

KONFERENCIJE
MLADIH,
JUL – OKTOBAR 2013



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JUL – OKTOBAR 2013

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UNIVERZALNA KUĆA PRAVDE
8. Februar 2013.

Bahá'íjima cijelog svijeta,

Dragi voljeni prijatelji,

Zadovoljstvo nam je posmatrati kako procesi Petogodišnjeg plana podstiču na duh službe i ohrabruju na ciljane radnje u zajednicama različitih veličina i jačine. Svakodnevnim primjeri pokazuju da dopiranje do ljudskih srca, upoznavanje ljudi sa Božijom riječju, i podsticanje na poboljšanje društva, mogu vremenom dovesti do poboljšanja ljudi. Taj zajednički pokret postaje prepoznatljiv kada se elementi Plana ujedine u dobro koordinisanim nastojanjima svih, a njegove dinamike postaju sve više poznate. Takva nastojanja uče iskusne vjernike kao i one koji tek uče o Vjeri, nezavisno o njihovoj dobi ili porijeklu, da zajedno rade, jedni sa drugima da služe, da bi omogućili svima da učestvuju u ispunjenju Plana.

Posmatranjem radnji Bahá'íja u cijelom svijetu, jedan fenomen nam je posebno zanimljiv: čvrsti doprinos od strane mladih na svakom kontinentu. Po tom fenomenu vidimo ispunjenje nada koje je Vođa uložio u njih „za budući napredak i širenje načela“ kao i uvjerenje s kojim je na njihova pleća stavio „svu odgovornost za istrajnost duha pri nesebičnoj službi za duge vjernike“. Takođe smo iznenađeni sa brojem mladih ljudi koji se samo nakon kratkog upoznavanja sa Bahá'í zajednicom, posvećuju

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svrsishodnoj službi i kako brzo otkrivaju naklonost prema širenju zajednice. Zaista, dok posmatramo Bahá'í omladinu i njihove vršnjake, moramo biti radosni zbog njihove želje da preuzmu odgovornost za duhovni i socijalni razvoj ljudi oko sebe, pogotovo onih mlađih. U dobi kada je bitan vlastiti interes, kada je čak i duhovno povezivanje vezano za nagrade i lično zadovoljstvo, dirljivo je vidjeti pojedince u dobi od tinejdžerskih godina do dvadesetih - one koji odlučno gledaju na agresivni materijalizam - koji su preplavljeni vizijom Bahá'u'lláh-a i koji su spremni da stave potrebe drugih prije svojih vlastitih. Takva omladina visokih shvatanja, sa svojim nastojanjima i podstrekom koji daju cijeloj zajednici bi trebala da doprinosi tako efektivno naporima svugdje.

Sve što je postignuto u posljednje dvije godine će svakako biti premašeno, ne samo u završnim godinama Plana nego i u posljednjim godinama prvog vijeka u Dobu Planiranja. Da bismo podstakli ove moćne pokrete i sakupili omladinu da u potpunosti shvate odgovornosti koje moraju preuzeti u ovom brzom intervalu, sazivamo 95 konferencija za mlade, od jula do oktobra, na lokacijama širom svijeta: Accra, Adis Abeba, Aguascalientes, Almaty, Antananarivo, Apia, Atlanta, Auckland, Baku, Bangalore, Bangui, Bardiya, Battambang, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Boston, Brasilia, Bridgetown, Bukavu, Cali, Canoas, Cartagena de Indias, Chennai, Chibombo, Chicago, Chisinau, Cochabamba, Daidanaw, Dakar, Dallas, Danane, Dar es Salaam, Dhaka, Dnipropetrovsk,

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Durham (SAD), Frankfurt, Guwahati, Helsinki, Istanbul (2), Jakarta, Johannesburg, Kadugannawa, Kampala, Kananga, Karachi, Khujand, Kinshasa, Kolkata, Kuching, Lae, Lima, London, Lubumbashi, Lucknow, Macau, Madrid, Manila, Matunda Soy, Moskva, Mwinilunga, Mzuzu, Nadi, Nairobi, New Delhi, Oakland, Otavalo, Ouagadougou, Panchgani, Paris, Patna, Perth, Phoenix, Port-au-Prince, Port Dikson, Port Moresby, Port-Vila, San Diego, San Jose (Costa Rica), San Jose City (Philippines), San Salvador, Santiago, Sapele, Sarh, Seberang Perai, South Tarawa, Sydney, Tbilisi, Thyolo, Tirana, Toronto, Ullanbaatar, Vancouver, Verona, Yaounde. Pozivamo na ova okupljanja svakog omladinca koji zna šta metode i instrumenti Plana znače za napredak ka boljem društvu. Pozivamo i sve Bahá'íje svih uzrasta da podrže učesnike jer mnogo toga zavisi od njihovog truda.

Dragi prijatelji: Svakoj generaciji mladih vjernika se pruži prilika da doprinesu humanizmu, jedinstvenom njihovom vremenu. Došlo je vrijeme za trenutnu generaciju da pogleda, posveti se, i da sebe službi za koju će doći veliko blagostanje. U našim molitvama na Svetom Pragu, mi preklinjemo Vječitu ljepotu da iz rastrzanog i zbunjenog čovječanstva izdvoji čiste duše obdarene sa jasnim viđenjima: omladinu čiji integritet i poštenje nisu umanjeni zbog posmatranja tuđih grešaka; omladinu koja će se obraćati Gospodaru „da privuče one koji su u grupi prisnih prijatelja“, omladinu koju greške društva podstiču da rade na njenoj promjeni, a ne da se udalje od nje;

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omladinu koja će, bez obzira na cijenu, da odbije nejednakost u svim njenim oblicima i koja će umjesto toga raditi da bi „svjetlost pravednosti mogla da sija na cijeli svijet“.

Potpisano: Univerzalna Kuća Pravde

Univerzalna Kuća Pravde
1. Maj 2013.

Bahá'íjima cijelog svijeta,

Dragi voljeni prijatelji,

Tako je ogroman bio odziv mladih Bahá'í-a i njihovih prijatelja - zaista, iz Bahá'í zajednica širom svijeta - na najavu 95 konferencija koje će se sazvati širom svijeta u periodu od jula do oktobra, izgleda da postojeći aranžmani nisu dovoljni za broj mladih koji žele da prisustvuju, pa je očigledno da su neophodna dodatna okupljanja. Sa velikom radošću koristimo ovu priliku, kada su se članovi Nacionalnih Duhovnih Skupština okupili za konsultaciju na jedanaestoj međunarodnoj Bahá'í Konvenciji, da objavimo našu odluku za sazivanje još dodatnih 19 konferencija na sljedećim lokacijama: Bertoua, Bidor, Biratnagar, Brisbane, Cagayan de Oro, Georgetown (Guyana), Houston, Kampong Thom, Kigoma, Los Angeles, Mahikeng, Milne Bay, Minneapolis, Montreal, Nuku'alofa, Nundu (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Seattle, Vientiane, and Washington, D.C.

Ovakav doček pokazuje veličinu rezervoara energije i predanosti koje mladi posjeduju. Moraju se uložiti svi naponi kako bi im se pomoglo da nastave djelovati na svojim zaduženjima i ugledati se na njih kako bi proširili horizonte onoga što Bahá'í zajednica može postići. Naše usluge nudimo zahvaljujući Blaženoj Ljepoti što je darovala Njegove mlade sljedbenike ogromnim kolektivnim sposobnostima da služe i preklinjemo Njega da se to može ostvariti u korist čovječanstva.

Potpisano: Univerzalni Kuća Pravde

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1. Jul 2013.

Za učesnike predstojećih 114 konferencija širom svijeta

Dragi voljeni prijatelji,

Kada se pojavio uzvišeni Bab da prenese svoju revolucionarnu poruku svijetu imao je samo dvadeset pet godina a mnogi od onih koji su prihvatili i dalje širili Njegova učenja su bili vrlo mladi, pa čak i mlađi od njega. Njihovo herojstvo, ovjekovječeno u djelu The Dawn Breakers, obasjava djela ljudske istorije već vjekovima. Tako je počeo niz u kojem svaka generacija mladih doprinosi prethodnom napretku u razvijajućem procesu transformacije čovječanstva pomoću inspiracije ovog Božanskog impulsa. To je niz koji nije imao nikakvih prekida od vremena Baba do danas.

Dugogodišnji naponi i žrtvovanja vaših duhovnih predaka su postigli mnogo da donesu Vjeru u razne zemlje i da ubrzaju proces nastanka globalne zajednice sa zajedničkim ciljem. Iako zadaci koje vi imate nisu slični njihovim, ipak i vaša odgovornost nije ništa manje bitna. Nakon više decenija, naponi ove daleko rasprostranjene zajednice da omogući razumijevanje Bahá'u'lláh-ovog otkrivanja i da uspostavi principe koje njeguje, su kulminirali u nastanku moćnog okvira za akciju, usavršenu iskustvom. Vi imate sreću da ste već upoznati sa metodama i pristupima koji su sada tako dobro uspostavljeni. Istrajanjem pri korištenju istih, mnogi od vas su već vidjeli svojim očima stvaranje zajednica božanstvenim podučavanjima. Na ovoj

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konferenciji, trebate da razmislite o doprinosu svake mlade osobe koja želi da odgovori na Bahá'u'lláh-ove savjete i da koristi tu moć. Da bismo vam pomogli, predstavljeno je mnogo tema o kojima možete promišljati, počevši od vašeg trenutnog perioda života.

Tokom konferencija za mlade sa istim ciljem, širom svijeta će se okupiti desetine hiljada omladinaca koji imaju mnogo toga zajedničkog. Iako su vaši životi određeni raznolikim okolnostima, želja da se doprinese konstruktivnoj promjeni i kapacitetu za korisnu službu, koji karakterišu različite etape života, nije ograničena samo na određenu rasu ili nacionalnost, niti zavisi od materijalnog dobra. Svi prolaze ovo svijetlo razdoblje života kao i vi - ali ono je kratko i određeno brojnim društvenim faktorima. Jako je dakle bitno težiti da budemo među onima koji, kako Abdu'l-Bahá kaže, "ubiru plodove života".

Stoga, zadovoljstvo nam je da je tako mnogo vas već uključeno u službu kroz aktivnosti stvaranja zajednice, i kroz organizovanje, koordinisanje, i učešće u naporima drugih; u svim tim poduhvatima preko kojih preuzimate sve više odgovornosti. Nije ni čudo da upravo vaša dobna grupa ima najviše iskustva u pomaganju mlađima i djeci, u njihovom moralnom i duhovnom razvoju, podstičući u njima sposobnosti za zajedničku službu i iskreno prijateljstvo. Na kraju krajeva, svjesni svijeta u kojem ovi mladi ljudi trebaju da žive, sa svim zamkama ali i mogućnostima, vi spremno prihvatate odgovornost za njihovo duhovno jačanje i pripreme. Svjesni da je Bahá'u'lláh došao da

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promijeni unutrašnji život i vanjske okolnosti čovječanstva, vi pomažete mladima da pročiste svoje karakteristike i preuzmu odgovornost za poboljšanje svojih zajednica. Kada dođu do adolescencije, vi im pomažete da pojačaju svoju sposobnost izražavanja, i da se usadi jaka moralna osjetljivost u njima. Na taj način, vaš vlastiti osjećaj dobročinstva postaje definisan dok se pridržavate Bahá'u'lláh-ove upute da "Djela, a ne riječi, budu vaš ukras"

Da bi se slijedio put službe, u bilo kojem obliku, potrebno je imati vjeru i istrajnost. Takođe je mnogo bitno ići putem službe u društvu drugih. Zajedništvo puno ljubavi, međusobna ohrabrenja, i volja da učimo zajedno su glavne osobine svake grupe mladih sa istim ciljem, a takođe trebaju biti karakteristike i ključnih veza između komponenti društva. Stoga, nadamo se da će veze koje uspostavite tokom ovih konferencija biti trajne. I zaista, neka vam ta prijateljstva i zajednički cilj pomognu u istrajnosti, i dugo nakon ovih druženja.

Mogućnosti svih kolektivnih akcija su posebno vidljive u stvaranju zajednica, a taj proces postaje momentum u mnogim zajednicama, susjedstvima i selima u svijetu, koji su postali centri intenzivnih aktivnosti. Omladinci su često u prvom planu tih aktivnosti - ne samo Bahá'iji, nego takođe i oni koji vide pozitivne efekte Bahá'i zajednice i koji su prihvatili temeljnu viziju jedinstva i duhovne transformacije. Na takvim mjestima, imperativ da se širi učenje Bahá'u'lláh-a prilagodljivim srcima i da se istražuju implikacije Njegove poruke u današnjem svijetu se uveliko osjeti. Kada društvo

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toliko poziva na pasivnost i apatiju, ili još gore, ohrabruje ponašanje štetno za pojedinca i druge oko njega, oni koji jačaju populaciju i koji se drže ispunjavajućeg života u zajednici nude nešto primjetno različito.

