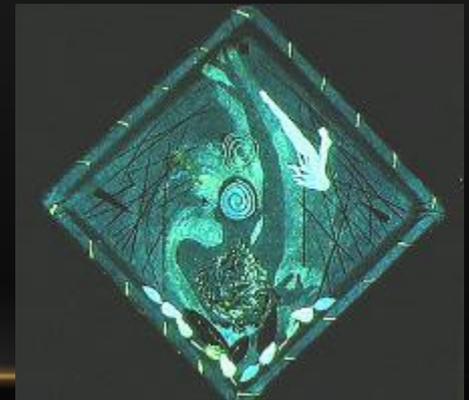




BahÁ'í Identity:

Conscientious Spirituality
and the
Games People PPlay

Dr. Robin M. Chandler
Wilmette Institute
September 9, 2018
Copyrighted 2018 Robin M.
Chandler



The 'heavenly army':

- *“These souls are the armies of God and the conquerors of the East and the West. Should one of them turn his face toward some direction and summon the people to the Kingdom of God, all of the ideal forces and lordly confirmations will rush to his support and reinforcement. He will behold all the doors open and all the strong fortifications and impregnable castles razed to the ground. Singly and alone he will attack the armies of the world, defeat the right and left wings of the hosts of all the countries, break through the lines of the legions of all the nations and carry his attack to the very center of the powers of the earth.” [‘Abdu’l-Baha, BWF: 424]*

Building a spiritual civilization....

- In 6000 years of religious history, what we are being asked to do by the Prophet Bahá'u'lláh has never been done before. As the Prophetic Cycle ends and the Cycle of Fulfillment is launched, there are only the surviving concepts of 'the golden rule'.
- We have successfully built material civilizations but we have never been able to build and sustain a spiritual civilization-not under any Prophet.
- The entire focus of the Bahá'í Teachings is on every aspect of learning starting with self-knowledge. This Revelation concerns every single iteration of knowledge (formal education, informal education, literacy, life-long learning, training, mentoring, early education, study, reflection, imagination, intellect, reason, thought, understanding, and teaching)

What is conscientious spirituality?

It is “perpetual religion”

- The master is the ACTION MODEL for living the unique life that Baha'is identify with..
- ***“My name is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, my identity is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, my qualification is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, my reality is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, my praise is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Thraldom to the Blessed Perfection is my glorious refulgent diadem; and servitude to all the human race is my perpetual religion”***
- The army
- The battle
- The one crusade
- The victory
- The struggle between conscientious spirituality (the rational soul) and conscientious materialism (the physical body) is on-going. Great healing occurs in people who understand and practice the gradual move away from the body and toward the soul.

The Spiritual ❖ verb > Conscientious

- Conscientious - The personality trait of being painstaking and careful; the quality of acting according to the dictates of one's conscience; includes self-discipline, thoroughness, organization, deliberation (thinking carefully before acting), and the need for achievement; character.
- Low conscientiousness= laid back, less goal-oriented, less driven by success
- Conscientiousness is a continuous dimension of human personality, rather than a "type" of person.
- Many of the behaviors associated with conscientiousness fall into the category of 'emotional intelligence'
- What has Bahá'u'lláh stated about conscientiousness or its qualities?

Critical Identity formation

- For our purposes as a Baha'i world community, the formation of spiritual identity is individual, local, and global. This alludes to the structural foundations of the individual and the administrative order. The two must be partners, co-contractors in the building of a divine civilization based upon spiritual principles.
- We are making a paradigm shift away from old (material) loyalties and toward new spiritual commitments that are based upon the 'Four Kinds of Time' . We are moving away from patriarchies, white supremacy and ethnocentrism, class and caste systems, excessive materialism and the secular and political power they have wielded.
- We will be expected to reconcile social inequality with natural inequality. The former must be dismantled, the latter "mined"
- *"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.**"*
[SWA:76-77]

“To hear and ponder the counsels of God...”

