

Virtue Workshop

Children, Youth and Adults Learning Together

Printable resources are included

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God's Great Teachers

General Introduction

This Material is designed for workshops/conferences, children's classes, families, and individual learning.

Unless we can make deep spiritual concepts understandable, we risk losing future generations to the distorted thinking of a deteriorating materialistic world..

Each spiritual concept explored includes activities specifically designed for groups of youth and adults and activities designed for children.

It is a method of group learning, based on the model of the oneness of humanity.

Everyone is a student, and everyone is a teacher. Our mission is not to provide exhaustive research and explanation of concepts for scholars. Our goal is to enable everyone to gain a basic knowledge of concepts indispensable for spiritual survival.

It is our hope that parents and teachers gathered in living rooms, backyards; in cities and villages, will use these spiritual concepts to improve the lives of children, youth and adults.

The writers, as members of the Bahá'í Faith, are guided by its teachings and principles. We have used language that allows the concepts to be accessible to the wider community. Reference is made to the sources of authority of the Bahá'í Faith. We are referring to the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice.

This material reflects the personal interpretations of the authors and should not be taken as authoritative.

Instructions

Materials listed in the Resource section of each activity, including images, should be carefully prepared. Images can be enlarged and are essential for presentation. If some of the materials listed are not available, facilitators may modify and adapt material to best meet the unique needs of different groups.

Activities for youth/adults may be completed in approximately one hour.

Activities for children are approximately twenty minutes to an hour in length.

Adult Activity

Document with text to be read aloud by participants. Facilitator may choose to use a projector.

Materials in Resource Section

Facilitator asks: a participant to read the following in a loud voice:

There is an old fable about a great king who sent a messenger with clear guidance to a far away village. The messenger was welcomed and the king's guidance was followed. The village prospered.

Years later, the village was experiencing great difficulty. Bad things were happening. The king heard news of this and decided a new messenger must be sent with new guidance. The messenger made the long journey to the same village. The people treated the messenger harshly, saying, "We have no need of you! We are content with the messenger who came years ago".

Facilitator asks: What do we think this story means?

What do we think happens to the village?

Does it improve or continue to deteriorate?

Participants respond

Facilitator asks: How can we compare the state of the village with the current state of the world?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: The villagers in our story, who reject the latest Messenger of God, lose so much more than time. Lives are lost through needless wars. Whole countries starve. Knowledge is destroyed by ignorance. Progress comes to a halt. All because of spiritual blindness.

The most that we can understand about God is what is reflected in the Person and the Writings of the Prophets of God. The individual can not see past the Manifestation (Prophet) of God to see God directly. Human sight is limited. The Prophets are our only option of learning about God.

Never before in religious history has the reality of the Prophets of God been so thoroughly explained. Religious communities throughout history have been trying to

explain the extraordinary Beings who lived among them. They came at intervals of roughly a thousand years improving their societies immensely. The people knew that this special Person was unlike them, yet looked like them. The Prophet seemed to know about and understand everything -- things that He should have no knowledge of. They would say, "This is not the same child who we have watched grow up in our village." They believed they were witnessing a miracle come to life. The enduring debate has always been: is this person God, one of the many Gods, or is he simply a very intelligent man?

In the year 325 AD, Roman Emperor Constantine I and his mother, very early Christians, convened the Council of Nicea. The purpose of the council was to decide if Jesus Christ was a man or God. The consultation attempted to please all sides. The decision was that Jesus Christ was three persons in one. This attempt to provide clarity and end disputes only created further confusion that lasts to this day.

The council defined Christ as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost combined. In the centuries that followed there has been a proliferation of Christian sects. The vast range of belief ranges from seeing Jesus as a great teacher and a wise man to seeing Him as the Word of God made flesh.

This confusion that surrounds the reality of Christ also surrounds all of God's Messengers.

Now, In this Day, at this point in our spiritual evolution, this great mystery has been explained in the Bahá'í Teachings.

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following quotation in a loud voice:

Know that the degrees of existence are finite -- the degrees of servitude, of prophethood, and of Divinity"

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Reference Library: Some Answered Questions:62

Facilitator says: In existence there are humans, who are servants of God, Prophets of God, and God.

Facilitator shares Image A with participants



Facilitator says: Why is it important, when we are walking in the desert, to find an oasis?

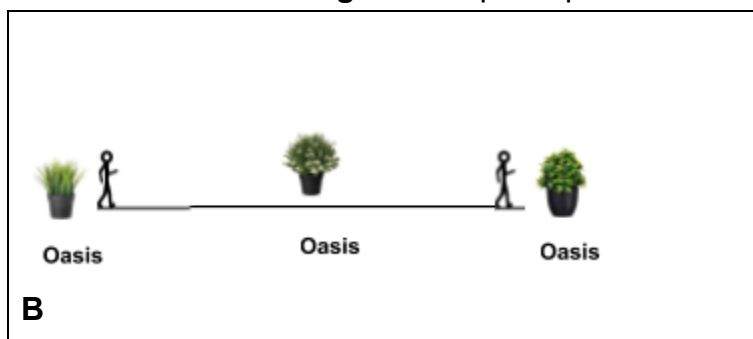
Participants respond

Facilitator says: In desert cultures, trees were planted at each oasis to guide the traveler to water, food and safety. The traveler could only faintly see the tree at the next oasis. The wayfarer knew that she must not leave the path. If she did, she would get lost and run out of water in the very hot, sandy desert. She knew that she must not deviate from the path. Drifting from the path; losing one's way, risked injury or death.

