

BAHÁ'Í CANADA

WINTER 2020 | DOMINION 176 B.E.

Vol. 33 No. 1

The bicentenary of the
Birth of the Báb

From the Writings

This is a letter from God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting, unto God, the Almighty, the Best-Beloved, to affirm that the Bayán and such as bear allegiance to it are but a present from me unto Thee and to express my undoubting faith that there is no God but Thee, that the kingdoms of Creation and Revelation are Thine, that no one can attain anything save by Thy power and that He Whom Thou hast raised up is but Thy servant and Thy Testimony. I, indeed, beg to address Him Whom God shall make manifest, by Thy leave in these words: “Shouldst Thou dismiss the entire company of the followers of the Bayán in the Day of the Latter Resurrection by a mere sign of Thy finger even while still a suckling babe, Thou wouldst indeed be praised in Thy indication.

– The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 7.

I am, I am, the promised One! I am the One whose name you have for a thousand years invoked, at whose mention you have risen, whose advent you have longed to witness, and the hour of whose Revelation you have prayed God to hasten. Verily I say, it is incumbent upon the peoples of both the East and the West to obey My word and to pledge allegiance to My person.

– The Báb, as quoted in *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 315–16.

The substance wherewith God hath created Me is not the clay out of which others have been formed. He hath conferred upon Me that which the worldly-wise can never comprehend, nor the faithful discover ... I am one of the sustaining pillars of the Primal Word of God. Whosoever hath recognized Me, hath known all that is true and right, and hath attained all that is good and seemly...

– The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 11.

I am the Mystic Fane which the Hand of Omnipotence hath reared. I am the Lamp which the Finger of God hath lit within its niche and caused to shine with deathless splendor. I am the Flame of that supernal Light that glowed upon Sinai in the gladsome Spot, and lay concealed in the midst of the Burning Bush.

– The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 74.

Do not say, “How can He speak of God while in truth His age is no more than twenty-five?” Give ye ear unto Me. I swear by the Lord of the heavens and of the earth: I am verily a servant of God. I have been made the Bearer of irrefutable proofs from the presence of Him Who is the long-expected Remnant of God. Here is My Book

before your eyes, as indeed inscribed in the presence of God in the Mother Book. God hath indeed made Me blessed, wheresoever I may be, and hath enjoined upon Me to observe prayer and fortitude so long as I shall live on earth amongst you.

– The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 47.

In this mountain [Máku] I have remained alone, and have come to such a pass that none of those gone before Me have suffered what I have suffered, nor any transgressor endured what I have endured! I render praise unto God and yet again praise Him. I find Myself free from sorrow, inasmuch as I abide within the good-pleasure of My Lord and Master. Methinks I am in the all-highest Paradise, rejoicing at My communion with God, the Most Great. Verily this is a bounty which God hath conferred upon Me; and He is the Lord of unbounded blessings.

– The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 16.

Behold how great is the Cause, and yet how the people are wrapt in veils. I swear by the sanctified Essence of God that every true praise and deed offered unto God is naught but praise and deed offered unto Him Whom God shall make manifest.

Deceive not your own selves that you are being virtuous for the sake of God when you are not. For should ye truly do your works for God, ye would be performing them for Him Whom God shall make manifest and would be magnifying His Name. The dwellers of this mountain who are bereft of true understanding unceasingly utter the words, ‘No God is there but God’; but what benefit doth it yield them? Ponder awhile that ye may not be shut out as by a veil from Him Who is the Dayspring of Revelation.

– The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 86.

Purge your hearts of worldly desires, and let angelic virtues be your adorning ... The days when idle worship was deemed sufficient are ended. The time is come when naught but the purest motive, supported by deeds of stainless purity, can ascend to the throne of the Most High and be acceptable unto Him. ... Beseech the Lord your God to grant that no earthly entanglements, no worldly affections, no ephemeral pursuits, may tarnish the purity, or embitter the sweetness, of that grace which flows through you. I am preparing you for the advent of a mighty Day. Exert your utmost endeavour that, in the world to come, I, who am now instructing you, may, before the mercy-seat of God, rejoice in your deeds and glory in your achievements..”

– The Báb, as quoted in *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 93–4.

Winter 2020

February | Dominion 176 B.E.

Vol. 33, No. 1

Published for the Bahá'ís of Canada



ON THE COVER A painting by Lorraine Pritchard entitled *Return to Green* (2019).

Photo: Guy L'Heureux

Bahá'í Canada (ISSN 1199-1682) is published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada three to four times per year.
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Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to
Records Department
7200 Leslie St.,
Thornhill ON L3T 6L8
email: records@bahai.ca

Publications Mail Agreement 40050758

Contents

Universal House of Justice	4
Following the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb Social media and non-involvement in politics	
National Spiritual Assembly	7
Message to the Bahá'ís of Canada	
About this Issue	9
From the History of the Faith	10
<u>K</u> hadíjih Bagum's recognition of the station of the Báb A Twofold Mission: Some Distinctive Characteristics of the Person and Teachings of the Báb	
Feature	17
Glimpses from the bicentenary	
From Across Canada	22
Strengthening the institute process from one bicentenary to another Montreal exhibition commemorates bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb <i>Dawn of the Light</i> film sparks conversations "The spirit of the bicentenary moving on its own" Celebrating the Birth of the Báb in schools	
Information	32



Roof of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

Following the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb

From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, 8 November 2019.

Dearly loved Friends,

The measure of what you have achieved—not only in the last few weeks, but during a two-year period of remarkable advance now brought to a stunning climax—compels us to address you who are the visible hosts of a movement that has proved itself irrepressible. Far from being merely a memorable event, the celebration of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb was the fruit of eight cycles of devoted effort, carried out in unity and with a sense of undaunted initiative. We rejoiced to see the friends so assured in their response to the call to service. Local communities, neighbourhoods, and villages be-

came arenas for intensified activity of all kinds, as the knowledge of what the community could accomplish—witnessed at the last bicentenary—prompted a release of tremendous energy and enterprise, supported by a sound process of preparation and reflection. There are so many highlights to acknowledge. Celebrations within families and among families featured prominently; gatherings organized by youth for their peers were likewise a strength. Opportunities for animated retellings of the lives of the Báb and His early disciples were eagerly seized. Festivities were given added depth through conversations on the needs of society, often begun by the parents of young children. The bicentenary elicited artistic works of beauty and feeling, creative expressions of devotion too numerous and diverse to describe. And the way that each avenue of activity became a natural invitation to engage with the institute was especially noticeable. We were much encouraged by the capacity shown to bring the broadest possible spectrum of people into the embrace of the community's activities. Surely, this illustrates how

moments sacred in human history and commemorated at Holy Days have immense power to uplift individual souls and to weld a people together through shared experience. What great promise for advances at the level of culture lies in the universal celebration of such Festivals in place after place in the years to come!

The reality that there is abundant receptivity in the world at large is not in doubt. Progress depends on developing the capacity to extend the community-building process further still. And so all eyes turn to the months ahead. The devotion to the Twin Divine Luminaries and to the well-being of humanity which inspired your noble exertions thus far must sustain you in the coming six cycles. We urge everyone who worked to bring about this success to hasten now and gather again to reflect and to consult, and to determine how best to apply, in each unique setting, all that your experience has taught you: how an expanding nucleus of friends can cultivate a growing pattern of activity; how children can advance to the next grade and junior youth to the succeeding

text, further developing their moral and spiritual qualities; how institute courses can yield much-needed skills and capacities; how the path of service can widen to accommodate large numbers; how real hope for the betterment of society can be demonstrated in action; and how all of God's peoples can be enabled to take inspiration from His new Revelation, and souls who are receptive can be invited to identify with the Cause of the Abhá Beauty. In this continuing period of special potency, at an hour when the world seems powerless in the face of overwhelming peril and souls have succumbed to dismay and despair, Bahá'u'lláh has shown us another glimpse of what the community that bears His name can accomplish through courage—even heroism—in the discharge of its God-given mission. We will pray earnestly in the Holy Shrines for His unflinching confirmations to surround every child and every youth, every woman and every man, every family and every community that treasures His love in their hearts.

– The Universal House of Justice

Social media and non-involvement in politics

From the Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies,
1 December 2019.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The troubling conditions facing the world's peoples and the persistent problems caused by disunity within and between nations have, as you know, been a prominent theme in the messages of the Universal House of Justice. Bahá'ís, of course, are ever mindful of the state of the world. The well-being of humanity and its peace and tranquillity are the constant desire of all those who have taken to heart Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation to "be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in". It is abundantly clear, moreover, that the longing of the believers to contribute to the betterment of the world and to participate constructively in the life of society is in no way contradicted by their non-involvement in politics. While consciousness of the hardships afflicting so many strengthens a commitment to fundamental social change, political activity by Bahá'ís would only dissipate the community's energies and fail to bring about this change. It must arise from the spiritual transformation of society. These concepts were explored by the House of Justice

much more fully in its message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran, a message which many communities have found it useful to revisit from time to time. We have been asked to convey to you some additional points on a closely related topic, and this letter may be shared with the friends in whatever manner you deem most appropriate.

One conspicuous symptom of society's deepening malaise is the steady descent of public discourse into greater rancour and enmity, reflecting entrenched partisan points of view. A prevalent feature of such contemporary discourse is how political disagreements rapidly degenerate into invective and ridicule. However, what particularly differentiates the present age from those that preceded it is how so much of this discourse occurs in full view of the world. Social media and related communication tools tend to give the greatest exposure to all that is controversial, and the very same tools allow individuals, in an instant, to disseminate more widely whatever catches their attention and to register their support or opposition to various sentiments, whether explicitly or tacitly. The unparalleled ease with which a person can join in such public debate and the nature of the technology make momentary lapses of judgement and incautious actions more likely and their residue more enduring.

This holds particular implications for Bahá'ís, who know well that the principles of their Faith require them to

refrain from involvement in political controversies and conflicts of all kinds. “Speak thou no word of politics” was the counsel of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to one believer, adding, “Except to speak well of them, make thou no mention of the earth’s kings, and the worldly governments thereof.” Shoghi Effendi warned against allowing our vision of the Cause to be clouded “by the stain and dust of worldly happenings, which, no matter how glittering and far-reaching in their immediate effects, are but the fleeting shadows of an imperfect world”. While the importance of keeping at a distance from all politically divisive issues is well known to the friends, their engagement with pressing social issues, motivated by a commendable and sincere wish to be of service to those around them, can present them with difficult situations. An unexpected development can turn an uncontroversial issue into one that divides people along partisan lines, and some of the same unhealthy modes of expression that are common to the political sphere can transfer into other areas of discourse. Especially in the uninhibited realm of social media, wrongs—both real and imagined—are quickly magnified, and a variety of feelings are easily stirred: righteous indignation perhaps, or a desire to promote one’s point of view, or an eagerness to be seen as the source of new information. Much that is taken to be harmless, or even well-intentioned, is, on closer examination, serving to deepen social divides, fuel differences between opposing groups, and perpetuate disagreements, driving away possibilities for consensus and the search for solutions. If one person’s contribution seems provocative or objectionable, reacting to it may have the effect of unwittingly strengthening and increasing the exposure of the original sentiment, and exacerbating matters. The followers of the Blessed Beauty must be conscious and conscientious users of any technology they decide to utilize and must apply insight and spiritual discipline. They should look to the lofty standards of the Cause to guide them at all times in the way they express themselves. Bahá’u’lláh states:

Every word is endowed with a spirit, therefore the speaker or expounder should carefully deliver his words at the appropriate time and place, for the impression which each word maketh is clearly evident and perceptible. The Great Being saith: One word may be likened unto fire, another unto light, and the influence which both exert is manifest in the world.