- *“**Self** has really two meanings, or is used in two senses, in the Bahá’í writings; one is self, the identity of the individual created by God. This is the self mentioned in such passages as ‘he hath known God who hath known himself etc.’. The other self is the ego, the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature that can develop into a monster of selfishness, brutality, lust and so on. It is this self we must struggle against, or this side of our natures, in order to strengthen and free the spirit within us and help it to attain perfection.”*
- *“The individuality of each created thing is based upon divine wisdom, for in the creation of God there is no defect. However, personality has no element of permanence. It is a slightly changeable quality in man which can be turned in either direction. For if he acquire praiseworthy virtues, these strengthen the individuality of man and call forth his hidden forces; **but if he acquire defects**, the beauty and simplicity of the individuality will be lost to him and **its God-given qualities will be stifled in the foul atmosphere of self.**”*

Spiritual ❖ noun > conscience

- Conscience is an aptitude, faculty, or intuition, or judgment of the intellect that distinguishes right from wrong.
- Common secular or scientific views regard the capacity for conscience as probably genetically determined, with its subject matter probably learned, or imprinted (like language) as part of culture
- What has Bahá'u'lláh stated about conscience?

What are the *games people play*?

- Once human civilization is influenced by the Revelation of the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh, the human rights era is inaugurated for the first time in political and religious history as a phenomena of globalization.
- This message is a completely revolutionary means for transfixing our attention on the internal world of the spirit and its' power to transform the individual from within.

What are the *games people play*? (continued)

“Games are a form of sport or play. Socially and politically they are often competitive and involve planning that take the shape of dodges, ploys, schemes or tricks. Here, “games” are the social pathologies about difference that result from both nature and nurture; they are transmitted to us by significant others and they are institutionalized in our societies.....These are games of deception, domination, and subversion. Prejudices are also addictions to unhealthy behaviors and contain a tension between hostility and the search for security.”

What are the *games people play*? (continued)

*Frequently we “play games” with other people when a situation gets “too hot to handle” through conventional interaction.....The problem with these games is that they are dead-ends, behavioral traps which we set for ourselves and others. Prejudices are also addictions to unhealthy behaviors and contain a tension between hostility and the search for security. We have to be vigilant to see through the masks we hide behind. .. they reveal complex tensions between what we have been taught and how a conscience or a ‘sense of shame” trigger our intuitive faculties about right and wrong. “ [from **Games People Play**, Chandler]*

What are the Games People Play about race?

- “ ‘I’m not a racist’
- “This is the way it’s done here”
- “We’ve come a long way, baby”
- “But I’m a decent man...”
- “What more do you people want?”
- “We have a _____ and a _____ on staff
- “We have a lot of diversity in our community.”
- “We are one, I love everybody,”
- “Find the racist”
- “You should have a sin-covering eye”
- “They are impatient or they are patronizing”
- “Why keep bringing up racism?”
- “My people were oppressed, too”
- “She’s going to leave and get pregnant”



“[T]he very gender inequalities in economic assets, political power, and cultural authority, as well as the means of coercion, that gender reforms intend to change, currently mean that men (often specific groups of men) control most of the resources required to implement women’s claims for justice. Men and boys are thus in significant ways gatekeepers for gender equality. Whether they are willing to open the gates for major reforms is an important strategic question. “ [R.W. Cornell, “Change Among the Gatekeepers: Men, Masculinities, and Gender Equality in the Global Arena”, *Signs*, 2005]



- The Equality of Men and Women-
- **VGlobal**
- Principle & Policy Histories since the 19th Century-
- -Human Rights Era (19th c.)- Abolition/Emancipation, Women's Suffrage, Industrialization, Labor (child) movements....
- *"We the people of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind and..."*
- -UN Charter (1945)-PR China, US, UK, Russia Federation, France

'L'Afrique", Six Continents, Musee d'Orsay, Paris by Eugene Delaplanche

Baha'u'llah dismantles gender discrimination

- *“In brief, the assumption of superiority by man will continue to be depressing to the ambition of woman, as if her attainment to equality was creationally impossible; woman’s aspiration toward advancement will be checked by it, and she will gradually become hopeless. On the contrary, we must declare that her capacity is equal, even greater than man’s. This will inspire her with hope and ambition, and her susceptibilities for advancement will continually increase. She must not be told and taught that she is weaker and inferior in capacity and qualification. If a pupil is told that his intelligence is less than his fellow pupils, it is a very great drawback and handicap to his progress. He must be encouraged to advance by the statement, “You are most capable, and if you endeavor, you will attain the highest degree.*