If we are walking in the very hot desert and can only carry one small bottle of water, would we want to get quickly to the next oasis and refill our bottles or would we want to stop and sight see and play in the sand for a few hours?

Participants respond

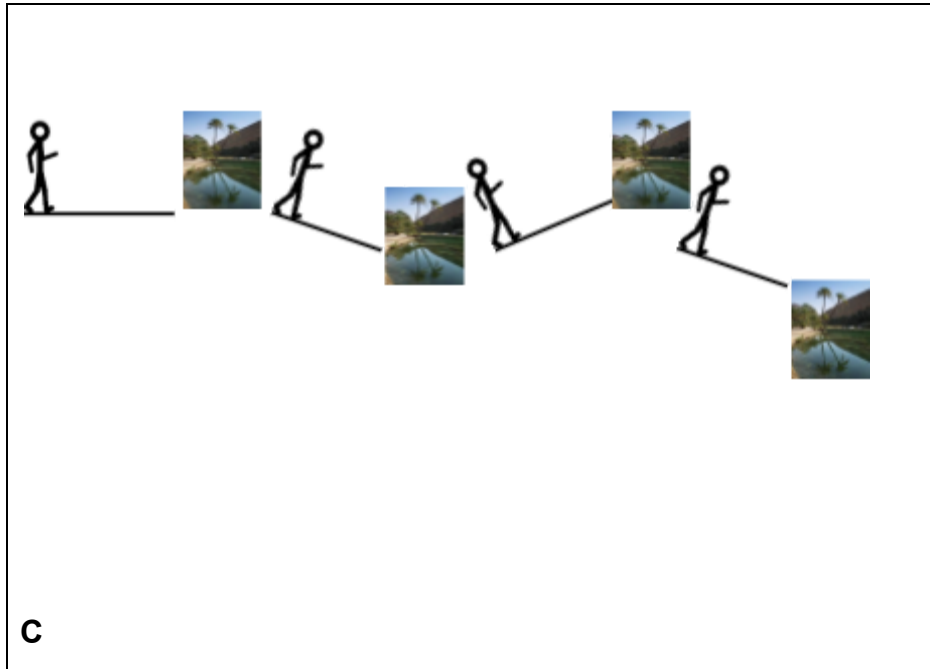
Facilitator shares image B with participants



Facilitator says: Of course we would want to get from one oasis to the next quickly. We would want to walk in a straight line if possible.

But here is a surprising bit of information:

Facilitator shares image C with participants:



Facilitator says: Oases do not naturally all appear in one straight line in the desert. They naturally occur in a zig-zag pattern.

But we still have to go from one to the next as quickly as we can. We can't make a detour and skip one oasis to get to one farther away to try to save time. We would run out of water. This makes the trip longer and not direct, but it is the only way.

Facilitator shares Image D image with participants



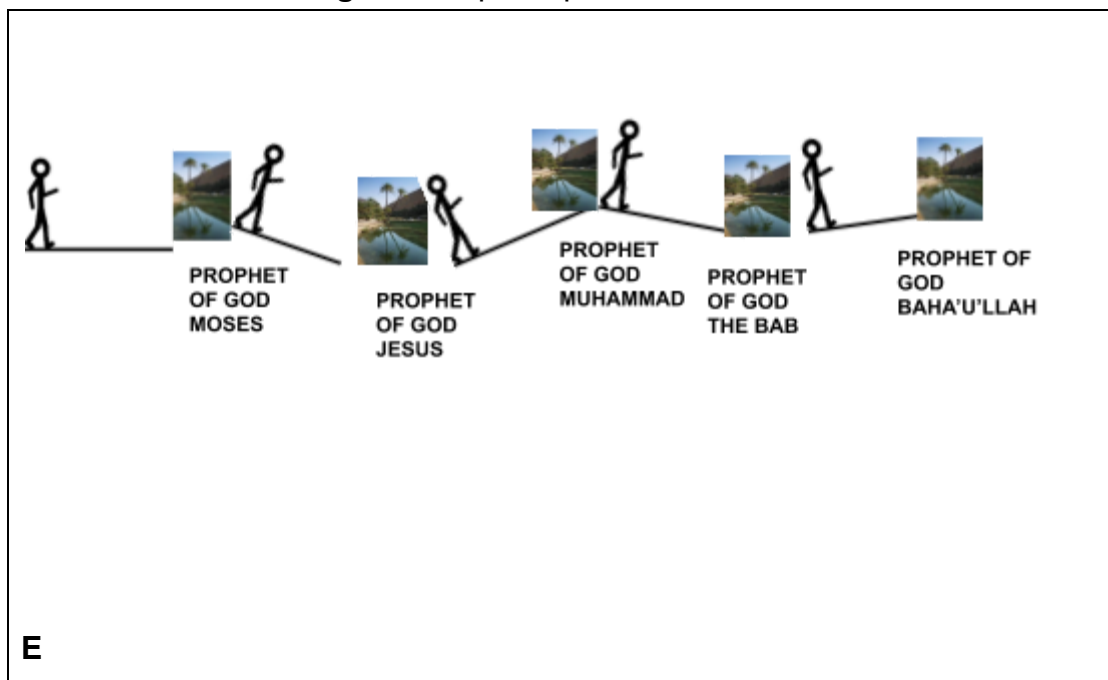
Facilitator says: A symbol for the Messenger/Prophet of God used in the Quran and in the Bahá'í Writings is the tree. The tree symbol is used in many world cultures and religions. For example; The Buddha had His “awakening” (the time to tell the world who He was)” sitting under the Bodhi tree in India.

