

BAHÁ'Í CANADA



**Reflections on commemorating
the Twin Holy Birthdays**

From the Writings

Verily I say, this is the Day in which mankind can behold the Face, and hear the Voice, of the Promised One. The Call of God hath been raised, and the light of His countenance hath been lifted up upon men. It behoveth every man to blot out the trace of every idle word from the tablet of his heart, and to gaze, with an open and unbiased mind, on the signs of His Revelation, the proofs of His Mission, and the tokens of His glory.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 10–11.

Concourse of earth and heaven! This is that first night, which God hath made to be a sign of that second night whereon was born He Whom no praise can befittingly extol and no attribute describe. Well is it with him who reflecteth upon them both: Verily, he will find their outer reality to correspond to their inner essence, and will become acquainted with the divine mysteries that lie enshrined in this Revelation, a Revelation through which the foundations of misbelief have been shaken, the idols of superstition have been shattered, and the banner hath been unfurled which proclaimeth, “No God is there but Him, the Powerful, the Exalted, the Incomparable, the Protector, the Mighty, the Inaccessible.”

On this night the fragrance of nearness was wafted, the portals of reunion at the end of days were flung open, and all created things were moved to exclaim: “The Kingdom is God’s, the Lord of all names, Who is come with world-embracing sovereignty!” On this night the Concourse on high celebrated the praise of its Lord, the Exalted, the Most Glorious, and the realities of the divine names extolled Him Who is the King of the beginning and the end in this Revelation, a Revelation through whose potency the mountains have hastened unto Him Who is the All-Sufficing, the Most High, and the hearts have turned towards the countenance of their Best-Beloved, and the leaves have been stirred into motion by the breezes of yearning, and the trees have raised their voices in joyful reply to the call of Him Who is the Unconstrained, and the entire earth hath trembled with longing in its desire to attain reunion with the Eternal King, and all things have been made new by that concealed Word which hath appeared in this mighty Name. Ayyám-i-Tis’ih, pp. 12–15, Selections from Days of Remembrance.

He is the Most Holy, the Most Exalted, the Most Great. The Birthday Festival is come, and He Who is the Beauty of God, the All-Powerful, the All-Compelling, the All-Loving, hath ascended His throne. Well is it with the one who in this Day hath attained His presence and towards whom the gaze of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting, hath been directed. Say: We have celebrated this Festival in the Most Great Prison at a time when the kings of the earth have risen against Us. Yet the ascendancy of the oppressor can never frustrate Us, nor can the hosts of the world dismay Us. Unto this doth the All-Merciful bear witness in this most august station. Say: Should the quintessence of assurance be dismayed before the clamour of the peoples of the world? Nay, by His beauty, which sheddeth its radiance upon all that hath been and all that shall be! This, verily, is the majesty of the Lord that hath encompassed the entire creation, and this is His transcendent power that hath pervaded all them that see and all that is seen. Take fast hold of the cord of His sovereign might and make mention of your Lord, the Unconstrained, at this dawning whose light hath laid bare every hidden secret. Thus hath the tongue of the Ancient of Days spoken on this Day wherein the choice wine hath been unsealed. Take heed lest the vain imaginings of them that have disbelieved in God perturb you, or their idle fancies deter you from this outstretched path.

Ayyám-i-Tis’ih, pp. 45–47, Selections from Days of Remembrance.

This is the month wherein was born He Who beareth the Most Great Name, Whose appearance hath caused the limbs of humankind to quake and the dust of Whose footsteps the Concourse on high and the dwellers of the cities of names have sought for a blessing. Whereupon they rendered praise unto God and cried out in joy and exultation. By God! This is the month through which all other months have been illumined, the month wherein He Who is the hidden Secret and the well-guarded Treasure hath been made manifest and hath called aloud amidst all humankind. All dominion belongeth to this newborn Child through Whom the face of creation hath been wreathed in smiles, and the trees have swayed, and the oceans have surged, and the mountains have taken flight, and Paradise hath lifted its voice, and the Rock hath cried out, and all things have exclaimed, “O concourse of creation! Hasten ye towards the dawning-place of the countenance of your Lord, the Merciful, the Compassionate!” This is the month wherein Paradise itself was decked forth with the splendours of the countenance of its Lord, the All-Merciful, and the heavenly Nightingale warbled its melody upon the Divine Lote-Tree, and the hearts of the favoured ones were filled with rapture. Má’idiy-i-Ásmání, vol. 4, p. 342, Selections from Days of Remembrance.

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ON THE COVER



The entrance to the Shrine in Montreal, Que., once the home of May and William Sutherland Maxwell where 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed in 1912.

Photo: Susan Sheper

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In the Throes of Learning

The following is a contribution the National Spiritual Assembly made to this year's National Convention, which it felt would be of interest to all the friends. It highlights advances made and insights gained by the Canadian Bahá'í Community over the last 20 years, since the start of this series of Plans.

The Canadian Bahá'í community entered the Four Year Plan in 1996 with resolve and vigour. In the first year of the Plan, six training institutes were established, one in each region of the country, and by the spring of 1997 the first training courses, focused on the fundamental verities of the Faith, were being offered.

At the International Convention in 1998, the National Assembly noted the encouraging progress being made in areas of the world using the materials of the Ruhi Institute, and in 1999, called for these materials “to be at the core of Canada’s institute process for the foreseeable future.” This decision provided the nascent institutes with welcome clarity and their attention turned to learning about the curriculum and raising tutors. To support the efforts of the institutes, a special gathering was held in Montreal in May 2000 with the assistance of Counsellors and experienced friends from South America to learn more about the approach and materials of the Ruhi Institute. Among the friends present, there were about 200 tutors, among whom was only one youth. From the insights and encouragement gained at this gathering, the training institutes set numerical goals for training tutors and establishing study circles.

With this greater clarity came increased focus and by the start of the One Year Plan in 2000, the institutes established a rhythm of training; the number of tutors and study circles began to steadily rise. During the brief and critical One Year Plan, the institutes established the first, simple schemes of coordination, most commonly consisting of a few “area coordinators” that helped organize tutor training and lent support to tutors as they began study circles. By the end of the One Year Plan, more than 2,000 people in Canada had completed at least one institute course, with hundreds moving on to the study of subsequent courses—a pyramid of human resources was filling out.

A persistent question was how to help these devoted friends serve effectively. The introduction in 2001 of the concepts of clusters and core activities was invaluable. These activities, each building on the learning and achievements of the previous Plan, helped channel human resources to strengthen patterns of growth in small geographic areas in which the friends could read their reality, plan, and collaborate for the progress of the Cause. Working to help some 50 people complete the full sequence of courses in a number of



The first training institute campaign in Toronto, Ont. in 1997. The courses used at the time focused on the fundamental verities of the Faith.

clusters in each region, the training institutes gained a great deal of experience with the first few courses of the curriculum and began to more systematically incorporate the practice components of the courses. As a result, more and more friends across the country achieved a deeper understanding of the nature of teaching the Faith and their practical ability to share the Word of God with others increased. More and more invitations were being extended to friends of the Faith—family, neighbours, co-workers and others—to join core activities. These activities became centres of unity and points of attraction, not only for members of the Bahá'í community, but gradually for more and more of their friends.

In September 2002, the Vancouver-UBC cluster achieved the conditions necessary to accelerate the work of expansion and consolidation, establishing the first intensive programme of growth in North America: “the systems the Plan requires are in place; the friends can now proceed with full confidence to welcome a steadily rising number of their friends, neighbors, relatives and co-workers into the core activities and fireside gatherings.” Throughout 2004 and 2005, additional clusters established propitious conditions and began intensive programmes of growth, largely the result of efforts to help 50 or so individuals complete the full sequence of courses. All in all, Canada concluded the Plan at Ridván 2006 with 17 intensive programmes of growth. Across the country there were well over 1,000 core activities with more than 7,000 participants, nearly 20 percent of whom were from the wider community.

