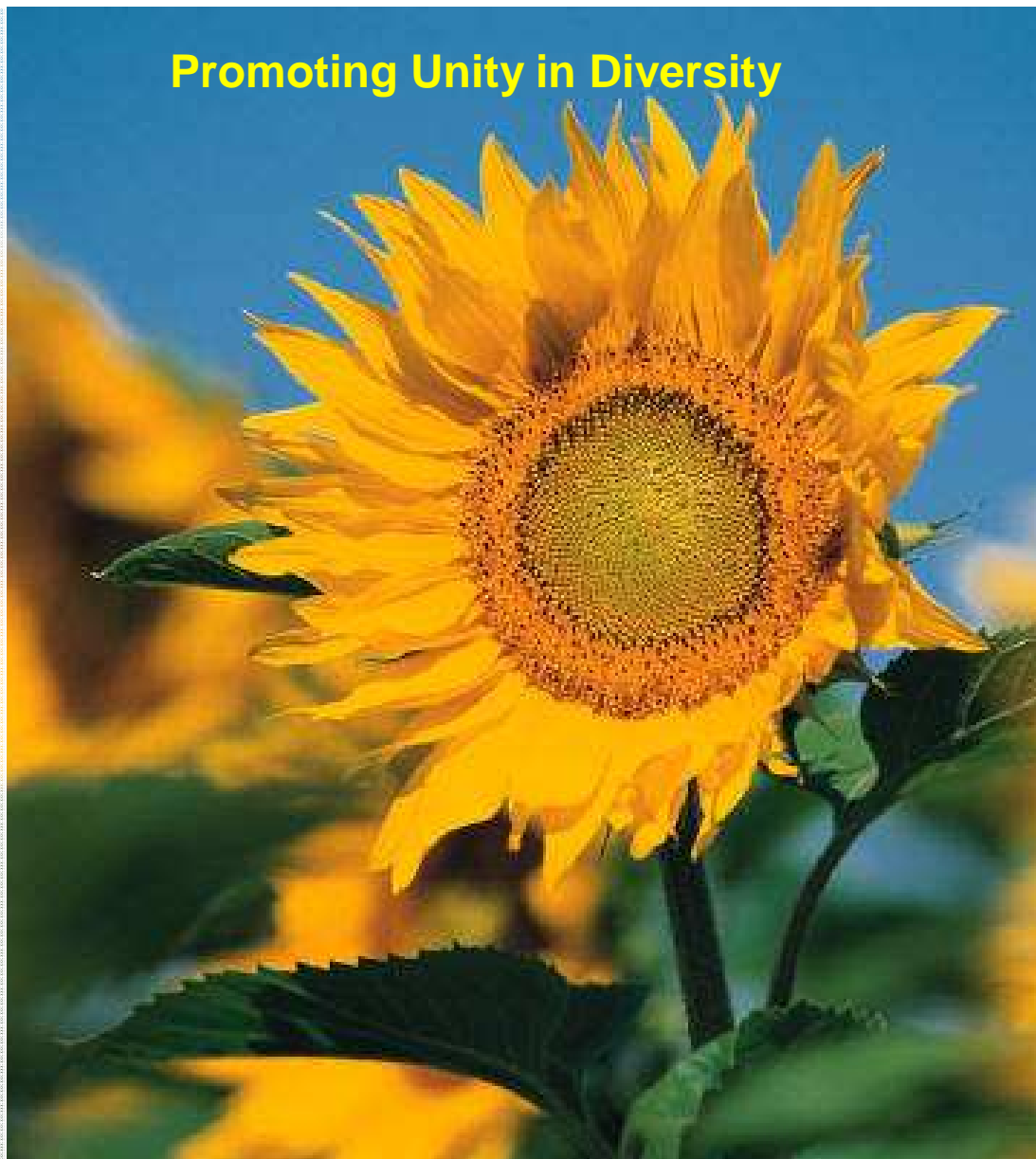


A Bahá'í Curriculum

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Promoting Unity in Diversity

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This curriculum is based on Edexcel specifications, and is offered as preparation material for pupils sitting GCSE exams in RE studies for the Bahá'í Faith. For edexcel specification contact their web site <http://www.edexcel.org.uk>

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Introduction

This document provides some of the resources required by RE teachers planning to teach the Bahá'í Faith to pupils sitting RE exams for key stages 3 and 4 based on Edexcel's specifications.

