12 Signs of Love

Notes from talks delivered by Tom Price at the Bahá’í Summer School in Finland 2014

These are personal notes taken while listening to this talk. They do not reflect the whole talk, may very well include misunderstandings, for sure does not cover all that was said during the talk, conveys the subjects and his reasoning in a much more condense form than the talk itself, and the text is my text reflecting what I understood to have been conveyed. The notes do not capture some of the stories told; neither do they convey the humor of Tom Price when delivering his talks. So at best these notes are very limited but hopefully helpful in some way.

Introduction

Tom Price began by reading excerpts from the letter of the Universal House of Justice dated 10th of July 2014.

*A sporting contest, even one on such a scale as this, cannot obscure the severity of the challenges that confront humankind. But in the weeks to come, we hope that observers everywhere—especially the youth of the world—will take heart from the many examples of teamwork, fair play, valour, and earnest striving that are sure to surface in the tournament. God willing, they will aspire to show those same qualities in their lives, in service to their communities, and in the promotion of peace. Whether labouring for the elimination of every trace of racism and discrimination, championing the equality of women and men, or seeking to advance justice, the efforts of every member of the human family are necessary. Constructive change is possible everywhere. Man, woman, youth, and child—all have an essential contribution to make.*

In this letter, the Universal House of Justice links the world cup to world transformation. It states that change is possible. If we study a game, such as soccer or any other game for that matter, we can discern some life lessons. In order to play a game, we need to know the answer to four questions.

The first question is "what is the aim of the game". This question clarifies the purpose of the game and sets the objective. In most games, much like soccer, it is to score. The second question is "what do you have that can help you to achieve that?" In our context, as we will talk about more, it is to perform acts of love. The third question is "who do you play against" that is, who is your opponent. Our opponent in life is our ego,
envy, pride, jealousy, selfishness, money, materialism and so on. The final question is "when does the game end?" I think we all know when the game of life ends.

`Abdu'l-Bahá says that true religion is the religion of action. The purpose is not just to believe but also to act. We will not talk about love alone but also about acts of love. Shoghi Effendi, when giving a summary of the aims, teachings and the history of the Bahá'í Faith, said, that the Bahá'í Faith is "scientific in its method". The Master was very scientific when, in his talks, he was describing and analyzing various matters such as love.

The famous scientist, Richard Feynman, related the following from his childhood. "The next Monday, when the fathers were all back at work, we kids were playing in a field. One kid says to me, "See that bird? What kind of bird is that?" I said, "I haven't the slightest idea what kind of a bird it is." He says, "It's a brown-throated thrush. Your father doesn't teach you anything!” But it was the opposite. He had already taught me: "See that bird?" he says. "It's a Spencer's warbler." (I knew he didn’t know the real name.) "Well, in Italian, it's a Chutto Lapittida. In Portuguese, it's a Bom da Peida. In Chinese, it's a Chung-long-tah, and in Japanese, it's a Katano Tekeda. You can know the name of that bird in all the languages of the world, but when you're finished, you'll know absolutely nothing whatever about the bird. You'll only know about humans in different places, and what they call the bird. So let's look at the bird and see what it's doing--that's what counts." (I learned very early the difference between knowing the name of something and knowing something.)"

We use the word love so many times in so many contexts we don't really know what it means. The Chinese have many different words for rice, each used depending on what stage of development it is in. Similarly the Eskimos have many words for snow and the Arabs have for sand. This is not surprising, when we deal with something a lot; we need many names and words to describe it more precisely. But we only have the one word in English, love, so we need to broaden our vocabulary when dealing with love.

`Abdu'l-Bahá says that love is a power, a force. Just like in the physical world, we have the power of electromagnetism, or the force of gravity; in the spiritual world we have love. `Abdu'l-Bahá says that everything in the world is held together by a mysterious force of attraction. He also says that wherever there is life, there is attraction and death is disintegration.

`Abdu'l-Bahá describes love in 18 sentences, each of which is a power. He says: Know thou of a certainty that Love is

the secret of God's holy Dispensation,
the manifestation of the All-Merciful,
the fountain of spiritual outpourings.

Love is heaven's kindly light,
the Holy Spirit's eternal breath that vivifieth the human soul.

Love is the cause of God's revelation unto man,
the vital bond inherent, in accordance with the divine creation, in the realities of things.

Love is the one means that ensureth true felicity both in this world and the next.

Love is the light that guideth in darkness,
the living link that uniteth God with man,
that assureth the progress of every illumined soul.
Love is the most great law that ruleth this mighty and heavenly cycle, 
the unique power that bindeth together the diverse elements of this material world, 
the supreme magnetic force that directeth the movements of the spheres in the celestial realms. 
Love revealeth with unfailing and limitless power the mysteries latent in the universe. 
Love is the spirit of life unto the adorned body of mankind, 
the establisher of true civilization in this mortal world, and 
the shedder of imperishable glory upon every high-aiming race and nation.

The first definition of love is that it is a power, a force. Love is the message of all the Manifestations of God. 
In the Bible it says: "And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." Mark 12:28-31.

