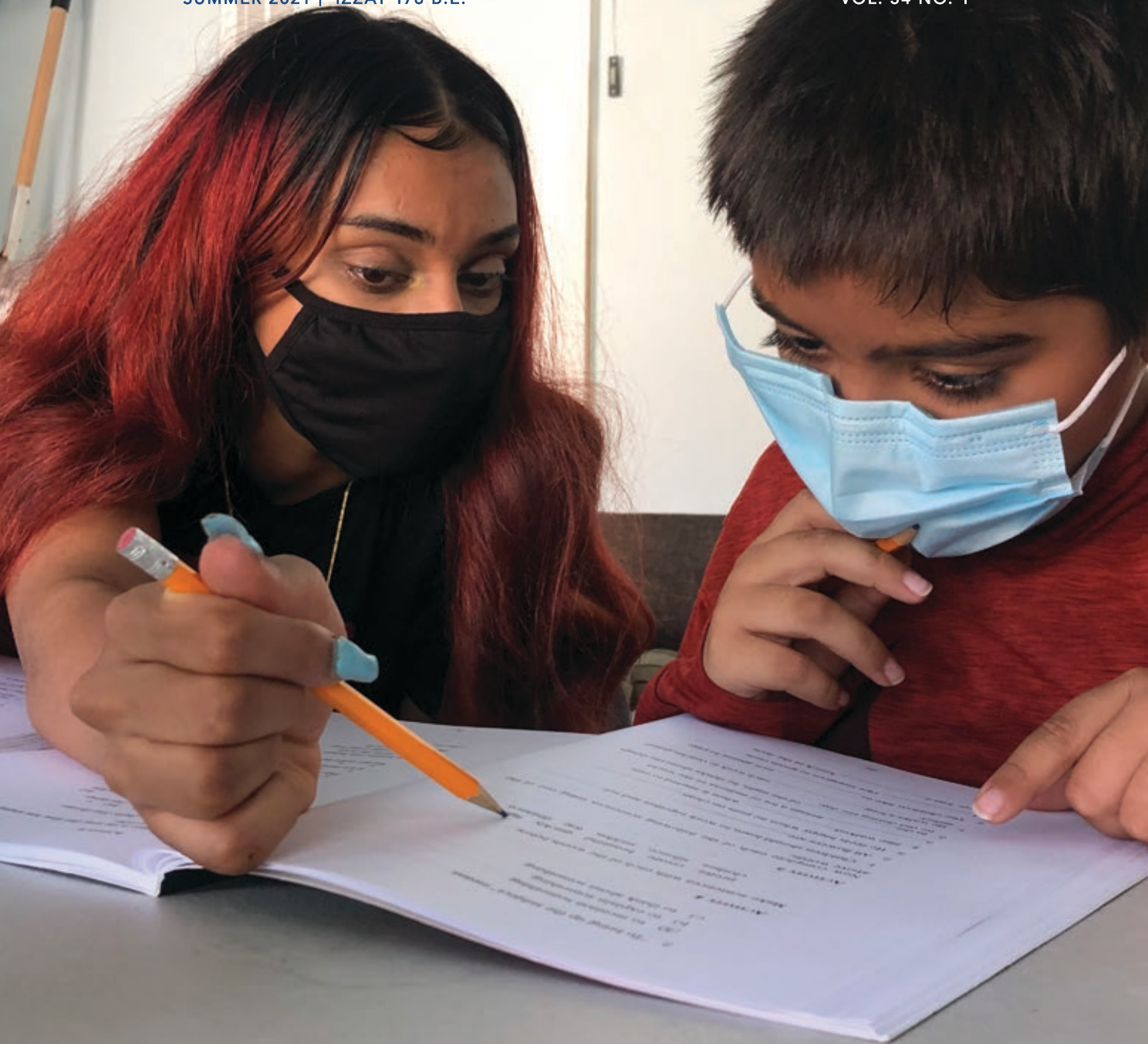


BAHÁ'Í CANADA

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VOL. 34 NO. 1



The page is turned

From the Writings

Divine Providence! Perplexing difficulties have arisen and formidable obstacles have appeared. O Lord! Remove these difficulties and show forth the evidences of Thy might and power. Ease these hardships and smooth our way along this arduous path. O Divine Providence! The obstacles are unyielding, and our toil and hardship are conjoined with a myriad adversities. There is no helper save Thee, and no succourer except Thyself. We set all our hopes on Thee, and commit all our affairs unto Thy care. Thou art the Guide and the Remover of every difficulty, and Thou art the Wise, the Seeing, and the Hearing. – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Prayers of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, No. 6.

He is God. O Thou forgiving Lord! These servants were noble souls, and these radiant hearts were made illumined and resplendent through the light of Thy guidance. They drank a brimming cup of the wine of Thy love, and gave ear to eternal mysteries imparted by the melodies of Thy knowledge. They bound their hearts to Thee, broke free from the snare of estrangement, and laid hold of Thy unity. Make these precious souls companions of the inmates of Heaven, and admit them into the circle of Thy chosen ones. Make them intimates of Thy mysteries in the retreats of the realm above, and immerse them in the sea of lights. Thou art the Bestower, the Luminous, and the Kind. – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Prayers of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, No. 12.

O my kind Lord, O Thou the desire of my heart and soul! Bestow upon Thy friends Thy loving-kindness, and grant them Thine unfailing mercy. Be Thou a solace to Thine ardent lovers, and a friend, a comforter, and a loving companion to them who yearn for Thee. Their hearts are ablaze with the fire of Thy love, and their souls are consumed with the flame of devotion to Thee. They long, one and all, to hasten unto the altar of love, that they may willingly lay down their lives.

O Divine Providence! Grant them Thy favour, guide them aright, graciously aid them to achieve spiritual victory, and confer upon them heavenly bestowals. O Lord, assist them by Thy munificence and grace, and make their radiant faces lamps of guidance in assemblies devoted to the knowledge of Thee, and signs of heavenly bounty in gatherings where Thy verses are expounded. Thou art, verily, the Merciful, the All-Bountiful, the One Whose help is implored by all men.

– ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Prayers of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, No. 21.

O thou daughter of the Kingdom! Thy letter was received. It was like the melody of the divine nightingale, whose song delighteth the hearts. This is because its contents indicated faith, assurance and firmness in the Covenant and the Testament. Today the dynamic power of the world of existence is the power of the Covenant which like unto an artery pulsateth in the body of the contingent world and protecteth Bahá’í unity.

The Bahá’ís are commanded to establish the oneness of mankind; if they cannot unite around one point how will they be able to bring about the unity of mankind?

The purpose of the Blessed Beauty in entering into this Covenant and Testament was to gather all existent beings around one point so that the thoughtless souls, who in every cycle and generation have been the cause of dissension, may not undermine the Cause. He hath, therefore, commanded that whatever emanateth from the Centre of the Covenant is right and is under His protection and favour, while all else is error.

Praise be to God, thou art firm in the Covenant and the Testament. – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 288-289.

He who hath knowledge and power will rather seek out the glory of heaven, and spiritual distinction, and the life that dieth not. And such a one longeth to approach the sacred Threshold of God; for in the tavern of this swiftly-passing world the man of God will not lie drunken, nor will he even for a moment take his ease, nor stain himself with any fondness for this earthly life.

Nay rather, the friends are stars in the high heavens of guidance, celestial bodies in the skies of divine grace, who with all their powers put the dark to flight. They break down the foundations of malevolence and hate. They cherish but one desire for the world and all its peoples: well-being and peace. By them, the ramparts of warfare and aggression are battered down. They have truthfulness and honest dealing and friendship for their goal, and kindness even toward a vicious foe; until at last they change this prison of treachery, the world, into a mansion of utmost trust, and turn this gaol-house of hatred and malevolence and spite, into God’s Paradise.

O ye loving friends! Strive ye with heart and soul to make this world the mirror-image of the Kingdom, that this nether world may teem with the blessings of the world of God, that the voices of the Company on high may be raised in acclamation, and signs and tokens of the bounties and bestowals of Bahá’u’lláh may encompass all the earth.

– ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 305-306.

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Published for the Bahá'ís of Canada



ON THE COVER Participants in an institute campaign in Brampton, Ont., study materials from the junior youth program about confirmation and the inherent capabilities of mankind.

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Progress made in construction of Shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

From the Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 21 February 2021.

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

Despite numerous obstacles arising from the current global health crisis and its inevitable impact on all operational matters, impressive progress has already been made on the construction of the Shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá since it began in earnest at the start of 2020. The preparation of the site is complete, and the extensive foundations required have now been laid. Permits for construction have been obtained, and the portal walls and folding walls surrounding the main edifice of the Shrine are now under construction. The design detail for the large intricate formwork for the marble-cladded trellis, consisting of eighty pieces, is close to being finalized. Before long, the Shrine itself and its associated structures will begin to take form. The friends will continue to be kept informed of the progress of each stage through the periodic reports of the Bahá’í World News Service which have included photographs and videos.

Soon after the announcement of the intention to build the Shrine, the Universal House of Justice informed you

in May 2019 of the inauguration of a Fund dedicated to this sacred objective and expressed the hope that this endeavour would be characterized by universal participation; it has been delighted by the response of the believers as they have seized the unique chance to contribute to the project. The House of Justice has now asked that we share with you the following information.

Certain important milestones—including the preparation of detailed drawings, the selection and procurement of materials, the signing of major contracts, and preliminary construction work—have been reached, making it possible now to estimate with confidence that this endeavour will require around seventy-five million dollars. Believers have for years donated sums for the eventual construction of the Shrine of their beloved Master. These funds have been substantially augmented by the generous contributions of believers which began to flow immediately following the announcement about the Shrine at Ridván 2019. To these amounts, the House of Justice has itself added a significant contribution on behalf of the Bahá’ís in Iran. Thus, altogether, nearly half of the estimated cost of the project has been raised so far. As the construction work proceeds, the friends will continue to have the opportunity to contribute to this monumental undertaking in the course of the expected two years that remain before its completion.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
– Department of the Secretariat

Restoration of the House of ‘Abbúd

From the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 2 April 2021.

Dearly loved Friends,

We are delighted to announce that, despite the various restrictions and limitations caused by the current global health crisis, a significant undertaking aimed at the comprehensive conservation of the House of ‘Abbúd at the heart of the ancient city of ‘Akká has been successfully concluded. The two-year project included a



House of ‘Abbúd. Copyright © Bahá’í International Community

major programme for the structural reinforcement of the building for seismic resistance; replastering of some 5,000

square metres of internal and external walls; conservation of the original painted ceilings; restoration of marble and stone; and substantial waterproofing.

That haven of immeasurable sanctity and immensely significant history for all peoples – the place where the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Charter of a new civilization, was revealed by the Pen of the Most High – has now been

restored to a standard that aims at preserving the building in a befitting condition for centuries to come. We look forward eagerly to the moment when the easing of public health restrictions will allow the flow of pilgrims to the Holy Land to resume and the visits to this sacred building to begin again.

– The Universal House of Justice

New volume of tablets penned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá

From the Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 30 April 2021.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

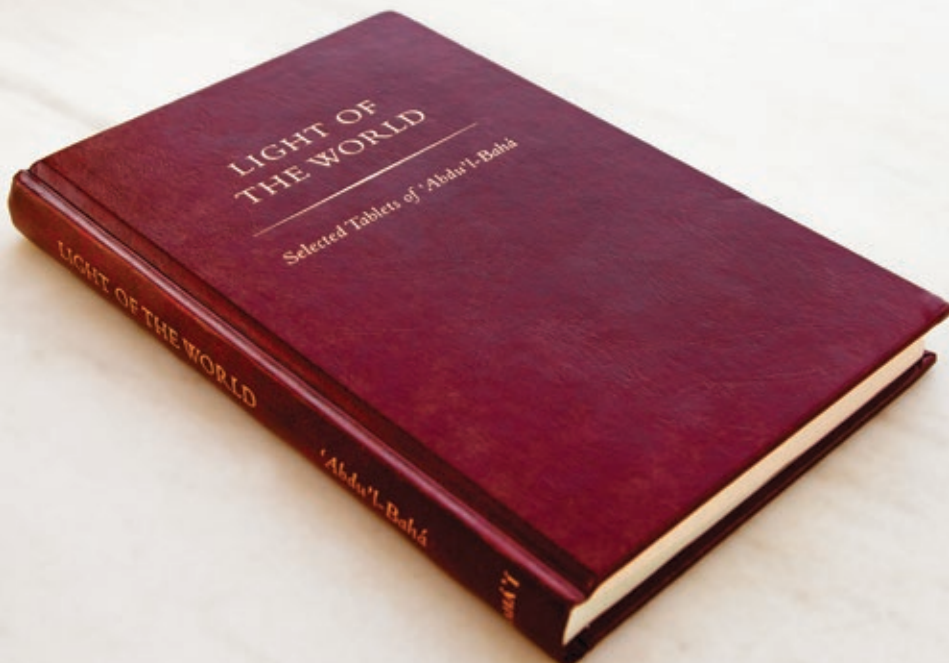
The Universal House of Justice is most pleased to announce, as we draw closer to the centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the publication of a new volume of Tablets in English translation titled *Light of the World: Selected Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* and to present you with a complimentary copy. The seventy-six selections chosen for this book cover the entire period of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry. They describe aspects of the

life of Bahá'u'lláh—the tribulations He suffered, events in His homeland, the purpose and greatness of His Cause, and the unparalleled nature and significance of His Covenant, as well as the relentless but futile efforts to undermine and destroy it. Many of these Tablets reflect parallels between Bahá'u'lláh's sufferings and those that the Master Himself endured during His lifetime.

