

## Bahá'í Faith and education

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The theme of education in the Bahá'í Faith is given emphasis. Its literature gives a principle of universal and compulsory education, which is identified as one of key principles alongside monotheism and the unity of humanity.

Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith wrote:

*"Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom."*

Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 161.

The Bahá'í teachings focus on promoting a moral and spiritual education, in addition to the arts, trades, sciences and professions. The emphasis on education is a means for social and national improvement. Since all Bahá'ís have the duty to do work that is useful to humanity, Bahá'í education is meant to prepare Bahá'ís to perform such work.

### Purpose

One purpose of universal compulsory education is implied in the Bahá'í *Short Obligatory Prayer* which states that God's primary reason for creating humanity is so that each of us would come to know and love Him. Clearly one purpose of education would be to facilitate this process.

But religious education, however necessary, should not lead to division and conflict. Bahá'u'lláh writes:



*"Schools must first train the children in the principles of religion, so that the Promise and the Threat recorded in the Books of God may prevent them from the things forbidden and adorn them with the mantle of the commandments; but this in such a measure that it may not injure the children by resulting in ignorant fanaticism and bigotry."*

Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 67.

This principle is most commonly applied by Bahá'ís in the form of social-welfare projects and children's classes. The emphasis on education as a means for social and national improvement is shown in the following quote by `Abdu'l-Bahá, the son and appointed successor of Bahá'u'lláh:

*"The primary, the most urgent requirement is the promotion of education. It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward. The principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples is ignorance. Today the mass of the people are uninformed even as to ordinary affairs, how much less do they grasp the core of the important problems and complex needs of the time."*

`Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 109.

### Moral and spiritual education

The Bahá'í teachings focus on promoting a moral and spiritual education, in addition to the arts, trades, sciences and professions.



*"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-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 135-136.

Children, and the requirement to give them a proper education, is particularly emphasized in many of the Bahá'í writings. Children's classes have become common-place in most Bahá'í communities, and were named by the Universal House of Justice in 2001 as one of the four core activities that Bahá'ís should focus on.

### A useful trade or profession

All Bahá'ís have the duty to do work that is useful to humanity. A major goal of Bahá'í education is therefore to prepare Bahá'ís to perform such work.

This is by no means the only goal (as the categories above and below indicate), or even necessarily the overriding one, but Bahá'ís are warned against courses of study which "begin and end in words":



*"The learned of the day must direct the people to acquire those branches of knowledge which are of use, that both the learned themselves and the generality of mankind may derive benefits therefrom. Such academic pursuits as begin and end in words alone have never been and will never be of any worth. The majority of Persia's learned doctors devote all their lives to the study of a philosophy the ultimate yield of which is nothing but words."*

Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*  
Revealed after the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 169.

## Responsibility

The father is attributed with the responsibility for every child's education and should he fail to execute his responsibility to educate his children he can be compelled and even lose his rights as father. Mothers are acknowledged as the "first educators" of humanity, and their responsibility is equally confirmed. Beyond this, responsibility also falls to the community as a whole, as embodied in its Bahá'í institutions:

*"Among the sacred obligations devolving upon the Spiritual Assemblies is the promotion of learning, the establishing of schools and creation of the necessary academic equipment and facilities for every boy and girl."*

From a letter dated 8 June 1925 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Persia.

In the unfortunate event that parents and/or their communities cannot educate all their children, Bahá'í law stipulates that girls are to be given priority over boys.

## Environmental factors

Abdu'l-Bahá wrote about school uniforms, cleanliness and courtesy:

*"As to the organization of the schools: If possible the children should all wear the same kind of clothing, even if the fabric is varied. It is preferable that the fabric as well should be uniform; if, however, this is not possible, there is no harm done. The more cleanly the pupils are, the better; they should be immaculate. The school must be located in a place where the air is delicate and pure. The children must be carefully trained to be most courteous and well-behaved. They must be constantly encouraged and made eager to gain all the summits of human accomplishment, so that from their earliest years they will be taught to have high aims, to conduct themselves well, to be chaste, pure, and undefiled, and will learn to be of powerful resolve and firm of purpose in all things. Let them not jest and trifle, but earnestly advance unto their goals, so that in every situation they will be found resolute and firm."*

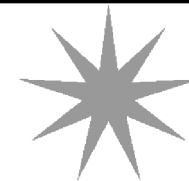
Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 135.

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# Bahá'í Faith

## Education

*The Prophets and Messengers of God have been sent down for the sole purpose of guiding mankind to the straight Path of Truth. The purpose underlying their revelation hath been to educate all men, that they may, at the hour of death, ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High....*

—Bahá'u'lláh