

## LET THERE BE...STUFF? A SPIRIT-FILLED RESPONSE TO A CONSUMER-CRAZED WORLD

A Baha'i - inspired Program for Youth created by

[www.storyofstuff.org](http://www.storyofstuff.org)

[www.greenfaith.org](http://www.greenfaith.org)

Story of Stuff Baha'i Team

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# SESSION 5: WHAT A WASTE!

These materials contain three main sections:

- \* TO THE FACILITATORS: Explanations about how to facilitate Session 5.
- \* SESSION 5 LESSON PLAN: A step by step guide through the session. Each activity is explained here.
- \* SESSION 5 HANDOUTS: These are all the readings and materials that need to be copied for each participant. They will be used throughout the session as indicated in the Session 5 - Lesson Plan.

## TO THE FACILITATORS

### Overview

In this session we explore what happens to our Stuff once we get rid of it. Whether we recycle it or throw it away, there is a big cost to the planet and to vulnerable populations. We will follow the secret life of the same objects we learned about in Session 3 to see where each of them goes at the end of their lives. Hint: It's definitely not heaven!

### Goals

- Develop the **virtue of compassion**.
- Understand the true cost of disposing of our stuff.
- Understand and practice ways to reduce waste.

### Themes

#### Secular:

- We are creating an unimaginable large amount of garbage. Much of it is toxic and it is a waste of precious resources.
- Reduce, reuse, recycle and rethink!

#### Spiritual:

- God created everything with love. We don't want to pollute the Earth with waste.
- Everything in nature is interconnected.
- We are called to be the trustees of God amongst His creatures, and to especially take care of the needs of the poor.
- "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."

## Introduction

This session contains three short videos (and another video rendition of Blessed Is the Spot). The first one is the Story of Stuff video clip on the disposal of Stuff. The other two videos show the harmful effects of waste on the environment and on human beings. This session also includes a garbage audit which will help the youth look at garbage in a new way. We suggest to do the garbage audit outdoors if at all possible.

## Materials for Session 5

- Handouts for Session 5 *for each participant*, which contain the Opening Prayer, Introduction, Spiritual Reading, Another Way, Closing Prayer, and Action Plan. (Pages 8 - 12)
- Your (the facilitator's) notes from Session 1 about the Promises
- Your computer for the four videos:
  - [The Story of Stuff video clip](#) cued for waste disposal section (16:47-19:02), (See instructions under To Do List right below)
  - [Blessed Is the Spot](#)
  - [When birds eat plastic!!](#)
  - [E-Waste: Dumping on the Poor](#)

For the Garbage Audit:

- A trash can containing trash that is representative of the waste that your facility/home generates.
- A thick paper tarpaulin or large pieces of cardboard (avoid a plastic tarp) on which the trash will be poured, and which you will dispose of at the end of the activity.
- Rubber gloves – preferably thick, reusable dishwashing/ cleaning gloves, not thin latex gloves.
- A mop and bucket to clean up any spills.
- Pen and paper to record ideas
- Camera to document the waste

## Session 5 To Do List

**Set up the following four videos on your computer:**

- The prayer *Blessed Is the Spot*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13P2R4J6XHg>
- Session 5 *Story of Stuff* video clip (16:47-19:02)  
<http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/>
  - START at 16.47 (“So in the end, what happens”)
  - STOP at 19:02 (“for true recycling.”)
- When birds eat plastic!! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYsJESXhnu0>
- E-Waste: Dumping on the Poor 4:35  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXzsqTFwV3Q&list=PLABD6CFAE7E1A475E>

- Copy the handouts *for each participant* which contain the Opening Prayer, Introduction, Spiritual Reading, Another Way, Closing Prayer, and Action Plan. (Pages 8 - 12)
- Garbage Audit set up – Find a can of trash that is representative of the waste your facility (or home) generates. Have it ready some place where you don't mind emptying a can of garbage. We recommend doing this outside. Have the paper tarp set up next to the can and gloves ready to hand out to students.
- Post Right Stuff Action board for Session 5 on wall.
- If the youth decided to have their parents present in Session 6, create and copy invitations for the parents, so that the youth can take them home at the end of Session 5.