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 76-77)

“a sense of shame ” is our moral and ethical midpoint, our fulcrum

- *“Verily I say: The fear of God hath ever been a sure defense and a safe stronghold for all the peoples of the world. It is the chief cause of the protection of mankind, and the supreme instrument for its preservation. Indeed, there existeth in man a faculty which deterreth him from, and guardeth him against, whatever is unworthy and unseemly, and which is known as his sense of shame. ”*
- As we ponder how to make peace in the world, a sense of shame forces us to examine the social and economic injustices that have prevented peace for millennia.

A Behavioral Model for Eliminating Racism- THE MOST CHALLENGING ISSUE (MCI)

-Show by every means in their power the warmth of their response	-Abandon once for all their usually inherent and at times subconscious sense of superiority
-Show their readiness to forget the past	-Correct their tendency towards revealing a patronizing attitude towards the members of the other race
-Show their ability to wipe out every trace of suspicion that may still linger in their hearts and minds	-Persuade them [other race] through their intimate, spontaneous, and informal association with them of the genuineness of their friendship
	-Master their impatience of any lack of responsiveness on the part of the people who have received, for so long a period, such grievous and slow-healing wounds

'*Living the Life*' is a science of identity formation'

- '*When you were born, you cried and the world rejoiced. Live your life so that when you die, the world cries and you rejoice.*' - Cherokee

What are the core components of "*a true Baha'i*" ?

- -strives by day and by night to progress and advance along the path of human endeavor
- -whose cherished desire is to live and act as to enrich and illumine the world
- -whose source of inspiration is the essence of divine perfection
- -whose aim in life is to conduct himself so as to be the source of infinite progress
- ***"Only when he attains unto such perfect gifts can it be said of him that he is a Baha'i."***

What constitutes identity & why is **Bahá'í identity** critical to human development

- The architecture and machinery of identity-making
- The founding myths of the U.S. (et al)
- The persistent myths of Bahá'í “culture” and truth-telling
- How society enforces convention and stifles the exploration of the “self”
- The impact of patriarchal systems on the emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical life of the individual
- How do we combat tribalism in ourselves and our communities?
- How does the Guardians' 7 step behavioral model help us to achieve new levels of spirituality beyond racial amity?
- How is the emergence of Baha'í identity linked to building a spiritual civilization?

Freedom, BALANCE & Well Being

- *“You who live in a land where freedom is so highly prized have not, then, to dispense with its fruits, but you are challenged and do have the obligation to uphold and vindicate the distinction between the license that limits your possibilities for genuine progress and the moderation that ensures the enjoyment of true liberty. “*
- The Universal House of Justice

We are combatting patriarchal systems and tribalism as “moral downfall”

- Signs of Barbarism, chaos, and ultimate extinction?
- “patriotic arrogance”
- “corruption of the press”

The Chaos that precedes peace

- *“Must a series of profound convulsions stir and rock the human race ere Baha'u'llah can be enthroned in the hearts and consciences of the masses, ere His undisputed ascendancy is universally recognized, and the noble edifice of His World Order is reared and established?”*

What pRoblems?.....

- The central organizing principles of the Bahá'í Teachings such as 'the extremes of wealth and poverty' directly identifies problems and indirectly imply even broader issues such as gender inequality, violence, the abuse of children, and the corruption of economic systems
- *"The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new world order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed... Be ye as firmly settled as the **immovable mountain in the Cause of your Lord, the Mighty, the Loving. .**"*

Spiritual Weapons

- Reflection on 7 behaviors to address the spectrum of forms of difference including race and gender [ADJ]
 - This is our spiritual homework both individual and in groups and within the family
 - Our personal development must be spiritual, tactical, and collaborative, that is, conscientious
 - Our spiritual weapons-prayer, meditation, fasting, service
 - Our community development must be the same
-

“....The coming of age of the human race”

- *“The **coming of age** of the entire human race is associated by Shoghi Effendi with the unification of the whole of mankind , the establishment of a world commonwealth, and an unprecedented stimulus to “the intellectual, the moral and spiritual life of the entire human race” .*
- *Baha’u’llah, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*
- *“...that predestined course traced for it by the Hand of the Almighty”*

What is conscientious spirituality?