The Canadian Bahá'í community thus entered the Five Year Plan at Ridván 2006 on a firm foundation.



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Efforts of the previous Plans had begun to give rise to a new culture, a culture characterized by teaching and learning. The community was abandoning any last traces of a congregational mindset and a renewed confidence emerged that the peoples of the world were indeed receptive. The goal to raise the number of intensive programmes of growth from 17 to 46 strengthened the resolve of the friends and institutions to labour unceasingly to bring the Word of God to the peoples of Canada and to contribute to a new culture, to an advancing civilization.

Institutes had been making efforts to engage junior youth since the One Year Plan. Their efforts, while small, had confirmed that this age group is eager to engage in meaningful conversation about profound themes and to serve; there were many positive stories of junior youth thriving in the environment of a junior youth group. In the summer of 2005, a group of youth in Ottawa reached out to junior youth in a small neighbourhood and were able to form a group with some 20 participants, all from the wider community. This initiative and the study of the guidance led the institutes at the start of this second Five Year Plan to launch systematic efforts to raise animators and begin junior youth groups, setting the community on a path of learning in action that would yield some of the finest fruits of this series of Plans. The response of junior youth and children to these efforts was greater than what was ever imagined by these young people during their training.

Engaging junior youth led the institutes to think about neighbourhoods, small geographic areas where people could walk to activities, and where the Faith could become known as a source of moral and spiritual excellence. In these small settings, where families live and people naturally interact, pursuit of a two-fold purpose would contribute in time to a change in culture. In the first few years of the Plan, junior youth groups were formed in dozens of neighbourhoods in clusters that were working to establish intensive programmes of growth.

As this second Five Year Plan opened, the training institutes began gaining more experience in helping participants study the higher level courses in the sequence, and this led naturally to consultation about how to help these friends teach directly and participate in teaching projects. At the same time, those working with junior youth in neighbourhoods began to realize that for the junior youth programme to root more deeply and grow further, residents needed to learn more about Bahá'u'lláh and His Faith. This launched the community into learning about direct teaching and collective teaching projects. Hundreds of teaching projects were held in cluster after cluster across the



A teaching project in Montreal, Que. in 2008.

country in which hundreds upon hundreds of friends sought to engage those in the wider community—family, neighbours, co-workers and many who lived in particular neighbourhoods. In the span of a few cycles, capacity to teach collectively began to rise—the friends began to think about teaching not just individuals, but families and groups of friends; consciousness of the movement of populations was increasing. These years hold some of the most precious and moving memories of this series of Plans.

These efforts gave rise to tremendous learning and capacity. The response of people from all walks of life to the Message convinced the friends and institutions that the peoples of Canada are receptive, despite preconceptions that this was an insular, secular society in which people were not willing to talk about spiritual matters and religion. All witnessed the tremendous receptivity, particularly of young people, and the unifying effect core activities had at the level of a neighbourhood or in a network. The efforts strengthened the learning process as the friends and agencies strove to become more effective at teaching and community building—these efforts strengthened the community's commitment to learning in action. Action, reflection and consultation became more woven into the pattern of individual and collective action. We learned how to go beyond making presentations to engaging people in a meaningful and distinctive conversation, a conversation born out of love and carried on with humility and caring. The institutes gained greater insight into the dynamics of training and accompanying friends into the field of service. The community became more aware, more nurturing. Teaching became natural.

Such were the achievements of this Plan. A new culture that took root in the initial Plans began to give beautiful fruits. In the course of the Plan, some 800 core activities were established, the number of participants nearly doubled—and now, nearly one-third were from the wider community. And, the goal of the Plan—which seemed so daunting at the start—was surpassed.



NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF CANADA

The Canadian Bahá'í community entered the third Five Year Plan having established 49 intensive programmes of growth and immediately began to build on these accomplishments—to strengthen further these 49 and bring the insights to another 58 clusters.

Over the past 5 years, in cluster after cluster, in every kind of social environment in the country—from the south to the far north, from the east to the west—small yet coherent programmes of growth began to emerge as the learning process strengthened. At the same time, clusters with intensive programmes of growth strengthened the pattern of action further, drawing more people into core activities and enriching the culture of learning that had taken root in the previous Plan.

Two strategies helped the community achieve the aims of the Plan: first, waves of homefront pioneers and travelling teachers—many of them youth—travelled to clusters, settled in neighbourhoods, and began working to reach the first milestone; and second, strengthening a movement of youth. These friends, bolstered by the constant encouragement and support of the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, helped the friends increase the number of programmes of growth to 108—a programme has now been established in over 90 percent of clusters across the country.

The receptivity of junior youth to the spiritual empowerment programme has never been an obstacle to its growth; the limit has been the number of trained animators. This realization led to sustained efforts to reach youth in cluster after cluster, to engage them in a meaningful and distinctive conversation and assist them to walk a path of service to their communities, ideally as animators. The youth conferences, held just after the mid-point of the Plan, drew thousands of



A group of youth at the Vancouver youth conference in 2013, map out their community to help them make plans to bolster its material and spiritual development.

youth together in a common pursuit. The institutes began learning about how to help contingents of youth to enter the institute process and complete book after book—building their capacity to contribute to an advancing civilization. By the end of the Plan, nearly 5,000 youth in Canada were engaged in this movement to some degree. All of these efforts led to a doubling of the number of junior youth participating in a group.

As we gather at the Convention this weekend and embark on the next stage in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan, we reflect on the manifold evidences in the increase in capacity of each of the three protagonists of civilization.

In these youth who have responded to His call we get a glimpse of a new individual, an individual walking—in the company of others—a path of service to the community with humility and love: an individual learning with others how to navigate past the pitfalls of an increasingly materialistic world, to live life more coherently, and to contribute to a spiritual and prosperous civilization.

In these neighbourhoods we have a glimmer of a new community, a community that prays together, that is aware of the presence of the sacred, conscious of the need to nurture the younger generations, that seeks to draw those who are excluded into the circle of friendship, that reflects and consults together about its future—a community learning to speak with one voice and work together as the fingers of one hand.

And supporting all of these achievements we see a new kind of institution emerging, institutions that collaborate together, that are concerned and work for the welfare of each and all, institutions learning to nurture human capacity and channel it for the betterment of the world.



A banner created by youth at the youth conference held in Toronto, Ont. in July 2013, among the first 114 conferences across the world called for by the Universal House of Justice.



Accounts from the commemorations of the Twin Holy Birthdays

The Universal House of Justice, in its 10 July 2014 message in which the adoption of the Badí' calendar is announced, writes that Naw-Rúz of 172 B.E. (2015) marked “yet another historic step in the manifestation of the unity of the people of Bahá' and the unfoldment of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order.”¹

“The adoption of a new calendar in each dispensation,” the House of Justice writes, “is a symbol of the power of Divine Revelation to reshape human perception of material, social and spiritual reality. Through it, sacred moments are distinguished, humanity's place in time and space reimagined, and the rhythm of life recast.”²

One such sacred moment came as, for the first time, Bahá'ís and their friends the world over commemorated the Twin Birthdays of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh on two consecutive days, two days that “are accounted as one in the sight of God.”³

Regarding “these blessed Days” in which, “nearly two centuries ago, the whole world was illumined with the light of a new Manifestation of God,”⁴ the following guidance was written on behalf of the House of Justice:

The friends should regard the Twin Festivals as a sacred moment to gather and strengthen the devotional and social life of the community and as a priceless opportunity to reach out to friends, family, and the wider society and share with them the significance of the lives and missions of these two most precious Beings.⁵

Another recent message written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice regarding the bicentenaries of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb in 2017 and 2019, respectively, bears special connection to the theme of this issue, and is included in a separate booklet with a number of other messages from the Universal House of Justice. As stated in the letter, “The House of Justice feels it would now be timely to explore further the manner in which these highly significant Festivals are to be celebrated so that preparations can begin to be made.”⁶ This issue captures some elements of the first Twin Holy Day commemorations that were held across Canada, just as the friends begin to consider how to celebrate the upcoming bicentenaries in a manner that “conveys a sense of what it means for humanity that these two Luminaries rose successively above the horizon of the world.”⁷ Such elements include: the spirit of love and devotion infused into the planning and the arrangement of the programs;

the careful consideration given to creating a reverent and reflective atmosphere; the thoughtful invitations extended to family, friends and the wider society—all culminating in two days “to commemorate moments when a Being peerless in creation, a Manifestation of God, was born to the world.”⁸

Several other messages from the Universal House of Justice are included in this booklet, including messages related to the details of the new Five Year Plan and the centenary of the revelation of the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, as well as the most recent Ridván message, and a message regarding the movement of pioneers in this Plan.

