

Children of the Kingdom: A Bahá'í Approach to Spiritual Parenting

Study Guide

This study guide is intended for small groups of parents to study this book on their own. It is best to go at your own pace and to take the time to fully discuss the book, the quotes, and the questions. It is also important to feel free to share your experiences and ideas with others in the group. We should remember that we are all here to help each other become better parents and to learn new ways to raise our children spiritually. Please read the pages out loud and let everyone take turns reading. And please remember that everyone's thoughts, feelings, and opinions are important.

To begin, start with a prayer, and then let everyone introduce themselves, tell something about themselves and their children, and share why they want to learn about the spiritual education of children.

Quote on Love

Read this beautiful quote by 'Abdu'l-Bahá together and share your thoughts about it. Does one sentence speak to you more than the others?

Preface

Read the Preface together and talk about it. Next, please share with the group how you chose the names of your children and what these names mean. Then share what religion you were raised with as a child and how it must feel to raise a child in a religion that you were not brought up with. And then answer these questions: What does the phrase "*Love is heaven's kindly light*" mean to you? What is your vision of a "child of the kingdom"? With the world in turmoil, why is it important to raise spiritual children?

Introduction

Read the Introduction and talk about it. The Glossary may answer any questions you may have about unfamiliar words or terms. Discuss this section with each other, discuss any unfamiliar words, and share what you have found interesting.

Chapter 1 – The Bahá'í Writings: A Doorway to Knowledge

Read this chapter together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What does Bahá'u'lláh mean when He states "*The beginning of all things is the knowledge of God*"? How does the Word of God "*instill new life into every human frame*"? In the quote by

‘Abdu’l-Bahá on page 13, what do the words “study,” “listen,” “think,” and “try to understand” mean to you as a parent? What do you think the poem by Howard Colby Ives is trying to say? And how does it relate to our modern society?

Chapter 2 – The Individual as Spiritual Being

Read this chapter together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How are we created in the image of God and in what ways has God revealed His beauty to us? Why has God focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes upon the reality of humanity? And how can we, as mere human beings, possibly become so radiant as to mirror forth the attributes of God? What does it mean to “see the face of God” in every person? What does it mean to “see the face of God” in our children? How would you feel if you were Howard Colby Ives and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answered your question by saying “little by little; little by little”? What does it mean to be “born into new life”? What noble goal would you choose to thank God for His blessings?

Chapter 3 – Marriage and Family: A Sacred Bond of Love

Read this chapter together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What does “*Each sees in the other the Beauty of God reflected in the soul*” mean? How would this apply to our relationship with our spouse? How could married couples “*improve the spiritual life of each other*”? What does “*that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants*” mean to you? Why would this be “*an assistance*” to us as parents? Next, describe your idea of a fortress. Then answer these questions: What kind of marriage would be a “*fortress for well-being*” for our children? How could one richly blessed family “*illuminate the world*”?

Chapter 4 – Pregnancy: The Soul and the Beginning of Spiritual Education

Read this chapter together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How did you feel when you learned you were pregnant or learned your wife was pregnant? What feelings, fears, or hopes did you have for your child? Next, read the quotes about the soul on page 26 again. Then answer these questions: What words do Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá use to describe the soul? What are your feelings about the soul after reading these words? What are our responsibilities to our unborn child during these earliest days of its existence? Are the mother’s and father’s role different at this period of time? How important is prayer in the life of the unborn child? What does “*Love is . . . the living link that uniteth God with man, that assureth the progress of every illumined soul*” mean to you? What does the word “nurture” remind you of when you think of your child? What does the last quote by Bahá’u’lláh on page 29 remind us to do as parents?

Chapter 5 – Infants: God’s Precious Gift

Read the first quote from Bahá’u’lláh on page 31 together and then talk about it. Next, read the rest of this section up to “The Duty of Parents” and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How did you feel when your first child was born or arrived? Did you feel a bond with all the other mothers (or dads) in the world? Did you ever try to look into the future and imagine the kind of person you wanted him or her to be? What does Bahá’u’lláh mean when He states “*At the outset of every endeavor, it is incumbent to look to the end of it*”? How would this apply to our parenting? How would the difficulties that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá faced in his life help him to advise us on spiritual parenting?

The Duty of Parents

Read this section together and talk about it. Next, please share your views about breastfeeding. Then answer these questions: How important are these earliest years in the physical and spiritual health of our children? What is the difference between “training” and “teaching”? Please use personal examples to illustrate this difference. How do we go about training our children “*perfectly and thoroughly*”?