The book, published in hardcover, will be available for purchase through the Bahá'í Distribution Service in the United States at the address below, at a retail price per copy of US\$20.00. Normal institutional discounts will apply, and payment should be made directly to that distribution service.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

– Department of the Secretariat



Light of the World, a volume of newly translated tablets penned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is now available online and in print. Photo: Bahá'í World News Service

Riḍván 2021

From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World.

Dearly loved Friends,

The final words in a most memorable chapter in the history of the Cause have now been written, and the page turns. This Riḍván marks the conclusion of an extraordinary year, of a Five Year Plan, and of an entire series of Plans that began in 1996. A new series of Plans beckons, with what promises to be a momentous twelve months serving as a prelude to a nine-year effort due to commence next Riḍván. We see before us a community that has rapidly gained strength and is ready to take great strides forward. But there must be no illusions about how much striving was required to reach this point and how hard-won were the insights acquired along the way: the lessons learned will shape the community's future, and the account of how they were learned sheds light on what is to come.

The decades leading up to 1996, rich with advances and insights of their own, had left no doubt that large numbers of people in many societies would be ready to enter under the banner of the Faith. Yet, as encouraging as instances of large-scale enrolment were, they did not equate to a sustainable process of growth that could be cultivated in diverse settings. Profound questions faced the community which, at that time, it had insufficient experience to answer adequately. How could efforts aimed at its expansion proceed hand in hand with the process of consolidation and resolve the long-standing, seemingly intractable challenge of sustaining growth? How could individuals, institutions and communities be raised up that would be capable of translating Bahá'u'lláh's teachings into action? And how could those who were attracted to the teachings become protagonists in a global spiritual enterprise?

So it was that, a quarter of a century ago, a Bahá'í community that could still count three Hands of the Cause of God in its front ranks embarked on a Four Year Plan, distinguished from those that came before it by its focus on a single aim: a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. This aim came to define the series of Plans that followed. The community had already come to understand that this process was not just the entry into the Faith of sizeable groups, nor would it emerge spontaneously; it implied purposeful, systematic, accelerated expansion and consolidation. This work would require the informed participation of a great many souls, and in 1996, the Bahá'í world was summoned to take up the

vast educational challenge this entailed. It was called to establish a network of training institutes focused on generating an increasing flow of individuals endowed with the necessary capacities to sustain the process of growth.

The friends set about this task aware that, notwithstanding their previous victories in the teaching field, plainly they had much to learn about which capacities to acquire and, crucially, how to acquire them. In many ways, the community would learn by doing, and the lessons it learned, once they had been distilled and refined by being applied in diverse settings over time, would eventually be incorporated into educational materials. It was recognized that certain activities were a natural response to the spiritual needs of a population. Study circles, children's classes, devotional meetings, and later junior youth groups stood out as being of central importance in this regard, and when woven together with related activities, the dynamics generated could give rise to a vibrant pattern of community life. And as the numbers participating in these core activities grew, a new dimension was added to their original purpose. They came to serve as portals through which youth, adults and whole families from the wider society could come into an encounter with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. It was also becoming apparent how practical it was to consider strategies for the work of community building within the context of the "cluster": a geographic area of manageable size with distinct social and economic features. A capacity for preparing simple plans at the level of the cluster began to be cultivated, and out of such plans, programmes for the growth of the Faith arose, organized into what would become three-month cycles of activity. An important point of clarity emerged early on: the movement of individuals through a sequence of courses gives impetus to, and is perpetuated by, the movement of clusters along a continuum of development. This complementary relationship helped the friends everywhere to assess the dynamics of growth in their own surroundings and chart a path towards increased strength. As time went on, it proved fruitful to view what was occurring in a cluster both from the perspective of three educational imperatives—serving children, junior youth, and youth and adults—as well as from the perspective of the cycles of activity essential to the rhythm of growth. Part-way into a twenty-five-year endeavour, many of the most recognizable features of the growth process we see today were becoming well established.

As the efforts of the friends intensified, various principles, concepts and strategies of universal relevance to the growth process began to crystallize into a framework for action that could evolve to accommodate new elements. This framework proved fundamental to the release of tremendous vitality. It assisted the friends to channel their energies in ways that, experience had shown, were

conducive to the growth of healthy communities. But a framework is not a formula. By taking into account the various elements of the framework when assessing the reality of a cluster, a locality, or simply a neighbourhood, a pattern of activity could be developed that drew on what the rest of the Bahá'í world was learning while still being a response to the particulars of that place. A dichotomy between rigid requirements on the one hand and limitless personal preferences on the other gave way to a more nuanced understanding of the variety of means by which individuals could support a process that, at its heart, was coherent and continually being refined as experience accumulated. Let there be no doubt about the advance represented by the emergence of this framework: the implications for harmonizing and unifying the endeavours of the entire Bahá'í world and propelling its onward march were of great consequence.

... a conception of the process of entry by troops emerged that relied less on theories and assumptions and more on actual experience...

As one Plan succeeded another, and engagement with the work of community building became more broadly based, advances at the level of culture became more pronounced. For instance, the importance of educating the younger generations became more widely appreciated, as did the extraordinary potential represented by junior youth in particular. Souls assisting and accompanying one another along a shared path, constantly widening the circle of mutual support, became the pattern to which all efforts aimed at developing capacity for service aspired. Even the interactions of the friends among themselves and with those around them underwent a change, as awareness was raised of the power of meaningful conversations to kindle and fan spiritual susceptibilities. And significantly, Bahá'í communities adopted an increasingly outward-looking orientation. Any soul responsive to the vision of the Faith could become an active participant—even a promoter and facilitator—of educational activities, meetings for worship and other elements of the community-building work; from among such souls, many would also declare their faith in Bahá'u'lláh. Thus, a conception of the process of entry by troops emerged that relied less on theories and assumptions and more on actual experience of how large numbers of people could find the Faith, become familiar with it, identify with its aims, join in its activities and deliberations, and in many cases embrace it. Indeed, as the institute process was strengthened in region after region, the number of individuals taking a share in the work of the Plan, extending even to those recently

acquainted with the Faith, grew by leaps and bounds. But this was not being driven by a mere concern for numbers. A vision of personal and collective transformation occurring simultaneously, founded on study of the Word of God and an appreciation of each person's capacity to become a protagonist in a profound spiritual drama, had given rise to a sense of common endeavour.

One of the most striking and inspiring features of this twenty-five-year period has been the service rendered by Bahá'í youth, who with faith and valour have assumed their rightful place in the forefront of the community's efforts. As teachers of the Cause and educators of the young, as mobile tutors and homefront pioneers, as cluster coordinators and members of Bahá'í agencies, youth on five continents have arisen to serve their communities with devotion and sacrifice. The maturity they have demonstrated, in the discharge of duties upon which depends the advancement of the Divine Plan, is expressive of their spiritual vitality and their commitment to safeguarding humanity's future. In recognition of this increasingly evident maturity, we have decided that, immediately following this Riḍván, while the age at which a believer becomes eligible to serve on a Spiritual Assembly shall remain twenty-one, the age at which a believer may vote in Bahá'í elections shall be lowered to eighteen. We have no doubt that Bahá'í youth everywhere who are of age will vindicate our confidence in their ability to fulfil “conscientiously and diligently” the “sacred duty” to which every Bahá'í elector is called.

*

We are conscious that, naturally, the realities of communities differ greatly. Different national communities, and different places within those communities, began this series of Plans at different points of development; since then, they have also developed at different speeds and have attained different levels of progress. This, in itself, is nothing new. It has always been the case that conditions in places vary, as does the degree of receptivity found there. But we perceive, too, a swelling tide, whereby the capacity, confidence and accumulated experience of most communities are rising, buoyed by the success of their sister communities near and far. As an example, while souls who arose to open a new locality in 1996 lacked nothing for courage, faith and devotion, today their counterparts everywhere combine those same qualities with knowledge, insights and skills that are the accumulation of twenty-five years of effort by the entire Bahá'í world to systematize and refine the work of expansion and consolidation.

Regardless of a community's starting point, it has advanced the process of growth when it has combined qualities of faith, perseverance and commitment with a readiness to learn. In fact, a cherished legacy of this series of Plans is the widespread recognition that any effort to advance begins with an orientation towards learning. The simplicity of this precept belies the significance of the implications that follow from it. We do not doubt

that every cluster, given time, will progress along the continuum of development; the communities that have advanced most quickly, relative to those whose circumstances and possibilities were similar, have shown an ability to foster unity of thought and to learn about effective action. And they did so without hesitating to act.

A commitment to learning also meant being prepared to make mistakes—and sometimes, of course, mistakes brought discomfort. Unsurprisingly, new methods and approaches were handled inexpertly at first because of a lack of experience; on occasion, a newly acquired capacity of one kind was lost as a community became absorbed in developing another. Having the best of intentions is no guarantee against making missteps, and moving past them requires both humility and detachment. When a community has remained determined to show forbearance and learn from mistakes that naturally occur, progress has never been out of reach.

Midway through the series of Plans, the community's involvement in the life of society began to become the focus of more direct attention. The believers were encouraged to think of this in terms of two interconnected areas of endeavour—social action and participation in the prevalent discourses of society. These, of course, were not alternatives to the work of expansion and consolidation, much less distractions from it: they were inherent within it. The greater the human resources a community could call on, the greater became its capacity to bring the wisdom contained in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation to bear upon the challenges of the day—to translate His teachings into reality. And the troubled affairs of humankind over this period seemed to underline how desperate was its need for the remedy prescribed by the Divine Physician. Implied in all this was a conception of religion very different from those holding sway in the world at large: a conception which recognized religion as the potent force propelling an ever-advancing civilization. It was understood that such a civilization would also not appear spontaneously, of its own accord—it was the mission of Bahá'u'lláh's followers to labour for its emergence. Such a mission demanded applying the same process of systematic learning to the work of social action and engagement in public discourse.

Viewed from the perspective of the last two and a half decades, the capacity for undertaking social action has risen markedly, leading to an extraordinary efflorescence of activity. Compared with 1996, when some 250 social and economic development projects were being sustained from year to year, there are now 1,500, and the number of Bahá'í-inspired organizations has quadrupled to surpass 160. More than 70,000 grassroots social action initiatives of short duration are being undertaken each year, a fifty-fold increase. We look forward to a continued rise in all these endeavours resulting from the dedicated support and stimulus now provided by the Bahá'í International Development Organization. Meanwhile,

Bahá'í participation in the prevalent discourses of society has also grown immensely. Besides the many occasions when the friends find they can offer a Bahá'í perspective in conversations that occur in a work or personal context, more formal participation in discourses has significantly advanced. We have in mind not only the much-expanded efforts and increasingly sophisticated contributions of the Bahá'í International Community—which in this period added Offices in Africa, Asia and Europe—but also the work of a vastly augmented, greatly fortified network of national Offices of External Affairs, for whom this area of endeavour became the principal focus; in addition, there were insightful and notable contributions made by individual believers to specific fields. All this goes some way towards explaining the esteem, appreciation and admiration which leaders of thought and other prominent figures at all levels of society have again and again expressed for the Faith, its followers and their activities.

In reviewing the entire twenty-five-year period, we are awed by the many kinds of progress the Bahá'í world has made concurrently. Its intellectual life has thrived, as demonstrated not only by its advances in all the areas of endeavour already discussed, but also by the volume of high-quality literature published by Bahá'í authors, by the development of spaces for the exploration of certain disciplines in the light of the teachings, and by the impact of the undergraduate and graduate seminars systematically offered by the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, which, in collaboration with the institutions of the Cause, now serves Bahá'í youth from well over 100 countries. Efforts to raise up Houses of Worship have very visibly accelerated. The last Mother Temple was erected in Santiago, Chile, and projects to build two national and five local *Mashriqu'l-Adhikárs* were initiated; the Houses of Worship in Battambang, Cambodia, and Norte del Cauca, Colombia, have already opened their doors. Bahá'í Temples, whether newly dedicated or long established, are increasingly occupying a position at the heart of community life. The material support offered by the rank and file of the believers for the myriad endeavours undertaken by the friends of God has been unstinting. Simply viewed as a measure of collective spiritual vitality, the generosity and sacrifice with which, at a time of considerable economic upheaval, the critical flow of funds has been maintained—nay, invigorated—is most telling. In the realm of Bahá'í administration, the capacity of National Spiritual Assemblies to manage the affairs of their communities in all their growing complexity has been considerably enhanced. They have benefited in particular from new heights of collaboration with the Counsellors, who have been instrumental in systematizing the gathering of insights from the grassroots across the world and ensuring they are widely disseminated. This was also the period in which the Regional Bahá'í Council emerged as a fully fledged institution of the Cause, and in 230 regions now, Councils and those training institutes

they oversee have proved themselves indispensable for advancing the process of growth. To extend into the future the functions of the Chief Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the Hand of the Cause of God 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, the International Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh was established in 2005; today it coordinates the efforts of no less than 33 National and Regional Boards of Trustees that now compass the globe, which in turn guide the work of over 1,000 Representatives. The developments which occurred at the Bahá'í World Centre during this same period are many: witness the completion of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and two buildings on the Arc and the commencement of the construction of the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, not to mention a host of projects to strengthen and preserve the precious Holy Places of the Faith. The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh and the Shrine of the Báb were recognized as World Heritage sites, places of inestimable significance for humanity. The public flocked to these sacred locations in their hundreds of thousands, approaching one and a half million in some years, and the World Centre regularly welcomed hundreds of pilgrims at once, sometimes more than 5,000 in a year, along with a similar number of Bahá'í visitors; we are delighted as much by the raised numbers as by the scores of different peoples and nations represented among those who partake of the bounty of pilgrimage. The translation, publication and dissemination of the Sacred Texts has also been greatly accelerated, in parallel with the development of the Bahá'í Reference Library, one of the most notable members of the growing family of websites associated with Bahai.org, which itself is now available in ten languages. A variety of offices and agencies have been established, situated at the World Centre and elsewhere, charged with supporting the process of learning unfolding across multiple areas of endeavour throughout the Bahá'í world. All this, our sisters and brothers in faith, is but a fraction of the tale we could recount of what your devotion to Him Who was the Wronged One of the World has brought forth. We can but echo the poignant words once voiced by the beloved Master when, overcome with emotion, He cried out: "O Bahá'u'lláh! What hast Thou done?"