It will be apparent that the precepts the friends observe in the course of their general interactions with those around them must also characterize, sometimes even

more scrupulously, their communication carried out via social media. These precepts include the prohibition on backbiting, the counsel to see the world with their own eyes and not through the eyes of others, the need to uphold the oneness of humanity and avoid a mind-set of “us” and “them”, and the principles of consultation and the necessary decorum associated with it.

The friends will occasionally come across instances when their fellow believers have made comments or circulated the comments of others in ways that seem unwise, or imprudent, when judged against the standards set out in the Bahá’í Writings. It would be wrong, when encountering postings of this kind, to conclude that such behaviour must therefore be unobjectionable, condoned, or even encouraged. Not infrequently, Bahá’í institutions have had to counsel individuals about their actions online, although wherever possible they do so with discretion, out of respect for the dignity of the persons in question.

The followers of the Blessed Beauty must be conscious and conscientious users of any technology they decide to utilize and must apply insight and spiritual discipline.

One example among many areas in which the considerations set out above are relevant is the discussion on social media of matters pertaining to Iran. As will be readily appreciated, this is an area of particular sensitivity, and therefore the friends need to be especially on their guard. Rash statements made online could endanger the believers in that land or unwittingly provide the enemies of the Cause with the means to misrepresent the Bahá’ís. Observing strict caution in this respect is essential for the protection of the sorely tried community in Iran.

In this connection, the House of Justice has asked us to convey an additional point to the Persian believers who reside outside the Cradle of the Faith. It is understandable that these friends feel a strong personal concern for the well-being of their fellow Bahá’ís in Iran and for the future of that sacred land. Nevertheless, they are urged to bear in mind that, regardless of their land of origin, their primary obligation ought to be to the progress of the Faith in the land in which they now dwell. Indeed, over the course of the Faith’s history, the contributions made by Persian Bahá’ís to the teaching work on every continent are too many to recount, and the House of Justice rejoices when these friends direct their efforts towards advancing the Five Year Plan in the places where they reside. This must be their chief object; striving for such a goal is what will bring joy to their spiritual brothers and sisters in Iran and properly honour the sacrifices being made by those steadfast servants.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat

Message to the Bahá'ís of Canada

From the National Spiritual Assembly to the Bahá'ís of Canada, 31 January 2020.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Following the celebration of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, the Universal House of Justice wrote: “The measure of what you have achieved—not only in the last few weeks, but during a two-year period of remarkable advance now brought to a stunning climax—compels us to address you who are the visible hosts of a movement that has proved itself irrepressible.”¹ As the National Spiritual Assembly and the Counsellors gratefully reflected on Canada’s part in those worldwide achievements, we saw a community that has not only flung open its doors to the diverse peoples of this nation, inviting them to the threshold of oneness, but which is itself being molded and shaped by the processes of growth gaining momentum.

The story that is unfolding has in many ways been penned by none other than ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Whose visit to North America and subsequent Tablets of the Divine Plan united the peoples of this continent in a common vision. This vision extended beyond the small band of believers who welcomed Him, to embrace the diverse peoples of the continent whose destiny He declared glorious. On 26 March 2016, the anniversary date of the first of these Tablets and a few short weeks before the launch of the current Five Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice wrote to “the chosen recipients of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablets of the Divine Plan, the Bahá'ís of the United States and the Bahá'ís of Canada”:

You have already accomplished that which is worthy of the gratitude and admiration of the entire Bahá'í world, but your mission is far from complete. After a century of resolute action, you should, more than ever before, be able to discern the straight path traced by heavenly inspiration across the many stages of the Divine Plan since its systematic execution began in 1937, and thus grasp the full implications of the latest stage about to open.

The letter continued that the “tasks confronting you are not identical with those of an earlier age” and noted that the worldwide spread of the Faith had been largely accomplished. With our sister communities around the world, we stood “ready to face the sterner challenges that lie ahead”. What would be a sterner challenge than the diffusion of the Faith around the entire planet, we might

have asked? “The movement of your clusters to the farthest frontiers of learning will usher in the time anticipated by Shoghi Effendi at the start of your collective exertions, when the communities you build will directly combat and eventually eradicate the forces of corruption, of moral laxity, and of ingrained prejudice eating away at the vitals of society.”²

Even a brief glance at the bicentenary celebrations across the country makes it abundantly clear: the narrative of this land begun by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is unfolding before our eyes. Over 30,000 souls commemorated the bicentenary of the birth of the Báb, in some 1200 celebrations small and large, intimate and grand. Of even greater significance was that these celebrations were not isolated events: they were intimately knit into a pattern of community-building activity that has moved clusters at every stage of development along a path towards the “farthest frontiers of learning”. Over the last year in North America, the number of core activities rose by close to 50%, representing thousands of new spaces where deep and meaningful conversation is forging bonds of friendship that are manifest in service. The total number of such activities in North America has grown to at least 15,000 devotional gatherings, study circles, junior youth groups and children’s classes, with 3,400 of these in Canada: a rise of 600 in this country within just six months. Of Canada’s 141 clusters, 119 have established a programme of growth, with 59 of those having moved past the second milestone to become intensive programmes of growth. Of those 59, 14 clusters have more than 100 core activities and are working with larger numbers, with Surrey-Delta-White Rock the most recent cluster to pass that threshold. This surge in purposeful and systematic activity has created the perfect conditions for the movement of all Canada’s clusters along the continuum of growth. This surge, sacred in its nature, has drawn tens of thousands of souls closer to their Creator and ignited in their hearts a longing for transformation, for service. It has created a collective movement among youth and children, among families, among neighbours and neighbourhoods, that is indeed irrepressible.

In the final months of the Plan, we have no doubt that Canada’s goal of establishing an intensive programme of growth in 119 clusters will be won. Tens of those clusters will be working with the larger numbers that begin to affect the culture, the very spirit of a place.

It was to this end that the National Assembly wrote to the friends in April 2018, with two calls to service: to a new intensity on the part of all the friends, and to the youth and young adults a special call to set aside time for

² 26 March 2016, The Universal House of Justice to the chosen recipients of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablets of the Divine Plan, the Bahá'ís of the United States and the Bahá'ís of Canada.

¹ 8 November 2019, The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world.

periods of service in their own clusters or as pioneers to another. In the remaining months of the Five Year Plan, each hour of which continues to be endowed with special potency, with spiritual powers we can but barely imagine, the National Assembly once more raises this call. In these days when the peril of the world cannot be denied, may the Canadian community embark on this final stretch clear-sighted, focussed, confident, assured, each soul with a plan in hand to use the precious gift of time—daily moments, weekends, school breaks, summer vacations—according to their circumstances and opportunities.

These opportunities will vary from community to community, from home to home. Yet, the House of Justice speaks of how everywhere, in every circumstance, an expanding nucleus can engage a growing number of people in a deepening conversation about the application of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.

Before long, there forms a nucleus of friends in a cluster who are working and consulting together and arranging activities. For the process of growth to advance further, the number of people sharing this commitment must rise, and their capacity for undertaking systematic action within the framework of the Plan must correspondingly increase. And similar to the development of a living organism, growth can occur quickly when the right conditions are in place.

Foremost among these conditions is an institute process gaining in strength, given its centrality to fostering the movement of populations.³

As the friends work together to create spaces in which such discussions are nurtured and structured, the number of those interacting with the Revelation and reconnecting with their Creator rises. To build capacity to create such spiritually-charged environments and to channel the longing to serve that is ignited therein, are among the aims of the training institute. In turn, the institute strengthens as we learn to invite many more to participate as protagonists, as builders of communities. In this way, a “broader cross section of the population is being engaged in conversations, and activities are being opened up to whole groups at once—bands of friends and neighbours, troops of youth, entire families—enabling them to realize how society around them can be refashioned.”⁴

Among those reading this message will be the friends gathered at Canada's unit conventions. We raise these questions for your consideration and that of the delegates to the National Convention that you will be electing.

- In their letter dated 8 November 2019, the Universal House of Justice spoke of the bicentenary: “Celebrations within families and among families featured prominently; gatherings organized by youth for their peers were likewise a strength.” “Festivities were given added depth through conversations on the needs of society, often begun by the parents of young children.” What was your experience of this strength,

and how did you connect the celebration to an ongoing conversation? How were the youngest ones involved, and how have you continued to engage entire families?

- “And the way that each avenue of activity became a natural invitation to engage with the institute was especially noticeable.” What did you see in this regard? What are the next steps?
- In the Tablets of the Divine Plan, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of some of the conditions that foster growth: firmness in the Covenant, fellowship, love, unity and a focus on teaching. What is being learned about supporting and assisting each other on this path?
- As the institute process is offered for all ages, and participants number in the hundreds, the need for facilities and staff for programs asserts itself. At last year's National Convention, inspired by the consultation of the delegates, the National Assembly increased the total expenditure budget to \$10.2 million, to meet the needs of the hour. How can the goal of universal participation in generating these resources be advanced?
- Finally, the special role of the young in this movement has been embraced by the entire community. What concrete measures can be taken to further support the youth in their sacred work of carrying the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh to the children of Canada, to junior youth, to their youthful peers and to their siblings, parents and grandparents?

A mighty task awaits, calling for prayerful, inspired and systematic action on the part of individuals, communities and institutions alike. This next stage builds not only on such recent achievements as we have seen surrounding the bicentenary celebrations, but on a legacy that ‘Abdu'l-Bahá so powerfully described in the Tablets of the Divine Plan. It continues a movement that began with His travels to North America and the movement of His pen in the Tablets. A small number of heroes and heroines who loved Him arose to bring His vision to life, a band whose numbers have now risen to hundreds of thousands.

At the beginning of the Plan, the House of Justice wrote to the Bahá'ís of the United States and the Bahá'ís of Canada, a joyful and sobering call:

This is a time for jubilation. Take pride in the sacrifices and victories of so many devoted souls who arose in response to ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's call. With the same spirit of renunciation shown by your predecessors, cast away the idle fancies and distractions of a world that has lost its way that you may consecrate yourselves in the next five years to the priceless opportunities and inescapable obligations of the latest stage of a spiritual enterprise on which the fate of humanity ultimately depends.⁵

In the fleeting months that remain, your consecrated efforts are in our ardent, loving prayers.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
– National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

3 29 December 2015, The Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors.

4 Ibid.

5 26 March 2016, The Universal House of Justice to the chosen recipients of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets of the Divine Plan, the Bahá'ís of the United States and the Bahá'ís of Canada.