Included at the beginning of this issue is a contribution the National Spiritual Assembly made to this year's National Convention, titled “In the Throes of Learning.” It highlights the advances made and insights gained by the Canadian Bahá'í Community over the last 20 years, since the start of this series of Plans. The Annual Report of the National Spiritual Assembly, while not included in this issue, is available on the *Bahá'í Canada* website: www.bahaicanada.bahai.ca. Please note, you must register if this is your first time accessing the website; however, this is only for the short term as the password protection feature of the *Bahá'í Canada* website will be removed in the coming months.

Also included in this issue are reflections on marriage and family life that emerged from a gathering in which a number of friends reflected together on relevant guidance and a selection of Writings in light of their own experiences. The account is a distillation of some reflections, thoughts and sentiments shared that evening.

It is hoped that as Holy Days are commemorated across the country, the friends will feel impelled to share their accounts and reflections, particularly on the way Holy Day observances enhance the devotional character of the community, acquaint more and more hearts with Bahá'u'lláh and His Revelation and strengthen Bahá'í identity.

- 1 The Universal House of Justice, 10 July 2014.
- 2 The Universal House of Justice, 10 July 2014.
- 3 Quoted in 10 July 2014 letter from the Universal House of Justice.
- 4 A letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 8 September 2015.
- 5 A letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 8 September 2015.
- 6 A letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 18 May 2016.
- 7 A letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 18 May 2016.
- 8 The Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 29 December 2015.

From the history of the Bahá'í Faith

The Son of Mírzá Buzurg-i-Núrí

The following account from The Dawnbreakers describes Bahá'u'lláh's response to a scroll from the Báb. The letter is delivered to Bahá'u'lláh by Mullá Mubammad-i-Mu'allim at the request of Mullá Husayn.

Tell me," further enquired Mullá Husayn, "is there to-day among the family of the late Mírzá Buzurg-i-Núrí, who was so renowned for his character, his charm, and artistic and intellectual attainments, anyone who has proved himself capable of maintaining the high traditions of that illustrious house?" "Yea," I replied, "among his sons now living, one has distinguished Himself by the very traits which characterised His father. By His virtuous life, His high attainments, His loving-kindness and liberality, He has proved Himself a noble descendant of a noble father." "What is His occupation?" he asked me. "He cheers the disconsolate and feeds the hungry," I replied. "What of His rank and position?" "He has none," I said, "apart from befriending the poor and the stranger." "What is His name?" "Husayn-'Alí." "In which of the scripts of His father does He excel?" "His favourite script is *shikastih-nasta'liq*." "How does He spend His time?" "He roams the woods and delights in the beauties of the countryside." "What is His age?" "Eight

and twenty." The eagerness with which Mullá Husayn questioned me, and the sense of delight with which he welcomed every particular I gave him, greatly surprised me. Turning to me, with his face beaming with satisfaction and joy, he once more enquired: "I presume you often meet Him?" "I frequently visit His home," I replied. "Will you," he said, "deliver into His hands a trust from me?" "Most assuredly," was my reply. He then gave me a scroll wrapped in a piece of cloth, and requested me to hand it to Him the next day at the hour of dawn. "Should He deign to answer me," he added, "will you be kind enough to acquaint me with His reply. I received the scroll from him and, at break of day, arose to carry out his desire.

"As I approached the house of Bahá'u'lláh, I recognised His brother Mírzá Músá, who was standing at the gate, and to whom I communicated the object of my visit. He went into the house and soon reappeared bearing a message of welcome. I was ushered into His presence, and presented the scroll to Mírzá Músá, who laid it before Bahá'u'lláh. He bade us both be seated. Unfolding the scroll, He glanced at its contents and began to read aloud to us certain of its passages. I sat enraptured as I listened to the sound of His voice and the sweetness of its melody. He had read a page of the scroll when, turning to His brother, He said: "Músá,

"I have written down in My mention of Him," He thus extols the Author of the anticipated Revelation, "these gem-like words: 'No allusion of Mine can allude unto Him, neither anything mentioned in the Bayán.'" "I, Myself, am but the first servant to believe in Him and in His signs..." "The year-old germ" He significantly affirms, "that holdeth within itself the potentialities of the Revelation that is to come is endowed with a potency superior to the combined forces of the whole of the Bayán." And again: "The whole of the Bayán is only a leaf amongst the leaves of His Paradise." "Better is it for thee," He similarly asserts, "to recite but one of the verses of Him Whom God shall make manifest than to set down the whole of the Bayán, for on that Day that one verse can save thee, whereas the entire Bayán cannot save thee." "Today the Bayán is in the stage of seed; at the beginning of the manifestation of Him Whom God shall make manifest its ultimate perfection will become apparent." "The Bayán deriveth all its glory from Him Whom God shall make manifest." "All that hath been revealed in the Bayán is but a ring upon My hand, and I Myself am, verily, but a ring upon the hand of Him Whom God shall make manifest... He turneth it as He pleaseth, for whatsoever He pleaseth, and through whatsoever He pleaseth. He, verily, is the Help in Peril, the Most High." "Certitude itself," He, in reply to Váhid and to one of the Letters of the Living who had inquired regarding the promised One, had declared, "is ashamed to be called upon to certify His truth ... and Testimony itself is ashamed to testify unto Him." Addressing this same Váhid, He moreover had stated: "Were I to be assured that in the day of His manifestation thou wilt deny Him, I would unhesitatingly disown thee ... If, on the other hand, I be told that a Christian, who beareth no allegiance to My Faith, will believe in Him, the same will I regard as the apple of My eye."

And finally is this, His moving invocation to God: "Bear Thou witness that, through this Book, I have covenanted with all created things concerning the mission of Him Whom Thou shalt make manifest, ere the covenant concerning My own mission had been established. Sufficient witness art Thou and they that have believed in Thy signs." "I, verily, have not fallen short of My duty to admonish that people," is yet another testimony from His pen, "...If on the day of His Revelation all that are on earth bear Him allegiance, Mine inmost being will rejoice, inasmuch as all will have attained the summit of their existence... If not, My soul will be saddened. I truly have nurtured all things for this purpose. How, then, can any one be veiled from Him?"

— Shoghi Effendi quoting the Báb, *God Passes By*, pp. 30-31.

what have you to say? Verily I say, whoso believes in the Qur'án and recognises its Divine origin, and yet hesitates, though it be for a moment, to admit that these soul-stirring words are endowed with the same regenerating power, has most assuredly erred in his judgment and has strayed far from the path of justice." He spoke no more. Dismissing me from His presence, He charged me to take to Mullá Husayn, as a gift from Him, a loaf of Russian sugar and a package of tea, and to convey to him the expression of His appreciation and love.

"I arose and, filled with joy, hastened back to Mullá Husayn, and delivered to him the gift and message of Bahá'u'lláh. With what joy and exultation he received them from me! Words fail me to describe the intensity of his emotion. He started to his feet, received with bowed head the gift from my hand, and fervently kissed it. He then took me in his arms, kissed my eyes, and said: "My dearly beloved friend! I pray that even as you have rejoiced my heart, God may grant you eternal felicity and fill your heart with imperishable gladness." I was amazed at the behaviour of Mullá Husayn. What could be, I thought to myself, the nature of the bond that unites these two souls? What could have kindled so fervid a fellowship in their hearts? Why should Mullá Husayn, in whose sight the pomp and circumstance of royalty were the merest trifle, have evinced such gladness at the sight of so inconsiderable a gift from the hands of Bahá'u'lláh? I was puzzled by this thought and could not unravel its mystery.