Bahá'u'lláh uses Sadratu'l-Muntaha (The Tree Beyond Which There Is No Passing) to refer to a Prophet of God. In Arabic, a title of the Prophet of God is “Sadratu'l-Muntaha”, which means “The Tree Beyond Which There Is No Passing”. “Sadrat” refers to a **tree** found in Arabia and “Muntaha” means the farthest point.

Trees connect earth to sky. Their root systems spread out deep into the earth at the same time their branches reach for the heavens. Amazingly, science now explains that trees recognize their own offspring and favor them by sending nutrients to them through an intricate root system. Much like the physical tree, the Prophet of God bestows spiritual sustenance to His followers.

Although the traveler could not see beyond the tree of the next oasis, he had faith that he was headed toward safety. He had faith that there would be another Tree (Prophet) to guide him.

Facilitator shares Image E with participants:



Facilitator asks: participant to read the following in a loud voice:

We, servants of God, are warned not to try to bypass any of the indispensable Messengers of God. We can't pick and choose which of God's Prophets we will accept or reject. Ultimately, in this world or the next, we will have to accept all of God's Prophets. To bypass One is to bypass All of Them and ignore the Will of God. The Tree of Moses guides us to the Tree of Jesus. The Tree of Jesus guides us to the Tree of Muhammad. The Tree of Muhammad guides us to the Tree of Báb. The Tree of the Báb guides us to the Tree of Bahá'u'lláh. We need Them all. We need all of God's great Teachers just like we need each oasis. They each bring us special Teachings that we need to transform our lives. We can't skip over any of God's Great Teachers, just like we can't skip over any of the oases when we travel across the desert.

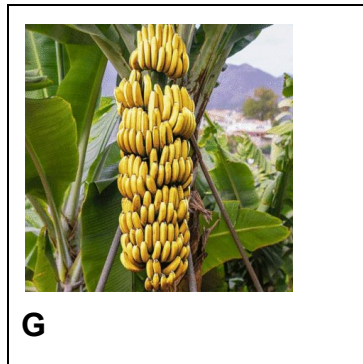
Facilitator says: We would run out of water and be very thirsty if we skipped any oases, trying to get to the one farthest away. We have to walk from each oasis to the next one. When we arrive at each oasis, we can rest, cool off, drink fresh water, and fill our water bottle. Then we continue to the next oasis. Also, each oasis is special. Each is different and unique.

Facilitator shares Image F with participants:



Facilitator says: One oasis has grape trees.

Facilitator shares Image G with participants:



Facilitator says: The next oasis has banana trees.

Facilitator shares Image H with participants:



Facilitator says: And the next oasis has orange trees.

Facilitator shares Image I with participants:



Facilitator says: And the next oasis has apple trees.

Facilitator shares Image J with participants:



Facilitator says: And the last oasis has delicious pears.

Note to Facilitator: To expand activity to include 4 additional Prophets of God, see Resource section for additional fruit images and Prophet names

We will pretend that we are travelling in a desert. Each potted plant is an oasis. We are going to travel from one oasis to the next until we get to the last one.

Let's set up our oases. We know already, that oases do not grow in a straight line in the desert. So we need to set up our four oasis plants in a zig-zag pattern.

Facilitator directs participants: to place five plants on chairs or on the floor/ground in zig-zag pattern.

Note: Depending on space available, the plants may be spaced at a farther distance from each other.

Facilitator says: Let's label our oases:

Let's put the picture of the grape tree in front of the first plant.

Facilitator selects participant to place grape tree image in front of plant # 1.

Facilitator says: Let's put the picture of the banana tree in front of the second plant.

Facilitator selects participant to place banana tree image in front of plant # 2.

Facilitator says: Let's put the picture of the orange tree in front of the third plant.

Facilitator selects participant to place orange tree image in front of plant # 3.

Facilitator says: Let's put the picture of the apple tree in front of the fourth plant.

Facilitator selects participant to place apple tree image in front of plant # 4.

Facilitator says: Let's put the picture of the pear tree in front of the last plant.

Facilitator selects participant to place pear tree image in front of plant # 5.

Facilitator says: Now let's add the names of God's Great Teachers to each oasis.
Let's put the name of Moses in front of our grape tree oasis.

Facilitator selects participant to place "Moses" card in front of grape tree image #1.

Facilitator says: Let's put the name of Jesus in front of our banana tree oasis.

Facilitator selects participant to place "Jesus" card in front of banana tree image #2.

Facilitator says: Let's put the name of Muhammad in front of our orange tree oasis.

Facilitator selects participant to place "Muhammad" card in front of orange tree image #3.

Facilitator says: Let's put the name of The Báb in front of our apple tree oasis.

Facilitator selects participant to place "The Báb" card in front of apple tree image #4.

Facilitator says: Let's put the name of Bahá'u'lláh in front of our pear tree oasis.

Facilitator selects participant to place “Bahá'u'lláh” card in front of pear tree image #5.

Facilitator places a water bottle at each oasis and cut fruit pieces corresponding to each labeled oasis.

Facilitator Note: depending on size of group, five participants may be selected to be “servers” at each of the five oases.

Facilitator gives each participant a small cup.