About this issue

Soon after the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, the Universal House of Justice addressed the Bahá'ís of the world as “visible hosts of a movement that has proved itself irrepressible. Far from being merely a memorable event,” it continued, “the celebration of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb was the fruit of eight cycles of devoted effort, carried out in unity and with a sense of undaunted initiative.”¹

In this issue, we are delighted to share several stories of celebrations across the country, and the strides forward they represent as our community approaches the final year of the current Five Year Plan. We also took this opportunity to call to mind the life and Mission of the Báb, “the Primal Point” and “King of the Messengers.”

An excerpt from the book *Leaves of the Twin Holy Trees*, by Baharieh Rouhani Ma'ani, provides insight into the Báb's station through an account of His wife, Khadíjih Bagum, who found Him in the condition of divine Revelation and perceived a “dazzling light emanating from His Being.”

The article “A Twofold Mission: Some Distinctive Characteristics of the Person and Teachings of the Báb,” by Elham Afnan and originally published on the Bahá'í World website, serves to increase understanding of the Báb's human and divine stations as well as the prominent themes of His Writings.

The feature piece of the issue, “Glimpses from the bicentenary,” is a selection of photos that, while by no means can represent the countless celebrations that took place across the country, serves to communicate the joy and diversity of these occasions. In November, we published a larger collection of bicentenary photos on bahaicanada.bahai.ca, which readers are invited to view if they have not already.

Since the last bicentenary, there seems to be a growing coherence between Holy Day celebrations and the community-building process. The article, “Strengthening

the institute process from one bicentenary to another” chronicles how, through nurturing a steady stream of youth through the institute process, new friends took an active role in celebrating the bicentenary in their neighbourhood.

This was also demonstrated in the article “The spirit of the bicentenary moving on its own,” as Chayan Dehghan, a young homefront pioneer, relates how a celebration at a Native Friendship Centre in Fort Erie, Ont. took the form of a traditional Haudenosaunee Social.

Many creative expressions also paid homage to the Báb. Among them, a series of paintings from Montreal artist Lorraine Pritchard explores themes in the Writings of the Báb. One of these paintings, entitled *Return to Green* is featured on the cover of this issue. We also included a short article about the public exhibition of these paintings at the Beaux-arts des Ameriques Gallery in Montreal.

More than 10,000 people viewed at least a portion of the film *Dawn of the Light* at celebrations across the country, including over 3,500 friends of the Faith. The article, “Dawn of the Light film sparks conversations” explores how this film touched the hearts and minds of viewers, in some cases prompting them to enter the institute process.

The contributions of children, who are connected to many peers, was also noteworthy. The article “Celebrating the Birth of the Báb in schools” provides five examples of how parents, children and teachers celebrated the bicentenary in that environment. These examples remind us of the many opportunities to engage others in conversation on “themes of spiritual import.”

And in the time since the bicentenary, it seems the “tempo of teaching” has been steadily increasing. “Exert your utmost endeavour,” the Báb declared to the Letters of the Living upon sending them on their missions, “that, in the world to come, I, who am now instructing you, may, before the mercy-seat of God, rejoice in your deeds and glory in your achievements...”²

1 From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, 8 November 2019.

2 Nabil-i-A'zam, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, pp. 93-4.

Submitting stories to *Bahá'í Canada*

The *Bahá'í Canada* magazine and website are spaces where we can continue to gain insight into the profound communication taking place between diverse individuals, communities and institutions. We invite people from across the country – from large cities to small towns – to submit stories and reflections about the efforts being made to translate the Writings of the Faith into action, the insights these actions are generating and the myriad questions that are arising. Send news, photos, insights, reflections and more to bahaicanada@bahai.ca.



The room in the House of the Báb where the Báb declared His Mission in Shíráz, Iran, before its destruction in 1979. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

Khadíjih Bagum's recognition of the station of the Báb

The following excerpt from *Leaves of the Twin Divine Trees* relays what Khadíjih Bagum, the wife of the Báb, experienced on the night He declared His Mission to Mullá Husayn.

About a year after Ahmad's¹ birth and death, on the night of 22 May 1844, Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad declared to Mullá Husayn in the upper chamber of His house in Shíráz that He was the promised Qá'im. Khadíjih Bagum's response to the Báb's claim is recorded in *The Dawn Breakers*:

The wife of the Báb. . . perceived at the earliest dawn of His Revelation the glory and uniqueness of His Mission and felt from the very beginning the intensity of its force.

Through her close association with the Báb and her observation of every aspect of His life, Khadíjih Bagum, long before His declaration to Mullá Husayn, had discovered her

husband's extraordinary spiritual endowments. However, she was unaware of the claim He was to make and the nature of His mission until she experienced something unique which confirmed her belief in Him. Furúgh Arbáb in *Akhtarani-Tábán* has given an account of what Khadíjih Bagum experienced on the night the Báb declared His mission to Mullá Husayn. The source of her

¹ The Báb's son who passed away in infancy.

account is the historical manuscript of Hájí Mírzá Habíbu'lláh Afnán, a great nephew of Khadíjih Bagum. Here is the English translation of the pertinent parts of the account:

The sun was setting, . . . when the Countenance of the Peerless Beloved illumined His home with the light of His effulgent Face. According to the usual custom, tea was served in the chamber of His mother and the dinner table was set. That night His blessed Person was not hungry but accompanied others and had a little food, then He went to bed.

Around midnight His wife noticed His absence. She became worried and searched the courtyard of the House and the room of His mother, but did not find Him anywhere. As she was not yet aware of His inner heart's secret, her anxiety heightened with the passing of every second. She involuntarily climbed up the staircase [leading to the second floor] and, lo and behold, she saw the upper chamber of the House immersed in light. What was the source of all this light, and where had the lamps come from, she asked herself. But this was not tangible light; it was divine light, and she did not see it with her outward eyes but with her inner sight. She proceeded towards the guest room. There she saw that world-illuminating Sun and light-shedding Moon standing in the middle of the room with His hands raised heavenward. While her eyes were fixed upon the dazzling light emanating from His Being, a feeling of awe and fright came over her. She wanted to return but was unable to move. Her awe grew to such intensity that she felt stupefied. At this point His Blessed Person relieved her of her bewilderment. By uttering the words 'go back' He gave her new life and revived her faculties. She returned to bed but could not sleep. She communed with the Almighty saying 'O my God, what power and grandeur! What greatness and glory! What

*The wife of
the Báb. . .
perceived at the
earliest dawn of
His Revelation
the glory and
uniqueness of
His Mission and
felt from the very
beginning the
intensity of its
force.*

is the wisdom in your revealing to me that effulgent Sun? Is He my Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad? Will I henceforth be able to live with that luminous Sun? Nay, nay, the rays of this Resplendent Sun will consume me, and will reduce me to ashes. I possess not the power to withstand it.'

Her thoughts were all night revolving around this episode until she heard the voice of the mu'adhhdhin from the adjacent mosque. At that time that Immaculate Being descended the steps. His esteemed wife, who had beheld the majesty and greatness of her glorious husband, was trembling as she thought of meeting Him face to face, and tried to conceal herself. When the breakfast table was spread and she went, according to the usual practice, to the room of His mother, she was still trembling, and would not lift her head. The Exalted Being poured tea and offered it to her. He enquired, 'What is the matter with you?' She replied, 'What was the condition I saw you in?' The Tongue of Grandeur uttered such words that

caused her anxiety to vanish, and confirmed her in what she had seen. He spoke with words such as these: 'Know thou that the Almighty God is manifested in Me. I am the One whose advent the people of Islam have expected for over a thousand years. God has created Me for a great Cause, and you witnessed the divine revelation. Although I had not wished that you see Me in that state, yet God had so willed that there may not be any place in your heart for doubt and hesitation.'²

A similar account with slight variations is found in H.M. Balyuzi's *Khadíjih Bagum*.³

Just as Khadíjih, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, witnessed the first emanations of the Spirit of Truth manifesting in her exalted husband and became the first to perceive the divinity of the mission with which He had been entrusted, so it was nearly 13 centuries later when a descendant of hers, also named Khadíjih, became the first to recognize the Sun of Reality shining through the person of Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad, a lineal descendant of Prophet Muhammad and His wife Khadíjih. Khadíjih Bagum was the recipient of this tremendous bounty without preparation and expectation, for despite her awareness that her husband was above other men in stature and spiritual endowments, she never imagined that her intimate and loving companion would be the promised Qá'im. The discovery was no doubt an overwhelming and awe-inspiring experience.

Bahá'u'lláh's words in the Tablet revealed in Khadíjih Bagum's honour after her death confirm that 'before the creation of the world of being', she had 'found the fragrance of the garment of the Merciful'.⁴

– Baharieh Rouhani Ma'ani, *Leaves of the Twin Divine Trees*, pp. 33-5.

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2 Arbáb, *Akhtaran-i-Tábán*, vol.1, pp.9-11.

3 Balyuzi, *Khadíjih Bagum*, pp. 10-14.

4 Balyuzi, *Khadíjih Bagum*, p.14.

A Twofold Mission: Some Distinctive Characteristics of the Person and Teachings of the Báb

The following article by Elham Afnan, originally published on *The Bahá'í World* website, explores the circumstances around the appearance of the Báb and the significance of His Mission.



Detail of the design of the arches of the Shrine of the Báb. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

Two hundred years ago, a Child was born Whose life and work were to revolutionize human history. His name was Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad, and He would come to be known to history as the Báb. The setting of His birth was a modest house in Shíráz, a city in southern Iran known for its renowned poets and its gardens of unsurpassed beauty. As the bicentenary of His birth is being celebrated by the members of a world community in neighborhoods and villages across the planet, it is timely to recall the circumstances surrounding His appearance and to reflect on the significance of His mission. Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Himself born two years earlier, lauded the Báb as “Mine own previous Manifestation”¹ and paid tribute to Him in these words:

No understanding can grasp the nature of His Revelation, nor can any knowledge comprehend the full measure of His FaithAll else save Him are

created by His command, and move and have their being through His law. He is the Revealer of the divine mysteries, and the Expounder of the hidden and ancient wisdom.²

Nineteenth-century Persia, once the cradle of a great civilization, was steeped in ignorance and corruption, the lives of its masses marked by disillusionment and hopelessness. Nor was the world at large faring much better, subject to the blights of war, imperialism, and slavery, and suffering the oppression of prejudice, growing materialism, and loss of faith. Into this darkness came the blazing figure of the Báb, shedding light upon the world and guiding a lost humanity in a new direction. Eulogizing the night on which the Báb was born, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Blessed art thou, O night! For through thee was born the Day of God, a Day which We have ordained to be the lamp of salvation unto the denizens of the cities

¹ See *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, no. CXV; *Days of Remembrance*, no. 37, par. 1.