*

From the panorama of a pivotal quarter century, we now direct our focus to the most recent Five Year Plan, a Plan quite unlike any that has gone before in a variety of ways. In this Plan we urged the Bahá'ís of the world to draw on all that they had learned in the previous twenty years and put it to full effect. We are delighted that our hopes in this regard were more than met, but while we would naturally expect great things from the followers of the Blessed Beauty, the character of what was achieved through their herculean efforts was truly breathtaking. It was the capstone to an accomplishment twenty-five years in the making.

The Plan was especially memorable for being trisected by two sacred bicentenaries, each of which galvanized

local communities the world over. The company of the faithful demonstrated, on a scale never previously witnessed and with relative ease, a capacity to engage people from all sections of society in honouring the life of a Manifestation of God. It was a powerful indicator of something broader: the ability to channel the release of tremendous spiritual energies for the advancement of the Cause. So magnificent was the response that in many places the Faith was propelled out of obscurity at the national level. In settings where it was unexpected, perhaps unlooked for, marked receptivity to the Faith became apparent. Thousands upon thousands upon thousands were transported by their encounter with a devotional spirit that is today characteristic of Bahá'í communities everywhere. The vision of what is made possible by observing a Bahá'í Holy Day was immeasurably expanded.

The achievements of the Plan, simply in numerical terms, quickly eclipsed those of all the Plans that had preceded it since 1996. At the start of this Plan, the capacity existed for conducting just over 100,000 core activities at a given time, a capacity that was the fruit of twenty years of common endeavour. Now, 300,000 core activities are being sustained at once. Participation in those activities has risen above two million, which is also close to a threefold increase. There are 329 national and regional training institutes in operation, and their capacity is evidenced by the fact that three-quarters of a million people have been enabled to complete at least one book of the sequence; overall, the number of courses completed by individuals is now also two million—a rise of well over a third in five years.

The increased intensity with which programmes of growth around the world are being pursued tells an impressive story of its own. In this five-year span, we had called for growth to be accelerated in every one of the 5,000 clusters where it had begun. This imperative became the impetus for earnest endeavour throughout the world. As a result, the number of intensive programmes of growth more than doubled and now stands at approximately 4,000. Difficulties involved in opening up new villages and neighbourhoods to the Faith in the midst of a global health crisis, or expanding activities that were at an early stage when the pandemic began, prevented an even higher total from being reached during the Plan's final year. However, there is more to tell than this. At the outset of the Plan, we had expressed the hope that the number of clusters where the friends had passed the third milestone along a continuum of growth, as a consequence of learning how to welcome large numbers into the embrace of their activities, would grow by hundreds more. That total then stood at around 200, spread across some 40 countries. Five years on, this number has risen to an astonishing 1,000 in nearly 100 countries—a quarter of all the intensive programmes of growth in the world and an achievement far surpassing our expectations. And yet even these figures do not reveal the loftiest heights to which the community has

soared. There are over 30 clusters where the number of core activities being sustained exceeds 1,000; in places, the total is several thousand, involving the participation of more than 20,000 people in a single cluster. A growing number of Local Spiritual Assemblies now oversee the unfoldment of educational programmes that cater to practically all the children and junior youth in a village; the same reality is beginning to emerge within a few urban neighbourhoods. Engagement with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh has, in notable instances, transcended individuals, families and extended kinships—what is being witnessed is the movement of populations towards a common centre. At times, age-old hostilities between opposing groups are being left behind, and certain social structures and dynamics are being transformed in the light of the divine teachings.

We cannot but be overjoyed at advances so impressive. The society-building power of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is being manifested with ever more clarity, and this is a firm foundation upon which the coming Nine Year Plan will build. Clusters of marked strength, as had been hoped, have proven to be reservoirs of knowledge and resources for their neighbours. And regions where more than one such cluster exist have more easily developed the means to accelerate growth in cluster after cluster. We feel compelled to stress again, however, that progress has been near universal; the difference in progress between one place and another is of degree. The community's collective understanding of the process of entry by troops and its confidence in being able to stimulate this process under any set of circumstances have risen to levels that were unimaginable in decades past. The profound questions that had loomed for so long, and which were brought into sharp focus in 1996, have been convincingly answered by the Bahá'í world. There is a generation of believers whose entire lives bear the imprint of the community's progress. But the sheer scale of what has occurred in those many clusters where the frontiers of learning are being extended has turned a significant advance in the process of entry by troops into a momentous one of historic proportions.

Many will be familiar with how the Guardian divided the Ages of the Faith into consecutive epochs; the fifth epoch of the Formative Age began in 2001. Less well known is that the Guardian also made specific reference to there being epochs of the Divine Plan, and stages within those epochs. Held in abeyance for two decades while local and national organs of the Administrative Order were being raised up and strengthened, the Divine Plan conceived by 'Abdu'l-Bahá was formally inaugurated in 1937 with the commencement of the first stage of its first epoch: the Seven Year Plan assigned by the Guardian to the North American Bahá'í community. This first epoch closed after the conclusion of the Ten Year Crusade in 1963, which had resulted in the banner of the Faith being planted across the world. The opening stage of the second epoch was the first Nine Year Plan, and no less than ten Plans have followed in its wake, Plans that have ranged in duration from twelve months to seven years. At the

dawn of this second epoch, the Bahá'í world was already witnessing the earliest beginnings of that entry into the Faith by troops that had been foreseen by the Author of the Divine Plan; in the succeeding decades, generations of devoted believers within the community of the Greatest Name have laboured in the Divine Vineyard to cultivate the conditions required for sustained, large-scale growth. And at this glorious season of Riḍván, how abundant are the fruits of those labours! The phenomenon of sizeable numbers swelling the activities of the community, catching the spark of faith and swiftly arising to serve at the leading edge of the Plan has moved from being a forecast sustained by faith to a recurring reality. Such a pronounced and demonstrable advance demands to be marked in the annals of the Cause. With elated hearts, we announce that the third epoch of the Master's Divine Plan has begun. Stage by stage, epoch after epoch shall His Plan unfold, until the light of the Kingdom illumines every heart.

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Beloved friends, no review of the five-year enterprise that concluded the second epoch of the Divine Plan would be complete without special reference to the upheavals that accompanied its final year and which persist still. The restrictions on personal interaction that waxed and waned in most countries over this period could have dealt the community's collective efforts a severe blow, recovery from which might have taken years, but there are two reasons why this was not the case. One was the widespread consciousness of the duty of Bahá'ís to serve humanity, never more so than in times of peril and adversity. The other was the extraordinary rise in capacity in the Bahá'í world to give expression to that consciousness. Accustomed over many years to adopting patterns of systematic action, the friends brought their creativity and sense of purpose to bear on an unforeseen crisis, while ensuring that the new approaches they developed were coherent with the framework they had laboured in successive Plans to perfect. This is not to overlook the serious hardships being endured by Bahá'ís, like their compatriots in every land; yet throughout severe difficulties, the believers have remained focused. Resources have been channelled to communities in need, elections went ahead wherever possible, and in all circumstances the institutions of the Cause have continued to discharge their duties. There have even been bold steps forward. The National Spiritual Assembly of São Tomé and Príncipe will be re-established this Riḍván, and two new pillars of the Universal House of Justice will be raised up: the National Spiritual Assembly of Croatia, with its seat in Zagreb, and the National Spiritual Assembly of Timor-Leste, with its seat in Dili.

And so the One Year Plan begins. Its purpose and requirements have already been set out in our message sent on the Day of the Covenant; this Plan, though brief, will suffice to prepare the Bahá'í world for the Nine Year Plan that is to follow. A period of special potency,

which opened one hundred years after the revelation of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, will soon close with the centenary of the Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, marking the conclusion of the first century of the Formative Age and the start of the second. The company of the faithful enter this new Plan at a time when humanity, chastened by the exposure of its vulnerability, seems more conscious of the need for collaboration to address global challenges. Yet, lingering habits of contest, self-interest, prejudice and closed-mindedness continue to hinder the movement towards unity, despite growing numbers in society who are showing in words and deeds how they, too, yearn for greater acceptance of humanity’s

inherent oneness. We pray that the family of nations may succeed in putting aside its differences in the interests of the common good. Notwithstanding the uncertainties that shroud the months ahead, we entreat Bahá’u’lláh to make the confirmations that have sustained His followers for so long more abundant still, that you may be carried forward in your mission, your composure undisturbed by the turbulence of a world whose need for His healing message is ever more acute.

The Divine Plan enters a new epoch and a new stage. The page is turned.

– The Universal House of Justice



Message to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Canada

From the National Spiritual Assembly to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Canada, 5 April 2021.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

As the National Spiritual Assembly gathered at its final weekend-long meeting of the year and of the Five Year Plan, we were moved by a wave of gratitude to write these few lines to you.

We need not describe again the conditions that have affected every aspect of life in Canada, as elsewhere in the world. Yet, what we saw as we prepared our annual report filled us with wonder. Hearts have been heavy, and in response you have gathered in devotional gatherings with your families and friends, in unprecedented numbers, in the presence of the Lord of Joy. At a time of economic uncertainty, you have provided a flow of material means for the advancement of the Cause in clusters, neighbourhoods and villages, and beyond that,

supported generously all the funds of the Faith. Youth, in spite of being burdened by a new and often-confusing educational landscape, have turned to their younger peers and served them with love and steadfast commitment.

The countless acts of sacrifice and devotion on which these achievements rest are known only to Him. How grateful we are to Bahá'u'lláh, that He has raised up such a people, emblems of hope in these troubled days: how thankful for what He has allowed the Canadian community to achieve in these five years. Soon, a brief One Year Plan will lead the worldwide community to the threshold of a nine-year endeavour. In these remaining hours of this Plan, each moment filled with opportunity, our prayers and thoughts are with you, of whom Bahá'u'lláh has said: "I swear by God! The sea of joy yearneth to attain your presence, for every good thing hath been created for you, and will, according to the needs of the times, be revealed unto you."¹

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

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, as quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 82.

Canada's representatives to a gathering in the Holy Land for the Centenary Commemoration of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in November 2021

From the National Spiritual Assembly to all Local Spiritual Assemblies, All Regional Bahá'í Councils, and All Registered Groups, 26 April 2021.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The newly-elected National Spiritual Assembly convened for the first time yesterday to elect

its officers and to draw lots to identify Canada's representatives to a special gathering in the Holy Land for the Centenary Commemoration of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in November 2021. Those elected to serve as officers of the National Assembly for the coming year are as follows: Deloria Bighorn – Chair; Ciprian Jauca – Vice-chair; Mehran Anvari – Treasurer and Karen McKye – Secretary.

In relation to the second task, it was with great joy that the National Assembly drew lots from among currently serving members of the National Assembly and each

Regional Bahá'í Council, as guided by the Universal House of Justice. National Assemblies had been asked to select two representatives through this process of drawing lots, one for its female members and another for its male members, where applicable. One representative of each Regional Council was to be selected by drawing lots from among those who are serving as members of the Regional Councils.

Through this process, two representatives of our Assembly were chosen to attend the gathering on our behalf, Hoda Farahmandpour and Ciprian Jauca. The names of the following friends were drawn from among the

membership of Regional Bahá'í Councils and they will therefore have the honour of participating in this historic event: Alberta – Tony Liu; Atlantic Provinces – Kelley Wright; British Columbia – Tabasom Eblaghie; Ontario – Melanie Vafaie; Quebec – Gregory Fortin-Vidah; and Saskatchewan and Manitoba – Melody Asdaghi.

We know you will join the National Assembly in prayers for these friends as they join fellow believers from around the world, conditions permitting, in seven short months.

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

Call for special prayers

From the National Spiritual Assembly to all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils, and Registered Groups, 31 May 2021.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The devastating news that the remains of 215 children, some as young as three years old, are buried on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia has appalled the nation. This discovery is a reminder of a dark and recent period of Canada's history, its legacy of suffering and the present-day trauma for its victims. A news release by the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation, which undertook the investigation, may be found at <https://tkemlups.ca/wp-content/uploads/05-May-27-2021-TteS-MEDIA-RELEASE.pdf>.

To honour the young souls, their families and communities, we call for all the friends to offer special prayers over the next weeks, in private prayer and in devotional gatherings or vigils, and especially at the Feast of Light to be commemorated on 3–4 June. Let us draw on these powerful spiritual forces, joining with others of many different backgrounds and beliefs to educate ourselves and commit, in action, to a future that becomes day by day more illumined, freed of the darkness of this age.

The National Spiritual Assembly joins you in ardent prayers for the flood of grace that will hasten this change, and contribute to healing the penetrating grief of families, communities and the nation.

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

To all the friends serving the Cause of God in Canada

From the National Spiritual Assembly to the Bahá'ís of Canada, 21 June 2021.