"A few days later, Mullá Husayn left for Khurásán. As he bade me farewell, he said: "Breathe not to anyone what you have heard and witnessed. Let this be a secret hidden within your breast. Divulge not His name, for they who envy His position will arise to harm Him. In

your moments of meditation, pray that the Almighty may protect Him, that, through Him, He may exalt the downtrodden, enrich the poor, and redeem the fallen. The secret of things is concealed from our eyes. Ours is the duty to raise the call of the New Day and to proclaim this Divine Message unto all people..."

– *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, pp. 104 – 108.

Bahá'u'lláh, the Dervish, and His visit to Núr

This story is an example of how Bahá'u'lláh would guide people to truth.

One day, in the course of one of His riding excursions into the country, Bahá'u'lláh, accompanied by His companions, saw, seated by the roadside, a lonely youth. His hair was dishevelled, and he wore the dress of a dervish. By the side of a brook he had kindled a fire, and was cooking his food and eating it. Approaching him, Bahá'u'lláh most lovingly enquired: "Tell Me, dervish, what is it that you are doing?" "I am engaged in eating God," he bluntly replied. "I am cooking God and am burning Him." The unaffected simplicity of his manners and the candour of his reply pleased Bahá'u'lláh extremely. He smiled at his remark and began to converse with him with unrestrained tenderness and freedom. Within a short space of time, Bahá'u'lláh had changed him completely. Enlightened as to the true nature of God, and with a mind purged from the idle fancy of his own people, he immediately recognised the Light which that loving Stranger had so unexpectedly brought him. That dervish, whose name was Mustafá, became so enamoured with the teachings which had been instilled into his mind that, leaving his cooking



Bahá'u'lláh's room in His house in Takur, Mázindarán, kept in its original condition. – Copyright © Bahá'í International Community

utensils behind, he straightway arose and followed Bahá'u'lláh. On foot, behind His horse, and inflamed with the fire of His love, he chanted merrily verses of a love-song which he had composed on the spur of the moment and had dedicated to his Beloved. "Thou art the Day-Star of guidance," ran its glad refrain. "Thou art the Light of Truth. Unveil Thyself to men, O Revealer of the Truth." Although, in later years, that poem obtained wide circulation among his people, and it became known that a certain dervish, surnamed Majdhúb, and whose name was Mustafá Big-i-Sanandájí, had, without premeditation, composed it in praise of his Beloved, none seemed to be aware to whom it actually referred, nor did anyone suspect, at a time when Bahá'u'lláh was still veiled from the eyes of men, that this dervish alone had recognised His station and discovered His glory.

Bahá'u'lláh's visit to Núr had produced the most far-reaching results, and had lent a remarkable impetus to the spread of the new-born Revelation. By His magnetic eloquence, by the purity of His life, by the dignity of His bearing, by the unanswerable logic of His argument, and by the many evidences of His loving-kindness, Bahá'u'lláh had won the hearts of the people of Núr, had stirred their souls, and had enrolled them under the standard of the Faith. Such was the effect of words and deeds, as He went about preaching the Cause and revealing its glory to His countrymen in Núr, that the very stones and trees of that district seemed to have been quickened by the waves of spiritual power which emanated from His person. All things seemed to be endowed with a new and more abundant life, all things seemed to be proclaiming aloud: "Behold, the Beauty of God has been made manifest! Arise, for He has come in all His glory." The people of Núr, when Bahá'u'lláh had departed from out their midst, continued to propagate the Cause and to consolidate its foundations. A number of them endured the severest afflictions for His sake; others quaffed with gladness the cup of martyrdom in His path. Mázindarán in general, and Núr in particular, were thus distinguished from the other provinces and districts of Persia, as being the first to have eagerly embraced the Divine Message. The district of Núr, literally meaning "light," which lay embedded within the mountains of Mázindarán, was the first to catch the rays of the Sun that had arisen in Shíráz, the first to proclaim to the rest of Persia, which still lay enveloped in the shadow of the vale of heedlessness, that the Day-Star of heavenly guidance had at length arisen to warm and illuminate the whole land.

— *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, pp. 118 – 119.

The Báb

The following is an excerpt from Some Answered Questions that describes the Báb's life, mission and station.

For the Báb—may my soul be His sacrifice!—it was at a young age, that is, in the twenty-fifth year of His blessed life, that He arose to proclaim His Cause. Among the Shí'íhs it is universally acknowledged that He never studied in any school, nor acquired learning from any teacher. To this the people of Shíráz, each and all, bear witness. Nevertheless, He suddenly appeared before the people, endowed with consummate knowledge, and though but a merchant, confounded all the divines of Persia. Alone, He undertook a task that can scarcely be conceived, for the Persians are known throughout the world for their religious fanaticism. This illustrious Being arose with such power as to shake the foundations of the religious laws, customs, manners, morals, and habits of Persia, and instituted a new law, faith, and religion. Though the eminent men of the State, the majority of the people, and the leaders of religion arose one and all to destroy and annihilate Him, He single-handedly withstood them and set all of Persia in motion. How numerous the divines, the leaders, and the inhabitants of that land who with perfect joy and gladness offered up their lives in His path and hastened to the field of martyrdom!

The government, the nation, the clergy, and prominent leaders sought to extinguish His light, but to no avail. At last His moon rose, His star shone forth, His foundation was secured, and His horizon was flooded with light. He trained a large multitude through divine education and exerted a marvellous influence upon the thoughts, customs, morals, and manners of the Persians. He proclaimed the glad-tidings of the manifestation of the Sun of Bahá to all His followers and readied them for faith and certitude.

The manifestation of such marvellous signs and mighty undertakings, the influence exerted upon the thoughts and minds of the people, the laying of the foundations of progress, and the establishment of the prerequisites of success and prosperity by a young merchant constitute the greatest proof that He was a universal Educator—a fact that no fair-minded person would ever hesitate to acknowledge.

— 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 8.



The House of the Báb, Shiraz, Iran, before its destruction in 1979. Copyright © Bahá'í International Community



Towards a wider path: Decentralized Holy Day commemorations in Vancouver, B.C.

The following account illustrates how the Local Spiritual Assembly of Vancouver, B.C., in collaboration with the Auxiliary Board members, strove to raise consciousness of the significance of the Twin Holy Birthdays, and to mobilize friends across the Vancouver cluster to plan decentralized commemorations. These efforts stemmed from a consultation in spring of 2015 on how to increase the quantity and quality of participation in the Bahá'í community's efforts to build a better world.

Over the months following their consultations in spring of 2015, the Auxiliary Board members and the Local Spiritual Assembly encouraged the study of the letter of the Universal House of Justice regarding the Badí' calendar and the newly translated Tablets for the Twin Holy Birthdays of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb. Ongoing exchanges between the Board members and the Local Assembly explored how the ultimate goal of the process leading up to the Holy Days could be viewed in numerical terms—for example, the number of participants and commemorations—but more importantly, in terms of a marked increase in the capacity of the friends “to speak with ease about the Person of Bahá'u'lláh and His Revelation.” In this way, these important events could be seen as part of a process of capacity building, with numerical achievements serving as indicators of the development of that capacity. It would also ensure that the Assembly's role would extend far beyond executing a project or organizing an event to lending impetus to the believers' efforts to refine how they speak of the Twin Manifestations, and would provide an opportunity to consult with the community and

help different groups learn to make simple plans and execute them collectively. Those participating in the consultations achieved a high degree of unity, and that unity undoubtedly was instrumental in achieving the results.



