

# BAHÁ'Í CANADA

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**A coherent life**

# From the Writings

**B**lessed is he who, at the hour of dawn, centering his thoughts on God, occupied with His remembrance, and supplicating His forgiveness, directeth his steps to the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* and, entering therein, seateth himself in silence to listen to the verses of God, the Sovereign, the Mighty, the All-Praised. Say: The *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* is each and every building which hath been erected in cities and villages for the celebration of My praise. Such is the name by which it hath been designated before the throne of glory, were ye of those who understand.

– Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, par. 115.

**O** SON OF EARTH! Wouldst thou have Me, seek none other than Me; and wouldst thou gaze upon My beauty, close thine eyes to the world and all that is therein; for My will and the will of another than Me, even as fire and water, cannot dwell together in one heart.

– Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, No. 31 from the Persian.

**B**y My life and My Cause! Round about whatever dwelling the friends of God may enter, and from which their cry shall rise as they praise and glorify the Lord, shall circle the souls of true believers and all the favoured angels. And should the door of the true eye be opened unto some, they shall witness the Supreme Concourse as it circleteth and crieth: “Blessed art thou, O house, for God hath made thee a resting-place for those He favoureth, and a lodging for those He holdeth dear, and a home for those in whom He hath placed His trust. Unto thee be His praise and His glory and His endless grace.”

– Bahá'u'lláh, From a Tablet translated from the Arabic and Persian quoted in *The Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár—A Statement and Compilation* prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, par. 7.

**T**hroughout eternity Thou hast been, O my Lord, and wilt ever remain the One true God, while all else save Thee are needy and poor. Having clung tenaciously to Thy Cord, O my God, I have detached myself from all mankind, and having set my face towards the habitation of Thy tender mercy, I have turned away from all created things. Graciously inspire me, O my God, through Thy grace and bounty, Thy glory and majesty, and Thy dominion and grandeur, for no one mighty and all-knowing can I find beside Thee. Protect me, O my God, through the potency of Thy transcendent and all-sufficing glory and by the hosts of the heavens and the earth, inasmuch as in no one can I wholly place my trust but in Thee and no refuge is there but Thee.

– The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 194.

**W**ere 'Abdu'l-Bahá not imprisoned and were there not obstacles in his path, he himself would assuredly hasten to 'Ishqábád and carry the earth for the building of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* with the utmost joy and gladness. It behoveth the friends now to arise with this intention in mind and serve in my place so that in a short time this Edifice may be revealed to all eyes, the loved ones of God may engage in making mention of the Abhá Beauty, the melodies of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* may rise at dawntide to the Concourse on high, and the songs of the nightingales of God may bring joy and ecstasy to the denizens of the All-Glorious Realm. Thus will the hearts rejoice, the souls delight in joyful tidings, and the minds be illumined. This is the highest hope of the sincere ones; this is the dearest wish of them that are nigh unto God.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet quoted in *The Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár—A Statement and Compilation* Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Note 77, extract 66.

**A**s to the design of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*: it should resemble the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* of 'Ishqábád. That is, it must be a nine-sided edifice and should be erected so as to evince the utmost spirituality, elegance, loftiness, refinement, and grace, in such wise that it becometh a place which is full of charm. Insofar as possible, effort should be exerted towards ensuring the pleasantness of the site, its freshness and beauty.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, From a Tablet—translated from the Persian.

**T**he foundation of life and existence is cooperation and mutual aid, whereas the cause of annihilation and deterioration is the cessation of aid and assistance. The higher the realm of existence, the stronger and more vital this weighty matter of cooperation and assistance doth become. In the realm of humanity, therefore, cooperation and mutual aid are in a greater degree of completeness and perfection than that which prevaieth in the other realms of existence—so much so, that the life of humanity dependeth entirely upon this principle. Among the friends of God, in particular, this strong foundation must be fortified in such wise that each soul may help the other in all matters, whether pertaining to spiritual realities and inner truths or to the material and physical aspects of life. Such is especially the case with regard to the founding of public institutions that benefit all people, and, in particular, the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*, which constituteth the greatest of divine foundations.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet quoted in *The Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár—A Statement and Compilation* Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Note 73, extract 22.

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**ON THE COVER:** Participants outside the Sylvan Lake Bahá'í Centre, in Alberta, where they gathered for a youth conference in January 2024.

Photo: Maya Asdaghi

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## REMOVABLE INSERT:

28 November 2023 message from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World

# Message regarding pilgrimage and brief visits to the Holy Land

From the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 17 January 2024.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

**T**he Universal House of Justice has asked us to convey that, while the situation in the Holy Land remains unsettled, pilgrims will be welcomed from 12 February 2024 and that, with immediate effect, friends may once again make requests to come on brief visits to

pray in the Sacred Shrines; kindly share this information with the members of your community.

The friends who wish to come at the present time are asked to give careful consideration to the travel advice of their respective governments and to exercise their own judgement regarding when to come. For the time being, believers are asked not to extend the length of their stay in the Holy Land beyond the period required to make their visit to the Bahá'í World Centre.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,  
Department of the Secretariat



Gardens at Bahjí near the entrance gatehouse plaza. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

# Process of selection and design of Canada's Temple

To all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils and Registered Groups, 12 December 2023.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

**A**s promised in our letter dated 5 December 2023, we are pleased to share information about the process of selecting an architect and a design for Canada's National House of Worship.

As you know from our letter, a number of consultations with the Office of Temples and Sites at the Bahá'í World Centre have guided us and helped us map out lines of action. Among the first steps taken to support the architect and design selection process was the appointment of a team of experienced friends to oversee procedural details, bring together particulars of potential architects, and eventually prepare evaluations/reports of

concept submissions to be put forward to the National Spiritual Assembly and the Bahá'í World Centre.

We are now ready for the next stage. The National Assembly lovingly invites Canadian Bahá'í architects and graduate architects who have not previously designed and completed a House of Worship elsewhere, to submit an Expression of Interest for the design of Canada's House of Worship by sending their name, contact information and educational qualifications to [temple@bahai.ca](mailto:temple@bahai.ca) with the subject line "Expression of Interest – Canada's House of Worship" before 31 January. Applicants will be contacted by the team directly about next steps and should not include a concept design at this stage.

We appreciate your assistance in widely circulating this invitation and ensuring that those friends who may be considering a submission receive it.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Karen McKye, Secretary



A bird's eye view of the vicinity where Canada's House of Worship will be built in Markham, Ont. Photo: Susan Sheper

# Message regarding Bahá'ís going to the Holy Land

To all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils and Registered Groups, 6 February 2024.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Now that the doors have been opened once more for pilgrimage and brief visits to the Holy Land, we have been asked to remind the friends of guidance that Bahá'ís must seek the permission of the Universal House of Justice before visiting the Holy Land—which also includes the West Bank and Gaza—for any purpose, whether it be for a brief visit to the Bahá'í World Centre, pilgrimage, studying in the country, visiting family or relatives, business purposes, employment, or any other reason.

Explaining the reason for this provision, which has been a long-standing requirement that no Bahá'í may come to the Holy Land for any purpose without the permission of the Head of the Faith, the House of Justice notes that

it dates back to the time of Bahá'u'lláh Himself. “The principal task of the Faith in the Holy Land is building its World Centre and administering the work of the Cause at the international level. To have believers visiting the country without the proper guidance pertaining to their specific circumstances may give rise to problems that could hamper the work carried out here, and this would have an adverse effect on the progress of the Faith throughout the world.”<sup>1</sup>

Bahá'ís wishing to apply for pilgrimage or request permission for a brief visit can do so by visiting the website <https://pilgrimage.bwc.org/>. Those wishing to visit the Bahá'í World Centre for other purposes may contact us at [secretariat@bahai.ca](mailto:secretariat@bahai.ca) and we would be pleased to convey your request.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Karen McKye, Secretary

<sup>1</sup> From a letter dated 1 February 2024 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assemblies

# Message to unit conventions

To the Bahá'ís of Canada, 7 February 2024.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The National Spiritual Assembly greets you with love, as you gather at the unit convention for this first stage of raising up the national institution to serve Canada in the coming year, and to consult together. As we considered the themes about which we wish to seek your comment and advice, we recalled how your thoughtful contributions at the unit convention last year were threaded throughout the National Convention, informing the discussions and enriching the National Assembly's own consultation throughout the year.

A momentous year it has been. The announcement, at Riqván, that the Canadian community is called to raise up a national House of Worship, has galvanized a community that was already in movement, rising in capacity to welcome growing numbers into its embrace.