Dear Friends,

Over the last few weeks, the peoples of Canada have awakened to a truth that has long been a reality in the living memory of its Indigenous peoples. Praise

God, consciousness is rising and a longing for action has been unlocked. As groups of friends have turned towards the Creator in focused prayer, they have nurtured this consciousness. By expanding their circles, opening space for meaningful and challenging conversation, they have watered seeds of a kind of friendship that bears the fruit of change in the world.

The first two months of the One Year Plan have been months of reckoning in our country. This initial period in

a year-long reflection on the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the strength of His Covenant, has already borne His mark: “Verily with exceeding joy, with heart and soul, do these oppressed of Thine offer themselves up for all mankind in every land. Thou seest them, O my Lord, weeping over the tears Thy people shed, mourning the grief of Thy children, condoling with humankind, suffering because of the calamities that beset all the denizens of the earth.”¹ We see in your actions a response to His call in that same prayer: “Make haste to love! Make haste to trust! Make haste to give! To guidance come!”.

In recognition of this swiftly-passing moment in history and the rising capacity of a growing community, the National Spiritual Assembly now raises a simple call to each one who has been touched by the beloved Master: to summon the peoples of Canada to the threshold of oneness, in the name of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Over the last year, the community has extended its embrace to an unprecedented number of friends and neighbours, families and acquaintances. The number of core activities and those involved in them has more than doubled since the beginning of the Five Year Plan, with the greatest part of this increase over the past eighteen months, under conditions of great constraint. The implications are clear. A marked acceleration in the processes of growth is underway in Canada.

We are emboldened by these developments to ask: might we aim in this one year to double once more? Might each family that has not yet established a regular space for prayers in their home, now do so? Might each household with one such weekly or monthly gathering, consider assisting someone in their circle to begin one with a few friends? Might each group gathering for prayers initiate a Book 1 study circle and welcome others to the direct study and application of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh?

Might each one in a devotional gathering or study circle, inspired by a vision of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s kindness to the young ones, turn a loving gaze to the children and youth in the participating families and learn how to engage them?

This One Year Plan will need dedicated time. Whether a youth or no longer so, each must weigh the complex priorities of life to decide what regular or extended time

can be offered up to the teaching work in this year. Pioneering to another cluster may be a possibility for one individual, or to a neighbourhood in their own cluster. A family might be able to set aside a weekend a month, or an evening a week, for home visits or for visits to another cluster. A period of service could be offered over the summer months. And always, a special contribution to the Deputization Fund could assist someone to arise in one’s place. Whether as part of a formal programme sponsored by a Regional Council or simply as a personal or family commitment, each pledge of time and

substance is sacred, a response to the call of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, a loving commitment to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during this period of profound reflection on His life and the strength of the Covenant.

In its message on the centenary of the revelation of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, the House of Justice described a thrilling vision “of a grassroots stirring, an organic flowering, a relentless movement that has grown imperceptibly at times and at others in great surges to eventually embrace the entire world: God-intoxicated lovers exceeding their personal capacities, embryonic institutions learning to exercise their powers for the well-being of humanity, communities emerging as shelters and schools in which human potential is nourished.”² In this season, a great surge is possible. As His loved ones make efforts to extend their circle in the name of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in united action, each according to his or her circumstances, He has promised: “Whensoever holy souls, drawing on the powers of heaven, shall arise with such qualities of the spirit, and march in unison, rank on rank, every one of those souls

“Whensoever holy souls, drawing on the powers of heaven, shall arise with such qualities of the spirit, and march in unison, rank on rank, every one of those souls will be even as one thousand, and the surging waves of that mighty ocean will be even as the battalions of the Concourse on high.”

will be even as one thousand, and the surging waves of that mighty ocean will be even as the battalions of the Concourse on high. What a blessing that will be—when all shall come together, even as once separate torrents, rivers and streams, running brooks and single drops, when collected together in one place will form a mighty sea.”³

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

– National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada

2 26 March 2016, Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the world acting under the Mandate of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

3 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, no. 207.

1 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, no. 218.

About this issue

"The Divine Plan enters a new epoch and a new stage.
The page is turned."¹

¹ From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ríqván 2021.

The third epoch of the Master's Divine Plan is upon us, as announced by the Universal House of Justice in its Ríqván 2021 message to the Bahá'ís of the World. "Stage by stage, epoch after epoch shall His Plan unfold," that message proclaims, "until the light of the Kingdom illumines every heart."²

The unfoldment of His Plan, the groundwork for which has been steadfastly laid by the Canadian Bahá'í community, is evident in the rich stories of community-building efforts that pour in from across the country. In this issue, we are pleased to share with you some glimpses of these efforts, as well as some of the insights being generated. Our feature article, "An unprecedented wave of prayer," shares stories from friends who, in response to the call from the National Spiritual Assembly to raise up a devotional gathering in each home associated with the Greatest Name, have used various strategies to overcome seeming obstacles and to enrich the devotional character of their families and communities.

The article entitled "Reading reality in times of crisis," by Amin Egea and originally published on The Bahá'í World website, explores how 'Abdu'l-Bahá's analysis of the crises of His time in relation to World War I was profoundly distinct from those of contemporaneous thinkers, as well as the ways in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed those crises. As our thoughts naturally focus on the Master during

² Ibid

the lead up to the centenary of His Ascension this year, it is hoped that this article allows for more profound reflection on His life.

Learning by doing has been a characteristic of many facets of the series of Plans that has led to this current One Year Plan. This past year and a half presented many opportunities for those engaged in the work of the Plan to adapt to dramatic change in their circumstances and learn new approaches to familiar activities. The article "Social action during the pandemic" highlights two undertakings that arose out of necessity during a period of restricted in-person activities.

In "The Institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh", Cheryl Fennel, a Representative of that institution serving in the North, reflects on how she and the believers in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut are continuing to learn about this mighty law of the "Right of God".

Finally, one of the concepts that the community is attempting to learn more about is that of the expanding nucleus. The article "An expanding nucleus: perspective from two neighbourhoods" explores this concept from the point of view of two neighbourhoods that have been advancing in their understanding of this idea and how it can be a useful tool in describing dynamics of teams of friends working side by side.

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.



'Abdu'l-Bahá visits Green Acre in 1912. Photo: centenary.bahai.us

Reading Reality in Times of Crisis

'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Great War

The following article by Amín Egea, originally published on *The Bahá'í World website*, looks at how 'Abdu'l-Bahá's analysis of the crises of His time was profoundly distinct from contemporaneous "progressive" movements and thinkers, as well as three ways that 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed the crises He foresaw.

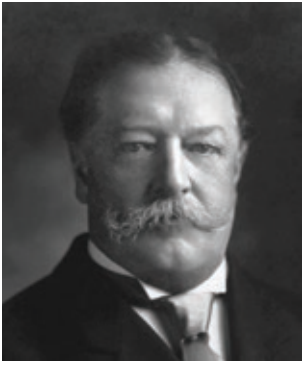
When 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited Europe and North America between 1911 and 1913, the West was experiencing a period of great prosperity and peace. Europe had gone almost forty years without a battle on its soil, while the United States had spent nearly half a century healing the wounds of its civil war. The accelerating technological and industrial advances on both sides of the Atlantic were proudly displayed year after year at international expositions visited by citizens and rulers from all corners of the globe. The Western economies had reached unprecedented prosperity, which brought about changes in social organization. It is not surprising, then, that decades later, when describing the gestalt of public opinion in the years preceding the outbreak of World War I, a famous Austrian writer would state: "Never had Europe been stronger, richer,

more beautiful, or more confident of an even better future."

Such confidence in a peaceful and prosperous future was also supported by rapid changes in international politics. The peace conferences held in The Hague in 1899 and 1907 convinced many statesmen and prominent thinkers that the possibility of war was increasingly remote. For the first time, most of the world's nations had collectively reached global agreements aimed at preventing war, perhaps the most promising of which was the establishment of an International Court of Arbitration. Experts in international law believed that, through arbitration, countries in conflict could resolve their disputes without resorting to arms or shedding a drop of blood. From 1899 until the outbreak of the Great War, hundreds of arbitration agreements were signed to secure peace between signatory countries.

Even Great Britain and Germany signed an agreement in 1904. Each of these advances was applauded by the many statesmen who were interested in internationalism as a path to peace. The Inter-Parliamentary Union, for example, which brought together more than 3,000 politicians from around the world, supported the court without reservation. Leaders such as President Theodore Roosevelt and his successor, William Taft, supported the court. Philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, who was president of the New York Peace Society—an organization that had invited 'Abdu'l-Bahá to speak to its members—paid for the construction of the Peace Palace in The Hague. The building was inaugurated with great pomp in August 1913, just one year before the outbreak of the Great War.

The conviction that the solution to war lay primarily in international



William Howard Taft, the 27th president of the United States and the tenth Chief Justice of the United States.



Ivan S. Bloch



David Starr Jordan
Photo: Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



Norman Angell

organization was so strong that the Hague Convention of 1907 agreed on the establishment of an International Court of Justice, which would not merely arbitrate but also administer justice and enforce international law. The details of such a court were postponed to a future Hague Conference, planned for the fateful year of 1915.

The academic world also gave credibility, through individuals' works and studies, to this optimistic vision of the future. Scholars reasoned that a war between world powers would be so costly economically and so devastating militarily that the business world, the banks, the political parties, and public opinion in general would undoubtedly impose reason on any warlike temptation.

"The very development that has taken place in the mechanism of war has rendered war an impracticable operation," wrote Ivan S. Bloch (1836–1902) in *The Future of War*. He added, "The dimensions of modern armaments and the organization of society have rendered its prosecution an economic impossibility."

Along similar lines, Norman Angell presented psychological and biological arguments in *The Great Illusion* (1911)—which was translated into more than twenty languages—to show that war would be an exercise in irrationality and suicide for the contending parties.

Optimism also spread to the peace movement, which was not only

more influential than it is today but enjoyed far more resources and support. David Starr Jordan, who held a leading position in the World Peace Foundation and was the first president of Stanford University—and who invited 'Abdu'l-Bahá to speak at Stanford—went so far as to ask in 1913, "What shall we say of the Great War of Europe, ever threatening, ever impending, and which never comes? Humanly speaking, it is impossible. ... But accident aside—the Triple Entente lined up against the Triple Alliance—we shall expect no war."

Andrew Carnegie, who had met 'Abdu'l-Bahá personally and received at least three letters from Him, would speak in similar terms a year before the war: "Has there ever been danger of war between Germany and ourselves, members of the same Teutonic race? Never has it been even imagined ... We are all of the same Teutonic blood, and united could insure world peace."

As in other spheres, many in the internationalist movement expressed absolute faith in arbitration as the ultimate means of ending war. "I am able to prove, and this is very essential," said J. P. Santamaria, an Argentinian representative at the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration in the same year that 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke at the distinguished event (1912), "that the majority of the Latin American republics have already exchanged trea-

ties whereby armed conflicts become practically impossible."

"We believe not only that France, but Germany and Japan as well, would gladly join with England and the United States in treaties of arbitration which would make war forever impossible," said another of the event's speakers.

Whether as a result of faith in technological progress, hope in the positive influence of international policy aimed at peace, assurance in the power of the economy, or confidence in the supremacy of scientific reason, the prevailing visions for the future of humanity at the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to the West were strictly based on material criteria. The outbreak of World War I demonstrated the fallacy of that premise.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Radical Analysis of the Causes of War

The diagnosis of the world situation presented by 'Abdu'l-Bahá was very different from that of His contemporaries. Although on numerous occasions He referred to the need to establish international bodies with global reach and sufficient executive power to intervene in conflicts between countries, He also impressed on His audiences the urgent need to focus on the moral causes of war and the spiritual requirements for the establishment of peace.

Far from arguing that war was simply the result of deficient international organization, He asserted that it was also rooted in erroneous conceptions of the human being, which led irremediably towards division and contention. He especially warned of the dangers of racism and nationalism, which define the individual according to material parameters—bodily appearance and community of birth, respectively—and prioritize human beings and entire societies according to these factors, thus generating inequality and injustice, and fostering hatred and alienation, among human groups. He also referred to religious hatred, which He described as contrary not only to the foundation of religions but also to divine will.

“All prejudices, whether of religion, race, politics or nation, must be renounced, for these prejudices have caused the world’s sickness,” He said in a talk in Paris in 1911. Prejudice, He asserted, is “a grave malady which, unless arrested, is capable of causing the destruction of the whole human race. Every ruinous war, with its terrible bloodshed and misery, has been caused by one or other of these prejudices.”

“Man has laid the foundation of prejudice, hatred and discord with his fellowman,” He explained in 1912 in a speech at a Brooklyn church, “by considering nationalities separate in importance and races different in rights and privileges.”

“As long as these prejudices prevail, the world of humanity will not have rest,” He wrote years later.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá rejected the premises on which each of these models of thought were based. He denied, for example, the objective existence of races, stating instead that “humanity is one kind, one race and progeny, inhabiting the same globe.” He also denied that nations are natural realities, referring to national divisions as “imaginary lines and boundaries.” He denied any essential differences between religions, since they all have a common origin, share the same spiritual foundations, and are

essentially one and the same. Furthermore, He affirmed that religious differences are due to “dogmatic interpretation and blind imitations which are at variance with the foundations established by the Prophets of God,” stressed that these aspects of religion must disappear, and even went so far as to declare that “if religion be the cause of enmity surely the lack of religion is better than its presence.”