Facilitator says: Now let’s all walk to each oasis in order on a path through the desert. Moses came before the other Great Teachers on our path, so we will start at our Moses oasis.

Let’s all refresh ourselves with a drink of water and grapes.

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Moses was a Great Teacher sent to us by God. He taught everyone how to live a spiritual life. God’s teachings that Moses gave us are like life-saving water we get at an oasis. Moses also gave us directions on how to find the next oasis where we can find the next Great Teacher. When we travel from one oasis to the next one, we need to carry some water in our cups with us so we won’t be so thirsty or frightened and have to turn back.

Let’s be sure we all have a little water in our cups as we continue to the next oasis.

Facilitator: or participant may give physical directions to go to the next oasis. Sample directions might be: “Go forward three steps; turn right; go forward three steps; etc.

Facilitator: Repeat process to continue guiding participants through remaining four oases, naming each Prophet of God and reminding participants that the water and refreshing fruit are symbolic of Their Teachings.

Note to Facilitator: The number of oases may be increased, representing additional Prophets of God.

Facilitator says: Let’s all return to our seats.

Participants respond

Facilitator says: God has always sent Great Teachers to train mankind. Over time, the followers drift from the straight path laid out by the Prophets. The path begins to look like the meandering path of our desert traveler. Each successive Prophet then attempts to correct the missteps of the followers of the previous religion, while at the same time, sets a new course for the future.

What would happen if the traveler stayed too long at one oasis, ate all the fruit and drank all the water?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Let's listen to this quotation and then discuss its meaning together.

Facilitator asks: participant to read the following quotation in a loud voice:

From the seed of reality religion has grown into a tree which has put forth leaves and branches, blossoms and fruit. After a time this tree has fallen into a condition of decay. The leaves and blossoms have withered and perished; the tree has become stricken and fruitless. It is not reasonable that man should hold to the old tree, claiming that its life forces are undiminished, its fruit unequalled, its existence eternal. The seed of reality must be sown again in human hearts in order that a new tree may grow therefrom and new divine fruits refresh the world.

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Reference Library: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*: 52

Allow 3-5 minutes for discussion

Facilitator's closing remarks: There probably will not be the same need for radical corrections due to the misconceptions of the followers of the Prophets in the future. Abraham is associated with the beginning of the Adamic Cycle - the cycle of prophecy. We are transitioning from the prophetic age to the age of fulfilment. The hallmark of this new age is an unbreakable covenant between God and man.

"This is the Day that shall not be followed by night"

Baha'u'lláh, Bahá'í Reference Library: *Summons of the Lord of Hosts*

This is the “Day” in which we finally learn who we are and what our purpose is. We know that our identity is being servants of God. Our personal model is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. All these corrections that were needed in the past were due to the fact that we did not have such a model. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá lived in a time when the means of communication existed to allow knowledge to be spread world-wide. This is why ‘Abdu’l-Bahá warns us to beware of “multiple identities”.

Facilitator asks: a participant to read the following in a loud voice:

“Let all be set free from the multiple identities that were born of passion and desire, and in the oneness of their love for God find a new way of life.” -

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Bahá’í Reference Library: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*: 36

Facilitator says: Catastrophic false identities of the past, such as Natzism, Communism, Racism, etc. will die a slow, painful death. These systems are based on race or ideology. They have put forth false “multiple identities”.

These will be replaced by our true identity as exemplified by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

God continually urges us to grow spiritually and increase our thirst and appetite for knowledge of Him.

God continually plants new Trees -- He sends us new Prophets. Each Prophet brings “...the seed of reality” that “must be sown again in human hearts”. We can only find the seed that has been placed in our hearts when we stop blindly imitating what we believed and did yesterday. We need to be open to new ideas -- new guidance from God. If we don’t, we’ll never grow.

To the Facilitator and all participants:

The physical world has been created by God to teach us deep spiritual concepts. It is the hope of the creators of this activity that we all make the transition as quickly as possible, from being student participants, to being teachers, sharing these ideas with others. Spiritual concepts are the building blocks for an ever-progressing world civilization.

Please feel free to adapt this material to best meet the unique needs of different groups.

Children's Activity:

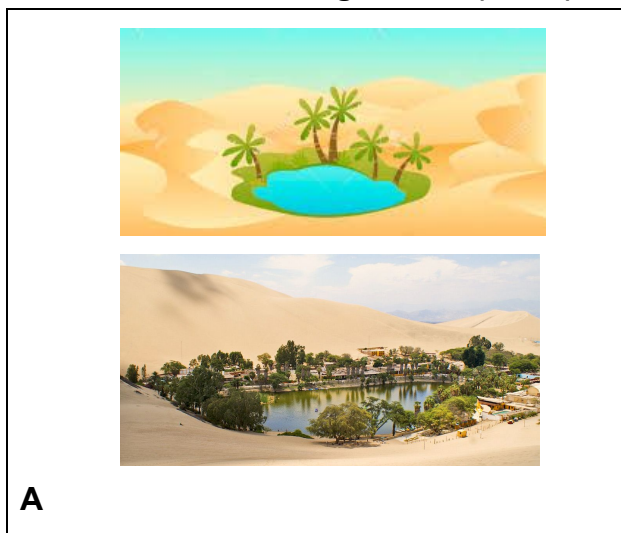
Document with text to be read aloud by participants. Facilitator may choose to use a projector.

Materials in Resource Section

Facilitator says: Who knows what an oasis in a desert is?