The Mother’s Role

Read this section together to the end of the first paragraph on page 37 (stop after “food of the soul”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How important is the role of the mother as the *first* educator of the child? How important was your mother in your life? What does it mean to have “*abundant love*” for our children? How is this love manifested both physically and spiritually?

Next, read through to the end of the first paragraph on page 38 (stop after “words of love”) and talk about it. Then reread the first quote by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on page 37. And answer this question: How do you or would you “*continually call God to mind and make mention of Him*” with your children?

Now, read through to the end of this section and talk about it. Then answer these questions: Why is the task of bringing up a Bahá’í child the chief responsibility of the mother? Should mothers work outside the home or confine themselves to the raising of children? Why do you think the father is given the primary responsibility for the financial support of the family? How have you and your spouse divided up family responsibilities? What, in God’s sight, is the best of all ways for mothers to worship Him? How does this quote influence your opinion about the role of mothers?

The Father’s Role

Read this section together to the end of the second paragraph on page 41 (stop after “that he can offer”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How important is the father’s role in the life of the child? How important was your own father in your life? Please share what your father meant to you growing up.

Next, read to the end of this chapter and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How difficult is the role of single parenting? Are there ways that we can help single parents in their parenting and in the spiritual education of their children? How important is abundant love in the spiritual, emotional, and physical welfare of children? Now, say this last sweet prayer together for all of the little children that you know.

Chapter 6 – Little Children: Gems of Inestimable Value

Read this section together and talk about it. Then discuss the concept of the child as a “gem full of promise.” Next, answer these questions: Is this concept of the child as a “gem” similar to your ideas about the potential of each child or is it different? How does this concept help us to look at our children in a different way? What kind of education is Bahá’u’lláh referring to when He states, “*Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom*”? Have you ever wondered how many gifts your children may possess? Have you ever wondered “How many gifts are yet to be mined in me?”

Prayer

Read this section together to the last full paragraph on page 50 (stop after “my sons ever learned”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What prayers did you learn as a child and were they meaningful to you? Why would Bahá’í prayers be different from spontaneous prayers? Is it possible that prayer can make our children “*tremble with joy*”? Next, please share any stories you may have about your children and prayer. Then read the quote by Bahá’u’lláh on page 49 again and discuss how children’s souls might “understand the words, even if their minds, as yet, do not.” Now, read the first quote by Bahá’u’lláh on page 48 again and talk about what it means. Then discuss the importance of teaching little children how to pray.

Finally, read to the end of this section and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How is music the “*food of the soul and spirit*”? How can we bring more music into the prayers for our children?

Reverence

Read this whole section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What does reverence mean to you? When have you felt the most reverent? Have you been to the Bahá’í Shrines in Israel? Can you share how you felt in the Shrines? How would the garden around the Shrines enhance our feelings of reverence? How can we foster an atmosphere of reverence when we pray with our children? Why is reverence important for children?

Children’s Behavior at Bahá’í Gatherings

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How can we teach our children to be reverent while at Feast and Bahá’í Holy Days? Does your

community welcome children to the Feasts and Holy Days or do they make them feel unwelcome? How could we assist parents who have young children at Feasts and Holy Days?

Courtesy – Manners, Politeness, and Love

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What does “*courtesy*” mean to you? How does the spiritual concept of courtesy differ from the social concept of courtesy? How important do you think courtesy is in the lives of your children? In what ways can you teach your children to show courtesy?

‘Abdu’l-Bahá as our Example

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What attributes did ‘Abdu’l-Bahá display in this story? Why would his life experiences have helped him to relate to people of all social standings? Why do you think he was referred to as a “perfect gentleman” and what could that have meant at that time?

The Importance of Virtues

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What does the quote by Shoghi Effendi at the top of page 62 tell us about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá? How important is it to train our children to acquire virtues? How does acquiring virtues relate to the next life? Can you share any ideas or techniques that you have found to help your children to acquire virtues?

Kindness

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How does the kindness spoken about by Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá differ from the typical notion of kindness? In what ways have you taught your children to be kind? Please discuss the last quote about kindness shown to the tyrant, deceiver or thief? Do the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá surprise you?

Cleanliness

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How important is “*cleanliness*” to our spiritual lives? How do we train our children to show cleanliness? How could we help others attain this great virtue?

Thankfulness

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What does thankfulness mean to your life and to your children’s lives? What are you thankful for? How can we encourage this important virtue in our children?

