

Authority of Self Workshop Format: Empowerment of Women

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This Workshop can be used for many purposes: to assist those who have been rendered powerless by oppression of any form, whether physical abuse, rape, sexual abuse, mental abuse, ethnic or religious intolerance, sexism or racism.

In addition, it can be used to awaken both men and women to each others need to develop birthright power¹ in the context of obedience to a just authority and enable them to walk equally with one another.

The final purpose is to demonstrate that “Repeated, identical, conscious thoughts physically enlarge the neural circuits in the brain when they are attached to or tagged by positive feelings, which in turn facilitates a change in behavior,”² despair, and anxiety.

Authority of Self: A beginning

In preparation for writing my book “Assisting the Traumatized Soul”, I did research through women’s literature for several years. The phrase “authority of self” kept popping up. I wondered “What does that mean? Why do the authors not define it?” Continued research turned up nothing. So I decided to go to a local university library and do a computer search of the literature to see if I could find more information. I tried every variable on the phrase that I could think of and still could not find any leads in journals, dissertations or reports.

Finally, I said to my self: “The word authority implies ‘power’”. And since I am a member of the Baha’i Faith, I went to the concordance on the Writings of Baha’u’llah, the Manifestation of God for the day in which we live,³ and looked up every quotation

¹ As for the spiritual perfections [powers] they are man's birthright and belong to him alone of all creation. Man is, in reality, a spiritual being, and only when he lives in the spirit is he truly happy. This spiritual longing and perception belongs to all men alike... ‘Abdu’l-Baha, Paris Talks, p. 72

² Hal Williamson and Sharon Eakes, “Liberating Greatness: The Whole Brain Guide to An Extraordinary Life”, copyright 2006, Word Association Publishers, Pennsylvania, p. 197.

³ The Baha’i Faith came out of Persia, what is now Iran, in 1844 with the Revelation of Baha’u’llah’s Forerunner, the Bab, which means “The Gate”. Baha’u’llah formally revealed His Station in 1853 after His exile to Baghdad. He revealed the Word of God for today and brought many unifying principles.

that referred to power that I could find...from energy, faculty, capability, gifts, virtue, power, and such. Among the hundreds of references I discovered 25 human birthright powers embedded in the Revelation of Baha'u'llah and defined "authority of self" as a combination of these powers working together, augmenting one another, controlled by me...controlled by you! I can say with certainty that these powers can also be found in other sacred texts and traditions, from Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity to Islam.

I define "Authority of Self" as: the freedom and ability to use God-given mental powers to make rational and moral choices, self-regulation of the emotions; and the right or permission to act independently with the understanding that one has personal limitations.⁴

Many psychologists and counselors adopt this particular model: Thought generates feeling which generates behavior or action, which helps us understand why we do the things we do; explained this way, we can see that it coincides with the definition of authority of self.

'Abdu'l-Baha, the son of Baha'u'llah, the Prophet/Founder of the Baha'i Faith, stated while in London, in 1911, in his very first public speaking engagement after 60 years in prison, that mankind was in need of new powers and virtues, new moralities, new capacities in the day in which we live. That they are fully within our grasp and that we have been granted permission by God to use these powers....such as the power of speech, the power of choice, the power of discernment, the power of identity, the power of wisdom, the power of intuition, the power of reflection, discovery, and understanding....the power of will, memory and to search for truth....the power of response, anticipation, attention, and receptivity....and the power of reasoning, deduction, and to recognized God or a Higher, Superior Being.

Another wise man, Ian Semple, gave a talk on "Obedience to a Higher Being" and its relationship to "authority of self". He proposed five simple steps.

1. The first is to accept personal responsibility and accept myself as the ultimate source of authority (Do all my choices, actions and responsibility for them come back to me?);

"God has given man the eye of investigation by which he may see and recognize truth. He has endowed man with ears that he may hear the message of reality and conferred upon him the gift of reason by which he may discover things for himself. This is his endowment and equipment for the investigation of reality. Man is not intended to see through the eyes of another, hear through another's ears nor comprehend with another's brain. Each human creature has individual endowment, power and responsibility in the creative plan of God. Therefore, depend upon your own reason and judgment and adhere to the outcome of your

⁴ Definition of "authority of self", excerpted from "Assisting the Traumatized Soul", used by permission of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States.

own investigation; otherwise, you will be utterly submerged in the sea of ignorance and deprived of all the bounties of God.”⁵

2. The second is to recognize personal fallibility (Am I capable of making mistakes because I am not all-knowing and all-wise? Can I admit to myself that my authority is merely a “mortal authority?”);

“This confession of helplessness which every mature contemplation must eventually impel every mind to make is in itself the acme of human understanding, and marketh the culmination of man’s development.”⁶

Inspire them, O my Lord, with a sense of their own powerlessness before Him Who is the Manifestation of Thy Self, and teach them to recognize the poverty of their own nature in the face of the manifold tokens of Thy self-sufficiency and riches, that they may gather together round Thy Cause, and cling to the hem of Thy mercy, and cleave to the cord of the good-pleasure of Thy will.

(Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 47)

“O SON OF BEING!

If thine heart be set upon this eternal, imperishable dominion, and this ancient, everlasting life, forsake this mortal and fleeting sovereignty [authority].”⁷

3. The third is to recognize a source of authority outside myself, a source of a higher truth (Like God, who is All-Knowing, All-Wise; a Supreme Being.);

“On this plane, neither the reign of reason is sufficient nor the authority of self. Hence, one of the Prophets of God hath asked: "O my Lord, how shall we reach unto Thee?" And the answer came, "Leave thyself [your authority and reason] behind, and then approach Me.”⁸

“Blessed is the wayfarer who hath recognized the Desired One, and the seeker who hath heeded the Call of Him Who is the intended Aim of all mankind, and the learned one who hath believed in God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.”⁹

“Say: O ye that have strayed and lost your way! The Divine Messenger, Who speaketh naught but the truth, hath announced unto you the coming of the Best-Beloved. Behold He is now come. Wherefore are ye downcast and dejected?

⁵ Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 293

⁶ Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 165-166

⁷ Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words #54

⁸ Baha'u'llah, The Four Valleys, p. 55

⁹ Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 235

Why remain despondent when the Pure and Hidden One hath appeared unveiled amongst you? ”¹⁰

“How high the reward of him that hath not deprived himself of so great a bounty, nor failed to recognize the beauty of his Best-Beloved this, His new attire. ”¹¹

“Take heed lest pride deter you from recognizing the Source of Revelation; lest the things of this world shut you out as by a veil from Him Who is the Creator of heaven. Arise, and serve Him Who is the Desire of all nations, Who hath created you through a word from Him, and Ordained you to be, for all time, the emblems of His sovereignty [authority] ”¹²

“Whoso firmly believeth today in the rebirth of man and is fully conscious that God, the Most Exalted, wieldeth supreme ascendancy and absolute authority over this new creation, verily such a man is reckoned with them that are endued with insight in this most great Revelation. Unto this beareth witness every discerning believer. ”¹³

“I magnify Thy Name, O my God, and offer thanksgiving unto Thee, O my Desire, inasmuch as Thou hast enabled me to clearly perceive Thy straight Path, has unveiled Thy Great Announcement before mine eyes and hast aided me to set my face towards the Dayspring of Thy Revelation and the Fountainhead of Thy Cause... ”¹⁴

“How high the reward of him that hath not deprived himself of so great a bounty, nor failed to recognize the beauty of his Best-Beloved this, His new attire. ”¹⁵

“Blessed is the man who recognizeth Him and entereth His presence. ”¹⁶

4. The fourth is to understand the requirements of the authority that I recognize (What is God’s contract with me? What does He promise me; and what does He expect from me? Where do I find it?);

“This is the Day, O my Lord, which Thou didst announce unto all mankind as the Day whereon Thou wouldst reveal Thy Self, and shed Thy radiance, and shine brightly over all Thy creatures. Thou hast, moreover, entered into a covenant

¹⁰ Baha’u’llah, Gleanings, p. 168

¹¹ Baha’u’llah, Gleanings, p. 167

¹² Baha’u’llah, Gleanings, p. 211-212. This is a commandment to the kings, the sovereigns, the presidents, the rulers, the divines and the wise to recognize him.