Ipak, iako se mnogi dive vašoj dinamici i idealima, istinska važnost vaših napora je manje vidljiva svijetu u cjelini. Bez obzira na to, vi ste svjesni svog učešća u moćnom procesu transformacije koji će vremenom kao rezultat imati civilizaciju koja ima jedinstvo čovječanstva. Vi vrlo dobro znate da će ideje uma i duha koje njegujete u sebi a i drugima da prevaziđu sve, i utiču na ideje o braku, porodici, učenju, poslu, pa čak i mjestu stanovanja. Znanje o ovom većem kontekstu pomažu da se razbije iskrivljena čaša u kojoj svakodnevni testovi, poteškoće, prepreke i nesporazumi mogu izgledati nepremostivi. A tokom poteškoća koje su česte pri svačijem duhovnom napredovanju, lakše je skupiti volju za napretkom kada se energija usmjeri višem cilju - a još je lakše kada osoba pripada zajednici koja ima taj isti cilj.

Sve ove ideje su uvod u zajedničku i sve veću diskusiju tokom konferencija i izvan njih, kada se uključite u diskusije koje ohrabruju srce i pokazuju umu sve mogućnosti. Oslanjanje na vaše zajedničko iskustvo će dalje obogatiti vašu promišljanja. Tokom ovog divnog vremena, naša srca će biti sa vama, i željno ćemo gledati šta se dalje dešava nakon svake konferencije. Mi ćemo moliti Boga da na svakom okupljanju podari učesnicima Svoju neiscrpnu milost, uvjereni baš kao i vi da je Božanska pomoć obećana svima koji

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odluče služiti čovječanstvu prema pozivu
Bahá'u'lláh-a.

Potpisano: Univerzalna kuća pravde

1

RAZDOBLJE MLADOSTI

Pročitajte sljedeće odlomke u velikoj grupi. Možda će biti potrebno zastati nakon prvog odlomka i ukratko diskutovati pitanja koja donosi te onda nastaviti čitati i razmatrati odlomke koji slijede.

Svaka generacija mladih odlikuje se određenim karakteristikama, a njihove živote oblikuju određene sile. U ovom dijelu od vaše grupe se traži da razmisli o ovoj ključnoj temi. Kako vidite ulogu vaše generacije u društvu? Koja uzvišena svrha oblikuje vaša pojedinačna i zajednička djela?

Konferencije mladih okupljaju mlade ljude različitih uzrasta i iskustava. Mnogi su tinejdžeri koji se, kroz školu, porodicu i život zajednice, pripremaju za dužnosti odrasle dobi. Drugi su stariji mladi koji možda studiraju ili rade, vjenčani ili u procesu zasnivanja prodice. Na neke su već društvene okolnosti nametnule dužnosti za mnogo stariju dob, pa preživljavanje njihovih porodica možda već zavisi o njima. Jednako raznolike su zajednice iz kojih dolaze, od malih sela u svijetu do susjedstava velikih urbanih centara sa milionima stanovnika.

Bez obzira na njihove društvene situacije, mladi ljudi teže duhovnom i intelektualnom rastu i tome da "doprinesu blagostanju čovječanstva".¹ Oni

posjeduju mnoge čudesne moći, a njihovo pravilno usmjeravanje važna je briga, jer kad su pogrešno usmjerene ili kada njima manipulišu drugi, mogu uzrokovati puno društvenih problema. Među mladima svijeta nalaze se oni osjetljivi na Bahá'u'lláhovu viziju duhovno i materijalno naprednog svijeta. Uključivanje u programe Instituta za obuku omogućava im da vide sebe kao da kroče putem službe. Na tom putu povećavaju svoje sposobnosti da primjene Bahá'u'lláhova učenja na život društva. Oni shvataju da, kao što je 'Abdu'l-Bahá rekao, niti jedno djelo na svijetu nije "plemenitije od služenja zajedničkom dobru"², da je "najpravednije"³ "ustati i energično se posvetiti služenju masama"⁴.

U nesebičnoj službi društvu leži mogućnost za lični rast i povećanje sposobnosti za doprinos društvenom napretku. "Služba čovječanstvu je služba Bogu"⁵, isticao je 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Onima koji su ustali na službu, On je zapovijedio "Neka ljubav i svjetlo Kraljevstva sjaje kroz vas sve dok svi koji vas gledaju ne budu obasjani njegovim odsjajem."⁶ Kroz usmjeravanje njihovih talenata i sposobnosti prema uzdizanju društva, oni "postaju uzrok spokoja u svijetu stvaranja".⁷ Kako u svakodnevne aktivnosti ulivaju duh velikodušnog davanja, te nude dobrovoljna djela za dobrobit drugih, oni privlače Božju pomoć i potvrde.

Nužno je tada da sve veći broj onih koji su u cvijetu mladosti "očvrsnu za život u službi"⁸ društvu.

Prirodno, mnoge stvari zaokupljaju njihovo vrijeme i energiju: obrazovanje, posao, odmor, duhovni život, fizičko zdravlje. No oni uče izbjegavati rascjepkani pristup životu koji ne uspijeva vidjeti veze među različitim aspektima života. Takav nepovezan pogled na život često čini pojedinca žrtvom lažnih izbora koje sugerišu pitanja poput toga da li treba studirati ili služiti, napredovati materijalno ili doprinosti dobrobiti drugih, napredovati u poslu ili se posvetiti službi. Neuspjeh u pristupanju svom životu kao jedinstvenoj cjelini često dovodi do nelagode i zbunjenosti. Kroz službu mladi ljudi mogu naučiti njegovati život u kojem se njegovi različiti aspekti međusobno nadopunjavaju.

Uvjereni u neiscrpne Božje blagoslove onima koji ustanu na službu, mladi gledaju na okruženja u kojima imaju interakcije s drugima – porodicu, vršnjake, školu, radno mjesto, medije, zajednicu – i prepoznaju društvene sile na djelu. Neke od tih sila, kao što su ljubav prema istini, žeđ za znanjem, privučenost ljepoti, podstiču ih u njihovom napredovanju na putu službe. Druge sile, kao što je sve rasprostranjeniji materijalizam i usredsređenost na sebe, razorne su, te iskrivljavanjem pogleda mladih na svijet, ometaju pojedinačni i zajednički rast. Kako napreduju u svojim nastojanjima da doprinesu izgradnji boljeg svijeta, njihova sposobnost da koriste duhovne i društvene sile koje ih čine graditeljima civilizacije, višestruko raste.

Nakon što ste ukratko raspravili ideje u svakom odlomku, podijelite se u manje grupe i razmotrite sljedeća pitanja:

a. Razmislite o zajednicama iz kojih dolazite i odredite neka okruženja u kojima vi kao mladi imate interakcije s drugima. Koje su pozitivne ili negativne sile na djelu u tim okruženjima? Možete li opisati različite načine na koje ta mjesta utiču na vas?

b. Pročitani tekst stavlja veliki naglasak na pozitivne učinke koje služba ima na duhovni i intelektualni rast te na sposobnost mlađih generacija da doprinesu društvenom napretku. Raspravite taj važan koncept koji uključuje dvostruku moralnu svrhu, koristeći što više primjera iz vlastitih zajednica.

c. Naglašavajući važnost toga da mladi ljudi nastoje voditi skladne živote, pitanja kao što su da li studirati ili služiti, unaprjeđivati sebe ili doprinositi dobrobiti drugih tekst naziva "lažnim izborima". Na koji način su to lažni izbori i kako oni mogu paralizovati mladu osobu? Koji drugi primjeri lažnih izbora se trebaju izbjegavati?

¹ Message dated 8 February 2013 written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, p. 2.

² 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 103.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2007), from a talk in New York, 12 April 1912, at the studio of Miss Phillips, para. 2.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1997, 2009 printing), para. 120.2.

⁸ Message dated 8 February 2013, p. 2.

2

RANA MLADOST

Pročitajte sljedeći tekst u velikoj grupi. Možda ćete željeti ukratko raspraviti pitanje postavljeno u prvom odlomku prije nego što nastavite čitati i razmatrati ostatak dokumenta.

U prvom dijelu konferencije, raspravljali ste o nekim važnim konceptima povezanim s mladošću. Jedna ideja koju ste razmatrali bila je uticaj konstruktivnih i destruktivnih društvenih sila na mlade ljude. Sada vas pozivamo da promislite o juniorima koji su u posebnim godinama rane mladosti i predstavljaju "riznicu sposobnosti za preobražaj društva koja čeka da se načne"⁹. Što čini to doba posebnim?

U dobi između 12 i 15 godina koja predstavlja prelaz iz djetinjstva u mladost, juniori doživljavaju nagle fizičke, intelektualne te emocionalne promjene. Njihova duhovna moć se širi. Novi nivo svjesnosti javlja se u njima, povećano zanimanje za duboka pitanja te za njihove talente i sposobnosti. Njihova "moć zapažanja se širi i produbljuje"¹⁰, kaže 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a njihove intelektualne sposobnosti se "treniraju i bude"¹¹. Tokom tog kratkog presudnog perioda oblikuju se ideje o pojedincu i društvu koje će najvjerojatnije oblikovati ostatak njihovog života. No, oduševljenje tim novim sposobnostima često je pomiješano s osjećajima brige, nelagodnosti i sumnje

koji mogu prouzrokovati kontradikcije u ponašanju. Usmjeravanje novih sposobnosti prema nesebičnoj službi čovječanstvu je stoga potrebno u toj dobi. To zahtijeva da prime pravu vrstu obrazovanja i brige, jer će inače njihove "odlike biti ugušene u zagušljivoj atmosferi sebičnosti"¹².

Neki pogledi na juniore ne stavljaju ovo razdoblje života pod pozitivno svjetlo. Popularni pogledi, na primjer, smatraju ovu dob punom zbunjenosti i kriza. Takve misli njeguju uslove u kojima se šire neželjeni obrasci ponašanja. Pravilno shvatanje ove dobi je da su to mladi ljudi s "izoštrenim osjećajem za pravdu, željom za učenjem o univerzumu i željom da doprinose izgradnji boljega svijeta."¹³ Negativne crte koje oni ponekad pokazuju zasigurno nisu svojstvene ovom razdoblju ljudskog života.

Ključna stvar koju stoga treba razmotriti je koji su izvori neprihvatljivih obrazaca ponašanja koji ponekad karakteriziraju neke juniore. Dva faktora zahtijevaju pažljivo promišljanje u tom pogledu. Prvo, uticaj negativnih društvenih sila na mnoge zajednice doveo je do širenja različitih društvenih boljki koje imaju ogroman uticaj na to kako mladi vide sebe i društvo. Drugo, juniori su duboko pogođeni ponašanjem odraslih prema njima. Iako oni u to doba stižu uvide u mnoge duboke stvari, odrasli često insistiraju na tome da ih tretiraju kao djecu. Uz to, razlika između riječi i djela koju neki odrasli ponekad pokazuju može biti uzrok zbunjenosti kod

mladih ljudi koji traže standarde prema kojim će oblikovati svoj život.

Naglašavanje učinka negativnih društvenih sila na juniore ne znači da su mladi ljudi u osnovi krhki. Oni se mogu, uz pomoć, suočiti s tim silama. Oni mogu razviti moći duše i uma koje im ne omogućavaju samo da se izdignu nad takvim izazovima već ih takođe čine doprinositeljima izgradnji novog društva. U tom svjetlu, Univerzalna kuća pravde zahtijeva pristupe "koji će uključiti njihove interese, oblikovati njihove sposobnosti za poučavanje i službu, te ih uključiti u društvenu interakciju sa starijom omladinom."¹⁴ Potrebno im je okruženje koje njeguje njihove duhovne kvalitete i nadahnjuje njihov žar za učenjem i svrsishodnim djelovanjem. Starija omladina, poistovjećujući se s iskustvima rane mladosti, može u stvaranju takvog okruženja odigrati presudnu ulogu. Budući da ih juniori često gledaju kao primjere kako se ponašati, stariji mladi su pozvani na svetu dužnost pomaganja svojim mlađim dvojnicima da osnaže svoje moralne temelje.

S tim u vezi, Bahá'í mladi i njihovi prijatelji u mnogim zajednicama posvećuju se služenju kao animatori programa za duhovno osnaživanje juniora. Program daje mladim ljudima "alat kojim će poraziti sile koje im žele preoteti njihov pravi identitet plemenitih bića, te raditi za opšte dobro."¹⁵ U veseloj i prijateljskoj grupi vršnjaka koja služi kao okruženje međusobne podrške, juniori proučavaju tekstove koji uvode različite temeljne koncepte. Pomaže im se da

izoštire svoju duhovnu percepciju, identifikuju sile koje oblikuju društvo, te da unaprijede svoje moći izražavanja, koje im zauzvrat omogućuju razumijevanje i jasno opisivanje svijeta koji ih okružuje. Kroz službu oni zajedno uče doprinositi dobrobiti društva.