Discipline and Obedience

Read this section together to the end of the first paragraph on page 74 (stop after “*elucidated and applied.*”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How do you define “*discipline*”? What does “*love demands discipline*” mean to you? What are some of the ways that you use “positive reinforcement” with your children? What are some of the ways that you “punish” your children?

Next, read the rest of this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How important do you think discipline is for your children? How would you define “strong” and “weak” parents? How important is it to balance “firmness and high expectations” with “a great deal of love and affection”? Discuss the concept of “awakening” as it regards discipline and punishment. What does this concept mean for you as a parent?

Patience and Support

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What have been your greatest challenges with patience as a parent? What are some of the ways that you have found to develop more patience with your children? How important is it to you that your children follow the normal patterns of behaviors? How difficult is it for you to have a child who is a different sex, a different personality, who has different interests, or who looks different from you? How can we try to “appreciate the beauty inside the stone”? Does this help us to see our child in a different way? How important is it to have a friend who is also trying to raise his or her baby spiritually? How important is the extended family in the raising of children? How can we extend our “family” to embrace other young families?

Shoghi Effendi as a Child

Read the first story about Shoghi Effendi together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What surprised you about this story? How does it apply to any of the previous sections we have discussed? What did you find the most interesting about this story?

Next, read the second story about Shoghi Effendi to the end of this section. Then, answer these questions: What have you learned from this story? What have you learned about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from these stories? Does it change your view of your own children?

The Value of Love and Affection

Read this section together to the end of the chapter and talk about it. Then answer this question: How important is love and affection in the lives of our children? Please share (if you choose) the love and affection that you experienced as a child or the lack of love and affection. Then answer these questions: In what ways can we show our children love and affection? How does the last quote by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on page 85 make you feel as a

parent? Does it make you appreciate the education of children as an honorable and spiritual endeavor?

Chapter 7 – School-Age Children: Roses of One Garden

Please say this first prayer together and talk about it. Then read the rest of this section and answer this question: How did you feel when your child started school on the first day?

The Role of Parents

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How does your role as a parent change when your children start school? Next, compare the two quotes on page 90 and answer this question: How are the roles of father and mother different or the same?

The Arts and Sciences

Read this section together to the end of the last full paragraph on page 93 (stop after “*elevate his rank*”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: Why are the arts and sciences important for children? What kind of arts and sciences should children study? What special role does the father take on now that his children are a little older? Why is the education of daughters even more important than the education of sons? Please name some of the places in the world where women are prevented from getting a good education. Now, answer these questions: How important is education in the advancement of civilization? What does Bahá’u’lláh mean when He states, “*When all receive the same kind of education the foundations of war and contention will be utterly destroyed*”? How important are the arts and sciences to humanity?

Next, please read to the end of page 95 and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How important is it for children to learn to be of “*powerful resolve*” and “*firm of purpose in all things*”? What is the difference between encouraging our children to “*strive for perfection*” and putting too much pressure on them to accomplish great things? How important is helping our children to develop “*intellect*” and “*reasoning*”? How do we help our children identify “*those things that lead to exaltation and those things that lead to abasement*”?

Now, read the rest of this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How important is music to the lives of our children? In what ways can we bring more music and art into our children’s lives? How should we try to balance the arts with the sciences in our children’s lives? Regarding education, what does ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mean when he states, “*this is so only on condition that man’s river flow into the mighty sea, and draw from God’s ancient source His inspiration*”? How do we teach our children to have confidence in their abilities instead of arrogance and pride? What do you think ‘Abdu’l-Bahá means in this last quote when he states, “*to such a degree that ye yourselves will be astonished*”?

Work as Worship

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How important is it to teach our children the value of work? How does the spiritual concept of “work as worship” differ from the material motive of working only for money? Does it seem like some children are naturally industrious while others, unfortunately, are not? What would you do as a parent in this situation? What do you think ‘Abdu’l-Bahá means when he advises us to “*accustom*” our children to hardship? What kinds of work do you or your children enjoy doing?

The Knowledge of God

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: Do you think all children have a “longing desire to know their Creator”? Why is it important to be “humble” before God? Why is the “*source of all learning*” the knowledge of God? Next, talk about the Word of God as a boundless ocean. And answer these questions: What does the image of the Word of God as a boundless ocean mean to you? How can we know God through His magnificent creation? How is every created thing “*a sign*” of the knowledge of God”? How does the beauty of nature make you feel? Why should we share the beauty of nature with our children? Now, please read the last quote by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on page 102 again and then answer this question: Why should we direct our attention “*toward the education and training of all the children*”?

