

BAHÁ'Í CANADA

FALL WINTER 2024/2025 | DOMINION 181 B.E.

VOL. 38 NO. 1



Rays of Light

From the Writings

Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation... Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty.

These energies with which the Daystar of Divine bounty and Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust and dross which cover the mirror. Neither the candle nor the lamp can be lighted through their own unaided efforts, nor can it ever be possible for the mirror to free itself from its dross. It is clear and evident that until a fire is kindled the lamp will never be ignited, and unless the dross is blotted out from the face of the mirror it can never represent the image of the sun nor reflect its light and glory.

— Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, Persian, XVII.

Through the power of the words He hath uttered the whole of the human race can be illumined with the light of unity, and the remembrance of His Name is able to set on fire the hearts of all men, and burn away the veils that intervene between them and His glory. One righteous act is endowed with a potency that can so elevate the dust as to cause it to pass beyond the heaven of heavens. It can tear every bond asunder, and hath the power to restore the force that hath spent itself and vanished.

— Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, Persian, CXXXI.

Whatever hath befallen you, hath been for the sake of God. This is the truth, and in this there is no doubt. You should, therefore, leave all your affairs in His hands, place your trust in Him, and rely upon Him. He will assuredly not forsake you. In this, likewise, there is no doubt.

— Bahá'u'lláh, *Crisis & Victory*, Persian, p. 171.

Wherefore must the loved ones of God, laboriously, with the waters of their striving, tend and nourish and foster this tree of hope. In whatsoever land they dwell, let them with a whole heart befriend and be companions to those who are either close to them, or far removed. Let them, with qualities like unto those of heaven, promote the institutions and the religion of God. Let them never lose heart, never be despondent, never feel afflicted. The more antagonism they meet, the more let them show their own good faith; the more torments and calamities they have to face, the more generously let them pass round the bounteous cup. Such is the spirit which will become the life of the world, such is the spreading light at its heart: and he who may be and do other than this is not worthy to serve at the Holy Threshold of the Lord.

— 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 206, para. 12.

O God, O Thou Who hast cast Thy splendor over the luminous realities of men, shedding upon them the resplendent lights of knowledge and guidance, and hast chosen them out of all created things for this supernal grace, and hast caused them to encompass all things, to understand their inmost essence, and to disclose their mysteries, bringing them forth out of darkness into the visible world! “He verily showeth His special mercy to whomsoever He will.”¹

O Lord, help Thou Thy loved ones to acquire knowledge and the sciences and arts, and to unravel the secrets that are treasured up in the inmost reality of all created beings. Make them to hear the hidden truths that are written and embedded in the heart of all that is. Make them to be ensigns of guidance amongst all creatures, and piercing rays of the mind shedding forth their light in this, the “first life.”² Make them to be leaders unto Thee, guides unto Thy path, runners urging men on to Thy Kingdom.

Thou verily art the Powerful, the Protector, the Potent, the Defender, the Mighty, the Most Generous.

— 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 115-6.

1 Qur'án 51:56.

2 Qur'án 55:19-22.

Fall Winter 2024/2025

February | 181 B.E.

Vol. 38, No. 1

Published for the Bahá'ís of Canada



ON THE COVER: *Roots on a Mission*
by Kiana Rezvani Baghae, coloured
pencil and watercolour.

Contents

Universal House of Justice	4
Letter regarding international conflicts and humanitarian crises	
Message announcing new Houses of Worship	
New volume of "The Bahá'í World"	
National Spiritual Assembly	8
Message regarding material means	
Message in anticipation of the celebration of the Twin Holy Days	
About this issue	11
From the history of the Faith	12
Siegfried Schopflocher: Chief Temple builder	
Feature	16
Mothers arise as social actors, promoting the education of children	
From across Canada	20
Insights from the discourse on technology and society	
Pioneering, from one generation to the next	
New junior youth text explores Bahá'í principles	
Bridging local and global efforts for social transformation	
Information	33

Bahá'í Canada (ISSN 1199-1682) is published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada three to four times per year.
7200 Leslie Street, Thornhill ON L3T 6L8
phone: (905) 889-8168 fax: (905) 889-8184
email: secretariat@bahai.ca

Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to
Records Department
7200 Leslie Street,
Thornhill ON L3T 6L8
email: records@bahai.ca

Publications Mail Agreement 40050758

Letter regarding international conflicts and humanitarian crises

To the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity,
26 May 2024.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice is aware that Bahá'í youth are increasingly being confronted by the question of what their response should be to serious conflicts and related humanitarian crises raging in the world. It notes that this is a question of particular relevance to the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, given the seminars which the Institute offers for youth and young adults. With this in mind, the House of Justice has asked us to share the following comments with you in the hope that they may be of assistance to Bahá'í youth who are seeking a clearer understanding of the Bahá'í attitude towards various world events in the context of the Teachings.

The suffering and bloodshed that are the outcome of conflicts are deeply distressing. Surely, every conscientious soul is pained by such events. As Bahá'í youth will be aware, 'Abdu'l-Bahá repeatedly stressed humanity's need for universal peace, and on an occasion referred to war as "the greatest catastrophe in the world of humanity". In its Riḍván 2022 message, the House of Justice described its sorrow "at seeing the persistence of conditions and conflicts in the world that create misery and desperate suffering—in particular, at observing the recrudescence of destructive forces that have disordered international affairs while visiting horrors upon populations." The House of Justice referred again in its most recent Riḍván message to the "desperate" condition of the world, before stating that "this demands from every conscientious soul a response." The question, then, is what kind of response is appropriate. This question merits deep reflection. Reports indicate that, just in the last few years, hundreds of thousands of people have been killed as a direct result of armed struggle across the world—not only in the wars that fill news bulletins and dominate social media, but also in conflicts that unfold in relative obscurity, yet are similarly horrific for human society. What kind of response can be considered adequate in the face of such destruction of human life?

Popular opinion, especially as expressed online, tends to place the highest value on the expression of outrage and

being outspoken. Particular significance is attributed to speaking out about conflicts and related humanitarian crises by making the kind of public statement that apportion blame to one or other government or political entity and condemns them. As is well known, Bahá'í institutions do not comment in this way on any ongoing conflict. This stance can only be properly understood in light of the Bahá'í principle of non-involvement in the political affairs of governments. However, to interpret such a stance as indifference to the suffering being caused by conflict would be unjustified. The House of Justice has repeatedly drawn attention to conditions in the world and has stressed the responsibility Bahá'ís must feel to labour for the emergence of a peaceful world. As it states in its Riḍván 2024 message, "heartfelt concern" about humanity's sufferings "must prompt sustained effort to build communities that offer hope in place of despair, unity in place of conflict." It should be borne in mind, too, that Bahá'ís themselves are not unaffected by war—there are Bahá'í communities in many countries where conflicts are now occurring. In such places, despite their limited resources, and at times under extreme conditions, Bahá'ís naturally do what they can to offer humanitarian assistance to those around them, often without drawing attention to their own efforts. The Humanitarian Relief Fund established by the House of Justice offers a means to support the relief work carried out by Bahá'ís and others. Beyond this, Bahá'í communities in these circumstances also engage in other constructive endeavours to comfort and support populations that are caught up in strife. There have even been notable examples, in certain traditional societies with strong Bahá'í communities, where the believers have contributed to the resolution of conflicts between previously contending peoples. All these endeavours are praiseworthy. However, it should be evident that a response to the condition of the world that focuses only on treating the symptoms of disunity, but does not address its fundamental causes, would be inadequate.

Resolving deep-rooted differences in society requires the patience to bring about profound social change through the application of moral and spiritual principles. It calls for sustained and sacrificial exertion. The Nine Year Plan in which the Bahá'í world is now engaged is designed to meet this need. In this year's Riḍván message, the House of Justice refers to the prosecution of the Plan as "the means by which long-term, constructive processes, unfolding over generations, are being set in motion in every society." Notwithstanding the scale of the challenge

involved in realizing this aim, Bahá'ís would be failing in their duty before Bahá'u'lláh to attempt anything less. As the House of Justice stated in its *Riḍván* 2015 message, “it is systematic, determined, and selfless action undertaken within the wide embrace of the Plan’s framework that is the most constructive response of every concerned believer to the multiplying ills of a disordered society.”

This, then, is what it means for Bahá'ís to take a stand against conflict—to act, in the words of the House of Justice, as “true practitioners of peace”. In the message it addressed to the Bahá'ís of Iran at Naw-Rúz this year, the House of Justice stated that “in purifying the heart and cleansing its mirror from prejudice on the one hand, and in creating the social conditions for peace and unity on the other, every individual has agency and the capacity to play a part.” The theme of working for peace was explored at length in the 18 January 2019 message of the House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world:

The establishment of peace is a duty to which the entire human race is called. The responsibility that Bahá'ís bear to aid that process will evolve over time, but they have never been mere spectators—they lend their share of assistance to the operation of those forces leading humanity towards unity. They are summoned to be as leaven to the world. Consider Bahá'u'lláh's words:

Address yourselves to the promotion of the well-being and tranquility of the children of men. Bend your minds and wills to the education of the peoples and kindreds of the earth, that haply the dissensions that divide it may, through the power of the Most Great Name, be blotted out from its face, and all mankind become the upholders of one Order, and the inhabitants of one City.

These words of Bahá'u'lláh are of particular relevance to any Bahá'í youth being questioned about their own response to the suffering caused by conflicts in the world. The House of Justice has often celebrated the extraordinary commitment being shown by Bahá'í youth across the world who are proffering the divine remedy that, ultimately, is humanity's only hope. In its *Riḍván* message this year, the House of Justice testifies to “how much vibrancy and strength is generated in any society by its youth being awakened to the vision of Bahá'u'lláh and becoming protagonists of the Plan”. And it calls for “a sustained, rapid rise in the number of those committing their time, their energy, their concentration to the success of this work.” The efforts of today's young believers, undertaken in the company of many like-minded friends, are of course a continuation of the efforts that have been made through the decades by the followers of the Blessed Beauty, youth and adults alike, who have been inspired by His vision of a united world. These are efforts which have required courage, as well as sacrifice. In His second Tablet to the Hague, 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the supreme sacrifices made by so many Bahá'ís for the cause of universal peace: “As ye have no doubt heard, in Persia thousands of souls have offered up their lives in this path,

and thousands of homes have been laid waste. Despite this, we have in no wise relented, but have continued to endeavour unto this very moment and are increasing our efforts as day followeth day, because our desire for peace is not derived merely from the intellect: It is a matter of religious belief and one of the eternal foundations of the Faith of God.”

Naturally, there is a clear distinction to be made between expressing political views about an active conflict, which Bahá'ís refrain from doing, and making constructive contributions to the discourses of society, which Bahá'ís are urged to do in an effort to bring insights emerging from the study of the Revelation and from the community's own experience to bear on the problems facing the world. Although some themes of discourse are the focus of such intense controversy and heated political disagreement that they must simply be avoided, there are many important discourses, including broader themes related to peace, to which Bahá'ís can and do make significant and valuable contributions at all levels, from the grassroots to the international stage. Bahá'ís also engage in projects of social action, through which, in a myriad ways, issues related to peace, justice, and unity can be practically addressed. Many Bahá'í youth will already be familiar with the 2 March 2013 message of the House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran, which explores what it means to be “a force of constructive change” and how this relates to the principle of non-involvement in politics. Study of this message will help any follower of Bahá'u'lláh appreciate why certain kinds of action and public statement by Bahá'ís are likely to contribute to unity and why others, however much they might be prompted by sincere concern about human suffering, would risk doing more to deepen and exacerbate the divisions in the world. Discernment is needed to distinguish between them.