¹³ Baha’u’llah, Tablets of Baha’u’llah, p. 142

¹⁴ Baha’u’llah, Baha’i Prayers, 2002

¹⁵ Baha’u’llah, Gleanings, p. 167

¹⁶ Baha’u’llah, Tablets of Baha’u’llah, p. 107

with them, in Thy Books, and Thy Scriptures, and Thy Scrolls, and Thy Tablets, concerning Him Who is the Day-Spring of Thy Revelation...."¹⁷

*"The bestowals of God are all and always manifest. The promises of heaven are ever present. The favors of God are all-surrounding, but should the conscious eye of the soul of man remain veiled and darkened, he will be led to deny these universal signs and remain deprived of these manifestations of divine bounty. Therefore, we must endeavor with heart and soul in order that the veil covering the eye of inner vision may be removed, that we may behold the manifestations of the signs of God, discern His mysterious graces and realize that material blessings as compared with spiritual bounties are as nothing. The spiritual blessings of God are greatest."*¹⁸

*"While in prison We have revealed a Book which We have entitled, 'The Most Holy Book'. We have enacted laws therein and adorned it with the commandments of thy Lord, Who exerciseth authority over all that are in the heavens and on the earth. Say: Take hold of it, O people, and observe that which hath been sent down in it of the wondrous precepts of your Lord, the Forgiving, the Bountiful. It will truly prosper you both in this world and in the next and will purge you of whatsoever ill beseemeth you. He is indeed, the Ordainer, the Expounder, the Giver, the Generous, the Gracious, the All-Praised."*¹⁹

*"Moreover, We announce unto everyone the joyful tidings concerning that which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book – a Book from above whose horizon the day-star of My commandments shineth upon every observer and every observed one. Hold ye fast unto it and fulfil that which is revealed therein. Indeed better is this for you than whatsoever hath been created in the world, did ye but know it."*²⁰

*"Whosoever maketh efforts for us, he shall enjoy the blessings conferred by the words: 'In our ways shall we assuredly guide him.'"*²¹

5. And the fifth step is the exercise of judgment in carrying out these requirements (The fact that I am a reasoning human being means that I must judge for myself and carry out these requirements to the best of my ability). Then I will be enabled to use "authority of self", my powers with wisdom.

*"In this Day whatsoever serveth to reduce blindness and to increase vision is worthy of consideration. This vision acteth as the agent and guide for true knowledge. Indeed in the estimation of men of wisdom keenness of understanding is due to keenness of vision. The people of Baha must under all circumstances observe that which is meet and seemly and exhort the people accordingly."*²²

¹⁷ Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, p. 275

¹⁸ 'Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 90

¹⁹ Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 262. The Most Holy Book is "The Book of Laws".

²⁰ Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 267. The Most Holy Book, also known as the Kitab-i-Aqdas.

²¹ Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 192-196

²² Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 35

“Say: Honesty, virtue, wisdom and a saintly character redound to the exaltation of man, while dishonesty, imposture, ignorance and hypocrisy lead to his abasement. By My life! Man's distinction lieth not in ornaments or wealth, but rather in virtuous behaviour and true understanding.”²³

A New Definition of Power

Humankind has not always been allowed to use all of its powers, especially women, because power in a male dominated paradigm has always been used and defined as force. But in the 21st Century, we have a new definition of power. An author by the name of N. Josefowitz defines power as “effectiveness: the ability or capacity to act or perform effectively. This broader concept of power includes the capacity and the ability or competence to get things done by either influencing others or having access to resources. It also includes the idea of granting more autonomy to those with less power.”²⁴

Power Used as Force

Everyone knows what power used as “force” looks like. We witness it in a world at war today and our history books are littered with the brutality of force. We also see it in the dangers our children and youth face, early pregnancy...forced into sexual slavery...forced to live on the streets, homeless and motherless...and we see it in the battering of women forced to endure sex and rape with the consequences of HIV/AIDS and ostracism...and we see it in the funerals of HIV/AIDS infected youth and adults who could have, but were too stigmatized to ask for help or ARV medication.

Sexual Abuse as Force

Another facet of force is the fact that sexual abuse is a world wide epidemic. Consider these horrific statistics on sexual abuse of children. Here are some facts and figures from the United States. One in four females is molested in childhood. One in seven boys is molested before the age of 18. 150,000 to 200,000 new cases of sexual abuse are being reported each year. In England a quarter of all rape victims are children.

In South Africa the largest group of perpetrators (33%) was school teachers. The findings suggest that child rape is becoming more common, and lend support to qualitative research of sexual harassment of female students in schools in Africa. South Africa has one of the highest rates of rape in the world, mostly against children. Every half an hour, a child is sexually abused in Brazil. Sometimes by Brazilians, sometimes by foreigners, who are presented the children by an intermediary who has rented them by the day from their families. Sugar Daddies (older men) in their cars wait outside of the school grounds in Botswana for young girls who want clothes and food and attention, trading it for sexual favors.

²³ Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 57

²⁴ Phyllis Peterson, “Assisting the Traumatized Soul”, 1999, Baha’i Publishing Trust of the United States.

Regarding sexual violence against children in Eastern Europe: Sexual violence against young boys and girls up to 15 years old accounts for 30 per cent of all crimes in this category, and it is most often children between 8 and 12 years old who are attacked. The perpetrators are known to their victims in 50 per cent of cases, and roughly 40 per cent of crimes of this kind are committed by relatives. The enormity of the problem can be realized by the fact that in India alone, at least 25 percent of the adult population has been molested before the age of 16. At least 27 million females are adult survivors of child sexual abuse. In Thailand it is estimated that up to 200,000 children have been sold into sexual slavery. It is a multi-national, multi-billion dollar industry in cities like Pattaya, where the population is 100,000 and 20% are known to be male and female prostitutes, many of them children. These are but samples of a world wide problem that should have all of us working on it. The sexual abuse of children is everyone's business and we must be about how to remedy it.²⁵

Most of these crimes are perpetrated against women and girls who are not given equal status. The root cause of these statistics is materialism and the tyranny of sexism that renders the victim powerless.

Tyrannical authority uses absolute power in an unjust or cruel way taking power, resources, and property away from those who are weak. Baha'u'llah states that true oppression is not knowing where to go for the truth. And I quote Him here, "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?"²⁶

Where do you go when you want to find Truth?

Can anyone offer an example of tyrannical/Oppressive authority? (pause...take two or three examples and discuss them.)

These are the reasons why we refuse to obey and rebel against unjust authority that seeks to dominate our lives, creating conflict and dissension. We may come to a point where we can no longer allow ourselves to be treated as a sexual object, as less than a human being...as if we cannot think or speak for ourselves....as though we are property that belongs to others.

But the principles we receive from Baha'u'llah for today are meant to create a unified world...where power is used in a different way...the principles of unity, equality, justice, oneness and consultation.

²⁵ These statistics were taken from the Internet. Simply go to Google and explore by putting in (Country) and the words "child sexual abuse."

²⁶ Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 31

Baha'u'llah knew about injustice because He was imprisoned for 40 years. Here is His principle about Oneness: "...His reason for putting on the heavy iron chains and for becoming the embodiment of utter resignation and meekness, was to lead every soul on earth to concord, to fellow feeling, to oneness; to make known amongst all peoples the sign of the singleness of God, so that at last the primal oneness deposited at the heart of all created things would bear its destined fruit, and the splendour of 'No difference canst thou see in the creation of the God of Mercy,' would cast abroad its rays."²⁷

Another principle that Baha'u'llah brought is that of "consultation." His great grandson, Shoghi Effendi, who became the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, explains, "Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority, but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Baha'i can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candour and courage on the other."²⁸

Regarding "consultation", 'Abdu'l-Baha reveals the following: "The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the assembly. They must be wholly free from estrangement and must manifest in themselves the Unity of God, for they are the waves of one sea, the drops of one river, the stars of one heaven, the rays of one sun, the trees of one orchard, the flowers of one garden.....the second condition: - They must when coming together turn their faces to the Kingdom on High and ask aid from the Realm of Glory."²⁹

He then encourages all of us who have been oppressed or who have oppressed others that, "They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views."³⁰

Just Authority

Here is a brief definition of a **just** authority: A rational, nurturing and just authority treats all as equal with the right to dignity even though others may not have the same power, intellectual capacity, and experience or material status.³¹ A just authority based upon genuflection to God, helps those under its care discover who they are through steadfast love, tolerance, and non-controlling encouragement. It is the responsibility of **Just** authority to encourage and teach ways of blending individual perspectives. Living in community requires the yielding of the individual perspective to truth and oneness. The verbal expression of two or more perspectives requires loving consultation.

