

Virtue Workshop

Children, Youth and Adults Learning Together

Printable resources are included

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Evolving Perfection

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 places: two glasses, half-filled with water, on a table in front of participants

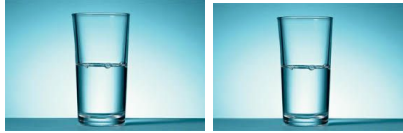


Photo for facilitator reference

Facilitator says: “What do we see?” In what different ways can we describe the glasses?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: We had different opinions -- different ways to describe these two glasses. The possibilities are:

#1 - Both are half-full.

#2 - Both are half-empty.

#3 - One is half full and one is half empty.

How many of us think its #1 - both are half-full?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: How many of us think its #2 -- both are half-empty?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: How many of us think its #3 -- one is half-full and one is half-empty?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Turn to a person near you and share with each other how you each viewed the glasses.

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Let's share with our group what we learned. What do our opinions say about who we are and how we see the world?

Participants respond

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

If we see the glasses half empty it could mean that we tend to be pessimistic. And if we see the glasses half full it could mean that we are more optimistic. My "truth" is also affected by my entire life experience. My truth is based on my perception of what I see. It is important that I know that my truth is not the "absolute" truth.

Facilitator asks: three participants to stand in front of the group

Participants respond

Facilitator draws: a stick figure person on one glass (or on paper/sticky note placed on glass) and gives it to one participant to hold. Facilitator does the same with the other glass and gives it to the second participant to hold.

Facilitator says to the third participant: These two glasses now represent two different people. Now look at these two people. Can you tell us with absolute certainty if these individuals are both half-full or half-empty or if one one is half full and one is half-empty?

Participant responds

Facilitator distributes or asks participants to distribute: paper and pencil/pen to each participant

Facilitator says: Think about four people who we really like and trust -- people we would place in the "more perfect" category.

Write their initials on the paper in one column

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Now, think about four people who we really don't like and don't trust -- people we would place in the "more imperfect" category. Write their initials on the paper in another column.

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Now look at the two groups we have created. Think about which one we would label half-full and which we would label half-empty.

Participants respond - Allow 1 minute

Facilitator says: Now let's write down our favorite color on our paper.

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Let's also write down our least favorite color on our paper.

Participants respond

Facilitator shares Image A with participants:



Facilitator says: For example, suppose you wrote down that your favorite color is blue and your least favorite color is yellow.

Imagine that the glasses are filled half way. Most likely you would perceive the yellow glass as being half-empty and the blue glass as being half-full. You could have a strong bias or you could have a subtle bias. But there will be a bias. All cultures have built in biases formed over many generations. We are all affected by the society we live in. How we view people from different cultures, religions, socio-economic backgrounds, etc. is based on the society which molded us. One of the most common examples of bias is based on racial differences, especially skin color.

The question of a half-full glass or person or a half-empty glass or person makes no sense because it cannot be answered. We cannot definitively label anyone as either being absolutely perfect or absolutely imperfect. Labeling people in this manner reveals our own prejudices.

It is critically important to take the first step of **accepting** our family and friends and everyone as they really are -- a combination of **perfections** and **imperfections**. Acceptance doesn't imply agreement or total understanding. It is the acknowledgement that no one is either completely "perfect" or "imperfect". We must accept the truth that absolute perfection and absolute imperfection only exist in our minds.

Instead, we should strive mightily to see everyone as "an **evolving perfection**"-- as souls inexorably being drawn throughout eternity towards God. Seeing the oneness of evolving perfection makes it possible to see the oneness of mankind. As we become aware of our own personal evolution, we can more readily understand that the realization of the oneness of mankind is also an evolutionary process. We are all evolving on our path towards an understanding of God.

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

"He is the one goal, towards which everything in nature yearns."

-'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Reference Library: *Paris Talks*:15

Facilitator says: Close your eyes. Take three deep breaths. For a minute think of 2-3 serious mistakes you have made. You will not be asked to share these with anyone.

Facilitator: Pause a minute

Facilitator says: Now for a minute think of 2-3 best things you have ever done.

Facilitator: Pause a minute

Facilitator Closing remarks: Can we accurately label **ourselves** as absolute saints or as absolute sinners? Can we accurately label **anyone else** as absolute saints or absolute sinners? If we make this mistake, we would be acting like people who try to play God.

When someone makes a mistake, we often become upset.

We get upset at ourselves for not doing everything perfectly. We get upset at our imperfections. We get upset at others' imperfections. The reason for this is that we want everyone to grow towards God. God is Perfection.

We can't ever say that anyone is totally perfect or totally imperfect. Isn't the truth somewhere in the middle? Aren't we all evolving perfections? Aren't we all always growing? Aren't we all struggling servants of God?