- CS is a mind tool of self-awareness and self-regulation.
- CS is a framework for higher level immersion into our spiritual identity
- CS uses the spiritual technology of the Teachings of Baha'u'llah: prayer, meditation, consultation, and service- to produce the inspiration, motivation, confidence, courage, forbearance, and positive energy to change ourselves
- CS has unique spiritual exercises adapted for personal, professional, and social life
- CS focuses on the links between spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical intelligence of human beings-the spirit, the thought, the emotions, the body- to increase our knowledge and understanding of human behavior---remindfulness.
- CS expands our self-knowledge, including the knowledge of a Divine Architect
- CS helps us to identify those ego roadblocks to true spiritual freedom
- CS is, above all, conscientious....

TWO THINGS

- *"There are two things which will contribute greatly to bringing more people into the Cause more swiftly: one is the maturity of the Bahá'ís within their communities, functioning according to Bahá'í laws and in the proper spirit of unity, and the other is the **disintegration of society and the suffering it will bring in its wake**. When the old forms are seen to be hopelessly useless, the people will stir from their materialism and spiritual lethargy, and embrace the Faith."* (Letter 3 July 1948, on behalf Shoghi Effendi) [13]

Acknowledging & Learning from our mistakes

- During the 1970's mass declaration brought many people in to the Baha'i world community. This occurred in many countries, not just the U.S.
- In addition to the truths of Baha'u'llah's Teachings, people were also searching for social community, for inclusion of their ethnic and cultural ways of being and knowing, and an understanding of their experiences, and a Baha'i presence in their residential communities
- If we were to experience 'mass declaration' again, how would you respond? What would you do to prepare yourself, your family, your community?

Spiritual technology

- Prayer
- Meditation- *"I retired alone and companionless....roamed the wilderness of resignation. The birds of the air were my companions, and the beasts of the field my associates.."*
- -Baha'u'llah, describing His two years of retreat to the mountains of Sulaymaniyyih, Kurdistan, and similar to the retreats of Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed..
- When we go to our Baha'i schools, conferences, and meetings we seek new knowledge and learning, less so as social occasion

The spiritual objective

- *“... Is not the object of every Revelation 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?”*
 - -Bahá'u'lláh
-

Oppression

- *“There is no fire in the eyes of those who have known God and His signs, fiercer than to transgress His laws and to oppress another soul, even to the extent of a mustard seed.”*
(The Bab, Selections from the Writings of the Bab, p. 79)
- *“What “oppression” is more grievous than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it? For opinions have sorely differed, and the ways unto the attainment of God have multiplied.*
(Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Iqán, p. 29)

'Abdu'l-Bahá in America - 1912

- Can we reflect on the forceful enthusiasm with which The Master became a lighting rod for social justice in a country that would “**lead all nations spiritually**”?
- How did His behavior shed light oppression & inequalities in the U.S.? What were the social, economic, and political conditions? How did His active approach to injustice provide a model for service to humanity?
- How did He model the spiritual qualities that would be required for the future builders of a divine civilization? What were those qualities?
- He modeled the necessity to turn to God, develop spiritual qualities, to use our intellect, reason, and conscience to startle us into an awareness of inequality and injustice. He empowered us to take action to propel a backward society forward into the future.
- *“If you will turn to Go, He will turn to you and assist you. He will make you eloquent. He will make you irresistible by His Wisdom.”*

Economic inequality-a source of oppression

- ***“Endeavor to become the cause of the attraction of souls rather than to enforce minds. Manifest true economics to the people. Show what love is, what kindness is, what true severance is and generosity. This is the important thing for you to do.”***
- -‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Boston
- Reducing the economic inequality that stems from institutionalized racism or sexism begins with expressing spiritual qualities in our lives; theories, policies, laws, and practices that currently oppress people and their communities will emerge from the economics of love, kindness, severance, and generosity. Conscientiously exercising the spiritual qualities of the soul will attract others and produce consultation on economic theories that result from spiritually-based thinking that will then be translated into action.