Let no one be under any illusions that the approach which has been described is easy or simple. The House of Justice is well aware that Bahá'í youth in many parts of the world find themselves facing considerable pressure from those around them to voice their support for one partisan stance or another. Ardent supporters of particular points of view sometimes use the threat of social ostracism as a way to compel others to adopt their political position. For Bahá'í youth to not only remain clear in their principles in such circumstances, but also continue to show forth courtesy, kindness, love, and forbearance towards their peers, requires courage and faith, strength of spirit and reliance on God. It also calls for a clear understanding of how Bahá'ís are striving to make a difference in the world. In its 25 November 2020 message to the Bahá'í world, the House of Justice counselled the friends that “vigilance on your part in avoiding discord and in not becoming entangled in society's controversies should under no circumstances be construed as aloofness from the many pressing concerns of this time. Far from it. You are among the most active and earnest of humanity's well-wishers. But, whether through deeds or words, the merit of your every contribution to social well-being lies, first,

in your resolute commitment to discover that precious point of unity where contrasting perspectives overlap and around which contending peoples can coalesce.”

While the challenge set out above is common to all Bahá'ís, the extraordinary potential that youth possess and the possibilities that are unique to their time of life give them special responsibility. Consider in this light the statement of the House of Justice in its most recent Riḍván message that “all must surge, but the youth must soar.” This counsel calls to mind a talk by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in which He describes how a faithful soul should aspire to flight:

But human flight is through faith. Human flight is through the virtues of the world of humanity. Human flight is through the acquisition of perfections. Human flight is through adherence to the divine teachings. Human flight is through service to the oneness of the world of humanity. Human flight is through heedfulness to the verses of God. Human flight is

to become the sign of guidance among the people. Human flight is to become a heavenly standard. Human flight is to become illumined with the light of truth. Human flight is to be detached from all save God. Human flight is to turn to the Abhá Kingdom. Human flight is to carry out the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh in their entirety. It is my hope that ye will all take flight; that your spirits, your hearts, and your minds will soar; and all your conditions will fly upwards. Such is my hope. God willing ye will be aided therein.

The House of Justice will supplicate in the Holy Shrines on behalf of Bahá'í youth everywhere, that they may be aided through the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh to confidently navigate the issues that occupy the minds of so many of their peers and demonstrate their wholehearted commitment to the promotion of peace for all humanity.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat

Message announcing new Houses of Worship

To the Bahá'ís of the World, 16 October 2024.

Dearly loved Friends,

We indicated in our Riḍván 2022 message our expectation that periodically more places will be identified where Houses of Worship are to be raised up. We are delighted that the national Temple in Papua New Guinea was recently inaugurated, and that progress is being made towards realization of the previously announced Temples in Bihar Sharif, India; Toronto, Canada; Kanchanpur, Nepal; and Mwinilunga, Zambia. With praise and gratitude to the Blessed Beauty, we joyfully announce that conditions make it possible for a further two national Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs to be erected, one in Brasília, Brazil, and the other in Lilongwe,

May the initiation of plans to build three additional Temples fill your hearts with joy...

Malawi, as well as a local Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Batouri, Cameroon.

May the initiation of plans to build three additional Temples fill your hearts with joy and serve as a source of inspiration in your sustained efforts to advance everywhere the processes of community building and engagement with society.

– The Universal House of Justice

New volume of “The Bahá’í World”

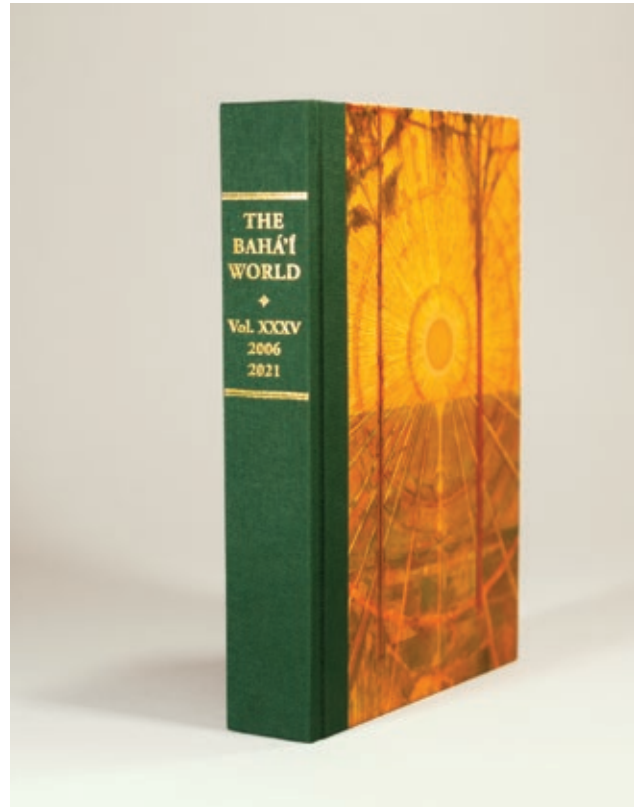
To all National Spiritual Assemblies,
8 December 2024.

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

It brings the Universal House of Justice great joy to share with you news of the resumption of the publication of volumes of *The Bahá’í World*.

The forthcoming volume of *The Bahá’í World* is the 35th in its history and covers the period between 2006 and 2021. As originally envisioned by the Guardian, the volume addresses the general public as well as students and scholars in a language that is welcoming and engaging, and invites the interest, in his words, of the ‘critical and intelligent enquirer, of whatever class, creed or colour’. To that audience, this new volume presents the growing experience of the Bahá’í community as an example of the potentialities within the human race to overcome conflict and division, to create new patterns of thought and human interaction, and to lay the foundations of a world that embodies the principle of the oneness of humankind. The articles in the volume seek to draw out the insights from Bahá’í experience that demonstrate aspects of ‘the high purpose, the moving history, the enduring achievements, the resistless march and infinite prospects of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh’.

As you may know, between 1926 and 2006, the *Bahá’í World* volumes provided a unique record of worldwide Bahá’í activity. Whilst the House of Justice continued to consider the release of future volumes, in 2019 it established *The Bahá’í World* as a website with the purpose of publishing essays and articles that reflect advances at the levels of thought and of action and the Faith’s purpose and mission in the world. Today, in addition to that website, certain functions of the original conception of the *Bahá’í World* volumes are being fulfilled by other publications such as *Summary of Achievements and Learning*, which is prepared at the end of each of the global Plans, *For the Betterment of the World*, and *The Bahá’ís* magazine, and also by the family of sites associated with Bahai.org, including the Bahá’í World News Service, and official national Bahá’í



This volume will be available for purchase through the Bahá’í Distribution Service Canada (<https://distribution.bahai.ca/>).

Photo: Bahá’í International Community

websites. Nevertheless, the House of Justice felt that, due to the distinctive role of *The Bahá’í World* as a public record of the development of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, its publication in book form should now resume.

The new volume is richly illustrated with photographs, and a special feature is the inclusion of works of art by Bahá’ís from around the world. The book also includes an “In Memoriam” section, offering accounts of the lives of individuals who rendered distinguished service at the international level.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat

Message regarding material means

From the National Spiritual Assembly to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Canada, 4 September 2024.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

As the final days of summer approach, thrilling accounts of a surge in activity over the past few months are reaching us, revealing how profoundly the Plan has shaped the rhythms of community life in Canada. Participants in children's festivals, junior youth camps, institute campaigns, youth conferences, teaching projects, Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity undergraduate seminars, summer schools, and the Association for Bahá'í Studies conference have transformed this brief period, once considered a time of lull, into one of vibrant activity. How fitting is this response to the urgent call of the Universal House of Justice in its Riḍván message: "The methods and instruments of the Plan allow every soul to contribute a share of what humanity needs in this day. Far from offering a temporary salve for the ills of the moment, the prosecution of the Plan is the means by which long-term, constructive processes, unfolding over generations, are being set in motion in every society. All of this points to an urgent, inescapable conclusion: There must be a sustained, rapid rise in the number of those committing their time, their energy, their concentration to the success of this work."

In striking numbers, youth—both Bahá'ís and their friends—have arisen to offer periods of service over the summer months. Against the backdrop of a suffering world that has lost its bearings, these spiritual warriors are holding fast to Bahá'u'lláh's description of reality, committed to bringing it into being. Supported by a surge in the energies and efforts of the friends, the youth are soaring.

Another powerful aspect of this mighty process, the call to raise Canada's first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, has further energized a community that was already deepening in its understanding of the sweetness of collective worship and its relationship to service. Tens of thousands across the country are participating in regular devotional gatherings in settings as diverse as parks and playgrounds, educational facilities and neighbourhood centres, homes, and backyards, providing the spiritual energy and focus that fuel their service. On this foundation, the call of the House of Worship is summoning souls, and contributions of time and material resources continue to

flow. For example, a group of youth from Quebec helped clear underbrush from the Temple site, contributing to its beauty, while friends from a nearby neighbourhood recently planted 850 saplings, which will eventually adorn the environs of the Temple. Based on contributions and pledges to the Canadian Temple Fund, we are confident that the means will be in hand to construct the Temple, whose central edifice alone will require approximately \$22.5M, once the rezoning process concludes.

Having witnessed the remarkable opportunities seized in recent months and the readiness of the youth to set aside time for service, and having taken stock of the pressing requirements of the two remaining years of the first phase of the Nine Year Plan, we wish to draw you into our confidence. The challenge is clear: how can this rapid rise in those offering time, energy, and concentration be sustained, while ensuring that the needs related to the construction of the House of Worship are met? A recent letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to our National Assembly underlined the importance of the friends' vision of the two endeavors of community building and raising the House of Worship as "mutual elements of one divine project that is now in their hands. By adequately equipping both, the friends reinforce the powerful spiritual enterprise gaining momentum across their nation." We write, then, to share with you the material means that will be required for this mighty spiritual enterprise in the coming year.

CANADIAN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTION GOALS FOR ALL THE FUNDS OF THE FAITH 2024-2025

National Fund	\$6,500,000
Deputization Fund	1,000,000
Canadian Temple Fund	5,000,000
International Fund	200,000
International Collaboration Fund	400,000
World Centre Endowment Fund	200,000
Continental Fund	200,000
Humanitarian Relief Fund (international)	100,000
North American House of Worship	100,000
Community Properties Fund (national)	400,000
Total	14,100,000¹

¹ Canada has achieved its five-year goal for the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but the friends are still welcome to earmark funds for that purpose. In addition, we have eliminated a specific fund for support of the educational facilities, but contributions may be made and earmarked through the National Fund.

The attached contribution goals for all the funds of the Faith represent our assessment, in consultation with the Counsellors, of the minimum required to meet the urgent opportunities before us, made all the more pressing by the uncertain and desperate conditions in the world. The decision regarding these goals this year was not easily reached. For the first time in many years, we began the year with an actual deficit in the National Fund. While the overall level of total contributions to all the funds of the Faith has remained steady, the immediate and sustained rise in contributions earmarked for the House of Worship has not yet been matched by an increase in contributions for the National and Deputization Funds to support community-building work. With the deficit of expenditure over revenue for the current year reaching \$650,000 by the end of July, we felt compelled to share this information with you, along with our confidence that this state is temporary. Nevertheless, to ensure adequate funds for the grassroots, we have frozen hiring or replacing staff for all but the most essential positions at the Bahá'í National Centre, and have asked each region to defer committing to any new regional staff not immediately required for the Plan.

The goals we place before the community take into account the record of contributions over the last five years and the current, time-sensitive requirements for financial support for the friends serving at the cluster, regional, and national levels who accompany others and provide the structure for a process of learning about growth. In addition, it has become clear that neighbourhood properties, which open the door to the participation of many and strengthen a pattern of vibrant community life at the grassroots, will be needed in increasing numbers over the course of the Plan. Of course, Canada's responsibilities extend beyond our own borders, through support of the Bahá'í World

Centre and our fellow national communities, including the sending of pioneers and participation in financial collaboration goals.

