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Letters to the Editor



Dearest Friends,

STUDY CIRCLES

It is my understanding and my experience that Study Circles are meant for all, enquirers, youth, new believers and established Bahá'ís.

“A distinguishing feature of study circles is that in many countries, and across diverse cultures, they have created a dynamic within the community and have become nuclei of community life and catalysts for teaching, service, and community development. In addition to study of the institute courses the members of the study circle, both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'ís often participate in service and extracurricular activities that bind the group together in fellowship and attract others to this mode of learning. Having experienced the participatory learning style of the courses, the members gradually take on a stronger commitment to actively serve and apply the knowledge and skills they are gaining to the work of the Faith.”

(From “Training Institutes and Systematic Growth”, a document prepared by the International Teaching Centre February 2000)

“The work of the Faith is currently focused primarily on the education of children, devotionals and the study circle process, in order to facilitate human resources to carry forward the teaching of the Faith in a more structured and systematic way. At one and the same time this creates more loving and united communities. Systematisation is thus permeating our efforts despite all misgivings! Bahá'ís are as resistant to change as those unfamiliar with the Faith, when we truly internalise all the guidance we have been given over the years, (the Six Steps to Spirituality is an example) we will develop confidence in our Institutions. We then discover the unity in all the plans we have experienced and this will affect all our relationships in a truly transforming manner. Institutions also take on board the following guidance: Ample opportunities should be given to them [study circle participants] to put into practice what they have learned, and in this connection, you will need to create within your community an encouraging environment, one in which the friends feel empowered to step forward, whatever their capacities may be, to take up the work of the Faith.”

(Letter dated March 7, 1998 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the Spiritual Assembly of Hong Kong)

Integrated consultation between the Training Institutes, Bahá'í Councils, Counsellors, ABM's and their Assistants, communities and individuals will lead to trust in our institutions and empower us in our (individual) ability to serve. On a personal level, having been in a group or less my whole Bahá'í life, I experience a new-found joy in being able to participate more fully with surrounding communities in the Study Circle process. It is enriching and sustaining.

Blessings and love, Doris V Lorkins.

Dear Friends,

RUHI INSTITUTES

I read the recent letters about study circles with great interest, and entirely agree that it is time for the community as a whole to discuss this issue. I also noted – in the letters about the Tranquillity Zone – a concern that we should be aware of the danger of turning this type of devotional into a ritual. There are many warnings in the our Writings of the danger of making Form more important than Spirit, and though I have seen many Bahá'ís really enthused by the Study Circle process, I would like to make a plea for tolerance for those who feel that the Ruhi method is not their cup of tea.

As a believer in Unity in Diversity, I have for many years now taken great comfort from a passage on page 46 of “Promoting Entry by Troops” in which the Universal House of Justice says that:

“ ... the community must become more adept at accommodating a wide range of actions without losing concentration on the primary objectives of teaching, namely expansion and consolidation. A unity in diversity of actions is called for, a condition in which different individuals will concentrate on different activities appreciating the salutary effect of the aggregate on the growth and development of the Faith, because each person cannot do everything and all persons cannot do the same thing.”

This passage comforts me in two ways because it recognises that I cannot do everything, and because it helps me to accept that other people will go off and do things in ways that do not necessarily appeal to me. There is then no need in our Faith to press people into doing what they would really rather not do, because surely, a belief in Unity in Diversity recognises that different things appeal to different people. We often lay great stress on the need to listen to those who are exploring the Faith, but we also need to listen to those who are already Bahá'ís and have concerns about the changing face of the Community of which they are a part.

With loving Bahá'í greetings, Christine Elliott

Dear Editor,

RUHI MATERIALS

I thought I would write to offer a few thoughts about the Ruhi materials. Of course, everyone will have their own opinions on the value of the institute curriculum adopted in any country. Personally, I like the Ruhi materials and I honestly feel they have developed my capacity to contribute towards the systematic growth of the Cause. But I haven't written to privilege my own experience over anyone else's! However, what does seem clear is that each Bahá'í should support the training institute, given its central importance to this stage of the unfolding of the Divine Plan. I would guess that whether we decide that this entails support of the institute's curriculum is a matter for personal reflection.