In Christianity, love is the greatest commandment. In John 13:34-35, it says: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

We are to love everyone as God has loved us. When `Abdu'l-Bahá travelled to the west, he spoke much about peace. If you remember, it was during the time when there was the build up to war. He was often referred to as "messenger of peace" Once when he was interviewed, he was asked if peace is a greater word than love. He answered: "No! Love is greater than peace, for peace is founded upon love. Love is the objective point of peace, and peace is an outcome of love. Until love is attained, peace cannot be; but there is a so-called peace without love. The love which is from God is the fundamental. This love is the object of all human attainment, the radiance of heaven, the light of man." Promulgation of Universal Peace page 169.

So peace must first be established among individuals before it can be established among nations. Love is the foundation of peace. Is love the foundation of anything else? It is.

Shoghi Effendi says: "Without the spirit of real love for Bahá'u'lláh, for His Faith and its Institutions, and the believers for each other, the Cause can never really bring in large numbers of people. For it is not preaching and rules the world wants, but love and action." Compilation on Entry by Troops.

In another letter, on the topic of racism, Shoghi Effendi says: "Let neither think that anything short of genuine love, extreme patience, true humility, consummate tact, sound initiative, mature wisdom, and deliberate, persistent, and prayerful effort, can succeed in blotting out the stain which this patent evil has left on the fair name of their common country." Advent of Divine Justice page 40.

`Abdu'l-Bahá says regarding Bahá'í Consultation that: "Therefore, true consultation is spiritual conference in the attitude and atmosphere of love. Members must love each other in the spirit of fellowship in order that good results may be forthcoming. Love and fellowship are the foundation." Promulgation of Universal Peace page 73.
The Universal House of Justice says regarding children classes in the Ridván Message of year 2000 the following: "But although providing spiritual and academic education for children is essential, this represents only a part of what must go into developing their characters and shaping their personalities. The necessity exists, too, for individuals and the institutions at all levels, which is to say the community as a whole, to show a proper attitude towards children and to take a general interest in their welfare. Such an attitude should be far removed from that of a rapidly declining order. Children are the most precious treasure a community can possess, for in them are the promise and guarantee of the future. They bear the seeds of the character of future society which is largely shaped by what the adults constituting the community do or fail to do with respect to children. They are a trust no community can neglect with impunity. An all-embracing love of children, the manner of treating them, the quality of the attention shown them, the spirit of adult behaviour toward them—these are all among the vital aspects of the requisite attitude. Love demands discipline, the courage to accustom children to hardship, not to indulge their whims or leave them entirely to their own devices. An atmosphere needs to be maintained in which children feel that they belong to the community and share in its purpose. They must lovingly but insistently be guided to live up to Bahá’í standards, to study and teach the Cause in ways that are suited to their circumstances."

Every time we see a child, we can show love, we can give our time and attention to that child. This is like scoring a goal in the game of life.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that Bahá’í love is unlimited. We don’t just love those that suit us or are similar to us. There are many ways to express love, it could be love for our family, our city, political party, or nationality but these are all limited. If you are expressing love for your nationality, you are by definition limiting your love. Love as according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is unlimited, it goes beyond family, political party, nationality and so on. Patriotic love is finite, loving ones own country that causes dislike of other nationalities is not perfect love. Real love must be for everyone.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá says: "When you love a member of your family or a compatriot, let it be with a ray of the Infinite Love! Let it be in God, and for God! Wherever you find the attributes of God love that person, whether be be of your family or of another. Shed the light of a boundless love on every human being whom you meet, whether of your country, your race, your political party, or of any other nation, colour or shade of political opinion. Heaven will support you while you work in this in-gathering of the scattered peoples of the world beneath the shadow of the almighty tent of unity. You will be servants of God, who are dwelling near to Him, His divine helpers in the service, ministering to all Humanity. All Humanity! Every human being! never forget this!"

Paris Talks page 38

All religions have taught about love. However, for instance, within Christianity, many men of theology, have reasoned in the lines that this love was for those of same belief that the love a Christian should have is for other Christians. Love one another simply meant love other Christians. This understanding seems to have been supported by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as he says: "In every dispensation, there hath been the commandment of fellowship and love, but it was a commandment limited to the community of those in mutual agreement, not to the dissident foe.” Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá page 21.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá continues: "In this wondrous age, however, praised be God, the commandments of God are not delimited, not restricted to any one group of people, rather have all the friends been commanded to show forth fellowship and love, consideration and generosity and loving-kindness to every community on earth. Now must the lovers of God arise to carry out these instructions of His: let them be kindly fathers to the children of the human race, and compassionate brothers to the youth, and self-denying offspring to those bent with years. The meaning of this is that ye must show forth tenderness and love to every human being, even
to your enemies, and welcome them all with unalloyed friendship, good cheer, and loving-kindness. When ye meet with cruelty and persecution at another's hands, keep faith with him; when malevolence is directed your way, respond with a friendly heart. To the spears and arrows rained upon you, expose your breasts for a target mirror-bright; and in return for curses, taunts and wounding words, show forth abounding love."

We are encouraged to have "enemy-loving love" The ability to love is shown if you love someone that is difficult to love. Loving someone who is very easily loved, is not difficult and does not show our ability to love. Loving someone difficult to love is a sign of love. We must never respond to lack of love by the same measure. In the Kitab-i-Aqdas, we are told to avoid anger. It is refereed to as "upbraid". In verse number 153, it says: "Should anyone wax angry with you, respond to him with gentleness; and should anyone upbraid you, forbear to upbraid him in return, but leave him to himself and put your trust in God, the omnipotent Avenger, the Lord of might and justice."