How different actions look when viewed in light of the society-building power they release! This expansive prospect allows a sustained activity to be seen as

much more than an isolated act of service or just a data point. In place after place, the initiatives being pursued reveal a population learning how to take increasing responsibility for navigating the path of its own development. The resulting spiritual and social transformation manifests itself in the life of a people in a variety of ways.<sup>1</sup>

It is to this difference of perspective that we wish to turn your attention today.

We need look back only ten years to recall the youth conferences that brought thousands of youth into a dynamic conversation about transformation, only six years to remember the bicentenary celebrations of the birth of the Báb and of Bahá'u'lláh that opened the doors wide to our friends and neighbours, and two short years since the global conferences in 2022, where this transformative conversation was further extended to tens of thousands. These outward surges, bringing so many into contact with the Revelation, have allowed us to learn how a conscious decision on the part of a few friends to act as an expanding nucleus, continues to widen the circle of participation. As devotional gatherings multiply and a culture of home visits is nurtured, a vibrant community

<sup>1</sup> Riqván 2023, Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World.

life that welcomes a growing army of kindred souls is taking shape. Above all, we see glimpses of the dramatic, empowering effects of the training institute as it takes root in a community. Whether this expansion has been in a centre of intense activity in an urban neighbourhood, or in a rural community where a children's class has been sustained for the first time, it has changed the face of the community. What has been your experience in trying to grow, work together, and sustain your efforts in settings of every kind? What signs of transformation have you seen? How have you been learning to reflect with those at whose side you are serving?

At the forefront of these advances have been the young. Among the moving accounts we continue to hear have been those of children introducing daily prayers into their family life and eagerly inviting classmates to children's classes; junior youth thoughtfully surveying the needs of their neighbourhoods and undertaking service to their communities; youth who, conscious of the precious responsibility that is theirs, are committing countless hours to their peers and those younger, while working towards an education that will allow them to serve humanity. In a letter dated 5 December 2013, the Universal House of Justice noted an advance in the process of entry by troops not hitherto experienced, propelled by the capacities developed by all three protagonists involved in the youth conferences and embodied in a community that had rallied around the young, rejoicing to see itself as an "interdependent, organic whole, readier to meet the imperatives of this day." In the *Riḍván 2023* message, we see the fruits of this development:

Amid all we have described, the actions of the youth shine resplendent. Far from being mere passive absorbers of influence—whether the influence be benign or otherwise—they have proven themselves bold and discerning protagonists of the Plan. Where a community has seen them in this light and created conditions for their progress, the youth have more than justified the confidence shown in them. They are teaching the Faith to their friends and making service the foundation of more meaningful friendships. Frequently, such service takes the form of educating those younger than themselves—offering them not only moral and spiritual education, but often assistance with their schooling too. Charged with a sacred responsibility to strengthen the institute process, Bahá'í youth are fulfilling our cherished hopes.

It is small wonder, then, that a great deal of the National Assembly's consultation with the Counsellors this past year has focused on learning about these conditions, which clearly involve young and old, community and institutions as well as the individual believer. How are the conditions created? How has this vision of youth as protagonists of spiritual and social development, rather than a congregation with needs to be met, changed our patterns of community life? What is needed for youth to be able to fulfil their sacred charge of strengthening the

training institute, including dedicated periods of service in addition to their daily patterns? What obstacles exist that the family, the institutions and the community can assist in removing?

Dear friends, a final theme for your discussions is best framed by this stirring passage from the 28 November 2023 message to the Bahá'ís of the world: "At its heart, the challenge presented by the interplay of the processes of integration and disintegration is the challenge of holding fast to Bahá'u'lláh's description of reality and to His teachings, while resisting the pull of controversial and polarizing debates and beguiling prescriptions that reflect futile attempts to define human identity and social reality through limited human conceptions, materialist philosophies, and competing passions." All that we have spoken of—building the first national House of Worship in the West to which the peoples of Canada will come to remember their Creator, strengthening the training institute and creating conditions for the young to thrive, establishing and extending patterns of community life as expanding nuclei working with individuals and families—depends on this condition of holding fast to Bahá'u'lláh's vision of reality. How are we helping each other in this deeply unsettled age, and how are we learning to convey Bahá'u'lláh's vision to others?

This brings us back to the *Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár*, a mighty and mysterious institution whose spirit is evoked in every community and home through the holding of devotional gatherings where "any soul may enter, inhale the heavenly fragrances, experience the sweetness of prayer, meditate upon the Creative Word, be transported on the wings of the spirit, and commune with the one Beloved". 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that even the act of "laying but one brick for [it] or one of its dependencies is like unto building a lofty edifice". If this is true of the physical structure, what of the spiritual bricks and mortar you are placing, as you extend your circles and bring others into contact with the penetrative power of the Word of God? As the material edifice of Canada's first House of Worship begins to take shape on these spiritual foundations, you, the builders, are remembered with love in our grateful prayers.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

– National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

# About this issue

The title of this issue, “A coherent life,” reflects the efforts of Bahá’ís to bring Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation into reality, both individually and collectively. It seems that the expansive vision required to unleash the society-building power of the Faith requires higher and higher levels of coherence—a far-reaching concept related to cultivating habits of the mind that seek unity and not division.

Of course, thoughts must be translated into action for change to occur. In our lives, this often means adjusting our pace on or breaking away from well-trodden paths carved out by the forces of society. As one of the young adults interviewed for this issue expressed, “[W]hat makes me a Bahá’í if I’m just doing the same thing as everyone else?”

This issue has a strong focus on the experience of Bahá’í youth in Canada. In 2013, the series of worldwide youth conferences called for by the Universal House of Justice galvanized youth and brought to their attention key concepts such as the twofold moral purpose.<sup>1</sup> To this conference, it wrote, “You know well that the habits of mind and spirit that you are nurturing in yourselves and others will endure, influencing decisions of consequence that relate to marriage, family, study, work, even where to live.”<sup>2</sup>

The feature article, titled “Coherence in the lives of young people entering work: part two” is the second in a series that explores the efforts of young people to live coherent lives of service to humanity. It shares the experience of three graduates of the seminars offered by the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, who extend insights from their time at university to their recent experience entering the workforce.

In the section called “From the History,” the article “‘Fiery love in her heart’: Early Bahá’í women teach the Faith in Iran” recounts the heroic efforts of women who, despite being expected to live in the shadows, emerged to proclaim the Faith. Their actions aligned with the transformation that had occurred inside them. Today,

1 The “A Few Thoughts for the Tutor” section of Ruhi Book 1 explains this as “to attend to one’s own spiritual and intellectual growth and to contribute to the transformation of society.”

2 From the Universal House of Justice to the participants in the forthcoming 114 youth conferences throughout the world, 1 July 2013.

our service can also be seen as a deep expression of faith and love.

As complexity increases in the life of an individual—for example, they start work, get married or have children—striving for coherence takes on new elements, both material and spiritual. A workshop recently offered by the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu’lláh in Canada is described in the article “‘Work, Wealth, and Service’ workshops help young people examine coherence in their material and spiritual lives.” In three workshops, youth and their parents in the clusters of North Vancouver, Ottawa and P.E.I. consulted about practical ways to navigate this crucial stage.

The article “Strengthening the junior youth program in Winnipeg” details the way the Fort Garry South neighbourhood, in Winnipeg, Man., through focusing on a single line of action—strengthening the youth movement—built capacity for efforts around children’s classes to also gain in strength. The article provides a valuable example of how learning is disseminated across the country, as visits to Vancouver, B.C., were key to the progress of this neighbourhood.

Coherence is not something that can be developed in isolation. It requires consultation, action, and reflection among a group of friends as they study the Bahá’í Writings, read reality, and act together. In the article “Colibri internships help young people undertake ‘noble goals,’” structured internships that bring together study of the institute with the personal aspirations of young people have helped them to pursue goals that align with their higher natures.

Also in this issue is a gift from the National Spiritual Assembly: a removable insert containing the 28 November 2023 message of the Universal House of Justice, which offers reflections on the first century of the Formative Age. This resource can be used as we continue to study, consult and reflect on this message, as “The National Assembly hopes that it will be studied by all the friends, individually and in groups with friends, families and in communities.”<sup>3</sup>

3 From the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada to all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá’í Councils, and Registered Groups, 28 November 2023.

## 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](mailto:bahaicanada@bahai.ca).





"Islamic Architecture Tiles," at the Mehr-o-Mah Tourist Complex, Qom, Iran. Photo: Hasan Almasi

## “Fiery love in her heart”: Early Bahá’í women teach the Faith in Iran

Despite severe restrictions on their freedoms and dangers to their person, early Bahá’í women made heroic efforts to spread the Faith and uphold the Covenant.