² *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, page 243.

of names, the chalice of victory unto the champions of the arenas of eternity, and the dawning-place of joy and exultation unto all creation.³

Human and Divine Stations

The Manifestations of God have two stations. The first is Their human station, the station of individual characteristics and temporal limitations; they love, suffer, and die, as do all human beings. The second is their divine station, one in which they manifest the majesty and power of God, in which their voice is the voice of God Himself. The Báb, while sharing this dual station with all the Prophets of the past, was unique in having a “twofold mission, as the Bearer of a wholly independent Revelation and the Herald of One still greater than His own.”⁴ His life and Writings are thus marked by a unique richness arising out of this twofold mission, which, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, “constitutes the most distinctive feature of the Bahá’í Dispensation”⁵—the appearance of two Manifestations of God in close succession.

The complementary nature of the human and the divine stations is clearly visible in the person of the Báb. He was a merchant by profession; He did not belong to any of the ecclesiastical orders of His time and had not acquired the learning current among them. His only schooling was what He received as a child in a traditional primary school, where children were taught to read the Qur’án and little else.⁶ Yet, in the course of six short years, from the time He announced His mission in 1844 until His martyrdom in 1850, voluminous writings, revealed with unimaginable rapidity, flowed from His pen. He states that He revealed “no less than a thousand verses within the space of five



A robe worn by the Báb.

Photo: Bahá’í International Community

hours,” limited only by the capacity of His amanuensis to set down His words.⁷ The power of His Writings, coupled with the meagerness of His schooling, is, as He Himself attests, proof of His innate knowledge and divine mission:

God beareth Me witness, I was not a man of learning, for I was trained as a merchant. In the year sixty⁸ God graciously infused my soul with the conclusive evidences and weighty knowledge which characterize Him Who is the Testimony of God—may peace be upon Him—until finally in that year I proclaimed God’s hidden Cause and unveiled its well-guarded Pillar, in such wise that no one could refute it.⁹

The Revealer of these words, “the gentle, the youthful and irresistible person of the Báb” was “matchless in His meekness, imperturbable in His serenity, magnetic in His utterance.”¹⁰ He exemplified honesty and fair-mindedness in His business dealings and was gracious and gen-

erous towards His family and associates. His tenderness and consideration for His mother and His wife are poignant. A letter He wrote to His wife, *Khadijih Bagum*, reflects His deep affection for her:

My sweet love, may God preserve thee. God is my witness that since the time of separation sorrow has been so intense that it cannot be described.¹¹

At the same time, He addressed the people of the world and the rulers of His day with power and authority. Summoned to an examination of His claim before the assembled dignitaries of the land, the Báb, having seated Himself in the place of honor that had been reserved for the heir to the throne, gave His “celebrated answer” to the question put to Him by that assembly, “Whom do you claim to be?”¹²:

I am, I am, I am the Promised One! I am the One Whose name you have for a thousand years invoked, at Whose mention you have risen, Whose advent you have longed to witness, and the hour of Whose Revelation you have prayed God to hasten. Verily, I say, it is incumbent upon the peoples of both the East and the West to obey My word, and to pledge allegiance to My person.¹³

He fearlessly proclaimed His mission in countless Tablets revealed by His pen, among them these words with which He addressed Muḥammad Sháh, the reigning monarch of Persia, from His prison cell in the fortress of Máh-kú:

I am the Primal Point from which have been generated all created things. I am the Countenance of God Whose splendour can never be obscured, the Light of God Whose radiance can never fade. Whoso recognizeth Me, assurance and all good are in store for him¹⁴

3 *Days of Remembrance*, no. 40, paragraph 2.

4 *God Passes By*, page 27.

5 *World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, page 123.

6 H.M. Balyuzi, *The Báb: The Herald of the Day of Days*, pages 33–40.

7 *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, page 82.

8 1260 A.H. (1844 A.D.).

9 See *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, page 12.

10 *God Passes By*, page xiv.

11 H.M. Balyuzi, *Khadijih Bagum: The Wife of the Báb* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), page 36.

12 *The Dawn-Breakers*, page 315.

13 *God Passes By*, page 21.

14 *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, page 12.

The Writings of the Báb

The Báb affirms that the verses revealed by a Manifestation of God are the greatest proof of His mission. His own vast Writings, comprising over two thousand Tablets, epistles, prayers, and philosophical treatises,¹⁵ were conclusive and sufficient testimony of His truth for thousands who came into contact with them. While His Writings are complex, unconventional, and at times esoteric, they are also possessed of a power that penetrates the hearts. They restructured the thoughts of their readers, so that they could break free from the chains of obsolete beliefs and inherited customs.

There is remarkable order and method in the Writings of the Báb. He Himself classified them in terms of five modes of revelation: divine verses, prayers, commentaries, rational discourse—written in Arabic—and the Persian mode, which in turn contains each of the other four. Within them, there is a complex but coherent system of symbols (including the symbolism of letters and numbers), extensive quotations from and allusions to the Qur’án and Islamic traditions, and references to concepts from *Shaykhí*¹⁶ discourse. The Báb’s works are, moreover, linguistically innovative, distinguished by departures from grammatical conventions and neologisms.¹⁷ They attempt, as one writer puts it, to “mine words for more than the meaning which is bound to them by usage and etymology.”¹⁸ The complexity of the ideas and their philosophical and mystical depth, together with the uniqueness of their language, make the Báb’s texts difficult to understand but “also account for their richness, beauty, and fascination.”

15 *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2006), pages 96–97.

16 The Shaykhí school, founded by Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ahsa’i, emerged in 19th century Iran as a movement within Shi’ah Islam.

17 See Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier, 2008), page 26.

18 Todd Lawson, “The Dangers of Reading: Inlibration, Communion and Transference in the Qur’án Commentary of the Báb,” in *Scripture and Revelation*, edited by Moojan Momen (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997), page 197.



An illuminated tablet of the Báb.

Photo: Bahá’í International Community

The Writings of the Báb range from brief personal letters written to members of His family to the *Kitáb-i-Asmá’*, a book of more than three thousand pages, in which He discusses the names and attributes of God and how all of reality can be spiritualized through the recognition of the Source of divine revelation.¹⁹ His works seek to “reconcile the life of the individual soul to the process of history, by asserting the potential and ultimate meaningfulness of all created things, from the highest to the lowest.”²⁰

In the “first, greatest and mightiest”²¹ of His books, the *Qayyúmu’l-Asmá’*, a commentary on the *Súrih* of Joseph, the Báb goes beyond merely commenting on the *Súrih* of the Qur’án, but finds in the figure of Joseph the archetype of His—and eventually Bahá’u’lláh’s—suffering and ultimate triumph. The story of Joseph thus becomes a link binding the Dispensations of the Manifestations of God throughout history. Similarly, the Persian Bayán, “the Mother-Book of the Bábí Dispensation,”²² is not only the repository of the laws ordained by the Báb, but also the link between

19 Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, page 36.

20 Todd Lawson, “The Dangers of Reading”, page 198.

21 *God Passes By*, page 6.

22 *God Passes By*, page 324.

the Faith of the Báb and that of Bahá’u’lláh.

The Purpose of Laws

The laws of the Báb are a distinctive feature of His Dispensation. They were designed “to abolish at a stroke the privileges and ceremonials, the ordinances and institutions” of the past, and to bridge “the gap between an obsolete system and the institutions of a world-encompassing Order destined to supersede it.”²³ The laws in the Báb’s early works were closely linked to the laws of Islam. They constituted at times a restatement and at times a restriction on some Islamic laws, thus beginning the process of gradually refashioning them. With the independence of the new Faith established, the laws revealed in His later works, particularly the Persian Bayán, had a different aim.²⁴ They were presented as a more definite break from the past, but their ultimate purpose was to pave the way for the future: the Báb was preparing His followers for the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh.

Thus, the fundamental purpose of the Bayan is twofold. The first is to explain that the recognition of God and of the shared truth of divine religions can be achieved only through the recognition of His Messenger in every age and by adherence to His laws and ordinances: “True knowledge, therefore, is the knowledge of God, and this is none other than the recognition of His Manifestation in each Dispensation.”²⁵ The second purpose is to herald the coming of Bahá’u’lláh, the Promised One designated by the Báb as Him Whom God shall make manifest, about whom He writes: “The Bayán is, from beginning to end, the repository of all of His attributes, and the treasury of both His fire and His light.”²⁶ The laws of the

23 *God Passes By*, p 59.

24 See Muḥammad Afnán & William S. Hatcher, “Western Islamic Scholarship and Bahá’í Origins,” *Religion* 15:1 (1985), 29–51.

25 *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, page 89.

26 *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, page 101.



The prison of Máh-kú. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

Bayán are formulated to promote and clarify this twofold purpose. For example, the law enjoining the believers to repeat ninety-five times each day the name of God, the All-Glorious (Alláh'u'Abhá)—a law later confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh—was meant to enable the one reciting it to attain to divine guidance so that he would recognize the Promised One when He appeared.

The Báb made the implementation of His laws subject to the sanction of Him Whom God shall make manifest, while at the same time making it clear that His advent was near at hand. In other words, the laws of the Báb created a bridge between the religious dispensations of the past and that of Bahá'u'lláh. Among the laws of the Bahá'í Faith that are based on the teachings of the Báb are those of pilgrimage, marriage, burial, and inheritance,

the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, and the Badí' calendar.²⁷

A calendar brought by a Manifestation of God is more than a practical tool; it gives meaning to the passage of time and the movement of history. In its letter announcing the common implementation of the Badí' calendar throughout the Bahá'í world, the Universal House of Justice writes:

The adoption of a new calendar in each dispensation 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.²⁸

²⁷ A calendar consisting of nineteen months of nineteen days each, the years organized into cycles of nineteen years and periods of 361 years.

²⁸ Letter dated 10 July 2014 to the Bahá'ís of the World.

The implementation of the calendar initiated by the Báb marks, therefore, a “historic step in ... the unfoldment of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order,”²⁹ that same Order which the Báb extolled in the Bayán when He wrote, “Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá'u'lláh and rendereth thanks unto his Lord!”³⁰

Striving for Perfection

The Báb exhorted His followers to display the highest degree of purity and refinement, both outwardly and inwardly, so that they would be worthy of receiving Him Whom God shall make manifest when He appeared. The promotion of excellence is a salient and recurring theme in His Writings. In the

²⁹ Letter dated 10 July 2014 to the Bahá'ís of the World.

³⁰ *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991, 2009 printing), p. 147.