`Abdu'l-Bahá says: "Wherefore must the loved ones of God associate in affectionate fellowship with stranger and friend alike, showing forth to all the utmost loving-kindness, disregarding the degree of their capacity, never asking whether they deserve to be loved. In every instance let the friends be considerate and infinitely kind. Let them never be defeated by the malice of the people, by their aggression and their hate, no matter how intense. If others hurl their darts against you, offer them milk and honey in return; if they poison your lives, sweeten their souls; if they injure you, teach them how to be comforted; if they inflict a wound upon you, be a balm to their sores; if they sting you, hold to their lips a refreshing cup."

Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá page 24.

How can we do this? `Abdu'l-Bahá gives us the way to do so, it is what I call the 12 signs of love. `Abdu'l-Bahá was once asked how one can become more spirit. He said that we first must acquire a thirst for spirituality and this is achieved by meditating on life after death, prayer and meditation.

"The first thing to do is to acquire a thirst for Spirituality, then Live the Life! Live the Life! Live the Life! The way to acquire this thirst is to meditate upon the future life. Study the Holy Words, read your Bible, read the Holy Books, especially study the Holy Utterances of Bahá'u'lláh; Prayer and Meditation, take much time for these two. Then will you know this Great Thirst, and then only can you begin to Live the Life!" Compilation on The Importance of Deepening Our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith.

Shoghi Effendi says: "One can hardly imagine what a great influence genuine love, truthfulness and purity of motives exert on the souls of men. But these traits cannot be acquired by any believer unless he makes a daily effort to gain them."

Compilation on Living the Life.

Developing love requires daily effort, it is not something that comes at once but rather something that is developed through daily effort. `Abdu'l-Bahá says, "kam kam, ruz be ruz" and Bahá'u'lláh says: "Let each morn be better than its eve and each morrow richer than its yesterday." Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas page 138. In the Hidden Words we can read: "Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning" Arabic Hidden Words number 31. We need to keep account of what we did today, is it better than yesterday? If it is, praise God and ask for more spiritual development. If it is not better than yesterday, if it is worse, they pray for forgiveness. We should keep account of our deeds, not our thoughts, beliefs and so on. It is "deeds, not words" that matter.
Sign 1 - Unity Above All

Unity is more important than anything else. It is the attitude that love, harmony and unity is the most important thing and that we try to maintain unity. Today, in the world we live in, we do not consider unity to be above all. The most important thing, perhaps, is life. It is based on what we can call "life doctrine". We do not have a "unity doctrine". One of the things we often think is more important that unity is the truth or that we are right. Consider for instance "constructive criticism". Thinking that we are right and that it is more important that unity is a false priority and causes a lot of hurt to for instance our family, or even on greater scale, wars.

`Abdu'l-Bahá says: "The fact that we imagine ourselves to be right and everybody else wrong is the greatest of all obstacles in the path towards unity, and unity is necessary if we would reach truth, for truth is one." Paris Talks page 136. In fact, `Abdu'l-Bahá puts unity above being right. He says: "If they agree upon a subject, even though it be wrong, it is better than to disagree and be in the right, for this difference will produce the demolition of the divine foundation. Though one of the parties may be in the right and they disagree that will be the cause of a thousand wrongs, but if they agree and both parties are in the wrong, as it is in unity the truth will be revealed and the wrong made right." Bahá’í World Faith page 411. We have to start thinking that unity is life and disunity is death as we talked about before. Consider for instance arguments. After an argument we feel angry, sad or hurt. Hurting other persons feelings, mentioning their faults or to give advice to others all cause more disunity than it causes unity.

`Abdu'l-Bahá said that "If two souls quarrel and contend about a question of the divine questions, differing and disputing, both are wrong." Tablets of the Divine Plan, p. 53. Once two believers were arguing about the station of Bahá'u'lláh and they decided to write to Bahá'u'lláh asking to clarify the issue and basically state who is correct. Bahá'u'lláh answered that if they both agree, they are right and if they do not agree, both are wrong. The lesson here is that unity is right.

If an instance of disunity occurs, we need to analyze that instance and figure out what it was that I was attached to in such degree that I made it more important than unity. Maybe it was my ego, pride, desire for power or being right, or whatever. Something causes me to make something more important than unity. On a daily basis, we can each morning think of "what can I do that is unity today?. In the evening we can reflect on "what did I do that caused disunity today?". We should do this for today, not for tomorrow. Tomorrow will come in due time.

Sign 2 - Acceptance and Tolerance

We must learn to accept everyone we meet as they are. `Abdu'l-Bahá says that unless we learn to love God, you cannot learn to love other. We simply cannot accept and tolerate others unless we accept and tolerate God. This means that we need to accept and tolerate our own lives. We have to accept that our lives are perfect as it is. What God has placed everything in front of us, is exactly what we need. We say in our prayers that God is the All-Bountiful, the All-Generous. Is God generous? Is God the All-Giver? If God is all these, why do we then think that what we have is not enough?
The key is for us to love our life and accept that it is perfect as it is. There are some things we should not question. One is who Bahá’u’lláh has chosen to play in His game. We need to stop thinking about who God puts in our life. Instead of questioning it, we should accept it. Whoever crosses our paths, is because God gave it to us. This is because we needed or need it. God is the All-Generous.