A photograph from one of six celebrations held for the birth of the Báb in the Commercial Drive neighbourhood in Vancouver, B.C. This photo captures a stencil puppet show organized by the participants of a Book 4 study circle.

The Báb, acclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh as the “Essence of Essences,” the “Sea of Seas,” the “Point round Whom the realities of the Prophets and Messengers revolve,” “from Whom God hath caused to proceed the knowledge of all that was and shall be,” Whose “rank excelleth that of all the Prophets,” and Whose “Revelation transcendeth the comprehension and understanding of all their chosen ones,” had delivered His Message and discharged His mission. He Who was, in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the “Morn of Truth” and “Harbinger of the Most Great Light,” Whose advent at once signalized the termination of the “Prophetic Cycle” and the inception of the “Cycle of Fulfillment,” had simultaneously through His Revelation banished the shades of night that had descended upon His country, and proclaimed the impending rise of that Incomparable Orb Whose radiance was to envelop the whole of mankind. He, as affirmed by Himself, “the Primal Point from which have been generated all created things,” “one of the sustaining pillars of the Primal Word of God,” the “Mystic Fane,” the “Great Announcement,” the “Flame of that supernal Light that glowed upon Sinai,” the “Remembrance of God” concerning Whom “a separate Covenant hath been established with each and every Prophet” had, through His advent, at once fulfilled the promise of all ages and ushered in the consummation of all Revelations. He the “Qá'im” (He Who ariseth) promised to the Shí'ahs, the “Mihdí” (One Who is guided) awaited by the Sunnis, the “Return of John the Baptist” expected by the Christians, the “Ushídar-Máh” referred to in the Zoroastrian scriptures, the “Return of Elijah” anticipated by the Jews, Whose Revelation was to show forth “the signs and tokens of all the Prophets”, Who was to “manifest the perfection of Moses, the radiance of Jesus and the patience of Job” had appeared, proclaimed His Cause, been mercilessly persecuted and died gloriously.

— Shoghi Effendi quoting the Báb, *God Passes By*, pp. 57-58.



FROM ACROSS CANADA

To increase the quantity and quality of Holy Day celebrations, a specific approach was taken. Rather than trying to fit a growing community under one roof, the Assembly encouraged neighbourhoods and teaching teams to consult about the opportunities before them to host an array of commemorations that would engage a growing number of their friends and acquaintances. Believers were encouraged to identify all the pockets and networks of contacts they have in each part of the city, to turn over every stone and follow every thread of friendship that exists between the believers and the wider community, and to determine what type of space would be best for them and who would need to meet to plan the commemorations. The Assembly also encouraged the friends to hold larger gatherings where this was desired and feasible, as long as individuals in that part of the city also felt free to hold separate, more intimate commemorations in their homes, if that would be more meaningful for their friends. During this period, the Auxiliary Board members' assistants, sometimes visiting friends in their homes, had conversations with the friends about the significance of observing the Twin Holy Days for the first time globally, and how to converse about the Twin Manifestations.

The approach also capitalized on the rhythm of a three-month cycle that the expansion and consolidation work has established in the cluster. Early in the cycle, conversations at the Nineteen Day Feast in different parts of the city began, but continued beyond the Feast itself. Meanwhile, the unit teaching committees and the Local Assembly had agreed to weave the conversation and associated planning into the consultations already taking place among members of teaching teams and neighbourhoods. At the following reflection meeting, the friends reflected on Holy Day observances—in addition to the core activities—and thus, such observances were naturally incorporated into the efforts of the cycle of growth. The Assembly kept the efforts before the friends at every Feast during the cycle, and the members made special efforts to be present in all the spaces where the friends were planning, commemorating and then reflecting on the Holy Days.

As a result, 24 Holy Day commemorations were held across the city in which more than 900 people participated, including more than 100 friends of the Faith. This contributed to the total of some 30 commemorations held across the cluster, with close to 1,200 participants. Many commented that holding these special commemorations in a decentralized fashion made it possible to mobilize many believers to create sacred and inviting spaces for their community and contacts. Commemorations included those held at

the Bahá'í Centre, in public spaces and in homes, and organized by friends consulting at the Feast, by study circles, and by individual teachers and teaching teams for their friends. They took place at all hours of the two days, from dawn until late in the evening.

An increase in quality was demonstrated in the creativity expressed by many more people planning scores of commemorations compared to a single event characteristic of previous Holy Day observances. Friends have commented on the Assembly's wise and loving leadership in guiding the community to prepare for the Twin Birthdays and on the helpfulness of the Assembly's encouragement to plan for them in concrete ways. A marked increase in the capacity of teaching teams to reflect and plan was witnessed because of the commemorations. One friend shared that during the planning period, a teaching team experienced "the best consultation we have had that focused on creating a space super catered to the needs of our seekers." Another shared that "this helped the team see the need to constantly widen the circle of friends we have because we ran out of seekers to invite." It seems many believers now have a habit of keeping lists of those they are trying to reach out to



Friends learn a circle dance at a Birth of Bahá'u'lláh commemoration in a neighbourhood in Vancouver, B.C.

Photo: Navarana Igloliorte



Friends are welcomed to a commemoration of Bahá'u'lláh's birth in the Commercial Drive neighbourhood in Vancouver, B.C. with a Tsimshian welcome song and dance.

Photo: Navarana Igloliorte



FROM ACROSS CANADA

and teach, and such lists will undoubtedly be helpful in future efforts related to Holy Day commemorations.

Another noteworthy experience centred on a Holy Day celebration that took place in a focus neighbourhood. It provided a concrete example of

how decentralization can increase participation. Some reflections by those in the neighbourhood on this long-term effort are available on the *Bahá'í Canada* website www.bahaicanada.bahai.ca.

– Prepared by a group of friends

Neighbourhood residents commemorate the Twin Birthdays

This account describes how a team serving in the Edmonds neighbourhood in Vancouver, B.C. seized the opportunity to invite those they have met in their community-building efforts to commemorate the Twin Holy Birthdays.

In our neighbourhood, a few of us saw the Twin Holy Birthdays as an excellent opportunity to strengthen bonds of friendship with those in our community, and to connect more friends to the community building process that we are engaged in. A few of us created some simple invitations, and over a weekend, a group of us walked around the neighbourhood to invite children, junior youth, youth and their families—those that we have been connected to through our efforts with junior youth groups, study circles, children's classes and devotional meetings.

Our invitations were simple and sincere. When extending these invitations, we were conscious of ensuring that every member of the family of those we were inviting felt welcome. We shared that these will be celebrations of the birth and lives of the Founders of the Bahá'í Faith, and that it is Their lives and teachings that inspire the community-building activities in which we are involved.

The Holy Days provided an opportunity to hold deeper conversations about the Faith with our friends and neighbours, and now a number of us have committed to continue to learn to connect hearts to the Revelation by studying Book 6 and actively pursuing personal teaching plans and participating in teaching projects.

It was beautiful to see what such modest efforts could yield for these Twin Holy Birthdays: with a small group of friends committing a relatively short amount of time to inviting their friends and their families, we had two celebrations with a total of 32 friends from the neighbourhood participating across both. We prepared a simple program of stories, prayers and songs. The environment created gave rise to conversations that established new friendships and strengthened existing relationships, and many friends continued to sing even after the formal program finished.

Our hope is that this pattern of life being fostered as the community-building process unfolds in our neighbourhood continues to strengthen and embrace

growing numbers of people. We also hope to continue to learn, through our conversations and the various spaces created in the neighbourhood, to draw our friends closer to this transformative process and the Author of the Revelation that is at its heart.

– Kristopher Firth



Twin Holy day commemoration in the Edmonds neighbourhood, in Vancouver, B.C.



Friends commemorate the Twin Holy Birthdays in Prince Rupert, B.C.