Persian Bayán, He defines the most perfect state of each thing as its paradise and writes:

He hath ordained for each thing that they who possess power over it should raise it to its highest station of perfection, so that it may not be deprived of its own Paradise.³¹

Although the Báb was condemned to a life of exile and imprisonment, yet, in the midst of His sufferings, His life was characterized by the highest degree of refinement and virtue and by His love of beauty³², which is evident in His exquisite handwriting. One example of His calligraphy is a beautiful scroll on which were inscribed, in the form of a pentacle, no less than three hundred and sixty derivatives of the word Bahá.³³

The prison of Máh-kú, the first of two prison fortresses where He spent His last years, was “a dungeon on a mountain top,” “so remote, so inhospitable and dangerously situated a corner of the territory of the Sháh,”³⁴ in which His companions were “two men and four dogs.”³⁵ In His presence “there [was] not at night even a lighted lamp!”³⁶ And yet, in such a place, the Báb’s qualities of rare nobility and beauty, His gentle yet forceful personality, and His natural charm, combined with infinite tact and judgment, won over “almost all with whom He was brought into personal contact, often converting His gaolers to His Faith and turning the ill-disposed into admiring friends.”³⁷

The life and character of the Báb until the last moments of His life reflected the perfect Light of Which

He was the personification. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has said of the Báb:

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.³⁸

Him Whom God shall make manifest

Through His unique combination of kindness, heroism, and majesty, the Báb inspired the selfless allegiance and wholehearted devotion of thousands of followers. Owing to His influence, these men and women not only broke with centuries-old traditions but also laid down their lives to help usher in the new age the Báb had come to inaugurate. Yet, the Object of this matchless adoration directed His own devotion and allegiance towards Bahá’u’lláh, Whose advent He had come to herald. In the Qayyúmu’l-Asmá, the Báb addresses Bahá’u’lláh in these words:

O Thou Remnant of God! I have sacrificed myself wholly for Thee; I have accepted curses for Thy sake, and have yearned for naught but martyrdom in the path of Thy love. Sufficient witness unto me is God, the Exalted, the Protector, the Ancient of Days.³⁹

The expression of Bahá’u’lláh’s praise for the Báb is equally moving. In the Kitáb-i-Íqán, writing about His own tribulations and sufferings, Bahá’u’lláh proclaims:

Amidst them all, We stand, life in hand, wholly resigned to His will; that perchance, through God’s loving-kindness and His grace, this revealed and manifest Letter⁴⁰ may lay down His life as a sacrifice in the path of the Primal Point,⁴¹ the most exalted Word.⁴²

In the Revelation of the Báb—marked by a profound recasting of the purpose of religion, by devotion to perfection and excellence, and by utter self-sacrifice—one finds the “seed, endowed by the Hand of Omnipotence with such vast potentialities” that was destined to germinate in the form of the “still more compelling Revelation”⁴³ of Bahá’u’lláh. The Twin Holy Days marking the birth of the Báb and the birth of Bahá’u’lláh, falling on successive days according to the lunar calendar and “accounted as one in the sight of God,” are fitting occasions to reflect on the distinctive characteristics of the life and teachings of the Báb and on their relationship to the message of Bahá’u’lláh.

– Elham Afnan,
originally published in *The Bahá’í World* online, October 2019.

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31 Authorized translation of an excerpt from the Persian Bayán.

32 For more on this theme, see Moojan Momen, “Perfection and Refinement: Towards an Aesthetics of the Báb,” in *Lights of ‘Irfán: Studies in the Principal Bahá’í Beliefs*, Book Twelve (Darmstadt: ‘Asr-i- Jadíd Publisher, 2010), pages 221–243.

33 *God Passes By*, page 69.

34 *The Dawn-Breakers*, page 245.

35 *Ibid*, page 248.

36 *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, page 87.

37 *The Dawn-Breakers*, “Introduction”, page xxxiii.

38 *Some Answered Questions*, Part 1: On the Influence of the Prophets in the Evolution of Humanity: 8. The Báb.

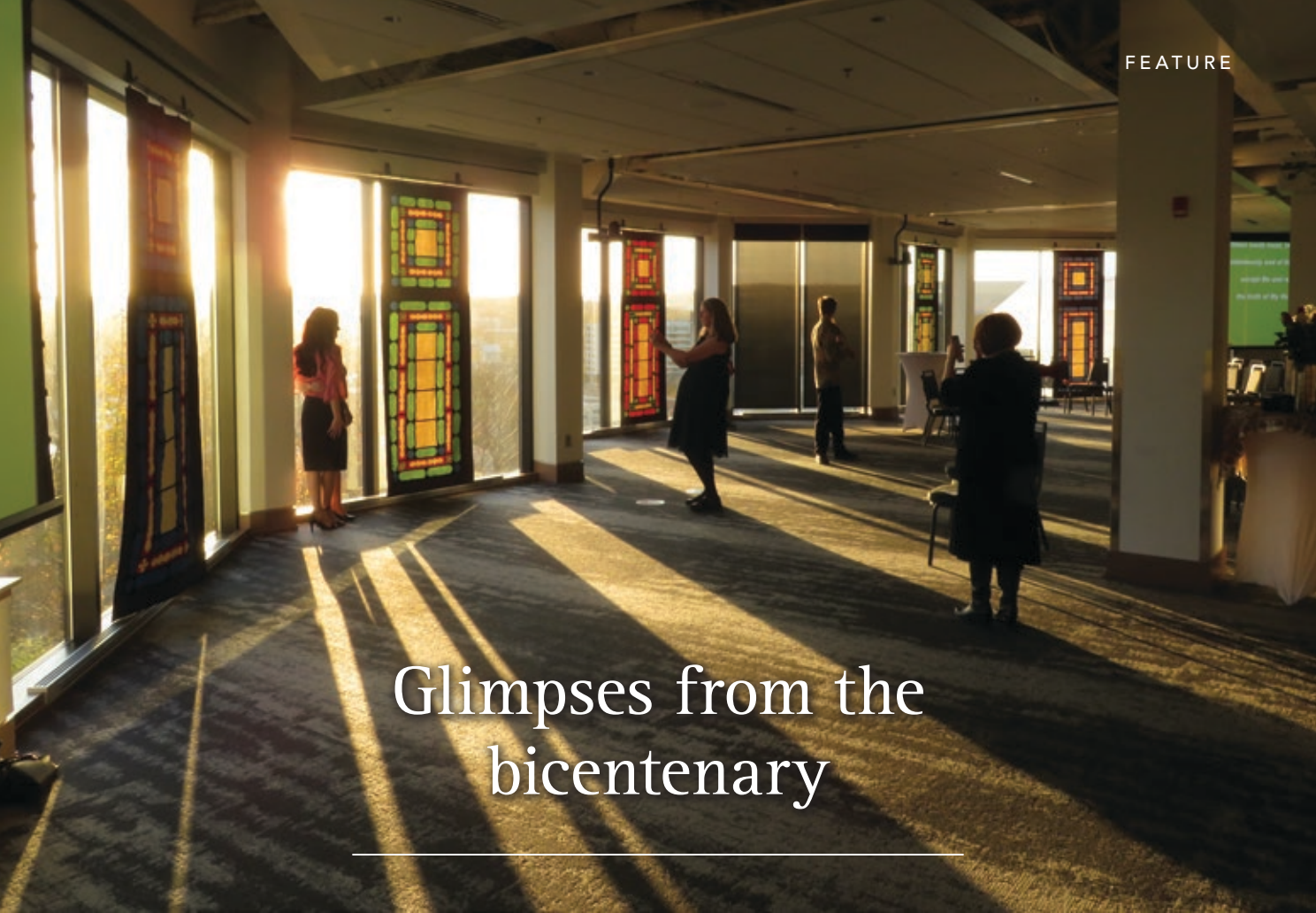
39 *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, page 59.

40 Bahá’u’lláh.

41 The Báb.

42 *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2003, 2008 printing), page 252.

43 *God Passes By*, page 54.



Glimpses from the bicentenary

Here we offer a small selection of photographs from celebrations across Canada, noting the victories they represent and the demonstrated capacity to “bring the broadest possible spectrum of people into the embrace of the community’s activities.”¹

¹ From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the world, 8 November 2019.



Top: Quilts on display in St. John’s N.L.

Photo: Jeff and Lisa-Jo van den Scott

Bottom: A children’s class bicentenary celebration in Kelowna, B.C.





Top: A painting by Ruth Perry, from Fort McMurray, Alta.; Children's class participants in Toronto, Ont. work on a poster; Friends carry out a home visit in Vancouver, B.C.



Middle: A children's class in Brampton, Ont. serve grandparents tea for the bicentenary; Friends carry out an artistic activity in Danville, Que.; Youth work on a gardening project in Winnipeg, Man.

Bottom: Artists in Quebec perform music from their album titled "Celebration"; A musical performance at an arts festival in Charlottetown, P.E.I.; Friends in Saskatoon, Sask. plan for the bicentenary; A Chinese dance is performed at a celebration in Coquitlam, B.C.







Top: Children perform a ribbon dance at a neighbourhood celebration in Toronto, Ont.; A painting workshop was part of a celebration in Halifax, N.S.; A group of young families in Ottawa, Ont.; A play depicting events during the lifetime of the Báb was performed in Calgary, Alta.

Middle: Friends in Winnipeg, Man. gather to consult about bicentenary preparations; A celebration in Gwillimbury, Ont. at the historic Sharon Temple; Friends enjoy music at a celebration in Montreal, Que.

Bottom: A celebration in Yellowknife, N.W.T.; Friends at a celebration in Whitehorse, Yukon; A flute performance at a celebration in Waterloo, Ont.; Children contribute to a celebration in Vancouver, B.C.





A bicentenary celebration in the Greenboro-Heatherington neighbourhood.

Strengthening the institute process from one bicentenary to another

In Greenboro-Heatherington, significant effort toward strengthening the institute process over the last two years led to unprecedented participation in celebrating the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb.

Greenboro-Heatherington is a neighbourhood located in south east Ottawa, Ont. The area is populated by many young families who live in a mix of single-family dwellings, townhouses and low-rise apartment buildings. Efforts to advance the community-building process in Greenboro-Heatherington

date back to 2009, when receptivity to the junior youth spiritual empowerment program was discovered. The work further intensified when several friends homefront pioneered to the neighbourhood to join the small team there, including an Auxiliary Board Member and his family, as well as two youth.

FROM ACROSS CANADA

In 2017, a few days before the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, the team serving in the neighbourhood, including animators, children's class teachers and tutors, set two goals. One was to have at least 10 celebrations hosted by youth from the population. The other was to grow from the 10 or so activities at that time to 100 core activities by the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb.

When only four youth came to the gathering at which the team had hoped to help them plan their celebrations for the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, and only one sat through the study of the House of Justice's message for the occasion, they knew that they wouldn't be able to achieve that first goal. Although several local celebrations did occur, none were hosted by youth from the local population. It was one of those moments of crisis that hinted at the need to focus more on strengthening the institute process.

During the eight cycles – or two years – between the bicentenaries, there were a few key developments in Greenboro-Heatherington. In 2018, the team, encouraged by the National Spiritual Assembly, identified the need for a community property. In June, just in time for summer activities, the Greenboro Neighbourhood Centre – located in a local strip mall – was opened.¹ This provided a material foundation for further growth. The team also started meeting more regularly, often daily, either in a home or at the new neighbourhood centre, to pray, consult and plan.

That summer, they discovered a particularly receptive block within the neighbourhood of Greenboro-Heatherington called Ledbury. Two junior youth groups and a children's class formed almost immediately there. They also started developing relationships with local institutions. The Boys and Girls Club in the area allowed the team to use their space, where several junior youth groups

¹ See the article "The development of community properties" in the Winter 2019 issue for more information.

now meet. A close relationship was also formed with the community centre in Ledbury, opening that space to a few more junior youth groups, where the staff also help to advertise the program.