My understanding is that the primary function of the Ruhi materials is not to deepen or provide exclusively academic stimulation to those taking the courses. Rather it is designed to develop the capacity of individuals, communities and institutions to facilitate the processes of expansion and consolidation. Of course, institute materials will develop and adapt according to the needs of a given community over time. However, it would be wrong to think that the Ruhi materials only work in “less developed” parts of the world, or indeed that they are only suitable for “immature” Bahá'ís. If we look at France, one of only a handful of countries which can boast a similarly rich and long Bahá'í history to the UK, groups have been formed for the intensive study of the Ruhi materials. By all accounts, the participants are finding their inner-lives revolutionised by this process. And, of course, the Guardian impresses upon us that it is upon such transformations that “the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause” will unfailingly and alone rest. This is not an anomalous experience. Throughout Western Europe and the developed world, Bahá'ís, young and old, are citing their positive experiences with the Ruhi Institute.

Of course the Ruhi materials aren't perfect. They never will be. But what is certain is that many, many Bahá'ís greatly enjoy this particular institute curriculum, and have found the materials to have assisted in a profound and positive transformation of their approach to

service. And that can't be a bad thing!

With heartfelt Bahá'í love, Dion Azordigan

Dear Editor,

THE JOY OF STUDY CIRCLES

It is difficult to put into words the joy and fulfilment that has been brought into my life from participating in study circles using the materials and methods developed by the Ruhi institute. In thirty years of daily efforts to share the awesome Message of Bahá'u'lláh, never have I felt such a buzz of exhilaration at the possibilities for systematic and sustained growth.

I'm not speaking theoretically, but based on wonderful, heartwarming experiences over the past seventeen months. Now, as a veteran of four Book 1 study circles, I have seen for myself what changes this process can bring about when we humbly and wholeheartedly take part, knowing that any mistakes we make will help us to learn, and knowing that whatever we do in unity draws down untold blessings from the Unseen World. It is important for us to understand that these study circles can benefit all who take part:

“To say that the institute is only useful for newly enrolled believers and those who read little is not correct. Many mature and deepened believers are participating in the institute process, both as students and as teachers of various courses, in an effort to contribute directly to the promotion of entry by troops in their respective countries.” (Universal House of Justice, May 2001 to an individual believer.)

In the study circles we come together to immerse ourselves in the Word of God, to enjoy spiritual fellowship and to serve. Each participant learns at their own pace, the tutor is there to facilitate the process and not as a “teacher”. The circles are open to all – and this for me is the most exciting part. We have found that those who are interested in the Faith, or simply interested in the spiritual life, are ready to join the study circles in increasing numbers and from all walks of life – and they really love it! Here they find the loving, spiritual, safe, uplifting atmosphere that they yearn for, and in this environment they are able to dive into the ocean of the Writings with us, and bring up pearls. It isn't just study though – we have used the arts in many different ways to enrich each meeting with something shared; singing, music, dancing, painting, poetry, flower arrangements, hospitality – these are all part of the experience.

The structure of the Book 1 course, “Reflections on the life of the spirit” is such that it invigorates the spiritual lives of the Bahá'ís and seekers alike, and provides an insight into the Revelation which touches the hearts and enables all the participants to experience the beauty of the teachings and great transforming power of the Word of God. This is the key to the hearts!

There are so many stories that I would love to share, but the greatest confirmation of all has been that through running two study circles and inviting interested friends we have had seven new enrolments and we can't wait to start book 2!

With loving greetings, Viv Craig

A Note from the National Spiritual Assembly

The discussion on the theme of Study Circles and different types of materials in recent editions of the BJUK has been stimulating. However, the National Spiritual Assembly feels that it would be better to have the various approaches evaluated by the four Training Institute Boards throughout the UK – in consultation with the Councils and in collaboration with the Continental Board of Counsellors – as this is a central aspect of their remit. This would be preferable to the publication of further correspondence in the "Letters" section of the Journal.

BJUK welcomes letters on any topic of general interest, which may be printed at the Editor's discretion. Letters may be edited for brevity or clarity. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the National Assembly or the Editor.
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