## SESSION 5: OVERVIEW

### ENTER AND CONNECT (10 MIN)

- Opening prayer
- Sharing and Getting Organized

### INTRODUCE (5 MIN)

#### THINK (14 MIN)

- Story of Stuff Video Clip
- Waste Quiz

### REFLECT (15 MIN)

- Spiritual Reading

### ENGAGE (30 MIN)

- Getting the Picture (Two short videos)
- Garbage Audit (Optional)

### ENACT (12 MIN)

- Another Way Sheet
- Service Project
- Action Plans

### EXIT (4 MIN)

- Closing Prayer(s)

Total Estimated Time: 90 min.

# SESSION 5 - PLAN

## The Story of Stuff - What a waste!

### ENTER AND CONNECT (10Min)

#### Opening Prayer(s)

Warmly welcome the youth and pass out the handouts for Session 5.

Then listen and watch another beautiful rendition of the prayer “Blessed Is the Spot”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13P2R4J6XHg>

The length of the video is only 0:53.

Then ask one or more participants to say a prayer. You will find one prayer as a suggestion in the Handouts for Session 5. (Just scroll down.)

#### Sharing and Getting Organized

##### Review and Reflection:

- What did we do last week? What did we learn?
- What was it like for you to spend the week more aware of media manipulation?
- **How were you able to practice the virtues of *contentment and detachment*?**

**Right Stuff Action Board** - Discuss actions taken since last session. Let them post any pictures they brought on the Right Stuff Action board or poster. (Or let them write a sentence about it.)

**Promises** - If necessary, briefly review the Promises together.

### INTRODUCE (5 Min.)

Have the participants take turns reading the **Introduction** in the Handouts, one reader per paragraph.

### THINK (10 Min.)

#### Part 1 Story of Stuff Video Clip

##### Preparation:

Set up The Story of Stuff video clip on the topic of disposal: <http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/>

- START at 16:47 (“So in the end, what happens ...”)
- STOP at 19:02 (“for true recycling.”)

##### Instructions:

- Tell the group that they are going to watch a section of the video about the disposal of stuff.
- Watch the video clip.
- Discuss – What do you think?

## Part 2 - Waste Quiz (6 Min.)

Tell the group that they will be taking a little Waste Quiz and ask them the following questions. Provide answers after a few youth have had the chance to offer their guesses.

### WASTE QUIZ

**Q: How much waste does the average American generate each year?**

A: 4.6 pounds/day which is more than 1600 lbs. a year. That's the size of two adult gorillas!

**Q: What is the most toxic man-made chemical?**

A: Dioxin. And we release dioxin every time we burn PVC or plastic #3.

**Q: How many cell phones are being thrown out in the US each year?**

A: About 130 million. This is especially sobering when you consider the number of toxic chemicals in our cell phones and that, if we chuck our phones into landfills, those toxic chemicals leach into our groundwater or, if the phones are being incinerated, they release, you guessed it, dioxin!

**Q: How many pounds of clothing does the average American throw away and how much of that ends up in landfill?**

A: The average American throws away about 68 pounds of clothing and textiles each year – and about 85 percent of that ends up in landfills.

**Q: How big is the largest floating garbage patch (that's a patch of garbage that has accumulated from all the stuff we have thrown into our ocean)?**

A: The size of Texas, and a second patch in the Atlantic ocean was just discovered!

**Discussion Question:** What are the most common things you throw away daily or weekly?

## REFLECT: (15 Min.)

### Spiritual Reading for Session 5 - Our Interconnectedness with Nature and Humankind

Read the Spiritual Reading for Session 5 taking turns after each paragraph. You will find the Spiritual Reading in the Handouts for Session 5, just scroll down.

## ENGAGE (30 Min.)

### Part 1 – Getting the Picture (15 Min.)

**Preparation:** Open the links of the following two videos on your computer.

#### Instructions:

1. Watch this **4 min. video: When birds eat plastic!!**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYsJESXhnu0>

This short film shows the *environmental* impact of trash.

2. Watch this **video: E-Waste: Dumping on the Poor 4:35**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXzsqTFwV3Q&list=PLABD6CFAE7E1A475E>

This short film shows the *human* cost of trash.

Allow a few minutes for sharing emotions and for discussion after each video.