Signs of growth at Holy Day Commemoration in Quebec

The following account, written by someone who grew up in Longueuil, Que., describes the commemoration of Bahá'u'lláh held in the community. She describes the beauty of the atmosphere and expresses the manner in which the gathering reveals how much the community has grown in the last ten years as a result of striving to execute the Plans of the Universal House of Justice.

I had the chance to take part in the celebration of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh of the Longueuil community, where I grew up and spent many years. I have taken part in a great number of Bahá'í events in my life, but I can say that during this celebration, I felt a wave of tenderness, unlike anything I have ever felt before. It was an unforgettable day, celebrated in a spirit of brotherhood, co-operation and sharing.

The Longueuil Local Spiritual Assembly spent many hours preparing the community for this event. In addition to the many long-time believers, 12 new believers and six seekers were involved in organizing it. We were received at the house of two new believers, who warmly opened their home and transformed their living room to receive the 77 guests who attended. A huge buffet of Persian food had been prepared and there were flowers throughout the house. A selection of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh was printed on beautiful paper and offered as a gift to all the guests. At the beginning of the program, a new believer shared a story she had prepared on the life of Bahá'u'lláh. Seven individuals, including five new believers and a seeker spoke movingly on the question, "What does Bahá'u'lláh represent for me?" A new French-Canadian Bahá'í friend said words imbued with great

sincerity: "For me, Bahá'u'lláh represents a chance to give new meaning to my life, but mostly, my faith in Him symbolizes the victory of my soul over my ego ..."

Another Bahá'í friend who declared his faith a few months ago, said that for him Bahá'u'lláh represents the end of a never-ending war with his ego, which gives new direction to his life. With humility and honesty, he said: "I am gradually learning to walk on a wire again and to keep my balance."

My sister, who also took part in the preparation of the tribute to Bahá'u'lláh, spoke movingly about the impact of the Faith on her life and mine, which brought me back to my childhood.

"On 15 May 1991, barely out of my mother's womb, while I was no doubt trying very hard to take my first breath in this world, the doctor whispered 'Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá' in my ear. It is an invocation in Arabic that refers to Bahá'u'lláh, the Greatest Name, and that means 'O Thou Glory of Glories.' As much as by whispering these words he was whispering all the mysteries of the world, he was also placing me, tiny as I was, where the infinite and the eternal quest for the ultimate unity begins. It is therefore, as the doctor liked to remind me often, on the day I was born that I first heard about Bahá'u'lláh."

No more than a span of nine short years marks the duration of this most spectacular, this most tragic, this most eventful period of the first Bahá'í century. It was ushered in by the birth of a Revelation whose Bearer posterity will acclaim as the "Point round Whom the realities of the Prophets and Messengers revolve," and terminated with the first stirrings of a still more potent Revelation, "whose day," Bahá'u'lláh Himself affirms, "every Prophet hath announced," for which "the soul of every Divine Messenger hath thirsted," and through which "God hath proved the hearts of the entire company of His Messengers and Prophets." Little wonder that the immortal chronicler of the events associated with the birth and rise of the Bahá'í Revelation has seen fit to devote no less than half of his moving narrative to the description of those happenings that have during such a brief space of time so greatly enriched, through their tragedy and heroism, the religious annals of mankind. In sheer dramatic power, in the rapidity with which events of momentous importance succeeded each other, in the holocaust which baptized its birth, in the miraculous circumstances attending the martyrdom of the One Who had ushered it in, in the potentialities with which it had been from the outset so thoroughly impregnated, in the forces to which it eventually gave birth, this nine-year period may well rank as unique in the whole range of man's religious experience. We behold, as we survey the episodes of this first act of a sublime drama, the figure of its Master Hero, the Báb, arise meteor-like above the horizon of Shíráz, traverse the sombre sky of Persia from south to north, decline with tragic swiftness, and perish in a blaze of glory. We see His satellites, a galaxy of God-intoxicated heroes, mount above that same horizon, irradiate that same incandescent light, burn themselves out with that self-same swiftness, and impart in their turn an added impetus to the steadily gathering momentum of God's nascent Faith. — Shoghi Effendi quoting the Báb, *God Passes By*, p. 3.



FROM ACROSS CANADA

Those were the words with which she wisely chose to start her account. I felt a mixture of gratefulness, emotion and love for life and my Creator, when she continued, saying:

“Since then, the light of His divine teachings has never stopped shining on my humble path and to cause miracles in all colours to bloom. My mother, my father and my sister together form the strongest pillar in the temple of my faith. The deeply transformative impact of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings on our family and the people around us is so wonderful and visceral that I cannot describe it fully. The love that binds me to them is beyond blood bonds and beyond anything on this earth. My heart cannot contain the vastness and power of this emotion. And it is when I connect with my love for them that I feel closest to God, the Unknowable.”

Hearing each of the tributes, I had the impression that Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá were seated in the front row and spreading a spirit of true unity. After these inspiring words, and as though the atmosphere was not already as loving as could be, a choir, bringing together people of all ages, sang texts from the Hidden Words put to music by a member of the community. Twenty five of us sang in the choir. We had met a few times to practice and to get into the spirit of the occasion. The choir included twelve new believers and six seekers, all French-Canadians. With rapt attention and emotion, the audience drank up the beautiful words and spiritual melodies.

Finding myself in this almost surreal atmosphere, I couldn’t help thinking about my own childhood. In June 1997, my little family and I moved to Longueuil. For me, it was a new school, a new house, new friends and a new Bahá’í community. At that time, the community was quite small and there were very few young people my age.

After arriving in our new community, my sister and I made new friends, the majority of whom were not Bahá’ís. I started high school, where, like many young Bahá’ís who had few or no Bahá’í friends, I started to live a double life: school life with my non-believer friends (or non-practicing, like the vast majority of Québécois), and weekend life with my small community of Bahá’í friends, my parents and my sister.

At the celebration of the birth of Bahá’u’lláh, I was filled with infinite gratitude, gratitude for seeing with my own eyes the benefits of study circles and the many new believers and seekers of our study circle, whom I now call my friends. It was the first time that I was at a Bahá’í event where the majority of guests were Québécois French-Canadian Bahá’ís. For me, it was quite a change to be able to talk about religion with

people who are “old-stock” Québécois, a population so traumatized by religion.

The activities of the Plan from the Universal House of Justice have had their effect on the Longueuil community in the last ten years. At age 29, I marvel at the difference. I never could have imagined that the community where I grew up and where I had so few Bahá’í friends would one day burst with new believers of all ages. For me, the celebration of November 14 was like a fresh breeze, a wave of hope and a sign that Bahá’u’lláh was celebrating with us.

Having witnessed such developments, I have hope for the world and I want to shout: Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá!

– Natasha Prévost Dubé



A child leads a group of friends on a devotional hike on Mt. Tzouhalem, B.C. to commemorate the Birth of the Báb, one of several commemorative activities that extended across the two Blessed Days. During several stops on the hike, the friends would share prayers that had been planned in advance.



FROM ACROSS CANADA



A child admires an installation of text and symbols designed to portray progressive revelation, at a Twin Holy day commemoration in Sooke, B.C. This was set up in the hallway which led to the room where the commemoration took place.

62 people, half of whom were children and junior youth, attended the Twin Holy Day commemoration in Sooke, B.C., a community with approximately 25 Bahá'ís. This has inspired the Local Spiritual Assembly and the community to host all Holy Days in Sooke, rather than joining the gatherings of another nearby community, in order to continue to reach out to the wider community.

Holy Day commemorations hold a special position in this regard. The Tablets recited, and the prayers, stories, songs, and sentiments voiced—all of them expression of love for those sacred Figures Whose lives and missions are being remembered—stir the heart and fill the soul with awe and wonder.

— The Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 29 December 2015.



Children prepare decorations to beautify the room in which the commemoration will be held. (Sooke, B.C.)



Friends gather in St. James Town, a neighbourhood in Toronto, Ont., to commemorate the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh.



Preparing for the Twin Holy days in Hamilton

This account, written by the Holy Days committee of Hamilton, Ont., highlights the level of thought given to planning and inviting friends to the Twin Holy Birthday commemorations.

