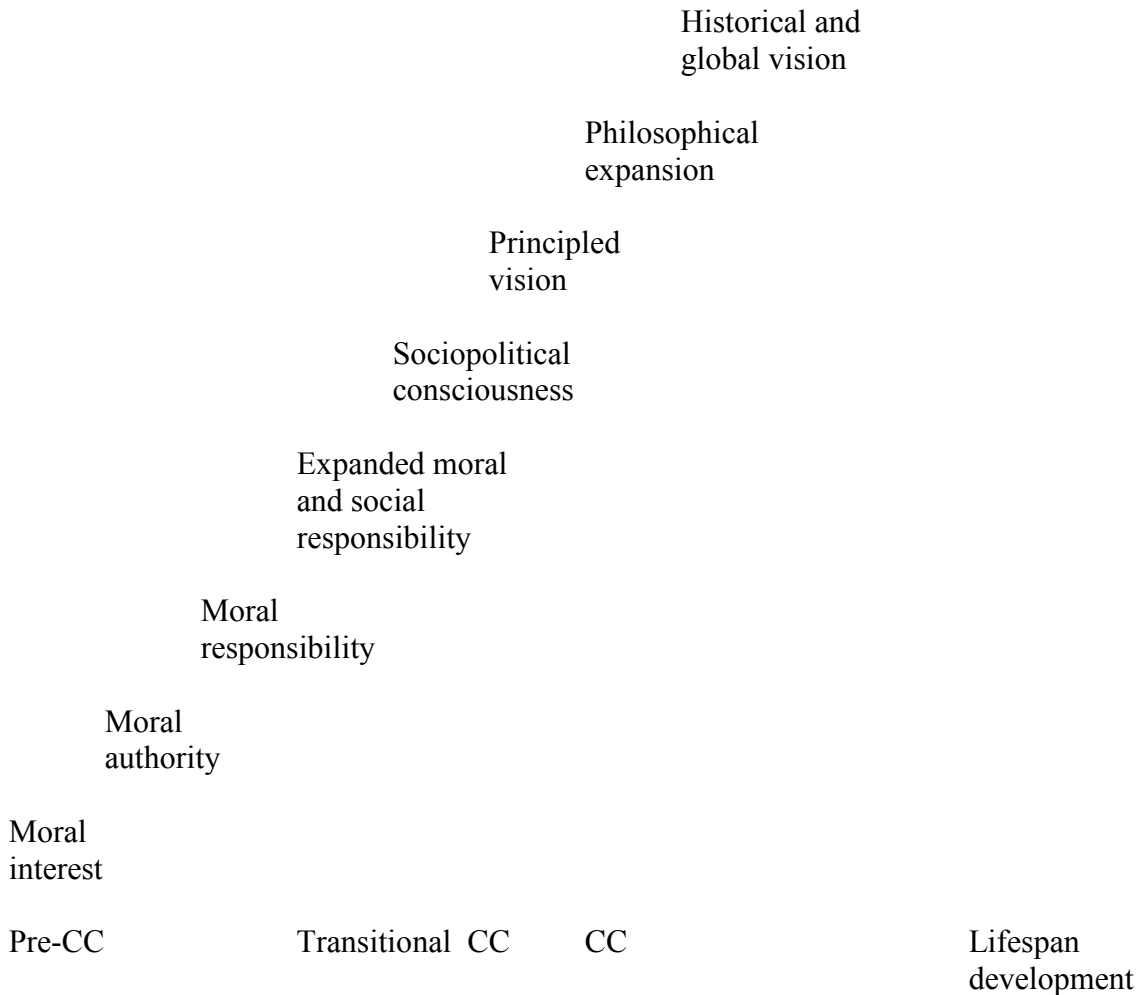
In these individuals, the development of moral motivation around the four central questions discussed above, and its synergistic interaction with ever-expanding intellectual understanding, undergoes the following progression from basic moral interest to historical and global vision:

²² Elena Mustakova-Possardt, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, pp. 261-2

²³ Nathan Rutstein, *Coming of Age at the Millennium: Embracing the Oneness of Humankind*

Successive Ascendance of Content Themes in the Evolution of CC

Ascendance of tasks (themes)



This progression falls into three large periods in the lifespan: pre-critical consciousness (which focuses on moral interest, authority and responsibility), transitional critical consciousness (which includes expanded moral and social responsibility and sociopolitical consciousness), and mature critical moral consciousness (which begins with principled vision).