He spoke at a time when the ideologies characteristic of a culture of inequality (racism, nationalism, sexism, and so on) were on the rise, gradually pushing humanity into what would be the bloodiest and most catastrophic century of its history. Racism, for example, was endorsed by a significant portion of the scientific community of the time and was firmly established in large parts of the world in the form of discriminatory and segregationist laws. It was even undergoing a major transformation equipped by new “scientific” techniques—such as craniometry, phrenology, and physiognomy—that inspired new and abhorrent “social reform” initiatives, such as eugenics and racial hygiene. Nationalism, for the first time in history, had instilled in the majority of humanity the vision of a globe divided into parcels of land defined by races, cultures, and languages. It drove imperialist and colonialist policies, while colonialism, in turn, exported nationalism, imposing previously non-existent categories and definitions on citizens and territories worldwide. At the same time, longstanding religious conflicts were still very much present, reviving old grievances and warlike moods—as exemplified by the chronic problems in the Balkans, which were in full swing when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited the West.

Even individuals and organizations with noble goals held such doctrines of inequality. Many pacifists, for example, saw war not so much as a moral problem, but as a biological one. Influenced by racism and social Darwinism, they based their criticism of war on the argument that “fit” men were sent to the battlefield,

where they died, while “unfit” men stayed behind and reproduced. The consequence of such a phenomenon, they believed, was “racial weakening.”

“Only the man who survives is followed by his kind,” wrote the aforementioned David Starr Jordan. “The man who is left determines the future. From him springs the ‘human harvest’ ...”

Along the same lines, Norman Angell also criticized colonial expansion in biological terms, arguing that domination and contact between civilizations prolonged the life of “weak races.”

“When we ‘overcome’ the servile races,” Angell reasoned in his internationally best-selling book, “far from eliminating them, we give them added chances of life by introducing order, etc., so that the lower human quality tends to be perpetuated by conquest by the higher. If ever it happens that the Asiatic races challenge the white in the industrial or military field, it will be in large part thanks to the work of race conservation, which has been the result of England’s conquest ...” In 1933 Angell would be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Benjamin Trueblood, secretary of the American Peace Society, who met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Washington, D.C., raised the possibility of a future world federation as a consequence of a “great racial federation” in the Anglo-Saxon world. This idea was similar to that put forward by Andrew Carnegie.

In this context, we can understand—with the perspective provided by the passage of more than a century since His travels—that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s warnings about the causes of war could not be understood by societies immersed in paradigms of thought totally different from the ones He presented.

And just as the meanings and diagnoses of the causes of war differed between those provided by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the dominant discourses of the time, so did propos-

als for the establishment of peace. As explained, the international community had placed its hope in legislation and international institutions as mechanisms for ensuring peace; some pacifists sincerely believed that such changes also required the racial hegemony of certain peoples. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, however, emphasized a completely different concept: peacemaking would only be possible when humanity reached the understanding that it is one and acted in accordance with this principle. He brought this idea forward in a great number of His talks. For instance, in Minneapolis, He stated that human beings “must admit and acknowledge the oneness of the world of humanity. By this means

“In every corner of the earth there is strife, discord and warfare of some kind.”

the attainment of true fellowship among mankind is assured, and the alienation of races and individuals is prevented ... In proportion to the acknowledgment of the oneness and solidarity of mankind, fellowship is possible, misunderstandings will be removed and reality become apparent.”

By making such a statement, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá presented His listeners with a radical challenge. The recognition of the oneness of the human race implies, on one hand, the acceptance that there is a primordial identity common to all human beings, which goes beyond any physical or accidental diversity between individuals. It also implies the abandonment of any vision of the human being—foundational to beliefs such as racism, sexism, unbridled nationalism, and religious exclusivism—that justifies human inequality. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s approach, therefore, clashed head-on with the discourses of the time and the materialistic premises that underpinned them.

The Great War

Although ‘Abdu’l-Bahá praised on numerous occasions progress that humanity was experiencing, for example in economics, politics, science, and industry, He also warned that material progress alone would not be capable of bringing true prosperity without a commensurate spiritual advancement.

“Material civilization concerns the world of matter or bodies,” He explained during His visit to Sacramento, “but divine civilization is the realm of ethics and moralities. Until the moral degree of the nations is advanced and human virtues attain a lofty level, happiness for mankind is impossible.”

From this perspective, the ideologies of inequality that permeated all areas of human endeavor were totally incapable of promoting lasting peace, including in movements that promoted pacifism, internationalism, and diplomacy.

“The Most Great Peace cannot be assured through racial force and effort,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained in an address in Pittsburgh:

It cannot be established by patriotic devotion and sacrifice; for nations differ widely and local patriotism has limitations. Furthermore, it is evident that political power and diplomatic ability are not conducive to universal agreement, for the interests of governments are varied and selfish; nor will international harmony and reconciliation be an outcome of human opinions concentrated upon it, for opinions are faulty and intrinsically diverse. Universal peace is an impossibility through human and material agencies; it must be through spiritual power ...

For example, consider the material progress of man in the last decade. Schools and colleges, hospitals, philanthropic institutions, scientific academies and temples of philosophy have been founded, but hand in hand with these evidences of development, the invention and production of means and weapons for human destruction have correspondingly increased ...

If the moral precepts and foundations of divine civilization become united with the material advancement of man, there is no doubt that the happiness of the human world will be attained and that from every direction the glad tidings of peace upon earth will be announced.

Based on this premise, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá challenged a falsely optimistic vision of the world, noting that, if the moral and spiritual dimensions of social reality were also assessed, it would become apparent that the world was experiencing a moment of great decadence. “If the world should remain as it is today,” He said in Chicago in 1912, “great danger will face it.”

“Observe how darkness has overspread the world,” he explained in Denver:

In every corner of the earth there is strife, discord and warfare of some kind. Mankind is submerged in the sea of materialism and occupied with the affairs of this world. They have no thought beyond earthly possessions and manifest no desire save the passions of this fleeting, mortal existence. Their utmost purpose is the attainment of material livelihood, physical comforts and worldly enjoyments such as constitute the happiness of the animal world rather than the world of man.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá warned of the acute risk of an impending international conflict on no less than seventeen occasions. “Europe itself,” He said in Paris in 1911, “has become like one immense arsenal, full of explosives, and may God prevent its ignition—for, should this happen, the whole world would be involved.”

Despite this and other explicit warnings, His audiences remained for the most part unmoved. Confidence in material well-being weighed more heavily on public opinion than His diagnosis of the moral state of the world.

He reiterated his warnings in the years between the end of World War I and His passing in 1921. In His correspondence, He explained that a second world conflagration was imminent, despite the terror caused by the first world war and the enormous progress that had been made in international governance with the establishment of the League of Nations.

“Although the representatives of various governments are assembled in Paris in order to lay the foundations of Universal Peace and thus bestow rest and comfort upon the world of humanity,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote in 1919, “yet misunderstanding among some individuals is still predominant and self-interest still prevails. In such an atmosphere, Universal Peace will not be practicable, nay rather, fresh difficulties will arise.”

“For in the future another war, fiercer than the last, will assuredly break out,” He wrote in 1920. “Verily, of this there is no doubt whatever.”

In another letter sent the same year, He was even more explicit. After presenting—as He had done in His addresses in the West—some of the spiritual requirements for the establishment of peace, He closed by enumerating some of the elements that would eventually lead humanity to World War II just nineteen years later:

The Balkans will remain discontented. Its restlessness will increase. The vanquished Powers will continue to agitate. They will resort to every measure that may rekindle the flame of war. Movements, newly born and worldwide in their range, will exert their utmost effort for the advancement of their designs. The Movement of the Left will acquire great importance. Its influence will spread.

The Birth of a New Society

No reader of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá should be tempted to think that, in His exposition of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings, He moved only within the theoretical realm. On the contrary, while His efforts to spread Bahá’u’lláh’s message were enormous, His endeavors to bring those teachings into the realm of action were colossal. In a conversation in London, for example, referring to one of the many congresses held at the time, bringing together philanthropists eager to improve the world, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stressed, “To know that it is possible to reach a state of perfection, is good; to march forward on the path is better. We know that to help the poor and to be merciful is good and pleases God, but knowledge alone does not feed the starving man ...”

Throughout His ministry, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá directed the Bahá’í community to make itself a model of the future society foretold by Bahá’u’lláh—one through which humanity might witness the transformations that accompany the application of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings to social and interpersonal relations.

In several of His talks, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá described the Bahá’ís of Persia (now Iran) as one such example. They lived in an environment in which religious segregation was a social reality. Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, and other religious minorities lived in isolation from their Muslim neighbors and also separated from each other. Being considered impure beings (*najis*), the minority groups were subject to strict rules that regulated not only their relations with Muslims, but also the jobs they performed and even the clothes they wore. In this environment, bringing people from different religious backgrounds together in the same room was not just taboo, but unthinkable. Despite this, the Bahá’í community in Persia managed to become—first under the guidance of Bahá’u’lláh and then of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá—a cohesive group comprising people from all religious backgrounds. Having

in common their faith in the transformative capacity of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings, they were able to set aside prejudices inherited from the surrounding society and their ancestors and work together to improve conditions for their fellow citizens. It was not long before Persian Bahá’ís—men and women alike—learned to make decisions collectively and to implement them without regard for different backgrounds or genders.

Such a change not only resulted in the unprecedented growth of the Bahá’í community, but also in the proliferation of numerous social and charitable projects throughout the country. For example, during the ministry of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Persian Bahá’ís managed to establish no less than twenty-five schools, including some of the country’s first schools for girls. Beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century, Bahá’ís in Persia also established health centers in several cities, including the Sahhat Hospital in Tehran, which followed the instructions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to include in its mission statement that it would provide “service to mankind, regardless of race, religion and nationality,” a revolutionary statement at that time and place.

While this was happening in the East, American Bahá’ís were working under the leadership of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to racially integrate their community.

“Strive with heart and soul in order to bring about union and harmony among the white and the black and prove thereby the unity of the Bahá’í world wherein distinction of color findeth no place, but where hearts only are considered,” He wrote in one of His letters to them. “Variations of color, of land and of race are of no importance in the Bahá’í Faith; on the contrary, Bahá’í unity overcometh them all and doeth away with all these fancies and imaginations.”

He also exhorted them to “endeavor that the black and the white may gather in one meeting place, and with the utmost love, fraternally associate with each other.”

“If it be possible,” He wrote on another occasion, “gather together these two races—black and white—into one Assembly, and create such a love in the hearts that they shall not only unite, but blend into one reality. Know thou of a certainty that as a result differences and disputes between black and white will be totally abolished.”

The process by which the Bahá’í community in the United States became a model of racial integration was accelerated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s visit to North America—through His personal example, His participation in integrated meetings, His encouragement to Bahá’ís who held them, and His constant instructions in all the cities He visited on the issue of race.

After the war, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá commissioned Agnes Parsons, a Bahá’í and member of high society in Washington, D.C., to organize the first Race Amity Conference, which took place in May 1921. The event, promoting racial unity and harmony, triggered a national movement that replicated the Conference in different parts of the United States in the following years, involving not only the American Bahá’í community, but also many other organizations and societal leaders. The result of these efforts was the transformation of the Bahá’í community into a group actively engaged in banishing the racial prejudices so present in its surrounding society.

In His efforts to demonstrate, through the global Bahá’í community, empirical proof that unity and freedom from prejudice leads to peace, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also promoted collaborative ties between the Bahá’ís of the West and the East. Beginning in the early twentieth century, He encouraged Persian Bahá’ís to travel to Europe and North America, and Western Bahá’ís to visit Persia or India. He promoted communications between Bahá’í communities. For example, the *Star of the West*, the journal of the Bahá’ís of the United States, included a section in Persian and was regularly sent to Persia.



Agnes Parsons

As development projects in Persia grew and became more complex, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá encouraged Western Bahá’ís to support them and extend assistance. As a result, in 1909, Susan Moody, M.D., moved to the country to work at the Sahhat hospital in Tehran. Moody was followed by other Bahá’ís, including teacher and school administrator Lilian Kappes, nurse Elizabeth Stewart, and fellow doctor Sarah Clock. In 1910, the Orient-Occident Unity was founded with the aim of establishing collaboration in different fields between the people of Persia and the United States. The work of this organization involved not only many Bahá’ís, but other prominent organizations and individuals.

All these transformations provided glimpses of the social implications of the principles promulgated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and presented examples of the effects generated by applying in the field of action the principle of world unity and the conception of the human being enunciated by Bahá’u’lláh.

Addressing the immediate needs

On 24 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of Austrian-Hungarian Empire, was assassinated in Sarajevo. A few weeks later, the European powers were at war, and the disaster predicted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá only a few years earlier became a reality.

The Ottoman regions of Syria and Palestine did not escape the dire

consequences of the conflagration. The area was hit by famine caused by pillaging Ottoman troops as they crossed the territory to reach Egypt, where they were defending the strategic Suez channel. In the Haifa area, circumstances were particularly complicated. The local population held diverging alliances. The Arabs were divided between those sympathizing with the French and those supporting the Ottoman Empire, while the members of the large German colony supported their own country. These divisions caused tension and sometimes produced violence. The city was also the target of bombings from the sea. Thus, within a few weeks, Haifa and its surroundings experienced a rapid transition from a relative state of peace to severe insecurity associated with a humanitarian crisis. The conflict caused acute needs that required urgent attention.

Before the war, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had taken steps that would allow Him to ameliorate these conditions. His most visible contribution was to provide food for the people of Haifa and its vicinity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had established various agricultural communities around the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan Valley, with the most important one in ‘Adasiyyih, in present-day Jordan. During the hardest years of the war, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sent shipments of foodstuffs from this location to Haifa, using some two hundred camels for just one trip, which gives an idea of the scale of the aid. To distribute the food within the population, He organized a sophisticated rationing system using vouchers and receipts to ensure that the food reached all those in need while preventing abuse.

