

Light Upon Light

exploring
moral & spiritual
transformation

Materials for children & youth aged 8-12

Book 1

Merryl Hammond with Navid Naimi

Contents

Preface

Session 1: Introduction to *Light Upon Light*

Session 2: Building a better world

Session 3: Small seeds

Session 4: Kindness

Session 5: Unity

Session 6: Justice

Session 7: Empathy

Session 8: Nobility (Part 1: Introduction)

Session 9: Nobility (Part 2: Images)

Session 10: How does my behaviour affect others?

Session 11: Developing our spirituality

Session 12: Review

Preface

TRAINING IN MORALS AND GOOD CONDUCT IS FAR MORE IMPORTANT THAN BOOK LEARNING. A CHILD THAT IS CLEANLY, AGREEABLE, OF GOOD CHARACTER, WELL-BEHAVED – EVEN THOUGH HE BE IGNORANT – IS PREFERABLE TO A CHILD THAT IS RUDE, UNWASHED, ILL-NATURED, AND YET BECOMING DEEPLY VERSED IN ALL THE SCIENCES AND ARTS. THE REASON FOR THIS IS THAT THE CHILD WHO CONDUCTS HIMSELF WELL, EVEN THOUGH HE BE IGNORANT, IS OF BENEFIT TO OTHERS, WHILE AN ILL-NATURED, ILL-BEHAVED CHILD IS CORRUPTED AND HARMFUL TO OTHERS, EVEN THOUGH HE BE LEARNED. IF HOWEVER, THE CHILD BE TRAINED TO BE BOTH LEARNED AND GOOD, THE RESULT IS LIGHT UPON LIGHT.

~'ABDU'L-BAHA

NOTE TO PARTICIPANTS

Welcome! This is a program specially designed for young people of all faiths and no faith aged about 8 to 12 or so. Quotations are drawn mainly from the Baha'i writings and from the sacred scriptures of other major faiths. The main objective is very simple: to help you further develop your moral and spiritual capacities so that you can live a better life and make a more significant contribution to the world.

But simple does not necessarily mean “easy to achieve”! It will take focus and sincere effort on your part to make changes in the way you see things, think, react and behave. Change will not come overnight. Improvement has to be worked for. But with the support of these materials, your tutor, friends in your group, and your parents, you can achieve truly great progress. May you also have lots of fun in the process!

NOTE TO TUTORS

Welcome to this program for neighbourhood children's classes. I hope you will have as much fun with your class as I did!

As mentioned in the *Note to participants* above, these moral and spiritual education sessions were developed for children of all faiths and no faith, aged 8 to 12 or so, and draw mainly on inspiration from the Baha'i writings and the sacred scriptures of other major faiths. The material included here has been pre-tested in a neighbourhood class in Montreal. We met at our home, once every two weeks or so, on Friday evenings from 7.30 to 9.15pm.

Ideas for the session topics came mainly from my own experience as a parent (we have five children, aged 10 to 25), and from listening to friends and neighbours talk about problems and struggles they had with their children, many of whom were attending the classes by that time! Additional ideas came from Linda Kavelin Popov's *The Family*

Virtues Guide, the on-line *Virtues Gazette*, and *Drawing on the Power of the Word*, the Ruhi Foundation's book for pre-youth.

We started with a group of three Baha'i boys in September 2002, and eight months later we had 11 boys and 6 girls attending, about half of whom were Baha'i... Invitations in the neighbourhood were done mainly by word of mouth by the children themselves. Soon, friends of friends were being invited, and I would overhear my son's friends saying, "Ask your mom if you can come too; it's really fun!"

To facilitate hosting, I asked parents to send a small snack to share. With the help of each child's food contribution, we had a real "party" each time!

Apart from the fun snacks, a major part of the attraction was the social time at the beginning and end of each session. I really recommend that you be "rigid" about providing playtime as an integral part of your program. For some children, especially those who don't particularly like reading or discussing, the chance to simply play with like-minded children may be the only real attraction at first. Don't think that the "work" is more important than the "play". At this age, children need and deserve time to be playful!