Učvršćujući moralne strukture koje se razvijaju u njihovim umovima, ideje predstavljene u svakom tekstu daju juniorima pogled pun nade na život i društvo. Animatori, koji služe kao njihovi prijatelji, podupiru ih i vode u tom procesu, pazeći da se ne odnose prema njima kao prema djeci već kao prema mladim ljudima s rastućim sposobnostima da doprinesu podizanju nove civilizacije. Dok njeguju uslove koji nadahnjuju nesebičnu službu zajednici, animatori također paze da, bez da to primijete, aktivnosti koje vode ne potaknu u njihovim štičenicima ego ili usredsređenost na sebe. Njihove interakcije s roditeljima juniora njeguju duh saradnje i pomažu širenju pozitivnog okruženja stvorenog u grupi na domove i na čitavu zajednicu.

Učinak programa na animatore jednako je značajan. Bilo da su sami bili članovi grupe juniora ili ne, oni su pod uticajem snage programa da oblikuje moralnu svrhu. Do one mjere do koje se posvete vlastitom duhovnom rastu povećat će se učinkovitost njihove službe mlađim generacijama. Imajući na umu koncepte naslijeđene od društva, a koji djeluju na njihove misli, animatori su stalno svjesni uticaja Bahá'u'lláhovih učenja na njihove misli i djela. Oni

se takođe trude stvoriti okruženje među sobom i u svojim zajednicama gdje najveća radost proizlazi iz toga da pomažu "jedni drugima pri usponu u visine službe".¹⁶

Nakon što ste ukratko raspravili ideje u svakom odlomku, podijelite se u manje grupe i razmotrite sljedeća pitanja:

a. Tekst sugerise da društvene sile koje utiču na mlade mogu još više preuzeti juniore. Razmišljajući o juniorima u vašoj zajednici, raspravite kako njih pogađaju destruktivne sile i obrasci ponašanja do kojih one dovode.

b. Neki od vas dolaze iz zajednica gdje je oformljeno barem nekoliko grupa juniora te možda čak i služite kao animatori. Opišite kako juniori uključeni u program napreduju duhovno i intelektualno, te kako uče doprinositi napretku svojih porodica i zajednica.

c. Svaki tekst programa za juniore pomaže mladim ljudima shvatiti jedan ili nekoliko temeljnih koncepata. *Lahori potvrde*, na primjer, pomaže im cijeniti to da ako ulože trud u nastojanjima za svoj i za napredak svojih zajednica, Bog će ih podržati. Raspravite glavne koncepte još tri teksta programa. Kakav uticaj imaju na način na koji juniori vide sebe i svijet oko njih?

d. Tekst gore naglašava uzajamnu vezu između služenja kao animator i duhovnog rasta. Razmotrite koje duhovne kvalitete i stavove treba pokazivati

onaj koji podržava grupu juniora te kako mu služba u tome pomaže.

- ⁹ Message dated 12 December 2011 written by the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, p. 7.
- ¹⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, from a talk in New York, 17 November 1912, para. 3.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy* (Boston: Tudor Press, c.1918), p. 132.
- ¹³ Riḍván 2010 message written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the world, p. 5.
- ¹⁴ Riḍván 2000 message written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the world, p. 9.
- ¹⁵ Riḍván 2010 message, p. 5.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

3

NJEGOVANJE MEĐUSOBNE PODRŠKE I POMAGANJA

Pročitajte sljedeći odlomak u velikoj grupi.

Prva dva teksta koja ste proučavali jasno govore o tome da je pred sadašnjom generacijom mladih velika odgovornost za doprinos poboljšanju društva. Na njima je takođe dužnost da neguju okruženje u kojem mlađi članovi društva mogu doseći duhovne i intelektualne moći potrebne kako bi postali graditelji nove civilizacije. Zadatak je nesumnjivo ogroman. Kako bi se suprotstavili snažnim društvenim silama koje prijete potkopati njihove moći i izopačiti njihovu svrhu, mladi se mogu pouzdati u Božju nepogrješivu pomoć. Takođe trebaju povećati sposobnost da stvore atmosferu međusobne podrške i pomoći jedni drugima u svojim zajednicama u kojima se umnogostručuju njihove sposobnosti da preobrazu društvo.

Slijedi zamišljeni razgovor četvoro bliskih prijatelja, dva momka, Sampe i Sanjiva, te dvije djevojke, Caroline i Rayen, koji žive u Springtownu, predgrađu Metropol Cityja sa nekih 4000 stanovnika. Mnogi Springtownovi stanovnici imaju između 15 i 30 godina. Sampa (18) i Rayen (19), upravo su završili srednju školu, dok Sanjiv i Caroline (oboje 21), studiraju na jednom od Metropolovih velikih

univerziteta. Uz izuzetak Caroline koja im se nedavno pridružila, oni se poznaju godinama. Zajedno su pohađali osnovnu i srednju školu u predgrađu te su tokom protekle tri godine služili kao animatori juniora. Sada njih četvoro podržavaju četiri grupe od nekih 50 mladih u Springtownu. Zajedničko služenje je ojačalo njihovo prijateljstvo te su uvijek uključeni u živahan razgovor o njihovim naporima i napretku zajednice. Rayen i Sanjiv su Bahá'íji.

"Trebamo više razgovarati o ideji kročenja putem službe," započe Sampa. "Znam da je važna služba koju pojedinac nudi, ali tu postoji i pitanje kako se služba izvršava."

"Pa, meni se sviđa činjenica da služimo zajedno," brzo odgovori Rayen. "Bilo bi teško služiti sam. Uz vas divne ljude pored mene, pronalazim hrabrost za nastavak služenja."

"Istina," doda Caroline. "No mislim da činjenica da služimo zajedno takođe pomaže da izbjegnemo negativne obrasce ponašanja. Lično sam se trebala dosta mijenjati otkad sam počela služiti s vama, a te promjene bile bi mi teške samoj."

Sanjiv se obzirno nasmiješi Carolini i reče: "To me podsjeća na ono što Kuća pravde kaže da put službe "može biti isproban i poznat, ne samo jednome ili dvojici već desetinana nad desetinama."¹⁷ Mislim da

to takođe znači da služba omogućava velikom broju ljudi da napreduju i zajedno rastu."

"Ja sam nova u ovome," reče Caroline, "no naše jedinstvo zaista pravi razliku". Ne samo da se ne svađamo, već vidimo stvari na isti način. Ujedinjeni smo u onome što tražimo; idemo u istome smjeru. Upoznala sam puno ljudi, dobrih i inteligentnih ljudi s odličnim idejama, čistih namjera. No oni ne mogu napredovati zajedno; oni nemaju zajedničku viziju."

"Mislim da je dio jedinstva prihvatiti da ne hodamo svi istom brzinom," kaže Rayen. "Kako je to rekla Kuća pravde, Sanjiv?" upita s osmjehom na licu.

"Da put 'prihvata različite brzine i korake'," ¹⁸ reče Sanjiv, čistim i odlučnim glasom.

"Različite brzine i korake," nastavi Rayen. "Lako je jednostavno trčati punom brzinom zato što možeš, no zastati, osvrnuti se, te se možda vratiti kako bi podupro svog prijatelja iziskuje iskrenu ljubav i strpljenje. U suprotnom, kako možemo zajedno napredovati?"

"No Rayen, trebamo isto tako paziti da to ne postane samo nekolicina dobrih prijatelja koji zajedno služe, već isto tako da bude nadahnuće i poziv onima koji nisu još na putu da nam se pridruže," reče Caroline. "Da me Sanjiv nije pozvao, ne bih bila ovdje. Postoje mnogi mladi oko nas koji zaista žele doprinijeti

društvu, ali ne znaju kako. Moramo naučiti stvarati prava i trajna prijateljstva s onima koji takođe žele poboljšati društvo."

"Jako mi se sviđa to što je Caroline rekla. Važno je da naši napori budu iskreni te da marljivo radimo. No ako ne možemo pomoći ostalima koji takođe žele početi kročiti putem službe, bit će teško postići trajnu promjenu," reče Sanjiv. "No tada moramo dobro razmisliti o vlastitim kvalitetama i stavovima, i kao pojedinci i kao grupa."

"Istina," reče Sampa. "Toliko dobrih napora zastrani zbog toga što su ljudi koji su uključeni usredsređeni na sebe. Ponekad to vodi do toga da se obraća previše pažnje na mane drugih, umjesto da se ohrabruju prijatelji kojima je možda teško, počinju se kritikovati."

"O, kritika ne koristi nikome," reče Caroline. "Ona guši rast. No danas je tako uobičajena u društvu. Ponekad se čini kao da svi kritikuju sve."

"A ponekad problem nije kritikovanje drugih. Neko se može toliko usredsrediti na svoje vlastite nedostatke da postane nepokretan," reče Sanjiv.

Sampa reče, "Niko se nikad ne bi smio osjećati bespomoćnim. Uvjereni smo u Božju pomoć – trebamo to vjerovati, mislim zaista vjerovati – te imamo prijatelje oko sebe. Prijateljstvo ne znači

samo smijati se i zajedno se igrati, već biti uistinu sretan zbog napretka prijatelja, ustvari pomagati jedni drugima da rastemo."

Rayen dodaje: "Mislim da kad ljudi postanu pravi prijatelji, te stalno ohrabruju jedni druge, čak i ono što se isprva čini nemogućim postaje ostvarivo. Tada služba postaje čista radost, a krug prijatelja raste."

Zavlada trenutak tišine dok četvero prijatelja promišlja o tim idejama. Pogledaše jedni druge sa smiješkom dok ih prože snažno duhovno drugarstvo. Čini se da svi žele nešto reći, no oklijevaju. Sanjiv se čini najspremniji da progovori.

"Samo reci Sanjiv, samo reci," Caroline ga bodri i svi se nasmiju.

"Samo sam razmišljao kako trebamo puno učiti o tim zaista dubokim idejama. Uzmimo nas kao primjer. Svi smo animatori, je li tako? Razmislite o tome što je potrebno da se podrži grupa željnih, poletnih, energičnih juniora tokom tri godine, ponekad i duže. Pa onda razmislite o stvaranju i održavanju zaista dobrog prijateljstva s drugim animatorima i stalnom međusobnom pomaganju. Možemo li postati dobri u tim stvarima ukoliko nismo spremni učiti?"

Sanjivove riječi ponovno su bacile grupu u tiho promišljanje. "Mislim da trebamo započeti kod onog što je Caroline ranije spomenula, imati potpunu vjeru

da će nam ukoliko smo iskreni, Bog pomoći," nakon nekog vremena reče Sampa.

"Takođe trebamo biti skromni i prihvatiti da ne znamo sve," doda Rayen. "Mislim da učimo kako učiti. Puno pomaže to što često zajedno proučavamo, pomažemo jedni drugima s grupama, te se redovito sastajemo kako bismo promišljali i savještovali se."

Caroline reče, "Mislim da isto tako učimo kako slušati jedni druge. Jedan moj prijatelj mi je znao reći, 'Znam da si me slušala, no jesi li me zaista čula?' Ponekad ljudi pridaju veću vrijednost rječitosti, a ne toliko pažljivom slušanju bez predrasuda. Ljudi mogu bolje podržavati jedni druge kad uistinu slušaju jedni druge."

Sanjiv reče: "Slušanje je takođe povezano s načinom na koji se savjetujemo. 'Abdu'l-Bahá kaže da 'savjetovanje za cilj mora imati istraživanje istine'¹⁹ te da 'čovjek mora razmatrati svoje misli s potpunim spokojem, mirnoćom i pribranošću'.²⁰ Mislim da je dio učenja biti iskreno zainteresiran za istinu radije nego za 'puko izražavanje ličnih stavova.

"U redu je, naravno, imati svoje lično mišljenje," reče Caroline, "no ono mora biti izraženo na način koji poziva, a ne guši mišljenja drugih. Moram reći da kad se sastajemo zbog promišljanja i razgovaramo, tako se osjećam: da su sva naša mišljenja dobrodošla i da vi zaista želite znati što svi

misle i osjećaju. Ja učim biti takva i mislim da je to odlično!"

Prijatelji nastave raspravu o tome kako efikasno mogu podržati jedni druge. Promišljaju o tome kako uzdići interakcije među prijateljima. "Sofisticiran je ovaj svijet danas, sa svim novim tehnologijama," zamišljeno će Rayen. "Neki od nas imaju više prijatelja na internetu nego u stvarnom životu. Interakcija na internetu može biti podstaknuta drugačijim skupom vrijednosti, te na kraju počnemo živjeti život kontradikcija. Pretpostavljam da ako ostanemo svjesni da nas Bahá'u'lláhova prisutnost puna ljubavi uvijek okružuje, truditi ćemo se uzdići svaku interakciju."

"Neki dan smo raspravljali o tome kako ljudi ponekad radije pišu poruke nekome na drugom kraju svijeta nego vode razgovor s nekim ko sjedi odmah pored njih," reče Sampa. "Ništa ne može zamijeniti pravo prijateljstvo koje je izgrađeno na zajedničkoj želji i posvećenosti poboljšanju vlastite zajednice. To je jedna od najvažnijih ideja koju sam izvukao iz ove rasprave."

