

# Moral Education in Community

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## Abstract

This presentation uses Bahá'í Writings and a description of several Bahá'í projects to develop an understanding of the moral standards that the Faith espouses, as well some salient elements of the processes of transformation that are needed to attain such standards. Several of the Writings of Baha'u'llah, Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi are offered, and the Terraces Projects on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel are used as a metaphor for both these standards and for the process of transformation needed to attain the standards. The Universal House of Justice letter of May 24, 2001 is then considered. In this letter, the House presents three challenges to youth for moral leadership. As an example of efforts to address these challenges, the programs, activities and processes used at Maxwell International Bahá'í School in British Columbia, Canada are shared, along with some perceptions of Maxwell alumni regarding their experience of moral education at Maxwell. It concludes with a brief consideration of a basis for moral education.

## Outline

1. Standards of Moral Education: Baha'u'llah, Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi
2. Terraces Projects as metaphor for moral transformation
3. The three challenges of the Universal House of Justice for moral leadership in the transformation of society
4. Moral education in the Maxwell community
5. Maxwell alumni perceptions of moral education
6. A basis for moral education

### **Standards of Moral Education: Baha'u'llah**

“The Prophets and Messengers of God have been sent down for the sole purpose of guiding mankind to the straight Path of Truth.”<sup>1</sup>

“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 utmost detachment, to the throne of the Most High.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Standards of Moral Education: Abdu'l-Baha**

“The root cause of wrongdoing is ignorance, and we must therefore hold fast to the tools of perception and knowledge. Good character must be taught.”<sup>3</sup>

“The individual must be educated to such a high degree that he would rather have his throat cut than tell a lie, and would think it easier to be slashed with a sword or pierced with a spear than to utter calumny or be carried away by wrath.”<sup>4</sup>

“Then will each one of God's beloved shine out as a bright moon with qualities of the spirit.”<sup>5</sup>

and the relationship of each to the Sacred Threshold of his Lord will not be illusory but sound and real, will be as the very foundation of the building, not as some embellishment on its façade.”

### **The Terraces Project as a Metaphor for Moral Transformation**

“I consider the terraces a symbol of beauty, perfection and hope, the way the Bab described and wished life to be for the people of the world.”  
(Fariborz Sabha, Canadian architect & designer of the Terraces)<sup>6</sup>

“The beauty and magnificence of the Gardens and Terraces now under development are symbolic of the nature of the transformation which is destined to occur both within the hearts of the world’s peoples and in the physical environment of the planet.” (The Universal House of Justice)<sup>7</sup>

### **Standards of Moral Education: Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice**

“The standards set out by the Guardian apply to the entire Bahá’í community, both in its collective life and in the lives of its individual members.”<sup>8</sup>

“ (these standards are) our rectitude of conduct toward towards others..the discipline of our own natures..our complete freedom from the prejudices that cripple collective action in the society around us and frustrate positive impulses toward change.”

“They hold, however, particular implications for Bahá’í youth, who are blessed with the enviable advantages of high energy, flexibility of mind and, to a great extent, freedom of movement. The world that Bahá’í youth are inheriting is one in which the distribution of educational, economic and other basic opportunities is grossly unjust. Bahá’í youth must not be daunted by such barriers. Their challenge is to understand the real condition of humanity and to forge among themselves enduring spiritual bonds that free them not only from racial and national divisions but also from those created by social and material conditions, and that will fit them to carry forward the great trust reposed in them.”

“Bahá’u’llah encourages us to anticipate from the youth of His community a much earlier advance to maturity than is characteristic of the rest of the society. Clearly, that does not in any way diminish the importance of the pursuit of education, of economic realities, or of family obligations. It does

mean that Bahá'í youth can accept – and should be encouraged to accept – a responsibility of their own for moral leadership in the transformation of society.”

### **Suggestions for Youth to Understand the Real Condition of Humanity**

To do this, children and youth must have a broad education, be exposed to people, ideas and cultures from different parts of the world, be exposed to Bahá'í Writings such as 'The Advent of Divine Justice', 'The Prosperity document', the new 'Century of Light'. They should be taught about Justice, the UN, the concept of Universal Human Rights, and the central role of service to the life of a human being. They should learn about consultation and how to plan and execute tasks and responsibilities as a group, as well as self discipline so that they will strive for excellence in all things. And, ideally, they should go on a YOS.

### **Suggestions for Youth to Forge Among Themselves Spiritual Bonds That Will Free Them from Prejudice**

To do this requires opportunities for youth to spend time together, preferably living, working, learning, planning, worshipping and serving together. As an international, Bahá'í school, this is, in fact, one of the most profound benefits of attending Maxwell. Our youth develop these bonds as a matter of course during their time together at the School, and which bless them with intimate, life-long friendship with people from all corners of the globe. For other youth, it is helpful if they can be part of a Bahá'í community that has other youth, and if they have opportunities to work and to serve together.

## **Suggestions for Youth to Come to Accept Responsibility for Moral Leadership**

Moral leadership requires dedication to spiritual and moral ideals. It requires growing up in an environment that both requires high standards of moral behaviour, and educates about them. Ideally, exposure to positive peer pressure is the best way for children and youth to come to regard good moral standards as 'normal' as opposed to what is often considered 'normal' but where morals have degraded to an extreme degree – rather like growing in healthy soil. Language of the virtues is very helpful; use of the arts to express spiritual ideals and lofty sentiments; youth long to feel. They'll either feel powerless, angry, depressed and discouraged or they'll feel excited, happy and powerful. Music, dance and theatre helps a great deal, as does the use of ceremonies and honorings. And, ideally, they should go on a YOS. A YOS can be a way of meeting all three challenges at once.

### **Maxwell Alumni comments on what assisted their moral development at Maxwell**

- “Learning about virtues and the qualities of God”
- “Experiencing unity in diversity in international environment”
- “Spiritual education through art and dance”
- “Being in ‘healthy soil’”
- “Music, dance & theatre because youth want to feel”
- “Talking about spirituality in the classroom makes it part of your thinking”
- “Through demonstration of spirituality of others”
- “Diversity teaches about the oneness of humanity”

### **Statement of Bahai International Community**

“Only moral education based on the oneness of humanity can give children and youth a vision of a better future and inspire them to build it; a vision that can provide a socially productive channel for their unbounded energies.”

“When children see themselves as members of one human family in which they have both rights and responsibilities, they will understand that there rights are dependent upon other people fulfilling their responsibilities, and, conversely, that they have the responsibility to grant and uphold the rights of others.”