²⁷ 'Abdu'l-Baha, SWAB, p. 263

²⁸ Shoghi Effendi, 23 February 1924, Baha'i Administration.

²⁹ 'Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i Administration, p. 22

³⁰ 'Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i Administration, p. 22

³¹ "Phyllis Peterson, "Assisting the Traumatized Soul," 1999, Baha'i Publishing Trust.

The concept of valid multiple perspectives is foreign to some because they lived in a family in which there was only one-way communication from higher to lower ranked family members. And the belief that a spark of truth could emerge from shared multiple perspectives is even more foreign. The truth that emerges becomes apparent only to the extent that we can link it to the principle of oneness. The important thing is that we share our perspective in two or more way consultation, showing respect for others viewpoints, trusting that they will show respect for ours. Remember that self-esteem is not dependent upon instinctively knowing truth without consultation, but on the yielding up of arbitrary perspectives or a treasured opinion that is blocking the truth. Know that some will challenge your viewpoint. You don't have to defend it. Some may applaud your viewpoint. That is not a sign that it is a truth for all. And some will be completely indifferent to all perspectives shared. While the one person among us who is shaking in his or her shoes in fear of revealing their thread, may lead us to the spark of truth and oneness we are seeking.

Who is the most just authority you have ever met and why? (pause... take two or three examples.)

“What mankind needeth in this day is obedience unto them that are in authority, and a faithful adherence to the cord of wisdom. The instruments which are essential to the immediate protection, the security and assurance of the human race have been entrusted to the hands, and lie in the grasp, of the governors of human society. This is the wish of God and His decree...”³²

What makes it difficult to trust authority and the governors of human society? Give examples from the news.

As a parent, I have not always been a just authority. While I did not harm my children physically, at times I was actually a tyrant and verbally abused them just as I was verbally abused in my childhood. I thwarted or blocked their powers rather than accepting and fostering their growing ability to negotiate their way in life as they became cooperative and responsible. This caused my children to rebel against me and for a long time I did not have the closeness that I so longed for with my children. I did not know how to share my feelings with anyone nor did I allow them to share feelings. I did not know that there were multiple viewpoints or perspectives and that each one could possess a spark of truth. I was barely verbal with people. I was sexually abused by my father between the ages of 2 and 8 years old and I was terrified of authority...the authority of my parents; God, whom I perceived as wrathful instead of merciful and forgiving; even my dog had more authority than I did. I was a person without problem solving skills, the verbal ability to express myself and I suffered from severe depression because of guilt about the way I had treated especially my oldest daughter. I wrote to my daughter, Nancy, after I had achieved a measure of recovery from the abuse that was perpetrated against me by a tyrannical authority, asking her forgiveness and how she perceived the

³² Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 207

past events between Mother and Daughter and how she perceives authority today. This was her reply.

Nancy's point of view about Authority:

“I guess I don't really look at it as being that I suffered from an excess of “authority” as a child. Rather, I experienced an excess of domination by ones who mistakenly believed they had a right to dominate. There is no one person or thing that has authority over anyone else...instead, I believe we are....the same, equal in the “eyes” of God.

Oppressive experiences from the past have (in the past, but thankfully less frequently in the present) caused me to dig in my heels of stubbornness and then participate in misdirected power struggles of rebellion. I say ‘misdirected’ because there is truly no need for me to struggle against human authority. There IS no human authority. There is only the authority of God. [The author interjects here that there are ‘institutions of **JUST** authority’ that represent God.] And there is no struggle to be had against or with God's authority...the struggle is what I have with myself. The authority of God exists whether I surrender to it or not – just like the universe exists (or rather multiple universes, infinitely incomprehensible). God's authority is even more infinite than this. There is no real “struggle” when it is a one-sided argument (i.e. coming from within myself). God isn't arguing with me about His authority. This authority is simply there like a mountain that is climbed. The mountain rests while I do all the work.”³³

This is an example of a young woman who uses higher thinking and has overcome the domination she has experienced. She has learned to trust the authority of God.

The Authority of God

Many people who have been abused or oppressed do not trust the authority of God. They do not understand the miracle of the commandments or laws of God, which reach beyond the individual to society. These are ancient laws from One who is known as the Ancient Beauty. Here, King David, who had great authority to rule, shows how he humbled himself and expressed his love of the laws of God,

“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. But who can discern his errors? Clear thou me from hidden faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and

³³ My daughter, Nancy, Personal Correspondence, June 2005

*innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in they sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*³⁴

What a beautiful welcome into obedience to the laws of God for anyone who has been crushed or even disappointed by authority!

*“Oh, how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day. Thy commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged for I keep thy precepts. I hold back my feet from every evil way in order to keep thy word. Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.”*³⁵

*“In such manner hath the Kitáb-i-Aqdas been revealed that it attracteth and embraceth all the divinely appointed Dispensations. Blessed those who peruse it. Blessed those who apprehend it. Blessed those who meditate upon it. Blessed those who ponder its meaning. So vast is it is range that it hath encompassed all men ere their recognition of it. Ere long will its sovereign power, its pervasive influence and the greatness of its might be manifested on earth. Verily, thy God is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.”*³⁶

*In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Most Holy Book) the following hath been revealed: “Say: O leaders of religion! Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men. In this most perfect Balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it.”*³⁷

These quotations help us to love the Authority of God, to seek out trust in the law of God, and help us to know that if we follow the commandments of God, we can trust our own “authority of self,” and rest in God.

“He guides unto Himself all who turn unto Him – those who believe, and whose hearts find their rest in remembrance of God – for, verily, in the remembrance of God men’s hearts do find their rest - : and so it is that

³⁴ The Holy Bible, Psalms 19, NIV

³⁵ The Holy Bible, Psalms, 119, NIV

³⁶ Baha’u’llah, Tablets of Baha’u’llah, p. 200. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas is “The Book of Laws” for the Baha’is.

³⁷ Baha’u’llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 128

they who attain to faith and do righteous deeds are destined for happiness in this world and the most beautiful of all goals in the life to come."³⁸

*"Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass."*³⁹

*"Work thou
As, in the days gone by, thy fathers did.
Thou sayst, perplexed, It hath been asked before
By singers and by sages, "What is act,
And what inaction?" I will teach thee this,
And, knowing, thou shalt learn which work doth save
Needs must one rightly meditate those three-
Doing,- not doing,- and undoing. Here
Thorny and dark the path is! He who sees
How action may be rest, rest action- he
Is wisest 'mid his kind; he hath the truth!
He doeth well, acting or resting. Freed
In all his works from prickings of desire,
Burned clean in act by the white fire of truth,
The wise call that man wise; and such an one,
Renouncing fruit of deeds, always content".*⁴⁰

We can find comfort and rest in the fact that in this world in which there is such injustice for women and children, God has provided new laws to protect the innocent and regenerate a society in which immorality is rampant and abuse of women and girls is epidemic.

*"O people of God! That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the sources of life to the world. Inasmuch as for each day there is a new problem and for every problem an expedient solution, such affairs should be referred to the Ministers of the House of Justice that they may act according to the needs and requirements of the time."*⁴¹

³⁸ Muhammad, The Qu'ran, Surah 13:27

³⁹ The Holy Bible, Psalms 37:7, KJV

⁴⁰ Hindu, Bhagavad Gita (Edwin Arnold translator)

⁴¹ Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 26

“The Great Being saith: The structure of world stability and order hath been reared upon, and will continue to be sustained by, the twin pillars of reward and punishment. And in another connection He hath uttered the following in the eloquent tongue: [1] Justice hath a mighty force at its command. It is none other than reward and punishment for the deeds of men. By the power of this force the tabernacle of order is established throughout the world, causing the wicked to restrain their natures for fear of punishment. [1 Arabic.]”⁴²

“In formulating the principles and laws a part hath been devoted to penalties which form an effective instrument for the security and protection of men. However, dread of the penalties maketh people desist only outwardly from committing vile and contemptible deeds, while that which guardeth and restraineth man both outwardly and inwardly hath been and still is the fear of God. It is man's true protector and his spiritual guardian. It behoveth him to cleave tenaciously unto that which will lead to the appearance of this supreme bounty. Well is it with him who giveth ear unto whatsoever My Pen of Glory hath proclaimed and observeth that whereunto he is bidden by the Ordainer, the Ancient of Days”⁴³.