Nakon što ste ukratko raspravili ideje u svakom dijelu razgovora, podijelite se u male grupe i razmotrite sljedeća pitanja:

a. Stvaranje okruženja međusobne podrške uključuje viziju velikog broja mladih koji kao istinski prijatelji zajedno rade na preobražaju svoje zajednice. Kako biste vi ostvarili takvu viziju u svom klasteru ili zajednici? Koliko bi važan bio razgovor među mladima, te koja bi bila njegova svrha i sadržaj?

b. Međusobna podrška nije povezana samo s međusobnim pomaganjem u izvršavanju djela službe, već i s napretkom u ostalim aspektima života. Koji drugi aspekti života iziskuju međusobnu podršku? Razmotrite na primjer dovođenje ličnog ponašanja u skladu sa zakonima i principima Vjere, obrazovanja, posla, braka.

c. Mladi ljudi provode mnogo vremena zajedno, pa je nužno nešto vremena provodi u aktivnostima zabave i odmora. Ipak, za njihov napredak važno je izbjegavanje gubljenja puno vremena na trivijalna nastojanja, te uzdizanje njihovih interakcija na različitim mjestima, uključujući elektroničke medije. Kako mladi mogu to postići?

d. Navedeni razgovor naglašava važnost njegovanja snažnih veza prijateljstva među ljudima koji služe zajedno. Šta smatrate pravom prirodom prijateljstva? Kako biste odredili koja prijateljstva pomažu, a koja su štetna za napredak mladih ljudi?

17 Message dated 12 December 2011, p. 2.

18 Ibid.

19 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, from a talk in Chicago, 2 May 1912, at Hotel Plaza, notes by Joseph H. Hannen, para

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., para. 1.

4

MLADI I IZGRADNJA ZAJEDNICE

Pročitajte sljedeći odlomak u velikoj grupi.

Prethodni tekst bavio se važnošću međusobne potpore mladih i zajedničkim napretkom u službi društvu. Bilo je jasno da izgradnja novog društva uveliko zavisi o iskrenim naporima sve većeg broja ljudi koji mogu "tkati svoje individualne inicijative i kolektivna nastojanja u djelotvoran obrazac ujedinjene akcije".²² U tom svjetlu sada se od vas traži da razmislite o doprinosu koji vaša generacija može dati izgradnji živahnih zajednica u susjedstvima i selima, te na drugim mjestima gdje se mogu naći ljudi željni odigrati ulogu u zajedničkom preobražaju.

Kako bi se razmotrilo to pitanje, nužno je ukratko pregledati neke od elemenata obrasca djelovanja koji usmjeravaju napore Bahá'í zajednice širom svijeta. Većina djelovanja Bahá'í zajednice u izgradnji novog društva nadahnutog učenjima Bahá'u'lláha odvija se u kontekstu klastera, geografskog područja kojim se lako upravlja, a koje se sastoji od sela i možda manjeg grada, ili velikog grada sa svojim predgrađima. Glavni cilj u svakom klasteru je jačanje, kroz primjenu Bahá'í učenja, tri protagonista u procesu promjene: pojedinca, zajednice, te

institucija. Rad na tome uključuje podizanje, kroz proces instituta, sve više ljudi sposobnih promovisati duhovni i društveni napredak; izgradnju živahnih lokalnih zajednica gdje "pojedinci, porodice i institucije... [rade] zajedno sa zajedničkom svrhom za dobrobit ljudi i unutar i izvan njenih granica";²³ a razvoj institucija sa sposobnošću mobiliziranja, usmjeravanja i ujedinjavanja energija mnogih prijatelja koji su željni služiti. Klasteri su nužno na različitim nivoima razvoja zavisno od broja i učinkovitosti onih koji rade na promjeni, te ovisno o snazi i napretku lokalnih zajednica i institucija. U nekima će naponi bahá'íja za izgradnju novog društva tek započeti.

U svakom klasteru prijatelji se suočavaju s različitim okolnostima. Mnogi od njih žive većinom u homogenim selima ruralnih područja ili najčešće raznolikim susjedstvima velikih gradova. Neke lokalitete obilježava snažan duh zajednice; u drugima on očito nedostaje. Prijatelji u klasteru takođe mogu biti povezani s drugima s obzirom na određene zajedničke interese na primjer, studiranje na određenom univerzitetu ili članstvo u profesionalnoj ili društvenoj organizaciji koja nije ograničena fizičkom lokacijom. Kako bi izgradili novo društvo, prijatelji se trude da podignu na tim mjestima i okruženjima sposobnosti primjenjivanja učenja Bahá'u'llah. Niti jedno društvo ne može iskusiti duhovni i društveni napredak moguć na ovom nivou ljudskog života bez nesebične službe njegovih članova.

Promišljajući o naporima mlade generacije da kroči putem službe, važno je razmisliti o tome kako oni mogu "njegovati živahan život zajednice u susjedstvima i selima".²⁴ Sljedeći prikaz i pitanja koja ga slijede pomoći će vam u savjetovanju o vašim doprinosima izgradnji zajednica koje sve jače odražavaju Bahá'u'lláhovu viziju za čovječanstvo.

U istočnoj regiji Manjalo, u klasteru Heri, leži Jambo, veliko selo od nekih 3000 ljudi smješteno na blagim padinama planine Muze. To je prekrasno selo s vijugavim ulicama punih predivnim stablima, koja kad se u ljubičastom cvatu povežu sa bogatim zelenilom polja daju selu živahan osjećaj života. Njegovi raznoliki stanovnici – petina kojih su mlađi od 11 godina, a desetina su juniori – dolaze iz različitih plemena koja žive zajedno već godinama. Kako ih je više od pola mlađe od 30 godina, oni su na mnogo načina živahna grupa.

Poviše na padini planine nad Jambo se nadvija velika stara crkva bijelo ispranih zidova, a u podnožju su seoska osnovna i srednja škola. Između je sve ostalo: uredna mala pošta; zidani domovi bogatih stanovnika; poveća klinika crvenog krova; aktivan sportski centar; poveća tržnica s dobro opremljenim prodavnicama; te najbliže školama, rastuće naselje gdje živi većina Jambovih stanovnika. To su marljivi Jambovi domaći stanovnici. Svaka prodica ima

komad zemlje gdje uzgaja željezom bogato lisnato povrće i ukusno gomoljasto povrće. Zarada muškaraca koji rade u rudniku bakra 10 kilometara sjeverno, te posjeti ljudi iz vruće i vlažne doline ispod pokreće malu seosku ekonomiju. Novi restorani otvorili su se duž njegove krivudave glavne ceste, isto kao i nekoliko pivnica, koje svojom treštavom muzikou mijenjaju Jambovu mirnu okolinu.

Jambo se razlikuje od susjednih sela na mnogo načina, no najviše zbog toga što trećina njegovih stanovnika zajedno radi za dobrobit zajednice. Predani su, reklo bi se, učenju kako koristiti Bahá'u'lláhova učenja za izgradnju boljeg društva. Njihovi često gorljivi razgovori pokazuju jednu stvar: proučavanje Riječi Božje kroz kurseve instituta stvorilo je u njima žeđ za razumijevanjem i želju za službom. Otvorili su svoje domove za molitvene sastanke; djeca se, uz pomoć tinejdžera, sastaju nedeljno pod stablima, u domovima i u učionicama radi duhovnog obrazovanja; juniori i njihovi mladi animatori izvor su neprestanih aktivnosti: ponekad marljivo proučavajući tekstove u grupama, a ponekad vani skupljajući smeće, posjećujući bolesne, sadeći drveće, služeći kako god mogu. Široki osmjesi njihovih roditelja otkrivaju – umjesto očajja dolazi nada u sposobnost njihove djece da se suoče sa svijetom koji se ubrzano mijenja kako svakodnevno u riječima i djelima svojih mladih vide sve veću moralnu hrabrost. A posebno je radosno kad se oni koji su uključeni u aktivnosti – djeca i juniori, mladi

i odrasli, žene i muškarci – okupe. Tu takođe ima i ozbiljnog savjetovanja kako teže povećanju učinkovitosti svojih aktivnosti.

U Jambu postoji stalno ohrabrivanje. Koordinatori instituta i Mjesno duhovno vijeće zajedno rade s ostalim vođama u zajednici kako bi podržali sve one koji ustaju da odigraju svoju ulogu. Bez obzira na dob i pol, oni se savjetuju kako brinuti o onima koji podstiču Jambov napredak i o tome kako dovesti one koji su još uvijek na periferiji u zajedničko djelovanje.

Promjena je počela prije nekih pet godina u Jambu. Nakon savjetovanja s članom Pomoćnog odbora koji ih je posjetio, nekolicina Bahá'íja shvatila je da sami neće ispuniti Bahá'u'lláhove nade za njihovu zajednicu." Trebamo pronaći druge u Jambu koji su spremni zajedno raditi na promjeni," razmišljali su. U razgovorima sa komšijama o tome što omogućavaju Bahá'u'lláhova učenja, pronašli su mnoge zabrinute za Jambo i željne pomoći. Kroz krugove za proučavanje nekoliko ih je započelo podučavati časove za djecu i održavati molitvene sastanke. No uskoro su se pojavile mnoge prepreke – jedinstvo je bilo krhko i često su izbijale nesuglasice; polet se gubio jer su ljudi bili ostavljeni da rade bez ohrabrivanja; a kada se otvorio rudnik bakra, većina pouzdanih ljudi je postalo prezauzeto svojim poslom da bi održali predanost aktivnostima zajednice. No, postojala je grupa prijatelja koji su ostali zajedno,

koji su u izazovima vidjeli priliku za izgradnju pravog i čvrstog prijateljstva.

Prije tri godine nešto ključno se dogodilo u Jambu. Nekoliko prijatelja koji su pohađali kurs instituta o služenju kao animatori grupa juniora vratilo se s velikim oduševljenjem. Posjetili su neke prodice, raspravljali su što Bahá'í vjera uči o ranoj mladosti, istražili sposobnosti potrebne mladim ljudima da se odupru destruktivnim društvenim silama i razmatrali kako zajedno s roditeljima mogu stvoriti duhovno podsticajno okruženje za mlade ljude u Jambu. Ubrzo su radili s 20 željnih juniora u dvije grupe. Onda su razgovor proširili na stariju omladinu u zajednici. "Juniori se ugledaju na vas," rekli su, "a budući da vi razumijete prirodu njihove dobi, vi im najbolje možete pomoći." Takođe su raspravljali o tome kako služenje kao animator pomaže pojedincu da se razvije. "Pomažući juniorima, takođe ćete unaprijediti svoje vlastite duhovne i intelektualne sposobnosti," objasnili su, "a zajedno ćemo doprinijeti izgradnji bolje zajednice."

Samo se nekoliko mladih uključilo u početku, no prijatelji su ustrajali u svojim interakcijama s mladim ljudima. Kroz dalje razgovore sve veći broj je reagovao pozitivno. Tokom vremena, mnogi su se obučili za animatore. Kako je snaga programa postajala očita, vođe zajednice, čak i oni koji su sumnjali u početku, postali su uvjereni da je predanost programu za juniore kritična za budućnost i dobrobit Jamba. Mnogi su otvorili svoje domove za

sastanke grupa, te ponudili svoje resurse i talente. U školama su omogućeni posebni uslovi zainteresiranim srednjoškolcima da otvore grupe za svoje mlađe prijatelje.

I tako se zajednica zbližila. Tokom vremena, kako su juniori završavali program, mnogi su izabrali proučavati kurseva instituta; neki su krenuli doprinositi životu zajednice poučavajući djecu, a drugi su nastavili služiti kao animatori, doprinoseći daljem širenju programa za juniore. Sve više i više ljudi je postalo uvjereno u snagu kurseva instituta u podsticanju predanosti na dugotrajno djelovanje i pridružili su se njihovom proučavanju. Broj zajedničkih molitvi se povećao, te se pojavio jasan osjećaj svrhe. Sada se ne vode samo razgovori o Jambu već i o tome kako njegovi stanovnici mogu pomoći ostalim selima u Heri klasteru da nastave na putu ka napretku.

Ova priča prikazuje nekoliko važnih principa koje trebaju imati na umu mladi ljudi koji žele doprinijeti izgradnji zajednica na koje utiču Bahá'u'lláhova učenja. Kao što je prije navedeno, mogućnosti koje se nude mladima u doprinosu izgradnje zajednice različite su. Većini je moguće raditi u kontekstu susjedstva ili sela, drugi će možda takođe raditi sa studentima i profesorima na svom univerzitetu. Oni čiji se lokaliteti pokazuju manje osjetljivima za zajedničko djelovanje mogu se povezati s ljudima na mnogo većem geografskom području s kojima dijele

određene interese. Kako god bilo, pitanja koja slijede pomoći će vam razmisliti o konkretnim koracima koje mladi mogu preduzeti kako bi unaprijedili materijalnu i duhovnu dobrobit zajednice u kojoj se nalaze.