“He was ever ready to help the distressed and the needy,” a witness was quoted as saying in 1919 in London’s *Christian Commonwealth*:

... often He would deprive himself and his own family of the necessities of life, that the hungry might be fed and the naked be



Susan Moody

clothed. . . . For three years he spent months in Tiberias and Adassayah, supervising extensive works of agriculture, and procuring wheat, corn and other food stuffs for our maintenance, and to distribute among the starving Mohamedan and Christian families. Were it not for his pre-vision and ceaseless activity none of us would have survived. For two years all the harvests were eaten by armies of locusts. At times like dark clouds they covered the sky for hours. This, coupled with the unprecedented extortions and looting of the Turkish officials and the extensive buying of foodstuffs by the Germans to be shipped to the "Fatherland" in a time of scarcity, brought famine. In Lebanon alone more than 100,000 people died from starvation.

"Abdul Baha is a great consolation and help to all these poor, frightened, helpless people," another report read.

A few years later—just after the war—a British army officer described 'Abdu'l-Bahá's role in reuniting the divided peoples of Haifa, saying, "Many are looking to him to solve the problems arising between Moslem and Christian sects."

Reading Reality in Times of Crisis

The three levels of action taken by 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the issue of war—participation in the discourses of His time, building a community based on spiritual principles, and paying



From left to right: Lillian Kappers, Muhibbih Sultan, his wife Muchul Khanum, Dr. Susan Moody, Dr. Sarah Clock, and Elizabeth Stewart, 1911 in Tehran.

attention to the immediate needs arising from the outbreak of war—offer us an opportunity to reflect, nearly one hundred years after His passing, on the appropriateness of the models of thought that currently influence global decision-making.

Today, as then, the world is beset by a large number of threats. The progressive environmental decline, the deficient global economic system—which allows for the existence of extremes of wealth and poverty and, at the same time, periodically causes major economic crises—the prevalence of war in a multitude of forms and its constant threat in a context of unprecedented technological development, the rapid spread and assimilation of hate mongering of all kinds and of all orientations, and the rise of an unfettered nationalism with an associated drive against human diversity and resistance to the processes of global convergence, are just some of the challenges facing humanity. In addition to these, which have been created by human beings themselves, there are others of an unexpected and natural character which, like the current global pandemic, highlight the fragility of a human ecosystem that has been greatly weakened by internal divisions and inequalities.

If the response to these crises—some of them unprecedented—is to be based on contradictions similar to those of the internationalists or pacifists of the years before the Great

War, we can anticipate that any remedy applied will be dramatically limited in its influence. Can, for instance, a humanity that still clings to a nationalistic world view provide an adequate response to global problems? Is it possible for societies that perceive consumerism and the accumulation of goods as a path to true happiness to find solutions to crises such as global warming?

If we heed 'Abdu'l-Bahá's advice, the diagnosis of these and future crises should not depend solely on an analysis of the material circumstances that converge in each of them, but should also address the ultimate, moral causes of these phenomena. Some of these include the pursuit of self-interest, submission to materialism, the perception that struggle and strife are legitimate means of resolving conflicts, the persistence of prejudices that deny human equality, and the distortion of the purpose of religion. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá consistently stated in His talks and writings, the solutions to the problems that afflict the human race depend not only on a change in the material conditions of humanity but also on a transformation in our understanding of what it means to be human, of our existential purpose, and of the moral framework upon which we base our actions.

To view this article online, including its footnotes, visit <https://bahaiworld.org/library/reading-reality-in-times-of-crisis/>



Haifa, Israel, from the upper terraces of the Shrine of the Báb. Photo: Galen Humber

An unprecedented wave of prayer

In the nearly one year since Canadians were called upon to increase the number of regular devotional gatherings, great progress has been made. The following article looks at how initiatives in two clusters have shaped the patterns of individual and community life.

In July of last year, the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada raised a call to the nation: that all Bahá'ís, as well as those working by their sides, should rise in an “unprecedented wave of prayer, establishing a regular devotional gathering in every household associated with the Greatest Name”. This call was, of course, set

against the backdrop of an equally “unprecedented crisis of health and spirit in our nation”, and, indeed, around the world.

In the nearly one year since this call was issued, the number of regular devotional gatherings across the country has increased by nearly 70 per cent to over 4,500. Whether held in-person or virtually, in

large groups or small families, this astounding growth represents a large-scale strengthening of the pattern of collective worship within the Canadian population.

While the ongoing health crisis has posed obstacles in the formation and continuation of so many of the community-building activities that have become part of the fabric of life

for us all, these same circumstances seem to have created in many individuals and households a desire to draw closer to their Creator through prayer and devotion, collectively turning towards God as the remedy for the ailments of humanity.

One such space, started in Stratford, Ont. in March 2020 after the first lockdown in Ontario, was organized after a consultation on how to create a sense of reverence in a virtual format.

Oonaugh Vaucrosson was one of the individuals who participated in this consultation, which later bore fruit in the form of a daily online devotional at dawn. “We thought it was important for us to have a space where we could connect every day, as the fear and uncertainty grew about infection,” said Mrs. Vaucrosson. “We knew we could have the solace of one another even as we were confined to our homes. People were concerned and needed to turn to prayer as a remedy—for themselves and for others who needed to seek a sense of peace and motivation.”

Mrs. Vaucrosson explains that the idea to hold the devotional gathering at dawn was inspired by a collective study of a compilation about the *Mashriqu’l-Adhkár*. The group was attracted to the Writings that encouraged friends to gather at the House of Worship at dawn, and how it is envisioned that one day these Houses of Worship will be at the heart of every Bahá’í community. “These gatherings are the embryo of the *Mashriqu’l-Adhkár*,” said Mrs. Vaucrosson. “Yes, this is a small initiative, but it is the beginning of something wonderful.”

In those early days of the pandemic, before online gatherings had become the norm, much thought was given to making the space attractive for others to join. How could a sense of reverence be fostered? How could they be sensitive to the non-verbal cues that were a natural part of being in the same physical space? These were some of the questions and concerns that the group con-

sidered when planning their devotional gathering. But, as they soon discovered, the community adapted quickly to connecting online, with many participants sharing that the daily space has helped them ward off feelings of isolation and some of the mental complications that often come with it.

Upon reflecting on this insight, the group decided to extend one of the devotional gatherings, on Monday morning, into a space where people could spend more time socializing and getting to know one another, as well as focusing on one aspect of the Writings and having a discussion around it. This has allowed for participants to make suggestions about how to further elevate the online space. It has also encouraged participation among members of the community who may not have been regularly active in the past.

This has led to what Mrs. Vaucrosson describes as a “blossoming of strength” among those who have a close association with the dawn prayers. “We have seen people come in and become more confident in their identities as Baha’is”, she said. “They ask questions they perhaps didn’t feel comfortable to ask before, and then explore and share those concepts with their family.”

This increased confidence is perhaps most evident in the four study circles and four devotional gatherings that have started as a direct result of this space. Through participating and witnessing how an online space can provide an uplifting environment, attendees have drawn the confidence to start their own activities.

For those in the cluster who prefer staying up late to waking up early, another devotional gathering was begun during this period, beginning just before midnight each night. Gordon Naylor says that this has led to the cluster being “blanketed by prayers, from dawn until midnight.”

Mr. Naylor says that when the National Assembly’s call for devotional gatherings was discussed in a cluster reflection meeting, he reflected on

what time of day would best be most practical for him to start a regular gathering. He decided on midnight, as he knew it was a time when he would be free every day. When he told his daughter about his idea, she asked “who could you get to come to that?” Mr. Naylor immediately thought to himself, “the youth will come.”

He brought the idea to his weekly youth fireside to see if there was any interest. The group was excited about getting together every night and felt that midnight fit their schedules well. They planned to make the gatherings brief, in order to assure they would be sustainable in the long term, and each agreed to volunteer to host one night a week.

Although the decision to hold the gatherings at midnight was motivated by practicality, the group has found the timing to be one of the most special aspects of the devotional gathering. Each night, the host welcomes everyone at 11:45 p.m. and asks if there is anything or anyone in particular they would like to pray for. The group then prays until midnight, at which point the host recites the following tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

O seeker of Truth!

If thou desirest that God may open thy (spiritual) eye, thou must supplicate unto God, pray to and commune with Him at midnight, saying:

“O Lord, I have turned my face unto thy Kingdom of Oneness and am drowned in the sea of Thy mercy! O Lord, enlighten my sight by beholding Thy lights in this dark night, and make me happy by the wine of Thy love in this wonderful age! O Lord, make me hear Thy call, and open before my face the doors of Thy heaven, so that I may see the light of Thy glory (Baha’) and become attracted to Thy beauty!

“Verily, thou art the Giver, the Generous, the Merciful, the Forgiving!”

“At that time such signs will appear which will guide thee to the Kingdom of Thy Lord, the Merciful.

The babe dressed in the white garment that gave thee the jessamine is a fragrance of the fragrances of God, reared through His love, a sign of His signs and a breeze of His breezes. It hath a wonderful power and there shall be for it astonishing states to the minds and spirits. Understand what I say to thee through the best of symbols.”

Mr. Naylor says that on several occasions participants have shared that since attending the regular gathering they feel changes in their lives. “The youth are experiencing more clarity of thought and receiving confirmations from God for the works they perform the next day,” says Mr. Naylor.

In the Vancouver, B.C. cluster, Deborah Hastings had been hosting a gathering for years that was “less of a devotional space and more of a musical one” where friends would get together every few months and share songs, poems, and some prayers. When social distancing became a necessity, the gatherings were paused, as it wasn’t yet a part of the natural rhythm to hold such a gathering online. However, after reading the call for devotional gatherings from the National Spiritual Assembly, she began to ask herself what she could do in

her community. “That was when I realized I could hold my gathering online,” says Mrs. Hastings.

She soon discovered a desire among her friends for the gatherings to resume, even if they couldn’t be in person. “All the people who had come before were hungering for it,” she said. Approximately 20 people, including 11 friends of the Faith, joined the gathering. In order to create an uplifting atmosphere, participants were asked to share something that brought them happiness.

Even though the limitations of technology make it difficult to sing together in synchronization, the group has found that it is still possible to share songs with microphones muted. While they cannot hear each other, they can see one another singing and feel the spirit of communal music. Said Mrs. Hastings, “It is still a joyous space online.”

Another initiative in Vancouver, at the level of a family, also drew its inspiration from the National Assembly’s July letter. Yalda Ravanbaksh, her husband, Stephen, and their two children strove to say prayers together daily. “We would start to fall into a rhythm of daily prayers and then it would fall off,” says Mrs. Ravanbaksh. “When we saw the letter from the National Assembly, we decided it has been a while since we tried to make praying together a consistent pattern.”

Mrs. Ravanbaksh also felt that her children were missing out on the communal aspect of prayer, since their children’s class could no longer meet in person.

Her family sat down to read the letter together and had a conversation about the importance of family devotional gatherings. They reflected on how their devotional gathering could differ from their daily prayers and could become a separate kind of space. From this discussion, it was decided that before bed would be a special time dedicated to holding a family devotional gathering.

Thought was given to how to make the space feel as beautiful as possible, and so the children are encouraged to tidy up the room and light candles beforehand. In order to raise awareness about the sacred act of prayer, the family will sit quietly and turn their thoughts inward for a few moments before praying. Sometimes they will also discuss who they would like to offer prayers for.

Since starting their family devotional gathering, Mrs. Ravanbaksh has noticed a shift in her children’s behaviour during prayers. “I see more initiative to sit upright and properly during prayers,” she says. “They are also drawn more to calling on the power of prayer; they look forward to the time and have become agents in the process.”





Artwork from the video Understanding the Covid-19 Vaccine, developed in collaboration with participants in the junior youth program in Brampton, Ont.

Social action during the pandemic

As lockdown and stay-at-home orders continue to be in place in many regions across the country, social action efforts have had to adapt in order to continue safely, as new initiatives also emerge.

In Springdale, a neighbourhood in Brampton, Ont., the community of friends serving and praying together has grown significantly and stirrings of social action have become apparent. This process of growth began in 2011, and, in the years since, numerous cohorts of young people have completed the junior youth program and advanced in the sequence of courses, with now over 100 core activities being supported by the local population, many of whom are South Asian. Two

working moms balancing numerous responsibilities, Jamila Siddiqui and Mehry Kianfar, along with Suchet Gill, a student pursuing her Bachelor of Business Administration, have recently published *Malika's Magical Mask*, a children's book about a group of friends learning to navigate the public health rules around COVID-19.

Dr. Kianfar, a family doctor and mother of four, describes how this project came to be:

It was a natural expression of a group's desire to contribute to their community, drawing on the capacities that have been nurtured by the Institute. The Institute nurtured a spiritual perception to recognize a need and then developed capacities to address it. If it wasn't for the core activities, the three of us would have never met each other!

Malika's Magical Mask features a young, female, South Asian

protagonist, her friend who is a young boy whose mother is at a high risk for severe illness from COVID-19, and a classmate learning the repercussions of not wearing her mask. The book stands out for the way in which it explores the practical aspects of living in a global pandemic for children, through the lens of friendship, oneness, and unity.

Both the story of Malika and her friends and the process of those engaged in creating this book are examples of what the Universal House of Justice describes in its Riqdân 2013 message, "...efforts to engage in social action are lent vital impetus by the training institute... The spiritual insights, qualities, and abilities that are cultivated by the institute process have proven to be as crucial for participation in social action as they are for contributing to the process of growth."