**S**tories of eminent women in the early history of the Bahá’í Faith are not plentiful. Women in Persia were sequestered, shielded from the public gaze—and expected to remain in the shadows, as befitted their station. Still, there are a few powerful examples who stand as heralds of the day when the equality of women and men will be achieved.

Consider, for example, the figure of Táhírih. When we hear her name, we probably think of those moments when she appeared unveiled at the conference of Badasht or when she proclaimed, shortly before her death, “You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women!” But other glimpses of her show not only her fearlessness, but also her graciousness, her tirelessness, her prodigious learning, and her capacity to teach individuals both high and low. No matter the circumstances, she spoke out—and spoke eloquently—about the Faith that burned inside her with a fierce flame.

Imprisoned in the house of the governor of Baghdad, for example, she did not remain silent. She conversed with him, debated with him, challenged him. Then, when the authorities sent her from Baghdad back to Persia because of her dangerous influence, she seems to have treated it as a kind of travelling teaching trip. Her caravan passed through Kurdistan—considered dangerous territory for anyone, let alone a woman. Did that daunt her? Apparently not. In the village of Karand, after three short days, she had led 1,200 of the villagers to embrace the Faith. Farther along the route, in Kermanshah, she stayed 40 days, setting up a teaching centre. Notables, including princes, clerics and even the governor of the province and his wife, sought her out. Of course, this stirred the ire of the city’s chief mujtahid, who demanded that Táhírih be expelled. She responded by challenging him to a debate. (He refused.) Not long after, troops attacked the Bábí, arresting some and carrying others, including Táhírih,

out of the city and abandoning them in a barren field without shelter, supplies or transport. Was Táhirih frightened? No. She wrote a strong letter to the governor, who promptly restored her property. Provided with the means to move on, she brought the teachings to the next village, where, after two days, all of the villagers accepted them and wanted to accompany her.<sup>1</sup> Her journey into captivity was, contrary to the authorities' expectations, triumphant.

Later, in Tehran, for the amusement of the women guests at the Kalantar's<sup>2</sup> son's wedding, she was brought out from the bare, cold room where she was imprisoned. Rumours of all sorts were swirling about. She was an enigma: a beauty, a scholar, a poet. And she was also a scandal: a heretic who had defied social convention. She was paraded out as a kind of curiosity, but soon all were mesmerized. "When I saw her," one guest said, "my heart was filled with happiness...she was so beautiful and so dignified, and when she spoke it was with such power that we...gradually turned to her and came and listened to her and forgot all about the wedding."<sup>3</sup> Her eloquence, her conviction and her character captivated them. Later, many of these women embraced the Faith.

A close associate of Táhirih's was Shams-i-Duha, who, with her husband, accepted the teachings of the Báb early in His ministry. At one time she was even mistaken for Táhirih by the authorities and, as a result, was attacked, stoned and beaten. Later, expelled from Baghdad with Táhirih, she experienced the perils and privations of that trip as well as the intense teaching activities along the route. In 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, "She taught with an eloquent tongue."<sup>4</sup>

*From the age of six, she endured the hardships of exile and imprisonment; as 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote, "For all her days she was denied a moment of tranquillity."*

Eventually, Shams returned to Persia. Her husband was attacked and died, but Shams, undaunted, continued to teach. When her daughter married the King of Martyrs and she lived with the young couple, the leading women of Isfahan thronged the house to hear her teach "with

great ardor and verve." She became known as the Bahá'í Lady of Light. But after the martyrdom of her son-in-law, she was hunted. The governor summoned her to his house, where he vilified, kicked and trampled her, shouting to his wife, "'Princess! Princess! Come here and take a look at the Bahá'ís' Lady of Light!'"<sup>5</sup>

Even when she was taken to Mashhad to escape the tumult, she could not restrain herself from teaching. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote, "So vehement was the fiery love in her heart that it compelled her to speak out, whenever she found a listening ear."<sup>6</sup> With the authorities once again angered and facing persecution, she and her family were called by Bahá'u'lláh to the Most Great Prison, where she lived the remainder of her days.

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Two women of the Holy Family present us with a different kind of story. As a counterpoint to Táhirih's fiery eloquence stands the figure of Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf, who was designated by the Guardian as "the outstanding heroine of the Bahá'í Dispensation"<sup>7</sup> and who, he said, "exemplified perhaps more than anyone the true spirit that animates His [Bahá'u'lláh's] teachings."<sup>8</sup> From the age of six, she endured the hardships of exile and imprisonment; as 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote, "For all her days she was denied a moment of tranquillity." Her life was an example of resilience and steadfastness.



Shoghi Effendi and Bahíyyih Khánum. Photo: Bahai.media

1 Ruhe-Schoen, Janet. *Rejoice in My Gladness: The Life of Tahirih* (Bahá'í Publishing) pp. 184-5.

2 The mayor in charge of a town.

3 Cited in *Rejoice in My Gladness: The Life of Tahirih*, pp. 318-9.

4 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful*, p. 177.

5 *Memorials of the Faithful*, p. 183.

6 *Memorials of the Faithful*, p. 185.

7 *Bahíyyih Khanum: The Greatest Holy Leaf, A Compilation* (Bahá'í World Centre Compilations) p. 62.

8 *Bahíyyih Khanum: The Greatest Holy Leaf, A Compilation*, p. 92.

9 *Bahíyyih Khanum: The Greatest Holy Leaf, A Compilation*, p. xiii.

It was circumscribed by the time and culture in which she lived, but it was nevertheless a life of active service.

She dedicated herself to serving her Father and later, after His ascension, her beloved Brother, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Centre of the Covenant. The bond they shared defies description. As the Master wrote in a letter during one of his absences from her, “I do not know in what words I could describe my longing for my honoured sister. Whatever it may write, my pen falls short.”<sup>10</sup> We can only imagine the grief she felt at His ascension. But then, at the age of 75, she was called to play a pivotal role in the history of the Faith. In the earliest years of Shoghi Effendi’s ministry, she was the one he designated to assume the “headship” of the Faith during his absences. She accepted this administrative responsibility willingly and executed its functions without hesitation. Her eloquent letters to the Bahá’ís of the East and of the West exhorted them to remain loyal and united; she repeatedly directed their attention to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament, pointing out that He had “explicitly” and “irrefutably” appointed Shoghi Effendi as “the Chosen Branch, the one to whom all must turn.”<sup>11</sup> Her letters also served to further “the advancement and consolidation of the worldwide [Bahá’í] Community.”<sup>12</sup> While she urged steadfastness in adhering to principles underpinning the Faith, she also recognized that as the Bahá’í community evolved and encountered new situations, it required flexibility of approach. In this way, she “enhanced the capacity of the believers and their embryonic Assemblies to devise systematic plans of action, to execute them with confidence, and to learn from experience...”<sup>13</sup>

Aside from her letters, Bahíyyih Khánum spent a great deal of time nurturing the increasing number of women who came on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. As Corinne True, one of the early Western believers, wrote about the Greatest Holy Leaf and Munírih Khánum, the wife of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Almost daily we were received by them in the Master’s garden where questions were asked and instructions given to us, clearing up many things that had puzzled the American friends.”<sup>14</sup>

Munírih Khánum’s life circumstances, like those of the Greatest Holy Leaf, were circumscribed. She lived her entire married life either in the prison city of ‘Akká



Portrait of Munírih Khánum, 1870. Photo: Bahá’í Chronicle

or in Haifa, with a few journeys to nearby locales. Yet within that limited context, she still strove to realize a hope that she had held from early in her life “that the means for the progress and success of Bahá’í girls, and indeed, for the girls of all nations, would come about.”<sup>15</sup> To this end, she worked actively to establish a school on Mount Carmel, which unfortunately never operated. Munírih Khánum was also recognized as an effective teacher of the Faith, when presented with the opportunity. During one of her trips to Egypt, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote to her, “According to the news received, thou didst meet with the mother of Nasiri’d-Din Mirza<sup>16</sup> and spoke well. My hope from the grace of the Blessed Beauty is that thou wilt always unloose thy tongue in setting forth proofs.”<sup>17</sup>

*In their different spheres and contexts, these women all exhibited qualities of courage, eloquence, and steadfastness.*

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In their different spheres and contexts, these women all exhibited qualities of courage, eloquence, and steadfastness. They advanced the Cause. They taught. They promoted education. They served without pause, patiently nurturing others’ nascent faith. They responded to challenges and remained undaunted in their efforts to serve in whatever capacity was open to them. They looked with the eyes of faith into the future and strove to raise the station of other women so they would be able to achieve their God-given potential. Reflecting on their stories, how can we not be uplifted—and, in our current context, inspired to strive as they did?