Participants respond

Facilitator shares image A with participants:



Facilitator says: That is right. An oasis is a spot in a desert where there is water and plants and animals.

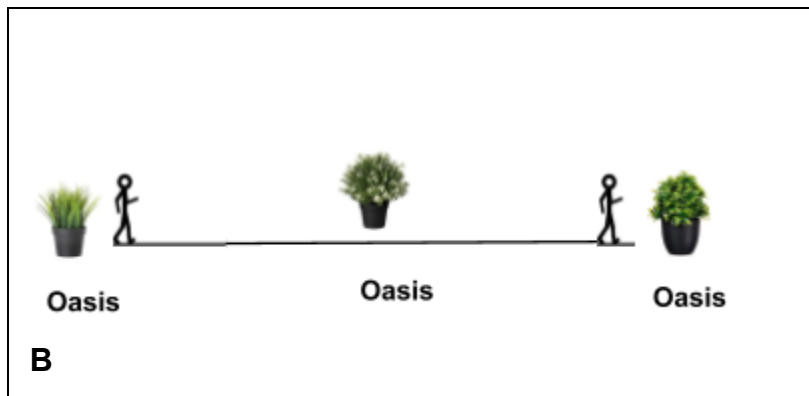
Why is it important, when we are walking in the desert, to find an oasis?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: If we are walking in the very hot desert and can only carry one small bottle of water, would we want to get quickly to the next oasis and refill our bottles or would we want to stop and sight see and play in the sand for a few hours?

Participants respond

Facilitator shares Image B with participants:

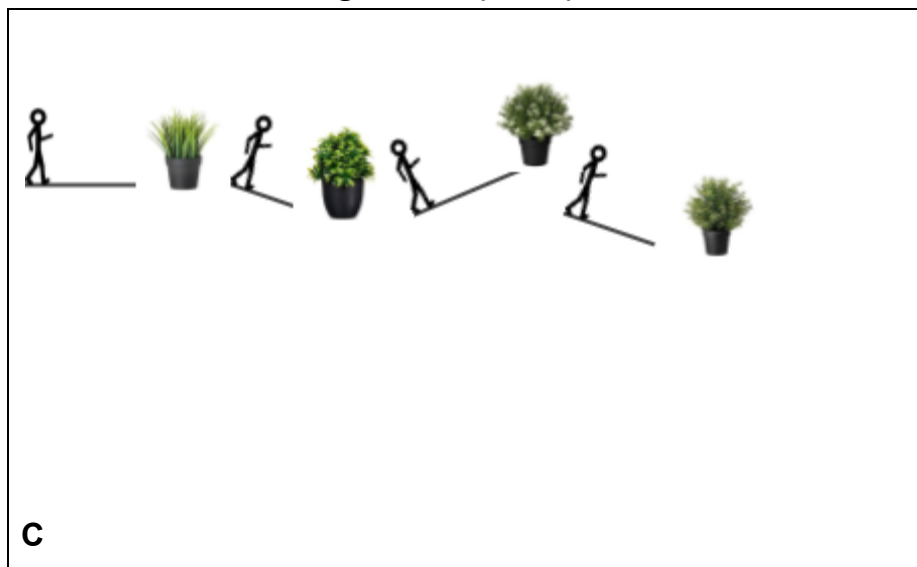


Facilitator says: Of course we would want to get from one oasis to the next quickly. We would want to walk in a straight line if possible to save time.

In desert cultures trees were planted at each oasis to guide the traveler to water, food and safety. The traveler could only faintly see the tree at the next oasis. She knew that she must not leave the path. If she did, she would get lost and run out of water in the very hot, sandy desert.

But here is a surprising bit of information:

Facilitator shares Image C with participants:



Facilitator says: Oases do not naturally all appear in one straight line in the desert. They naturally occur in a zig-zag pattern. But we still have to go from one to the next as

quickly as we can. We can't make a detour and skip one oasis to get to one farther away to try to save time. We would run out of water. This makes the trip longer and not direct, but it is the only way.

My friend made a trip through the desert last year and stopped at each oasis. She told me that her favorite oasis was the last one. It had a big fruit tree with a swing.

What if I decide I want to skip all the other oases and go straight to that last one with the big fruit tree and the swing?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: But I can't skip any of the oases. Why can't I do this? Why can't I go straight to the last oasis?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: We would run out of water and be very thirsty if we skipped any oases, trying to get to the one farthest away.

We have to walk from each oasis to the next one.

When we arrive at each oasis, we can rest, cool off, drink fresh water, and fill our water bottle. Then we continue to the next oasis.

Each oasis is special. Each is different and unique.

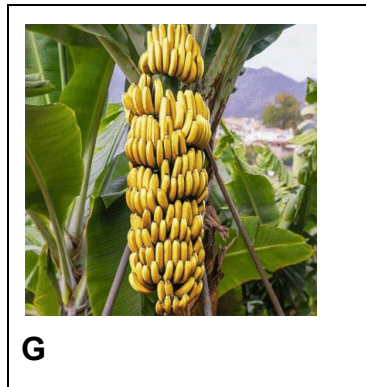
Facilitator shares Image F with participants:



F

Facilitator says: One oasis has grape trees.