In the Words of Wisdom, Bahá’u’lláh says: “The source of all good is trust in God, submission unto His command, and contentment with His holy will and pleasure.” Furthermore it says: “The source of all glory is acceptance of whatsoever the Lord hath bestowed, and contentment with that which God hath ordained.” In these two passages, Bahá’u’lláh is explicitly saying that we need to learn to accept what ever God has put in our path, and to be content with it. This is the source of all good and glory.

In the Gems of Divine Mysteries, Bahá’u’lláh talks about two journeys, one is about resignation and the other about contentment. We all have sufferings, we all try to avoid it and do not very much like it. However, Bahá’u’lláh says that we should be thankful in adversity. We think it is a bad thing but it is a good thing. Why is it so? Outwardly it is a fire but inwardly it is life.

In the seven valleys, each valley has its own steed. The steed of the valley of love is pain. To get love, we need pain. We have to change our attitude towards life. In 1911, ’Abdu’l-Bahá was interviewed and was asked how it felt to be a prisoner. ’Abdu’l-Bahá said: “Freedom is not a matter of place. It is a condition. I was thankful for the prison, and the lack of liberty was very pleasing to me, for those days were passed in the path of service, under the utmost difficulties and trials, bearing fruits and results. "Unless one accepts dire vicissitudes, he will not attain. To me prison is freedom, troubles rest me, death is life, and to be despised is honour. Therefore, I was happy all that time in prison. When one is released from the prison of self, that is indeed release, for that is the greater prison.” ’Abdu’l-Bahá in London page 120. Key to learn to love God is to accept Gods Will.

**Sign 3 - Praise and Gratitude**

In order to love God, we have to, on a daily basis, praise God and show gratitude. We do not do this because God needs our praise and gratitude for surely God does not need our praise or gratitude. If you cannot praise someone, you cannot love them. Its not enough to think it but it has to be expressed. Praising others helps us to see them in their right light. It’s kind of something that needs to become a daily habit. Praise must be what we observe in others. If it is not based on what we see, it is hypocrisy and it has a very foul odor. When we show love, it must be freed from all kind of hypocrisy.

We can praise but can we say that we are thankful for them? How can we express gratitude? ’Abdu’l-Bahá expressed his praise and gratitude. Whenever someone came into his presence, he expressed joy and gratitude that they had come. Perhaps he knew that everyone who was placed before him, was the right person and he was grateful for that.
Sign 4 - Only see good in others

Theophany is a visible manifestation of God to humankind in world and Shoghi Effendi says that Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation is a theophany. If one wanted to define God, one could perhaps say that God is a bunds of attributes such as love, compassion, forgiveness, joy, kindness and so on. Also we cannot know anything unless we know about its qualities and attributes. So we can only know God through Gods attributes. ʼAbdu’l-Bahá says that if there were no people in the world, how could we then know the attributes of God? The way to find the attributes of God, is to look for them in other people. ʼAbdu’l-Bahá said that we must try to find these qualities in others and as soon as we see them, think that we just saw God. We try to see God in them because these qualities are reflecting the same attributes of God. So, on a daily basis, we are finding God.

ʼAbdu’l-Bahá said that everything in creation reflects, to a certain degree, something of God. Humans, however but reflect the attributes of God much more. All creation reflects light. If something does not reflect light at all, you cannot see it. If something is of a certain color, you can see that color because it is reflecting a part of light, a partial light that is seen as that color. All of creation reflects God to some degree but the human being reflects Gods attributes a lot. That is why ʼAbdu’l-Bahá likened us to mirrors. Mirrors reflect all light.

But sometimes, mirrors reflect less light because it is so dusty and so on. The purpose is to polish that mirror, and enabling it to reflect more light. Whenever someone is doing something good, they are showing a quality, an attribute of God, they are reflecting an attribute of God. The key is to look for the qualities in others. You will find that God is everywhere. For instance, wherever there is kindness, there is God.

ʼAbdu’l-Bahá says that if someone has ten good qualities and one bad, look at the ten good qualities. He also says that if someone has ten bad qualities and one good one, focus on the good quality and ignore all the bad qualities. There is this story from Islam about Christ and His disciples who one day came across a dead dog that had started to decompose. One after another disciple said that it looked awful, smelled terribly bad and so on. But Christ said, look at its teeth, how white they are. ʼAbdu’l-Bahá says that bad qualities really don't exist. They are just absence of good qualities. Consider the sky at night. When we look at the sky, we don't look at the dark space between the stars, we don't look where there is no light. We focus on the stars, we notice the stars and we focus on the light. The dark space is just absence of light and in similar way, we must ignore the bad qualities of others.

There is this story of a believer who used to lie a lot and people got tired of it and complained about it to ʼAbdu’l-Bahá. The Master wrote a Tablet to him that began with "O lover of truth". One might thing that this does not make sense. But it does. ʼAbdu’l-Bahá saw that quality in him, that truthfulness and focuses on that.