## Part 2 - Garbage Audit (15 Min)

### Summary

A garbage audit is an entertaining, memorable, and effective way to educate people about the importance of good waste management and recycling habits, and to motivate them to take action. The goal of such an audit is to identify ways for your facility or home to reduce the amount of garbage it generates – whether through recycling or by decreasing the amount of trash generated in the first place. By taking a look at the waste we create we become aware how we personally contribute to the problem and how we can become part of the solution. You will need to be careful to contain the garbage activity so it doesn't take the whole session.

### Step 1: Get Prepared

The audit will involve pouring out a trash container onto a tarpaulin – so you need to make sure you have got the materials you will need. We recommend that you dress in clothes which can get dirty, and that you conduct the audit *outdoors* or in an auditorium or meeting room where there is a bare, non-carpeted floor and lots of space.

We also recommend that you gather the following items:

- A trash can containing trash that is representative of the waste that your facility/home generates.
- A thick paper tarpaulin or large pieces of recycled cardboard (avoid a plastic tarp) on which the trash will be poured, and which you will dispose of at the end of the activity.
- Rubber gloves – preferably thick, dishwashing/cleaning gloves, not thin latex gloves.
- A mop and bucket to clean up any spills.

### Step 2: Get Started

Carefully pour out the contents of the trash can onto the tarp/cardboard and sort the waste into the following piles:

- Paper
- Aluminum, plastic and glass
- Food scraps
- Other food-related waste – e.g. Styrofoam cups or plates, soiled paper, soiled aluminum foil

When you have sorted the waste into piles, assess how much of your waste falls into each of the categories above.

### Step 3: Analyze your Garbage

Have a youth write down the suggestions for how to decrease waste. Have another youth in charge of photos, so they can share their experience with the community.

Make the following plans in relation to each of the waste categories:

- Office paper can be recycled.
- Aluminum, plastic and glass can be recycled as long as there is no food waste attached to them. For example, an empty aluminum can is recyclable, while a piece of aluminum foil with cheese from a pizza melted onto it is not recyclable.
- Food scraps can be composted.
- Other food-related waste may in many cases be eliminated. For instance – paper cups or Styrofoam mugs can be replaced by mugs or cups, which can be used over and over and washed in a dishwasher or by hand. The same is true for paper or Styrofoam plates and plastic cutlery.

#### **Step 4: Separate the Piles and Clean Up**

When you have finished analyzing your garbage, separate the recyclable and compostable materials and find ways to properly dispose of them. Then pick up the tarp/cardboard by its corners and replace the remaining trash, with the tarp/cardboard, into the garbage can.

Most institutions find that they can reduce the amount of garbage that they generate by over 50% if they follow these four steps and address each of the different waste categories listed above!

#### **ENACT: (5 Min.)**

#### **Another Way - Practical Actions We Can Take**

Read and briefly discuss this paragraph which you will find in the handouts. It provides some ideas what we all can do to reduce waste.

#### **Group Service Project**

Tell the youth that *in the next session* you will decide on a small group service project.

Briefly brainstorm how you as a group could help improve your community/surroundings. What does your community need? Is there a need for more education about the harmfulness of consumerism? Or is there an area in your town that needs a clean-up?

Think of a service project that your group can do together to make your community better. Consider the needs of your community as well as the age and capacity of the youth group and the time available. Keep this conversation brief. You don't have to make a decision today.

#### **Action Plan**

Ask students to pull out their Action Plan in the handouts of Session 5 which you distributed at the beginning of this session.

1. If necessary, review the Action Plan instructions together.
2. Give the participants some time to decide on their actions for the week (5 min.)

#### **EXIT 5 (Min.)**

#### **Closing Conversation**

**Encourage** students to practice the **virtue of compassion** when carrying out their actions.

Remind the participants that the **next session will be the last one**. If your group decided to invite their parent(s)/guardian(s) to help celebrate the completion of the course, hand out the **letter with the invitation** to parents. Encourage the youth to decorate and personalize their invitation at home.

#### **Closing Prayer**

The handout contains a suggestion for a closing prayer. You may be surprised with the reference of "Author unknown" for the prayer "O God, refresh and gladden my spirit." It used to be included in Bahá'í prayer books and attributed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but a few years ago, the Universal House of Justice wrote to the Publishing Trust to explain that this prayer has not been authenticated.