As the weather improved in the spring, I included a short physical play period before we started, for the children to let off steam before we sat down together. We would play basketball in the driveway, or do some skateboarding, or chase each other in the park across the road. Ten or fifteen minutes like that served to break the ice and then when we started the session inside, everyone was more relaxed. In addition, I still included a good twenty to thirty minutes of time for play at the end. They really looked forward to that.

A brief word of caution, however. If you can possibly arrange this, I urge you *not* to allow TV or video watching, computer or other electronic games, or surfing the internet during this special time together. Many children are deeply addicted to these diversions, and hardly know how to socialise and interact properly with peers or play together in a self-directed and active way. Let your class be an oasis from the passive forms of entertainment and noisy over-stimulation most children are over-exposed to in daily life. Let them experience the simple pleasure of being together, getting to know each other as friends, and devising their own amusements for a change!

I always included a few opening prayers. For several participants, the very notion of saying prayers was utterly foreign at first. (In some cases, a child would say that s/he had never said a prayer or even heard one said before. In all these cases, after the first exposure, hearing other children recite, chant or read a prayer, they would ask if they too could read one...) For that reason, in the first sessions, I would do an ice-breaker *before* the opening prayers.

Just one suggestion: keep the prayers short. These sessions are not designed to be mini-devotional meetings. (If the children would like to host a devotional meeting for one session, that would, of course, be a great project!) In the beginning, I didn't have the heart to limit the prayers, and the result was that this part of the session would take too long, and we never got through the work planned for the session itself.

Each session involves some reading aloud of numbered paragraphs. If everyone in your group is comfortable reading aloud, you can just take turns going round the circle, having each child read one paragraph in turn. But if some of them are very shy or weak readers, you may prefer to ask good readers to read the longer paragraphs, and ask the others to read shorter sections (or none at all, until they gain confidence).

Older participants could be asked to assist in various ways (e.g. mentoring a younger child, helping with set-up and clean-up, etc.) to make them feel appropriately appreciated in the group. The estimated times mentioned for various sections of each session are based on an average group size of about 6-8 participants. Allow shorter or longer for participatory exercises if your class is smaller or larger. If you run out of time, you can always suggest that they complete an exercise at home with their parents' help. Answers are at the back of the book.

I have included a page at the end of many sessions for the child to share with her/his parents. From the feedback I got in my class, many of the parents were very interested in the content, and wanted to be able to follow-up with their children between sessions. In some cases, if a child missed a session, the parents would ask me to e-mail them the materials so they could work through the content with their child at home. Talk about dedication! (Note: I was developing sessions as we went along, so that group did not have a book to work from.)

Parents also often said to me that they really appreciated the topics I was teaching, and that their children were really eager to learn. However, they said that "changing behaviour" was another story. ("They are not so eager to put their learning into practice!") These parents felt they needed more tools to help them take the lessons a step further so that new approaches could really be *integrated* into the child's life. I hope the "homework" pages will go some way towards closing that gap. In addition, I have since developed a parallel program for parents using these same topics, called "*With Heart and Soul*". If possible, encourage the parents of children attending your classes to join a *With Heart and Soul* circle for parents. (Find a friend in your community who would lead these sessions for parents, or offer them yourself if you have energy!)

As well, there is a parallel *Unite the Hearts* program using the same topics for younger siblings aged 4-7 (*Pearls of the Ocean*) and one for older siblings aged 13 and up (*Illumined Youth*).

Dear friends, don't even hesitate now. You've come this far; all you need is to gather a small group of children the right age. Have fun, and just do it!

~Merryl Hammond
Montreal, 2003

BLESSED ART THOU, SINCE THOU ART ENGAGED IN RENDERING A SERVICE WHICH WILL MAKE THY FACE TO SHINE IN THE ABHA KINGDOM, AND THAT IS THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF CHILDREN. IF ONE SHOULD, IN THE RIGHT WAY, TEACH AND TRAIN THE CHILDREN, HE WILL BE PERFORMING A SERVICE THAN WHICH NONE IS GREATER AT THE SACRED THRESHOLD. ACCORDING TO WHAT WE HAVE HEARD, YOU ARE SUCCEEDING IN THIS. YOU MUST, HOWEVER, STRUGGLE UNCEASINGLY TO PERFECT YOURSELF AND WIN EVER HIGHER ACHIEVEMENTS.