We offer a final comment about the Deputization Fund, the means whereby a believer can meet their sacred obligation to teach the Cause of God. The House of Justice has clarified that the act of deputizing another to teach in one's stead can be applied to the support of those serving the training institute, in addition to pioneers and traveling teachers. Deputization is thus essentially about teaching, and the Deputization Fund is a channel for this intention.

Dear friends, we hope that this context will enable each individual, community, and institution to prayerfully consider their current contribution patterns and weigh a befitting and extraordinary response to the needs of this "divine project that is now in their hands." In the final paragraphs of the Riḍván message, the House of Justice states: "The urgency of the present hour must not obscure the special joy that comes from service. The call to service is an uplifting, all-embracing summons. It attracts every faithful soul, even those weighed down by cares and obligations. For in all the ways in which that faithful soul is occupied can be discovered deep-rooted devotion and a lifelong concern for the well-being of others. Such qualities give coherence to a life of manifold demands." Well aware of the manifold demands in the lives of the friends, with great love the National Assembly offers prayers for the service of each one.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF CANADA

Karen McKye, Secretary



An illustration of trees found on the site of Canada's future National House of Worship, by Kiana Rezvani Baghae.

Message in anticipation of the celebration of the Twin Holy Days

From the National Spiritual Assembly to the community of Bahá'u'lláh in Canada, 29 October 2024.

Dearest Friends,

The Counsellors and National Spiritual Assembly have just spent four joyful days in a spiritually restorative retreat, studying guidance and consulting on what it takes to raise up vibrant, outward-looking communities in the face of the accelerating destructive forces at play in the world. With admiration and gratitude, we reflected on the ways you are living your lives, as well-wishers of humanity, builders and growers, practitioners of peace, sources of light and hope amidst growing forces of disintegration that “have left their traces in blood and anguish on the pages of history and the lives of billions.”¹ We vowed to quickly write to you.

It is clear: the pace of change has quickened. Precious, fleeting opportunities are ready to be seized, provided we match the quickening pace of disintegrative forces with a surge of our own. In the coming weeks and months, you will hear of special measures being taken to infuse joy and energy into current efforts at every level. These

1 28 November 2023, Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world.

may take many forms, including teaching conferences, expansion phases, seminars, spaces for members of institutions, special visits, and gatherings for the youth. Be alert to such announcements in your communities, ready to participate.

Yet, the destructive forces will not wait. As the commemoration of the Twin Holy Days on 2 and 3 November approaches, might each follower of Bahá'u'lláh mark these sacred days by surveying their immediate teaching opportunities, and choosing one or more on which to act?

Through the power of the words He hath uttered the whole of the human race can be illumined with the light of unity, and the remembrance of His Name is able to set on fire the hearts of all men, and burn away the veils that intervene between them and His glory. One righteous act is endowed with a potency that can so elevate the dust as to cause it to pass beyond the heaven of heavens. It can tear every bond asunder, and hath the power to restore the force that hath spent itself and vanished...²

With our love and admiration,

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF CANADA

Karen McKye, Secretary

2 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXI



Gate entrance to the Shrine of the Báb. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

About this issue

The title of this issue, *Rays of Light*, is shared with a recently-released junior youth text. An article on this text is included here and was previously published on the Bahá'í Canada website.¹ The text focuses on the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í Faith, which are like rays of light from the Sun of Truth that illuminate reality. On the cover is a drawing by Kiana Rezvani Baghae titled *Roots on a Mission*, which also includes an image of the sun as a source of life and strength.

Rays of light can also symbolize hope. In its 26 May 2024 message to the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, published in this issue, the Universal House of Justice addressed the “suffering and bloodshed that are the outcome of conflicts” and discussed how young people can respond to the deteriorating situation of the world.

This calls to mind the 29 October 2024 message from the National Spiritual Assembly, who wrote “With admiration and gratitude, we reflected on the ways you are living your lives, as well-wishers of humanity, builders and growers, practitioners of peace, sources of light and hope amidst growing forces of disintegration...”

The articles in this issue also point to these sources of light and hope. The feature article, “Mothers arise as social actors, promoting the education of children,” details the sustained collective effort of a group of families, united in their concern for the well-being of their children. Through the impetus of the training institute, their vision expanded. Now they are beginning to see signs of transformation at the level of the family, and the community has emerged as a protagonist.

The “From the History” section of this issue includes the article “Siegfried Schopflocher: Chief Temple builder,” by Vahid Spencer. This engaging article details how a Canadian Hand of the Cause of God made a decisive contribution to completing the Mother Temple of the West. This legacy is instructive as we endeavour to raise up the Mother Temple of Canada.

A prayer from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the entirety of which is included in the “From the Writings” section of this issue, reads: “Make them to be...piercing rays of the mind shedding forth their light in this, the “first life.” These rays of the mind were at work in the article “Insights from the discourse on technology and society,” which is the first of its kind. Contributed by a working group of the Association for Bahá'í Studies, the article outlines how an in-depth understanding of technology, and its ubiquitous influence, is a requirement of moral empowerment.

During the Ten Year Crusade (1953-1963), a large-scale effort to pioneer to every corner of the globe was carried out, which is where the story “Pioneering from one generation to the next” begins. Based on an interview with Knight of Bahá'u'lláh to Morocco Nosrat Ardekani, who now resides in Montreal, Que., as well as the memoirs of her late husband Husayn Ardekani, this piece examines lives reshaped by the summons of the Guardian and later guided and sustained by the House of Justice.

Finally, Gloria Brown from Hamilton, Ont. wrote about how her participation in the Bahá'í International Community's events leading up to the United Nations' Summit of the Future gave her hope. She shares, “... the BIC emphasized...the need to cultivate a spirit of optimism in the face of global difficulties.” She carried this spirit of optimism home, commenting, “The Action Days reaffirmed for me that local initiatives—no matter their scale—are integral to global progress.”

¹ bahaicanada.bahai.ca

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.



Siegfried Schopflocher: Chief Temple builder

The pivotal Canadian contribution to North
America's first Bahá'í House of Worship.

Siegfried Schopflocher (1877-1953).

Photo: Canadian Bahá'í Archives

Lorol didn't need a new Cadillac. She had been raised in an affluent Montreal home, with many privileges, including those of travelling splendidly around the world, primarily to alleviate feelings of boredom. Cementing her position in the upper echelons of society, she had married a successful businessman. She was now once again travelling the world and life was good, but nah, a brand-new Cadillac could wait. She scribbled something on a table napkin and sent the elderly Japanese servant off to the telegraph office.¹

¹ Whitmore, Bruce W. *The Dawning Place: The Building of a Temple, The Forging of the North American Bahá'í Community*. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980, p. 132.

It was 1929, a midpoint between the two world wars, but also the consequential year when the Great Depression began. Businesses failed throughout the world and rates of unemployment skyrocketed. Cities around the world were severely affected, especially those dependent on heavy industry. Construction was virtually halted in many countries and farming communities and rural areas suffered as crop prices fell dramatically. Significantly, the Great Depression gave rise to the Nazi Party in Germany. It is unlikely that Lorol would have had much inkling of what was to come during her travels that spring.



Lorol Schopflocher (1886–1970). Photo: Canadian Bahá'í Archives

Ten years earlier Lorol had met May Maxwell, a prominent early Bahá'í in Montreal. Being increasingly attracted to the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, she became a member of the community in 1920, with her German-born husband, Siegfried “Fred” Schopflocher, taking that same step a year later. It was at the Bahá'í World Centre in present-day Haifa, Israel, where Lorol was visiting that spring of 1929.

The Montreal-based couple had joined the Bahá'í community at the outset of the Formative Age of the Faith, which is marked by the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1921, and the beginning of the ministry of the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi. Fred and Lorol would have had very little knowledge of the 24-year-old grandson of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá who was then taking up the mantle of leadership in the fledgling, global community they had just joined.² And they would have known even less about the course the community would soon be taking.

In the early years of his ministry, Shoghi Effendi gave much attention to establishing and refining the functioning of local and national Bahá'í administrative bodies, mostly through letters written to national and local communities. None of his best-known letters or major translations were released in the 1920s, however, so the community’s understanding of the central verities of the Faith was still in a state of early formation. Through their frequent international travels, however, the Schopflochers would develop a very close relationship with Shoghi Effendi over the coming decades and their understanding of the Faith’s mission would significantly increase.

2 In His last Will and Testament, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá appointed Shoghi Effendi as His successor and Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada was established in 1925, and Fred was elected a member for 15 different years until 1947³ and thus became very involved in the administrative affairs of the Faith in North America. He always showed much interest in the properties of the Faith, such as Green Acre, in Eliot, Maine and Geyserville, California.⁴ Fred would also carry out various assignments on behalf of Shoghi Effendi throughout the world. It was noted that Fred had a deep affection for the friends in India.⁵

Upon becoming Bahá'ís, both Fred and Lorol would soon learn about the curious case of the hulking black foundation rising over the lakefront north of Chicago. They would have learned that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself had laid the cornerstone for the building during His travels in North America in 1912 and of the architectural conception that had been chosen in 1920. But the work of actually building the House of Worship—the future Mother Temple of the West—seemed to be going nowhere.

The slowness of advancing the construction work was perhaps not surprising, given the relative smallness of the North American Bahá'í community and its meagre resources. The new National Spiritual Assembly devised a “Plan for Unified Action” in December 1925 to accumulate \$400,000 within three years, enough to construct the first unit of the superstructure.⁶ However, a year later, only \$50,000 had been raised, and the 1927 contributions proved just as low. The painful struggle continued.

At the National Convention in 1928, a participant shared details of a conversation he had recently had with Shoghi Effendi in the Holy Land. The Guardian had stated that the National Assembly needed to assure the believers that it would not exceed its budget, as it had done in previous years, and would allocate all the monies received over its budgetary needs to the Temple Fund. The underlying point that was being made was that the material needs to build the Temple deserved higher priority and sacrifice.⁷

Fred attended this National Convention, and immediately understood the implications of the point being raised. Being a man of considerable wealth, he spontaneously made a pledge of \$25,000 to the Temple Fund. This inspired other delegates to make their own pledges, which resulted in an additional \$15,000. Contributions increased dramatically following the Convention and the Temple Fund was showing a much healthier balance, but still considerably short of the goal of \$400,000 set three years earlier.⁸

3 *Bahá'í World, The*. vol 12. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980, p.664.

4 Now known as Bosch Bahá'í School.

5 *Bahá'í World, The*. vol 12. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980, p.664.

6 Harper, Barron. *Lights of Fortitude*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1997, p. 389.

7 Whitmore, Bruce W. *The Dawning Place: The Building of a Temple, The Forging of the North American Bahá'í Community*. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980, p. 131.

8 Harper, Barron. *Lights of Fortitude*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1997, p. 389.



The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, in front of the Temple during construction, 1938. Back row, left to right: George Latimer, Roy Wilhelm, Horace Holley, Leroy Ios, Siegfried Schopflocher. Front row, left to right: Allen McDaniel, Dorothy Baker, Amelia Collins, Harlan Ober.

Photo: National Bahá'í Archives, United States

The roses of Haifa would have been in full red bloom that spring of 1929 when Shoghi Effendi himself handed Lorol a cable from her husband: “Are you willing to contribute \$50,000 to Temple which may mean you do not get a new Cadillac this year?” In response, Lorol wrote on the table napkin the message of her cabled reply: “Why not \$100,000?” Fred responded: “You win, love to Shoghi Effendi, love, Fred.”⁹ An additional \$100,000 was thus added to the balance of the Temple Fund.¹⁰ The superstructure of the Temple was completed in 1931—a victory—and yet there was much work yet to be done.