— Ann Boyles

10 Bahíyyih Khanum: *The Greatest Holy Leaf, A Compilation*, p. 18.

11 Bahíyyih Khanum: *The Greatest Holy Leaf, A Compilation*, p. 154.

12 Bahíyyih Khanum: *The Greatest Holy Leaf, A Compilation*, p. 41.

13 Khan, Janet. *Prophet’s Daughter* (U.S. Bahá’í Publishing Trust) p. 298.

14 Rouhani Ma’ani, Baharieh. *Leaves of the Twin Divine Trees* (George Ronald) p. 359.

15 *Leaves of the Twin Divine Trees*, p. 357.

16 Soon to be Nasiri’d-Din Shah, who ruled Persia from 1848-96.

17 *Leaves of the Twin Divine Trees*, p. 359.



A participant at a seminar for the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP) at the Bethany Bahá'í Centre of learning, in Ontario, works to maintain the property during a break period. Photo: Liam Dousti

## Coherence in the lives of young people entering work: part two

Three young professionals describe how their efforts as students to live a coherent life centered on service are now being extended to their experience in the workplace.

This is the second in a series of articles titled “Coherence in the lives of young people entering work,” which explore the efforts of young people in Canada to live coherent lives of service to humanity. The previous article, published in the Winter/Spring 2023 issue of *Bahá'í Canada*, reviewed guidance, particularly from the Universal House of Justice, that many youth have been studying and applying to their lives in recent years.

In its *Riḍván 2023* message the House of Justice continued this stream of guidance, writing, “Amid all we have described, the actions of the youth shine resplendent. Far from being mere passive absorbers of influence—whether the influence be benign or otherwise—they have proven themselves bold and discerning protagonists of the Plan.”

Holding service at the centre of one’s life is a process that requires

adjustment as new elements are introduced: higher education, work, marriage. In this article, three youth agreed to share their own efforts to organize their lives in a way that allows them to “gain an ever more profound understanding of Bahá'u'lláh’s teachings...and to apply them to the needs of their society.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 30 December 2021.

Entering work, particularly full-time employment, is a major life change. Youth participating in the seminars offered by the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP) have often found space to consult about challenges arising from institutional and cultural pressures around what it means to be a “good student” or a “good employee”—all with the sincere desire to strive for excellence in their studies or future occupations. Patterns of life in society and the vision of Bahá’í life often do not align. How do we have conversations and take steps so that increasingly they do align?

For some years now, this conversation has advanced in the context of higher education. For example, some students reduce their course load to continue with service activities. Others take a year off from their studies and embark on a year of service, sometimes serving a particular role in their neighbourhood or cluster. At other points, work and studies require intense focus. Now, as increasing numbers of young people who have completed the ISGP seminars are embarking on careers, new insights are emerging in this area.

Of course, individuals have varying talents and abilities, opportunities, and resources. But certain commonalities are a source of insight. For example, striving for coherence involves engaging in a process of consultation, action, reflection and prayer with parents and trusted friends. It requires a dynamic approach that seeks to unify the elements of one’s life so that they reinforce one another, resisting the tendency to dichotomize. Naturally, various elements may take more time and attention than others depending on circumstances. Positively, the concept of coherence seems to alleviate any fears over entering new domains of life—for example work, marriage, and parenthood, as it becomes natural to reflect and make adjustments when necessary.

The three youth interviewed for this article had already been

striving for coherence during their postgraduate education, which was a major factor when they entered work. One young woman living in Ottawa, whose family considered the pursuit of knowledge and higher education to be of the greatest value, began her undergraduate studies in health sciences, with the intention of applying to medical school. She had also met someone, and they had made the relatively uncommon decision to marry around the time that she began her studies.

During her undergraduate years, she participated in the ISGP Undergraduate Seminars and, inspired by the 2013 Youth Conferences, assumed the role of a cluster coordinator for children’s classes. Through her service she was exposed to regional spaces, which allowed her to begin seeing and planning her action and life in terms of three-month, six-month, and annual cycles.

She explains, “After the first year of ISGP I really got it...there is a difference in the way we’re supposed to be operating. We’re not supposed to just be doing what everyone else is doing. There are, you know, 150 students in my class, all doing the same thing as me. And so, what makes me a Bahá’í if I’m just doing the same thing as everyone else?”

She was able to strive for excellence in both school and service. Living in a neighbourhood that was a centre of intense activity helped to reduce her travel times to activities. Working in the context of a team with a daily pattern of activity provided a structure that allowed her to orient her time and energy toward service as much as possible. Knowing that she was walking the path of service alongside others lent her flexibility to focus on her studies more intensely when necessary.

Focusing her volunteer experience on depth in the institute rather than breadth across many organizations helped her when applying to medical school. She decided that she wanted to attend in the city where she lived so that she could continue her Bahá’í service, but also assisted

with medical research so that other opportunities would be available to her if she was not accepted.

While applying to medical school, she decided to undertake a year of service in her neighbourhood. She describes, “It’s not putting life on pause. It’s actually a huge need. It’s a different type of job, and one that I felt like was really necessary and still do.”

When it came time to apply to medical school, she comments, “Learning to articulate in writing for an application but then also in words during my interview what we’re doing as Bahá’ís and what we’re trying to accomplish was really important...I didn’t feel necessarily that I had to have breadth, but I felt that it was valuable to present depth in something.” She later commented, “It’s unusual, I think, in our society for young people to stick with something for so long.”

Happily, she was accepted to medical school, and now faced the challenge of balancing a demanding program, akin to full-time work, with her service. She described, “Because I had that period of service, I was already connected to so many activities.” Structuring her service in different ways—whether moving junior youth through the material in monthly camps, co-animating with friends who had more availability, or organizing campaigns around breaks in school—allowed for more flexibility to continue serving. Importantly, gaining early experience maintaining many responsibilities in relation to family life, academics, work, and service, allowed her to focus on her studies without falling into conventional patterns of seeing medical school as a totalizing source of identity.

As she continued through her studies, she considered questions of when to start a family, and what type of residency would allow her to serve, both through her field of work and through the activities of the Bahá’í community. Drawing connections between her studies, work, family life, and different



Youth at an ISGP seminar sit within the grounds of the Providence Point facility in Lanark, Ont. in May of 2022. Photo: Liam Dousti

forms of service has helped her to set aside some common anxieties that can accompany rigorous academic programs. Ultimately, placing her identity as a spiritual being at the centre of her decisions has led to increased clarity as she has been striving for coherence between the various aspects of her life.

She says, “I never thought of them as decisions really, or forks in the road. It’s always just part of the same process, which is when you put service in the middle, or when you put, I think more importantly, your identity as a spiritual person in the middle, then everything else does fall into place.”

She continues, “It’s so easy to forget what our mission is. I want to ensure that the first thing I think about in the morning and the last thing I think about before going to bed is how I can contribute to my community, to my neighbourhood, in whatever capacity I’m serving.”

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A second interviewee, a young man who came to live in Vancouver, Canada as a refugee with his family when he was in middle school, also learned a great deal about coherence while studying in high school and later engineering and business in university.

He engaged with the Bahá’í community through his family’s encouragement from the moment of his arrival. In his high school years, he was encouraged to serve in a neighbourhood that was learning to mobilize many youth from the cluster. He poured himself into this service and would spend time in the neighbourhood every weekend, helping to plan camps for junior youth and serving as an animator.

Though encouraged to give a year of service, he declined, assuming that offering this time after receiving a university education would be more useful. He felt pressure to go directly to university as all his friends were taking this same step together. He recalls a sense of holding to an identity of belonging to a group of friends in high school—one which was, ironically, lost as friends dispersed into several different educational institutions or jobs across the city, province, and country.

When he first entered university, there were many social gatherings, most of which featured the consumption of alcohol. Many of these were loud and exciting parties, with invitations extended by the ‘cool’ friends on campus. He observed that some Bahá’í friends would also attend, and all

felt pressured to drink at these parties. His family’s intense focus on education and their sacrificial efforts for his future encouraged him to reflect on his use of time. He recalled a sense of his purpose in university being to learn and serve, and not to spend time so frivolously, much as he was happy to make a wide variety of new friends.

As a result of his reflection, classwork became a primary focus, to such a degree that as the difficulty of coursework increased, he found himself not only less involved socially but also less involved in Bahá’í service in his neighbourhood. In the university, new and unexpected pressure was emerging—as he performed well, he received special treatment and encouragement from professors to invest more of his time in his field. He was not prepared for the strong descriptions of ‘success’ and ‘excellence’ presented by his professors, and their confidence that he had what it took to achieve both as an engineer. This kind of encouragement made achievement in courses take on a new emphasis and momentarily diminished the importance of service in the community in his eyes.