Nakon što ste ukratko raspravili ideje u svakom odlomku, podijelite se u male grupe i razmotrite sljedeća pitanja:

a. Navedena priča započela je opisom Jamba kao fizičkog i društvenog prostora. Važno je da mladi ljudi razumiju uslove zajednica u kojima žive, njihovu opštu populaciju, organizaciju prostora, institucije i procese koji u se odvijaju u njima. S tim na umu, opišite lokalitet u kojem živite, te možete nacrtati njegovu kartu.

b. Kao što je opisano u priči, proces izgradnje zajednice inspiriran Bahá'u'lláhovom porukom mora u središtu imati postupan razgovor o učenjima Vjere te njihovim implikacijama na život stanovništva. Taj razgovor napreduje kako sve više onih koji proučavaju kurseve instituta za obuku ustaju kako bi ponudili temeljne aktivnosti – molitvene sastanke, časove za djecu, grupe juniora, te krugove za proučavanje. Što vi možete učiniti kako bi ohrabрили velik broj mladih da postanu dio tog razgovora i nužnog procesa proučavanja i služenja povezanog s njim?

c. Kao što ste raspravljali ranije, duhovno osnaživanje juniora ključan je proces zajednice u podizanju mladih s duhovnim i intelektualnim sposobnostima da unaprijede društvo. Možda ćete stoga željeti sagledati njegov razvoj u vašoj zajednici i odrediti kako možete pomoći sve većem broju mladih da ustanu i podrže juniore.

d. Izgradnja zajednica uključuje stalno učenje. Ono je obogaćeno stalnim dijalogom među stanovnicima klastera, sela ili susjedstva kroz koji oni čine jasnijom svoju viziju, procjenjuju svoje rastuće sposobnosti, utvrđuju prepreke koje treba ukloniti, odlučuju o sljedećem nizu koraka, te učvršćuju sponu ljubavi i prijateljstva. Koje doprinose mladi daju ili mogu davati jačanju procese savjetovanja u vašoj zajednici?

e. Zajednica predstavlja jedinicu civilizacije. Njeni članovi i ustanove rade "zajedno sa zajedničkom svrhom za dobrobit ljudi unutar i izvan njenih granica".²⁵ Važno je zato razmotriti kako mladi u zajednici ili klasteru koji napreduje mogu širiti uticaj Bahá'u'lláhovih učenja koja izgrađuju civilizaciju pomažući drugoj zajednici u klasteru, ili čak drugom klasteru, da započnu njezino kretanje putom održivog napretka.

- ²² Riḍván 2007 message written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, p. 1.
- ²³ Riḍván 153 [1996] message written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, p. 6.
- ²⁴ Riḍván 2010 message, pp. 2–3.
- ²⁵ Riḍván 153 [1996] message, p.6.

5

DOPRINOS UNAPRJEĐENJU CIVILIZACIJE

Pročitajte sljedeći odlomak u velikoj grupi.

Tekstovi koje ste do sada proučavali imali su za cilj pomoći vam da razmislite o nekim aspektima života generacije mladih osjetljivih na Bahá'u'lláhovu viziju novog društva. Prije nego što nastavite s proučavanjem ovog posljednjeg teksta, možda će biti korisno podijeliti s drugima kako se povećalo vaše razumijevanje.

Napori bahá'ija i njihovih prijatelja za izgradnju zajednice nisu samo dobri društveni projekti nesebičnih pojedinaca. Oni su zasnovani na vjerovanju da čovječanstvo živi u vrlo posebnom vremenu u svojoj istoriji. U svom razvoju čovječanstvo je prošlo kroz razdoblja slična djetinjstvu i adolescenciji, te sada stoji na početku svoje zrelosti. Dva neodvojiva procesa, jedan dezintegracije a drugi integracije, pomiču čovječanstvo naprijed. Proces dezintegracije vidljiv je u nasilju, ratu i korupciji koji idu zajedno s padom zastarjelog poretka koji više nije sposoban nositi se s potrebama svijeta koji sazrijeva. On uzrokuje veliku zbuđenost i patnju, no takođe doprinosi uklanjanju prepreka za jedinstvo među ljudima. Proces integracije povezan je s duhovnim silama

oslobođenim dolaskom Bahá'u'lláha. S jedne strane, te sile utiču na sve više ljudi svuda da rade na jedinstvu i napretku. S druge strane, one postupno preoblikuju društvo kroz svjesne napore bahá'íja i njihovih prijatelja.

Svrha oba procesa dezintegracije i integracije jeste stvaranje svjetske civilizacije, kakvu još nikada nitko nije vidio. Njihov krajnji cilj je razvoj ujedinjenog i mirnog svijeta, globalnog društva koje je napredno kako duhovno tako i materijalno. 'Abdu'l-Bahá kaže:

Materijalna civilizacija je poput svjetiljke, dok je duhovna civilizacija svjetlo u toj svjetiljci. Ako materijalna i duhovna civilizacija budu ujedinjene, tada ćemo imati svjetlo i svjetiljku zajedno, a rezultat će biti savršen.²⁶

Cilj izgradnje nove civilizacije zahtijeva potpunu promjenu u načinu na koji je društvo organizovano i isto tako u ponašanju i postupanju pojedinaca. S tim u vezi Bahá'u'lláhova učenja imaju namjeru "ostvariti preobražaj u cijelom karakteru čovječanstva, preobražaj koji će se iskazati spolja kao i iznutra, koji će uticati i na unutrašnji život kao i na vanjske uslove".²⁷

Ključno za izgradnju civilizacije je prihvatanje da su svi ljudi svijeta, uistinu svake zajednice, jedno. Prepoznavanje ove temeljne istine ima mnoge primnjene na život zajednice i šire društvo. Danas su svi ljudi na svijetu primili jednaku mjeru milosti i

naklonosti jednoga pravoga Boga, te, u svoj svojoj raznolikosti, dijele pravo i dužnost da doprinesu stvaranju novoga svijeta. Kad se odnosi među članovima zajednice te između njih i institucija odlikuju ljubavlju i pravdom, svima je data prilika koristiti svoje Bogom date odlike za napredak društvenog dobra. Kad su duhovne i naučne spoznaje dostupne svima, članovi zajednice mogu zajedno učiti kako ih primjenjivati na njihov zajednički život. To je povezano s naporima bahá'íja za izgradnju zajednice o kojima smo raspravljali u prethodnom tekstu, a koji se pojačavaju u mnogim klasterima, susjedstvima i selima širom svijeta. Promjena u kulturi koju oni promiču dokaz je izranjanja novog društva iz nastojanja sve većeg broja ljudi danas da primjenjuju Božja učenja na život sve više zajednica.

Implikacije na život pojedinca koji žarko želi doprinijeti napretku civilizacije takođe su značajne. Osoba teži steći odlike, stavove i sposobnosti onoga koji učinkovito doprinosi napretku te pridaje različitim aspektima svog života – obrazovanju, radu, braku, prodičnom životu – snažan osjećaj misije. Takav pojedinac čini svaki napor kako bi udovoljio visokim idealima Vjere. Učenje kako izbjegavati predrasude svih vrsta, držati se visokog standarda čednosti, te pokazivati ispravnost u svim interakcijama s drugima, omogućuje pojedincu da postane učinkovit učesnik u nastojanju da se promijeni društvo. U "naporima da dosegne osobni napredak i drži se Bahá'í ideala",²⁸ osoba je uronjena u svrhovitu zajednicu, okruženje u kojem istinsko

jedinstvo podstiče prijatelje svih dobi da pomažu jedni drugima doseći sve veću i veću duhovnu, moralnu i intelektualnu izvrsnost.

S tog stanovišta, onaj ko je svjestan potencijala koji sadrži Bahá'u'lláhova poruka za obnovu svijeta nesumnjivo će pronaći mnogo radosti u dovođenju njezinog nadahnuća ljudima svijeta, omogućavajući im da ustanu ispuniti svoju dužnost kao svjesni graditelji nove civilizacije.

Nakon što ste ukratko raspravili ideje u svakom odlomku, podijelite se u male grupe i razmotrite sljedeća pitanja.

Postoji mnogo područja nastojanja kroz koja ljudi uče primjenjivati Bahá'u'lláhova učenja kako bi doprinijeli izgradnji nove civilizacije. Pitanja koja slijede pomoći će vam u razmišljanju o odnosu između izgradnje civilizacije i rada i obrazovanja, braka i porodice, te lokalne zajednice.

Svaka grupa treba razmotriti jedno od ovih pitanja:

a. Obrazovanje, sticanje znanja i posao, nužni su za doprinos izgradnji civilizacije. Kako se mladi ljudi u različitim društvenim uslovima mogu pobrinuti da steknu najučinkovitije dostupno obrazovanje? Kako bi posao ili profesija mogli poslužiti kao sredstvo za doprinos izgradnji civilizacije? Što bi ih učinilo preprekom?

b. Kako se mladi ljudi mogu prikladno pripremiti za brak i za porodicu koja će značajno doprinijeti stvaranju novog društva?

c. Šta bi bile odlike lokalne zajednice koja je sposobna pomoći svojim članovima da razviju kvalitete i sposobnosti istinskih graditelja civilizacije? Koje interakcije među stanovnicima takve zajednice i sa njihovima institucijama mogu pomoći u povećanju predanost mladih ljudi da, recimo, žive čistim i čednim životom?

d. Izgradnja nove civilizacije iziskuje vjekove napornog rada. Kako bi se izgradio jak temelj, uključivanje velikog broja mladih je ključno. Kako mogu mladi, od kojih zavisi toliko posla oko izgradnje novoga svijeta, učinkovito podržati jedni druge kako bi postigli napredak u svim različitim sferama njihovih života?

²⁶ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, from a talk in New York, 14 April 1912, at Church of the Ascension, para. 2.

²⁷ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-Íqán: The Book of Certitude* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2003, 2005 printing), para. 270.

²⁸ Letter dated 19 April 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to three individuals.

English

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

8 February 2013

To the Baha'is of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

Within communities of every size and strength, we are glad to see the processes of the Five Year Plan kindling the spirit of service and stimulating purposeful action. Examples appear every day of how the act of reaching out to touch individual hearts, acquainting souls with the Word of God, and inviting them to contribute to the betterment of society can, in time, tend to the advancement of a people. This collective movement becomes discernible when the Plan's elements are combined into a well-coordinated cluster-wide effort, the dynamics of which are becoming increasingly familiar. Such a cluster becomes the setting for experienced believers as much as those newly introduced to the Faith, whatever their age or background, to work side by side, accompanying one another in their service, enabling everyone to participate in the unfoldment of the Plan.

From the panorama of the Baha'i world engaged in earnest activity, one phenomenon strikes us especially: the decisive contribution made by youth on every continent. In this phenomenon we see the vindication of the hopes the beloved Guardian invested in them "for the future progress and expansion of the Cause" and of the confidence with which he laid upon their shoulders "all the responsibility for the upkeep of the spirit of selfless service among their fellow-believers". We are struck, too, by the number of youth who, after only

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a brief association with the Baha'i community, commit themselves to meaningful acts of service and quickly discover their affinity with the Faith's community-building endeavour. Indeed, in contemplating both the Baha'i youth and their like-minded peers, we cannot but rejoice at their eagerness to take on a measure of responsibility to aid the spiritual and social development of those around them, especially ones younger than themselves. In an age consumed by self-interest, in which even spiritual affiliation is weighed in the scales of reward and personal satisfaction, it is heartening to encounter individuals from their mid-teens to their twenties-those upon whom the sights of an aggressive materialism are decidedly trained-who are galvanized by the vision of Baha'u'llah and are ready to put the needs of others before their own. That such high-minded youth, by dint of their own exertions as well as the momentum they lend to the whole community, should be contributing so effectively to efforts everywhere under way bodes well for the anticipated acceleration of these efforts.

What has been accomplished in the past two years will, surely, be far surpassed, not just in the concluding years of this present Plan but in the remaining years of the first century of the Formative Age. To spur on this mighty enterprise and to summon today's youth to fully assume the responsibilities they must discharge in this fast-contracting interval, we announce the convocation

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of 95 youth conferences, between July and October, planned for locations that span the globe: Accra, Addis Ababa, Aguascalientes, Almaty, Antananarivo, Apia, Atlanta, Auckland, Baku, Bangalore, Bangui, Bardiya, Battambang, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Boston, Brasilia, Bridgetown, Bukavu, Cali, Canoas, Cartagena de Indias, Chennai, Chibombo, Chicago, Chishinau, Cochabamba, Daidanaw, Dakar, Dallas, Danane, Dar es Salaam, Dhaka, Dnipropetrovsk, Durham (United States), Frankfurt, Guwahati, Helsinki, Istanbul(2), Jakarta, Johannesburg, Kadugannawa, Kampala, Kananga, Karachi, Khujand, Kinshasa, Kolkata, Kuching, Lae, Lima, London, Lubumbashi, Lucknow, Macau, Madrid, Manila, Matunda Soy, Moscow, Mwinilunga, Mzuzu, Nadi, Nairobi, New Delhi, Oakland, Otavalo, Ouagadougou, Panchgani, Paris, Patna, Perth, Phoenix, Port-au-Prince, Port Dickson, Port Moresby, Port-Vila, San Diego, San Jose (Costa Rica), San Jose City (Philippines), San Salvador, Santiago, Sapele, Sarh, Seberang Perai, South Tarawa, Sydney, Tbilisi, Thyolo, Tirana, Toronto, Ulaanbaatar, Vancouver, Verona, Yaounde. We extend an invitation to these gatherings to every youth who recognizes in the methods and instruments of the Plan potent means for movement towards a better society. And from Baha'is of all ages, we invite wholehearted support for the participants upon whose efforts so much depends.