The Love of God

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: In what ways does God show His love to the human world? How do you teach the love of God to your children? How important is God’s love for them and their feelings of love toward God to our children? What do Bahá’u’lláh’s words “*Let the flame of the love of God burn brightly within your radiant hearts*” mean to you?

Teaching the Love of God: Stories of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Please read the first story about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How did ‘Abdu’l-Bahá treat Howard Colby Ives? What reaction did Howard Colby Ives have to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá? What relationship does this story have to our behavior as parents with our own children?

Please read the next story (excerpt) about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Then answer these questions: How did ‘Abdu’l-Bahá make Howard Colby Ives feel? What example does ‘Abdu’l-Bahá give us when it comes to teaching our children or teaching others? Does this story show us why ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is considered the Exemplar of our Faith?

Now, read the last story. And answer these questions: How would you have reacted to the minister? What have you learned from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá?

The Importance of Prayer

Read this section together to the end of the second paragraph on page 110 (stop after “the sacredness of prayer”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How important is prayer in the lives of children? When is the best time to say prayers with our children? How important are our own prayer-lives?

Now, read the next story to the end of this section and talk about it. Then answer these questions: Do you identify with Mr M at times? What method of teaching did ‘Abdu’l-Bahá use to teach Mr M how to pray? How does this resonate in your life with your own children?

Study, Memorization, and Recitation

Read this section together to the end of the second paragraph on page 114 (stop after “*yet wrapped in slumber*”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: Why is it important for children to “*peruse the divine verses every morn and eve*”? What should our attitude be toward the Creative Word of God? Why is it important for children to memorize and recite the sacred verses? Next, please share how you teach your children to “peruse”, “memorize”, and “recite” the Sacred Word.

Now, read the story of Shoghi Effendi as a child to the end of this section and talk about it. Then answer this question: What have you learned from this story?

Eloquent Speech

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: Why is it important to teach our children “eloquent speech”? How important is our communication with our children in teaching them eloquent speech? What is “backbiting” and how does it affect eloquent speech? Why are “*truthfulness*” and “*honesty*” so important for our children? How do we teach them these virtues?

Divine Virtues

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What is the purpose of developing virtues? Why does ‘Abdu’l-Bahá say that “*training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning*”? How does the image of angels as “those who are illumined with the light of divine virtues” help us to view our own children? How does the image of the gardener help us to understand how we should train our children to acquire divine virtues? How do we make our children aware that “*a ‘Bahá’í is not just a name but a truth*”? Do the beautiful images of nature in these quotes give you confidence and hope as a parent?

Character

Read this section together to the end of page 122 and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How do you define a person of “good character”? If the mother is the first teacher of the child and if it is she who “*establisheth the character and conduct of the child,*” what then is the father’s role? At what age should children learn good character and how is this accomplished? How do our own characters determine the characters of our children?

Next, read the rest of this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: Did you have a teacher or other person in your life who personified outstanding character? How do tests “refine” our characters? How is training our children in good character the same as “*that which the sun exerteth over tree and fruit*”?

Excellence and Refinement

Read this section together to the end of the first paragraph on page 126 (stop after “they were meant to be”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: Why is it important to give our children “*high ideals and goals*”? What is the meaning of “*refinement*”? Can you think of someone who possesses this quality? In what ways can we teach our children to be refined? Why is “*refinement*” a spiritual quality?

Next, read the rest of this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: Did you know who Louis Gregory was? How important is it to know the history of the Bahá’í Faith? What can people like Louis Gregory teach us?

Love and Compassion

Read this section together to the end of the first full paragraph on page 130 (stop after “Bahá’í community”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What was it that attracted you to the Bahá’í Faith? What are some of the ways that we can foster a spirit of love and compassion in the Bahá’í community? In what ways can we teach our children to feel love and compassion for others?

Next, read to the end of this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: In what ways can we show our children, through our own examples, how love and compassion should exist in a marriage? In what ways can we teach our children to love, respect, and protect their environment?

Developing a Bahá’í Identity

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How important is it for children to have a Bahá’í identity? What does having a Bahá’í identity mean? How important is the mother in the Bahá’í identity of her children? How important is the father? In what ways can we foster a Bahá’í identity in our children?

Feasts and Holy Days

Read this section together to the end of the first full paragraph on page 136 (stop after “Bahá’í community”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How can we help our children become “*bathed in the spirit of the community*”? How can we help our Feasts become spiritual “feasts of love”?