Pre-critical consciousness begins in early childhood and is ideally completed by adolescence, when the foundation for moral motivation is formed and the structural conditions for transitional critical consciousness are achieved. The task of this period is to recognize and amplify the spiritual yearnings of the child toward truth, beauty and goodness by exposing her to moral discourse as an organizer of experience and cultivating in her a general moral orientation to life, stimulating moral interest, and a preoccupation with questions regarding authentic moral authority and moral responsibility, as well as by exposing her to a range of lived examples of uprightness, moral earnestness and idealism, and cultivating a sense of relatedness. Such environments foster the

inherent truthfulness and permeability to authenticity characteristic of the naive consciousness of the impressionable young child. The presence of explicit moral values in a child's environment, of moral induction practices coupled with optimal empathic arousal, which allow moral self-attribution to occur, and significant and authoritative moral voices to be internalized, are all important conditions. All of the above processes help understand the unique effectiveness of the Virtues Project.²⁴

Researchers Daloz, Keen, Keen and Parks identified some important characteristics of early environments that successfully fostered the above processes: a) a home with open doors which provides glimpses into the larger socio-political world; b) a public parent; c) exposure to, and learning to discern justice and injustice; d) the gradual expanding of the meaning of 'home' to include increasingly more encompassing spheres of trust and agency. All of these illustrate central Bahá'í principles of family and community life.

With the advent of adolescence, and the negotiation of egocentric, and then early conformist consciousness, the first signs of personal moral authority of the young person are found in 'structured self-identification through the member role and intra-group relationships'.²⁵ At this time, youth service projects are particularly effective in fostering transitional critical consciousness.

As the developing cognitive structures of the young mind are engaged in a real dialogue with life, the young person is likely to reach the cognitive threshold for transitional critical consciousness without cognitive developmental arrests. This structural threshold constitutes at least early formal operational ability for a consistent analysis of causality, conventional understanding of social system, the development of a conscience oriented toward duty and responsibility to a larger human group than one's immediate circle, and early self-knowledge and its accompanying ability for some self-reflection, coupled with an internal organization of the self, able to differentiate personal goals, and to articulate a coherent philosophy.

In adolescence, the youth increasingly engages in negotiating the second and the third dimensions of moral motivation - moral agency, and increasingly conscious relatedness on every level. The theme of service to a larger human family becomes a wonderful context for the idealistic young person to channel her energies, and experience social-cognitive challenge and growth. This period also increasingly manifests the fourth dimension of moral motivation, a defining concern with the meaning of life and with finding larger frames of reference than the self. It is marked by growth in critical discernment and in the ability to examine critically various aspects of reality. However, it still manifests a significant tension between mind and heart, between various emotions and the moral sense of identity, a limited capacity for critical reflection, and some internal contradictions, linked to the absence of systemic reasoning.

Education in this period needs to facilitate the dominance of a moral sense of responsibility and agency over fear, helplessness and skepticism. It needs to cultivate empathy, relatedness, and permeability to meaningful social relationships rather than self-protectiveness, closed-mindedness and prejudice. The developmental tendency to compartmentalize contradictions and engage in negative criticism, and short-term, pragmatic, and self-referential goals needs to be resisted by the

²⁴ Linda Kavelin Popov, Dan Popov, and John Kavelin, *The Virtues Guide*

²⁵ Jenny Wade, *Changes of Mind*, p. 119

cultivation of larger frames of reference, critical discernment, self-reflection, and a larger life purpose.

With the advent of systemic reasoning and the movement to more complex structures of the self, the individual opens up to a more thorough and consistent examination of both self and world from principled moral reasoning, developing mature critical consciousness. Not only does this level of consciousness achieve the full structural capacity to examine critically both its own ideology and socio-historic reality, but it is highly empowered, moved by the deepening synergy of knowledge, love and will. This deepening synergy between moral motivation and critical systemic thought leads progressively toward philosophical expansion and historical and global vision.

In conclusion, dear friends, when we approach optimal development from the perspective of critical consciousness, and the harmonious integration of knowledge, love, and will, it becomes clear that service to humanity is not something extrinsic to human nature, in which people have to be trained. Rather, the use of human knowledge, volition, and action in ways consistent with one's deepest understanding of the reality of oneness and interdependence, and with one's deepest love toward truth, beauty, and goodness, is the organic outcome of the formation of critical consciousness.

O Son of Spirit!

*My claim on thee is great, it cannot be forgotten. My grace to thee is plenteous, it cannot be veiled. My love has made in thee its home, it cannot be concealed. My light is manifest to thee, it cannot be obscured.*²⁶

²⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Arabic Hidden Words*