Taking more and more courses and achieving good grades generated a new kind of anxiety in him, which led to a feeling of imbalance and eventually to reflection on how he needed to be doing something other than just studying while in school—perhaps that he should return to serving in his community. He reached out to a group of Bahá’í friends on campus who introduced him to the seminars offered by ISGP. In the first year of his studies in the seminars, he realized that where previously he had accepted that ‘being a Bahá’í in university is hard,’ he had not thought about what he could do to affect his own situation, that he could take concrete steps to live a more coherent life.

He elaborates, “ISGP requires patience for people to trust the process...And I think that trust has always been highly valued in my

family. So, for me it was no question, I was like, ‘Okay, this is what ISGP is saying. I might not understand this, but it’s probably the best resource out there right now.’ And the more I read into it, the more I understood, okay, this is amazing.”

Meeting youth at ISGP, and studying and consulting together with them, helped this youth reconnect with the community. He said that, though his thinking was challenged many times, his trust in Bahá’í institutions gave him the confidence to consider deeply the perspectives he encountered—a stance which opened new ways of thinking about his time at university.

Participation in the seminars helped him conceive of service as the centre of his life and gave him language to describe the nature of the challenges that he was facing as a university student. As this strengthened his dedication to service, he found himself in conversation with youth exploring the possibility of reducing their course loads in university to give them more time to attend to pressing needs in their clusters—many after participating in the 2013 global youth conferences, during which they studied materials related to coherence. At this time, he decided to reduce his course load to focus on other important aspects of his life, including starting a business.

He also met his future wife at the ISGP seminars. He describes, “When COVID happened...the nicest part was that we could have things online. So that meant people who I met at ISGP could attend devotionals online. And that’s how I met [my wife] more. I invited her to a devotional online, and sadly and fortunately, she was the only attendant on the first day. So, we got to know each other and talk.”

They worked together to grow these online activities, eventually starting a study circle and a games night. “That was the grounds for our marriage,” he said, “service is the most important.” They read passages from the Writings together on topics such as consultation and

eventually, marriage. “At some point we read an excerpt from *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* [about marriage] and we’re like yeah, that’s how I feel about you...And then we were like, but we don’t have the money to get married. There were so many things, and we realized, okay, those are not the important aspects. And eventually we asked for consent.”

After marriage, he undertook two co-op work placements at engineering firms. He wanted to excel at work, but to pursue other areas of service as well, and to resist the pull of ‘engineer’ as an all-encompassing identity. His marriage helped him strive for coherence, as he and his wife continued their service in their community.

He reflects, “There was a talk that the Counsellor gave a few years prior to my education that was a great help. Think of service as like breathing. You don’t stop breathing when you’re going for a run. Breathing is essential to that. Everything you do, you breathe at the same time. So, if you think about service that way, it’s helpful.”

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Some young people relocate to North America for all or part of their tertiary education. In this young woman’s story, she first moved to the United States to complete her undergraduate degree, then came to Canada to pursue her master’s degree in architecture. As she describes it, “I made the decision to go to the States to have a liberal arts education that was more holistic in its approach rather than going straight into architecture...I was very curious as a 19-year-old as to why people were the way they were and what social forces were acting on them.”

In the United States, she pursued opportunities to learn and serve through participation in the institute process. The summer before her last year in high school, she had visited Toronto for a youth campaign, where for the first time, she “really saw the power of the institute process.” This experience increased

her desire to see transformation at the level of the neighbourhood, to which she didn’t have access in high school. She explains, “During the first week of my undergrad I learned that there was a children’s class that was an hour away from me. This was the only children’s class in my sphere. So, I dedicated myself to this children’s class for three years. And I would travel every Saturday for two or three hours to go to it.”

She also heard about and eagerly participated in the seminars offered by the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity. This came at a time when she was becoming somewhat disheartened with university after realizing that fields like social studies did not address spiritual reality. She continues, “My professors said that architecture is the solution to all the world’s problems, but I knew this wasn’t true as it’s Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation.” Engaging with the ISGP materials shifted her thoughts to respond by asking, “How can architecture serve as a tool for this Revelation?”

At ISGP, she found a group of like-minded individuals who were also thinking of their studies in this way. She notes, “That was the very beginning of my approach to my undergraduate degree, and it was a saving grace because it is a protection from adopting certain materialistic ideologies.” Becoming conscious of her conceptual framework gave her language to describe her thoughts, which helped her to communicate with like-minded students and faculty members in her program.

After graduation, she decided to give a year of service, mostly serving as a junior youth coordinator. One year soon turned into three: “Every year I had to make a strong decision about whether or not I would continue.” This period was one of intense learning. “I learned a lot about confirmation,” she explains, “the idea of individual prayer and the idea of consulting with people that you trust. To make the decision to go serve for one year I spoke with my

parents who were very supportive while also curious about how I would advance a career. Although I had no idea, my heart told me to do this..."

During this time, her career was not completely on pause—in fact, she was gaining capacities in community engagement—something that would later feature prominently in her master's dissertation. At the beginning of her undergraduate studies, the world received the Riḍván 2012 message from the Universal House of Justice, announcing seven new Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs and outlining certain conditions for their establishment. Such an announcement awoke a life-long devotion to this special institution, which continued to deepen during these years. Through many conversations with family and various friends, and reading any Writings she could, she learned that with regards to Temples, it was not about building physical structures but about building capacity for service and worship in communities around the world. Additionally, her interest turned to the systems that will eventually develop as the number of Temples rise in the world.

One of her questions was "How does a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár...reflect the people that it's being designed for?" This question inspired her in seeking out a program to continue her education. She found a program at the University of Toronto that was more open to different ideas, but this meant leaving the United States, and a neighbourhood that she had been dedicated to for three years. Again, this decision required consultation, prayer and detachment, but she felt confirmed to go. Ensuring a healthy connection to a new geographic community, she consulted with Auxiliary Board members in Toronto and moved into a neighbourhood where she could learn from and support ongoing community-building efforts.

Her approach to her studies was proactive and focused. She describes sitting near the front of

the classroom and asking questions about community and participation where appropriate during lectures. "I would have to describe what I meant by community engagement," she continues, but once she did, she sparked an interest in others. "I was learning how to have a conversation about community engagement in the classroom in a similar way as I'd learned how to have a conversation at someone's door," she explains.

Her life was disrupted, however, when an unfortunate accident resulted in an injury that required a long period of recovery. During this time, she went to live with her parents and even questioned whether she could continue in her field. However, she says, "When I prayed, I felt very strongly that I needed to continue this program." After a year of recovery, she was able to return, but for health reasons had to limit her service activities for a time. She managed to study a few Ruhi books when able, and began serving with ISGP, which brought her joy and helped her to feel connected to the Faith. Although the injury continues to influence her life with chronic pain, she was able to work on her master's thesis.

At this time, nearing graduation, she also began to think about applying for jobs. She had undertaken two internships and was beginning to make a list of architecture firms that interested her. "I had to decide whether to focus on my thesis and do it really well or start applying to jobs. I couldn't do both." She consulted further with her parents and trusted friends and prayed intensively. She decided that she would focus on her thesis and that doing well in this area of her life would open doors.

For her thesis work, which underscores the valuable intersection between her academic pursuits and consistent engagement in service to her community, she ended up receiving three awards—an unusual achievement—which she attributes to God's confirmations. Observations she made as she served in the community informed her

approach and even the content of her socially-oriented academic studies.

Transitioning into a career, she articulated in her interviews that community service was an integral aspect of her architectural awareness and practice—something that she would like to maintain as she advanced into the workforce. She asked questions of people that she looked up to, such as "How did you approach your job process?" and "How do you talk about salaries?" Her mother also sent her a prayer related to employment, which she started saying daily.<sup>2</sup>

She ended up taking a position at a firm with which one of her former professors connected her. During her interview, she was able to describe how participating in ISGP and community building helped her to excel in her work as an architect. She was then able to negotiate time off to attend an ISGP seminar, something that her employer was beginning to encourage as they saw how it helped her work. She says, "I described how the seminars shaped who I am and are the reason I do the research that I'm doing." She was able to arrange taking unpaid leave, or working overtime to compensate for the time off so that she could still visit her family with her vacation days.

In terms of service in her neighbourhood, she describes, "As I was adapting to work life my availability changed. Every night I'm available after 6 p.m., so a small group of us have started seeing what is possible. We are connected to 30 people weekly and 60 people monthly. There's a rhythm of community life...There's a team and each one of us is necessary but none of us are in the centre...At the same time I'm serving with the neighbourhood properties..." She finds the new vistas in her workplace both daunting and thrilling but is confident that she can take a systematic approach to learning, together with like-minded peers, and find her way in this field.