Next, read to the end of this section and talk about it. Then answer these questions: In what ways can we make Ayyám-i-Há special for children? How can we make the Bahá’í Holy Days more meaningful for our children? Now, if you have been to a Bahá’í Holy Day in Haifa, please share that experience now.

Children’s Classes

Read this section together to the end of the second full paragraph on page 142 (stop after “children’s Bahá’í experiences”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How important are children’s classes to the Bahá’í community? How important are children’s classes to children? What subjects should children learn in Bahá’í classes? How important is creativity in Bahá’í classes? Now, please share your children’s experiences with Bahá’í classes.

Next, read the rest of this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How important is “*discipline*” and “*order*” in children’s classes? How can we foster discipline and order in children’s classes? How important is “*cleanliness*” and “*courtesy*” in children’s classes? How can we foster cleanliness and courtesy in children’s classes? How can we educate the Bahá’í community as to the importance of children’s teachers?

Bahá’í Summer and Winter Schools

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How important are Bahá’í Summer and Winter Schools to the lives of our children? What are some of the ways that we could help parents who need assistance to attend these schools with their children?

Children’s Duty toward Their Parents

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How important is honoring one’s parents? What implications does this have for society in general? How should children “*honor*” their parents? How important is it for parents to stand firm, to show flexibility, and to present a unified front? How do we remind our children to “*respect*” their elders? What are the responsibilities of children toward their parents?

The Value of Love, Listening, and Laughter

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How do we show our children that we love them? What does it mean to be a good listener? How do

we listen to our children with our *hearts* as well as our minds? What are the best ways to spend time with our children? How important is laughter in the home? Are there ways that we could increase laughter and happiness in our home? How important are restful, gentle times for children? In a busy world, how do we find time to enjoy restful, gentle times with our children? Now, please read the last quote from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on page 152 together again. And answer these questions: If you were a gardener, what kind of flower would your child be? Why is the education of children “*among the most meritorious acts of humankind*”?

Chapter 8 – Junior Youth: Fruitful Trees

Please say the first prayer together. Then read the rest of this section and talk about it.

Prayer and Meditation

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How do we teach our children to “*Commune intimately with His Spirit*”? What is the purpose of “*meditation*”? How do we teach our children to meditate? How do we strive “*day by day*” to make our actions “*beautiful prayers*”?

The Importance of Deepening

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: Why is it important for junior youth to “*deepen*” in the Bahá’í Writings? How important is memorizing and reciting the sacred verses for junior youth? How do the Bahá’í Writings fill our hearts with “*radiant joy*”?

Service to Humanity

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: In what ways can we help our junior youth to be of service to humanity? How can we encourage them to do well in school so that they will be of service to humanity? How can we encourage our junior youth to be good examples for their peers?

The Value of Friends, Mentors, and the Arts

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How important are friends to junior youth? How can we encourage our junior youth to choose their friends wisely? How important are mentors in the lives of junior youth? How can we find or be mentors to junior youth? How important are the arts in the lives of junior youth? In what ways can we promote the arts in the lives of our children?

Moderation and Detachment

Read this section together to the last full paragraph on page 162 (stop after “*restraints of moderation*”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What is the meaning of

“moderation” and why is it a spiritual quality? How can practicing moderation protect our young people? How can we encourage our young people to practice “moderation” in all that pertains to dress? How has civilization overleapt the *“bounds of moderation”*?

Next, read together to the end of the first paragraph on page 164 (stop after *“rust from the heart”*) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How do we encourage our junior youth to practice “detachment”? What is the meaning of Bahá’u’lláh’s words when he states, *“The company of the ungodly increaseth sorrow, whilst fellowship with the righteous cleanseth the rust from off the heart”*?

Now, read the rest of this section and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What did you learn from this story? How did Táhirih practice detachment? What does ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mean when he states, *“Detachment does not imply lack of means; it is marked by freedom of the heart”*?

Tests and Difficulties

Read this section together to the top of page 168 (stop after “whom they are with”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How is the world “continuing its downward spiral even as the forces of good are raising their voices in the world”? Do you think the time when *“morals will degenerate to an extreme degree”* is now or in the future? What are some of the challenges that young people face today? How do we teach our children to face these challenges in a strong and spiritual way? How do we teach our children to take responsibility? What is our duty as parents when it comes to giving our children rules, responsibilities, and boundaries, and making sure that they are enforced?

Next, read to the top of page 170 (stop after “that they are loved”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How do we develop a close connection with our children? How important is prayer in dealing with difficulties? How does the example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá help us to respond to our children? How important is affection in overcoming difficulties with our children?