In 2003 QCA policy on RE studies was changed to be more inclusive. This allows teaching of the Bahá'í Faith. Edexcel's accreditation from QCA and its own policy equally allow teaching of the Bahá'í Faith at schools and for pupils to sit exams on this subject.

This document is based upon Edexcel's specifications for RE studies.

We warmly invite you to use this material and welcome you to send any suggestions for the improvement of this document to the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Brent.

Any information on Edexcel can be obtained from the following website:
www.edexcel.org.uk

Historical Facts about the Bahá'í Faith

The Bahá'í Faith was born out of the Bábí Faith and it would be impossible to consider a history of one without the other. The Prophet-Founder of the Bábí Faith was a young merchant from Shiraz (a city in the south of Iran). At the age of 25, he declared that he was a Messenger from God, the twelfth Imam and the Qa'im that the Shi'ah sect of Islam was expecting. The main teachings of the Báb were very straightforward. His title - The Báb - is an Arabic word which means 'The Gate'. This was exactly what he claimed to be: the gate to a second Messenger who was to follow him and bring a new Message from God, which would result in the birth of a world civilisation.



The House of the Báb in Shiraz

During the next six years, over 20,000 followers joined the new religion. Many people were extremely disturbed by the rising popularity of this young man. To the Shi'ah Muslim clergy, the claims of the Báb were not only a heresy, but a serious threat to the distribution of power within the country. Many of his followers were tortured, imprisoned and killed in attempts to get rid of his religion. The Báb was arrested by the Prime Minister and transferred from one prison to another. He was finally executed by a firing squad in the year 1850 at the age of only 31.

A young nobleman known as Bahá'u'lláh had accepted the Báb's teachings. Bahá'u'lláh is an Arabic word meaning 'The Glory of God'. In yet another wave of persecution which took place in 1852, Bahá'u'lláh was tortured and imprisoned in a notorious underground dungeon called the 'Black Pit' in Tehran. It was in this dark, rat-infested place that God first revealed to Bahá'u'lláh that he was the second Messenger foretold by the Báb. Bahá'u'lláh had very little sleep due to such awful

conditions, but when he did manage to find some rest he underwent mystical experiences. He said:

I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast even as a mighty torrent that precipitated itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf)

He described this experience as a rushing stream of water which falls down the side of a mountain. Every part of his body felt as if it was on fire. On one such night Bahá'u'lláh had a dream. He seemed to hear voices coming from every side and these were the words he heard:

Verily, we shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy pen. Grieve Thou not for that which hath befallen Thee, neither be Thou afraid, for Thou art in safety. Erelong will God raise up the treasures of the earth - men who will aid Thee through Thyself and through Thy name.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf)

Bahá'u'lláh survived his imprisonment, but on his release he and his family were banished from Persia and sent to Baghdad. From there the authorities exiled them to Turkey, and eventually in 1868 sent them to the prison-city of Akka in present-day Israel (what was then Palestine).



Map showing the stages in Bahá'u'lláh's exile

All the time that Bahá'u'lláh was in various prisons or under house arrest, he was not allowed to mix freely with people. Since Bahá'u'lláh did not have the opportunity to teach his Faith openly, he wrote down his teachings and spread God's new Message through letters. Many of the original letters have been collected and are kept at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel. For the first time in the history of humanity, religious teachings have been written down by the Messenger of God Himself. There

can be no argument about what he said or did not say, because everything was written down by Bahá'u'lláh himself or dictated to a secretary before being approved and signed by him.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote about God and His plan for this day and age, and how this linked with the Messengers of the past. He revealed prayers and passages for private meditation. He dealt with daily life and laws of personal conduct. Bahá'u'lláh sent a very important set of letters to the rulers of the great European powers, who, because of their capacity to manufacture weapons and the power they exercised in their colonies, controlled the fate of so much of the world. He told them to lay down their weapons and concentrate their efforts on bettering the conditions of their subjects rather than building up military might.