Facilitator shares Image G with participants:



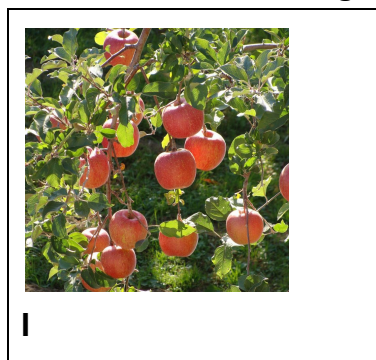
Facilitator says: The next oasis has banana trees.

Facilitator shares Image H with participants:



Facilitator says: And the next oasis has orange trees.

Facilitator shares Image I with participants:



Facilitator says: And the next oasis has apple trees.

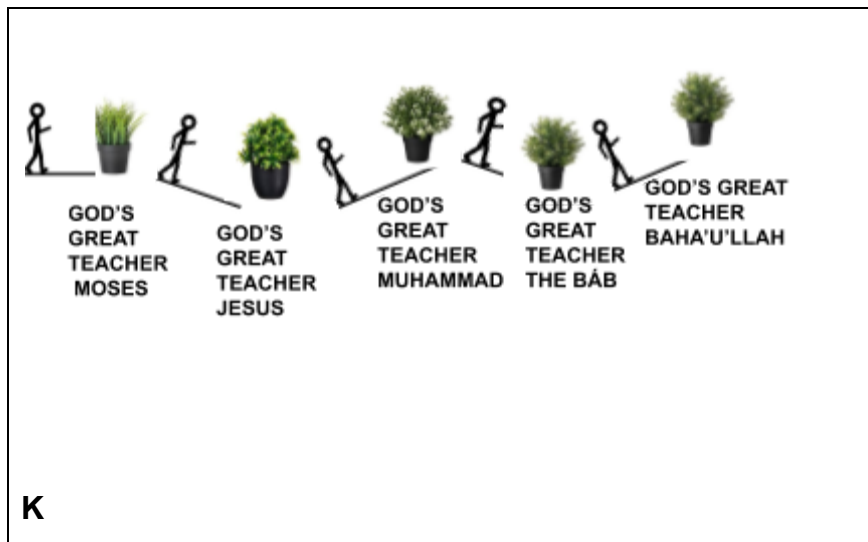
Facilitator shares Image J with participants:



Facilitator says: And the last oasis has delicious pear trees.

Note to Facilitator: To expand activity to include 4 additional Prophets of God, see Resource section for additional fruit images and Prophet names

Facilitator shares: image K with participants:



Facilitator says: God sends us Great Teachers. These Teachers have different names, such as Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. They are like the different trees that grow on different oases. We need Them all. We need all of God's great Teachers just like we need each oasis. They each teach us special things that we need to know to make our lives better. We can't skip over any of God's Great Teachers, just like we can't skip over any of the oases when we travel across the desert.

We will pretend that we are travelling in a desert. Each potted plant is an oasis. We are going to travel from one oasis to the next until we get to the last one.

Let's set up our oases. We know already, that oases do not grow in a straight line in the desert. So we need to set up our four oasis plants in a zig-zag pattern.

Facilitator directs participants: to place five plants on chairs or on the floor/ground in zig-zag pattern. Alternately, a hundred square grid pattern may be made on paper or cloth and placed on the floor. The plants may be placed on this.

Note: Depending on space available, the plants may be spaced at a farther distance from each other.

Facilitator says: Let's label our oases:

Let's put the picture of the grape tree in front of the first plant.

Facilitator selects participant to place grape tree image in front of plant # 1.

Facilitator says: Let's put the picture of the banana tree in front of the second plant.

Facilitator selects participant to place banana tree image in front of plant # 2.

Facilitator says: Let's put the picture of the orange tree in front of the third plant.

Facilitator selects participant to place orange tree image in front of plant # 3.

Facilitator says: Let's put the picture of the apple tree in front of the fourth plant.

Facilitator selects participant to place apple tree image in front of plant # 4.

Facilitator says: Let's put the picture of the pear tree in front of the last plant.

Facilitator selects participant to place pear tree image in front of plant # 5.

Facilitator says: Now let's add the names of God's Great Teachers to each oasis.

Let's put the name of Moses in front of our grape tree oasis.

Facilitator selects participant to place “Moses” card in front of grape tree image #1.

Facilitator says: Let’s put the name of Jesus in front of our banana tree oasis.

Facilitator selects participant to place “Jesus” card in front of banana tree image #2.

Facilitator says: Let’s put the name of Muhammad in front of our orange tree oasis.

Facilitator selects participant to place “Muhammad” card in front of orange tree image #3.

Facilitator says: Let’s put the name of The Báb in front of our apple tree oasis.

Facilitator selects participant to place “The Báb” card in front of apple tree image #4.

Facilitator says: Let’s put the name of Bahá'u'lláh in front of our pear tree oasis.

Facilitator selects participant to place “Bahá'u'lláh” card in front of pear tree image #5.

Facilitator places a water bottle at each oasis and cut fruit pieces corresponding to each labeled oasis.

Facilitator Note: depending on the size of group, four participants may be selected to be “servers” at each of the four oases.

Facilitator gives each participant a small cup.

Facilitator says: Now let’s all walk to each oasis in order on a path through the desert. Moses came before the other Great Teachers on our path, so we will start at our Moses oasis.

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Let’s all refresh ourselves with a drink of water and grapes.

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Moses was a Great Teacher sent to us by God. He taught everyone how to live a spiritual life. God's teachings that Moses gave us are like life-saving water we get at an oasis. Moses also gave us directions on how to find the next oasis where we can find the next Great Teacher. When we travel from one oasis to the next one, we need to carry some water in our cups with us so we won't be so thirsty or scared and have to turn back.