The Great Depression made the prospects of the Temple Fund still gloomy. The small group of Bahá'ís had less funds to contribute, although many were willing to make sacrifices. The Maxwells of Montreal¹¹ offered to sell their home on Pine Avenue with Fred and Lorol in mind as ideal buyers. However, in a letter to the *Guardian* dated 11 April 1933, May Maxwell wrote that “Mr. Schopflocher felt that he could not buy the house, he feels that he cannot contribute any more to the Temple either in this way or directly himself...”¹²

During this period and into the mid-1930s, friends and colleagues of Fred noticed that his mood had changed, he was more irritable and his posture increasingly critical and negative. They did not know of the inner turmoil he was

facing, and he kept largely to himself.¹³ Born in Germany in 1877 to an Orthodox Jewish family, the youngest of 18 children, Fred was regularly learning of the escalated persecution of Jews by the Nazi regime. Most of his large family would eventually die in concentration camps.¹⁴

Despite whatever spiritual battles Fred had to fight during this relatively short period—undoubtedly armoured with intense prayers and far-sighted faith—his unceasing commitment to the Cause was only reinvigorated. In 1937 a new goal was set to raise \$350,000 to complete the exterior ornamentation of the House of Worship and Fred pledged another \$100,000¹⁵ to the Temple Fund—a considerable contribution given the context of the Great Depression.

When Shoghi Effendi would educate the believers about the significance of establishing the House of Worship, Fred seems to have understood this well, and perhaps better than others. He not only contributed funds, but also practical advice based on his long-term professional experience. He also helped to elevate the vision of the friends about the importance of the House of Worship for the actual growth of the Faith.

A letter written on Shoghi Effendi's behalf in 1936 states that “it was mainly due to his [Fred's] unflinching and most generous assistance that the Temple in Wilmette

9 Harper, Barron. *Lights of Fortitude*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1997, p. 389.

10 \$100,000 in 1929 is equivalent in purchasing power to about \$1.8 million today.

11 Prominent early Bahá'ís in Canada, Sutherland and May Maxwell.

12 Nakhjavani, Violette. *The Maxwells of Montreal: Middle Years 1923-1937, Late Years 1937-1952*. Oxford: George Ronald, 2012, p. 193.

13 Hogenson, Kathryn Jewett. *Infinite Horizons: The Life and Times of Horace Holley*. Oxford: George Ronald, 2022, p. 301.

14 Van den Hoonard, Will. Schopflocher, Siegfried (1877 - 1953) <https://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org/>

15 \$100,000 in 1937 is equivalent in purchasing power to about \$2.2 million today.



From left to right: John Roberts, Winnifred Harvey, unknown, Fred Schopflocher, [possibly Lorol Schopflocher], [possibly Patrick Roberts], standing near the lower entrance to the Bahá'í House of Worship, Wilmette, 1942.

Photo: Canadian Bahá'í Archives

was built.” Another letter of the same year written on Shoghi Effendi’s behalf asserts that Fred’s name will “ever be associated” with the Wilmette Temple: “Had it not been for the continued and whole-hearted support, both financial and moral, which he so generously extended to it, that edifice could never have been reared so steadily and efficiently.” Shoghi Effendi designated this German-born Canadian “the Chief Temple Builder.”¹⁶

Lorol was a heroine of the Faith in her own right. She would travel the world nine times and often visit Shoghi Effendi during those travels. She served and taught the Bahá'í Faith in 86 countries, including Soviet Russia and Iran, often venturing into dangerous and difficult territories. She gave numerous talks, made efforts to defend Bahá'ís who were being persecuted, and met with numerous dignitaries and other prominent people.¹⁷

As the Canadian Bahá'í community continued to gain strength, it was eventually able to form and elect its own National Spiritual Assembly in 1948. Fred was elected to this Assembly and would play a pivotal role in securing, only a year later, a formal recognition of its status under civil law through a special Act of Parliament, a victory which Shoghi Effendi hailed as “an act wholly unprecedented in the annals of the Faith in any country, in either East or West.”¹⁸ In 1952 Shoghi Effendi asked

Fred to assist the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada to establish its National Bahá'í Centre.

Fred was one of the few Hands of the Cause of God who learned of their appointment directly from Shoghi Effendi, when visiting Haifa, before it was announced formally in February of 1952. A witness noted that “Freddie turned so white I thought he was going to faint!”¹⁹ On returning to Canada after having learned of his appointment, but before the official announcement had been made, Fred attended a National Assembly meeting without mentioning his appointment to anyone.²⁰

Only three months before his passing, in 1953, Fred was able to attend the dedication of the Wilmette House of Worship, to which he had made such outstanding contributions. At some level it appears that he was granted a signal bounty of seeing the fruition of the most cherished endeavour his soul had responded to during his lifetime. He and his wife had been blessed with material fortunes, which they channeled for the advancement of the Faith at all levels, from the local to the global, through complete consecration and rock-like staunchness. Cadillac or not, this was their chosen highway!

– Vahid Spencer

16 van den Hoonard, Will. Schopflocher, Siegfried (1877 – 1953) <https://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org/>

17 *Bahá'í World, The. vol 15*. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1976, p. 488.

18 Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to Canada*, 2nd ed. Thornhill: Bahá'í Canada Publications, 1999, p. 114

19 *Ministry of the Custodians*. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1997 p. 4.

20 van den Hoonard, Will. Schopflocher, Siegfried (1877 – 1953) <https://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org/>



A group of mothers during a literacy camp for children, which they helped to organize alongside youth.

Mothers arise as social actors, promoting the education of children

A tutor in British Columbia recounts how, over the past 18 months, the efforts of a group of mothers concerned with their own children has led to a broader vision of advancing an educational process in their community.

Edmonds, in the Southeast of Burnaby, B.C., is a neighbourhood with many families who are new to Canada. “This is one of the most diverse neighbourhoods in Canada,” comments Ms. Sanaz Niagan, a tutor who serves in the area. A group of families participating in the educational process, from backgrounds including Chinese, Indian, Columbian and Mexican, have found a sense of belonging and purpose through a shared concern for their children’s education.

These families were first attracted to the neighbourhood centre, located in a commercial plaza with a street-

front entrance, which the Bahá’í community started renting in 2021.¹ Although the primary focus of the neighbourhood team at the time was on the spiritual empowerment of junior youth and the training of animators, the centre attracted the attention of passersby, and families with children aged 11 and younger expressed a desire for programming for their children. From here, a few teachers started a Bahá’í children’s class.

Many of the mothers who brought their children stayed at the centre

until the class finished, and the team of tutors and teachers began to think about how to engage them. A few of these friends had visited the Portal da Glória cluster in Brazil as part of an internationally-coordinated effort to share learning, and insights from the visit advanced the team’s understanding around how a population can take ownership of its spiritual and material development. They were eager to apply these insights to their neighbourhood.

Responding to the highest aspirations of a population

Ms. Niagan, whose son is also in the children’s class, explains, “We were thinking about how to

¹ The article “A space to call their own,” published on bahaicanada.bahai.ca in August 2022 details the experience of acquiring the Edmonds neighbourhood centre.



The Edmonds Youth Education Centre in Burnaby, B.C. is a prominent centre of activity in the neighbourhood, where Bahá'í children's classes now also take place.

invite the mothers, maybe to Ruhi Book 1, and take it from there. But the conversation was unnatural until they expressed the desire to learn English.” English classes for newcomers usually fill up quickly in the neighbourhood, which prevents many from accessing them. Rather than determining that this need was outside the scope of the programs offered at the centre, the team seized an opportunity. “We started an English class for them at the centre while the kids were in children’s class,” says Ms. Niagan. She facilitated the sessions using texts from the junior youth spiritual empowerment program that focus on literacy.

After meeting for a few months, Ms. Niagan noticed that the conversation among the group of seven mothers naturally turned to the needs of their children. Seeing this development, she invited them to study Ruhi Book 3: *Teaching Children’s Classes*. While understanding that these mothers might not start children’s classes of their own, the tutors saw the material as beneficial not just for aspiring teachers of children’s classes, but also for parents. Describing the change in their weekly space, Ms. Niagan says, “These mothers started studying Book 3 as a way to help them with the education of their children, their relationship with their children, and to address some of the concerns they had, while continuing to strengthen their English language capabilities.”

The mothers continued to meet weekly for one hour while their children were in class. Ms. Niagan

shares, “Every week we study spiritual qualities and think about how, as mothers, we can nurture these qualities in our children and in our family units.” At the beginning of every study circle, they reflect on their efforts of the past week.

Stirrings of personal transformation

Engaging in a process of study, action and reflection increased the mothers’ consciousness of changes occurring as well as new capacities developing in their children. Ms. Niagan says, “This process led to these mothers seeing a lot of transformation in their kids at the beginning, and then over time, in their whole families.”

In one instance, a mother realized that her daughter was treated differently than her son, as is often the norm in her culture. She had made negative comments about her daughter’s intelligence, straining their relationship. The son, being talented in reading and writing, was more highly regarded than her daughter who did not do as well in these subjects at school. Studying Book 3 changed this mother’s view of her daughter.

The mothers studied the quotation, “Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.”² Ms. Niagan describes, “Reflecting on this quote helped her to see that each child

has different talents and abilities, and they’re not the same.” With encouragement from the other mothers, who began to collectively recognize her daughter’s strengths, the relationship between mother and daughter gradually improved.

Another mother is going through a divorce, and she and her children are facing a difficult time. This mother reflected with the group on her children’s increasing reliance on prayer as this habit has been cultivated at home. As her family faces this crisis, the mother observes that her two children often hug one another and recite prayers to soothe their hearts. They’ve learned a prayer in children’s class for difficulties, and after reciting it, are calm.

Cultivating an outward-looking orientation

As the mothers began to experience transformation in their own families, an urge to extend it to others developed naturally. Through consultation, they concluded that if all the children in the neighbourhood had access to the educational activities, problems like bullying might be resolved. They began to reach out to new families and organized several children’s festivals to introduce them to the process. This provided an opportunity to pause and reflect on what distinguished these educational activities from the other programs offered in their neighbourhood.

Ms. Niagan shares, “The mothers came to the realization that it’s actually the Word of God that makes the programs very distinct from everything else and allows for such transformation. This really unlocked a lot in these moms, particularly in the way they looked at how to engage other families in the process.” The group set a numerical goal and decided to go out and invite others. “They realized that by just going to the neighbours, it was going to be very slow, and they wouldn’t be able to attract a lot of people. So they started engaging the school principals and community coordinators,” explains Ms. Niagan.

² *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, Lawh-i-Maqsúd.



Junior youth tutor children during a literacy camp in July 2024, which took place at a local school. An older youth sits with each group, ready to assist if needed.

However, they noticed that the spiritual nature of the program was an obstacle for some, who were otherwise interested in participating. For example, one mother, who immigrated to Canada two years ago, decided of her own accord to reach out to her daughter's teacher about promoting the children's festival to other families at the school. The teacher told her that she would have to take the matter to the principal. The mother then booked an appointment to meet the principal.

At first, the principal said that he was not able to promote the festival due the spiritual concepts in the materials and the religious aspect of the program.³ Ms. Niagan shares, "The mother did not give up and started connecting the program to the issues that the kids have at school, and particularly her own daughter." The mother reminded him of their series of meetings the year before, which were due to her daughter being bullied at school. She was able to articulate how the program helped her daughter with this issue and told the principal that if he wanted to stop bullying at school, these were the kinds of concepts that children needed, and which had led to transformation in her daughter's life.

Later, when sharing her efforts with the rest of the mothers, this mother explained "This is the key that I used to open his heart." Once the principal gained a deeper understanding, he agreed with the proposal and shared the festival invitations with all the families connected to the school. Within a few hours of this invitation, the team received 40 new registrations from parents. The group of mothers planned and executed a two-day festival for children, and at the same time engaged more parents in conversation during the festival and through a formal gathering afterwards.

Fostering the intellectual development of children

"As the mothers continued advancing through Book 3, they started to voice other issues," Ms. Niagan says. One was the academic and intellectual development of their children. They felt that the main priority of primary school in Canada seemed to be social development, especially compared to their home countries. "They started thinking about organizing a reading club and math tutorials for the kids," Ms. Niagan continues. The summer months, when school is on break, were soon approaching.