In spring 2019, insights from the representatives from Toronto and Vancouver who travelled to Sydney, Australia, to learn about working with large numbers led to an advance in the team's thinking.² Additionally, a few members of the team serving in Greenboro-Heatherington travelled to New Delhi, India, to learn about some of the systems and modes of operation that have led to large-scale growth there. A key learning from these experiences was the importance of nurturing a steady stream of youth through the institute process. They also learned that when focusing on capacity-building, things can move quickly.

As the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb approached, there were 20 core activities in the neighbourhood. This

² See the article "Stories from Sydney" in the Summer 2019 issue for more information.

soon increased to 36, however this was still not even halfway to their goal of 100 before the bicentenary. They soon realized that they could not continue in the same way.

In its 29 December 2015 message the House of Justice wrote, "[S]imilar to the development of a living organism, growth can occur quickly when the right conditions are in place. Foremost among these conditions is an institute process gaining in strength." The team members who travelled to Delhi experienced this firsthand. There, youth who enter the institute are assisted to progress through the sequence of courses, are accompanied in the field by someone more experienced than themselves, and, as their experience grows, soon begin to accompany others. Often, they quickly become tutors. As friends enter the institute process and accompany others, "generations" of resources emerge. The House of Justice describes this process so clearly, and in Greenboro-Heatherington, glimmerings of this were discernable.

In Delhi, they set ambitious goals regarding how many youth will enter the institute process yearly, which are then broken down into weekly plans. In Greenboro-Heatherington, the team realized that they cannot be content with their current intake and should set goals not only based on their capacity but also on how quickly they wish to become a relevant contributor against the forces of disintegration. When they returned home from Delhi, the team began to implement these lessons in their own neighbourhood, primarily through increasing the regularity of institute campaigns and by making a concerted effort to invite new friends into the process.

It took about four weeks of full-time effort by a team of five friends, with a few others joining some evenings, to mobilize the first cohort of 17 youth into a Book 1 campaign. This was the first sleep-away campaign that they had organized, which took place in the village of Lanark, Ont. about an hour's drive from the neighbourhood. The team felt that going away from the neighbour-



Many celebrations in the neighbourhood focused on unity, inspired by the quote from Bahá'u'lláh, "Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch."

hood would remove distractions, immerse the youth in an uplifting environment and help them to complete the courses.

Conversations with the families of the youth were vital to the success of the campaign, especially as the youth would be staying away from home, and the team spent a lot of time conversing with parents and answering their questions. They described where the youth would be going, what they would be doing (and eating) every day and studied the first section of Book 1 so that parents had an idea of what their children would be learning.

During the camp the tutors made sure to connect concepts from the institute courses with the youths' motivation to act. They consciously helped participants to reflect on their twofold moral purpose – to take charge of their own spiritual and intellectual growth as well as contribute to the transformation of society – and made plans to return home and start junior youth groups and children's classes. Over the course of eight days, the youth completed their study of Book 1 and went on to study parts of Books 3 and 5. Within the camp, bonds of friendship were formed, and a strong sense of purpose was developed.

After this first campaign it became easier to register a new cohort of youth, as the first group returned ready to engage their friends in the community-building process. On returning home, the youth entered a strong pattern of action right away. They joined the neighbourhood team in their daily meetings, which were animated by prayers and the singing of songs from the camp. All have stayed in the process; all are holding core activities.

The second campaign, at the same location, had 27 participants (including 14 from the first camp; the rest were mostly friends they had invited) and lasted seven days. Those who have been in the institute process for only two months are now accompanying others. By the end of the summer there were 84 core



A youth with the leaf he created for a bicentenary art activity.

activities taking place in Greenboro-Heatheringington.

It was under these circumstances that the neighbourhood entered the potent bicentenary period. With a sizeable cohort of youth now moving through the institute and holding activities, it was easier to help them plan their own celebrations, which they held with the participants of their junior youth groups and children's classes. The team didn't set a goal this time, but at least 10 such celebrations were led by youth from the population.

With respect to the second goal of 100 core activities before the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, the team knew it would be a tough one when there were just over 30 core activities in the neighbourhood at the beginning of June 2019, which meant that they had five months to grow three times as much as they had in the first half of the current Five Year Plan. But considerable work had been done toward strengthening the institute process – a key condition of growth.

The group of youth that participated in the summer institute campaigns contributed to a significant increase in the number of core activities in Greenboro-Heatheringington. They are not only holding junior youth groups

and children's classes but are engaging their families and neighbours in devotional gatherings. Many of these devotional gatherings are carried out as home visits with the purpose of sharing prayers with families and neighbours.

The youth gather and reflect together each week and accompany each other in the field of service. Many of the activities are fledgling, but the youth are committed. During the time leading up to the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, Greenboro-Heatheringington surpassed 100 core activities. They now have 9 children's classes, 26 junior youth groups, 13 study circles and 53 devotional gatherings.

This includes four generations: youth who accompany others to start core activities who in turn accompany others. As one team member commented, "There is so much more still to do in terms of consolidation and a scheme of support and coordination, but we have truly rejoiced during this period of the bicentenary and are in awe of the power of the institute process."

– From notes and conversations with a team member

Montreal exhibition commemorates bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb

A series of artworks explores the themes and aesthetic of the Writings of the Báb.

In her latest exhibition, Montreal artist Lorraine Pritchard was inspired by the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb. Pritchard's exhibit showed at the Beaux-arts des Ameriques (BADA) Gallery in Montreal from October 17 to November 16, 2019.

"I was always very inspired by [the Báb's early Writings], the way that the calligraphy was placed on the page, the expression in the line. I work a lot with lines, movement and rhythm. None of these things I wanted to copy or illustrate, but they were a point of departure for this project," says Pritchard.

Pritchard also uses the concept of "circumambulation," a pattern of reflective walking around a sacred place. Pilgrims who approach the Shrine of the Báb in Haifa, Israel, will often circumambulate the Shrine before crossing the threshold into the interior to offer their prayers and supplications.

"They look like a language, but they are not, they are my way of drawing."

"I have always done abstract pieces, but these were related to this particular theme and from these ideas I had. They look like a language, but they are not, they are my way of drawing," adds Pritchard.

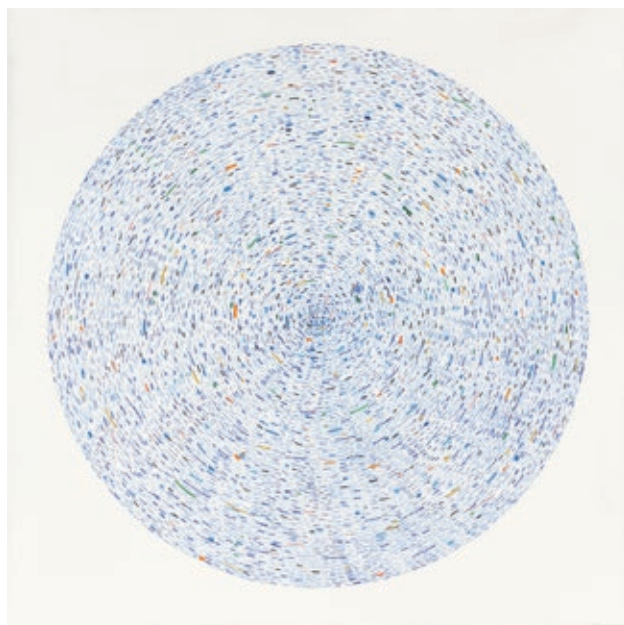
Another theme of the Báb's writings is the intimate relationship between intellect and spirit, an aspect that Pritchard's work also evokes in those who view her work. "I always think that intellect and intuition are interconnected... we don't fully know how they respond to each other but they work together."

Asked how the life of the Báb can speak to us today, Pritchard reflects that the heroism and drama of His life are hard to comprehend. "I get overwhelmed when I talk about the Báb... The dramatic story of His life and the sacrifices that were made, the revolutionary nature of it. But it can inspire us in the mystery of it all, the sacrifices that were made and courage [His followers] had."

A version of this article was originally published on the Canadian Bahá'í News Service website at news.bahai.ca.



Sojourn (2019) by Lorraine Pritchard.
Courtesy of BADA Gallery. Photo: Guy L'Heureux



Radiation Blue (2019) by Lorraine Pritchard.
Courtesy of BADA Gallery. Photo: Guy L'Heureux

Dawn of the Light film sparks conversations

Many Bahá'ís across Canada shared the film *Dawn of the Light* with their friends and family, often in the context of bicentenary celebrations. This opened the door for meaningful conversations.



A still from the film *Dawn of the Light* showing community-building activities in Vienna, Austria.

About a month before the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, the Universal House of Justice released the film *Dawn of the Light*, commissioned for the occasion. “The film follows the personal search for truth and meaning undertaken by eight people from different parts of the world,”¹ including the United States, Nepal, Chile, Northern Ireland, Tajikistan, New Zealand, Austria and Zambia. It can be viewed at bicentenary.bahai.org. The film is offered in English and French, as well as many other languages.

¹ Bahá'í World News Service “‘Dawn of the Light’: New bicentenary film explores search for truth and meaning.” 23 September 2019.

In **Rimouski, Que.**, over forty people – most of whom were friends of the Faith – gathered to celebrate the bicentenary, some travelling from remote regions more than 250 kilometres away. As part of the program, the film *Dawn of the Light* was screened in French. “People were very enthusiastic about the content of the movie,” Francine Alary, who helped organize the event, said.

After watching the film, the participants naturally split into smaller groups to discuss its contents. “We were surprised at how it really opened the door for discussions,” Ms. Alary continued, “Over the years friends have been asking: What is the Bahá'í Faith? and Who

is Bahá'u'lláh? Here, in one shot, is a movie that answers their questions.”

The content of the film often prompted viewers to ask questions. In **Charlottetown, P.E.I.**, Ann Boyles hosts study circles on Friday evenings, and typically three or four groups meet to advance through various books of the institute. One evening before the bicentenary, the tutors were away attending a meeting, so, rather than cancel, plans were made to screen the film *Dawn of the Light*.

“I wasn't sure how many would come, since most of the tutors were absent and it wasn't a regular study evening,” Dr. Boyles shared, “but 17 youth and two adults showed up and

watched the movie very attentively.” The film was particularly relatable to those relatively new to the community-building process.

“It was wonderful to see two young women from Nepal so excited when the segments from their country came onto the screen and a young man from an Arab country listening attentively to the young man in the Austrian segment as he was speaking Arabic,” Dr. Boyles continued. After the screening, this young man asked, “Why is unity so important in your religion?” which prompted a long discussion.

Miles Thomsen became a Bahá’í about five years ago and homefront pioneered to the neighbourhood of Dalhousie, in **Winnipeg, Man.**, near where he grew up. As the only Bahá’í in his family, he saw the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb as an opportunity to continue sharing the Faith with his family members.

During the bicentenary period, he hosted a gathering including his parents, all four of his grandparents and his sister to watch the film *Dawn of the Light*. “The film really helps connects the dots for a lot of themes and concepts that I’ve shared piecemeal over time...and connects them to the community-building activities we’ve been doing,” Mr. Thomsen explained.

