

## Virtues and the Family

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Today I will talk about the guidance given in the Baha'i Writings concerning developing virtues in the family. How indispensable it is for the prosperity of humankind to develop all the virtues potentially given to each human being! Equally important is knowing what to do to foster the growth of virtues in each child. Although mankind longs for world peace, we are fighting terrorism globally on a scale never experienced before. Injustice is prevailing everywhere, tragic murders occur daily, there is no day that our hearts are not sorrowful. Thinking of disunity, arguments, criticism, indifference to others, etc., I have come to feel the realization of world peace is an illusion. Baha'u'llah said, "*The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.*" (1)

To achieve this unity, the people of the world must assume responsibility for the destiny of the entire human race. The foundation of this idea is to be conscious of the oneness of mankind and what makes it possible is the power of justice. Justice is a virtue that is one of the functions of the human soul. If it is essential to develop this virtue for the foundation of the prosperity of humankind, let us consider how we can foster its growth. The Baha'i principles emphasize the spiritual nature of man. According to a Tablet of Baha'u'llah, "*Man's glory lieth in his knowledge, his upright conduct, his praiseworthy character, his wisdom.*" (2)

### What Are Virtues?

Virtues are invisible, but they certainly exist in man. They are the good things that God places in the human soul. Baha'u'llah told us, "*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.*" (3) There are over five hundred virtues latent in man which have been named in the Sacred Texts of the world. Therefore, whose job is it to find these virtues and polish them in our children?

### Virtues Are Nurtured in the Family

In the *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 'Abdu'l-Baha tells us, "*The family, being a human unit, must be educated according to the rules of sanctity. All the virtues must be taught in the family.*" (4) He also told mothers, "*For mothers are the first educators, the first mentors, and truly it is the mothers who determine the happiness, the future greatness, the courteous ways and learning and judgment, the understanding and the faith of their little ones.*" (5) At another time He said, "*O ye loving mothers, know that in God's sight, the best of all ways to worship Him is to educate the children and train them in all the perfections of humankind and no nobler deed than this can be imagined.*" (6) These quotations from the Sacred Tablets show how great and important the role of mothers in family life is.

### **‘Abdul-Baha Told Us About Our Children**

*“Every child is potentially the light of the world and at the same time its darkness, wherefore must the question of education be accounted as of primary importance.”* (7) The Master also tells us,

*It is extremely difficult to teach the individual and refine his character once puberty is passed. By then, as experience has shown, even if every effort be exerted to modify some tendency of his it all availeth nothing.... Therefore it is in early childhood that a firm foundation must be laid. While the branch is green and tender it can easily be made straight.* (8)

In Japan, there is an old saying that the soul of three-year old child lasts for a hundred years. Child psychologists have explained that until the age of about seven it is easy to train children. Their hearts are receptive and pure. After that it is more difficult.

### **How Do We Develop Virtues in Our Children?**

The Master told us, *“Man reacheth perfection through good deeds, voluntarily performed, not through good deeds the doing of which was forced upon him.”* (9) We scold our children and force them to do good deeds. But this is not good discipline because their good deeds do not come from their character. They do not belong to them. Mothers have to train their children and draw out their virtues, not force them to do good deeds, but help them do good deeds voluntarily.

### **Self-Esteem**

There are many people who suffer from low self-esteem and have no confidence in their potential. One of the reasons that people are suffering from low self-esteem is that they were humiliated by abusive language when they were children. For example, “How many times must I tell you before you understand? You, good for nothing! You have no guts.” In this way, parents scold their children and hurt them. Children think that they are really useless and behave poorly.

### **Acknowledging Efforts To Improve**

Another point I want to make is the importance of acknowledging children when they are making an effort to improve their behavior. If parents do not acknowledge their efforts, they will lose their motivation to try. Moreover, their self-esteem will not grow. Even adults are happy when they are acknowledged for their effort. Children know when they deserve to be praised. So mothers have to watch their children and encourage them, acknowledging their virtues. To encourage children and acknowledge their virtues leads to the further development of their virtues and potential. This builds the foundation of happiness for them. The Master told us, *“Human happiness is founded upon spiritual behavior.”* (10) *“Joy gives us wings! In*

*times of joy our strength is more vital, our intellect keener, and our understanding less clouded. We seem better able to cope with the world and to find our sphere of influence.”* (11)

### **The Importance of Religious Education**

Next, I would like to mention the importance of religious education. There is not much religious education available in Japan. About fifty years ago, Japanese families were large and children were brought up by their parents and also by their grandparents. Children were often taught morals by their grandparents, who admonished them, “Even if nobody watches you, you should never do bad things. Heaven will always watch over you. If you do good things, they will return to you. But if you do bad things, you will be punished.” Today, very few adults teach children such things. It seems to me that that lack of religious education causes many problems in Japan. Baha’u’llah mentioned the importance of religious education. *“The fear of God hath ever been the prime factor in the education of His creatures. Well is it with them that attained thereunto.”* (12)

*That which is of paramount importance for the children, that which must precede all else, is to teach them the oneness of God and laws of God. For lacking this, the fear of God cannot be inculcated, and lacking the fear of God an infinity of odious and abominable actions will spring up, and sentiment will be uttered that will transgress all bounds ...* (13)

‘Abdu’l-Baha said, *“From the very beginning, the children must receive divine education and must continually be reminded to remember their God. Let the love of God pervade their inmost being, commingled with their mother’s milk.”* (14)

### **The Role of the LSA in Child Education**

In order that mothers rear their children according to the principles of Baha’i education, the LSA must play an important role in the future. ‘Abdu’l-Baha tells us,

*So long as the mother faileth to train her children, and start them on a proper way of life, the training which they received later on will not take its full effect. It is incumbent upon the Spiritual Assemblies to provide the mothers with a well-planned programme for the education of children, showing how, from infancy, the child must be watched over and taught. These instructions must be given to every mother to serve her as a guide, so that each will train and nurture her children in accordance with Teachings.* (15)

As ‘Abdul-Baha told us, the LSA must support mothers in education their children about God’s teachings and virtues. Moreover, we should teach children that every human being has been given virtues by our Creator. In time, they will understand the oneness of God and the oneness of humanity and they will shoulder the responsibility to build the world civilization and contribute to the prosperity of humankind.

## References

1. *Gleanings*, p. 286
2. *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, p. 68
3. *Gleanings*, p. 260
4. *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 163
5. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 126
6. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 139
7. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 130
8. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 137
9. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 115
10. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 127
11. *Paris Talks*, p. 109
12. *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 27
13. *Compilation on Baha'i Education*, p. 27
14. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 127
15. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 138