“Ignorance is the night of the mind, a night without moon or stars.”

The inner conference

The “*intelligent ego*”

- “*When you wish to reflect upon or consider a matter, **you consult something within you**. You say, shall I do it, or shall I not do it? Is it better to make this journey or abandon it? Whom do you consult? Who is within you deciding this question?....”*
- “*Surely there is a distinct power, an intelligent ego. Were it not distinct from your ego, you would not be consulting it. **It is greater than the faculty of thought**. It is your spirit which teaches you, which advises and decides upon matters. Who is it that interrogates? Who is it that answers?”*
- -'Abdu'l-Baha

From the intelligent ego [IE] to the “natural emotions” & emotional intelligence [EQ]

- *“What is the dust which obscures the mirror [of the heart]? It is attachment to the world, avarice, envy, love of luxury and comfort, haughtiness and self-desire.... The **natural emotions** are ... like rust which deprives the heart of the bounties of God.....*
- -'Abdu'l-Bahá
- *....But **sincerity, justice, humility, severance, and love** ... will purify the mirror and make it radiant with reflected rays from the Sun of Truth.”*

Think oppositionally

- What is the opposite of ignorance?
- We have some backward, obsolete, and unenlightened attitudes in this country which are not based in fact, but serve as a “deficit model” of thinking and doing.
- How about that “***independent investigation of truth***” principle? Let’s apply it to a social belief in the U.S. population.
- Example: that monolingualism (English) is an asset, both virtuous and functional in a diverse society.
- Fact: polyglots are smarter and faster at cognitive processing, “script swappers” or “code switchers”, focusing, and multitasking. They have sharper perception, can separate meaning from form (can categorize meaning in different ways), have a better ear for listening (and can, therefore, be better listeners, have more cognitive flexibility, higher order thinking, can be simultaneously insiders and outsiders. For children, it improves academic performance, for elders it may help offset age-related declines in mental dexterity because of superior working memory storage and retrieval required if you’re bi-lingual, etc.
- Challenge: If we move toward an “abundance model” of learning, acquiring virtues and new knowledge, we have a better chance of have skills to offer in the building of spiritually-based divine civilization. The latter model is a ubiquitous feature of the Writings of the Revelation of both The Bab and Baha’u’llah. Everywhere we are being asked to focus on our God-given knowledge assets and the “abundance” of gifts and new ways of thinking offered in this Revelation. To “IGNORE” = to be ignorant.

Think creatively

- The “deficit model” of human behavior operates in many other ways.
- We return to the principle of the “independent investigation of truth”
- Example: that racism and prejudice are endemic to American society, that Bahá'is cannot be prejudiced, that Bahá'is who emigrate to the U.S. cannot be prejudiced, and that, therefore, racism is not present in Baha'is in the U.S.
- Fact: racism and prejudice are a deficit in a diverse society. The racial dynamics of evolving Bahá'i community life demonstrate that racism functions in both Baha'is and Baha'i community life. Race prejudice is “_____”. Belief in the principle of “the elimination of all forms of prejudice” is a value indicator, but not a value. It remains a principle-only, until it is actualized in our lives. The deficit model operates in U.S. Baha'i communities. Baha'is often behave as if racism only exists outside of Baha'i community life. Demographically, the disproportionate numbers of white and Persian believers in many communities suggests that perceptions of racial/ethnic diversity are reductive, have been “normalized” to signify “world-embracing”, when in fact communities may not include representative numbers of the U.S. population. This means that the “corrosion” is inside the body of the Faith.

Heavenly Training

“Wherever the mention of Bahá’u’lláh rises up, that is the paradise of Abhá. Wherever purified, severed, illumined souls are found, that is the paradise of Abhá...

It is my hope that you all may become the product of the life of Bahá’u’lláh and the outcomes of His heavenly training. When the people ask you, “What has Bahá’u’lláh accomplished?” say to them, “He has created these; He has trained us.”

-‘Abdu’l-Bahá

The Future...