Why principles and laws? Why reward and punishment? Why religion in the first place? With the Supreme Pen of God Baha'u'llah exhorts:

“...the manifestations of authority and the sources of power, namely the kings, the sovereigns, the presidents, the rulers, the divines and the wise, and enjoineth them to uphold the cause of religion, and to cleave unto it. Religion is verily the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world and of tranquility amongst its peoples. The weakening of the pillars of religion hath strengthened the foolish and emboldened them and made them more arrogant. Verily I say: The greater the decline of religion, the more grievous the waywardness of the ungodly. This cannot but lead in the end to chaos and confusion. Here Me, O men of insight, and bewarned, ye who are endued with discernment.”⁴⁴

“In truth, religion is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold, for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world, for the fear of God impelleth man to hold fast to that which is good, and shun all evil. Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness and justice, of tranquility and peace cease to shine. Unto this will bear witness every man of true understanding.”⁴⁵

Equality of Women and Men: A Fundamental Principle of Religion

⁴² Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 164

⁴³ Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 93

⁴⁴ Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 63

⁴⁵ Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 125

One of the fundamental principles of justice enunciated by Baha'u'llah and His son, 'Abdu'l-Baha, is the equality of women and men. Thereby are we influenced and motivated to work toward establishing this aspect of a just society. Granting authority of self and equality to women is an integral part of Baha'u'llah's Revelation.

"Whosoever serves humanity most is nearest God -- for God is no respecter of gender. The male and female are like the two wings of a bird and when both wings are reinforced with the same impulse the bird of humanity will be enabled to soar heaven-ward to the summit of progress. In which sacred book is this written?"⁴⁶

"By the grace and favor of God, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has elevated the station of women in this radiant age. He has altered the quranic verse" "Men are the custodians of women." He has taught that men and women are like the two wings of a bird, and neither is superior to the other. Girls should be educated in the same way as boys, perhaps even given preference."⁴⁷

What is Blocking Equality in Africa?

For the most part, people in the west are not faced on a daily basis with the sheer terror peoples in Africa feel because they are surrounded by the raping of women, girls and boys. Pillaging, slaughter by mercenaries, abuse, and oppression are rampant in some countries. Your sisters in America and Europe walk in relative safety; but there are those all over the world who need to hear this message of warning and promise; reward and punishment from Baha'u'llah.

Ethnic cleansing such as in Sudan, Chad, and Rwanda; terrorism around the world, poverty, food insecurities and political corruption... religious war and intolerance, multiple sexual partners...and the belief that having sex with a virgin child will cure men of HIV/AIDS, all are having an impact on destroying not only the individual and whole cultures, but the entire infrastructure of Africa. God can and will bestow retribution for these injustices. Those with destructive tendencies do not know the fear of God.

"You ask him about the fear of God: perhaps the friends do not realize that the majority of human beings need the element of fear in order to discipline their conduct? Only a relatively very highly evolved soul would always be disciplined by love alone. Fear of punishment, fear of the anger of God if we do evil, are needed to keep people's feet on the right path. Of course we should love God - but we must fear Him in the sense of a child fearing the righteous anger and

⁴⁶ Abdu'l-Baha, Divine Philosophy, p. 82

⁴⁷ Misc Baha'i, Munirih - Memoirs and Letters, p. 85

chastisement of a parent; not cringe before Him as before a tyrant, but know His Mercy exceeds His Justice!"⁴⁸

*"Verily I say: The fear of God hath ever been a sure defence 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. This, however, is confined to but a few; all have not possessed, and do not possess, it. It is incumbent upon the kings and the spiritual 28 leaders of the world to lay fast hold on religion, inasmuch as through it the fear of God is instilled in all else but Him."*⁴⁹

*"We have admonished Our loved ones to fear God, a fear which is the fountainhead of all goodly deeds and virtues. It is the commander of the hosts of justice in the city of Baha'. Happy the man that hath entered the shadow of its luminous standard, and laid fast hold thereon."*⁵⁰

*"Admonish men to fear God. By God! This fear is the chief commander of the army of thy Lord. Its hosts are a praiseworthy character and goodly deeds. Through it have the cities of men's hearts been opened throughout the ages and centuries, and the standards of ascendancy and triumph raised above all other standards."*⁵¹

So, we have the love, mercy and justice of God; and we have the element of the fear of God to assist us in our quest for using authority of self rightly.

Question: Who is the Authority in your life? How do you discipline your conduct? (We are about to share some heavy experiences. Some of us like to have our experiences acknowledged, while others prefer to just be listened to. See below the questions for ways to acknowledge another's life experiences.)

1. Examine in discussion how our power of choice regarding morality is influenced by media, celebrities, conformity to friends or cultural traditions, pursuit of money, control by boyfriend or girlfriend, or deferring to parental traditions.
2. How have these influences affected your choices as a teenager/adult?

⁴⁸ Shoghi Effendi, Compilations, Lights of Guidance, p. 238

⁴⁹ Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 27

⁵⁰ Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 120

⁵¹ Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 121

3. How have your personal choices reflected obedience or non-obedience to the commandments of God, either through your belief in Moses, Christ, Muhammad or Baha'u'llah?
4. Are you your own authority? Or do you give over (abdicate) your authority to your boyfriend, girlfriend, conform to celebrity standards, or outdated standards and cultural beliefs that are harmful, afraid to stand on your own?
5. Does your spouse participate in multiple sexual partners increasing the possibility of you developing HIV/AIDS or another STI?
6. Do you vent a lot because you don't know how to get your powers back or don't believe you have permission to use authority of self? How do you vent and what solutions are there that you see?
7. What is the heart of your personal story? Talk from your own experience and feelings. "I experienced this.... "I felt this....", rather than "They did this. They did that."
8. What have been your experiences with inequality in your family and the culture in which you live?

Acknowledgment of one another's life experiences:

Acknowledgement of what the other says creates connection with them. Listening to another and then acknowledging their viewpoint or experience is the first step towards unity. Just as in the intimacy of prayer to God, we acknowledge His power and attributes, we must also acknowledge the reality of those to whom we speak or listen. And what constitutes acknowledgement? It is taking a moment to express verbal or written regard or esteem for having been the recipient of the honest disclosure of another's identity, their thoughts, their feelings, their wants, needs and hopes. Acknowledgment is entering their reality while observing and honoring boundaries that protect their freedom and privacy. Do not fear that you are endorsing their reality by acknowledging it. Failure to acknowledge what the other says, even if we disagree with it, especially if we disagree with it, is failure to validate their life experience and failure to take a necessary and vital step toward intimacy.

Examples of Acknowledgment:

- A. I can appreciate that this belief, idea, perception is very important to you. This is the awareness I have because you have shared it with me. I've never experienced or thought of that before and I'm grateful to you for sharing your perspective with me.
- B. I appreciate your insights. They help me understand you better.
- C. Help me understand your life experience by saying it in a different way.
- D. That sounds very important you to you and therefore, it is very important to me. Could you rephrase that so that I can understand you more completely?

- E. Hearing your viewpoint helps me understand myself better. I accept the differences between us and I can also see the similarities. Thank you for sharing your perspective.

Summary for Part One:

We are here to discover why we sometimes give our power over to others, rather than to condemn tyrannical authority. We are also here to share our experiences and hope with others. We must focus on how to get back our power through solutions instead of purely venting. We have learned a definition of authority of self and we have learned about the authority of God, whatever religious beliefs we have. And we are learning about the equality of women and men. After our break we will learn ways of thinking about our powers, how to use them and how to challenge negative messages that we have internalized.

(Lunch Break or 15 minute Break)

Part Two: “Authority of Self”, Higher Thinking and Affirmation:

I discovered that there is a language I used to disempower and silence my children in an attempt to dominate them. I am ashamed of that but I did it in ignorance and blindness because this language was also used on me when I was growing up. It is a language that keeps us from being intimate with one another. It may not be spoken out loud. It discourages communication. It discourages oneness with others. It suppresses creativity, freedom, and individuality. And it can make one mentally ill if not identified and done away with.