Let's be sure we all have a little water in our cups as we continue to the next oasis.

Facilitator: Facilitator or participant can give physical directions to get to the next oasis. If a 100 square grid has been set up, sample directions might be: "Go forward three spaces; turn right; go forward three spaces; etc.

Facilitator: Repeat process to continue guiding participants through remaining four oases, naming each Prophet of God and reminding participants that the water and refreshing fruit are symbolic of Their Teachings.

Note to Facilitator: The number of oases may be increased, representing additional Prophets of God.

Facilitator says: Let's all return to our seats.

Participants respond

Facilitator Closing remarks: God wants us to grow spiritually and get closer to him. He wants us to love and learn from each of the Great Teachers that He sends to us.

"O Lord! Make these children excellent plants. Let them grow and develop in the Garden of thy Covenant..."

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Reference Library: Bahá'í Prayers: Children*

Let's read (or sing) this prayer for children all together:

O God! Educate these children. These children are the plants of Thine orchard, the flowers of Thy meadow, the roses of Thy garden. Let Thy rain fall upon them; let the Sun of Reality shine upon them with Thy love. Let Thy breeze refresh them in order that they may be trained, grow and develop, and appear in the utmost beauty. Thou art the Giver. Thou art the Compassionate.

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Reference Library: Bahá'í Prayers: Children*

Resources:

Adult Activity

Materials:

5 small potted plants or plastic plants - representing each oasis

Cut pieces of fruit: grapes, bananas, oranges, apples, pears
(other fruits or images of fruit may be substituted is necessary)

5 bottles of water (size depending on number of participants)

Small cups (one for each participant)

Small napkins or plates

Images A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J

Images L,M,N,O - if expanding activity

Children's Activity

Materials

5 small potted plants or plastic plants - representing each oasis

Cut pieces of fruit: grapes, bananas, oranges, apples, pears
(other fruits or images of fruit may be substituted is necessary)

5 bottles of water (size depending on number of participants)

Small cups (one for each participant)

