

The Light of Unity



A NEWSLETTER ABOUT THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

Vol. 1 Issue 2

"So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth." — Bahá'u'lláh

The Foundation For The Education Of Children

The Station of Motherhood

Childhood was once thought to be a period of innocence and purity; yet, it seems that each passing day brings a new story of violence and tragedy among our children and youth.

School shootings, and other acts that shock the conscience, continue to occur. No end appears in sight. In the face of these problems, we may feel helpless. Is there anything we can do to change these patterns?

This is certainly a very complex problem, and there is no simple solution. However, a critical part of a solution has to be more effective education of our children. Effective education is not simply the teaching of reading, writing, and arithmetic, but more importantly the instruction on character, morals, and spiritual values.

Character education in schools has been increasingly emphasized in recent years, but it must be asked whether such education needs to start much earlier in order for it to be truly effective. According to the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, the answer is a definite "yes." Such moral education begins, of course, with the family and, in particular, the parents.

Although both father and mother must play their part in instilling spiritual values, according to the Bahá'í teachings, the mother plays a unique role.

The Bahá'í Faith teaches that mothers must be honored and their station must be recognized and respected.

(see *Station of Motherhood*, Page 2)



The House of Worship of the Bahá'í Faith in North America, located in Wilmette, Illinois. To see the House of Worship *Live on the Internet*, visit: <http://www.us.bahai.org>

A Spiritual Springtime: The Bahá'í Fast and New Year Celebration

For Bahá'ís throughout the country and the world, New Year's Day comes on March 21st. This special day is preceded by a period of fasting, one of the most important times of the year for Bahá'ís.

Each day, for nineteen consecutive days, Bahá'ís fast between the hours of sunrise and sunset. This fasting consists of refraining from food and drink. (Those who are physically unable because of age, illness, pregnancy, and other reasons are exempt.)

The period of the fast is seen by Bahá'ís as a time to bring one's self to account, a sort of spiritual "spring cleaning" at the close of each Bahá'í year in preparation for the new year to come.

Fasting is a part of various religious traditions. For example, Moses fasted for forty days. Jesus also fasted, and early Christians followed his example. Muslims observe a fasting period.

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Station of Motherhood (con't from Page 1)

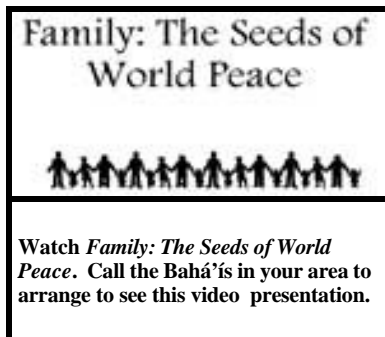
Though both parents are responsible for the education and rearing of their children, mothers have a special spiritual station as the first teachers of the children, a station which is greatly exalted in the sight of God: "O ye loving mothers, know ye that in God's sight, the best of all ways to worship Him is to educate the children and train them in all the perfections of humankind; and no nobler deed than this can be imagined."

Why is the mother's role so important? The mother "is the first educator of the child. Her attitude, her prayers, even what she eats and her physical condition have a great influence on the child when it is still in womb. When the child is born, it is she who has been endowed by God with the milk which is the first food designed for it, and it is intended that, if possible, she should be with the baby to train and nurture it in its earliest days and months."

What should mothers bestow upon their children? The Bahá'í writings state that the "root cause of wrongdoing is ignorance, and we must therefore hold fast to the tools of perception and knowledge. Good character must be taught. Light must be spread afar, so that, in the school of humanity, all may acquire the heavenly characteristics of the spirit."

According to the Bahá'í scriptures, timing is crucial in the education and training of children, and mothers must exert their efforts from the earliest time of the child's life: "when the bough is green and tender it will grow in whatever way ye train it. Therefore it is incumbent upon the mothers to rear their little ones even as a gardener tendeth his young plants."

Once a child has grown past puberty, it becomes extremely difficult to change his or her character. The Bahá'í Writings state that, "Therefore it is in early childhood that a firm foundation must be laid. While the branch is green and tender it can easily be made straight."



In sum, the Bahá'í beliefs state that mothers occupy a very important spiritual station because of the great impact they can have in instilling moral values in children. Recognizing and honoring this station is the foundation for raising spiritually-grounded children for today and the future.

Making a Difference For Women's Rights

Layli Miller Bashir is making a difference. It has been nearly five years since Layli stepped forward as a law student to help a young woman from being deported to her homeland of Togo, where the woman feared a forced marriage and genital mutilation — common burdens to young women of that country.

Since then, Layli has gone on to found an international organization, the Tahirih Justice Center, that deals with the largely untouched areas of women's immigration rights. Layli has based the organization on the Bahá'í principles of justice and the equality of men and women.

Nearly 30 attorneys from several firms have donated their legal services to the justice center. About 220 people have been helped by the organization in the past year, and many of their cases are breaking new ground in the area of human rights. The center has been consulted by many groups — from CNN to the White House — for its expertise on human rights issues.

Recently, a senior presidential advisor met with Layli and others to discuss the oppression of women in war-torn Afghanistan. "I had always known that there were divine forces at work in the world and in my own personal life," says Layli, "but my experiences with the center have caused me to appreciate the power of God in a whole new and much more meaningful way."