You have heard these messages before if you have been abused and oppressed. They may come as a swarm of whispers that bind your hands behind your back and paralyze your mouth. They are messages that perpetuate the inequality of women. They are the antitheses of women sharing equal rights with men.

“Yet another of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is the equality of men and women and their equal sharing in all rights. And there are many similar principles. It hath now become evident that these teachings are the very life and soul of the world.”⁵²

⁵² ‘Abdu’l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, p. 249

Identifying the Negative Messages and Oppressive Language:

Don't be smart or intelligent! Don't ask questions! Don't be close! Don't be weak!
Don't be strong! Don't need! Don't be a child! Don't learn and grow! Don't lead!
Don't be happy! Don't see from your perspective! Don't be important! Don't be afraid!
Don't change! Don't laugh! Don't be different! Don't set boundaries! Don't be aware!
Don't be sane! Don't trust! Don't be you! Don't try! Don't talk or express yourself!
Don't know yourself! Don't be! Don't take care of yourself! Don't be greedy! Don't
make choices! Don't disobey or challenge authority!⁵³

This is the language of tyranny, dictatorship, totalitarianism, and authoritarianism. It is in direct opposition to encouraging us to use our birthright powers... the power of speech, the power of choice, the power of discernment, the power of identity, the power of wisdom, the power of intuition, the power of reflection, discovery, and understanding....the power of will, memory and to search for truth....the power of response, anticipation, attention, and receptivity....and the power of reasoning, deduction, and to recognized God or a Higher, Superior Being.

Sometimes the language that imprisons our powers is directed as “You are lazy! You are stupid! You're crazy! You made me hit you! You whore!” No matter how the language is framed, the fundamental relationship is that of disempowerment of authority of self.

Which messages have you heard growing up?

Do you use these messages internally today?

(Discussion...list the individual messages on a flip chart.)

But there is a higher language, a higher thinking as my daughter demonstrated, that can affirm our right to grow and develop physically, mentally, and spiritually to overcome the oppression that we experience.

There are many ways to empower women and men. I have chosen to dismantle these negative messages and awaken men and women to affirmations that confront this insidious, destructive language that causes despair, anxiety, helplessness, hopelessness and unnecessary rebellion. Instead, I have imbued the following positive messages and higher thinking affirmations with the powers of “Authority of Self,” using the “thought, feeling, action model to rise above the negativity.

It is by the Grace of God that Baha'u'llah has revealed these powers and given us permission or authority to use them to problem solve. Without His Word or the Sacred Text of other Prophets, we would be helpless to know how to detach from our old thinking process and be regenerated. “Verily, the Word of God is the Cause which hath preceded the contingent world -- a world which is adorned with the splendours of the

⁵³ Phyllis Peterson, “Assisting the Traumatized Soul” 1999, and “The Heroic Female Spirit: A Collection of Tales, 2006,” published by the Baha'i Publishing Trust of the United States.

Ancient of Days, yet is being renewed and regenerated at all times.”⁵⁴“The world of thought has been regenerated.”⁵⁵

Feelings:

Feelings are very important to this exercise because if we have been disempowered, our feelings are going to be negative. This can result in depression and/or a loss of a feeling of nobility. Our thoughts are going to be negative, too, and they, together, will negate our ability to change our behavior. There is much research that has been done on how to change how our brain thinks. In “Liberating Greatness: The Whole Brain Guide to An Extraordinary Life”, authors Hal Williamson and Sharon Eakes say that an “affirmation when tagged with emotions create strong, new neural circuits” in the brain. “These new circuits have the capacity to alter old, unwanted behaviors in favor of new, desired behaviors”⁵⁶ because they lift us up out of the despair.

Right now, think of the happiest moment you’ve ever experienced in your life! It may be a moment when you have achieved or accomplished a goal, the birth of a baby, the feeling you had when you learned to drive and became more independent; when someone saw the real you and accepted you. At any rate, it is an “I can do it!” moment that brought you great joy! Bring up the memory of it, then bring up the “Feeling” you had. What Mr. Williamson suggests is that you take that special, positive feeling and tag, connect, or attach it to your new affirmation. This will create the strong neural circuits that will help you alter your old, unwanted behaviors and emotions. Whatever challenge you are experiencing needs to be tagged emotionally with that joyous feeling, instead of the feelings of disempowerment that weigh you down. When the negative thoughts repeatedly come up, as they always have, use the following affirmations and tag them with the invincible feeling of joy! Doing it repeatedly will actually change your brain given time! Repeat the affirmation “identically” every time, or craft your own affirmation, but remember to tag it with a positive emotion while you do so!

There are actually “twin concepts” to adopt to win the battle: Tagging the affirmation with the positive emotion; and “detaching” your mind and heart from the negative emotion as Baha’u’llah shows concisely here:

“Peruse My verses with joy and radiance. Verily they will attract you unto God and will enable you to detach yourselves from aught else save Him. Thus have ye been admonished in God’s Holy Writ and in this resplendent Tablet.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Baha’u’llah, Tablets of Baha’u’llah, p. 141

⁵⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Baha, Baha’i World Faith, p. 224

⁵⁶ Hal Williamson and Sharon Eakes, Liberating Greatness”, copyright 2006, Word Association Publishers, Pennsylvania, p. 197

⁵⁷ ~ Baha’u’llah, From a Tablet- translated from the Arabic Compilations, No. 365 The Compilation of Compilations vol. I, p. 188

Dr. Kathryn Brown says that detachment is a pathway to wonderful feelings, not just a means of stepping away from troublesome feelings. No wonder Baha'u'llah says: “ O SON OF MAN! Sorrow not save that thou art far from Us. Rejoice not save that thou art drawing near and returning unto Us.”⁵⁸

The blessings ‘Abdu’l-Baha showers upon us with the following prayer are infinite when juxtaposed with the foregoing verse:

“O God! Refresh and gladden my spirit! Purify my heart! Illumine my powers! I lay all my affairs in Thy hand. Thou art my guide and my refuge. I will no longer be sorrowful and grieved. I will be a happy and joyful being. O God! I will no longer be full of anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass me. I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life. O God! Thou art more friend to me than I am to myself. I dedicate myself to Thee O Lord.”⁵⁹

Research shows that a woman who is being battered will leave her partner 7 times before she finally leaves for good. This is because she doesn't know how to change her thinking and feeling patterns from fear to courage, confidence and problem solving with her own powers!

Go through this list of negative messages and positive affirmations as a group, selecting 5 or 6, depending on the size of the group:

Discuss the times you have listened to the negative messages automatically, without being aware of the accompanying feelings and without challenging the messages by tagging the affirmation with a positive feeling. Think of the affirmation as a celebration of “higher thinking.” Know that even if you have no resources or if violence surrounds you, emotionally tagging your experience with a remembered feeling of joy, will help you to become detached, and able to use your power of reasoning.

“Drink thou the life-giving water of blissful joy from the chalice of utterance proffered by the Fountainhead of divine Revelation...”⁶⁰

Repeat each affirmation three times:

1. Don't be smart or intelligent!

Q. What feelings would prevent you from revealing that you are smart or intelligent?

⁵⁸ Baha'u'llah, “The Hidden Words”, Arabic, #35

⁵⁹ ‘Abdu’l-Baha, Baha’I Prayers, 2002, pp. 174-175

⁶⁰ Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 139

I challenge the belief that I have to pretend to be stupid with men, women, or authority. Today I will look for ways to reveal instead of conceal my intelligence. I will develop the power of independent investigation of truth. I will discover a new reality with my power of reasoning by bringing my inner thoughts into public view. I will speak my truth without fear. I celebrate my visible intelligence. I tag this affirmation, these new thoughts, with a feeling of joy that comes from a memory of a prior accomplishment! And I repeat this affirmation word for word, knowing it will lead to a change in my behavior! (Feel the joy you remember and then say the affirmation!)

2. Don't ask questions!

Q. What feelings would prevent you from asking questions?

I challenge my belief that I will experience violence if I ask questions. Asking questions now becomes my basis for searching for reality or truth. Consciously developing the power of independent investigation of truth means I don't have to blindly obey authority or follow tradition and culture exclusively. I celebrate my birthright power to question. I attach a feeling of courage and curiosity to this affirmation; and I do it repeatedly!!