Bahá'u'lláh clearly stated in his Will that after his passing the Bahá'ís were to turn to his son 'Abdu'l-Bahá for guidance and clarification on his teachings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá appointed his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, to succeed him. After Shoghi Effendi's death, the Universal House of Justice was elected to look after the affairs of the Bahá'ís. This institution had been mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh in his writings, and he had given it the authority to legislate on any matters not revealed in his writings. Because the line of successorship is so clear, the Bahá'í Faith has remained intact and has not split into sects.



'Abdu'l-Bahá as a young man.

The Bahá'í Faith

Section A1. Believing in God

Bahá'ís believe that the universe and the forces and creatures in it were created by one supernatural Being whom we call God. Although we may have different ideas about God's nature, although we may pray to Him in different languages and refer to Him by different names, we are speaking about the same Being. Bahá'u'lláh taught that God's essence is unknowable. In the same way as a painting cannot understand its painter, we cannot understand our Creator. We can, however, know His Will through His Prophets' teachings, and feel His love and compassion. We can come to see the effects of His wisdom and mercy in peoples' lives, and we can see His beauty in the natural world. The majesty of the mountains, the force of a waterfall, and the wonder of conception and birth are all signs of God in nature, but we can never understand God.

Religious Experiences

Upbringing

It is the parents' responsibility to educate their children, both spiritually and academically. Bahá'í children are taught prayers from an early age.

O God, guide me, protect me, illumine the lamp of my heart and make me a brilliant star. Thou art the mighty and the powerful.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá)

Many Bahá'í families organise regular children's class in their homes. These classes are open to children of all Faiths or none and teach basic morals. The classes encourage children to develop spiritual qualities such as tolerance, kindness and patience. As the children get older, the curriculum broadens to include the history and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith and the other major world Faiths. In addition, Bahá'í children and their friends can attend residential Bahá'í schools during the school holidays.

Bahá'í families make every effort to attend regular community gatherings, called Nineteen Day Feasts, which are held once every Bahá'í month. Children are encouraged to take an active role in all sections of the Feast.

The years between 12 and 15 are seen as a particularly formative time during which young people benefit from guidance to help them explore the meaning of life and their place in the world. A young Bahá'í is considered spiritually mature at the age of 15. At this stage, she or he can decide whether or not they wish to call themselves a Bahá'í and obey the Bahá'í laws.

Suffering and Evil

Although suffering often brings great pain, the Bahá'í Faith teaches that we grow and develop as individuals when we have to cope with hardships and difficulties.

The mind and spirit of man advance when he is tried by suffering. The more the ground is ploughed the better the seed will grow, the better the harvest will be. Just as the plough furrows the earth deeply, purifying it of weeds and thistles, so suffering and tribulation free man from the petty affairs of this worldly life until he arrives at a state of complete detachment.

(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks)

Suffering is sometimes self-inflicted – the consequence of a wrong action on our part. If this is the case, we should learn from our mistakes. However, people also suffer through no fault of their own. If this is the case, Bahá'ís are encouraged to pray for the strength and patience to overcome their difficulties. Bahá'ís also believe that it is their responsibility to try to tackle the injustices which are the root cause of so much of the suffering in the world.

Bahá'ís have no belief in a person or being known as the Devil. Bahá'u'lláh speaks of the “Satan of self”. We are responsible for our own behaviour and cannot blame them on a supernatural anti-God. In the Bahá'í teachings, evil is the absence of good just as darkness is the absence of light. It is our egos that turn us away from the teachings of God.

Miracles

The Bahá'í Faith teaches that the Messengers of God can and do carry out supernatural acts or ‘miracles’. However, miracles are not considered to be important proofs of a Faith because, at best, they might only convince the people who actually see them.