As with others who saw it, the film encouraged his family members to ask questions about the Bahá’í Faith. They were interested to hear more about his personal involvement in the community as a homefront pioneer and asked questions like: What is a House of Worship? What is the meaning of the nine-pointed star? How long has the Bahá’í Faith been in Winnipeg? Through this experience he realized that he can actively create opportunities for his family to learn about the Faith.

In Peanut Plaza, a part of the Upper Don Mills neighbourhood in **Toronto, Ont.**, there was a large celebration about a week before the bicentenary during which they

showed a portion of the film *Dawn of the Light*. The team serving there used this opportunity to follow up with a few families and ask if they would be interested in viewing the entire film.

“This led to a conversation about how all the Manifestations of God are connected through the Holy Spirit and how they all had great influence on the masses and experienced tribulations.”

One family – a mother and her son – agreed to watch the film with some of the animators, including Tahireh Mohebati. “They came over on a rainy night, and after enjoying soup and cake together, we watched the film in silence,” Ms. Mohebati shared. “In our conversations afterward, the mother and son both noted how similar the Báb was to Christ. This led to a conversation about how all the Manifestations of God are connected through the Holy Spirit and how they all had great influence on the masses and experienced tribulations.”

All those present agreed that their community requires the teachings of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh in order to raise a new generation that is more kind, just and united. The mother said she felt greatly blessed to be connected to the community-building process. They also agreed to host their own celebration. The following week, “The mother

prepared tea and food for us, and we had a small and simple program including songs, prayer and a story of the life of Bahá’u’lláh,” Ms. Mohebati shared.

In **Victoria, B.C.**, the participants of a monthly devotional gathering, including neighbours, coworkers and families connected to the junior youth spiritual empowerment program, watched the film. “This film clearly touches the heart,” Laylee Rohani, who hosts the devotional, said. “After the film one of our friends shared his reflections with tears in his eyes. He immediately spoke of how the message of the film resonated with him.”

“Another friend shared her story of having a Croatian mother and Serbian father,” Ms. Rohani continued, “As a result of these two groups fighting each other, her family was targeted in the war and eventually evacuated by the United Nations, ending up in Canada. She had never understood why she was made to feel that she had to pick an identity of either being Croatian or Serbian. The message of the film and the message of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh was something she wholeheartedly agreed with.”

This opened the door for the hosts to invite the participants to study *Ruhi Book 1: Reflections on the Light of the Spirit*, “in the context of discussing the community-building activities that were shown in the film and what we can do as individuals in our own community,” Ms. Rohani shared. Some of these devotional participants have already begun their study of Book 1.

She shared that since the last bicentenary – that of the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh two years ago – she learned that, “a smaller and more intimate gathering lends itself to an environment where a direct invitation and a willingness to accept such an invitation is more natural,” as well as the value of working with a group of friends within “a smaller geographic area.”

“The spirit of the bicentenary moving on its own”

Chayan Dehghan, a young homefront pioneer, tells the story of how over 200 people celebrated the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb at the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre.

I have always had a great deal of respect for Indigenous peoples and their culture. I started to attend weekly events at the Native Friendship Centre in Fort Erie, a town in the Niagara Region of Ontario, in 2017. Historically, the Bahá'í community has had a relationship with the centre, renting the space for events and hosting a regular devotional there. However, everything had stopped for a period of about 15 years.

I participated in drumming and singing sessions, socials and pow wows, and through these activities developed strong friendships with many families, youth and junior youth. This summer, I pioneered to the neighbourhood where most of these families reside.

Over time, I introduced the Bahá'í Faith and the institute process. A junior youth group soon formed, and a group of youth rallied around it to assist, including a few Bahá'í youth who live in the community. The 29 December 2015 message of the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors was my driving force and manual as a pioneer, particularly the following passage:

“In its early stages, the systematic effort to reach out to a population and foster its participation in the process of capacity building accelerates markedly when members of that population are themselves in the vanguard of such an effort. These individuals will have special insight into those forces and structures in their societies that can, in various



Kevin Locke gives a hoop dance demonstration at a bicentenary celebration in Niagara, Ont. Photo: Ron Lynch

ways, reinforce the endeavours under way.”

The truth of this passage was demonstrated in organizing our celebration for the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb. At the end of the summer, I consulted with my friend, Edgar, who is the cultural resource coordinator of the friendship centre, about the possibility of hosting a celebration there. I shared the exciting news that Kevin Locke, a Bahá'í and celebrated Lakota hoop dancer, flute player, and storyteller,

was going to be in the area and had offered to do workshops and performances while here.

I also explained that the end of October marked a very special holiday for Bahá'ís: the Birth of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, both Divine Teachers Who brought teachings from the Creator, like the Peace-Maker, the Manifestation of God for the Haudenosaunee peoples. Put in this context, the value and importance of the Holy Day was felt.

I suggested we celebrate this special occasion with Kevin by organizing a Haudenosaunee social, a gathering where the friends sing and dance the traditional dances of the Longhouse. Edgar became very excited at this idea. I even heard him describing it to some of the other staff, saying, "It's the birth of their Peace-Maker, so it's pretty important." And so, the planning began!

Originally, the social was scheduled for Sunday October 27th. However, Edgar pointed out that Sunday was the day the Buffalo Bills play football, and many people, being fans of the team, would want to stay home to watch the game. He suggested that if we wanted a lot of friends to come to the celebration, it would be best to have it on another day.

The next date we chose, Saturday October 26th, was also logistically challenging as, unknown to us at the time, the centre had already been booked by another organization. Additionally, another staff member wanted to host a social around the same time and was requesting to combine socials rather than plan a separate occasion.

After consulting about the importance of unity, we decided that having two separate socials so close together might lead to gossip in the community. It seemed that from whatever direction we looked at it, we had to change the date and accommodate the other staff member's request to combine socials. And so, we decided to move the social to Wednesday October 30th. It wasn't until later that I realized that this was the actual day of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh! Another confirmation came when the Regional Bahá'í Council of Ontario agreed to support in terms of funds. Those at the friendship centre were profoundly touched by this.

In addition to Kevin Locke's performance, we also asked friends from the Oneida Nation of the Thames to sing during the social dancing. A women's drumming group also agreed to perform. Excitement was

building in the community and many volunteered to help with setting up, cooking and cleaning. In the days leading up to the celebration, I could feel a sudden shift which I can't describe in any other terms than the spirit of the bicentenary moving on its own.

Several days before the celebration, one of my friends, a talented digital artist who had created a poster for the social which featured a nine-pointed star, said "I'm so curious. I really want to know more about the Bahá'í Faith." He asked if one can be a Christian and a Bahá'í. I explained that in one sense this is possible, and our conversation led to the topic of progressive revelation. We spoke about how being a Bahá'í does not negate one's identity, but rather strengthens it. I used Kevin Locke and the late Doris McLean as examples of individuals whose Indigenous identities were deepened further because of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and who spent their lives advocating for Indigenous culture.

On the day of the celebration, Edgar and I lit sage so that we could smudge and start off in that good way. He walked around the room with a smudge stick and I had the honour of going around and offering smudge with his eagle feather to all the friends who were getting ready for the participants to arrive. Then the approximately 200 attendees began to enter, all bringing food with them for the potluck feast. It was a very large turnout for a social at the centre. We opened first with the Thanksgiving address – an acknowledgement of all the things we are thankful for in creation, recited in a Haudenosaunee language.

After dinner, which included traditional Indigenous cuisine, Kevin Locke shared songs on his flute and performed a hoop dance demonstration for us. Some of us, including friends from Six Nations, had the honour of singing and drumming for him while he danced. After his dance, Kevin spoke about the fundamental concept of the oneness of humanity, how we were

all created noble and were meant to soar like eagles but need to do this together in unity. He emphasized that universal participation is essential because even if one person, or one people, is left out, it will result in the fall or decline of all. He also spoke of the period in which we live: The Divine Springtime.

Those who volunteered and performed were gifted braids of sweetgrass and tobacco ties; after this, the opening dance of the social began. Never had I seen so many friends for the opening dance at the centre. The line came all the way around to form a second layer in the circle. The rest of the evening was spent dancing and singing and was filled with joy and ecstasy. The last dance of the night was the women's shuffle dance to honour the women for all the strength they bring to the community. After that, the same Elder who opened the gathering closed with the Thanksgiving address to make sure we all left with our minds as one.

The following day, after dropping off Kevin at the airport, I went back to the centre to see if they still needed help with cleaning up and to give gifts to those who had left early the night before. I kept hearing from different staff that the spirit of the gathering and the sheer number of people was so profoundly beautiful. One of the women who everyone looks at as an aunty told me that she had come out of the kitchen during the social thinking, "This is it! This is what I want to see in this community!" She said "We have to do this again. I wish we could do this every month."

Truly, the bicentenary has caused a stirring in the spirit of this community and I hope its influence continues. Now I think the key will be in focusing all our energies on the junior youth and how, through them, we can continue to strengthen the community.

– Chayan Dehghan

Celebrating the Birth of the Báb in schools

The following narratives demonstrate the creative efforts of children, youth, parents and teachers to celebrate the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb in the context of schools.

A team of animators in **Summerside, P.E.I.** has been learning about collaborating with local institutions in their community; one junior youth group takes place at a library and another at a church. A third group is offered through an intermediate school.

The school group formed when some friends serving in the neighbourhood approached the principal and delivered a presentation describing the purpose and vision of the junior youth spiritual empowerment program. After receiving approval to start a group there, they were able to make school-wide announcements. The first junior youth to express interest in forming a group also invited their peers to join.

As the bicentenary approached, the animators shared that this period marked the appearance of the Báb, Who was a great Teacher, and invited the group to celebrate the occasion. They decided to host a community dinner, to which they would invite everyone they knew, including their parents, teachers and friends. The junior youth created a program and planned the meal with the assistance of their animators.

Approximately 47 people from the community attended. Many parents were able to see for the first time what their children were learning in the junior youth group. One animator said that hosting the event strengthened the relationship between the parents and animators and as a result, the practice of home visiting parents has become much more natural.

In **Toronto, Ont.**, sixth-grade student Phoenix gave a 45-minute



Sixth-grade student Phoenix gives a presentation on the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb to his class.

presentation about the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb to his class. Several weeks before, his mother had asked his teacher if she could give a presentation to his class. The teacher initially declined but later said that Phoenix was welcome to give the presentation himself.

Phoenix rose to the task. The night before, he created a PowerPoint presentation with the help of his mother. In addition to introducing the special period of the bicentenary, he wanted to engage his classmates in a discussion around the significance of Holy Days.

He first asked his classmates what Holy Days they celebrate. Then he spoke about how these special days are often connected to Manifestations of God, Who appear from time to time to guide humanity with spiritual teachings. Attending children's classes for many years had helped him to develop capacity to speak with ease about such concepts. Phoenix's class also discussed how Holy Days present opportunities to serve others. He described the role of service in building a better society

for all human beings and showed his class acts of service that people around the world had carried out to commemorate the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb.

