



## Meditation Pilot Project

### Feasibility project report

IN DECEMBER 1999, the National Spiritual Assembly initiated a pilot project with the aim of exploring the feasibility of promoting the use and benefits of meditation, both in our community and within the larger community in which we live.

The Project Committee, which was set up in the South-West of England, were given the following guidelines:

- it should be based on our Writings,
- offer a straightforward introductory course on meditation,
- be suitable for people from various backgrounds – not just Bahá'ís,
- facilitate the experience of meditation for participants,
- give an understanding of the basic principles,
- provide a basis for subsequent individual practice,
- and explore its practical benefits and applications.

Prior to our getting together, none of us on the project committee had any clear idea of what form this initiative would take, but just before our first meeting the Bahá'ís of the world were sent a letter from the Universal House of Justice (December 28, 1999) which, among other things, universally applied the law of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas related to the recitation of the Greatest Name.

In its opening sentence the letter points to the, “... growing thirst for spiritual life...” amongst the peoples of the world, and asks, “Who should be better equipped to satisfy this longing...” than our community. Using the following phrases it stressed how it was, “... imperative for the believers... to deepen their awareness... acquire greater insight... carry out all the divinely revealed aspects...” so that we reach this state of preparedness in which we could be able to help others.

Identifying the vital role of facilitating the spiritual nourishment of souls, it states, “Whosoever experienceth the holy ecstasy of worship ...” would refuse to exchange that experience, “... for all that existeth in the world .... Let all experience ... spiritual enrichment brought to their souls ...” and concludes, “... greater attention to the spiritual heart of the Teachings ...” will “... attract to the Cause the receptive souls amongst His spiritually famished children.”

This letter became very significant in defining the direction of the project. Its central endeavour would now be to help souls thirsty for spiritual nourishment to recognise that there is an inner source from which their yearning can be satisfied; that there is a source of

profound peace, love, healing, inspiration, comfort and strength, or whatever we need, a source from which we can draw to help us manage more effectively all the immense challenges and great opportunities that we all face.

After a year the outcome of the pilot committee's work was a meditation course

consisting of ten two hour sessions, that could run over ten weeks. Three trial courses were run at which the majority of participants were not Bahá'ís. All got a great deal from the course, and those that were not Bahá'ís particularly appreciated the opportunity to have regular spiritual fellowship and wanted this to continue when the course ended.

Following on from the favourable outcome of the trial courses, a Facilitators' Workshop was run at the Arts Academy this year, which was attended by a small group of Bahá'í friends interested in meditation, and enthusiastic about the possibilities that such a project could have. The aim of this workshop was to provide sufficient experience and understanding of the Meditation Course so that those attending could then run it in their local communities. Initially this might be through practising with the local Bahá'ís, and close friends, to gain confidence.

It is not the object of the course to teach any particular type of meditation. Rather, in the course, meditation is viewed as a process through which we move from our normal state of consciousness to a deeper one in which our souls become more receptive; where our hearts can become enkindled, and our minds inspired. Here we also gain greater insight into how our lives can have more fullness and meaning. Of course, the more regularly we practice the better we will be able to do this.

To make the process of meditation clearer it is broken down into six nominal steps. Using relevant meditational exercises participants are provided with an opportunity to experience this complete process of meditation at each meeting, and also explore one of the stages in greater depth using the Writings. The intention is that, by the end of the course, experience and theory will reinforce each other, and participants will have a reasonable foundation upon which to develop their subsequent practice, and apply it in their lives.

This venture falls in to the category of a social development initiative, rather than a teaching project, and is a way in which we as Bahá'ís can develop our understanding of this vital subject, as well as unconditionally share meditation's potential benefits with others.

The intention is to develop this Pilot Project over the Five Year Plan, during which time further workshops will be arranged for those who feel inspired to become facilitators for the setting up of meditation courses in their own localities. If this is something you feel attracted to, or you would like more information, please get in touch. Those of you who have contacted us previously are on our list and will be informed of any developments.

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