The mothers started to acquire some reading material and then brought the conversation to one of the neighbourhood's monthly community gatherings. Their concerns seemed to naturally fit with the discussion on education, and they shared that from their own experience as well as from their

engagement with schools, language and numeracy are two areas that many children struggle with.

Ms. Niagan explains, "What came out of that community gathering was, 'Can we organize something in the summer that addresses the numeracy and literacy needs of the kids, not just junior youth, but also the younger ones?'" The model that these families came up with was that the animators and older youth would help the junior youth, and the junior youth would help the children, in the areas of numeracy and literacy.

There were two three-week long camps for junior youth during the summer months. The junior youth met for the first two weeks, and on the last week of each camp they were joined by the children. The junior youth tutored the children in literacy for the first camp and numeracy during the second. The mothers accompanied the junior youth in this process. The junior youth gained valuable experience from the camps, which evolved into a weekly reading club at the neighbourhood centre, where they continue to tutor the children.

Responding to tests and difficulties

When one mother opened up about the passing of her father, another suggested that they host a devotional gathering in his memory. This conversation led to a discussion on life after death and the purpose of life. Ms. Niagan says, "They were wondering why we go through suffering and hardship in life."

3 The "A Few Thoughts for the Tutor" section of Ruhi Book 3 states: "What should be clear from the outset is that spiritual education for children as conceived in the Bahá'í Faith differs fundamentally from the imposition of dogmatic beliefs sometimes associated with religious instruction. It aims to foster, instead, a love for knowledge, an open attitude towards learning, and a constant desire to investigate reality."



A numeracy camp took place in the Edmonds neighbourhood in August 2024, with a similar structure as the literacy camp the month before.

The mothers would describe their hardships and say, “I am a good person. I don’t know why I had to go through this.”

“We had a brief discussion about the nature of tests and difficulties,” Ms. Niagan continues, “The next day, I invited them over to talk more from a Bahá’í perspective. We talked about certain concepts in Book 1, Unit 3, which addresses life after death. They were very interested and asked, ‘What is this book?’ I said, ‘You know, we’re studying Book 3, this is Book 1. And this is among the concepts we explore in Book 1.’”

After having lunch that day, they watched the film *Light to the World*, about the life of Bahá’u’lláh. “They were very, very touched by the film,” explains Mrs. Niagan. Two mothers come from Roman Catholic faith backgrounds, “And they were just drawing so many parallels between Bahá’u’lláh and Jesus Christ, and how history repeats itself, how every Manifestation of God comes to help humanity, and what humanity does to them,” Ms. Niagan recounts. They learned more about the Blessed Beauty and asked many questions about His Personage. After this, the mothers decided that during the time their kids were in the new reading club at the neighbourhood centre, they wanted to start studying Ruhi Book 1.

Enhancing the devotional character of the community

For most families, joining the children for prayers before their class was their first introduction to

a devotional space. This devotional, which follows a meditative yoga session led by one of the mothers at the beginning of every class, is a chance for the children to let out their creative energies by playing ukeleles and singing songs and prayers. They usually become loud and lively. Afterwards, the children split up into their classes and the mothers continue with their study of Ruhi Book 3.

Now, in addition to the devotions at the beginning of children’s classes, the mothers host a devotional gathering that rotates between their homes. The fathers and children also participate in these family devotionals, and the conversations from the Book 3 study circle are extended in this space, which takes place every week. The power of prayer is strengthening family bonds.

The devotional character of the group of families has evolved over time. Ms. Niagan explains, “What’s interesting is that their confidence in the power of prayer has increased so much. When they have challenges, the families turn to prayer. In many instances the issue has resolved.”

Creating a new parenting culture

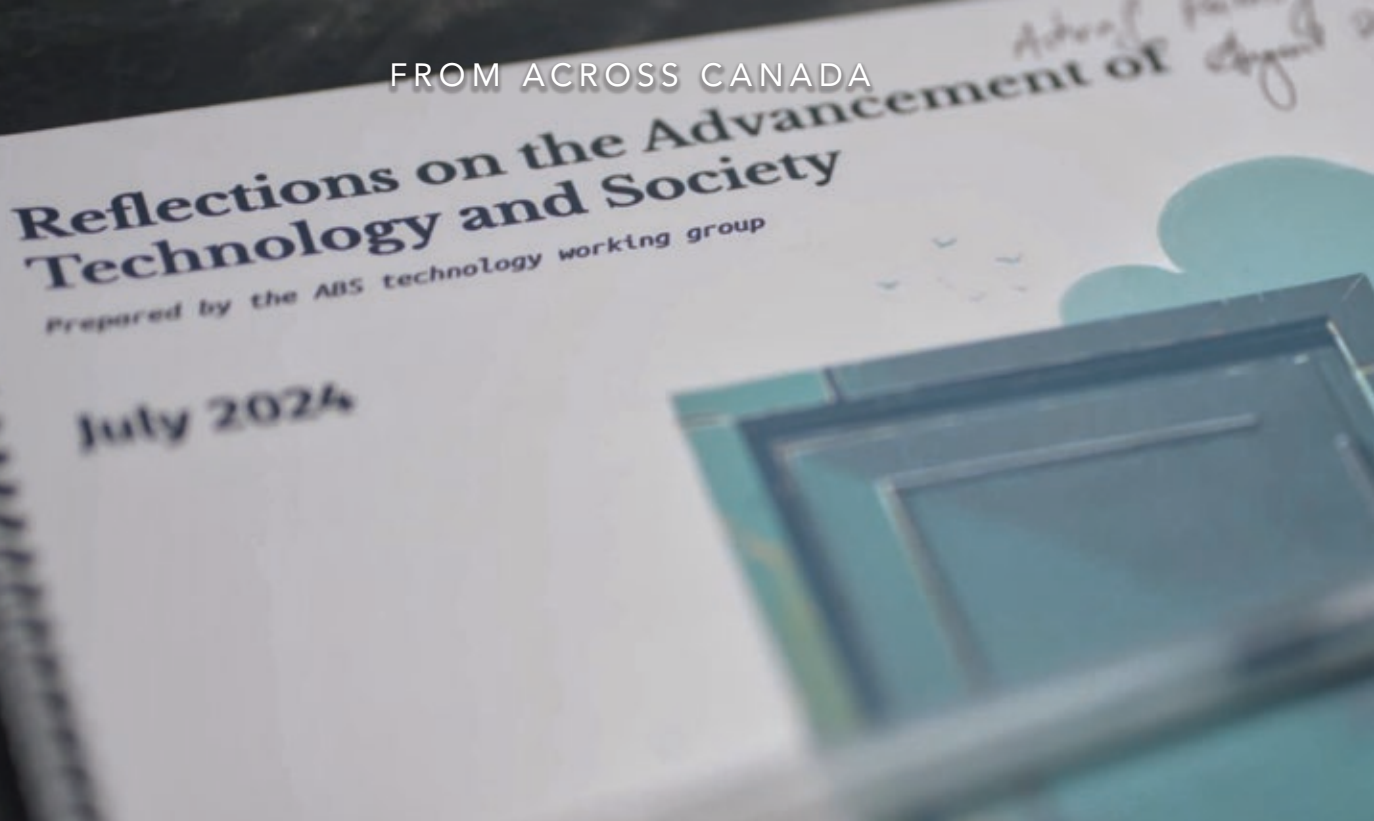
Living in a diverse neighbourhood, the mothers reflected that they often meet parenting styles and approaches that are different to their own. One example that was shared with the group was the approach to dealing with conflict among children. One mother shared, “In the playground,

when there is conflict or another child hits my child, I tell my child to let go, to forgive. But then I see another parent saying, ‘If someone hits you, you should hit them back.’”

Additionally, the mothers are concerned with the culture of individualism in North America, which can limit the involvement of the community in raising and disciplining children. “There is a sense that everybody is only concerned with their own family,” Ms. Niagan describes, sharing the sentiments of the group, which can lead to isolation and a lack of meaningful connection in the community. Oftentimes, they felt that the culture in their country of origin allowed for much more collaboration in the rearing of children.

The mothers are now taking steps to remedy this issue. For example, “This group of families help all the children to develop a prayerful attitude. It’s not just their own child. If they see something in someone else’s child, they can help with it. They don’t stay passive because of the fear that maybe the parent would get offended.”

New patterns have emerged as these mothers continue to identify challenges and, through the potent instrument of the institute, address them. Spaces have multiplied through which Baha’u’llah’s Revelation is being applied, and there is continuous effort to reach out to others, as these mothers extend a love for their families to all those with whom they are connected.



A two-day seminar took place before last year's Association for Bahá'í Studies conference during which participants explored questions around technology and society. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

Insights from the discourse on technology and society

Over the past several years, a working group has been collaborating with the Association for Bahá'í Studies to learn about the discourse on technology and society.

The group includes participants from both Canada and the United States.

For a number of years, the Association for Bahá'í Studies has, through its Committee for Collaborative Initiatives, been working with small groups of people who have been exploring how they can contribute to discourses within their fields more coherently, in a way that corresponds with the Bahá'í Teachings.

Contributing to the discourses of society is a dimension of a “single, unified, outward-looking endeavour”¹ that includes expansion and consol-

idation and social action. Regarding Bahá'í contributions to discourses, the House of Justice wrote, “At a time when the urgency of attaining higher levels of unity, founded on the incontestable truth of humanity’s oneness, is becoming apparent to larger and larger numbers, society stands in need of clear voices that can articulate the spiritual principles that underlie such an aspiration.”²

To address salient questions within their respective fields, groups often begin with the simple step of reading and discussing selected texts and

analyzing them in light of a Bahá'í conceptual framework.³ One such working group focuses on technology and society and comprises both professionals and those with a particular interest in this field. This group offers online seminars, reading groups, and collaborative spaces at the grassroots to explore how individuals, communities, and institutions can become actively engaged in decision-making around technology.

In its 28 November 2023 message, the House of Justice referenced a list of “destructive forces and events,”

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

² From the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 9 May 2020.

³ <https://www.bahaistudies.ca/collaborative-initiatives>



The Technology and Society working group prepared materials for the seminar, which framed a consultation with a larger group. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

including “unbridled technology.” In this light, the technology and society group considered how we can approach the design, application and use of technology more thoughtfully, guided by Bahá'í principles. Clearly, even as human beings create and shape technology, it also shapes us, gives rise to new activities, and presents us with new decisions. In the Bahá'í Faith, we understand ourselves as primarily spiritual beings, created noble and with agency. How can we restructure our relationship with technology so that it is coherent with the rest of our lives as we strive to serve humanity?

The technology and society working group held a two-day seminar before last year's Association for Bahá'í Studies conference in Atlanta, Georgia, to explore some of these questions. During the seminar the working group consulted on five concepts that reflect its experience in beginning to grapple with the relationship between technology and society. These concepts include: the definition of technology; theories of technological progress; that technology is not neutral, but has embedded values; the relationship between technology and culture; and making sound technological choices. This article is an attempt to share insights and summarize thoughts that emerged from the seminar.

The first theme the working group discussed is the concept of technology itself and the various ways it is conceived in the discourse. Technology can be viewed as consisting of tangible artifacts or intangible processes and systems. A narrow con-

ception sees technology as tangible artifacts, or products of human interaction with the natural world that are meant to address perceived needs and problems, as well as improve some aspects of material well-being (e.g., automobiles). Broader conceptions define technology as comprised of intangible processes, systems, and methods that enable these advancements (e.g., machine learning algorithms).

The working group then explored fundamental questions regarding the nature of the relationship between technological progress and society in the North American context. Clearly, technology is inherently transformative and reshapes how we interact with each other and our surroundings. Does society adapt to new technologies or are the technologies themselves reflections of what society is thinking about?