Beloved friends: To every generation of young

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believers comes an opportunity to make a contribution to the fortunes of humanity, unique to their time of life. For the present generation, the moment has come to reflect, to commit, to steel themselves for a life of service from which blessing will flow in abundance. In our prayers at the Sacred Threshold, we entreat the Ancient Beauty that, from out a distracted and bewildered humanity, He may distil pure souls endowed with clear sight: youth whose integrity and uprightness are not undermined by dwelling on the faults of others and who are not immobilized by any shortcomings of their own; youth who will look to the Master and "bring those who have been excluded into the circle of intimate friends"; youth whose consciousness of the failings of society impels them to work for its transformation, not to distance themselves from it; youth who, whatever the cost, will refuse to pass by inequity in its many incarnations and will labour, instead, that "the light of justice may shed its radiance upon the whole world."

Signed: The Universal House of Justice

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

1 May 2013

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

So overwhelming has been the response of the Bahá'í youth and their friends—indeed, of Bahá'í communities worldwide—to the announcement of 95 conferences to be convened around the world between July and October, that existing arrangements now seem unlikely to accommodate the number of youth wishing to attend, and it is apparent that a further complement of gatherings is therefore required. With great joy, we take this opportunity, when the members of National Spiritual Assemblies are gathered in consultation at the Eleventh International Bahá'í Convention, to announce today our decision to convene an additional 19 conferences in the following locations: Bertoua, Bidor, Biratnagar, Brisbane, Cagayan de Oro, Georgetown (Guyana), Houston, Kampong Thom, Kigoma, Los Angeles, Mahikeng, Milne Bay, Minneapolis, Montreal, Nuku'alofa, Nundu (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Seattle, Vientiane, and Washington, D.C.

This welcome development is indicative of the magnitude of the reservoirs of energy and devotion that the youth possess. Every effort must be made to

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assist them to continue to act on their responsibilities, and we look to them to expand the horizons of what the Bahá'í community can accomplish. We offer thanks to the Blessed Beauty for endowing His youthful followers with an immense collective capacity for service, and we beseech Him that it might be realized in benefit to humankind.

Signed: The Universal House of Justice

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1 July 2013

To the participants in the forthcoming 114 youth conferences throughout the world

Dearly loved Friends,

When the exalted figure of the Bab, aged just twenty-five, arose to deliver His revolutionizing message to the world, many among those who accepted and spread His teachings were young, even younger than the Bab Himself. Their heroism, immortalized in all its dazzling intensity in *The Dawn Breakers*, will illumine the annals of human history for centuries to come. Thus began a pattern in which every generation of youth, drawing inspiration from the same divine impulse to cast the world anew, has seized the opportunity to contribute to the latest stage in the unfolding process that is to transform the life of humankind. It is a pattern that has suffered no interruption from the time of the Bab to this present hour.

The lifelong exertion and sacrifice of your spiritual forebears did much to establish the Faith in diverse lands and to hasten the appearance of a global community of purpose. Though the tasks that lie before you are not the same as theirs, the responsibilities with which you are entrusted are no less vital. After many a decade, the world-embracing labours of this far-flung community to obtain a more adequate understanding of the

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Revelation of Baha'u'llah and to apply the principles it enshrines have culminated in the emergence of a potent framework for action, refined through experience. You are fortunate to be familiar with its methods and approaches now so well established. Through perseverance in their implementation, many of you will already have seen for yourselves signs of the society-building power of the divine teachings. At the conference you attend, you are being invited to consider the contribution that can be made by any young person who wishes to answer Baha'u'llah's summons and help to release that power. To assist you, a number of themes have been identified for you to explore, beginning with looking at your current time of life.

Across the world are to be gathered, in scores of youth conferences sharing the same aim, tens of thousands who have much in common. Although your realities are shaped by a broad diversity of circumstances, yet a desire to bring about constructive change and a capacity for meaningful service, both characteristic of your stage of life, are neither limited to any race or nationality, nor dependent upon material means. This bright period of youth you share is experienced by all-but it is brief, and buffeted by numerous social forces. How important it is, then, to strive to be among those who, in the words of `Abdu'l-Baha, "plucked the fruit of life".

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With this in mind, we are delighted that so many of you are already engaged in service by conducting community-building activities, as well as by organizing, coordinating, or otherwise administering the efforts of others; in all of these endeavours you are taking an increasing level of responsibility upon your shoulders. Not surprisingly, it is your age group that is gaining the most experience at aiding junior youth, and children too, with their moral and spiritual development, fostering in them capacity for collective service and true friendship. After all, aware of the world which these young souls will need to navigate, with its pitfalls and also its opportunities, you readily appreciate the importance of spiritual strengthening and preparation. Conscious, as you are, that Baha'u'llah came to transform both the inner life and external conditions of humanity, you are assisting those younger than yourselves to refine their characters and prepare to assume responsibility for the well-being of their communities. As they enter adolescence, you are helping them to enhance their power of expression, as well as enabling a strong moral sensibility to take root within them. In so doing, your own sense of purpose is becoming more clearly defined as you heed Bahi'u'llah's injunction: "Let deeds, not words, be your adorning."

To follow a path of service, whatever form one's activity assumes, requires faith and tenacity. In this connection, the benefit of walking that path in

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the company of others is immense. Loving fellowship, mutual encouragement, and willingness to learn together are natural properties of any group of youth sincerely striving for the same ends, and should also characterize those essential relationships that bind together the components of society. Given this, we hope the bonds you develop through association with other conference participants will prove abiding. Indeed, long after the gatherings close, may these ties of friendship and common calling help keep your feet firm.

The possibilities presented by collective action are especially evident in the work of community building, a process that is gaining momentum in many a cluster and in neighbourhoods and villages throughout the world that have become centres of intense activity. Youth are often at the forefront of the work in these settings—not only Baha'f youth, but those of like mind who can see the positive effects of what the Baha'fs have initiated and grasp the underlying vision of unity and spiritual transformation. In such places, the imperative to share the Revelation of Baha'u'llah with receptive hearts and explore the implications of His message for today's world is keenly felt. When so much of society invites passivity and apathy or, worse still, encourages behaviour harmful to oneself and others, a conspicuous contrast is offered by those who are enhancing the capacity of a population to cultivate and sustain a spiritually enriching pattern of community life.

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Yet, although many admire your dynamism and ideals, the true significance of these endeavours is less apparent to the world at large. You, however, are aware of your part in a mighty, transforming process that will yield, in time, a global civilization reflecting the oneness of humankind. You know well that the habits of mind and spirit that you are nurturing in yourselves and others will endure, influencing decisions of consequence that relate to marriage, family, study, work, even where to live. Consciousness of this broad context helps to shatter the distorting looking glass in which everyday tests, difficulties, setbacks, and misunderstandings can seem insurmountable. And in the struggles that are common to each individual's spiritual growth, the will required to make progress is more easily summoned when one's energies are being channelled towards a higher goal-the more so when one belongs to a community that is united in that goal.

All these thoughts are openings to an inclusive and ever-expanding conversation that will extend through the conferences and well beyond them as you engage many others in earnest discussions that lift the heart and awaken the mind to the possibilities of what could be. Drawing upon your collective experience will further enrich your deliberations. At this propitious time, our hearts will be with you, and as each conference concludes, we will eagerly look to see what will follow. For every gathering we will entreat the Almighty to bestow upon its participants a measure of His boundless grace, knowing, as you do, that divine assistance is promised to all those who arise to

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serve humankind in response to the galvanizing
call of Baha'u' llah.

Signed: The Universal House of Justice

1

THE PERIOD OF YOUTH

Read the following passage in the large group. It might be necessary to pause after the first paragraph and briefly discuss the questions it raises and then continue to read and consider the paragraphs that follow.

Every generation of youth is distinguished by certain characteristics and their lives are shaped by particular forces. In this session, your group is asked to reflect on this vital subject. How do you view the role of your generation in society? What high purpose shapes your individual and collective actions?

The youth conferences gather young people of different ages and experiences. Many are teenagers who, through school, family, and community life, are preparing for the duties of adulthood. Others are older youth who may be in college or working, married or in the process of starting a family. For some, social conditions may have thrust on them duties of a much older age, and the survival of their families may already depend on them. Equally diverse are the communities they come from, ranging from the small villages of the world to the

neighbourhoods of large urban centres with millions of inhabitants.

Regardless of their social situations, young people aspire for spiritual and intellectual growth and “to make a contribution to the fortunes of humanity”.¹ They have many wonderful powers, and channelling them properly is an important concern, for when misdirected or manipulated by others, they can cause much social distress. Among the youth of the world are those alive to Bahá’u’lláh’s vision of a spiritually and materially prosperous world. Engaging in the programmes of the training institute enables them to see themselves as walking a path of service. Along this path they enhance their capacity to apply Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings to the life of society. They understand, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated, that no deed in the world is “nobler than service to the common good”,² that “the highest righteousness”³ is to “arise and energetically devote themselves to the service of the masses”.⁴

In selfless service to society is the possibility for both personal growth and enhancing capacity to contribute to social progress. “Service to humanity is service to God”,⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stressed. To those who have arisen to serve, He has urged, “Let the love and light of the Kingdom radiate through you until all who look upon you shall be illumined

by its reflection.”⁶ Through directing their talents and abilities to the elevation of society, they “become the cause of the tranquillity of the world of creation”.⁷ As they infuse their day-to-day activities with a spirit of generous giving, and offer voluntary acts for the well-being of others, they attract the assistance and confirmations of God.

It is essential then that ever-growing numbers of those in the prime of their lives “steel themselves for a life of service”⁸ to society. Naturally, many matters occupy their time and energy: education, work, leisure, spiritual life, physical health. But they learn to avoid a fragmented approach to life that fails to see the connections among life’s various aspects. Such a disjointed view of life often makes individuals fall victim to the false choices suggested in questions such as whether one should study or serve, advance materially or contribute to the betterment of others, pursue work or become dedicated to service. Failure to approach one’s life as a coherent whole often breeds anxiety and confusion. Through service, young people can learn to foster a life in which its various aspects complement each other.

Assured of God’s unfailing blessings to those who arise to serve, youth look at the environments in which they interact with others—the family, the peer

group, the school, the work place, the media, the community—and recognize the social forces that operate in them. Some of these forces, such as love for truth, thirst for knowledge, and attraction to beauty, impel them in their progress along a path of service. Other forces, for instance the spreading materialism and self-centredness, are destructive and by distorting young people’s view of the world impede individual and collective growth. As they advance in their endeavours to contribute to the construction of a better world, their capacity to draw on the spiritual and social forces that make them builders of civilization grows manifoldly.

After briefly discussing the ideas in each paragraph, break into small groups and consider the following questions:

- a. Think of the communities you come from and identify the environments in which as youth you interact with others. What are the positive or negative forces operating in them? Can you describe the various ways in which these spaces influence you?
- b. The reading above has placed great emphasis on the positive effect that service has on spiritual and intellectual growth and on the capacity of the younger generation to contribute to social progress.

Discuss this important concept, which implies a twofold moral purpose, drawing as much as possible on examples in your own communities.

c. In highlighting the importance of young people striving to live coherent lives, the reading refers to questions such as whether to study or serve, improve oneself or contribute to the well-being of others as “false choices”. In what way are they false choices and how can they paralyse a young person? What are other examples of false choices that must be avoided?

¹ Message dated 8 February 2013 written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, p. 2.

² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 103.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2007), from a talk in New York, 12 April 1912, at the studio of Miss Phillips, para. 2.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997, 2009 printing), para. 120.2.

⁸ Message dated 8 February 2013, p. 2.

2

EARLY ADOLESCENCE

Read the following passage in the large group. You might want to briefly discuss the question posed in the first paragraph before continuing with reading and considering the rest of the document.

In the first session of the conference, you discussed a number of important concepts related to being a youth. One idea you considered was the influence of the constructive and destructive social forces on young people. Now you are invited to think about junior youth who are at the special age of early adolescence and represent “a reservoir of capacity to transform society waiting to be tapped”.⁹ What makes this age special?

Falling between the ages of 12 and 15 and representing a transition from childhood to youth, junior youth experience rapid physical, intellectual, and emotional changes. Their spiritual powers expand. A new level of awareness fosters in them an increased interest in profound questions and in their talents and abilities. Their “faculties of observation are broadened and deepened”,¹⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states, and their intellectual capacities “are trained and awakened”.¹¹

During this short and critical three-year period, ideas about the individual and society that may very well shape the rest of their lives are formed. However,

delight at these new powers is often combined with feelings of worry, discomfort, and doubt that may produce contradictions in behaviour. Directing their new abilities towards selfless service to humanity is therefore needed at this age. It requires that they receive the right kind of education and nurturing, otherwise their “qualities will be stifled in the foul atmosphere of self”.¹²

Some views of junior youth do not cast this period of life in a positive light. Popular views, for instance, regard this age as full of confusion and crises. Such thoughts foster conditions in which undesirable patterns of behaviour are spread. A proper understanding of this age is that of selfless young people with “an acute sense of justice, eagerness to learn about the universe and a desire to contribute to the construction of a better world”.¹³ The negative traits they sometimes show are certainly not intrinsic to this stage in human life.