On a typically damp, gray and overcast autumn day in Hamilton, hearts were warmed and spirits uplifted as several hundred members of the Hamilton Bahá'í community celebrated the historic inauguration in the West of the Festival of the Twin Births, together with their family members and friends from the wider society. These two commemorations took place at the Art Gallery of Hamilton.

From the first announcement by the Universal House of Justice on July 10, 2014 that the worldwide implementation of the Badí' calendar was to occur at Naw-Rúz 2015, the Holy Day Committee of the Bahá'ís of Hamilton began to consult and plan for joy-filled and befitting celebrations to mark the Twin Festivals of the Birth of the Báb and the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh. As always, the Committee strives to create celebrations that are open and welcoming to a diversity of Hamiltonians, that are filled with love and warmth, that are characterized by beauty and dignity, that convey central tenets of the Faith, that incorporate the arts and that will energize the community. For these celebrations however, the aspirations were significantly higher.

Some questions we considered were: where to find a suitably dignified, sufficiently large and readily accessible setting; when to schedule the celebrations—on two successive Gregorian days or at the onset of one Bahá'í day and at the conclusion of the second Bahá'í day but separated in between by a Gregorian day; how best to help build understanding about the significance of the two Festivals to encourage as wide a representation of the Bahá'í and wider community as possible at both celebrations, and to offer opportunities for dialogue and socializing; how to convey the “launch of a unified Bahá'í” calendar and the interconnectedness of the Twin Manifestations, their consecutive Twin Birthdays, which are “to be accounted as one in the sight of God”; and most important, what types of programmes would be best suited to communicate “the significance of the lives and missions of these two most precious Beings.”

The unexpected availability of space at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, located in the centre of the city, provided an exceptional opportunity—both financially and creatively—and a solution to a number of these questions. Two distinct yet inextricably linked Commemorations could be held, one in the afternoon and one in the evening, separated by sunset, in a setting that would be uplifting and would afford a new

experience for many guests. A reception with light refreshments to follow the afternoon programme for the Birth of the Báb would provide an opportunity for social interaction. Ample time could also be provided between the various events so that participants could enjoy time spent in the company of friends and family over dinner at nearby restaurants and cafés, as well as in the exhibition galleries which could remain open for the enjoyment of commemoration guests, offering another arts related dimension to the overall experience. Significantly, the break also provided an opportunity to physically modify the setting to further distinguish one event from the other. As daylight waned with the close of the afternoon programme, guests were greeted on their return in the evening with a greater abundance of flowers and sparkling lights.

Each of the two Commemorations was conceived to be self-contained and the tone and atmosphere of each celebration was intended to be distinctive. Nevertheless, the concepts inherent to each were intimately connected, with the experience of one to enrich and be enriched by the experience of the other.

Sacred Tablets revealed for the Twin Festivals and made available especially for this year's historic commemoration were included in both programmes. The afternoon Birth of the Báb commemoration was intended to communicate the grandeur of His Person, aspects of His ministry and the catalytic capacity of the His Revelation, the birth of a new day as symbolized by His birth, His role as the Herald of a yet greater Messenger to come as well as the profound interconnectedness of the Twin Manifestations. A talk, chanting, the reading of prayers and tablets and performances by a professional opera singer served to convey the majesty of this new Dispensation.

For the evening celebration of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, an assumption was made that the attendees would include a greater number of family members, friends and the wider community. The focus moved to the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and His role as the Messenger for today. One of the friends spoke about the conditions and challenges of the present day, the essential precepts of the Faith and the fact that Bahá'u'lláh's message provides the remedy that the world so deeply needs. In addition to the reading of sacred texts and chanting, a musician performed a number of songs and those present enthusiastically sang along. The mood and approach were joyful and



FROM ACROSS CANADA

celebratory, uplifting and inspirational, intended to create personal relevance so that by the programme's end guests, whether Bahá'í or not, would be moved to go into the world with positivity and resolve.

From spring of 2015, regular announcements, short presentations, and deepenings about the significance of the Bahá'í calendar and the Twin Festivals were held at community Feasts and other meetings to encourage as much participation from the Hamilton community as possible. Beautiful and distinctive invitations were designed and printed for distribution to friends, family and the wider community and shared at Firesides, study circles and devotional gatherings for broader dissemination. These invitations were also extended to members of like-minded organizations, shared in social settings and made available for dissemination in electronic formats and through the Community's electronic newsletter and on our local website. The significance of the Festivals and the stature of the Twin Manifestations were regularly discussed with friends at study circles and in fireside settings. Indeed, one member of the local Bahá'í Community indicated that as the Ruhi courses instil greater confidence in speaking about the Faith and the Manifestations with others, it has become easier to extend invitations.

Based on anecdotal reports, the response to the Twin Festivals was largely warm, widely positive, enthusiastic and frequently emotional on the part of the Hamilton Bahá'í community and our friends who joined in celebration. The dignity of the setting befitted the occasion, the talks offered insight, beauty permeated the gatherings, and the recitation of prayers and Holy Writings touched the spirits. Appreciation was expressed for creating a space for deeper heart-to-heart connections with, for example, an extended break between the two programmes, since it provided an opportunity to spend meaningful time with members of the community. One of the most confirming expressions of appreciation was extended at the conclusion of the evening's festivities by a long-time, often sceptical friend from the wider

community who expressed gratitude for "a very special night to remember."

- The Holy Day Committee of the Bahá'ís of Hamilton



A poster designed by a children's class in Richmond, B.C. for the Day of the Covenant. The children also arranged the program to commemorate the Holy Day, with the assistance of their children's class teacher.



Participants of a Book 8: *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, in Ottawa, Ont.



Participants of the Calgary cluster conference in April.



FROM ACROSS CANADA



Youth gather to pray in Halifax, N.S. Photo: Zachary Miloff



Youth analyze the forces in society at a youth conference in Victoria, B.C. Photo: Zachary Miloff



Participants at a youth gathering in P.E.I. play a game together. Photo: Paul Vreeland



FROM ACROSS CANADA



A junior youth group service project in St. John's, N.L.
Photo: Zachary Miloff



Children at the Atlantic summer school. Photo: Zachary Miloff



Two youth in Toronto, Ont. practice sharing themes from Book 2: *Arising to Serve*. Photo: Zachary Miloff



Youth study Book 1: *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*, at the Atlantic summer school. Photo: Zachary Miloff



A rich conversation about marriage and family life

The following is an account of a conversation held in Toronto, Ont. among a group of young friends who gathered to reflect on the institution of marriage and family life.

Each February, the National Spiritual Assembly encourages Bahá'ís in Canada to deepen on the institution of marriage. In honour of this occasion, a few young people—some single, some recently married, and some with young children—came together to share a meal and to reflect on a few passages from the Universal House of Justice on marriage and family life in the context of their efforts to contribute to the advancement of civilization. The friends had diverse religious upbringings, including Muslim, Catholic, Buddhist, non-religious, and Bahá'í. The group discussed marriage and family life as an important aspect of a coherent life, which includes other elements such as service to one's community and advancing one's career. Much of the conversation that ensued focused on strengthening the habit of praying and reading the Writings as a family, as well as learning to contribute to the spiritual and material development of their communities. In striving to develop patterns of devotion and service as working families with many demands on their time, these young people say they are learning to overcome the tendency to have a narrow idea of service. Instead, they are developing a broader notion of service, which involves spending adequate time nurturing one's own family, conscious that the development of one's family is connected to the wellbeing of one's community.

Strengthening a pattern of devotion as a family

As soon as a Bahá'í family unit emerges, the members should feel responsible for making the collective life of the family a spiritual reality, animated by Divine love and inspired by the ennobling principles of the Faith. To achieve this purpose, the reading of the Sacred Writings and prayers should ideally become a daily family activity. As far as the teaching work is concerned, just as individuals are called upon to adopt teaching goals, the family itself could adopt its own goals. In this way the friends could make of their families strong healthy units, bright candles for the diffusion of the light of the Kingdom, and powerful centres to attract the heavenly confirmations.

The Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 17 April 1981.

Several couples mentioned that since getting married or having children, they had become more aware of the importance of developing a habit of praying and reading the Writings together.

“Of course, it's important at any stage of life to develop these habits,” said one young mother. “But when you get married and have children, you really feel the need for it because life becomes more complex.”

She shared that she and her husband are conscious of the importance of daily prayer as they strive to create an environment that nurtures their one-year-old. Others added that prayer helps them in their families by assisting them to reflect on their inner condition and by learning to overcome negative tendencies, such as being in a bad mood or complaining about the difficulties in one's life.

One young father mentioned that he grew up in a secular environment and he was not used to praying with his family.

“Due to many forces, I didn't grow up with prayer that strongly,” he said.

However, he shared that recent guidance from the Universal House of Justice regarding enhancing the devotional character of the community—and thus helping to evoke the spirit of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár—as well as the birth of his son, has made him appreciate the importance of developing a strong pattern of praying and reading the Writings as a family. He said he is encouraged to see that increasingly, when his extended family comes together, they spontaneously take a few moments to pray, which makes such gatherings more meaningful.

The young father described one symbol of his change in consciousness in regards to the importance of prayer: recently, he picked up a children's prayer book that was given to him as a child from some Bahá'ís—which he said, “was literally on the bookshelf collecting dust”—to use with his son.

Serving together as a family

While it is right to expect great things from those who have so much to give in the path of service, the friends must guard against adopting a narrow outlook on what development to maturity entails. Freedom of movement and availability of time enable many youth to serve in ways that are directly related to the needs of the community, but as they advance further into their twenties, their horizons broaden. Other dimensions of a coherent life, equally demanding and highly meritorious, begin to make stronger claims on their attention. For many, an immediate priority will be further



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education, academic or vocational, according to the possibilities before them, and new spaces for interaction with society open up. Moreover, young women and men become acutely conscious of the exhortations of the Supreme Pen to “enter into wedlock” that they may “bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants” and to “engage in crafts and professions”. Having taken up an occupation, youth naturally try to contribute to their field, or even to advance it in light of the insights they gain from their continued study of the Revelation, and they strive to be examples of integrity and excellence in their work. Bahá'u'lláh extols those “that earn a livelihood by their calling and spend upon themselves and upon their kindred for the love of God, the Lord of all worlds.” This generation of youth will form families that secure the foundations of flourishing communities. Through their growing love for Bahá'u'lláh and their personal commitment to the standard to which He summons them will their children imbibe the love of God, “commingled with their mother’s milk”, and always seek the shelter of His divine law. Clearly, then, the responsibility of a Bahá'í community towards young people does not end when they first start serving. The significant decisions they make about the direction of their adult lives will determine whether service to the Cause of God was only a brief and memorable chapter of their younger years, or a fixed centre of their earthly existence, a lens through which all actions come into focus. We rely on you and your auxiliaries to ensure that the spiritual and material prospects of the youth are given due weight in the deliberations of families, communities, agencies, and institutions.

– The Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 29 December 2015.

Bahá'u'lláh came to bring unity to the world, and a fundamental unity is that of the family. Therefore, we must believe that the Faith is intended to strengthen the family, not weaken it. For example, service to the Cause should not produce neglect of the family. It is important for you to arrange your time so that your family life is harmonious and your household receives the attention it requires....

– The Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 1 August 1978.

Several people mentioned that they felt that getting married or having a child created many challenges, but also enriched their community and opened up new opportunities in the field of service. One of the main challenges was learning to overcome the tendency to pit service and family life against each other, thus creating a false choice. Inspired by materials studied in a recent series of youth conferences, the participants posed a number of questions: How do we not see

service and family life as a false choice? How do we learn to appreciate that service evolves, as we mature? How do we avoid having a narrow idea of service? How do we ensure that we give adequate attention to both our families and our communities?

One recently married young man initially felt selfish when he spent time with his future wife because it was time he was not spending directly serving his community.

“I was a little extreme in my views ... I didn’t think of the time that I spent with [my future wife] very positively in my mind,” he explained.

But after going on pilgrimage, as well as praying and consulting with friends, he realized that his marriage was also extremely important and required time and effort.

“It helped me become less fragmented in my idea of service and marriage,” he said.

The group also discussed the inclination that some parents have to withdraw from service when they have children, due to the complexities of raising a child. Participants discussed the perils of trying to raise a child without a strong community. They noted that if one only focuses on the development of one’s own child, eventually the child will go out in the world and become exposed to many forces that are beyond their parents’ control. Instead, it is better to think about how to help a group of children advance together.

A young mother said that she could already see the need of her one-year-old for a community of people. “If I focus a lot on him, he gets restless,” she observed. However, she noticed, that when she interacted with others, her child was also happier, provided he was well rested and well fed.

She suggested that young families need support from the community to be able to participate in activities. She noted that there was a change in culture in the last Plan that allowed youth to be at the forefront of the field of service. Perhaps, she suggested, as communities advance, more attention will be given to supporting youth as they begin to start families.

“We are one human family,” one participant said. “When you start serving alongside others, you create a family,” another added. “The House of Justice has given us the task to build stronger friendships and this has implications for family life. How do we build families that are more outward looking?”

In addition to challenges the couples faced, many also joyfully talked about the new opportunities that opened up in the field of service as a result of marriage or having a child.



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“It brought a lot of light to [our community] when our baby was born,” one young mother shared with a laugh. “I think it may have even increased attendance at feasts and reflection meetings since everyone wanted to be around him.”

Reflecting together on family life

Bahá'ís, well aware of the essential part played by the family in building a new and united society, are, of course, already labouring in this field. Wherever they reside, they have before them valuable opportunities to collaborate with others by, on the one hand, offering the many insights contained in the Bahá'í writings related to the strengthening of the family and its central role in the advancement of civilization and, on the other, humbly sharing their own experience....

— From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 29 October 2009.

... [W]e urge you to continue to reflect upon the question of family life and upon the progress made by the Bahá'í community in this respect. You are encouraged to share your understanding of this subject with your neighbours, friends and co-workers so that each may benefit from insights gained by the other. Explore in consultation with them what it means in practical terms for every member of the family to play a constructive part in creating a proper home environment and what measures can be taken to ensure that increasingly significant progress in this regard is made with each generation. In this way may you, one and all,

render a signally important service to your nation.

— The Universal House of Justice letter to the Believers of Cradle of the Faith [Iran], 24 November 2009.

The young people noticed an increase in opportunities to hold profound conversations with those around them, after getting married or having children. A newly married couple shared that getting married opened up opportunities for discussions about friendship and marriage with the junior youth in their respective junior youth groups and their families. They were also excited to learn that some of their married friends were inviting their school friends over to discuss the Faith. One young mother said that after having a child she found that she talked more and more often about the material and spiritual education of children, especially with those who had recently had young children.

One obvious step that each participant felt they could take was to consult more frequently with those around them about family life, sharing both insights from the Bahá'í writings on the topic and humbly sharing their own experience applying them, as the House of Justice called on the Bahá'ís of Iran to do. Some felt that this might be challenging since Bahá'ís, like others, are struggling with the fact that the family, like all other institutions in society, is in crisis. However, the group was encouraged by a few examples they had seen of strong, united families who had devoted their lives to service. They expressed the conviction that as patterns of community life become stronger, the next generation of children, junior youth and youth will have more such examples.



THE RIGHT OF GOD ~ ḤUQÚQU'LLÁH

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In response to guidance from the International Board of Trustees, the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in Canada has set up a centralized system of receipting and recording of payments at the Treasury Department of the Bahá'í National Centre. Payments of the Right of God (Ḥuqúqu'lláh) are not processed through individual Deputies or Representatives.

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