~'ABDU'L-BAHA,

COMPILATION OF COMPILATIONS (VOL. I), P.272

THANKS

Sincere thanks to the three stalwart boys who got this whole project started, the “founding fathers” as we called them: Seena Sabet-Kassouf, Sam Dupras and my son, Matt Hammond-Collins. Even though none of them really wanted to “open the doors” of their Friday night sessions to friends and neighbours (“It’s so nice with just us!”), they all adapted with great maturity as the group of participants grew, first in drips, and then in a virtual flood as friends invited their friends in turn! Sam’s mom, Joanne Tonkin and Seena’s parents, Naghmeh Sabet and Ramzy El-Kassouf, were wonderfully supportive and encouraging throughout.

My daughters, Tami and Karrie Hammond-Collins were also a major support. As the group expanded, they themselves started attending (how “uncool” to attend sessions originally designed for your younger brother and his friends!), and even bringing *their* friends as well! (Special mention to Samantha Strath for her loyal support after swimming lessons!) Another special friend, our teenaged neighbour Martin Murry, was particularly brave: being considerably older than the others in the group, he accepted to be an occasional helper-participant, and his wonderful presence with children added a lot to the sessions he attended.

Nima Naimi, a local Baha’i youth, very kindly offered his service as my assistant once the group started to expand. He was utterly faithful in his attendance, and the children found it really cool to have a youth – not a boring adult! – showing interest in their moral and spiritual development.

Thanks to all the children, junior youth and youth who attended (in those days, we hadn’t thought of separate sessions for youth), and to their parents who gave so much time driving people up and down so they could attend sessions.

Sincere thanks to the Children’s Education Committee (Montreal), the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of Montreal, the Quebec Baha’i Council, Institute Board and the National Literature Committee for their encouragement.

Respectful thanks to Linda Kavelin Popov for her incredible resources, *The Family Virtues Guide* and *Sacred Moments*. Also to the Ruhi Foundation’s *Drawing on the Power of the Word*, which initially inspired me to write materials for children in the First World.

Thanks to Fariba Mottahedeh for her beautiful cover art, and my dear friend Navid Naimi (Nima’s mother!) who did a massive on-line search for the perfect quotations, meditations and opening prayers. I could not have completed this project without you both!

Finally, as always, my love and thanks to my long-suffering husband, Rob Collins, who, though not a Baha’i (or anything else for that matter), has been a faithful friend of the Faith since I became a Baha’i in 1995. He watched in bemusement as our living room was transformed into a neighbourhood classroom every two weeks or so, and calmly accepted droves of joyful and excited (read “rather loud” and “occasionally messy”!) young people into our home on a regular basis. God will bless you, Rob, whether you believe that or not!

Before you start, you will need...

Please note: This is a wish-list. If you do not have easy access to some or even many of these items, don't worry. You can start something wonderful with the simplest of supplies. Gather more as you go along; ask parents to lend or donate toys, games and books etc. Each child will need her/his own *Light Upon Light* book. This will be sent home after each session to show parents and siblings what was done in the session.

For opening prayers and to create a spiritual atmosphere in the room:

- Candle in child-safe container, matches (light for opening prayers under strict supervision, of course)
- Small table and beautiful tablecloth (for prayer books, candle etc.)
- Fresh or dried flowers or a pot plant or other attractive centrepiece for the table
- Children's and adult prayer books (from as many faiths as possible)
- Spiritual-sounding music (classical, meditational, etc.) for background music before and during opening prayers and meditation
- Small framed photograph of 'Abdu'l-Baha, if you like

For crafts:

- Table and chairs or low table and cushions to work at
- Koki pens/Pencil crayons
- Glitter/glitter glue

For games and free play:

- Books
- Stuffed animals
- Lego or other construction-type toys
- Toy cars, dolls
- Hoola-hoop, jump rope, basketball, skateboard, etc. (Ask children to bring their own)
- Board games
- Playing cards
- Art supplies (suitable for self-directed projects during free play time)

For role plays:

- Dress-up clothes: hats, scarves, shawls, etc.
- Simple props (e.g. a cardboard box; a sheet.)

For refreshments:

- Plastic or paper cups and plates, napkins