The concept of service was further illustrated through a story from the junior youth text *Walking the Straight Path*, about a king who met an old man planting trees for the benefit of future generations. Afterward, Phoenix asked his class: What are some things others have done that we benefit from? and What are some things we could do for others?

The class then discussed service projects that they could do together, including planting a vegetable garden at their school, and decided to follow up with some of these ideas.

Anne, a high school teacher in **Port Alberni, B.C.**, has been teaching a social justice course to Grades 11 and 12 students for several years. The course explores various "strands" of social justice, such as poverty, gender equality, Indigenous reconciliation and the environment.

She also added a religion strand, which has allowed for discussions around spiritual concepts. Classroom discussions about the students' spiritual and intellectual development are often "really open and honest," Anne said, "and sometimes tough." Her students also carry out biweekly service projects as part of the course.

Anne was able to align the religion strand of her two classes with the week of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb. Each class held a small celebration together as a part of their religion unit. This included an introduction to the Bahá'í Faith by Anne, including segments of the film *Dawn of the Light* and stories about the Life of the Báb, Anís and Tahirih.

At the end of the religion strand, the students will take a test in which they will apply the Teachings of the Bahá'í Faith to world issues like globalization. Anne hopes the spiritual advancement of her students continues to develop and that she can also create opportunities to introduce the institute process into the school environment.

In the Springdale neighbourhood of **Brampton, Ont.**, a large gathering to celebrate the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb took place at a local high school. Hosting the event at this venue, as it was familiar to the community, allowed for the participation of many.

Through reading messages from the House of Justice, the team broadened their vision of who could participate in the bicentenary celebrations. They invited those who had never attended neighbourhood activities before and those who had been absent for a long time. "Sometimes we get comfortable, but it helped us see all the people we could reach out to," said Martharoot Malungu, who serves as a tutor in the neighbourhood. This became a conscious part of their thinking.

A group of four to five team members attended each of the numerous smaller celebrations in

the neighbourhood, many of which were hosted by young people in the community. By doing this, they were able to have meaningful conversations in intimate spaces and invite more people to the large collective celebration at the high school.

At the larger celebration, participants of children's classes and junior youth groups shared presentations that showcased the arts, including Punjabi and Afrobeats dances. As Diwali, the festival of lights, is celebrated by many in the neighbourhood and fell within the week of the bicentenary, one group spoke about how, through service, they can be a light in the world. A youth studying Ruhi Book 2 also gave a short talk on the oneness of humanity.

These efforts soon developed into two regular children's classes at the school that follow the Ruhi Book 3 curriculum.

"Many people were excited to share with each other what they were learning in their respective activities," Ms. Malungu commented.

Four years ago, Sima first began getting to know the teachers at her son's primary school in **Toronto, Ont.** She gradually introduced the concept of spiritual education into their conversations and noted that the public-school curriculum does not often acknowledge the spiritual nature of human beings. This resonated with several of the teachers.

From there, Sima began visiting the classes and teaching the students songs that put the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith to music. Sometimes she enlisted the help of local artists to make music with the children.

They learned a melody for the quotation "[S]trive that your actions day-by-day may be beautiful prayers," and another for "So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth."

These efforts soon developed into two regular children's classes at the school that follow the Ruhi Book 3 curriculum. These occur on a weekly basis from 12 to 2 p.m., one for a Grade 3 class and one for a combined Grades 4 and 5 class. The teachers love the material and appreciate it when Sima brings guests to help her teach the classes because they like seeing other people serve young children.

The children have recently been learning about the Manifestations of God. Sima shared, "We've started teaching them about all the religions. We started with Abraham, Krishna and we'll do Moses this week." During the week of the bicentenary, they also learned about the Báb and carried out an artistic activity in which they made "mines" filled with gems, inspired by the quotation "Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value." Additionally, Sima invited several teachers and staff members to her home for dawn prayers and two individuals attended.

The children's classes have also opened up other opportunities for service. For example, Sima's husband made a friendship bench that has the quotation "Let your heart burn with loving kindness for all who may cross your path" carved across the top. It is placed in a common area in the school and when a child feels sad, they can sit on it to invite conversation.

In another part of the school, a banner on the wall declares, "Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch..." and at the front desk in their main office, there are two Bahá'í prayer books in different languages. It seems that the Bahá'í Writings are now extending beyond the walls of the two classrooms into the entire school.

Bahá'í literature in French

For many years, the National Spiritual Assembly has actively supported the production of Bahá'í literature in French, as evidenced by the various Bahá'í Canada publications made available for sale over the years.¹ Canada, particularly Quebec, has been privileged not only to provide literature for its own Francophone populations but has also made a significant contribution to the dissemination of French Bahá'í literature around the world.

Each of the publications produced requires a great deal of work: writing, translating, editing and proofreading. These tasks call for a certain level of expertise, as well as time. In Canada and elsewhere, as the processes of growth gain momentum, a new challenge is before us: to raise up human resources in this field, extending

the range of Bahá'í literature available to Francophone populations.

As young Bahá'ís in Canada make career choices, they are encouraged to consider the possibility of serving the Faith in this way, confident that such a decision is completely in alignment with the aims of the Plan and is a valid option for anyone with the relevant skills and interest. In addition, however, without necessarily making it a career choice, the friends could also seek to perfect their French-language skills in order to be able to offer services in this field.

Individuals who wish to explore their interest in this service are warmly encouraged to contact le Comité bahá'í de littérature et de productions françaises at cblpf@bahai.ca.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Le Comité bahá'í de littérature et de productions françaises

¹ Literature from Bahá'í Canada Publications can be purchased at bookstore.bahai.ca.

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The International Fund

The Community Properties Fund

The World Centre Endowment Fund

The Bahá'í Development Fund

REGIONAL CONTACT INFORMATION

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GENERAL INFORMATION

To purchase **Bahá'í books in English, Persian, Chinese or Spanish**, visit bookstore.bahai.ca

Or contact:

University of Toronto

Press Distribution

Phone: 1-800-565-9523 or 416-667-7791

In the event that the title you are looking for is not available, contact the Bahá'í Distribution Service

Email: bds@bahai.ca

Phone: 1-800-465-3287 or 905-889-8168

To purchase **Bahá'í books in French**, contact the Service de distribution bahá'í-Québec (SDB-Q)

75 d'auteuil Street, Québec, QC, G1R 4C3

Email: sdbc@bahai.ca

Phone: 418-692-2402

Website: bookstore.bahai.ca

To travel teach or pioneer within Canada or internationally, contact the Pioneer Desk at pioneer@bahai.ca or 905-889-8168.

To change your address, please notify your Local Spiritual Assembly, Regional Council or the Records Department of the National Spiritual Assembly, providing your name, old address, new address and your Bahá'í ID number to: Records Department, Bahá'í National Centre, 7200 Leslie Street, Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8; Phone: 905-889-8168; Fax: 905-889-8184; Email: records@bahai.ca.

To request international credentials from the Bahá'í National Centre when planning to visit countries other than the United States, contact the Records Department: 7200 Leslie Street, Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8; Phone 905-889-8168; Fax: 905-889-8184; Email: records@bahai.ca.

Pilgrimage requests (nine-day pilgrimage or three-day visit) are to be made directly to the Bahá'í World Centre through the Bahá'í Pilgrimage Website <http://pilgrimage.bahai.org> or by post or fax: Office of Pilgrimage, PO Box 155, 3100101, Haifa, Israel; Fax: 011-972-4-835-8507.

Getting married? A Bahá'í wedding cannot take place without the authorization of a Local Spiritual Assembly. Please contact, as early as possible, the Local Assembly in whose jurisdiction the wedding will take place. The Records Department at records@bahai.ca can provide you with the necessary contact details.

Submit news, photos, etc. to Bahá'í Canada through email bahaicanada@bahai.ca or mail to 7200 Leslie St., Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8. Items submitted to *Bahá'í Canada* are considered for publication online and in the magazine.

The Right of God ~ Ḥuqúqu'lláh

"Ḥuqúqu'lláh is indeed a great law. It is incumbent upon all to make this offering, because it is the source of grace, abundance, and of all good. It is a bounty which shall remain with every soul in every world of the worlds of God, the All-Possessing, the All-Bountiful." – Bahá'u'lláh, Ḥuqúqu'lláh – The Right of God, p.5.

ḤUQÚQU'LLÁH PAYMENT INFORMATION

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 receiving 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.

Payments should be sent directly to the **Ḥuqúqu'lláh Treasury** at the Bahá'í National Centre, 7200 Leslie Street, Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8. The Ḥuqúqu'lláh Treasury will issue one receipt, which will serve both as an acknowledgment receipt and as an official tax receipt. It is up to the individual to determine whether or not she/he wishes to use the receipt when filing her/his income tax return. Cheques, bank drafts, bank and/or postal money orders should be made payable to "Canadian Bahá'í Fund" earmarked "Ḥuqúqu'lláh" or "Right of God." Payments to the Right of God can also be made utilizing the <www.bahai-funds.ca> Online Contribution System. The individual's Bahá'í identification number must be provided on all payments.

Payments should not be made through a Local Spiritual Assembly.

Inquiries regarding the law of the Right of God (Ḥuqúqu'lláh) should be directed to your nearest Representative or Deputee Trustee.

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جان مک لود

اطلاعیه مهم در خصوص نحوه پرداخت "حقوق الله"

با توجه به راهنمایی هیأت بین المللی امنای حقوق الله، هیأت امنای حقوق الله در کانادا برنامه مرکزی جدیدی را برای دریافت وجوه، صادر کردن رسید و نگهداری سوابق حقوق الله در اداره مالی دفتر محفل ملی کانادا برقرار کرده است. لذا امور مربوط به حقوق الله دیگر توسط افراد معاونین و یا نمایندگان امین حقوق الله اجرا نخواهد شد. وجوه مزبور مستقیماً باید به صندوق حقوق الله به آدرس زیر ارسال گردد:

Bahá'í National Centre Ḥuqúqu'lláh Treasury, 7200 Leslie Street Thornhill ON L3T 6L8

خزانه دار هیأت امنای حقوق الله رسید وجوه دریافت شده را که در عین حال رسید مالیاتی نیز محسوب میگردد برای فرستنده ارسال خواهند داشت. تقدیم کنندگان حقوق الله میتوانند از این رسیدها در زمان تهیه اوراق مالیاتی استفاده نمایند. در روی چک، حواله بانکی یا پستی باید عبارت Canadian Bahá'í Fund – Ḥuqúqu'lláh ذکر شود. شماره تسجیل بهائی نیز باید در هر پرداخت قید گردد. از چندی پیش امکان پرداخت حقوق الله از طریق سایت اینترنتی "www.bahai-funds.ca" و با استفاده از کارتهای اعتباری نیز میسر شده است. وجوه تقدیمی برای حقوق الله به هیچ وجه نباید توسط محافل روحانی محلی ارسال شود.

سوالات مربوط به حقوق الله را از معاونین و یا نمایندگان امین حقوق الله درخواست کنید