#### **After the Class - Follow Up**

If your group decided to invite their parent(s)/guardian(s) to the last session, send an email or call parents to invite them to the last session.

# SESSION 5 HANDOUTS

## The Story of Stuff - What a Waste!

### OPENING PRAYER

*O Thou kind Lord! Thou hast created all humanity from the same stock. Thou hast decreed that all shall belong to the same household. In Thy Holy Presence they are all Thy servants, and all mankind are sheltered beneath Thy Tabernacle; all have gathered together at Thy Table of Bounty; all are illumined through the light of Thy Providence.*

*O God! Thou art kind to all, Thou hast provided for all, dost shelter all, conferrest life upon all. Thou hast endowed each and all with talents and faculties, and all are submerged in the Ocean of Thy Mercy.*

*O Thou kind Lord! Unite all. Let the religions agree and make the nations one, so that they may see each other as one family and the whole earth as one home. May they all live together in perfect harmony.*

*O God! Raise aloft the banner of the oneness of mankind.*

*O God! Establish the Most Great Peace.*

*Cement Thou, O God, the hearts together.*

*O Thou kind Father, God! Gladden our hearts through the fragrance of Thy love. Brighten our eyes through the Light of Thy Guidance. Delight our ears with the melody of Thy Word, and shelter us all in the Stronghold of Thy Providence.*

*Thou art the Mighty and Powerful, Thou art the Forgiving and Thou art the One Who overlooketh the shortcomings of all mankind.*

'Abdu'l-Baha

### INTRODUCTION

Now it's time to look at what happens once we are done with our stuff. It seems simple: We throw it away, we put it in the garbage can, the garbage truck comes and Presto! It magically disappears. Or does it?

Once it's taken away, most of us don't give our garbage another thought. We just keep filling our cans over and over again, happy to have someone else dispose of it for us and to not have to look at or smell it ever again. It might be out of our sight, and out of our minds. But it's not off the planet! It doesn't vanish into thin air or gets taken to another planet. It's still here and a part of our world, which is getting piled higher and higher with our garbage.

When we throw our stuff away, where does it go? Where IS away, exactly? What happens to it there? And what is the cost to people and nature?

In this session we are going to take a good look at "away" and the real cost of the enormous pile of junk that's piling up there. When people try, they can significantly reduce the amount of waste they produce.

## SESSION 5 SPIRITUAL READING

### – OUR INTERCONNECTEDNESS WITH NATURE AND HUMANKIND

Everything in nature is interconnected:

*... every part of the universe is connected with every other part by ties that are very powerful and admit of no imbalance, ...*

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, Section 137

Even actions we consider unimportant such as throwing away trash can affect other creatures and other human beings. Our caring actions, of course, can positively affect plants, animals, and other human beings.

Baha'u'llah said:

*Be ye the trustees of God amongst His creatures, and the emblems of His generosity amidst His people.*

Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 297

The center of the Baha'i teachings is the oneness of humankind and that we should live together like one family:

*All mankind are creatures and servants of the one God. The surface of the earth is one home; humanity is one family and household.*

Abdu'l Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace 44

The Baha'i Teachings point out that at present, the household of the human family is not well arranged:

*Some members are comfortable and some in direst misery; some members are satisfied and some are hungry; some members are clothed in most costly garments and some families are in need of food and shelter.*

'Abdu'l Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace 102

Today, many people are still very poor; almost one billion people don't even have enough to eat. Then there are people so rich that they are consuming things, buying Stuff, they don't even need, and thereby damage nature that sustains life. For the most part, poor people are producing the Stuff for the rich. They are often working under harmful conditions and are exploited. In the process of production and disposal, the environment of the poor is often polluted and degraded, which will prevent future generations from living a healthy life. Much of the hazardous (toxic) waste created by rich people is dumped in poor countries or communities making people sick.

All religions teach that we must take care of the poor. Baha'u'llah said:

**"O YE RICH ONES ON EARTH!**

*The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own ease."*

Baha'u'llah, *The Persian Hidden Words*

The Baha'i teachings provide a glimpse into a future spiritual civilization that is truly glorious: While there will always be people with more or less wealth, there will no longer be a large wealth inequality. All people will have their basic needs met, will have access to education, will be able to develop their capacities and to contribute to the well-being of humankind.