The key issue to consider then is what the sources of unacceptable patterns of behaviour are that sometimes characterize some junior youth. Two factors require particularly careful thought in this regard. First, the effect of negative social forces on many communities has led to the spread of various social ills that have great influence on how young people view themselves and society. Second, junior youth are heavily affected by the behaviour of adults towards them. Although at this age they are gaining insights into many profound matters, adults

sometimes insist on treating them like children. In addition, the difference in words and actions that some adults at times exhibit can be a source of confusion to young people who are looking for standards by which to shape their lives.

Stressing the effect of negative social forces on junior youth does not imply that young people are basically fragile. They can, with help, face these forces. They can develop the powers of the soul and mind that not only enable them to transcend such challenges but also make them contributors to building a new society. In this light, the Universal House of Justice has called for approaches “that will engage their interests, mould their capacities for teaching and service, and involve them in social interaction with older youth”.¹⁴ They need an environment that nurtures their spiritual qualities and inspires their zeal for learning and meaningful action. The role that older youth, who relate to the experiences of early adolescence, can play in creating such an atmosphere is critical. Since the junior youth often look to them for examples of how to act, older youth are called to the sacred charge of helping their younger counterparts strengthen their moral foundations.

In this connection, Bahá'í youth and their friends in many communities are committing themselves to serving as animators of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme. The programme gives young people “tools needed to combat the forces that would rob them of their true identity as noble beings

and to work for the common good”.¹⁵ In a joyous and friendly group of peers that serves as an environment of mutual support, junior youth study texts that introduce various fundamental concepts. They are aided to sharpen their spiritual perception, to identify forces shaping society, and to enhance their powers of expression, which, in turn, enable them to understand and describe with clarity the world around them. Through acts of service, they learn together to tangibly contribute to the well-being of society.

Reinforcing the moral structures that are developing in their minds, the ideas addressed in each text give junior youth a hopeful outlook on life and society. Animators, acting as their friends, support and guide them in this process, careful to relate to them not as children but as young people with growing abilities to contribute to raising a new civilization. While fostering conditions that inspire selfless service to the community, animators are also watchful lest, without realizing it, the activities they facilitate evoke in their charges ego or self-centredness. Their interactions with parents of the junior youth nurture a collaborative spirit and help extend the positive environment created in the group to the homes and to the entire community.

The effect of the programme on the animators is equally significant. Whether they had been members of a junior youth group or not, they are all affected by the programme’s power to shape moral purpose. To

the extent that they commit to their own spiritual growth will the effectiveness of their service to the younger generation increase. Mindful of the concepts inherited from society that affect their minds, animators are ever conscious of the effect of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on their thoughts and actions. They also strive to create an atmosphere among themselves and in their communities where the greatest joy is derived from aiding "one another scale the heights of service".¹⁶

After briefly discussing the ideas in each paragraph, break into small groups and consider the following questions:

- a. The reading suggests that the social forces affecting youth can have an even greater hold on junior youth. In thinking about the junior youth in your community, discuss how they are affected by destructive forces and the patterns of behaviour they give rise to.
- b. Some of you come from communities where at least a few junior youth groups have been formed and you may even be serving as animators. Describe how the junior youth involved in the programme are advancing spiritually and intellectually and how they are learning to contribute to the progress of their families and communities.
- c. Each text of the junior youth programme helps young people understand one or several fundamental concepts. Breezes of Confirmation, for instance, helps them appreciate that if they apply effort in

endeavours to advance both themselves and their communities, God will confirm them. Discuss the major concepts of at least three other texts of the programme. How do they influence the way junior youth view themselves and the world around them?

d. The statement above has emphasized the reciprocal relationship between serving as an animator and spiritual growth. Discuss the spiritual qualities and attitudes that you think one supporting a group of junior youth should strive to demonstrate and how service assists him or her in this regard.

⁹ Message dated 12 December 2011 written by the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, p. 7.

¹⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, from a talk in New York, 17 November 1912, para. 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy* (Boston: Tudor Press, c.1918), p. 132.

¹³ Riqdván 2010 message written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the world, p. 5.

¹⁴ Riqdván 2000 message written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the world, p. 9.

¹⁵ Riqdván 2010 message, p. 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

3

FOSTERING MUTUAL SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE

Read the following passage in the large group.

The first two statements you have studied make clear that a great responsibility to contribute to the betterment of society faces the current generation of youth. On them also rests the duty of fostering an environment in which the younger members of society can attain the spiritual and intellectual powers needed to become builders of a new civilization. The task is no doubt immense. To counteract the powerful social forces that threaten to sap their powers and distort their purpose, youth can rely on God's unfailing assistance. They also have to enhance the ability to create an atmosphere of mutual support and assistance among themselves and in their communities in which their powers to transform society are multiplied.

Below is an imaginary conversation among four close friends, two boys, Sampa and Sanjiv, and two girls, Caroline and Rayen, who live in Springtown, a Metropol City suburb of some 4,000 people. Many of Springtown's residents are between the ages of 15 and 30 years. Sampa, 18, and Rayen, 19, just finished high school, while Sanjiv and Caroline, both 21, study in one of Metropol's large universities. With the exception of Caroline, who joined them recently, they have known each other for many years.

They studied together in the suburb's elementary and high school and over the past three years have been serving as junior youth animators. Currently, the four of them are supporting four groups of some 50 youngsters in Springtown. Serving together has strengthened their friendship, and they are always engaged in enthusiastic conversation about their efforts and the progress of their community. Rayen and Sanjiv are Bahá'ís.

* * *

“We need to talk more about the idea of walking a path of service,” Sampa starts. “I know it is about the service one offers, but there is also the question of how the service is carried out.”

“Well, I like the fact that we serve together,” Rayen responds quickly. “Serving alone would be hard. With you wonderful people around me, I find courage to keep serving.”

“It is true,” Caroline adds. “But I think the fact that we serve together also helps us avoid negative patterns of behaviour. Personally, I have had to make many changes since I started serving with you guys, changes that would have been difficult to make by myself.”

Sanjiv smiles thoughtfully at Caroline and says: “I am reminded of what the House of Justice says, that the path of service ‘can be experienced and known,

not only by one or two but by scores upon scores'.¹⁷ I think this also means that service allows a large number of people to advance and grow together."

"I am new to this," Caroline says, "but our unity makes such a great difference. It is not only that we do not fight but also that we see things the same way. We are united in what we seek; we walk in the same direction. I have met many people, good and intelligent people with great ideas, pure intentions. But they cannot advance together; they have no unified vision."

"I think that part of unity is accepting that we all do not walk at the same pace," says Rayen. "How did the House of Justice say it, Sanjiv?" she asks with a smile on her face.

"That the path 'accommodates different paces and strides',"¹⁸ Sanjiv says, his voice clear and deliberate.

"Different paces and strides," Rayen continues. "It is easy to just run at top speed because you can, but to stop, look back, and maybe walk back to support your friend requires sincere love and patience. Otherwise, how can we advance together?"

"But Rayen, we also have to be careful that it is not just about a few very good friends serving together but also inspiring and inviting those not yet on the path to join us," says Caroline. "If Sanjiv had not

invited me, I would not be here. There are many youth out there who really want to contribute to society, but they do not know how. We have to learn to form true and lasting friendships with others who also want to better society.”

“I really like what Caroline has said. It is important that our efforts are sincere and that we work hard. But if we cannot help others who are also willing to start walking a path of service, it will be difficult to achieve lasting change,” Sanjiv says. “But then we must really think about our own qualities and attitudes, both as individuals and as a group.”

“True,” says Sampa. “So many good efforts are derailed because of the self-centredness of the people involved in them. Sometimes this leads to paying too much attention to the faults of others, and instead of encouraging friends who may be struggling, one starts criticizing them.”

“Oh, criticism does not benefit anyone,” says Caroline. “It stifles growth. But nowadays it is so common in society. Sometimes it seems as if everyone is criticizing everyone else.”

“And sometimes the problem is not the criticism of others. Someone can so focus on his or her own shortcomings that he or she becomes immobilized,” Sanjiv says.

Sampa says, “No one should ever feel helpless. We are assured of God’s help—we have to believe that, I mean really believe it—and we have friends around us. Friendship is not just laughing and playing together but being sincerely happy with the progress of a friend, actually helping each other to grow.”

Rayen adds: “I think when people become true friends, and are constantly encouraging each other, even what may at first seem impossible becomes achievable. Then service becomes pure joy, and the circle of friends grows.”

There is a moment of silence as the four young friends ponder these ideas. They look at one another and smile as a strong sense of spiritual camaraderie engulfs them. They all seem to want to say something, but they hesitate. It appears that Sanjiv is the one most eager to speak.

“Just say it Sanjiv, just say it,” Caroline urges him on as they all burst into laughter.

“I was just thinking that we need to learn a lot about these really profound ideas. Let us take ourselves as an example. We are all animators, right? Now think of what it takes to properly support a group of eager, enthusiastic, and energetic junior youth for three years, sometimes longer. Then think about building and maintaining really good friendships with other

animators and constantly helping each other. Can we become good at these things if we are not prepared to learn?"

Sanjiv's words send the group into silent reflection again. "I think the place to start is what Caroline said earlier, having absolute faith that if we are sincere, God will assist us," Sampa says after a while. that all our thoughts are appreciated and that you guys really want to know what everyone thinks and feels. I am learning to be like that and I think it is just great!"

"We also have to be humble and accept that we do not know everything," adds Rayen. "I think we are learning how to learn. It really helps that we often study together, support one another with the groups, and regularly meet to reflect and consult."

Caroline says, "I think we are also learning to listen to each other. A friend of mine used to say, 'I know you heard me, but did you really listen to me?' Sometimes people give greater value to eloquence and not so much to listening carefully and without prejudice. People can better support each other when they really listen to each other."

Sanjiv says: "Listening is also related to how we consult. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that 'consultation must have for its object the investigation of truth'¹⁹ and that 'man should weigh his opinions with the utmost serenity, calmness and composure'.²⁰ I think part of

learning is being sincerely concerned about truth rather than the ‘mere voicing of personal views’²¹.”

“It is, of course, okay to have personal opinions,” says Caroline, “but they must be expressed in a way that invites rather than stifles the views of others. I have to say that when we meet for the reflection meetings and talk, that is how I feel.

The friends continue discussing how they can support one another effectively. They think about how to elevate interactions among friends. “It is a sophisticated world nowadays, what with all the new technologies,” Rayen says thoughtfully. “Some of us have more friends on the Internet than we do in real life. Interactions on the Internet might be driven by a different set of values, and we end up living a life of contradictions. I guess if we remain conscious that Bahá’u’lláh’s loving presence surrounds us always, we will strive to elevate every interaction.”

“We were discussing the other day how people sometimes would rather be texting someone halfway across the world than having a conversation with someone sitting right next to them,” Sampa says. “Nothing can replace real friendship that is built on a shared desire and dedication to bettering one’s community. This is one of the most important points I take from this discussion.”

After briefly discussing the ideas in each segment of the conversation, break into small groups and consider the following questions:

- a. Creating an environment of mutual support includes having a vision of large numbers of youth who as true friends work together to transform their community. How would you go about fulfilling such a vision in your cluster or community? How important would conversation among the youth be, and what would be its purpose and content?
- b. Mutual support is not only related to helping one another carry out acts of service but also progress in other aspects of life. What other aspects of life require mutual support? Consider for instance aligning personal conduct with the laws and principles of the Faith, education, work, and marriage.
- c. Young people spend a lot of time together, and necessarily some of the time is spent in activities of fun and leisure. Nonetheless, important to their progress is avoiding wasting a great deal of time on trivial pursuits and also elevating their interactions in various spaces, including electronic media. How can youth accomplish this?
- d. The conversation above highlights the importance of fostering strong bonds of friendship among people

who serve together. What do you regard as the true nature of friendship? How would you determine which friendships are helpful and which are detrimental to the progress of young people?

¹⁷ Message dated 12 December 2011, p. 2.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, from a talk in Chicago, 2 May 1912, at Hotel Plaza, notes by Joseph H. Hannen, para.

2.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., para. 1.

4

YOUTH AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

Read the following passage in the large group.

The last session addressed the importance of youth supporting one another and advancing together in service to society. It was clear that building a new society largely depends on the sincere efforts of growing numbers of people who are able to “weave their individual initiatives and collective endeavours into an effective pattern of unified action”.²² In this light, you are now asked to reflect on the contribution your generation can make to the building of vibrant communities in neighbourhoods and villages, and in other settings where people eager to play a part in collective transformation are found.