2 This prayer, from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, begins "O God, my God! Give me to drink from the cup of Thy bestowal and illumine my face with the light of guidance..." and is available on the Bahá'í Reference Library website.





Parents and youth studied the Work, Wealth and Service workshop at a one-day retreat in North Vancouver, B.C. organized by Representatives of Ғуқуқу'ІІлáh. Photo: Afshin Khazei

## “Work, Wealth and Service” workshops help young people examine coherence in their material and spiritual lives

Young people and their parents in North Vancouver, B.C., P.E.I., and Ottawa, Ont. have recently benefited from studying materials offered by representatives of Ғуқуқу'ІІлáh.

**W**hat is the spiritual purpose of economic life? How do our decisions about work and wealth fulfill our moral duty to lead a coherent life? How does observing the Right of God help us to avoid extravagant expenditures? How does this contribute to a just society? These are just a few of the questions explored by youth across the country as they studied the “Work, Wealth and Service” workshop offered by Representatives of Ғуқуқу'ІІлáh. This study program covers a number of themes especially helpful to youth and young adults who are

making decisions about what work to pursue or are in the early stages of their careers, although we develop our capacity and discipline to live coherently throughout our lives.

In North Vancouver, B.C., a one-day retreat to study the “Work, Wealth and Service” materials engaged whole families, with junior youth, youth and parents participating. Approximately half of the time was allocated to the use of visual arts, music, and storytelling. This encouraged deeper reflection and expressions of understanding from head to heart. The youth, alongside

their parents, naturally related the study to their unique stage of life. Some of the parents remarked that the retreat allowed them to recall what it was like when they were young and to reflect on the qualities needed to support youth to navigate this crucial stage of life. Together the parents consulted on how taking time away from studies, as a year of service, for example, is not ‘wasted time,’ and how they can be supportive of youth who wish to serve this way. Having both the youth and parents at the same workshop hopefully allowed for

families to talk together about what they learned.

On Prince Edward Island, a small group of youth, both formally enrolled and part of the wider community, recently studied this material over the course of several weeks. After every session, the participants shared lunch, which created an environment of love and respect and strengthened bonds of friendship. The participants learned many new concepts upon which they want to further reflect, such as work as a form of worship and the conditions that make wealth commendable. The youth found that some of the themes and ideas addressed relate to conversations they were having with junior youth and they appreciated the opportunity to study and reflect on these themes more deeply. The educational endeavours to deepen the friends on the Right of God complement and enrich all facets of community life.

*Coherence emerged as a recurring theme, challenging any notion that service is a post-study or post-career consideration.*

In Ottawa, Ont. a close-knit group of youth who recently completed the first unit of Ruhi Book 12: The Institution of Marriage decided to continue to deepen their knowledge through the “Work, Wealth and Service” materials. Gathering weekly at the home of a Ḥuqúqu’lláh Representative, the youth studied the material following a simple dinner. As the majority were university students, discussions revolved around how service to the Faith can be integrated into their daily lives. Coherence emerged as a recurring

theme, challenging any notion that service is a post-study or post-career consideration. A participant who had recently completed a year of service, shared how the experience provided purpose to their education and enhanced self-understanding. The youth also reflected on the sharp contrast between the culture of consumerism prevalent in current society and among their university colleagues, and the high standard of honesty, integrity, and generosity that Bahá’ís are called upon to uphold. They discussed how observing the Right of God helps create habits and fosters coherence and balance in one’s material and spiritual life.

At an age when decisions about professions are being made, family obligations increase, and financial independence is sought, questions about living a coherent life and maintaining a balance between one’s spiritual and material advancement are close to the heart. The International Board of Trustees has highlighted the significance of the Right of God for youth and young adults in the following excerpts from its letter dated 7 September 2014:

Upon entering their profession, young believers often find their peers motivated by an “unquenchable thirst for, and the feverish pursuit after, earthly vanities, riches and pleasures.” With a culture of consumerism promoting the view that the end justifies the means, wealth is sometimes obtained through “the exploitation of others, the monopolization and manipulation of markets, and the production of goods that promote violence and immorality.” Even with the noblest of efforts to acquire wealth through just means, the “widening economic divide between the rich and the poor” within all of the world’s economies, a sure sign of injustice, illustrates the importance of the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh as a means to purify wealth gained within such systems and contribute to building a just society. How befitting that

believers should observe this law from the very beginning of their professional lives.

Meeting the challenge of how wealth is obtained correlates to the test of how that wealth is used, and the observance of this “sacred law which enables each one to express his or her personal sense of devotion to God in a profoundly private act of conscience that promotes the common good.” While calling upon the friends to “act with moderation and not impose hardship upon themselves” in fulfilling its obligations, Ḥuqúqu’lláh is relevant to young professionals as they expend wealth in meeting their needs and those of their families within a society that promotes the pursuit of luxury. The emphasis of the law on avoiding extravagance in expenditures for which “it is left to the discretion of the individual to decide which items are necessary and which are not,” can prevent wasteful spending habits and accumulation of debt.

Political upheaval, economic turmoil, the rise of fanaticism, organized crime and violence, and unstable financial structures in a failing system make the safeguarding of wealth increasingly uncertain. The law’s protective aspects which “cause one’s possessions to be purified and protected,” “avert loss and disaster,” and “enable[s] them and their offspring to benefit from their possessions,” lend added importance to the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh for today’s young believers as they prosper through their professions.

The “Work, Wealth and Service” material is available throughout the country, and can be made available to small groups who would like to study it with their Ḥuqúqu’lláh Representative. Please reach out to your local Representative or the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu’lláh if you would like any additional information.

– Charlotte Mosleh



In the summer of 2023, several youth from Saskatoon, Sask. joined the youth and junior youth in the Fort Garry South neighbourhood in Winnipeg, Man. to learn from their experience with the community-building process.

## Strengthening the junior youth program in Winnipeg

A description of how efforts to strengthen the junior youth empowerment program in the Fort Garry South neighbourhood in Winnipeg were reinforced by learning shared from more advanced clusters.

Canada has been granted a National Temple by the Universal House of Justice, in part a testament to the growth that has occurred in many parts of the country. One sign of this growth is the movement of clusters from one stage of development to the next. Clusters that have reached the third milestone of development have been particularly key in terms of a region's learning. In its 30 December 2021 message, the Universal House of Justice describes, "To have come this far implies intense activity occurring in specific neighbourhoods or villages, but also concerted effort being made by the generality of the believers living across the cluster..."

In this same message the House of Justice states, "One important les-

son that has become clear is the immense value, to a region, of a cluster where the third milestone has been passed. Once the friends in a given cluster have developed the range of capacities that such progress implies, and the means to disseminate insights and share experience about community-building endeavours are in place, then a swift acceleration of the work of expansion and consolidation in surrounding clusters becomes possible."

In 2021, the Winnipeg cluster passed the third milestone, reaching 100 core activities, galvanized by efforts to celebrate the bicentenaries of the Birth of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Over the last few years, it has matured even further as the community-building process advanced. Within the span of a year from 2022-23,

the cluster went from 158 to 300 core activities.

There was a strong desire to foster growth in the cluster, as well as a spirit of collaboration. Other factors that contributed to growth include the ability to read reality and identify learning that applies to their circumstances. A cluster-wide initiative to increase the number of devotional gatherings was a major contributor, as well as learning that took place in centres of intense activity, including the neighbourhood of Fort Garry South.

Historically, the neighbourhood had worked with the Syrian and Yazidi populations, but much of this activity had stalled during the pandemic. The sole junior youth group in the neighbourhood was lacking a proper space to meet and the participants



Junior youth and animators engage in games outside their camp facility. Photo: Anis Sabet

were aging out of the program. The institutions began to look for experience that could help those serving in the neighbourhood.

A member of the Continental Board of Counsellors noted the connection between the clusters of Winnipeg and that of Richmond, B.C., a more advanced third milestone cluster. There were natural family connections between the clusters, and both have sizable populations of people of Chinese origin. After some experience was shared, it was decided that friends from Fort Garry should visit Richmond so that they could ask questions, observe, and participate in the spiritual environment that is created around the educational activities.

In July 2022, three youth from the Fort Garry neighbourhood, an Auxiliary Board member and an institute resource person visited Richmond, B.C. Some of these friends were in regular contact with their coworkers back home, which helped them to implement the learning in their own neighbourhood immediately.

In December 2022, a few of the friends serving in Fort Garry South participated in a Book 1 institute seminar in Vancouver. As part of the seminar, they undertook field visits to various neighbourhoods in Vancouver, particularly Edmunds.