It is very easy to see bad qualities. What is special is to ignore the bad qualities and notice the good in others. ʼAbdu’l-Bahá says: Never become angry with one another. "Promulgation of Universal Peace page 93. ʼAbdu’l-Bahá talk about anger as an absolute in contrast to the world today that talk about managing it (anger management). Studies have shown that when we are angry, we control it when the circumstances do not allow us for showing it. For instance, one person might be very angry at home but should he or she be angry
at work, they will not show it to their managers. The ability to control anger is there. We have to change our mindset and realize that in no circumstances at all is it allowed to be angry. It's not that we do not have the ability, it is that we are not realizing the dangers and consequences of it. 'Abdu'l-Bahá would not say that we have to close the door to anger, backbiting, slander and so on, had it not been possible to achieve.

**Sign 5 - Listening and Understanding**

Listen and silent are anagrams. We have to be silent in order to listen. We should never interrupt. Silence is not only with our mouths but also with our minds. Often we are silent but in our thoughts we are thinking of what I am going to say next or some other thoughts. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "*In order to find truth we must give up our prejudices, our own small trivial notions; an open receptive mind is essential. If our chalice is full of self, there is no room in it for the water of life. The fact that we imagine ourselves to be right and everybody else wrong is the greatest of all obstacles in the path towards unity, and unity is necessary if we would reach truth, for truth is one.*" Paris Talks page 136. An open mind is essential, if we lose this, we also lose the ability to listen.

The first step to listening is to think that they might be right. In science, truth is considered dependent on the frame of reference. For instance, if you look at a straw from two different perspectives, they will look very different and if two persons only cling to their perspective, they both consider the other being wrong. However, both are right, each from his or her own standpoint or perspective.

As such, every person is right according to their frame of reference, based on their experiences, learning and so on. It is of no use to try chaining their opinion as it is dependent on their frame of reference. However, if you change their frame of reference, their opinion will change by itself. If we think they are wrong, we can not understand their frame of reference.

Bahá'u'lláh says: "He [Bahá'u'lláh] spoke about teaching. He said: 'A kindly approach and loving behavior toward the people are the first requirements for teaching the Cause. The teacher must carefully listen to whatever a person has to say -- even though his talk may consist only of vain imaginings and blind repetitions of the opinions of others. One should not resist or engage in argument. The teacher must avoid disputes which will end in stubborn refusal or hostility, because the other person will feel overwhelmed and defeated. Therefore, be will be more inclined to reject the Cause. One should rather say, "Maybe you are right, but kindly consider the question from this other point of view." Consideration, respect, and love encourage people to listen and do not force them to respond with hostility. They are convinced because they see that your purpose is not to defeat them, but to convey truth, to manifest courtesy, and to show forth heavenly attributes. This will encourage the people to be fair. Their spiritual natures will respond, and, by the bounty of God, they will find themselves recreated.' 'Consider the way in which the Master teaches the people. He listens very carefully to the most hollow and senseless talk. He listens so intently that the speaker says to himself, 'He is trying to learn from me.' Then the Master gradually and very carefully, by means that the other person does not perceive, puts him on the right path and endows him with a fresh power of understanding." Words attributed to Bahá'u'lláh, Stories from the Delight of Hearts, pp. 109-110.
Sign 6 - Forgiveness

We talked about daily effort before. Practice is also needed. Knowledge alone is not sufficient, it’s not enough. Knowledge must be implemented. If one only believes but does not make efforts to implement what one leads, it is quite useless. A Bahá’í can come to talk after talk and listen to all wonderful things being said. All of it is not worth much if it does not lead to implementing what one has learned. I would call those who just come to talks and believe but does not implement as "professional Bahais".

Love is the same, we need to put in our daily effort and it needs practice. When I was a child, I was taken to a teacher who was one of the best teachers. He told me that I must practice every day. He said it is better to practice 30 min every day than 4 hours a week. This does not make sense because 4 hours is more. But that does not matter, it is the daily practice that matters. Practice in regards to love needs to be done in public and it is very painful just like listening to a child learning to play the violin.

Nobody gets mad at the child who is practicing the violin, however painful it might be for the ears. Likewise, we should not be mad with others who are practicing love. In 1911, `Abdu’l-Bahá was in Egypt for one year to recuperate from prison life and to prepare for his travels to the West. He travelled by ship to Europe. One day when `Abdu’l-Bahá was in Europe, he stayed in a town not far from Geneva. At the same time, Zillul-Sultan was in the same town. Zillul-Sultan was the oldest son of Nasirid-Din Shah and he would have been the heir of the throne if his mother had not been a woman outside of the Qajar family. Nevertheless, the sultan had prominent governmental position in Iran. His father, Nasirid-Din Shah, as you know, ordered the imprisonment of Bahá’u’lláh, His exile and was responsible for the ruthless killing of many Babis and Bahais. The sultan was also responsible for many Bahais being martyred, among them the King and the Beloved of Martyrs in Isfahan. So these two had caused a lot of suffering for `Abdu’l-Bahá and his family.

When the sultan was in the same town as `Abdu’l-Bahá, he noticed that there was another Persian (from the clothes) and he asked who that was. He was told it was `Abdu’l-Bahá and he asked to meet him. He was granted permission to meet `Abdu’l-Bahá. When they met, `Abdu’l-Bahá took him in his arms and said: "All that is of the past, Never think of it again." Then `Abdu’l-Bahá invited him to spend the day with him. Think a moment about this. This was the sultan who had cause so much grief and hardship for the friends and `Abdu’l-Bahá, and the Maser says, never think of it again.