3. Don't be close!

Q. What feelings do you have when someone tries to get close to you?

I challenge the belief that I have to be totally independent or that I am not lovable because I am different than my siblings or my peers. I no longer have to do everything all by myself. I can observe varying degrees of development, perfection and consciousness and determine who is safe to be close to and who is not. Clarifying the limits of acceptable behavior will allow me to be close to others and experience safety. I tag this affirmation with the feeling of joy that comes from decisiveness because I can tell others what I need and want, offering the same to them. I repeat this affirmation identically, marking it with a feeling of previously remembered joy.

4. Don't be weak/strong!

Q. What feelings tell you that you have to be weak or strong?

I challenge the belief that I should be superwoman or superman. Today I perceive weakness as vital to understanding my relationship to God who is All-Powerful. I no longer have to tough it out and hide all my human frailties. Using the power of will I can let go of the role I have accepted and the mask of strength I wear. I will begin to trust that I will be accepted for who I am in moments of weakness as well as strength. I can allow myself to cry when I feel sad or frustrated, but I promise

myself to rejoice after the tears because it will help me detach from the sadness. I feel successful; and I will no longer allow myself to cower in front of anyone. I emotionally attach a feeling of joy repeatedly while I repeat this affirmation word for word identically.

5. Don't need!

Q. What feelings do you have when you sense that you have a need?

I challenge my belief that I am undeserving, that I must continually martyr myself, or that I must self-punish when I need something. I will speak my needs and the needs of others. I will use the power of will to overcome the feeling of inertia or apathy that prevents me from acquiring my moderate needs, whether they be material or spiritual, energy, or space, time or emotional. I celebrate the power to ask to have my needs met; and I repeatedly tag this affirmation with the feeling of reassurance both for myself and others.

6. Don't be a child!

Q. What feelings prevent you from being child-like?

All of us have a child within. I challenge the belief that I must always work and should never play or be spontaneous. I will advocate for my inner child. I will become more aware of the power of my identity to firmly know who I am, what is important to me and where I fit in this world. I will not settle for the rigid role of caretaker which was assigned to me as a child. I can give care willingly and also take care of myself. I celebrate my ability to satisfy the needs of my inner child and the adult that I am because I am multi-faceted. I repeatedly tag this affirmation with the feeling of playfulness and confidence.

7. Don't learn and grow!

Q. What feelings prevent you from seeking out knowledge?

I challenge the belief that I have to fit the mold prescribed for me by authority figures. This week I will turn toward the source of my inner knowledge, my power of intuition. I will educate myself to discover the gems of knowledge within me. Though I have often felt discounted and discouraged, I celebrate new success in my capacity to grasp knowledge, my power to discover something new. I emotionally mark this affirmation with the feeling of inquisitiveness that has guided me and helped confirm my intuition; and I do it repeatedly.

8. Don't lead!

Q. What feelings hold you back from showing others how capable you are?

I challenge the belief that I have to be less than capable in order to escape the wrath of authority. I challenge the belief that I have to be passive and compliant while other people make decisions. I no longer have to be a follower only. I can take the lead or be an active participant. I celebrate bold action and with the power of identity, I change and grow. At this point of my development I would not feel shame, but would welcome a mentor who would teach me servant/leadership skills. I emotionally attach a feeling of courage to this affirmation. I repeatedly combine this affirmation with the feeling of courage.

9. Don't be happy!

Q. What feelings squelch your happiness and spontaneity?

I challenge my belief that I have to be emotionally sober and duty bound at all times. I can be spontaneous. I can allow myself to laugh and play instead of rigidly sticking to the list of things I need to complete. I can sing, dance and listen to music. I can also achieve spiritual happiness by seeking out things that will give my life meaning. I celebrate the ultimate happiness...drawing closer to my Creator. I repeatedly and identically tag this affirmation with the feelings of happiness and spontaneity!

10. Don't see!

Q. When does the feeling of confusion cloud your perception of the truth?

I challenge my belief that the truth is too painful to experience. When things are not going well in my relationships and I experience confusion or crazy-making behavior, I can test out my perceptions with a neutral party. I don't have to minimize the effects of others' treatment of me or rationalize excuses for others' behavior. I celebrate as I perceive the truth and speak the truth. I emotionally attach a feeling of peacefulness and courage to this affirmation every time I want to express the truth of my experience. I also connect a feeling of freedom to this affirmation repeatedly.

11. Don't be important!

Q. Where does your feeling of worthlessness come from?

I challenge my belief and the emotional feeling that I am worthless. My value does not come from measurable achievement or having money. It comes from my ability to love, from the justice with which I treat others, from the unity and peace I alone bring to my personal relationships or my community. I celebrate my nobility whether I do menial work or preside over a company. In either case I am

merely God's servant. I tag this affirmation with the feeling of relief and confidence that I have experienced when someone advocated for me in the past and I do it repeatedly!

12. Don't be afraid!

Q. What acts in the past have made you feel brave? What person makes you feel brave?

I challenge the belief that I am a coward. With a healthy fear of God which teaches me to obey JUST institutions of authority, I no longer need fear any man. I celebrate courage. Through the power of faith, I can take risks to make healthy changes in my life. I repeatedly tag this affirmation with the feeling of courage and security with every cell of my body and brain; and I repeat this affirmation identically each time fear comes up.

13. Don't change!

Q. What feelings are so strong that they keep you from expressing your true identity? Who gives you "Change back!!" messages when you have tried to change?

I challenge the belief that I have to be passive and compliant while others make healthy changes in their value systems, beliefs, jobs and relationships. If others are uncomfortable with the changes I make, I can still bring my true identity into focus and wait for them to adjust to the change. If they cannot make the adjustment, I can accept their limitations while staying on my course of growth. I celebrate my right to choose and have a self-determined life while observing the Covenant of God which sets spiritual and physical limits for me. I visualize not only new growth, but connect the virtues of Faith and Patience to it repeatedly as I say this affirmation word for word.

14. Don't laugh!

Q. Are you afraid to have such positive emotions as hope, faith and love?

I challenge my belief that people laugh only to ridicule my body, my thoughts or my speech. I now celebrate the joy that laughter can bring to happy occasions. I also celebrate the full range of my positive emotions such as hope, faith, love, determination, purpose, festivity and a strong will to live. Tears also become an important release of frustration and anger and become a signal to me that I may need to address a need or confront a wrong doer. Emotionally I return to that moment in time when I did have hope and I connect that hope to this affirmation so that I will experience a full range of positive emotions.

15. Don't be different!

Q. Guilt is a powerful emotion. Does it stop you from trying new things... new approach to life?

I now challenge the belief that I have to be the same as everyone around me. If my thoughts, character and the way that I dress set me apart from others, I can celebrate my individuality as I add variety to my relationships and environment. I will no longer allow my differentness to be swallowed up by convention and tradition or guilt that others try to heap upon me. Some things will always remain the same...the Covenant of God, the fact that rights always come with responsibilities; but I will conquer my guilt with the feeling of Freedom with which I mark this affirmation repeatedly.

16. Don't set boundaries!

Q. Your internal alarm is a combination of negative feelings that causes confusion and can immobilize you. Have you recognized it in the past? What is it like for you?

I challenge my belief that it is too risky to set boundaries with others. I am not the property of others or an object to be used as others please. I celebrate my freedom from boundary enmeshment (violation). I celebrate my internal alarm that tells me something is wrong and needs to be set right before my relationship proceeds. I now take control of and practice vigilance for the boundaries that govern my thinking, spirituality, emotions, will, perceptions, sexuality, money, time, space, energy, body and belongings. With the virtue of vigilance, I tag this affirmation and set boundaries with others repeatedly until they begin to know who I am. The end result of this is that my identity will become clear to me.

17. Don't be aware!

Q. Some people minimize their emotional pain, saying, "Oh, it's not that bad." Or they rationalize the behavior of others by saying "Oh, he was drunk otherwise he wouldn't have done that." Give examples from your own life.

I challenge my belief that it is too painful to be confronted with reality and truth. I allow myself to become conscious of the defense mechanisms that prevent me from being fully aware of my denial, the times I minimize my emotional pain and rationalize the behaviors of others; I take responsibility for my dissociation (going into a trance) and its consequences. I celebrate my growing awareness that protects me because it keeps me in the present where I can choose relationships that are healthy instead of harmful. I repeatedly connect the feeling of gratitude to this affirmation and repeatedly affirm my consciousness knowing it will lead to new behaviors.