Participants studied two related theories, both of which imply a lack of agency in the individual and society: *technological determinism* and *autonomous technology*. The first view is summarized in the seminar materials: “Technology drives the course of history. Devices and machines rather than people are the primary engines of change. Technological developments precipitate social developments, not the other way around.” The second view further asserts, “Technology progresses according to its own internal logics and values, shaping society and advancing itself in ways which now lie beyond human control.”⁴

4 David M. Kaplan, ed., *Readings in the Philosophy of Technology*, 2nd ed (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), (paraphrased)

While these two views hold some merit in describing the present social reality, it is challenging to reconcile these paradigms with a Bahá'í viewpoint, which sees every individual and community as a protagonist with the potential to be an active agent of his or her own development. The view that technology is an autonomous force beyond the control of the individual or a socially determined construct that is inescapable deprives the individual and the community of a sense of agency.

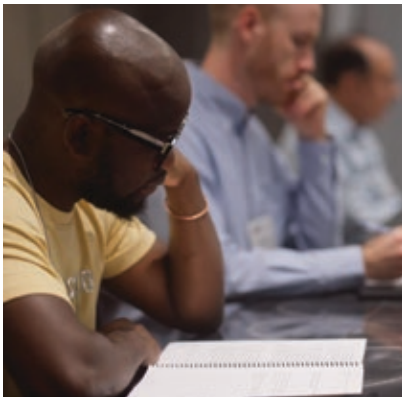
“Technological somnambulism,” a concept used by political theorist Langdon Winner, whose book was the subject of study in an online reading group⁵, seems to describe the existing social reality more accurately. In his conception, the seeming lack of human control over technology is not inherent. The relationship between technology and society is characterized by one in which human beings “Willingly sleepwalk through the process of reconstituting the conditions of human existence”⁶—a passivity that can, however, be overcome.

Farzam Arbab, in his chapter “Promoting a Discourse on Science, Religion, and Development,”⁷ describes the “subtle paralysis of thought”

5 Winner, Langdon. *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology*. University of Chicago Press; 2 edition (2020).

6 Winner, L. (1983). “Technologies as forms of life”. In R. S. Cohen & M. W. Wartofsky (Eds.), *Epistemology, methodology, and the social sciences* (pp. 243-263). D. Reidel Publishing Company.

7 Farzam Arbab was a physicist and founder of the Bahá'í-inspired NGO FUNDEAC. His paper can be found here: <https://www.ruhi.org/en/useful-links/>



Participants at the seminar, which took place in Atlanta, Georgia, in August 2024.

in both those who “celebrate” and those who “lament” the notion that technology is an autonomous force. He suggests that not only individuals, but populations must build the capacity to make sound technological choices.

The third concept is that technologies are not neutral means to freely chosen ends but reflect and embody human values. Some would posit that there is no good or bad technology—it all depends on how it is used by individuals. However, while the working group acknowledged that technologies are often used for unintended purposes and, clearly, can be misused, it set out to articulate a more nuanced approach to technology and values.

Every technology promotes certain ways of being and doing in the world. Since “people are not neutral,” the technologies we create “cannot help but reflect human ends, values, and ideas.”⁸ Values associated with

a technology’s design, application, and use—while not always easy to identify—are critical to understanding the contemporary discourse and fundamental to a Bahá’í perspective on technology.

For example, consumer technologies such as smartphones tend to reinforce a materialistic model of human nature with a focus on the individual. A motivation for high profits pervades the environments in which technologies are developed with materialistic, and sometimes contradictory, values embedded. Consumer technologies seem to simultaneously promise efficiency while encouraging us, through design elements, to spend more and more of our time using them. They promise connection yet also create an individualized digital reality for each person.

In this connection, the group examined a subtle yet systematic behavioural influence, termed ‘nudging.’ Examining nudging as a design tactic helped them recognize how user choices can be manipulated

while promoting a passive acceptance of values embedded in technological design. Studying these phenomena gave participants a vocabulary to express a conception of technology that admits both its benefits and the disintegrative forces it can unleash. The modern proliferation on some social media platforms of 30-second clips (reels) based on an algorithmic analysis of an individual’s proclivities is but one example of this powerful tactic meant to distract and motivate the user to remain online. During the seminar, participants were encouraged to reflect on the implicit values of specific technologies to move beyond the technology-as-neutral-tool paradigm.

The fourth area addressed in the seminar was the relationship between technology and culture. The group looked at how the expansion of technology moves from one sphere of life to another, driven by technological enthusiasm. As explained by Winner, “Technology goes where it has never been. Technological development proceeds

⁸ David M. Kaplan, ed., *Readings in the Philosophy of Technology*, 2nd ed (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), introduction.

The fifth concept the group studied is the vital need for individuals, communities, and institutions to develop the capacity to make sound technological choices.

steadily from what it has already transformed and used up toward that which is still untouched.”⁹ In the North American context, the group studied the emergence of technology as a “disruptive” force, transforming a growing number of industries and challenging the sustainability of the planet.

Moreover, commodification is inherent in modern technological advancement. This influence limits the kind of technology that is developed, disproportionately benefitting materially prosperous populations. A system which imposes technological transfer on populations perceived as ‘less developed’ is one result of this commodification. This section of the materials allowed participants to reflect on this phenomenon through the lens of their own social reality. Often, they observed, minor technological advancements are introduced to encourage consumption and major advancements in particular technologies are segmented to generate gradual iterations of products, thereby increasing profits.

The working group’s discussion of technology and culture concluded with a brief study of technocracy: societies, particularly in North America, are now dominated by technical experts who control and dictate the application and generation of knowledge. Knowledge is vital for individuals to remain effective agents of collective life and involves far more than the utilization of techniques. An overreliance on technical solutions to problems can

prevent humanity from engaging in a collective process of learning. Those with technical means are also often better equipped to promote and amplify their worldviews, influencing culture.

The fifth concept the group studied is the vital need for individuals, communities, and institutions to develop the capacity to make sound technological choices. Winner claimed that the source of our passivity regarding technology is a tendency toward forgetfulness—that the workings of technology become invisible in our daily lives, that we care more about if they work than how they work. Regarding technology, Winner writes, “One does not want to bother with its structure or the principles of its internal workings. One simply wants the technical thing to be present in its utility.”¹⁰ Therefore, the group concluded, an investigation into the embedded values of technology was not so much to condemn it but rather to empower ourselves and our communities to make decisions that align with our values.

This conversation drew on guidance highlighting insights from Bahá’í efforts in social action and participation in the prevalent discourses of society as a grounding for thinking about the capacity for technological choice. In addition, *Ruhi Book 13: Engaging in Social Action* and *Ruhi Book 14: Participating in Public Discourse* outline a conceptual framework in these areas of endeavour.

Following this fruitful seminar, the working group looks forward to ex-

ploring possibilities for collaboration at the local level. At the forefront of its efforts is a system of accompaniment among professionals in the field to explore possible lines of action. Is it possible to develop technologies that better reflect the values of a community? The technology discourse is vast; it touches every sphere of human endeavor. Developing meaningful contributions to the discourse demands systematic and focused effort along multiple lines of action as increasing numbers of friends participate.

– The Association for Bahá’í Studies’ Technology and Society working group

For more on this subject, read the article “Technology, Values, and the Shaping of Social Reality” on the Bahá’í World website: www.bahaiworld.bahai.org or listen to the podcast “Insights from the Field: Technology, values, and society” on the Bahá’í World News Service: www.news.bahai.org.

⁹ Winner, Langdon. *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology*. University of Chicago Press; 2 edition (2020). (p. 174). University of Chicago Press.

¹⁰ Winner, Langdon. *Autonomous Technology: Technics-out-of-Control as a Theme in Political Thought* (1978, pp. 314–315)



Three generations of pioneer women, all now living in Montreal, Que. From left to right: Shanaz Ardekani, Nosrat Ardekani, Nika Ardekani-Djoneidi.

Pioneering, from one generation to the next

Rebecca Vachon sat down with Mrs. Nosrat Ardekani, a 93-year-old Knight of Bahá'u'lláh who described how a pilgrimage during the time of the Guardian set in motion generations of pioneers in her family.

Mrs. Nosrat Ardekani lives in a small apartment attached to the Montreal Shrine on Pine Avenue West, as her daughter and son-in-law currently serve as its custodians. Sitting down with them to dinner, the phone rings a few times. They put aside their cutlery to answer calls from family members around the world and say a prayer together. Mrs. Ardekani's deep reliance on prayer is rooted in decades of pioneer service. It all started with a conversation she had with the Guardian when she was about 20 years old and on pilgrimage—a meeting that changed the course of her life. Now aged 93, Nosrat has lost none of her fervour and lovingly recounts stories of her

family, four generations of whom have arisen to pioneer.

A mother embraces the Faith

Nosrat's mother, Shayesteh Rafii, was born in Iran in 1907 to a Muslim family and married Ali Akbar Rafii, who became a devoted Bahá'í after their marriage. Until she was 30, Shayesteh refused to enquire about her husband's faith. She followed the advice of her spiritual guide, a Shaykh who advised her to preserve their marriage for the sake of their children, but that she should not learn about her husband's religion, and even the cutlery he used should be purified. Their home life was strained and sadly, due to illness, the couple lost their 14-year-old

daughter. While her husband was on pilgrimage to the House of the Báb in Shiraz, Shayesteh had a mystical dream. She saw her beloved deceased daughter, who told her that she was now very happy where she was, thanks to the prayers of her father. This dream prompted her to read the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, and shortly afterwards, she embraced the Bahá'í Faith. The couple brought up their children as Bahá'ís and lived in a state of harmony. Along with their daughter Nosrat, and their youngest son Abbas, Shayesteh and Ali Akbar Rafii arose as pioneers, winning the accolade of Knight of Bahá'u'lláh in the later years of their lives. Their daughter Batul also arose as a pioneer and served in several

pioneering posts until the end of her earthly life.

A life-altering pilgrimage

Nosrat Ardekani was born in 1931 in Rafsenjan, Iran. She was a spiritual and intelligent child, becoming one of the first girls to be accepted in public school in Rafsenjan. Her family and her future husband's family had joint business interests in the production and marketing of pistachios, and it was through these relations that the two crossed paths. Nosrat and Husayn were married in 1947, when she was about 16 years old. The couple's first child was a daughter.

Nosrat becomes animated as she recounts the pivotal moment in her life, a 1952 pilgrimage with her extended family after the end of World War II and the joyous reinstatement of pilgrimages. The 11 family members traveled in three successive groups due to restrictions on the number of pilgrims allowed at one time, and so she went before her husband, who was occupied at the time with business. "It was during my pilgrimage to the Holy Land with some members of my family," she describes with enthusiasm, "when the beloved Guardian came to visit us." This pilgrimage was at the dawn of the Ten Year Crusade, which would launch worldwide the following year.

She continues: "The beloved Guardian said: 'Now is the time for everyone to rise up and serve the Faith. Now is the time to open up to the whole world. This is the Ten Year Plan. Everyone must go as a pioneer.' He would say, 'I invite you to be a pioneer.' And he added that if someone couldn't go, they should send someone in their place through deputization. And if they couldn't afford to deputize, they should pray for the success of the Plan. The Guardian emphasized the importance of every Bahá'í's involvement in this initiative."¹

This encounter had a profound effect on Nosrat, who left the Holy

¹ These are recollections of the statements of Shoghi Effendi and not his exact words.



Husayn and Nosrat Ardekani, newly wed.

Land with no desire other than to serve as a pioneer. Back in Tehran, she discussed this possibility with her husband, but "he didn't agree" with the idea of leaving everything behind. Husayn was a successful businessman and a member of the National Pioneering Committee in Iran, and the couple had a large home and hosted many Bahá'í activities. Nosrat decided to wait for her husband's pilgrimage to the Holy Land a few months afterward to bring up the subject again. As she later stated, the Guardian would transform her husband—a busy and influential entrepreneur—into a distinguished servant of God.