Yes, miracles are proofs for the eyewitness only, and even he may regard them not as a miracle but as an enchantment. Extraordinary feats have also been related of some conjurors.

(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions)

The Founders of the world's religions achieved the greatest miracle of all by changing people's hearts and transforming society.

The Bahá'í Faith and Other Religions

Bahá'ís believe that the Founders of the world's great religions have all come from God, and that the teachings which they brought are all part of a single divine plan. Each different Faith is like another chapter in the same book. If we look at the

original teachings of the great Prophets, there are many common themes. They all condemn murder, lying, cheating, dishonesty and so on, while telling their followers to love God, to love other people, to be selfless and trustworthy.

One reason for differences between the Faiths may be that the followers of religions tend to add ideas to the original message. Arguments start over how to interpret and apply the teachings. Eventually the religion splits into various sects, each with its own version of the 'truth'.

A second reason revolves around the fact that the world's great religions have come at different times to different societies. Abraham's message was given to a nomadic family group, whereas Bahá'u'lláh addressed a world in the grips of the industrial revolution. Because of this, there are bound to be differences. Bahá'ís believe that the social teachings of a Faith are suited to the needs of the society to which they are given and so they vary from religion to religion. Bahá'ís believe in and accept all the great Messengers of the past. They believe that Bahá'u'lláh is the latest Messenger from God and that he has brought social teachings which are suited to our present civilisation. Bahá'ís expect God to send another Messenger in the fullness of time.

Section A2. Matters of Life and Death

The Beginning of Life

Bahá'ís believe in the existence of an immortal soul or spirit. Life begins at the time of conception. In the Bahá'í writings life is described as a never-ending process of spiritual development. Progress comes about through meeting and overcoming the daily struggles of life. When that person becomes an adult they have to take responsibility for their own moral and spiritual progress.

Life After Death

When our bodies die, Bahá'ís believe that the individual's soul continues to grow and develop in a spiritual after-life. However we cannot imagine or understand the next life. It is as hard for us to imagine the next world as it is for a child developing in its mother's womb to imagine the world it will enter at birth.

The nature of the soul after death can never be described, nor is it meet and permissible to reveal its whole character to the eyes of men. ...The world beyond is as different from this world as this world is different from that of the child while still in the womb of its mother.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings)

'Heaven' and 'Hell' are conditions of the soul, not physical places. Closeness to God is heaven, remoteness from God may be likened to hell, but we continue to make progress in the next world. We can and should pray for those who have passed on, and there are special prayers for the departed for this purpose. We are aware of what we have done on this earth the moment we die and our joy or apprehension depends on our faith and our deeds. Infants who die are specially protected by God.

These infants are under the shadow of the favour of God; and as they have not committed any sin, and are not soiled with the impurities of the world of nature, they are the centres of the manifestation of bounty, and the Eye of Compassion will be turned upon them.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions)

Souls continue to be aware of each other in the next world and Bahá'í marriage is for eternity. People who claim no belief in God but who live a good life and perform good deeds will progress in the next world as they have learnt lessons and developed skills which are needed there.

Abortion

There is nothing explicitly stated in the Bahá'í scriptures regarding abortion. However, the Universal House of Justice has explained that, given the Bahá'í belief that life begins at conception, it is absolutely forbidden for a woman to have an abortion merely for the purposes of birth control, but there may be medical reasons for which an abortion might be justified. At the present time the whole matter is left to the consciences of those concerned, who must carefully weigh the medical advice in the light of the general guidance given in the Bahá'í teachings.

Euthanasia

There is nothing specifically mentioned about euthanasia in the Bahá'í scriptures. Suicide is forbidden because God is the Author of all life and alone can take it away. The purpose of life is to teach us spiritual lessons, so we should not end our own life prematurely. Caring for another person, far from being a burden, may bring spiritual benefits to the carer.

Section A3. Marriage and the Family

Bahá'ís believe that marriage is a spiritual and social pact between a man and a woman and that the family is the basic unit of society. Bahá'u'lláh encouraged people to marry and taught that they should be completely faithful to one another. Bahá'ís believe that sex should be restricted to marriage between a man and a woman, and that its main purpose is to produce children. Therefore sex before marriage, adultery and promiscuity are all forbidden.

