**Summer School BE180**

**Theme 3, session1: A Universal Education System for all ages**

**Part One:** **The centrality of education to the transformative processes.**

*Read through the first two paragraphs and share any insights gained. Then discuss the questions that follow.*

“Bahá’u’lláh states that “the purpose for which mortal men have, from utter nothingness, stepped into the realm of being, is that they may work for the betterment of the world and live together in concord and harmony.” He has revealed teachings that make this possible. Building a society that consciously pursues this collective purpose is the work of not only this generation, but of many generations to come, and Bahá’u’lláh’s followers welcome all who labour alongside them in this undertaking. It means learning how to raise up vibrant, outward-looking communities; it means those communities learning how to bring about spiritual and material progress; it means learning how to contribute to the discourses that influence the direction of that progress. These areas of endeavour are, naturally, familiar ones. Seen from one perspective, they are quite distinct, each having its own characteristics and imperatives. Yet they all represent ways of awakening the energies latent in the human soul and channelling them towards the betterment of society. Together, they are means of releasing what the Guardian described as “the society-building power” of the Faith. This inherent power possessed by the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh is visible even in the fledgling efforts of a Bahá’í community learning to serve humanity and promote the Word of God. And though the world society foreshadowed in His Revelation is of course far distant, communities that are earnestly learning to apply His teachings to their social reality abound. How immensely blessed are those souls who, alive to the greatness of this Day and the significance of their actions, strive for the emergence of a society shaped by the divine teachings.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

“From the outset, it should be clear to every participant that the courses of the Ruhi Institute trace a path of service to humanity, upon which we each walk at our own pace, assisting and being assisted by others. Treading this path implies the pursuit of a twofold moral purpose: to attend to one's own spiritual and intellectual growth and to contribute to the transformation of society. Progress on the path entails the development of a number of capabilities that require understanding and knowledge, spiritual qualities and praiseworthy attitudes, as well as a host of abilities and skills. The sources of knowledge upon which the books of the Institute draw are, on the one hand, the teachings of the Bahá’í Faith and, on the other, the accumulating experience of the worldwide Bahá’í community and furthering material and spiritual civilization. It is Bahá’u’lláh's vision of the individual we can become and of the civilization we can build that inspires the Institute. It is assumed that all participants, independent of background, are open to embracing this vision, which is explicit in every unit of every book.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

*Questions for discussion:*

1. *Many of you may be familiar with the first course of the Ruhi Institute, Reflections on the Life of the Spirit. Can you share examples/experiences from Book 1 of how Baha’u’llah’s teachings have provided us with the knowledge, qualities and attitudes, skills and abilities, ‘to work for the betterment of the world and live together in concord and harmony?’*
2. *What are the areas of endeavour mentioned in the first paragraph? How is education central to this process of transformation? Can you provide examples from any of the educational programmes?*
3. *What is meant by the twofold moral purpose? How does participating in the institute courses help to raise awareness of this twofold purpose?*

**Part Two: How the institute is the potent instrument to help bring about change.**

*Read through the first two paragraphs and share any insights gained. Then discuss the questions that follow.*

“The accomplishments of the previous series of Plans—particularly the last Five Year Plan—could not have occurred without a tremendous advance in the teaching work. An important dimension of this work is the capacity to engage in conversations on spiritual themes…. where we described how it is developed through participation in institute courses and by gaining practical experience. It is evident that the pattern of activity unfolding at the grassroots opens up a variety of settings in which receptive souls—sometimes whole families or peer groups—can take part in meaningful conversations which awaken interest in the vision of the Faith and the Person of Bahá’u’lláh.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

*Question:*

1. *What important dimension of the teaching work has contributed to its tremendous advancement? How has this capacity been developed?*

“Central to the pattern of action evolving in a cluster is the individual and collective transformation effected through the agency of the Word of God. From the beginning of the sequence of courses, a participant encounters Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation in considering such weighty themes as worship, service to humanity, the life of the soul, and the education of children and youth. As a person cultivates the habit of study and deep reflection upon the Creative Word, this process of transformation reveals itself in an ability to express one’s understanding of profound concepts and to explore spiritual reality in conversations of significance. These capacities are visible not only in the elevated discussions that increasingly characterize interactions within the community, but in the ongoing conversations that reach well beyond—not least between the Bahá’í youth and their peers—extending to include parents whose daughters and sons are benefiting from the community’s programmes of education. Through exchanges of this kind, consciousness of spiritual forces is raised, apparent dichotomies yield to unexpected insights, a sense of unity and common calling is fortified, confidence that a better world can be created is strengthened, and a commitment to action becomes manifest. Such distinctive conversations gradually attract ever-larger numbers to take part in a range of community activities. Themes of faith and certitude surface naturally, prompted by the receptivity and experiences of those involved. What is clear, then, is that as the institute process in a cluster gains momentum, the act of teaching comes to assume greater prominence in the lives of the friends.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

*Question:*

1. *From the above paragraph, describe “the individual and collective transformation effected through the agency of the Word of God.” What is the connection between the influence of the Creative Word and conversations of significance? How does this lead to raising consciousness of spiritual forces and attracting ever-larger numbers to take part in a range of community activities?*
2. *What other capacities are developed when individuals participate in institute courses? Are there any examples/experiences that can be shared?*

“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.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

“Over the past few decades, the Baha’i community has succeeded in establishing a very special kind of institution of learning in practically every country of the world. These institutes, which is how we refer to them, offer courses that strengthen our capabilities to serve the community. By studying these courses, we gain the spiritual insights and the practical skills needed to move forward on the path of service together. As we advance through them, our capacity to carry out increasingly complex acts of service grows. All along, we are accompanied by those who are more experienced than we are and in time, we naturally come to accompany friends with less experience. From this start, we are all protagonists of personal and social transformation, eagerly assuming responsibility for our own learning and for service to the community.

“To be a protagonist” means to have the will to act thoughtfully, to persevere in our endeavours, and to gain and apply knowledge at every step. A protagonist is not a mere passive receiver of benefits but an active contributor to progress. To be a protagonist one must learn to exercise creative and disciplined initiative. The institute courses help us enhance our capacity to be protagonists of the community-building process.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

*Question:*

1. *Think about the types of interactions in which you could introduce some of the ideas from the above paragraphs and reflect on the diverse conversations in which you engage with friends, family members, and acquaintances. Which of the themes, ideas or concepts would you consider introducing or advancing in the context of the educational programmes at the heart of the community-building processes?*

**3.** **How the education system of the institute is seamless from children to junior youth to youth and adults:**

Refer to the story in Session 2 of Day 3.

1. Message dated 30 December 2021 written by the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ruhi Book 1, Reflections on the Life of the Spirit, 2020, page v. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Message dated 30 December 2021 written by the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Message dated 29 December 2015 written by the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Message dated 30 December 2021 written by the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ruhi Book 2, *Arising to Serve*, 2020, page 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)