When her husband left for Haifa, Nosrat prayed that his heart would be enlightened by his meeting with the Guardian. Following his pilgrimage, Husayn travelled to Europe on business before returning home, which put other affairs on his mind. Nosrat was still unable to persuade him to pioneer. Her husband had too much work. Following their consultations, however, they decided to deputize a Bahá'í friend to pioneer in their stead. Muhammad Ali Jalili, a former cleric who had embraced the Faith, left for Morocco soon after. However, Nosrat felt restless. She continued to advocate that her family embark on their own pioneering journey, emphasizing the significance of their personal involvement.

Soon, Bahá'í friends came to visit to hear about their pilgrimage. While re-reading his notes, Husayn came across a passage in which the Guardian had assured him of his future success as a pioneer. Nosrat's heart leaped. One of the guests interrupt-

ed him and asked, "But who exactly was the Guardian addressing when he said that?"

"Of course, to me," replied Husayn.

"And you're still here taking care of your business?" replied their guest.

Nosrat observed that her husband was suddenly overwhelmed by powerful feelings, and she realized that her prayers had been answered: Husayn at last understood the Guardian's summons.

Arising as pioneers to Morocco

Overjoyed, they both responded to the pioneering call, leaving everything behind to travel with their four-year-old daughter to Tangiers, Morocco. Due to the pressures of work and the strain of preparations, Husayn became ill, prompting the family to make a stopover in Geneva, Switzerland, for medical attention. The physician prescribed total rest for a period of two years, but they chose to carry on with their trip, ultimately reaching Tangiers in 1953. They acquired a temporary visa, valid for two months, and at first resided in an expensive hotel where Husayn could recover. A few days later, they were joined by Nosrat's mother and father, Shayesteh and Ali Akbar Rafii, who had also come as pioneers after committing themselves at a worldwide conference in Stockholm, Sweden, and proceeded to Morocco without even going back to Iran first. Together with her parents, her brother 'Abbás Rafii and the friend who they had previously deputized, Muhammad Ali Jalili, they were designated as Knights of Bahá'u'lláh.²

Together with Nosrat's parents, the couple moved into a two-bedroom apartment. They furnished it with their belongings from Tehran, which they had shipped. However, they were unjustly charged a large sum by the port authorities, who mistook their Persian carpets as

² Other Knights of Bahá'u'lláh to Morocco include: Manúchíhr Hizári, Hormoz Zende, Elsie Austin, Evelyn Walters, Richard Walters, Mary Suhm and Richard Suhm.



Bahá'í community of Tangier, Morocco in 1954: Back row, from left to right: Abbas Rafii, Muhammad 'Ali Jalali, Hormoz Zende, Manouchehr Hezari, Hussein Rouhani Ardekani. Front row, from left to right: Miss Elsie Austin, Mrs. Shayesteh Rafii, Ali Akbar Rafii Rafsanjani, Mrs. Nosrat Ardekani.

items imported for sale rather than personal use and couldn't be convinced otherwise. Life was not easy at first, and they had difficulties with the food. They decided to learn French, and immediately began to teach the Cause. Their French teacher became the first to declare her faith in Bahá'u'lláh. Eventually, with her husband and seven other Bahá'ís, Nosrat was part of establishing the first Local Spiritual Assembly in Morocco, in Casablanca.

Learning languages was to become an ongoing dimension of this family's service as pioneers. In addition to French, the Guardian encouraged them to learn Arabic and teach the Berber population. Nosrat studied the Qur'án and would recite verses from it to enlighten Muslims about the station of God's Messenger. "Many, many, Berbers accepted the Bahá'í Faith. Many people accepted the Faith," she remembers. For Nosrat, the power of prayer is unmistakable. "I would recite the Tablet of Ahmad, and my prayers would be answered," she declares.

Tenerife, Canary Islands

After hearing of a need for pioneers on the island of Tenerife, in the Canary Islands, the couple left

Morocco for that post in 1955. At this time Nosrat had just given birth to their second child—a daughter named Chahine—and was exhausted and in pain from childbirth. At first, they lived on the third floor of a building, which running water did not usually reach. Everyday she tearfully recited the Tablet of Ahmad, and soon received numerous confirmations.

The family had hired a Spanish housekeeper who one day came to Nosrat in tears, confiding in her that after 10 years of promises, her fiancé no longer wished to marry her. Nosrat prayed fervently every day, and on the fourth day her housekeeper reported that her fiancé had changed his mind, and soon after they married and went to live elsewhere. The neighbours were intrigued by the power of Nosrat's prayer, which seemed to bestow blessings on anyone who asked her to pray for them, including mothers having trouble with their children. They soon came with various problems and requests for prayers and wished to learn about Bahá'í prayers and the Bahá'í Faith. The family eventually moved to a comfortable villa, from which they continued to teach.

The pioneers' active teaching attracted the attention of the clergy, who fiercely opposed their activities. The Spanish authorities refused to renew visas for the Ardekanis, forcing the family to leave with only seven days' notice. They decided to return to Morocco, rejoining Nosrat's parents who were now in the city of Larache. The arrival of the Ardekani family meant that the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Larache could be formed.

Around this time, Shoghi Effendi granted the family the rare opportunity of a second pilgrimage. They were supposed to arrive in Haifa at the end of November 1957, in time for the commemoration of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. However, less than a month before they were meant to be with him, the Guardian suddenly passed away, devastating the Bahá'í world. In their deep sorrow, the Ardekanis decided to render a service in memory of the Guardian and open up Meknes, in the French zone of Morocco, to the Faith.

In Meknes, the Ardekanis taught the Faith to a Sufi Sheikh who became a Bahá'í and brought many into the Faith himself. Soon, the first Local Assembly was formed. The community grew rapidly, becoming the largest Bahá'í community in Morocco, receiving visits from Hands of the Cause of God Mr. Enoch Olinga and Mr. Ṭarázu'lláh Samandari. The Bahá'ís created a company through which they managed the purchase of properties, including a Bahá'í Centre. Over time, due to the growing community, a few walls had to be broken down inside this centre so that everyone could be accommodated.

Nosrat's parents had also come to live in Meknes. Her father was ill and bedridden, and she tended to him every day until his final breath. He was buried in a Bahá'í cemetery the community had recently acquired. Overwhelmed by grief, Nosrat considered travelling to Las Palmas, Spain, to rest. She then had a dream in which her father told her to

recite a Persian prayer. In this prayer were the words “Now is the time to serve and teach.” When she woke up, Nosrat knew she had to stay and keep teaching in Morocco. In 1958, a year after the passing of the Guardian, the Ardekani undertook their pilgrimage at the time that 25 Hands of the Cause were gathered in a conclave.

Dakar, Senegal

In 1958, Nosrat’s husband, Mr. Husayn Rouhani Ardekani, was elected a member of the Regional Spiritual Assembly for North and West Africa. As part of his service, he visited Senegal, The Gambia and Liberia. It was during this period that the urgent need for pioneers in Senegal became apparent. After consulting as a family, the Ardekani’s decided to pioneer there on a short-term resident permit.

Shahnaz, Nosrat’s third daughter, was born before they left for Senegal in 1962. Unfortunately, six months after their arrival in Dakar, their residence permit was not renewed, and the family received an order to leave the country. Returning to Senegal would not prove to be an easy feat. Upon their return to Morocco, Nosrat and Husayn made several attempts to secure a residence permit in Senegal. However, all their attempts were unsuccessful, and Husayn was even blacklisted from applying for a visa at several Senegalese embassies throughout Africa. Nosrat recounts that Shoghi Effendi used to say that when pioneers were denied entry to a country due to their activities, they had to persist and demonstrate that Bahá’ís are a peaceful people who love everyone. With the sustaining encouragement of the Universal House of Justice, after four years of perseverance, the family was finally granted a temporary visa to go to Senegal, settling in Dakar in 1966. After the second International Bahá’i Convention, Mr. Husayn Rouhani Ardekani was appointed to the Board of Continental Counsellors for Northwestern Africa, an institution he served for 22 years.

In 1971, Nosrat and her family welcomed Rúhíyyih Khánúm, and then accompanied her to The Gambia. Nosrat recalls: “Rúhíyyih Khánúm loved teaching. We assembled a team of teachers and went to teach outside the capital.” Along with 10 other volunteers, Nosrat boarded a minivan that set off along the main road in The Gambia. At every village they passed, Rúhíyyih Khánúm designated two passengers to disembark, and eventually there was only Nosrat, Rúhíyyih Khánúm, and the driver. Arriving at the last village, they met the village chief and attracted a gathering of locals, curious to listen to them. Rúhíyyih Khánúm turned to Nosrat and said, “It’s your turn to speak.” Nosrat was caught off guard, stammering: “I don’t know what to say.” Rúhíyyih Khánúm replied, “Turn your heart to Bahá’u’lláh. Ask for His help. And say what your heart tells you.” Nosrat spoke, and that day 12 new believers professed their faith in Bahá’u’lláh. Nosrat was already a great teacher of the Faith, but this experience gave her even more courage and confidence. Thereafter, wherever she went, Nosrat taught.

In 1972, Nosrat gave birth to her last child, Chirine, who sadly suffered from a rare type of blood cancer at a young age. Leaving her third child in the care of her mother, Nosrat and her husband Husayn travelled to France to obtain treatment for Chirine. It was after three years of suffering that Chirine’s soul took flight, and she was buried in Montpellier in October 1975. Nosrat returned to Senegal with her husband, where she resumed her activities, always keeping her four beloved daughters in her prayers.

Following the Islamic revolution in Iran, her husband Husayn’s passport was confiscated by the Iranian consulate in Senegal and, because he was a Bahá’í, he was sentenced to death in absentia. All their assets and possessions on Iranian soil were confiscated, and they were unable to visit Iran from that point on. But Nosrat and her husband again placed all their affairs

in God’s hands and continued their pioneering efforts in Senegal and neighbouring countries. Tragedy struck Nosrat’s family again when their eldest daughter, Shahla, was diagnosed with lung cancer. Shahla underwent surgery, the cancer was removed and the treatment worked. But, five years later, it recurred, and she passed away, leaving her husband and two daughters behind, in 1995.

The path of service that Nosrat and her husband had chosen was full of crises and victories. They obtained residency in Senegal, and serenity gradually settled into their home. In the end, they were even granted Senegalese nationality. Nosrat served on the National Spiritual Assembly of Senegal, which was formed in 1975. She and her husband continued to work for the Bahá’í communities in West Africa until the death of Husayn, who is laid to rest in Senegal, in 2007. Today, although her advanced age prevents her from travelling, Nosrat spends much of her time in prayer, most often praying for those who dedicate themselves to pioneering.

Nosrat and Husayn’s daughters Shahla, Chahine and Shahnaz, together with their husbands and children, went on to follow their parent’s footsteps as pioneers in various countries in Africa and on the homefront in Canada. Shahla’s eldest daughter, May, and her husband Nabil, are pioneers in Val-d’Or, Québec. Shahnaz’ daughter, Nika Ardekani-Djoneidi, served as a pioneer with her husband, Zoutenn and their new-born daughter, in Uashat, Québec.

In addition to the interview conducted with Nosrat Ardekani, this article used as a source the text “Husayn Rouhani Ardekani: Knight of Bahá’u’lláh” by Thierno Ousmane Ndiaye, which was written and printed in the Gambia in collaboration with the family.



The text focuses on the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í Faith, which are like rays of light that illuminate reality. Photo: Yasha Shodjaee-Zrudlo

New junior youth text explores Bahá'í principles

A junior youth animator shares her experience studying the text *Rays of Light* with a group during a recent camp in Montreal, Que.

Rays of Light, released in September 2023¹, is the latest of 14 texts developed for the junior youth spiritual empowerment program. It explores the principles of the Bahá'í Faith and helps advance understanding around the implications of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation for the transformation of society.