Forgiveness is a very important sign of love. We can hold on for a very long time before forgiving but we must remember that forgiving someone is not to let them off the hook, it is for our own benefit. Anytime you do not forgive someone, it is because they hurt a part of you. You need to get rid of that part and to become detached from that part. So forgiving is about becoming detached from those parts in us that was hurt such as pride, respect, loss of money and so on. If you cannot forgive, then this is a part of you that you are attached to. Forgiving is detachment.

Michelangelo was once asked about his masterpiece, the statue of David and how he did that. He said it was very easy, that he just took a big marble stone and cut away every part that was not David. God is doing exactly the same thing with us. God is cutting away all the parts in us that is not of the should and God uses other persons to do it. God is, through other persons, chiseling away all parts that are not "David".
The sultan never actually apologized but rather made a lot of excuses. Sometimes we say that if you accept that you did wrong, I will forgive you.  'Abdu'l-Bahá did not do that, he forgave the sultan without him even asking for forgiveness. Then comes the next thing, which is amazing.  'Abdu'l-Bahá asks him to spend the whole day with him. Every trace of the past his completely erased.

In the Lords prayer, it says: "Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." In the Bible (Mathews 6:4) it says: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you". Its simple, if you don't forgive, God will not forgive you. How can we be sure that God forgives us? By forgiving others.

In the Bible (Mathews 18>21-22) it says: "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." Furthermore, in Mathews chapter 18: 23-35, there is this following story:

"Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

Once I heard that "the best thing about the past is that it is over". Studies have shown that when we replay and event in our minds, that is when we think about a think that has happened, it is 90% as the real thing. Replaying it in the mind is like experiencing the whole thing again up to 90% but it the story becomes worse. So every time we do a mental replay, it is like re-experiencing the event but for each replay the story gets worse. Remember, forgiving does not mean they were right, you forgive the wrong and get over it.

**Sign 7 - A kindly Tongue**

Speech has an enormous power. Bahá'u'lláh says that "A harsh word is even as a sword thrust; a gentle word as milk." Tabernacle of Unity page 9. It's not necessarily what you say but how you say it. Bahá'u'lláh also says that "For the tongue is a smoldering fire, and excess of speech a deadly poison. Material fire consumeth the body, whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart and soul. The force of the former lasteth but for a time, whilst the effects of the latter endureth a century." Gleanings number 125.
In the Hidden Words (26), the only time the word accursed is used is when speaking about backbiting. "How couldst thou forget thine own faults and busy thyself with the faults of others? Whoso doeth this is accursed of Me." In the Ruhi books you have studied that "A kindly tongue is the lodestone of the hearts of men. It is the bread of the spirit, it clotheth the words with meaning, it is the fountain of the light of wisdom and understanding." Loadstone is like a magnet so when we speak with a kindly tongue, we attract the souls of others.

**Sign 8 - Selfless Love**

Another sign of love is selfless love or unconditional love. Think of the butcher and the lamb. The lamb things the butcher loves him and why should he not? The butcher gives the lamb shelter, food and takes care of him. The butcher also loves the lamb, he takes care of the lamb and feeds it, make sure the lamb is in health and so on. The love of the butcher for the lamb, is however based on something else, he loves the lamb because he wants to kill it for food or money. This is the butchers love, its not unconditional. It has a condition, a reason. This is not real love. If I ever say, I no longer love you, I never really loved you. True love is unconditional, it does not change.

We also have semi-selfish love such as love of family. You love your family but not the others (or your soccer team, members of your party etc.). We can learn from this kind of love but it needs to be extended. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says we have to love all of us as we love our children, love all as if they are my brothers and sisters and so on.

What does it mean to be selfless? What is this self that we need to have less of? The Guardian says there are two selves. One is the bad self and the other is the good self. Bahá'u'lláh says: "Know also that the soul is endowed with two wings: should it soar in the atmosphere of love and contentment, then it will be related to the All-Merciful, and should it fly in the atmosphere of self and desire, then it will pertain to the Evil One; may God shield and protect us and protect you therefrom, O ye who perceive! Should the soul become ignited with the fire of the love of God, it is called benevolent and pleasing unto God, but should it be consumed with the fire of passion, it is known as the concupiscent soul. Thus have We expounded this subject for thee that thou mayest obtain a clear understanding." Summon to the Lord of Hosts page 154.