Now, read the rest of this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: If we do not spiritually educate our children, who else or what else will fill that void? If we do not fight for our children’s right to a spiritual education, who else will give them a spiritual connection to God? How difficult is parenting when we are undergoing difficulties ourselves? How important is a spiritual education to our children?

Nobility

Please read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What does *“Noble have I created thee”* mean to you? What is the “station of spiritual nobility”? How would understanding that they are created “noble beings” help our young people in their lives?

The Value of Love, Communication, and Cooperation

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How can we make our junior youth feel “genuinely loved and appreciated”? How can we encourage good communication with our children? When should we use consultation as a family? In what ways can we encourage cooperation in the family? How can we educate our children so that their characters will be “*second to none*”?

Chapter 9 – Youth: Stars of the Heaven of Understanding

To begin, please say this first prayer for youth. Then read the rest of this section together and talk about it.

Obligatory Prayer and Fasting

Read this section together to the end of the second paragraph on page 183 (stop after “into our own lives”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What is the reason for “*obligatory prayer*”? What attitudes should we have while reciting the obligatory prayer? What is the reason for saying “*Alláh-u-Abhá*” ninety-five times?

Next, read the rest of this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What is the reason for fasting? How can we assist our young people to have a healthy and meaningful Fast?

Study of the Sacred Word

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: Why should we encourage our young people to study the Sacred Word? How should we teach our young people to study the Sacred Word? Where can young people study the Sacred Word in your community?

The Importance of Reason and Independent Thought

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: Why is the ability to think for one’s self and to use one’s powers of “reason and understanding” so crucial for this age group? What does ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mean when he states, “*Man is not intended to see through the eyes of another, hear through another’s ears nor comprehend with another’s brain*”? How do we encourage our young people “to reason and to think independently”? Why are science and religion “complementary, not opposing,” forces? Why is “*justice*” important both for homes and for governments?

School and Careers

Read this section together to the top of page 192 (stop after “develop themselves spiritually”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What does Bahá’u’lláh mean when He states, “*Unto each one hath been prescribed a preordained measure*”? How do

we help our young people to develop “volition” and “resolve”? How important is “*integrity*” in our children’s lives?

Next, read the rest of this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What is our responsibility as parents in guiding our children on their career paths? How do we encourage our young people to develop spiritual characteristics? How do we encourage our young people to “*scale the ascending heights in all they aspire to do*”? How do we “*strive to acquire the various branches of knowledge*” and to increase our “*understanding of the Holy Books*”?

Bahá’í Youth Retreats and Conferences

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How important is it for youth to have fellowship with one another? What special activities could we plan for our youth?

The Year of Service

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: In what ways can we encourage our youth to be of service to humanity? Why is service so important for our young people?

Teaching

Read this section together to the next to the last paragraph on page 200 (stop after “happy time in their lives”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: Who were the “Letters of the Living”? (See Glossary) Who was the “Purest Branch”? Who were the “Knights of Bahá’u’lláh”? What does Bahá’u’lláh mean when He states, “*The wise are they that speak not unless they obtain a hearing*”? In what ways can young people find ways in which to share their Faith?

Next, read the rest of this section together and talk about it. Then discuss how you felt when you read Queen Marie’s letter. What kind of person do you think Martha Root was? How can she inspire us to live our lives?

Distinction

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How can we encourage our young people to acquire “*distinction*”? What does Bahá’u’lláh, in the quote on page 206, mean when He states, “*For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other being hath excelled or surpassed*”? How can this help us realize our great potential and that of our children’s?

Looking toward Marriage

Read this section together to the top of page 210 (stop after “*right conduct and beauty*”) and talk about it. Then answer these questions: What should be some of the characteristics of a Bahá’í marriage? What are some of the ways that we could encourage our young people to practice “chastity” before marriage?

Next, read the rest of this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: Why is the consent of parents important? What does it mean for two people in a marriage to be “*even as a single soul*”?

The Value of Love, Respect, and Trust

Read this section together and talk about it. Then answer these questions: How can we express our love for our young people? How can we foster “respect” in the family? How can we encourage our young people to have respect for themselves? How can we foster “trust” in the family? How important is “unity” in the family?

Afterword

Read this last section together and talk about it. Then share any final words you may have about spiritual parenting. Finally, read the prayer for the education of children on page 87 for all of the children that you know.

Congratulations! You are finished!

Now go out and continue to be wonderful parents to your children!