*“Seeing the degree of conviction and clarity the youth [in Vancouver] have about the institute process struck me... it helped me to see the possibilities...”*

The friends had a few objects of learning. They wanted to build on their experience running junior youth camps and learn about maintaining a level of formality to the program. In-person visits also allowed for spontaneous questions to be answered, such as how animators organize their time, since many are involved in full-time work and studies.

Angeline Dang, one of the friends who participated in this seminar, described how the visit expanded her vision of what is possible. “Seeing the degree of conviction and clarity the youth [in Vancouver] have about the institute process struck me...it helped me to see the possibilities... And they had just started the process less than a year ago. It gave me confidence that this is possible.”

When they asked how youth had become so dedicated after a period of six months, they learned more about the importance of meaningful initial conversations. In the Edmonds neighbourhood, the Bahá’í Faith was introduced as the inspiration for the junior youth spiritual empowerment program from the first conversation. They also learned a considerable amount regarding formalizing the program. In Edmonds, the junior youth groups met in a public space, the animators made a calendar of activities and they met regularly to consult.

Those serving in the neighbourhood also considered themselves as tutor-animators. Experience demonstrates that when youth are accompanied through the sequence of courses by tutors experienced with sustaining a junior youth group, they can apply what they’ve learned by starting their own junior youth group, which in turn increases understanding of the educational content.

Ahdieh Bimrew, a youth in Fort Garry who attended this seminar and had earlier visited Richmond, B.C., describes how the experience highlighted the importance of focus: “We try to do two or three things with really high quality rather than overburdening ourselves with multi-

ple things.” When consulting about activities in the neighbourhood, the team often lost focus because they felt that in giving attention to the junior youth and youth movements, there was not enough being done for the children in their neighbourhood. However, they realized that doing a few things well would build their capacity to carry multiple lines of action.

This allowed them to be consistent in their efforts. “We’ve been having a youth gathering every two weeks,” continued Mr. Bimrew, “It’s been really nice for the youth to develop relationships with each other as well as for us to understand their needs.” Presently, the tutor-animators meet regularly, as do the children’s class teachers; they also have periodic meetings as a neighbourhood.

When the team returned home from Vancouver, they decided to focus on holding junior youth camps, which was one of their strengths as a neighbourhood. They created a calendar with a monthly pattern of camps to stimulate the youth movement and junior youth program. “The calendar helped us to not feel discouraged,” Ms. Dang explained, “We are not afraid to make mistakes...if we do not do well in this camp, in three weeks we will refine our approach.”

The friends throughout the cluster began to feel the spirit of confirmation as Fort Garry South saw growth through this initiative. In January 2023, there were 10 youth working informally with six junior youth, and by June 2023, there were 20 youth working with 35 junior youth.

They also had to read their reality in order to set realistic goals. For example, they recognized that, for the most part, it wasn’t yet possible to have a daily pattern of action, but that they could manage a weekly pattern. “We think about the love we have for each other,” Ms. Dang shared, “We have to be understanding on where each of our team members are at.”

They also began to use public spaces for the program, including the lo-

cal library and a junior high school. They were able to receive guidance from more advanced clusters regarding formal conversations, for example with the school principal. “Conversations with institutions don’t have to be one-off things,” Ms. Dang explained, “We are there to learn from them.”

The efforts that took place between January and June 2023 to expand and strengthen the junior youth program introduced about 12-15 families of Chinese origin to the process in the neighbourhood. Serving alongside this population was a new area of learning for the Fort Garry team. They found a few parents who were very proactive in reaching out to others, using online networks to reach out to many more parents. This way, the junior youth empowerment program steadily grew.

Rather than dropping their children off at their junior youth groups, the parents tended to stay, and it became possible to regularly converse with them. These conversations led to spaces for parents such as an English Corner, where adults practice conversational English on meaningful themes. The connection with Vancouver neighbourhoods, such as Richmond, proved valuable in learning to work with this population as they had accumulated years of experience in serving alongside them.

The summer of 2023 was full of activity in the Fort Garry neighbourhood. They decided to meet with the junior youth twice a week instead of once, and the types of activities that took place concurrently expanded. “Monday and Tuesday every week we had a group for two hours,” Mr. Bimrew explained, “we would have the junior youth meet in the large area, the parents in the lounge, the children upstairs...then we have snacks together and big group activities.”

Ms. Dang explained that the gap between the experience of junior youth and parents seems to be expanding in society. “The junior youth program is trying to bring that gap closer, so it’s very helpful for the parents

to learn the junior youth content so that they can reinforce it at home.”

The increased tempo and participation in the activities led to a need for more planning. The team decided to meet one hour before the groups were going to start, which also helped new animators arrive on time and study sections of Book 5: *Releasing the Powers of Junior Youth* together. They also focused on their own spiritual condition and on creating a loving and encouraging environment.

They had a large camp during the summer called the “curiosity camp” that focused on scientific and spiritual concepts. They were able to reach 53 junior youth through this camp and are now learning to consolidate new junior youth in the weekly program. At this point, the number of groups doubled from four to eight. There are also 10-12 youth serving as animators in the neighbourhood. Building capacity in those who want to serve is now the challenge ahead. “A good quality junior youth group means that the animators have to go through the institute process,” Ms. Dang reflected.

This past winter, a youth training camp was held, uniting dedicated youth serving as junior youth animators and children’s class teachers in three centres of intense activity in Winnipeg, including Fort Garry South, with groups studying Books 1 and 2.

For some time, the Winnipeg cluster has been serving as a reservoir for the clusters of Regina and Saskatoon. They have received visitors themselves and through various means learning is being shared to and from the cluster. In terms of next steps for the Fort Garry South neighbourhood, their focus is now on consolidating and building the capacity of youth. “Every week we have new junior youth and new youth who want to serve,” Ms. Dang remarks.



Youth interns from the Edmonds and Richmond neighbourhoods in British Columbia study together alongside Counsellor Borna Nouredin (back row, first on left).

## Internships accompany young people to undertake “noble goals”

Since 2021, internship programs for youth have taken place in four centres of intense activity in British Columbia.

**T**he Colibri Learning Foundation is a development organization that was established 11 years ago and initially focused its learning processes on “English Corners”: spaces for newcomers to Canada to practice conversational English on themes inspired by the Writings. Since 2019, it has also begun to consider how young people build the spiritual and intellectual capacity to serve their communities: how their perception of the reality of their neighbourhoods, in its spiritual and material dimensions, becomes increasingly accurate; how their vision of possibilities becomes broader and sharper; how their resolve to live a coherent life, to pursue a twofold moral purpose, becomes stronger and stronger. Specifically, it has been collaborating with a network of organizations in North America

learning how to support the intellectual and spiritual development of 12-18-year-olds, as well as older youth, who could participate in internships that would allow them to learn to contribute meaningfully to the progress and development of their communities.

Efforts began with a youth in the Commercial Drive neighbourhood, in Vancouver, B.C., in 2021, who focused on enhancing the junior youth program in her neighbourhood. Further experience was gained as another youth in Central Richmond, B.C. began a year-long internship later that year. He was in his second year of university studying cognitive systems and was also engaged in animating a junior youth group and tutoring a study circle. He was interested in learning how to avoid false dichotomies—for example, thinking

he must choose between studies or service—and fragmentation amongst all these activities.

The internship, guided by the Colibri Foundation, allowed him to pursue insights into this question in a practical way. Over the course of the internship, he met weekly with his mentor and reflected on how to reconcile the various aspects of his life, including his education and his service with the junior youth empowerment program. As part of the internship, he chose a research question to pursue—his question related to technology and time management—and produced written materials based on his findings.

In the summer of 2022, this initial intern was joined by three other youth from his neighbourhood, all of whom shared an interest in the field of technology. These youth were



Interns from the Edmonds neighbourhood in Vancouver, B.C. lead a technology workshop.

already studying institute courses and living in centres of intense activity with large numbers engaged in the dynamics of community building. Additionally, they began to study some materials provided to Colibri by FUNDEAC<sup>1</sup> related to language, as well as mathematical and scientific concepts and practices.

During the same summer, nine interns from Edmonds, another neighbourhood in Vancouver, joined the youth from Central Richmond in a joint study space. In this weekly gathering, which continued for a year, the youth studied and reflected on the application of the Bahá'í Writings in their lives and their communities. They began to consult on all matters, act, and reflect. Their ability to read reality was developed collectively as individual goals were set in the context of contributing to the wellbeing of their community. They grappled with how to make their career and study paths coherent with living a life of service.