'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained that the evil one is the self, the insistent self. In fact, the evil one, Satan, devil, evil whisperer and other similar terms all refer to the insistent self. We all have a Satan of our own. It is like God has given us an opponent in the game of life, someone to play against in the game metaphor. We have a spiritual duality, the higher and the lower self. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "Do not let the desires of the self find a place within you ; for it is certain that even when you reach the highest state of spirituality, one worldly desire can cause your downfall. The spirit is like a bird ; when it flies in the air it is always mounting ; but the self is like the hunter, who is thinking how to catch the bird. You will see that by one arrow, one shot, it will be brought low. This arrow is the connection with this world ; the occupations of this world ; the desire of this world ; the honours of this world. In many ways the hunter will stop the spirit from ascending. That is why you must ask and implore and entreat, " God ! protect me from myself ! "

In another passage 'Abdu'l-Bahá compares the self as dust. When you dust of something, it is not enough to do it once and leave it. The dust will fall again. The same is with the human heart or soul, it needs to be regularly cleaned. Bahá'u'lláh says in Hidden Words (59): "Thy heart is My home; sanctify it for My descent."
In the Star of the West we can read "The oneness of the world of humanity can be found first of all in the conquest of the self within you! Selfishness, pride, vain-glory, social distinction, intellectual superiority, material acquirement. If you are able to sever yourself from these slaveries of pride, of selfishness, of greed, of vain-glory and of distinction of caste classifications, you will have the beginning of the assurance of oneness within yourself. It is the first and greatest struggle."

Whenever a thought or an idea comes into your mind, how do you know from which self it comes from? The insistent self is the cry baby, it’s the drama queen. Before opening your mouth, as who has the ball? Is the ball going towards your own goal or the opponent’s goal? The lower self or the insistent self is like gravity. We can never get rid of it, it will always be there pulling things towards it but we can make the body strong to fight it. We can check ourselves. We can ask, where is this thought or idea coming from? Never argue with the lower self of anyone else. The lower self does not understand logic, if you argue, it will just be the lower part of you arguing with the lower part of someone else. Stop discussing that issue all together or it will get worse.

Remember, the lower nature is not you, we are given this opponent to play against, to fight against. It is not our true self, but the opponent. In Iqan (page 194) Bahá'u'lláh says: "He should consume every wayward thought with the flame of His loving mention". It does not say that we should stop having wayward thoughts but that they will come. They are to be consumed with the flame of the mention of God.

**Sign 9 - Service**

Service is to do something to help someone. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "To live the Life you must be the very kindest woman, you must be the most pure, you must be absolutely truthful, and live a perfectly moral life. Visit your neighbors when they are sick or in trouble, offer your services to them, try to show them that you are longing to serve them. Feed the poor, divide what you have. Be contented to remain where God has placed you; be faithful in your care of those to whom He has trusted you, never waver in this. ..." Star of the West Vol 19 number 3.

'Abdu'l-Bahá says that God has trusted us with these people. As a parent, our children have been trusted to our care. As a teacher, the students have been trusted in our care, for a doctor, the patients have been trusted to his care and so on. Now, all the persons I meet have been trusted to my care.

Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá continues with: "show by your life you have something different, so that all will see and will say, 'What has this person that I have not? Show the world that in spite of the utmost suffering, poverty, sickness, you have something which gives you comfort, strength and peace -- that you are happy -- serene -- satisfied with all that is in your life. Then they, too, will want what you possess and will need no further teaching after you tell them what it is."

In Paris Talks (page 81), 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "Therefore strive that your actions day by day may be beautiful prayers." So another kind of prayer is actions, and actions can become prayers. Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá continues with: "Turn towards God, and seek always to do that which is right and noble." He elaborates this with a list of what this is. He says: "Enrich the poor, raise the fallen, comfort the sorrowful, bring healing to the sick, reassure the fearful, rescue the oppressed, bring hope to the hopeless, shelter the destitute! This is the work of a true Bahá'í, and this is what is expected of him. If we strive to do all this,
then are we true Bahá’ís, but if we neglect it, we are not followers of the Light, and we have no right to the name. God, who sees all hearts, knows how far our lives are the fulfillment of our words."

Love must be expressed in action. We may think we love people but if it is not manifested in action, it is not love. It is just a wish. The quickest way to love someone is to serve them. In many prayers we read about "nearness to God". What does this mean? `Abdu'l-Bahá explains that "nearness is likeness" `Abdu'l-Bahá says: "Baha’u’llah proclaims in the Hidden Words that God inspires His servants and is revealed through them. He says, "Thy heart is My home; sanctify it for My descent. Thy spirit is My place of revelation; cleanse it for My manifestation." Therefore, we learn that nearness to God is possible through devotion to Him, through entrance into the Kingdom and service to humanity; it is attained by unity with mankind and through loving-kindness to all; it is dependent upon investigation of truth, acquisition of praiseworthy virtues, service in the cause of universal peace and personal sanctification. In a word, nearness to God necessitates sacrifice of self, severance and the giving up of all to Him. Nearness is likeness." Promulgation of Universal Peace page 148.

So nearness is likeness. Nearness is not a physical closeness to something but being like something. `Abdu'l-Bahá chose the name of `Abdu'l-Bahá, the servant of Baha. Of all the nouns, of all the titles he had been given by his Father, of all the titles he could have chosen for himself, he chose `Abdu'l-Bahá. Close to the end of his life, he was knighted and given the title Sir Abbas Effendi. He was knighted for his service to the poor during the first world war, not for being a Bahá’í. `Abdu'l-Bahá says that we should not sit by the sandals wishing to be in the front. You know, in the mosques, people sit but they leave their sandals before entering the room. So those who sit far behind sit close to the sandals listening to the one sitting in the front. By this is meant that we should not pretend to be humble but wish to be in the center. You have to serve the poor, the downtrodden and so on but also the other Bahais.