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 **Growing Toward Perfection**

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

Materials in Resource Section

Facilitator: set the two half-filled glasses on a table in front of participants



***Image for facilitator reference**

Facilitator says: What do we see? In what different ways can we describe these glasses?

Do we have different opinions -- different ways to describe these two glasses?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: We had different opinions -- different ways to describe these two glasses. The possibilities are:

#1 - Both are half-full.

#2 - Both are half-empty.

#3 - One is half full and one is half empty.

Facilitator says: How many of us think its #1 -- both are half-full?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: How many of us think its #2 -- both are half-empty?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: How many of us think its #3 -- one is half-full and one is half-empty?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Would you feel comfortable drinking either one of these?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Now I have to tell you that I poured the water into these two glasses last night.

When I came in this morning, I found this worm in this glass of water.

Facilitator hold up: a rubber worm and point to one of the glasses of water.

Facilitator says: Would everyone still feel comfortable drinking out of both of these glasses?

Participants respond: no

Facilitator says: So can we say that this other glass of water is perfectly good to drink? (hold up the glass which did not have the worm in it) Can we also say that this glass of water is not perfect and not good to drink? (hold up the glass which had the worm in it)

Participants respond

*** Facilitator should now begin to pretend to be an absent-minded professor.**

Add hesitation and a bit of confusion to voice.

Facilitator says: Well... wait a minute. Now I'm not sure which glass the worm was in! Now can I really tell which water I can drink and which water I can't drink? Can you help me which one is perfect and which one is not perfect? Can you tell just by looking at the two glasses of water?

Participants respond: no

Facilitator says: OF COURSE NOT!..... They both look exactly the same and I don't remember which one had a worm in it.

Facilitator says: Wait a minute. I didn't take a **real** worm out of the water this morning. I was thinking about a science experiment I did last year. This morning I took this candy worm out of this glass of water! (hold up a candy worm).

... So now we see that both glasses of water were safe to drink.

Facilitator: choose two children to stand up in front of the group.

Says: Now can we tell which of these two friends is perfect and which is not perfect?

Participants respond: no

Facilitator says: Of course we can not.

Can you tell which one has never ever made a mistake in their lives?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Do you think it is possible for anyone to go through their entire life without making a mistake?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: Of course it is not possible.

Our friends and even the adults in our lives are not perfect and never will be. We all make mistakes

Facilitator says: Let's all stand up and form a circle and hold hands.

Participants respond

Facilitator places: shows the group a silly hat. *

Facilitator may choose to attach the rubber worm to the hat.

Facilitator places the hat: on one participant

Facilitator says: For some reason, I don't know why, I am going to pick this person and take them out of the group because I don't think they belong with the rest of us. S/he is not perfect. S/he is wearing a silly hat.

Facilitator: remove one person and lead them to the outside of the circle.

Facilitator says: to the child who has been removed: How do you feel about what just happened? It was decided that you weren't perfect and could not stay in the group with everyone else. Are you happy about this?

Participant will respond that s/he is not happy

Facilitator says: to the group - How does everyone else feel about what just happened?

Participants respond

Facilitator says: What should we do?

Participants will respond: that they want to bring the person back into the group.

Facilitator says: Does a person have to be perfect to be a friend?

Participants will respond: no.

Facilitator invites the excluded participant to return to the group.

If time allows, repeat actions: of placing the hat on other participants, placing them outside the circle of friends and then inviting them to return to the circle.

Facilitator says: Let's all sit down in our circle.

Participants respond

Facilitator says: It is so important that we never see ourselves or see our friends as being totally perfect or as being totally imperfect. I have to think of myself as "my ever-growing self". We are always growing.

When someone makes a mistake, we often become upset. We get upset at ourselves for not doing everything perfectly. We get upset at our imperfections -- what is not perfect about us. We get upset at our friends' imperfections -- what is not perfect about our friends. The reason for this is that we want everyone to grow towards God. God is Perfection.

One of the names of God is the All-Forgiving. God will always be the All-Forgiving. This means that we will sometimes make mistakes.

We need to follow the example of God and be forgiving when our friends make mistakes.

It will be easier to make and keep friends when we are able to forgive them when they are not perfect -- when they make mistakes.

Resource Section

Adult Activity

Materials:

Two identical glasses filled to midpoint with water

Table

Wet erase marker or paper sticky notes and marker

Paper and pencil/pen - enough for one per participant

Image A

Children's Activity

Materials:

Two identical glasses filled to midpoint with water

Table

Rubber fishing worm - colorful if possible

Candy worm

Silly hat

Image A