The organization's main focus is on the use of immigration and other foreign policy law to help women resist gender-based injustice. Its clients include individuals from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin and Central America. Cases in the past year have involved protection from political reprisal and child abduction, as well as violence against women.

The center attempts to realize Bahá'u'lláh's vision of justice and equality for women around the world, while integrating Bahá'í administrative principles into the organization's management. These include prayer, consultation, and a spirit of service, which give the center a special strength and resilience.

Layli is putting her faith into action and is making a difference.

Spiritual Springtime (con't from Page 1)

Although practiced by some today, fasting has become an uncommon practice in current American culture. In the land of plenty, fasting is often regarded with suspicion — a strange custom associated with the asceticism's of a bygone age. According to the Bahá'í teachings, the purpose of fasting, however, is not to inflict pain, but to increase awareness.

“Fasting is a symbol,” explain the Bahá'í Writings: “mere abstention from food has no effect on the spirit.” Material fasting — abstaining from food or drink — is simply a reminder of the true spiritual fasting ...”

After the period of the fast, Bahá'ís seek to enter the new year with a revitalized and transformed spirit.

Human nature is a creation both material and spiritual, according to Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet of the Bahá'í Faith. Dishonesty, cruelty, and injustice are all the products of an untrained and uncontrolled material nature. On the other hand, love and mercy, truth and justice are qualities that reflect our higher spiritual nature.

Our greatest challenge is to grapple with our own dual nature and to give the reins of control to that which is most noble within us: our spiritual nature. Bahá'u'lláh writes, “man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement.

True loss is for him whose days have been spent in utter ignorance of his self.”

At the heart of it all is the human heart — that essential mystery at the core of our being, which, in

the sight of God, has neither color nor gender nor social rank — only purity. Bahá'u'lláh, as God's Messenger, writes, “All that is in heaven and earth I have ordained for thee, except the human heart, which I have made the habitation of My beauty and glory....”

The candle of thine heart is lighted by the hand of My power, quench it not with the contrary winds of self and passion.”

Every change, great or small, begins with the human heart. If we wish to change the world, it is the heart we must first transform.

Fasting is a tool in that transformation — not a deprivation, but a gift. We use it to overcome the tyranny of our lower material nature, whose “selfish passions” generate so much of the world's hatred and pain.

Featured Devotions from the Bahá'í Scriptures

In each issue of *The Light of Unity*, select prayers and devotional passages from the Bahá'í Scriptures are presented. The focus of this issue is the unity of humankind, the central principle of the Bahá'í Faith.

“All humanity are the children of God; they belong to the same family, to the same original race.... This signifies that racial assumption and distinction are nothing but superstition. In the estimate of God there are no English, French, Germans, Turkish or Persians. All these in the presence of God are equal; they are of one race and creation; God did not make these divisions. These distinctions have had their origin in man himself. Therefore, as they are against the plan and purpose of reality, they are false and imaginary. We are of one physical race, even as we are of one physical plan of material body — each endowed with two eyes, two ears, one head, two feet.”

(Promulgation of Universal Peace)



(see **Featured Devotions**, Page 4)

Featured Devotions (con't from Page 3)

“O Children of Men! Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest. Such is My counsel to you, O concourse of light! Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory.”

(Hidden Words # 68)



“O my God! O my God! Unite the hearts of Thy servants, and reveal to them Thy great purpose. May they follow Thy commandments and abide in Thy law. Help them, O God, in their endeavor, and grant them strength to serve Thee. O God! Leave them not to themselves, but guide their steps by the light of Thy knowledge, and cheer their hearts by Thy love. Verily, Thou art their Helper and their Lord.”

(Bahá'í Prayers)



“Truthfulness is the foundation of all the virtues of the world of humanity. Without truthfulness, progress and success in all of the worlds of God are impossible for a soul. When this holy attribute is established in man, all the divine qualities will also become realized.”

(Baha'i World Faith)

“O Thou kind Lord! Thou hast created all humanity from the same stock. Thou hast decreed that all shall belong to the same household. In Thy Holy Presence they are all Thy servants, and all mankind are sheltered beneath Thy Tabernacle; all have gathered together at Thy Table of Bounty; all are illumined through the light of Thy Providence.

O God! Thou art kind to all, Thou hast provided for all, dost shelter all, conferrest life upon all. Thou hast endowed each and all with talents and faculties, and all are submerged in the Ocean of Thy Mercy.

O Thou kind Lord! Unite all. Let the religions agree and make the nations one, so that they may see each other as one family and the whole earth as one home. May they all live together in perfect harmony.

O God! Raise aloft the banner of the oneness of mankind.

O God! Establish the Most Great Peace.

Cement Thou, O God, the hearts together.

O Thou kind Father, God! Gladden our hearts through the fragrance of Thy love. Brighten our eyes through the Light of Thy Guidance. Delight our ears with the melody of Thy Word, and shelter us all in the Stronghold of Thy Providence.

Thou art the Mighty and Powerful, Thou art the Forgiving and Thou art the One Who overlooketh the shortcomings of all mankind.”

(Promulgation of Universal Peace)



The Light of Unity is a monthly newsletter that discusses the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. It is offered for free to those who would like to learn about the Bahá'í Faith. There is no obligation. Those wishing to receive a free subscription should write to: *The Light of Unity*, [address], or email us at