**Sign 10 - Always be the cause of happiness to others**

`Abdu'l-Bahá used to ask people "are you happy?" Happiness is very important, more so than health, wealth and so on. Happiness has nothing to do with wealth, social status and so on, it is something you choose to do. Perhaps if we try to make someone happy, we show them love. Bahá’u’lláh says: "Ye have well observed, in all its aspects, the behavior of Him Who is the Word of Truth amidst you. Ye know full well how hard it is for this Youth to allow, though it be for one night, the heart of any one of the beloved of God to be saddened by Him." Gleanings number 146.

The goal (in the game metaphor) is to make someone happy, its kind of the purpose of life, to make other happy.

**Sign 11 - Never make people unhappy**

We should never ever be the cause of grief.

One way we can cause grief is by anger. `Abdu'l-Bahá lists anger first when he talk about bad qualities.
We should not criticize, all criticism is destructive.

You may have heard of constructive criticism, it’s just not true, there is no such thing.

We should not give advice to anyone. Do you like it when someone tells you that you should to it this way or that way? It can be good but usually it is an indication that something is wrong.

We should refrain from "I told you so" statements in whatever form they may be presented.

We should not take offence from other people. If you have become unhappy by other people, never tell them you have been offended. Taking offence is egoistic, never take offence. If someone hurts your feelings, don't tell them that.

Don't make other feel stupid.

Don't doubt others abilities.

Don't ignore others and do not show that you are not happy to see them.

**Sign 12 - The Golden Rule**

Every religion has the golden rule. For instance:

Christianity: *All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.* Matthew 7:1

Buddhism: *Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.* Udana-Varga 5,1

Hinduism: *This is the sum of duty; do naught unto others what you would not have them do unto you.* Mahabharata 5,1517

Islam: *No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.* Sunnah

Judaism: *What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellowman. This is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary.* Talmud, Shabbat 3id

Zoroastrianism: *That nature alone is good which refrains from doing another whatsoever is not good for itself.* Dadisten-I-dinik, 94,5

The golden rules of all religions have four flavors.

1. Do unto others what you want them to do unto you.

2. Do not do unto others, what you do not want them to do unto you.
3. Not wish for others what you do not wish for yourself.

4. Should wish for others what you wish for yourself.

Bahá’u’lláh in the Iqan (page 194) says: "He should not wish for others that which be doth not wish for himself..." Other expressions of the golden rule in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh are:

"Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself." Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh revealed after Kitáb-i-Aqdas

"O Son of Being! Ascribe not to any soul that which thou wouldst not have ascribed to thee, and say not that which thou dost not. This is My command unto thee, do thou observe it."  Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

"Wish not for others what ye wish not for yourselves" Kitáb-I-Aqdas

"Lay not upon any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself." Gleanings

This includes acts, wishes, speech and desire. First we have to think very hard on how we wish to be treated. The golden rule does not state how to treat others but how we wish to be treated. The golden rule forces you to see the others as yourself. Consider that when die, we get to see our whole life in review but not from our perspective but from the perspective of all those we have crossed paths with and how we made them feel. So what they feel is what we will feel in the "final review". All the joy and happiness we have caused will be felt by us and all the hurt, sadness, and sorrow we have caused in others, will also be felt.

Bahá’u’lláh says: "Hear no evil, and see no evil, abase not thyself, neither sigh nor weep. Speak no evil, that thou mayest not hear it spoken unto thee, and magnify not the faults of others that thine own faults may not appear great, and wish not the abasement of anyone, that thine own abasement be not exposed." Hidden Words number 44 Persian section.

Bahá’u’lláh is saying that anything I say, think, desire and want for others, will happen to me. Imagine if you had a golden rule machine, it would work like this, whatever you did to it, it would do the same to you. Whatever we do and wish for everyone we meet, is like doing it to the golden rule machine, it will do it back to us.

Conclusion

`Abdu'l-Bahá says: "Whatsoever is conducive to unity is merciful and from the divine bounty itself. Every universal affair is divine. Everything which conduces to separation and estrangement is satanic because it emanates from the purposes of self. Consider how clearly it is shown in creation that the cause of existence is unity and cohesion and the cause of nonexistence is separation and dissension. By a divine power of creation the elements assemble together in affinity, and the result is a composite being. Certain of these elements have united, and man has come into existence. Certain other combinations produce plants and
animals. Therefore, this affinity of the inanimate elements is the cause of life and being. Through their commingling, therefore, human affinity, love and fellowship are made possible. If the elements were not assembled together in affinity to produce the body of man, the higher intelligent forces could not be manifest in the body. But when these elements separate, when their affinity and cohesion are overcome, death and dissolution of the body they have built inevitably follow. Therefore, affinity and unity among even these material elements mean life in the body of man, and their discord and disagreement mean death. Throughout all creation, in all the kingdoms, this law is written: that love and affinity are the cause of life, and discord and separation are the cause of death." Promulgation of Universal Peace page 207.

Bahá’u’lláh says: "The Most Great Name beareth Me witness! How sad if any man were, in this Day, to rest his heart on the transitory things of this world! Arise, and cling firmly to the Cause of God. Be most loving one to another. Burn away, wholly for the sake of the Well-Beloved, the veil of self with the flame of the undying Fire, and with faces joyous and beaming with light, associate with your neighbor." Gleanings number 147