The standard to achieve that goal is very high:

*Consort together in brotherly love, be ready to lay down your lives one for the other, and not only for those who are dear to you, but for all humanity. Look upon the whole human race as members of one family, all children of God; and, in so doing, you will see no difference between them.*

‘Abdu’l Baha /Paris Talks 53

Baha'u'llah told us that humankind will go through great suffering before it will learn to live according to the divine teachings and establish a world based on peace and justice. Although we know that we will experience great difficulties in the near future, it is quite exciting that we are able to contribute to this great transformation of humanity.

We can personally acquire the spiritual attributes that are prerequisites for a peaceful society. We can live simply and joyously without the constant urge of acquiring new Stuff. We can also become engaged in Baha'i study circles that are conducted all over the world. When we learn and help others to learn, we are building capacity for service. Our love for creation and for humankind motivates us to preserve this Earth for future generations.

*It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.*

Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 167

## ANOTHER WAY - PRACTICAL ACTIONS WE ALL CAN TAKE

Reduce, reuse, recycle and rot. The mantra may be simple, but it's filled with wisdom. First you have to reduce the amount of stuff you buy, use and throw away, then you should keep on reusing it, and then (if you can't think of anything better to do with it) you can go ahead and recycle it. If it's an organic material, you can put it in the compost and let it rot. Of course, that means you have to set up a compost pile if you don't have one already.

More tips:

- Bring your own bag when you go out shopping.
- Skip bottled water and use reusable bottles instead.
- Buy second hand when possible. It is better for the planet, less expensive, and sometimes even more original.
- Only buy what you really need!

## CLOSING PRAYER

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.

Author unknown

## SESSION 5 ACTION PLAN

### Instructions

Read and think about the actions:

- Which actions would you *like* to do?
- Which seem like you *could do* them?
- Which seem like fun?
- Which seem as if they will really make a difference?

Decide which actions to take:

- Choose which of the many suggested actions you are planning to take. Remember to consider the time you will have available and your other obligations.

Remember to:

- Show your parents your action plan when you get home and ask them to support you.
- When carrying out your actions, remember to apply the **virtue of compassion**.
- If you are working with a buddy, check in at least once this week.
- You can change your action plans.
- You can catch up on any unfinished actions at anytime.

### My Action Plan after Session 5

Remember that everything which we buy, use and dispose of – all the stuff we throw out – goes on to impact nature and other people. Let us take responsibility for our waste, and not burden others with it.

### Create

- Trash art - Make some art out of trash.

### Communicate

- Make a poster to help folks understand what gets recycled, composted and sent to the landfill. Start by looking up your local recycling facility: <http://earth911.com/>

### Get Smart

- Take a dump trip – Find out where your local dump is by looking online. If your town doesn't have a dump find the local transfer station. Take a trip to either the dump or the transfer station and just see what happens to your stuff. Reflect on it and write your thoughts and feelings in your journal.

### Try Something New

- Repair something: fix your bike, replace a button on a jacket. Take a picture of it and show it.
- Say no to plastic - Avoid single use plastics like bottled water, straws, and yogurt cups - bring your lunch in a cloth bag. Write down what you did.
- Lose waste weight - Weigh your family's garbage. See if you can reduce it by at least 1 lb the next week. See how low you can get your garbage.

## Have Insights

No More Away - Next time you throw something away just think about the fact that there is no away. Imagine that all the stuff you see came from nature and will one day end up in a landfill. Reflect on these questions and write your response in your journal. What does that make you feel? How would your life be different if you were always aware of that?

## Be an Example

With peers

Host a Trash to Treasure party. Have friends over and turn trash into art. Check out this slideshow to get inspired: <https://www.treehugger.com/slideshows/style/rethinking-trash-into-inspired-art/#slide-top>

In your family

Stop The Catalogs - Sign your family up with Catalog Choice and reduce the number of unwanted catalogs that flood your mailbox and destroy thousands and thousands of trees. Visit their website at <http://www.catalogchoice.org/>

In your school

Green Your School - Think about ways to make your school a Zero Waste School or a green school. Draft up an action plan.

In the Baha'i Community

Be an E-Steward - Bring a box as an e-waste pick up for cell phones to your next 19-day feasts and then drop them off with an E-Steward.

Remember to take pictures of anything you did to share and put them on the mural at the next session.