Small napkins or plates

Large paper drawn 100 square grid - optional

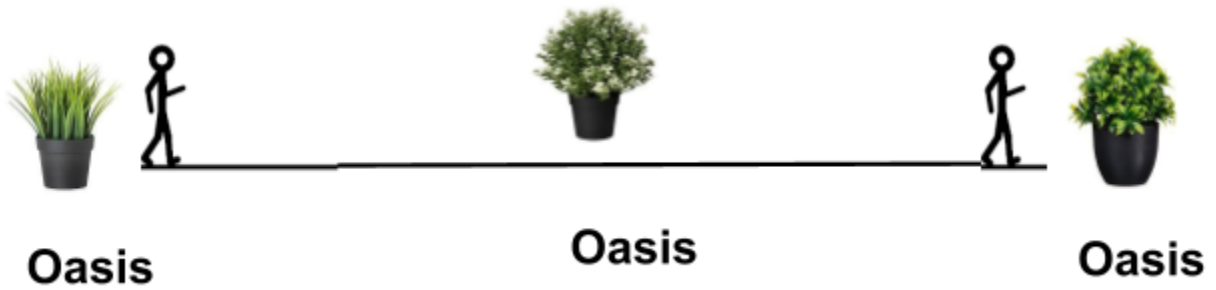
Images A,B,C, F,G,H,I,J,K

Images L,M,N,O - if expanding activity

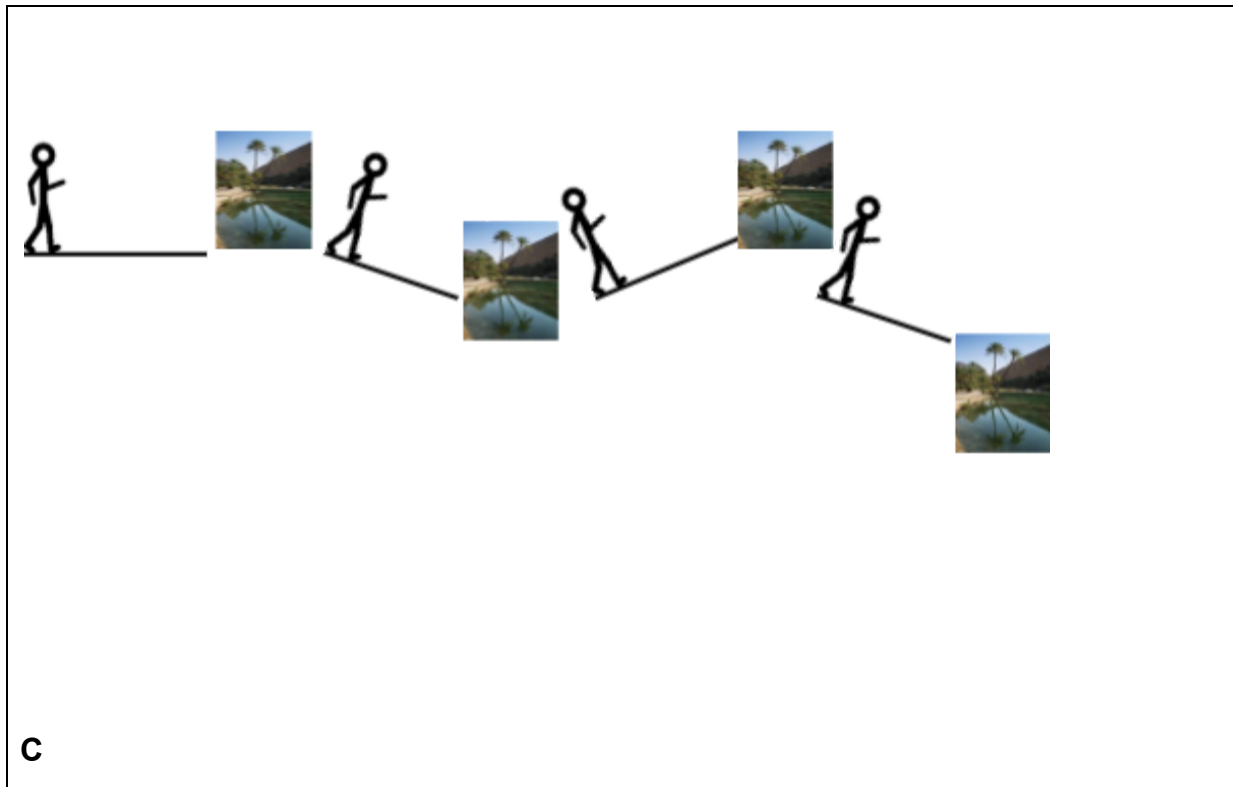
Images

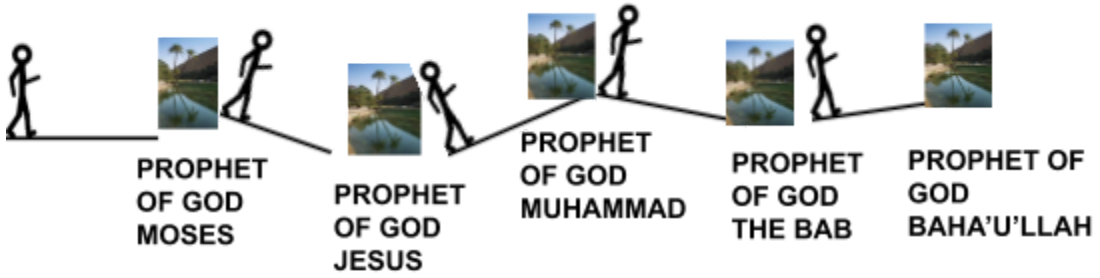


A



B





E



F



G



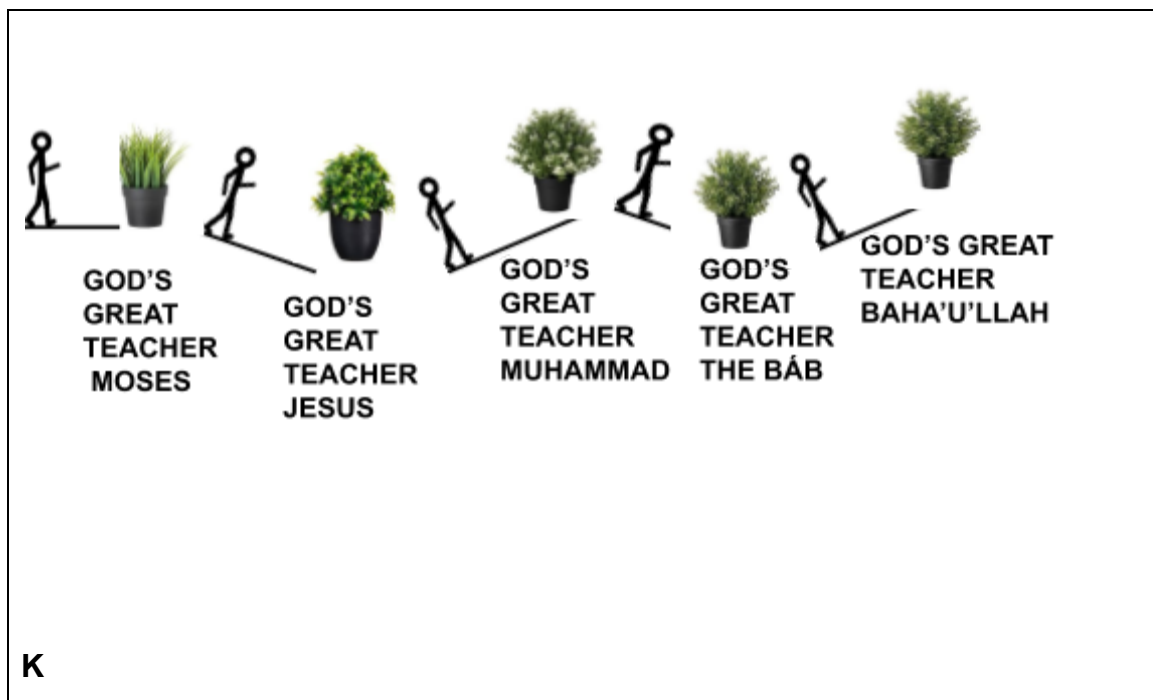
H



I



J



Additional 4 images of fruits if Facilitator chooses to expand activity to include 9 instead of 5 Prophets of God:





M



N



O

Names of Prophets for cards

MOSES

JESUS

MUHAMMAD

THE BÁB

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

Names of Prophets of God - for additional representation and expansion of activity if desired

Names of Prophets for cards

ABRAHAM

KRISHNA

ZOROASTER

BUDDHA