18. Don't be sane!

Q. Do people in your life allow you to have access to the truth of your history? Explain further.

I challenge the belief that I have to seek the safety of a fantasy world and live in denial. I celebrate the independent investigation of truth which will rid me of that which is false. The roles I have been forced to play, the perceptions that were discounted by others, the thwarting (blocking) of my attempts to communicate my intelligence through speech or feelings. I also celebrate having access to the truth of my history for that is the root of my sanity, even though it may be painful. I mark this affirmation repeatedly with the feeling of determination, combining intuition and truth to live my life fearlessly in the present to change the future.

19. Don't trust!

Q. Do you trust your perceptions, feelings, and thoughts regarding who is trustworthy? What has happened in the past when you have or have not trusted? What did it feel like?

I challenge my belief that I have to control everyone and everything in my life. I celebrate the component powers of "authority of self," within the guidelines of the Covenant of God. This makes it possible for me to trust and give up my need to control others and always be defending myself. I now trust my perceptions, feelings and thoughts which help me come to a conclusion about who is trustworthy and who is not to be trusted. I am no longer open to boundary enmeshment or violation. I repeatedly connect this affirmation with the feeling of trust and joy, combined with caution, knowing that all three are virtues meant to protect me.

20. Don't be you!

Q. Everyone has multiple roles to play in life. Do you have a role that is too rigid, in which others control you? How does it make you feel?

I challenge my belief that I have to play a role or have permission to be the person I really am. I no longer allow others to ridicule, discount, ignore, manipulate or control who I am. I celebrate my inmost true self which is a trust from God, and which was created in His image as noble and full of beauty. I follow my true

Purpose now, and that is to develop virtues, to know God and to follow His commandments. I repeatedly connect the feelings of boldness and spontaneity, which I remember from my past, to this affirmation, no longer dependent and powerless.

21. Don't try!

Q. Do you feel like giving up when you don't have cooperation and reciprocity coming from others? What could you do instead?

I challenge my belief that life is too hard to keep trying. I challenge my feeling that I'll never be able to please anyone no matter what I do. I rekindle my desire for cooperation and reciprocity. With my power of faith I begin anew to make efforts toward my goals whether they relate to my work or my personal life. I now celebrate my power of speech, my power of will and my desire to rise above the trauma in my life. I repeatedly attach the feeling of success and joy to this affirmation because I know I am cooperative and reciprocate at appropriate times.

22. Don't talk!

Q. Have you ever had your feelings and thoughts reflected by others? What did it feel like?

I challenge my belief that I must remain silent, refrain from expressing my thoughts and opinions or refrain from confronting others with my power of speech. I challenge my belief that open, direct, honest discussion or consultation is too risky. I no longer fear the threat of violence if I should talk. I can ask to have my feelings and thoughts reflected by others. I can ask for validation. I can offer my viewpoint and show respect for others' views without discounting my own views. I celebrate release from oppressive force that kept me silent all these years. I repeatedly mark this affirmation with the feeling of freedom to speak that I remember from my past. If I never had that feeling of freedom, then I choose the feeling of gratitude and happiness for that one advocate I remember, utilizing that as a key freedom.

23. Don't know yourself!

Q. Do you feel like you are the only one in the world who makes mistakes and therefore, you shame, blame, crucify, and guilt yourself every day? Explain.

I challenge my belief that I cannot put aside the roles that have been assigned to me and discover my true identity. I challenge my belief that my world will fall apart and others will be uncomfortable if I seek to know my inmost true self through the awkward process of elimination that a teenager goes through as part of her or his development. I release myself from shaming, blaming and guilt when I make mistakes. But I turn toward the Word of God for guidance and take responsibility for the consequences of all my choices. I celebrate the unveiling of the ever-evolving self that I am beginning to know. I repeatedly attach the feeling of compassion for myself that I have experienced in the past, and the knowledge that others, too, have had compassion for me when I have made mistakes.

24. Don't be!

Q. Nobility is not only a virtue...it's a feeling as well. What kinds of behavior help you feel noble?

I challenge my belief that I am not enough as a child, a woman, a man, a friend, a spouse, or an employee. I reclaim my identity as a child of God. I no longer have to continually do something spectacular to be accepted. Yet I can seek to know that which leads me to self-worth and nobility, or that which leads me to shame. I celebrate the fact that God created my soul with His light within, and I claim nobility as my birthright. I recreate that feeling of nobility in my heart that I felt when I gave of myself to the Cause of God: and I attach that feeling repeatedly to this affirmation.

25. Don't think!

Q. Does problem solving by your self make you feel like you are going in circles? That's called being locked into your own perspective. Who could you trust in asking for feedback or to validate your powers?

I challenge my belief that it is threatening to think. I no longer have to drift into a fantasy world when things go wrong. I can stay in the here and now to problem solve, to ask questions, to communicate my feelings, thoughts, history and hopes, to ask for feedback, validation, and guidance. I celebrate my powers of reasoning and understanding for they are spiritual gifts from God. I repeatedly connect the feeling of confidence to this affirmation, knowing that a mentor, if asked, would help me problem solve by pointing out to me my unique powers.

26. Don't like yourself!

Q. Do you have an internalized voice that says, “You are bad?” When ever you hear a “YOU” message like that, know that it was imposed originally by an external source. Who gave you messages like that when you were a child?

I challenge myself that I have to abuse myself every time I make a mistake. I challenge the belief that I have to listen to an internalized, abusive voice that has haunted me from childhood. It tells me I am bad but I don't have to own its judgment of me. I no longer have to compare myself to others, but justly seek to do my best whatever my goal. I celebrate my freedom from constant criticism and punishment whether by self or others. I repeatedly connect the feeling of excellence in a job well done, creating pride and joy that I remember from my past; because nobility is the way God created me. I detach myself from “you” messages such as “You are stupid”, which I have learned from an external source.

27. Don't be greedy!

Q. We need material as well as spiritual bounties. What needs are you thirsting for...and what feelings do you have when you try to fulfill those needs?

I challenge my belief that to “need” is to be greedy. I can fulfill my need for food, clothing, love and attention without labeling myself as a greedy person. I allow God's bounty to build trust and pride and hope within my heart and mind. I allow my needs to become conscious. I celebrate the material as well as the spiritual wealth a loving, merciful, bountiful God bestows upon me. I repeatedly connect the feeling of contentment and joy with the will of God with this affirmation, knowing that He provides me with both material and spiritual bounties.

28. Don't make choices!

Q. What has happened to you in the past when you tried to assert your power of choice? What feelings do you have when you come to the point of making a choice?

I challenge my belief that I must be passive and compliant instead of a choice maker. I challenge my belief that I must conform to escape the criticism of others or self-punishment. I now choose to assert myself and my identity. I now choose to be different, to have higher thoughts, to develop virtues that set me aside for my true purpose. I can say “This is who I am!” and respect the differences of others. I am no longer afraid of my power of choice. I celebrate it as freedom from oppression. I now celebrate taking responsibility for the consequences of

my choices, knowing that ultimately I am responsible to my Creator for the choices that I make. I repeatedly tag this affirmation with the feeling of enthusiasm and joy because it uplifts my soul as I make hopeful choices.

29. Don't disobey or challenge "authority!"

Q. What has happened to you emotionally when you have blindly obeyed authority in the past? How can you break free of this injustice and use "Authority of Self", to regulate your emotions, and act with the power of discernment?

I challenge the belief that blindly following authority is the safest way to live my life. I challenge the belief that I must blindly obey regardless of the content or context of the issue. I refuse to discount my own search for truth, my own inner vision, or invalidate my ability to recognize the truth I discover. I now celebrate "Authority of Self" bestowed upon me by a loving, just and merciful God within His Covenant. And I celebrate my spiritual perception that assists me in recognizing truth. I repeatedly mark this affirmation with the feeling of gratitude and joy I have felt in the past, grateful that I know right from wrong, good from bad and that I have the Word of God to guide me.

Authority of Self:

Here is the definition of authority of self again: "Authority of Self" is the freedom and ability to use God-given mental powers to make rational and moral choices, self-regulation of the emotions; and the right or permission to act independently with the understanding that one has personal limitations.⁶¹ Remember, the model is "I think! I feel! (I then regulate my emotions.) I act!" We will soon build affirmations on this model.