The connection between the institute process and the organic approach to developing and publishing of this book are described by Dr. Kianfar:

Once the lockdown restrictions were put in place in March 2020, our children's class, of which both my and Jamila's children are a part, started to meet online daily. The increased intensity of the class led to a Ruhi Book 1 forming with the mothers of the children. As we were studying these materials, conversations about how to contribute to our community during this pandemic naturally arose. As a nurse, Jamila was working in the ICU of our local hospital and so she cared for the sickest COVID-19 patients and saw a need and urgency to enhance the understanding of our community about the importance of social distancing measures and mask-wearing. In fact, this study circle offered to make homemade masks to be distributed to members of the community.

Conversations of this nature continued over time. Then, when the announcement was made about schools reopening in September and the new health guidelines for

children, the idea for the book came about. The creators of the book wanted the children to understand that wearing a mask is not simply another rule to follow, but an action that is done out of our love for humanity and our desire to protect one another.

In addition to the story being relevant and timely for children, the process of both creating and disseminating it built naturally on relationships formed through community building activities. Suchet Gill had been in the junior youth program for many years and then went on to complete Ruhi Books 1-5. As she has an interest in journalism and writing, she was asked to help in writing the story. And then, when Suchet and Dr. Kianfar needed an illustrator, they were already in touch with Jamila Siddiqui through children's classes in Springdale.

Once the book was released, the team of friends in Brampton were so excited to share it with friends, seeing it as an opportunity to raise awareness about public health in their community. As part of these efforts, they shared the book with school administrators and the junior youth had an online festival called "An Afternoon with Your Magical Mask". The junior youth took ownership of the event, inviting children to make bookmarks as a way to encourage them to read more and develop their literacy skills. The children also spent time beautifying their masks together and had a live reading with the authors.

In addition to these efforts, the group launched an Instagram page, @malikasmagicalmask, to raise awareness about public health. Recently, they collaborated to produce a short, animated film entitled "Understanding the Covid-19 Vaccine", describing in detail the way an mRNA vaccine is created and how it works. This film can be found on YouTube.

The creation of *Malika's Magical Mask* and the processes surrounding it bring to mind these words from the Universal House of Justice:

There is a mounting realization on the part of the world's people that the decades ahead are set to bring with them challenges among the most daunting that the human family has ever had to face. The current global health crisis is but one such challenge, the ultimate severity of whose cost, both to lives and livelihoods, is yet unknown; your efforts to succour and support one another as well as your sisters and brothers in society at large will certainly need to be sustained, and in places expanded.

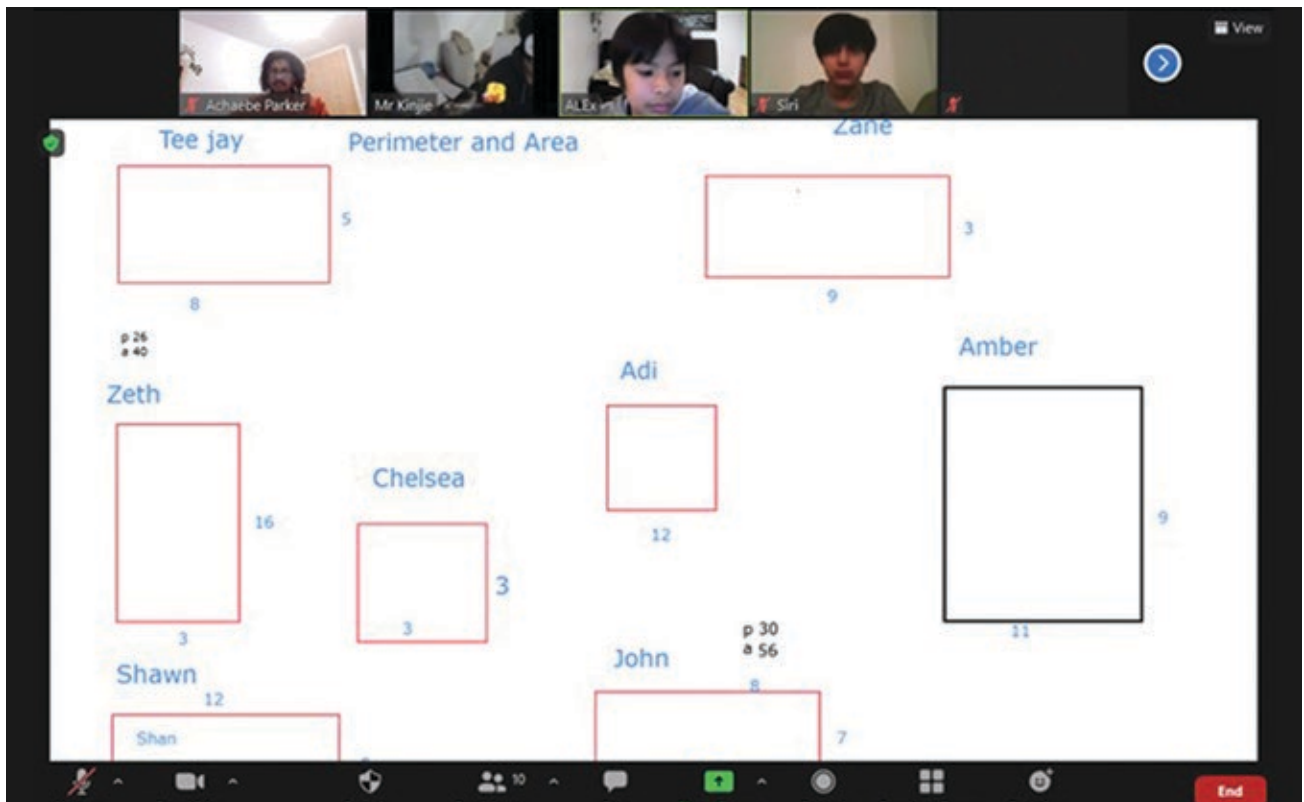
– Prepared for OntarioBahai.org by Esther Maloney and regional collaborators

Côte-des-Neiges

In the Côte-Des-Neiges neighbourhood in Montreal, Que., the team of friends serving the community saw that participants in their junior youth groups were finding certain classes in school challenging. The team decided to form study clubs to help the students with their most difficult classes. One such club was the math study club lead by Achaebe Parker and Kinjie Supe, which aims to not only address the immediate challenges junior youth have with their math homework, but also to help the junior youth improve their academic abilities for future math studies.

Mr. Supe, who tutors math, is a local youth that first started volunteering with the club to learn more about his research project. He is part of an internship program focused on mathematics and education, more specifically, he wants to learn about methods that help junior youth develop a better understanding of mathematics. Although the research project was his initial motivation to teach the participants, as time passed, he found he was enjoying his service as a math tutor. Now, he has developed a love for service and is motivated by seeing the junior youth in his community improve in their mathematical skills.

When the study club switched to an online platform during



Participants work together on a digital whiteboard to solve a math problem at an online meeting for the math study club.

the pandemic, the participation decreased in number. The tutors decided to ask a local Filipino community centre to post about the club on their Facebook page to be able to reach more junior youth in need of math help in the community. The team had an existing relationship with the community centre, where the junior youth groups would often meet prior to the pandemic. This online outreach was successful, with a large cohort of participants joining the study group as a result.

Parents also became an integral part of the club's increase in membership. The initial push from parents to invite their friends' children to participate, as well as to regularly remind their own children to join study sessions, gradually helped the junior youth to see the importance of the club and to join sessions out of their own volition. As a result, the relationship between the tutors and parents has strengthened. Recently, the tutors had a meeting with a parent of the study club who told the tutors that there is a visible improvement in terms of their child's under-

standing and skill level in math. The child's teacher had also given the parent positive feedback in terms of the child's improved ability in math.

The participants are divided into groups by age. When they join the club meetings, the tutors ask them what they are learning in school that week. Then the tutors attempt to build the foundational knowledge and skills needed for those specific units of study. Participants do not always study the same math unit in school as one another. Because of this, the tutors sometimes try to be creative and address multiple needs at the same time by incorporating many elements into a single math question. Tutors also keep track of what units the participants have learned in school as well as their current unit of study.

In terms of the relationship between tutors and participants, Mr. Supe commented, "We try to approach the study club with friendliness. We don't just talk about mathematics. We try to build our friendship with them so that they can become more

comfortable with us at the club. When they make jokes, we laugh with them and sometimes even add to it. I think they see us as a friend, rather than just an adult that's helping them with math. That has helped with their engagement in the club."

The close friendship that developed between the tutors and participants and the participants with one another lead to a desire for them to have a space outside the club to socialize and do other activities together. The tutors took this opportunity to introduce the junior youth spiritual empowerment program to each individual family. They started a new junior youth group in July 2020 with Mr. Parker and Mr. Supe animating.

As for the future of the math study club, the tutors hope to improve their own French language skills to incorporate more French math words into sessions. The tutors also plan to use the summer break to prepare participants for the coming school year.

The institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

A northern Representative shares her learning about the mighty law of the "Right of God".

In 1992, Chief Trustee and Hand of the Cause of God Dr. 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá travelled to Iqaluit, Nvt., on his way to Nuuk, Greenland, to attend that country's inaugural Bahá'í National Convention. His daughter Faraneh, along with Pouran Baghai, a Ḥuqúqu'lláh Representative from Toronto, and several Bahá'ís from the Northwest Territories and Nunavut accompanied him for eight blessed days as Greenlandic Bahá'ís and pioneers formed their first National Spiritual Assembly.

Each day, Dr. Varqá humbly and quietly attended a gathering of friends. On the last evening, Faraneh invited each attendee to visit with Dr. Varqá, as he had requested them to tell their stories about what had attracted them to Bahá'u'lláh. After meeting with all the friends, Dr. Varqá told those in attendance that the Right of God is a divine prescription from the treasury of God's love to spiritually and materially enrich all peoples in the world, as we return 19 per cent of the surplus above our needs and expenses to God. This had special meaning for the friends who often reflected upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tablet about the melting of the Greenland ice¹, which would affect the spiritual and material well-being of the entire planet, so blindly submerged in a sea of materialism. After Dr. Varqá departed, the Greenlandic friends were inspired to find a way to make their Ḥuqúqu'lláh payment.

When I returned home to the Northwest Territories, at that time serving as an Auxiliary Board member for the N.W.T., Nunavut, and Greenland, I often reflected on the example of humble, respectful, loving servitude shown by the Chief Trustee and Hand of the Cause of God as

¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet to Bahá'ís of Canada Greenland, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, no. 5



An embroidered symbol of the Greatest Name with a seal skin nine-pointed star. This wall hanging was made by Inuit women in Iqaluit in the early 1980s with guidance from a Bahá'í tailor who managed the Parka Centre. (Collection of David and Pat Parks, Pond Inlet, Nvt.)

he listened so intently to each Bahá'í who spoke of their relationship with Bahá'u'lláh.

After my service as an Auxiliary Board member ended, I was invited to become a Representative for the Board of the Ḥuqúqu'lláh and my heart leapt at this opportunity to learn everything I could, in order to share it, so that others might also experience that same joy. Now, over ten years later, I have seen how observance of this law changes understanding and behaviour as we respond to the needs of this transitional stage towards the establishment of order and unity in the world.

The following article focuses first on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's explanation of the interrelationship between "cooperation, mutual assistance, and reciprocity" in the world of creation. A brief report follows of how the believers in Canada's far northern communities of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut are learning about the law, incorporating it in our wills while facing the practical challenges of all northern Indigenous believers and pioneers to ensure its proper application. Finally, a reflection follows on how this law can regenerate our personal relationship with Bahá'u'lláh and benefit us in this world and the next.

“Cooperation, mutual assistance and reciprocity”

In explaining the spiritual foundation of the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá likens the physical world to a single being with inseparably linked limbs and members. He tells us that by using one's inner or spiritual eye we discover “the realities of all things”² and learn to appreciate that what binds the world of being together is cooperation, mutual assistance and reciprocity. He reminds us that all created things either influence or derive benefit from each other and that without this interrelationship “the entire creation would be reduced to nothingness.”³

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that while the signs and evidences of this truth exist at all levels of creation, they are relatively more conspicuous at the higher levels. For example, the vegetable and animal kingdoms are diverse yet coexist interdependently. This can be seen in nature, where the slightest imbalance between the kingdoms may either positively or negatively affect the ecosystem. When a small number of predatory animals are introduced into an environment that is overpopulated by grazing animals, it changes the behaviour of those grazing animals. Fearful of becoming prey, they retreat from areas they had overgrazed, and as the vegetation regrows, the habitats of several other species are restored. This mutual rebalancing of the two species illustrates how every part of creation either influences or is affected by another part; in the simple words of John Muir, “when we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.”⁴

Continuing with His explanation of this fundamental rationale of the Right of God, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says we see the “conspicuous signs and evi-

dences of the truth that cooperation, mutual assistance and reciprocity”⁵ exists for “all conditions, whether physical or spiritual, such as those related to minds, thoughts, opinions, manners, customs, attitudes, understandings, feelings or other human susceptibilities.”⁶ In light of this all-encompassing view of the ordered world, Shoghi Effendi states we are implicitly organic with the natural world and that, “we cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved.”⁷ Our inner life both “moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.”⁸

Learning about Ḥuqúqu'lláh

The Universal House of Justice writes that the Right of God must permeate our consciousness, so that our observance of it will, as Bahá'u'lláh states, be “conducive to prosperity, to blessing, and to honour and divine protection”⁹ and be “the source of grace, abundance, and of all good.”¹⁰

In 2018, the Institution of the Ḥuqúqu'lláh initiated a project to widely distribute the compilation Ḥuqúqu'lláh, The Right of God. The National Spiritual Assembly of Canada published this compilation at the request of the Office of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and offered it as a gift to all Bahá'í households in Canada. The Counsellors, Auxiliary Board members, Regional Councils, Local Assemblies, and the Ḥuqúqu'lláh Representatives have all assisted in distributing the compilation.