In both neighbourhoods, parents, teachers and school administrators had identified challenges with the use of technology by youth and junior youth. The interns in Central Richmond were also all interested in pursuing higher education within the field of technology and

computer science. Thus, in both neighbourhoods, some of the interns undertook a special effort to learn how to address this challenge. Because they were all serving as junior youth animators, it was natural for them to focus their efforts on helping junior youth develop healthy habits around the use of technology. Building on the experience of the Edmonds neighbourhood's technology workshops for families,<sup>2</sup> the interns came up with a 12-week tutorial space for junior youth that would take place during the summer months.

The interns each chose one or two junior youth with whom they were naturally connected (some were younger siblings of interns, participants in their junior youth groups, and/or living near the interns) and invited them to take part in this 12-week program. Each of these junior youth set a noble goal for themselves to pursue. A quote from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which appears in the junior youth text *Breezes of Confirmation*, reads, "...make ye a mighty effort, and choose for yourselves a noble goal."<sup>3</sup> The space evolved over time: initially it started out with a weekly reflection, but the interns soon realized the junior youth could benefit from being accompanied throughout the week.

The youth interns created a template to help the junior youth visualize how they are using their time. They studied sections of junior youth texts, then encouraged them to reflect on how their technology habits can impact their ability to pursue their noble goal. Some examples of noble goals included learning the guitar to contribute musically to devotional spaces, improving basketball skills to contribute to a sports team, and receiving a better grade in a subject at school.

The interns also facilitated a technology workshop with the parents of these junior youth before and after launching the tutorial space. Beforehand, they shared current research on youth and adolescents' technology use based on a literature review they conducted on the subject, and later reflected on the transformation they witnessed in the junior youth. One of the interns observed, "One thing we noticed is that because they had a noble goal and something to work towards, their recreational screen time went down significantly." Another remarked on how the capacity of the junior youth to share the Word of God with others grew over the course of the 12 weeks: "What really stood out to me was their natural tendency to make it collaborative, involving their friends and talking to their teachers."

In fact, a common theme that emerged from these initial workshops

1 The acronym in Spanish for "The Foundation for the Application and Teaching of the Sciences," a Bahá'í inspired non-profit organization that has focused on education and development in rural Columbia since the 1970s. Permission was given to Colibri to use these texts in limited contexts.

2 The article "Providing education: the signature contribution," which appears in the Fall 2022 issue of Bahá'í Canada, describes these technology workshops in more detail.

3 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 35.



Youth interns from the Guildford and Commercial Drive neighbourhoods in British Columbia study together.

was how true friendships grow within the context of service. One of the interns from Central Richmond observed: “I don’t think there is any medium other than service that would allow for such profound connections and relationships. The quote ‘Create relationships that nothing can shake...’<sup>4</sup> is really true within the context of serving.” An intern from Edmonds commented, “Having the chance to intensively study the Word of God in that space, the relationships built between the participants and tutors were deeper. The relationship was truly built through service, was deepened through that foundation.”

In the summer of 2023, additional interns joined from the Commercial Drive neighbourhood, and for the first time an internship was held in the Guildford neighbourhood in the Surrey-Delta-White Rock cluster next to Vancouver. Each of these two neighbourhoods designed their internships drawing on the insights generated in Central Richmond and Edmonds. In Guildford, the study element of the internship included

<sup>4</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Divine Philosophy*, p. 110.

*“... a common theme that emerged from these initial workshops was how true friendships grow within the context of service.”*

supporting the youth to intensify their study of the institute courses, while also bringing in sections of the FUNDAEC materials where relevant. This neighbourhood worked with three interns, each of whom set a personal goal for their internship.

One of the interns described how her goal was to view herself differently. She wanted to reach out to others more, and not feel as if she had to socially isolate herself in order to pursue academic excellence. “I was always trying to keep myself occupied and busy in different ways,” she explained. She said she is now pursuing her twofold moral purpose and “trying to live a coherent life with school added into the mix.” She, too, commented on the deep spiritual connection that develops between souls as a result of

serving together: “The environment of the internship made me realize that even after the summer, I will still have these people by my side no matter what. They’re also my friends and my family.”

Another intern from Guildford, who has been involved in the institute process since joining children’s classes at age five and is now in his second year of college, had a more skill-oriented goal: to become more comfortable with outreach activities and home visits. The interns in Guildford spent every afternoon serving together in the field, which provided ample opportunity for this intern to work towards his goal, shoulder to shoulder with others. He described how initially it seemed like a very unnatural and challenging act, but over time he developed a



lot of confidence, and it became a pattern in his life. He explained that before the internship, he viewed the community and his place in it as “very separate” from the rest of his life, but now knows “I can do this, and it’s not a thing I have to arrange, I can just go do it.”

In the Commercial Drive neighbourhood, two internships took place over the summer. The first was a month-long intensive in which two youth gathered for four to six hours every weekday. The study component had three aspects. The first was the institute courses, with the goal to complete Ruhi Book 3 and start Ruhi Book 4. Secondly, each intern chose a personal research project related to their career aspirations. One intern decided to study a document on science and religion in order to prepare for beginning a degree in Pharmacology in the fall. The other intern was interested in writing graphic novels, so she engaged in a study of adolescent literature together with themes from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *Paris Talks*. Thirdly, the interns studied the first text from FUNDAEC, which helps them to describe the physical world and connect it to spiritual reality—together with interns from other neighbourhoods.

In reflecting on what they had observed as animators, the interns decided that they wanted to learn more about how they could help junior youth understand their true nature as human beings and the importance of actively nurturing their higher natures. Drawing on lessons from the junior youth text *Walking the Straight Path*, the interns spent the afternoons visiting families and conversing with junior youth. In the last week of the internship, the youth held a camp with some of the junior youth they had been visiting, during which they created a comic book together on the theme of our higher and lower natures. After the internship, one of the participants reflected:

We’ve talked about a coherent life during this internship, but what does that really mean? I think

*We’ve talked about a coherent life during this internship, but what does that really mean? I think that it reflects in how we think and make choices.*

that it reflects in how we think and make choices. We had talked about how feelings like stress are not a quality in living a coherent life, or not collaborating with others is another example. I believe that we concluded that living a coherent life means practicing our higher nature qualities to unite all communities of humanity in our discussions. I distinctly remember what [one of the tutors] said, “Our thoughts are our reality.” It stuck to me because our mentality is what begins the actions we choose to perform everyday.

Echoing the importance of daily prayer, which was emphasized in the reflections from other neighbourhoods, the facilitator for these two interns shared the following: “Both interns drew heavily on prayer during the four weeks and our daily devotions became a special time for us all together. We often prayed fervently for the eyes of these [junior] youth to be opened to their higher selves.” Over the course of the internships, the youth grew closer to Bahá’u’lláh.

The second summer internship that took place in Commercial Drive was a seven-week entrepreneurial internship. This program emerged from a desire expressed by younger youth (Grades 11-12) from the

Indigenous population in the neighbourhood to learn about entrepreneurship within the context of community building. It was introduced with the understanding that not all young people are thinking about attending post-secondary education. Around 10 youth participated in some part of the program, with seven completing the full internship. Most of these youth were graduates of the junior youth program. The interns met twice a week: once to study Ruhi Book 1, and a second time to study principles of business—such as identifying and validating a problem, the business model canvas and minimum viable product—in light of the Bahá’í Writings. They also considered how their business could respond to the spiritual and material needs of their community. Each intern came up with a business proposal and submitted it to the Local Spiritual Assembly, which offered small grants.<sup>5</sup>

The businesses included a clothing brand for youth with body image issues, mobile beauty services for those with limited mobility, art workshops for teens, a cleaning service for people suffering from mental health issues, and an online Indigenous youth wellness hub. The facilitator shared that, “Some of the youth became emotional when receiving this funding and were so moved that they were being supported to begin these initiatives. Many of the participants are eager to continue meeting to start pursuing their businesses with this financial support and continue their study of Book 1.”

– Maryam Zerbes

5 Guidance from the Universal House of Justice in its 30 December 2021 message states Local Spiritual Assemblies give “growing attention... to the multiplying initiatives of social action arising from groups of junior youth, youth, women, families, or others who are responding to the needs around them.”

# NATIONAL CONTACT INFORMATION

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Other ways to **Contribute to the Funds of the Faith** include through the Treasurer of your Local Assembly, or the Regional Bahá'í Council in your area. You can also donate through the National Spiritual Assembly. In this case, kindly make your cheque payable to "Canadian Bahá'í" and mail it to:

The Treasury Department, Bahá'í National Centre,  
7200 Leslie Street Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8.

The major Funds of the Faith to which one can make contributions are:

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

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

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

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# 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.

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