



LARGE PRINT / Standard Print.

Educate these children

'Educate these children. These children are the plants of Thine orchard'

(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 194)

IT HAS TAKEN me five years of Bahá'í life to get the courage to write this, during which time I've taught the Faith in 19 countries and shared my love for Bahá'u'lláh with many souls – however, this article is about what happened before. There are many Bahá'ís like myself, who, whilst having Bahá'í parents, did not learn about the Faith as children. We are often asked, “So, are you from a Bahá'í family, or did you find the Faith yourself?” and find ourselves unable to answer. Our experience can make us natural teachers of the Faith – understanding both the thrill of discovering the Writings for the first time and having the support of our families in our efforts.

On the other hand we feel uncomfortable when anyone asks us about our Bahá'í background since we may be obliged to explain circumstances and actions that feels like backbiting, while a simple “yes” or “no” would lead to more questions that require another often painful explanation. What can we do then?

Five years after I was first asked that question I'm still unsure of exactly what to say. Nowadays if a non-Bahá'í asks me, I will communicate the joy I found in discovering the Writings for myself, and the equanimity of my parents to raise me open-minded so I could accept the Bahá'í Teachings quickly.

If a Bahá'í asks me, I point out that I have an insight into both experiences, but most of all I appreciate the importance of having what I lacked. Both of these approaches are true, but the last point is the one I want to address here.

It is difficult to understand why something so precious passed you by as a child, so to help others come to terms with it I have compiled as concise a list of motives as I can drawn from the Writings and especially the Ridván letter 2000/156.

Difficult Circumstances: if only one parent is a Bahá'í, or the community doesn't offer children's classes. It doesn't make sense to blame the community – ultimately you're blaming yourself. If your partner disagrees with Bahá'í activities you can still encourage your children to say prayers with you by making it a bonding experience; Bahá'u'lláh will present you with opportunities to pass on your knowledge of the Faith.

Lack of Deepening: hopefully not as much a problem today as it was in the past – Bahá'í parents would claim that “education of Bahá'í children is the community's responsibility” or “children should make up their own minds about religion.” Both are singled out as false excuses by the Universal House of Justice. Now that the Ruhi materials are available, and the National Syllabus “Waiting on the Blessed Beauty” has been devised for children's classes, no Bahá'í should remain ignorant of the essential teachings.

Personal Insecurity: it needs to be addressed – we live in a fearful world, and our fears can manifest themselves in the wrong places. Sometimes we'd rather our children didn't do “better” than us. If we remember our personal duty to acquire virtues, we should be less prone to despise virtue in others.

Lack of Encouragement: why don't we tell each other that it is our duty as Bahá'ís to educate our children in the Faith? There may be a cultural attitude that tells us “we must not interfere with other people's parenting techniques” but you'd have the courage to tell

...learn from other people's parenting techniques, but you should have the courage to tell someone about less fundamental duties – why not about this one?

We know that mistakes were made in the past, but our duty is to learn from them and create a better world for ourselves and our children. If we pledge that we will never let circumstances get in the way of our children's Bahá'í education, that we will always deepen ourselves and others in this essential duty, that our personal struggles are our own problem – since our children are entrusted to us by God – and that we will not hesitate to encourage others to do the same, then we will have learnt our lesson, and nobody will ever have to answer, “Well, sort of; you see, my parents are Bahá'ís, but ...”



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