To consider this question, it is essential to briefly review some of the elements of the framework for action that guides the efforts of the worldwide Bahá'í community. Most of the actions of Bahá'í communities to build a new society inspired by the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh take place in the context of a cluster, a manageable geographic area consisting of villages and perhaps a small town or of a large city and its suburbs. The main objective in each cluster is strengthening, through the application of Bahá'í teachings, the three main protagonists in the processes of change: the individual, the community, and the institutions. This work includes raising,

through the institute process, growing numbers of people capable of promoting spiritual and social progress; building vibrant local communities where “individuals, families and institutions ... [work] together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders”;²³ and developing institutions with the capacity to mobilize, canalize, and unify the energies of many friends who are eager to serve. Clusters necessarily are at different stages of development based on the number and effectiveness of those labouring for change and the strength and advancement of the local communities and institutions. In some, efforts of the Bahá’ís to build a new society are yet to begin.

In each cluster, the friends face different circumstances. Many of them live in largely homogeneous villages of rural areas or the usually diverse neighbourhoods of large cities. A strong communal spirit characterizes some localities; in others, it is clearly absent. The friends in a cluster may also associate with others based on certain common interests, for instance, study at a particular university or membership in a professional or social organization that is not restricted to a physical location. To build a new society, the friends seek to raise in these settings and spaces the capacity to apply the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. No society can experience the spiritual and social advancement possible at this stage in human life without the selfless services of its members.

In reflecting on the efforts of the young generation to walk a path of service, it is important to think about how they can “foster a vibrant community life in neighbourhoods and villages”.²⁴ The account below and questions that follow will help you consult on your contributions to building communities that increasingly reflect Bahá’u’lláh’s vision for humanity.

* * *

In the eastern region of Manjalo, in the cluster of Heri, lies Jambo, a large village of some 3,000 people located on the gentle slopes of Muze Mountain. It is a beautiful village with meandering streets lined with gorgeous jacaranda trees, which when in their purple bloom, combine with lush green fields to give the village a vibrant sense of life. Its diverse inhabitants— a fifth of whom are below the age of 11, and a tenth are junior youth—come from various tribes who have lived together for many years. As more than half of them are under 30 years old, they are in many ways an energetic lot.

Furthest up the slopes of the mountain, a large old church with white-washed walls overlooks Jambo, and at the foot are the village’s elementary and high schools. In between is everything else: a tidy little post office; the walled homes of affluent residents; a sizeable clinic with a red roof; a busy sports centre; a good-sized market with well-stocked shops; and closest to the schools, a sprawling compound where

most of Jambo's residents live. They are hard-working, Jambo's locals. Each family has a plot where it grows iron-rich greens and delicious tubers. The income of the men working in a copper mine 10 kilometres north and the visits of people from the hot and humid valley below fuel the village's small economy. New restaurants have opened along its winding main road, as have a few beer halls, which, with their blaring music, are changing Jambo's tranquil surroundings.

Jambo differs from nearby villages in many ways, but mostly for having nearly a third of its residents working together for the community's well-being. They are committed, one would say, to learning how to use Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to build a better society. Their often fervent conversations show one thing: studying the Word of God through institute courses has given them a thirst for understanding and a desire to serve. They have opened their homes to devotional gatherings; children, aided by teenagers, meet weekly under trees, in houses, and in classrooms for spiritual education; the junior youth and their youthful animators are a source of ceaseless activity: at times diligently studying their texts in groups, other times out and about, hauling garbage, visiting the sick, planting trees, serving in whatever way they can. The beaming smiles of their parents are telling—hope in their children's ability to face a fast-changing world is replacing despair as every day a growing moral courage is seen in their youngsters' words and actions. And there is much rejoicing when

those involved in activities—children and junior youth, youth and adults, women and men—gather. There is serious consultation, too, as they strive to increase the effectiveness of their activities.

There is constant encouragement in Jambo. Institute coordinators and the Local Spiritual Assembly work together with other community leaders in supporting all those arising to play their part. Regardless of age and gender, they consult on how to nurture those fostering Jambo's progress and on how to bring others still on the periphery into collective action.

Change started some five years ago in Jambo. Following consultations with a visiting Auxiliary Board member, the few Bahá'ís realized that alone they would not fulfil Bahá'u'lláh's hopes for their community. "We need to find others in Jambo who are ready to work together for change," they reflected. In conversations with their neighbours on what Bahá'u'lláh's teachings make possible, they found many worried about Jambo and eager to help. Through study circles, a few started teaching children and holding devotional meetings. But soon many obstacles arose—unity was fragile and arguments often broke out; zeal was lost as people were left to labour without encouragement; and when the copper mine opened, the most dependable people became too busy with their work to sustain their commitment to the community activities. Yet there was a small group of friends who stayed together, who saw in the challenges a chance to build true and enduring

friendship.

Three years ago, something pivotal happened in Jambo. A few friends who attended an institute course on serving as animators of junior youth groups returned with much excitement. They visited a number of families, discussed what the Bahá'í Faith teaches about early adolescence, explored the capabilities needed by young people to withstand destructive social forces, and considered how together with the parents they could create a spiritually enabling environment for the young people in Jambo. Soon they were working with 20 eager junior youth in two groups. They then took the conversation to the older youth in the community. "The junior youth look up to you," they said, "and since you understand the nature of their age, you can best assist them." They also discussed how serving as an animator assists an individual to develop. "By helping the junior youth, you will also be advancing your own spiritual and intellectual abilities," they explained, "and together we will be contributing to building a better community."

Only a few youth got involved at the beginning, but the friends persevered in their interaction with the young people. With continued conversation, a growing number responded favourably. Over time, many were trained as animators. As the power of the programme became clear, community leaders, even those who were doubtful at the beginning, were convinced that dedication to the junior youth was

critical to the future and well-being of Jambo. Many opened their homes for the groups to meet and offered their resources and talents. At the schools, special provision was made for interested high school students to form groups of their younger friends.

And so the community pulled together. Over the course of time, as junior youth completed the programme, many of them chose to study institute courses; some of them went on to contribute to the life of the community by teaching children, and others proceeded to serve as animators, contributing to the further expansion of the junior youth programme. More and more people became convinced of the power of the institute courses to stimulate commitment to long-term action and joined in their study. Collective worship increased and a keen sense of purpose emerged. Now conversations in Jambo are not only about Jambo but also about how its inhabitants can help other villages in the Heri cluster proceed on a path of progress.

The story above illustrates a number of important principles that young people seeking to contribute to building communities influenced by Bahá'u'lláh's teachings should bear in mind. As stated earlier, the opportunities available for youth to contribute to community building vary. For most, it is possible to labour in the context of a neighbourhood or village; others might also work with the students and faculty

members of their university. Those whose localities prove less receptive to collective action might engage with people in a much larger geographic area with whom they share certain interests. Whatever the case, the questions below will help you reflect on the concrete steps youth can take to advance the material and spiritual well-being of the community in which they find themselves.

After briefly discussing the ideas in each paragraph, break into small groups and consider the following questions:

- a. The story above started with a description of Jambo as a physical and social space. It is important that young people understand the conditions of the communities in which they live, their general population, the organization of their physical spaces, and the institutions and processes operating in them. With these points in mind, describe the locality in which you live, perhaps drawing a map of it.

- b. As illustrated in the story, a process of community building inspired by the message of Bahá'u'lláh must have at its heart an unfolding conversation on the Faith's teachings and their implications for the life of the population. This conversation advances as a growing number of those studying the courses of the training institute arise to offer the core activities—devotional meetings, children's classes, junior youth groups, and study circles. What can you do to encourage large numbers of youth to become part of this conversation and the indispensable process of

study and service related to it?

c. As you discussed in an earlier session, the spiritual empowerment of junior youth is a critical process of the community as it raises young people with the spiritual and intellectual powers to advance society. You might want therefore to review its development in your community and determine how you can help growing numbers of youth arise to support junior youth.

d. Building communities involves constant learning. It is enriched by an ongoing dialogue among the inhabitants of a cluster, village, or neighbourhood through which they clarify their vision, assess their growing capacity, identify obstacles that require removing, decide on the next set of steps, and reinforce their bonds of love and fellowship. What contributions are youth making, or could youth make, to strengthen consultative processes in your community?

e. The community represents a unit of civilization. Its members and agencies work “together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders”.²⁵ It is therefore important to consider how youth in a community or cluster that is advancing can spread the civilization-building influence of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings by helping another community in the cluster, or indeed another cluster, begin its movement on a path of sustainable progress.

²² Riḍván 2007 message written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, p. 1.

²³ Riḍván 153 [1996] message written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, p. 6.

²⁴ Riḍván 2010 message, pp. 2-3.

²⁵ Riḍván 153 [1996] message, p.6.

5

CONTRIBUTING TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF CIVILIZATION

Read the following passage in the large group.

The statements you have discussed so far have aimed to help you think about some aspects of the life of a generation of youth alive to Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a new society. Before continuing with the study of this final statement, it might be useful for you to share how your understanding has advanced.

The community-building efforts of the Bahá'ís and their friends are not simply good social projects by selfless individuals. They are based on the belief that humanity is living at a very special time in its history. In its development, humankind has passed through stages similar to infancy and adolescence and now stands at the beginning of its maturity. Two inseparable processes, one of disintegration and the other of integration, are moving it forward. The process of disintegration is visible in the violence, war, and corruption that go together with the collapse of an outmoded order now incapable of dealing with the needs of a maturing world. It causes great confusion and suffering but also contributes to removing barriers to unity among people. The process of integration is related to the spiritual forces released with the coming of Bahá'u'lláh. On the one hand, these forces are influencing increasing numbers

of people everywhere to work for unity and progress. On the other, they are gradually reshaping society through the conscious efforts of the Bahá'ís and their friends.

The objective of both the process of disintegration and of integration is the creation of a world civilization, the like of which no one has ever seen. Their ultimate aim is the development of a unified and peaceful world, a global society that is advanced both spiritually and materially. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

Material civilization is like unto the lamp, while spiritual civilization is the light in that lamp. If the material and spiritual civilizations become united, then we will have the light and the lamp together, and the outcome will be perfect.²⁶

The goal of building a new civilization requires complete change in how society is organized and also in the conduct and behaviour of individuals. In this connection, Bahá'u'lláh's teachings intend "to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions".²⁷

Essential to civilization building then is accepting that all the people of the world, indeed of every community, are one. The recognition of this vital truth has many implications on the life of a community and of society at large. In this day, all the

people of the world have received an equal measure of the favour and mercy of the one true God and, in all their diversity, share the right and duty to contribute to creating a new world. When relationships among members of a community, and between them and the institutions, are characterized by love and justice, all are given the opportunity to use their God-given attributes to advance social good. When spiritual and scientific knowledge is accessible to all, members of a community can together learn to apply it to their collective life. This is related to the community-building endeavours of the Bahá'ís discussed in the previous statement that are intensifying in many clusters, neighbourhoods, and villages across the globe. The change in culture they are fostering is evidence of how a new society emerges from the efforts of growing numbers of people to apply the teachings of God in this day to the life of a growing number of communities.

The implications for the life of an individual who yearns to contribute to advancing civilization are also significant. A person strives to acquire the qualities, attitudes, and abilities of an effective contributor to progress and endows the various aspects of his or her life—education, work, marriage, family life—with a strong sense of mission. Such an individual makes every exertion to conform to the high ideals of the Faith. Learning to avoid prejudices of all kinds, to adhere to a high standard of chastity, and to show rectitude in all interactions with others enables an individual to become an effective actor in the

endeavour to change society. In “efforts to achieve personal growth and to uphold Bahá’í ideals,”²⁸ one is immersed in a purposeful community, an environment in which true unity impels friends of all ages to assist one another attain higher and higher levels of spiritual, moral, and intellectual excellence.

From this perspective then, one who is aware of the potential for creating the world anew that the message of Bahá’u’lláh holds will no doubt find great joy in bringing its inspiration to the people of the world, and enabling them to arise to fulfil their duty as conscious builders of a new civilization.

After briefly discussing the ideas in each paragraph, break into small groups and consider the following questions.

There are many areas of endeavour through which people learn to apply Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings in order to contribute to building a new civilization. The questions below will help you reflect on the relationship between civilization building and work and education, marriage and family, and the local community.

Each group could consider one of the questions below:

a. Education, the acquisition of knowledge, and work are essential to one’s contribution to civilization building. How can young people under diverse social

conditions ensure that they obtain the most effective education available? How would one's work or profession serve as a means to contribute to civilization building? What would make it an obstacle?

b. How can young people properly prepare themselves for marriage and for families that would contribute meaningfully to creating a new society?

c. What would be the nature of a local community that is able to help its members develop the qualities and abilities of true civilization builders? What interactions among the inhabitants of such a community, and with their institutions, would help increase the commitment of young people to, say, living a pure and chaste life?

d. Building a new civilization will take many centuries of hard work. To build a strong foundation, the involvement of large numbers of youth is essential. How can youth, upon whom so much of the work of building a new world relies, effectively support each other in order to attain progress in all the various areas of their lives?

²⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, from a talk in New York, 14 April 1912, at Church of the Ascension, para. 2.

²⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-Íqán: The Book of Certitude* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2003, 2005 printing), para. 270.

²⁸ Letter dated 19 April 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to three individuals.