Similarly, sexual relations between people of the same sex are contrary to the Bahá'í teachings. Individuals who feel they have a homosexual orientation are welcome to become Bahá'ís, but they should not practice homosexual sex.

The partners and their parents must give their full and free consent to the marriage. Bahá'ís can choose a partner from any religious or racial background. There are no specific rituals associated with the marriage ceremony. It can take any form that the couple wishes as long as the following marriage vow is taken:

We will all, verily, abide by the will of God.

The purpose of marriage is for the couple to build a loving home, open to friends and strangers alike. They should bring up their children to be spiritual and to serve humanity. Marriage is regarded as sacred. If differences of opinion occur between the couple, they should consult honestly together and try to resolve their problems. Divorce is allowed but should only be considered when the situation is intolerable.



Section A4. Social Harmony

The Roles of Men and Women

The equality of women and men is an extremely important teaching of the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'u'lláh stressed that women are just as capable as men in all aspects of life. The reason that they have not achieved as much as men is due to a lack of education and opportunity and because they have been dominated by men. Men, on the other hand, have suffered because they have not been encouraged to develop the more feminine aspects of their personalities such as the ability to care for others, patience, sympathy, and compassion.

The world in the past has been ruled by force and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the scales are already shifting, force is losing its weight, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals, or to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilisation will be more properly balanced.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Star of the West, volume 8)

The oppression of women is one of the great injustices in the world. World peace will not be possible until women are given equal rights with men.

Social Harmony

The oneness of humankind is a basic Bahá'í principle. This means that we are all members of one human race and that we are of equal worth. Physical differences are superficial and have nothing to do with any supposed superiority of one ethnic or social group over another. All ideas of one group of people being 'better than'

another are rejected by Bahá'ís as being the result of ignorance. Bahá'u'lláh's message aims to bring about a universal consciousness where there will be close ties among all the peoples of the world. Bahá'u'lláh says that:

It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings)

Once people recognise the oneness of humankind, they will also recognise the unity of the nations of the world, the need for a world government, and realise that eventually a planetary civilisation will come into being.

...the object of life to a Bahá'í is to promote the oneness of mankind. The whole object of our lives is bound up with the lives of all human beings; not a personal salvation we are seeking, but a universal one..... Our aim is to produce a world civilisation which will in turn react on the character of the individual.

(Shoghi Effendi, message to the Bahá'í youth, 1948)

The Bahá'í way of looking at unity does not mean that we all have to be the same. We cannot achieve unity by suppressing the differences among us. People will always vary in their tastes, habits, personalities, cultures and so on. Whether or not we allow these differences to create problems depends on our attitudes. If we respect each other's cultures, then our differences can add richness and variation to our lives. If we are intolerant and prejudiced then differences can become a source of friction.



A group of Bahá'ís from all over the world

Wealth and Poverty

The unity of mankind taught by Bahá'u'lláh is a unity which must be based on justice and fairness for all the peoples of the world. A cause of much injustice in the world today is the fact that there are huge extremes of wealth on the one hand and poverty on the other. Bahá'u'lláh said that economic injustice is a moral evil and as such is condemned by God.

When we see poverty allowed to reach a condition of starvation, it is a sure sign that somewhere we shall find tyranny.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Paris Talks)

Although Bahá'u'lláh accepted the idea of people owning their own home and the need for private enterprise, he recommended the use of profit sharing in the economy. People's earnings should be placed within limits. Everyone should have a basic standard of living but it should be impossible to accumulate vast and unnecessary wealth.

The Bahá'í Faith teaches that all wealth ultimately comes from God. We can enjoy it but should not become attached to it. Bahá'ís are called upon to pay a certain sum called Huqúqu'lláh (the Right of God) to the Head of the Faith. This involves voluntarily donating 19% of their annual profits. This money is used to support charitable projects, and is a mechanism for redistributing wealth.

By Hassan Afnan and Parvin Afnan