Most recently, on January 23–24, 2021, an excellent virtual

workshop on wills and the Right of God, hosted by the Institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in British Columbia and the Yukon, was attended by the Deputy Trustees and regional Representatives across Canada. The impact of this workshop has rippled widely, spurring Representatives to hold workshops in other parts of Canada.

The Deputy Trustee for Ḥuqúqu'lláh for the Prairies and Northern Canadian Territories (N.W.T. and Nunavut) consulted with the Representatives in our areas and decided to hold small, pilot-based workshops on wills and the Right of God in order to gain experience in holding the workshops using the prepared material. They are reviewing their experiences and learning in order to evaluate options for holding a larger regional gathering in the near future. A virtual workshop for Nunavut Bahá'ís was held during the last two days of Ayyám-i-Há, including five Bahá'ís from three Nunavut communities (Arviat, Pond Inlet, Rankin Inlet). The participation of the Deputy Trustee and two Representatives, from Manitoba and Saskatchewan, greatly enriched the gathering and raised the spirits of the Bahá'ís living in these small, isolated Nunavut communities. More modest workshops are being held by telephone in the Northwest Territories for individual Bahá'ís living in small, isolated communities.

As the reader can appreciate, there are many questions and practical challenges for the northern believers to consider when making a will in accordance with Bahá'í law, one which includes the provision for making one's final payment to the Right of God. For example, how can an isolated Bahá'í find a lawyer to draft their will when there are no lawyers in the small northern communities? How does one find an executor who can carry out the express wishes of a Bahá'í who assigns a piece of property to a particular person and deal with cultural dynamics around community sharing? Given the high costs of travel in the north, how

2 'Abdu'l-Bahá in *Ḥuqúqu'lláh – The Right of God*, 2017, p. 18.

3 Ibid, p. 19.

4 John Muir, (1838–1914), naturalist, writer and advocate of U.S. forest conservation, founded the Sierra Club and assisted in the establishment of the Sequoia and Yosemite National Parks; retrieved March 16, 2021 from <https://www.biography.com/scholar/john-muir>

5 'Abdu'l-Bahá in *Ḥuqúqu'lláh – The Right of God*.

6 Ibid.

7 Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 17 February 1933 retrieved March 16, 2021 from: <https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/essential-relationships>

8 Ibid.

9 The Universal House of Justice, 1997, in a letter to the Deputies and Representatives of the Institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

10 Ibid.



Bahá'ís gathered in Nuuk, Greenland, in 1992 for the 1st National Bahá'í Convention with Chief Trustee and Hand of the Cause of God Dr. 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá and friends from Greenland, Canada, Faroe Islands, Iceland, Denmark, and England. In photo is a beaded Greatest Name symbol in the tradition of the Yellowknives Dene in Ndilo, made as a gift from the N.W.T. Bahá'ís to Greenland in honour of this spiritual milestone by Ernie Abel of Yellowknife, N.W.T. (Collection of the National Spiritual Assembly of Greenland and housed in Bahá'í House, Nuuk, Greenland)

would a lawyer or executor external to the community efficiently execute the expressed will of a Bahá'í in an isolated community? The Deputy Trustee and the Representatives are reflecting on the outcomes from each workshop and considering ways to address these and other issues facing the believers. Even in the face of these daunting obstacles, the northern Bahá'ís in these workshops are coming to recognize that, “the wisdom of this perspicuous and most mighty ordinance is that no one should draw breath without a will.”¹¹

11 Extracts from *Four Tablets by Abdu'l-Bahá Concerning the Question of Inheritance*, retrieved March 17, 2021 from Bahá'í Reference Library at: www.bahai.org

Reflection on the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

In 2007, Dr. Varqá observed a new generation of Bahá'ís, enlightened with the “vision and knowledge” of this unique law of love and encouraged all to nurture “self-discipline and concern for the betterment of others.”¹² He recognized that the Right of God would anchor material progress in a spiritual foundation to advance social and economic welfare of mankind through the development of spiritual conscience. He echoed 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that the effect of “mutual aid and co-

12 Dr. Varqá' to Deputy Trustees and Representatives of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and friends participating in the Annual Conference on the Right of God in Canada, Sept 27, 2007.

operation among the peoples of the world” would be “the cause of the good pleasure of the True One in the heavenly realm.”¹³

Ḥuqúqu'lláh resonates deeply with the Bahá'ís in the north, both Indigenous and pioneers, who walk humbly together in these small, isolated communities, serving and obeying the laws of Bahá'u'lláh in honour of the Creator as the life-giver, Who asks little in return for the blessings He showers on us in this world and the next. As we make our wills, we will tell our story of deep attraction to Bahá'u'lláh.

– Cheryl Fennel

13 *Star of the West*, Vol. 11, Issue 8, p. 124



A mural created for a neighbourhood centre in Greenboro, Ont., by a group of youth in spring 2020, designed to spread a positive message to passersby in the plaza.

An expanding nucleus: perspective from two neighbourhoods

The Greenboro and Springdale neighbourhoods describe their understanding of the concept of an expanding nucleus.

In Canada, the Greenboro neighbourhood in Ottawa, Ont., and the Springdale neighbourhood in Brampton, Ont., are engaged in a process described by the Universal House of Justice in its 28 December 2010 message:

It is to be expected, however, that the multiplication of these core activities would soon be sustained by human resources indigenous to the neighbourhood or village itself—by men and women eager to improve material and spiritual conditions in their surroundings. A rhythm of community life should gradually emerge, then, commensurate with the capacity of an expanding nucleus of individuals committed to Bahá’u’lláh’s vision of a new World Order.

In both neighbourhoods, the number of core activities exceeds 100, and the responsibilities of coordination and tutoring are carried out by both pioneers and friends originally from the region.

The two neighbourhoods are still in the process of learning how an expanding nucleus operates, but their understanding of it thus far gives insight into what it means for “a band of local friends [to join] the initial team,” and to gradually “develop a deeper sense of ownership of the growth process and an ardent desire to see it encompass the entire population.”¹

In Greenboro, seven local youth, who are tutors, and seven pioneers make up the current nucleus, which is understood of as a team of people

¹ From a letter of the International Teaching Centre to All Continental Counsellors, dated 3 May 2018.

working and consulting together. As youth become tutors, they are naturally drawn into the nucleus.

In the summer of 2019, a cohort of youth entered the institute process through two camps, over a period of two weeks. They came together again to continue their study of the Ruhi books during the winter 2019 holidays. By the summer of 2020, the youth organized an intensive study of Book 1, where they themselves would serve as tutors, and began to bring invite friends to participate. This was the first instance of a cohort of youth being raised as tutors from the Greenboro population.

“The reason it was our goal to train youth as tutors that year,” says Caitlin Moore, a coordinator and pioneer in the neighbourhood, “was because the Universal House of Justice has said repeatedly that once



A group of youth studying Ruhi Book 1: Reflections on the Life of the Spirit at a Summer 2020 institute campaign in the Greenboro neighborhood.

you raise tutors from the population, the dynamics of growth change in a significant way. So, we just decided to figure out how we can raise tutors.” She went on to add, “I think in doing it, we just realized how true the words of the House of Justice were and that it didn’t have to be complicated.”

The youths’ preparation to serve as tutors consisted of a thorough study of Ruhi Book 1 to ensure they were comfortable and well familiar with the content. Their preparation to tutor the study of the books was essential, but another element that helped them was their experience with accompanying their friends in service, which they had developed capacity for even before their service as tutors.

From when the first cohort of youth entered the institute process, the team tried to develop a culture of growth based on mutual support. As animators and children’s class teachers, they were also gaining experience by going to their friends’ activities, helping one another conduct their children’s classes and junior youth groups, and carrying out home visits to families. Whenever they had the chance to act, they would do it together. Any time anyone wanted to start an

activity, they were joined by a friend that had done it before. Because of this and because of the vision given to them at the outset – of eventually helping other youth come into the institute once they became tutors, bringing new friends into the process was not complicated. As tutors, they continued to accompany their friends in the field of service, now with a more deliberate purpose: to help friends start and conduct junior youth groups.

Now, all the youth entering the institute in the neighbourhood do so through the efforts and invitations of these tutors from the neighbourhood. The institute process in the neighbourhood has taken on a life of its own.

As to the way the team plans and operates now, two coordinators described the dynamics and membership of the team as being “fluid.” During the school year, because school takes up much of their daily time and effort, the tutors are not able to set time aside for weekly nucleus meetings; however, this does not mean that the team does not consider them a part of the nucleus.

Ms. Moore shares, “We are finding different ways to keep the nucleus

together – whether it be the coordinators seeing the tutors during the week when they carry out their core activities, or just checking on each other. This way, when the time comes for a school break and we can offer institute courses, everyone is on the same page, even when they cannot attend meetings every week. So, there’s some fluidity to all of it.”

As to some questions of the nucleus moving forward, the team wants to know what it means for the institute process to permeate a neighbourhood. Although raising tutors from the population is significant, the team sees this as a first step in the process. Anthea Nelson James, another coordinator and pioneer in Greenboro, shared, “one thing we are noticing, especially in the population we’re engaging, is how important it is to have not just the support of families, but the involvement of families as well.”

Since the youth tutor their friends in study circles, they also carry out home visits to the families of their friends in their study circles. “Now that the youth from the neighbourhood are carrying out these visits and sharing what they are learning, we notice a different kind of receptivity from parents,” noted Ms. Moore. She went on to share,

“the parents were really impressed by the way their children’s friends were carrying themselves, by the way they were talking about Book 1 and what they were studying, and by the process in the neighbourhood.” Some parents became more eager to encourage their youth to attend institute activities in the summer and some began supporting the activities in various ways themselves, including by providing food for the entirety of an institute campaign. Moving forward, one question the team has is how to visit families more consistently and how to have parents come all together so that they can also be a part of the planning in the neighbourhood.

Springdale

In the Springdale neighbourhood, the nucleus consists of 12 friends. The team sees the nucleus as a group of friends that is always expanding, and it views the community building activities as the responsibility of the entire neighbourhood. The nucleus tries to act on this view in its day-to-day operation.

The study of Book 10: Building Vibrant Communities helped the team to see the nucleus as always expanding and inviting more people. The team also realized that taking on the responsibility of guiding the core activities could not fall solely on the shoulders of those in the nucleus, or even those friends attending weekly meetings. Otherwise, the team would become exhausted, and eventually the number of activities needing support would outgrow the capacity of those supporting them. The progress of the activities in the neighbourhood would then become limited. Eliza Rizal, a team member, reflected, “We realized there is a whole group of people connected to these activities that can also share this responsibility. It’s not just those of us in the nucleus that serve or have a desire to serve, and it should never be just us. So, we tried to think about other people, who are not always at team meetings but can still share that responsibility.” An example of this is a youth who does

not attend weekly meetings but is an active children’s class teacher who is now thinking about the growth of all the children’s classes in the neighbourhood. Another is a tutor who had become distant because of school prior to the pandemic, but during the pandemic has had more time and when asked to accompany a new group of youth in the institute, gladly accepted.

A few weeks prior to the pandemic, there was a shift in structure of the weekly meeting space of the team. In the past, the team meetings in the neighbourhood would be highly structured and the attendance was limited to those who were already in a conversation about the core activities. The team decided to change the meeting dynamics by opening the space to anyone in the community who had a desire to learn about growth and to reflect on the activities and plans in the neighbourhood.

Junior youth came to these meetings and brought their friends; sometimes people would come in late, some would come even 10 minutes before the end of the meeting, but no matter who participated and at what point, they would be caught up with the conversation and plans. This allowed for a larger number of friends in the neighbourhood to be involved in the conversation around the community building process. The team firmly believes that everyone has the capacity to contribute to the conversation and to think about the advancement of the community. These weekly meetings were a space where they could do that every week.

Beyond this space, the team regularly asks itself how it can bring the questions that arise in the meetings of the animators and children’s class teachers to others that reside in the community. This way, siblings, parents, and neighbours can be involved in thinking about the solutions and the decisions that are made for the educational activities. About this experience, Martharoot Malungu comments, “We saw that if we were to think about growth

and embracing large numbers, that required large numbers to be part of this conversation. It couldn’t just be the people who have experience or the people who are showing up to a junior youth group every week.”

The team also makes a lot of effort to ensure people stay connected to each other and to the activities during the pandemic. Whether the restrictions allow the team to make in-person distanced visits to friends or confines them to the limits of their own home, one thing they always make sure to do is to keep in touch with everybody with whom they are connected and to make sure everyone knows what is happening with the activities.

An essential part of reaching everybody and ensuring the neighbourhood activities continue growing is thinking about the individuals and families needing home visits. During team meetings, first a list of names is made of individuals that need to be reached, afterwards, each team member takes several names on the list to call or visit throughout the week. Looking at the list of names also helps the team to consult about ways to help everyone in the institute process to take next steps in their service to the community. The conversations during home visits become centered around themes of capacity building as well as how individuals see their service advancing.

Moving forward, there are several qualitative questions the team wants to learn about – how devotional gatherings can be a part of every educational activity in the neighbourhood; how groups of friends can enter together into the institute process; and how animators and children’s class teachers can reinvigorate the energy in meetings of junior youth groups and children’s classes during lockdown.

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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;
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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;
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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 receipting and recording of payments at the Treasury Department of the Bahá'í National Centre. Payments of the Right of God (Ḥuqúqu'lláh) are not processed through individual Deputies or Representatives.

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.

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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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عضای هیات امنای حقوق الله در کانادا

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شارلوت مصلح

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 رسید ها 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