Our limitations come with the understanding that our Creator has not only promised us that He will bestow many blessings and bounties upon us, but has expectations of us.

⁶¹ Phyllis Peterson, "Assisting the Traumatized Soul", Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1999

The Covenant of God:

“Blessed the one who hath remained faithful to the Covenant of God, and woe betide him who hath broken it and disbelieved in Him, the Knower of secrets. Say: This is the Day of Bounty! Bestir yourselves that I may make you monarchs in the realms of My Kingdom. If ye follow Me, ye shall behold that which ye were promised, and I will make you My companions in the dominion of My majesty and the intimates of My beauty in the heaven of My power forevermore. If ye rebel against Me, I will in My clemency endure it patiently, that haply ye may awaken and rise up from the couch of heedlessness. Thus hath My mercy encompassed you. Fear ye God and follow not in the ways of those who have turned away from His face, though they invoke His name in the daytime and in the night season.”⁶²

Obedience to the Covenant of God is acceptance, in essence, of God’s power and authority, as well as the limitations and boundaries which God has set for us to preserve our psychological and spiritual balance and to protect society. The Universal House of Justice explains that a: “Covenant in the religious sense is a binding agreement between God and man, whereby God requires of man certain behavior in return for which He guarantees certain blessings, or whereby He gives man certain bounties in return for which He takes from those who accept them an understanding to behave in a certain way.”⁶³

The Promises of God:

“And now, LORD, thou art God, and hast promised this goodness unto thy servant: Now therefore let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may be before thee for ever: for thou blessest, O LORD, and it shall be blessed for ever.”⁶⁴

“And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.”⁶⁵

“...Not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed...”⁶⁶

“We have taken the inner essence thereof and clothed it in the garment of brevity, as a token of grace unto the righteous, that they may stand faithful unto the Covenant of God,

⁶² Baha’u’llah, Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 64-65

⁶³ Compilation of Compilations, 1:11

⁶⁴ King James Bible, 1 Chronicles 17:26-27

⁶⁵ King James Bible, 1 John: 2:25

⁶⁶ New International Version Bible, Joshua 23:14

may fulfill in their lives His trust, and in the realm of spirit obtain the gem of Divine virtue.”⁶⁷

*“Never lose thy trust in God. Be thou ever hopeful, for the bounties of God never cease to flow upon man. If viewed from one perspective they seem to decrease, but from another they are full and complete. Man is under all conditions immersed in a sea of God's blessings. Therefore, be thou not hopeless under any circumstances, but rather be firm in thy hope.”*⁶⁸

*“The bestowals of God are all and always manifest. The promises of heaven are ever present. The favors of God are all-surrounding but should the conscious eye of the soul of man remain veiled and darkened he will be led to deny these universal signs and remain deprived of these manifestations of divine bounty. Therefore we must endeavor with heart and soul in order that the veil covering the eye of inner vision may be removed, that we may behold the manifestations of the signs of God, discern His mysterious graces, and realize that material blessings as compared with spiritual bounties are as nothing. The spiritual blessings of God are greatest.”*⁶⁹

‘Abdu’l-Baha, the Son of Baha’u’llah, says that our true purpose is to develop “virtues” and that it is the Holy Spirit that bestows virtues and spiritual bounties upon us. From this we can infer that whether we are infected by HIV/AIDS, surrounded by violence, living in extreme poverty, or in a culture that is permeated with immorality, we can still, “in the realm of spirit obtain the gem of Divine virtue,” our purpose in life. This is a promise from God if we stand faithful to his Covenant. Such spiritual virtues as understanding, compassion, faith, hope, love, steadfastness, discipline, gratitude, unity, trustworthiness, forgiveness, honesty, thankfulness, determination, compassion, righteousness, chastity, and others help us through these difficult times and situations where we want to give up.

When we acquire a spiritual virtue, we enjoy the upliftment of our minds to higher thinking and we find ourselves acting or behaving from that higher realm. We find this process is easier and that we can maintain it with greater consistency within community. This is truly a goal to seek! We do this because of our Love of God.

⁶⁷ Baha'u'llah, *The Arabic Hidden Words*

⁶⁸ *Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 205*

⁶⁹ *Abdu'l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 90*

The Power of the Love of God:

Because the reality of mankind is diverse and there are different levels of experience, intelligence, and education, ‘Abdu’l-Baha says, “Therefore, we have need of a general power which may dominate the sentiments, the opinions and the thoughts of all, thanks to which these divisions may no longer have effect and all individuals may be brought under the influence of the unity of the world of humanity. It is clear and evident that this greatest power in the human world is the love of God. It brings the different peoples under the shadow of the tent of affection; it gives to the antagonistic and hostile nations and families the greatest love and union.”⁷⁰

Discussion of the Powers that make up Authority of Self:

The power of speech, the power of choice, the power of discernment, the power of identity, the power of wisdom, the power of intuition, the power of reflection, discovery, and understanding....the power of will, memory and to search for truth....the power of response, anticipation, attention, and receptivity....and the power of reasoning, deduction, and to recognized God or a Higher, Superior Being.

Have each participant choose a power they want to develop further from the list above. Then have them verbally or in writing, answer the following questions:

1. Do you consciously have and use this power?
2. Has this power been taken from you?
3. What does this power mean to you as a woman/man?
4. What does this power mean to you in your relationship to your parents, employer, or other authority figure?
5. What memories do you have of being powerless, currently or in the past.

Discussion of Specific Powers:

1. How do you use your power of speech to assert your needs?
2. How do you express your power of identity? What and who makes you feel comfortable? Who are you? What makes you different/the same as anyone else? What is important to you?
3. Education is one way we use the power of investigation of truth. What experiences have you had that have enriched your life while doing so? What are the most important questions about life to you? How are you searching for answers?
4. Tell us about some choices you have freely made based on wisdom?
5. Choose a power: How would you use this power to change your life?
6. Do your feelings determine your actions; do they help you make informed decisions; do you know how to regulate them?

⁷⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 301, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, p. 63

Break: 10 minutes

Part Three: Creating our own Affirmations

(Teach them how to make a Time-limited Action Statement based on the Affirmation. It's not necessary to do all 29 statements. Just a sample by those who feel comfortable.)

“I challenge my belief that I must remain silent in the face of the unjust anger or criticism of others. This week I will use the power of speech to speak up for myself when someone criticizes me. Though I may normally be silent, this time I will defend myself, but I will speak kindly. I also know that I do not have to speak kindly to a tyrant or an oppressor. I may feel like withdrawing, hiding or running away because I am afraid, but I will stand my ground and speak my truth. I repeatedly connect the feeling of safety and joy with this affirmation.”

“I challenge my belief that I cannot tell people who I am and what I need, distinguishing myself from them. This week I will recognize my power of identity and express my opinions, what I want, and what I need with freedom. I will tell at least two people what I need; and I will share my opinions with two people. I may feel timid because I'm not used to telling people what I want and need. I may have to reinforce my statements 3 to 5 times again and again; but I will stand firm. I repeatedly tag this affirmation with the feeling of courage that I have experienced even at one moment in time.”

“I challenge my belief that I have to numb my feelings. This week I will use my power of speech to speak my **feelings** of anger, resentment, and outrage when someone discounts my feelings or memories of the past, or when they do not treat me as if I am equal to them. I also know that “venting” these emotions is not problem solving. I can prepare myself for this in the privacy of my home and make angry faces in the mirror, growling noises in my throat as I express my feelings, and yet regulate my feelings so that when I confront the person who is treating me as “less than”, I will still retain my dignity. I repeatedly attach the feeling of justice to this affirmation; and if I have never experienced justice in my history, I will choose serenity as I act with nobility.”

(Examples of feelings: Anger, resentment, perturbed, unhappy, joyful, glad, sad, disappointed, ticked off, excited, glum, hopeful, disillusioned, patient, mixed-up, conflicted....and others.)

Questions and Answers: 10 to 15 minutes

Closing:

(It will be crafted spontaneously, dependent upon the happenings of the workshop and the needs of the individuals who participated in it.)

Or: Thank you for participating in this workshop. Please return next week at the same time; and we will review what we have learned in the interim.

**** Excerpts from Phyllis Peterson's book, "Assisting the Traumatized Soul", are used by permission of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States.**

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