

Educational endeavours and the training institute – *Workshop material*

The importance of education to a Bahá'í conception of spiritual and social transformation can hardly be overestimated. “Consider”, Bahá'u'lláh states, “the revelation of the light of the Name of God, the Educator. Behold, how in all things the evidences of such a revelation are manifest, how the betterment of all beings dependeth upon it.” The significance of education in the work of community building is unmistakable, and in the field of social action the provision of education remains the signature contribution of Bahá'ís in most parts of the world. Pre-eminent among the structures and agencies created by the Bahá'í world to offer education is, of course, the training institute. Indeed, the network of national and regional training institutes operating with such proficiency around the globe is among the choicest fruits of the previous series of global Plans. Building capacity for service within communities by enabling ever-increasing numbers of individuals to benefit from the institute process will continue to be a central feature of the Plans in the present series. The capacity for community development that has already emerged, represented by hundreds of thousands of individuals who are able to serve as tutors, animators, or children's class teachers, is a resource of historic consequence.

When we first introduced the concept of the training institute, it was in the context of the need to raise up human resources to take on the tasks of expansion and consolidation. At this juncture, when a new series of Plans has just begun, we invite you to take a more expansive view. Increasingly, participation in institute courses is preparing the friends of God for an ever deeper engagement in the life of the wider community; it is endowing them with the knowledge, insights, and skills that enable them to contribute not only to the process of developing their own community, but to the progress of society. In short, the institute is a potent means for the society-building power of the Faith to find release.

...Appreciating the effectiveness of the institute process, every follower of Bahá'u'lláh will feel a desire to contribute to its advancement in some way - not least, the Bahá'í youth. Institutes know well that releasing the potential possessed by young people is, for them, a sacred charge; we now ask that Bahá'í youth view the future development of the institute in the very same light. At the vanguard of a nine-year, community-wide endeavour to bring the institute to a higher level of functioning, we expect to see a broad movement of youth setting the standard. They should seize every opportunity - in their schools and universities, and in spaces dedicated to work, family, or social interaction - to encourage more and more souls to benefit from the institute's programmes. Some youth will be able to devote a period of service - perhaps even successive years - to the provision of education, especially to those younger than themselves; for many, support for the institute's activities will be an ever-present dimension of their lives throughout their own education and as they seek a livelihood from their calling in this world; but for none should it be anything less than a cherished commitment.

(Universal House of Justice, 30th Dec 2021)

The Bahá'í community is engaging with indigenous populations and other groups of people across the globe in an unfolding discourse centred on spiritual and social transformation. The training institute has proven to be a most effective instrument in this process - a process that has far-reaching implications; it carries with it an invitation to a higher consciousness of the purpose for which every individual human being was created. It implies a fundamental re-orienting of a soul towards its Creator, an awakening to the personal and social implications of the Guardian's statement that Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is calling into being “a new race of men”, a wholehearted dedication of one's talents and abilities to the attainment of that day when, the Blessed Beauty assures us, “all men

shall be regarded as one soul". The efflorescence of those talents and abilities and their channelling into specific acts of service is a goal that the training institute aspires to achieve.

The implications at the level of society are no less profound than those at the individual level. "All men" Bahá'u'lláh asserts, "have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization." This, rather than the mere accumulation of religious converts, is the elevated goal towards which all our efforts in the teaching field are directed. The central purpose of the training institute process is to raise up human resources who can contribute to this objective. In countless instances, including amongst indigenous populations, participants of the institute process, whether veteran Bahá'ís or those only recently acquainted with the Faith, have testified to the efficacy of the institute courses in opening their eyes to both a new conception of spiritual reality and its implications for the creation of a new civilization as well as empowering them to become an agent of the renewal society must undergo. The House of Justice is aware that there are numerous souls among the Maori population who not only have the capacity to embrace this vision, but who are ready and eager to work towards its realization.

(Letter dated 23 August 2018 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual)

This exploration of the centrality of education to a community founded on Bahá'í principles would be incomplete without a further observation. Shoghi Effendi has laid great stress on the importance of striving, through "constant endeavour", to obtain "a more adequate understanding of the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation". The training institute has no parallel as an instrument for the systematic exposure of limitless numbers of souls to the life-giving waters of the Revelation and the inexhaustible meaning of the Word of God. But the friends' efforts to increase their understanding of the Faith and its teachings are of course not limited to participation in the institute process. Indeed, one strong indicator of an institute's effectiveness is the thirst it cultivates within those who engage with its materials to continue to study the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh—individually, but also collectively, whether in formal spaces created by the institutions or in more informal settings.

(Universal House of Justice, 30th Dec 2021)

Small group discussion:

- 1) In the coming years, the House of Justice invites the friends to take a more expansive view, seeing the institute process not only as a means to enabling large scale expansion & consolidation, but also as a potent means for releasing the society-building power of the Faith. Much will be required during the Nine Year Plan to advance towards this more expansive view. What needs to be done in this respect? What practical steps are involved?
- 2) Understanding that the institute ultimately belongs to the community, how are the friends in your cluster taking greater ownership of it? How can they nurture in more friends the "desire to contribute to its advancement"? In what ways can your community expand the delivery of the institute courses, particularly in terms of the flow into and through the main sequence of courses, including the higher courses?
- 3) How can youth be assisted to "view the future development of the institute" as a sacred charge?
- 4) Understanding the importance of education in all its forms, how can we encourage the further exploration of the Revelation, both formally, through courses arranged by various institutions, and informally, through individual or collective initiative?