There are two categories of content for the junior youth spiritual empowerment program: Bahá'í-inspired texts and those with a distinctly Bahá'í component. While Bahá'í-inspired texts “draw extensively on the power of the Word of God, both by quoting directly from the writings and by weaving the teachings of the Faith into the

presentation of intellectual, moral, and spiritual themes,”² they “are not religious in nature, nor do they treat subjects that are specifically Bahá'í.”³

Rays of Light falls into the other category, which also includes the texts *Spirit of Faith* and *Power of the Holy Spirit*—which junior youth would typically study before *Rays of Light*—all of which are “explicit in their treatment of fundamental Bahá'í beliefs and discuss the manner in which these beliefs are to be translated into action in the context of community life.”⁴ It is important to note that both categories of content are for all

junior youth: Bahá'í junior youth should study Bahá'í-inspired texts, and junior youth from the wider community enjoy the study of distinctly Bahá'í materials.

The text *Rays of Light* looks to the Words and example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who elucidated principles established by Bahá'u'lláh such as the independent investigation of truth, the harmony of science and religion, the elimination of all forms of prejudice, the equality of men and women, the establishment of justice, the oneness of humankind, and universal education.

Sophie Turbide, who animated the text in French during a six-day camp this past summer, explains, “*Rays of Light* focuses on the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í Faith and the concept that the Sun of Truth has risen, and it illuminates the whole

1 The text was released in a pre-publication format, which means that, based on experience in the field, modifications may be made before it is published.

2 Ruhi Book 5: *Releasing the powers of junior youth*, Unit 3, p. 88.

3 <https://www.ruhi.org/en/spiritual-education-for-all-ages/>

4 Ruhi Book 5: *Releasing the powers of junior youth*, Unit 3, p. 89.

world through these principles.”

The text is considered one of the most advanced of the program. Totalling around 100 pages, it builds on concepts from the preceding materials—such as progressive revelation and the fact that we have a higher and lower nature—as well as capacities such as reading comprehension. The story, set in a large urban centre, features the discussions of a junior youth group and their animator. Ms. Turbide comments, “The junior youth had the same kinds of reflections as the characters in the book. So, it was a way to understand the youth and their preoccupations about the world.”

The lesson around eliminating prejudice of all kinds particularly resonated with the junior youth and helped them to describe their own reality. Coming from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, many of the junior youth and their friends face instances of prejudice in their day-to-day lives. “These principles touch on things that they are talking about anyway,” Ms. Turbide shares. Other topics they found particularly interesting included the text’s exploration of agnosticism as well as contemporary skepticism of science.

“The junior youth are conscious of the state of the world, and they see its impact...studying the Writings and exploring how these concepts



The camp was infused with a spirit of joy, with games and arts activities incorporated in addition to the study. Photo: Yasha Shodjaee-Zrudlo

“The junior youth are conscious of the state of the world, and they see its impact...They feel they have things to share with their friends.”

apply to their lives helps them to have profound conversations. They feel they have things to share with their friends,” she continues.

For example, the text encourages the junior youth to turn their focus from physical and material characteristics—such as gender, economic status and race—to the purity of hearts. According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, this is what distinguishes human be-

ings from one another in the sight of God.

Another section explores the imperative to eliminate the extremes of wealth and poverty. The junior youth are invited to consider in some detail ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s proposal to establish in every village a general storehouse to meet the needs of the poor. Contributions to this storehouse would depend on one’s income and expenses. To better understand this idea, the junior youth are invited to calculate what different farmers would owe to the storehouse, if anything, based on their net profits.

The text also demonstrates how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the perfect example of Bahá’í principles in action. In this way, it builds on the Bahá’í children’s class materials, which present stories from the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to illustrate spiritual qualities. “It shows the coherence in the educational process,” Ms. Turbide explains, “as, like the children’s class materials, *Rays of Light* helps junior youth develop a relationship with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and draw from His life’s example.”

Regarding the spirit of the camp, Ms. Turbide comments, “What really struck me was that although the camp was right after the school year and you could feel that the junior youth were tired by the end of the day, they all expressed how interesting and engaging the text was. They really felt nourished by the content and the conversations they had throughout the day.”



A group of junior youth studied the text *Rays of Light* in Montreal, Que. this past summer.



Gloria Brown (left) with fellow representative Nabil Sami during their time attending the "Actions Days" event at the Headquarters of the United Nations.

Bridging local and global efforts for social transformation

Gloria Brown, a youth from Hamilton, Ont., shares her experience at the United Nations Summit of the Future during her time as an intern with the Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office in New York.

Over the past year, I had the opportunity to assist the Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office (BIC) remotely, conducting research on projects related to freedom of religious belief as well as the role of youth in promoting social transformation, from the grassroots through to the international level.

These projects connect to broader themes that the Bahá'í International Community is addressing through its work with the United Nations. At the international level, the BIC collaborates with others, offering insights from the Bahá'í teachings and the experience of the worldwide Bahá'í community to address global challenges.

At the end of September, the United Nations hosted the Summit of the Future at its headquarters in New York. Here, a cross-section of global actors met to create international consensus around how to build a better future. In the days leading up to the Summit itself, two "Action Days" brought together representatives from civil society, youth, governments, and international organizations to discuss pressing global challenges such as climate change, inequality, and peace. As an extension of my research, I had the opportunity to participate in these Action Days. Fourteen of the events during these days were organized or co-sponsored by the BIC.

The Action Days were more than just a meeting of minds; they represented a crucial moment in advancing the dialogue on how humanity can work collectively toward a sustainable, equitable future. The discussions centered around the urgent need for reforms in global governance that can ensure institutions are responsive, inclusive, and able to address the growing complexities of our world. The sessions were filled with a palpable sense of urgency, yet also with hope, as they emphasized the critical role that collaboration, consultation, and a shared vision for humanity's future can play in overcoming the challenges it faces.

The Bahá'í International Community played a pivotal role in shaping



Gloria Brown (second from left) with other representatives who attended the "Action Days" event.

these conversations. Through its contributions, the BIC emphasized the importance of moral and spiritual principles in decision-making processes and the need to cultivate a spirit of optimism in the face of global difficulties. One of the stand-out events during the Action Days was a gathering hosted by the BIC called "Room for Optimism: A Precondition for Success in Challenging Times." This session brought together BIC representatives, dignitaries, youth delegates, and civil society leaders to explore how fostering resilience, hope, and unity can help humanity navigate the myriad crises it faces. The event not only underscored the necessity of maintaining a positive outlook but also highlighted the importance of consultation and collective action as key tools in addressing global challenges.

The contributions of the Bahá'í International Community reflected a unique capacity to integrate spiritual

and moral dimensions into global discourse, offering perspectives that emphasize the oneness of humanity and the need for justice and equity in all arenas of decision-making. This holistic approach is increasingly recognized as essential to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Attending these sessions was a deeply inspiring experience. It highlighted the interconnectedness of local and global efforts, and reminded me that even grassroots initiatives, like those I am involved with in my neighbourhood in Hamilton, Ont., are part of a larger global movement for social transformation. The lessons learned at the Summit have shaped my approach to working with newcomer families and youth in my neighbourhood. Those lessons reinforce the importance of unity, resilience, and the role that local action plays in contributing to the global advancement of communities.

The Action Days reaffirmed for me that local initiatives—no matter their scale—are integral to global progress. Whether supporting the integration of newcomers through the junior youth spiritual empowerment program or contributing to international discussions on the Sustainable Development Goals, we are all participants in a global movement aimed at building a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world. My experience has been a source of motivation, reminding me that every step taken at the grassroots level contributes to a global effort of immense consequence.

– Gloria Brown

Read more about the Bahá'í International Community's participation at the Summit of the Future here: <https://news.bahai.org/story/1752/>

Coming soon

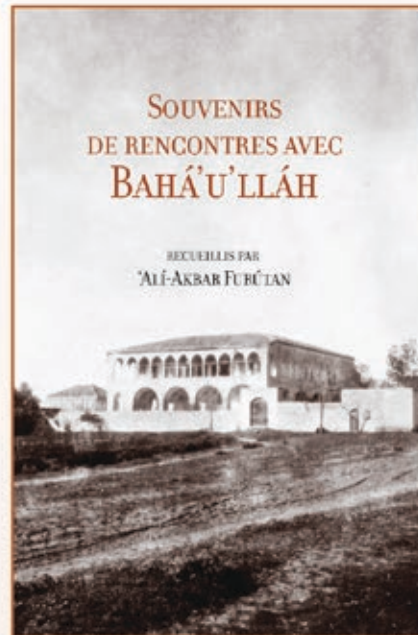
Souvenirs de rencontres avec Bahá'u'lláh

The first complete French translation of *Stories of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Collected by 'Alí-Akbar Furútan, the 144 anecdotes contained in this publication paint a picture of Bahá'u'lláh's life in Iran as well as in Baghdad, Constantinople, Adrianople, Akká and Bahjí, revealing His majesty and authority as well as His compassion, humility and sense of humour.

Author : 'Alí-Akbar Furútan

Type of publication : Soft cover | 118 pages



Audio recordings

A number of audio recordings of the Bahá'í Holy Writings are available online in French, please refer to the following addresses:

<http://www.bahai-biblio.org/a-lecture.htm>

https://bahai-library.com/marchal_enregistrements_francais



Service de distribution bahá'í - Canada
Un organe de l'Assemblée spirituelle nationale des bahá'ís du Canada

distribution.bahai.ca
SDBC
SDBC@bahai.ca
418 692-2462
75, rue d'Autueil
Québec QC
G1R 4C3

NATIONAL CONTACT INFORMATION

National Spiritual Assembly

Secretariat: secretariat@bahai.ca

Phone: 905-889-8168 Fax: 905-889-8184

Treasury: treasury@bahai.ca

Bahá'í Canada Committee: bahaicanada@bahai.ca

National and Unit Conventions: conventions@bahai.ca

Office of Public Affairs: publicaffairs@bahai.ca

Records Department: records@bahai.ca

Membership Portal: Use the online membership portal to update your personal information in the national database, participate in Bahá'í elections and contribute to the Funds of the Faith. Log in or register by visiting the website <https://member.bahai.ca/member>. To register, you will need your Bahá'í ID card information.

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 Fund" 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:

The Local Fund (only through a Local Spiritual Assembly or online)

The National Fund

The Deputization Fund

The Continental Fund

The Community Properties Fund

The International Bahá'í

Development Fund

Humanitarian Relief Fund

The North American House of
Worship Fund

The International Collaboration Fund

The International Fund

The World Centre Endowment Fund

The Canadian Temple Fund

REGIONAL CONTACT INFORMATION

INSTITUTE BOARDS

British Columbia and the Yukon

203-3823 Henning Dr.
Burnaby, BC, V5C 6P3
institute@bc.bahai.ca
(604) 619-5859

Alberta

ibsecretary@ab.bahai.ca

Saskatchewan and Manitoba

rib@skmb.bahai.ca

Ontario

instituteboard@ontariobahai.org

Quebec

secretariat@institut.bahaiqc.org

Atlantic Provinces

institute.board@atlantic.bahai.ca

BAHÁ'Í COUNCILS

British Columbia

PO Box 2871 Vancouver Main
Vancouver, BC, V6B 3X4
council@bc.bahai.ca
(250) 507-2765

Alberta

PO Box 33018 RPO
Panorama Hills
Calgary, AB, T3K 0A1
bcasecretary@ab.bahai.ca

Saskatchewan and Manitoba

521 McMillan Ave.
Winnipeg, MB, R3L 0N4
rbc@skmb.bahai.ca

Ontario

7200 Leslie St.
Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8
council@ontariobahai.org
(647) 479-8650

Quebec

84 Ch Juniper
Chelsea, QC, J9B 1T3
secretariat@conseil.bahaiqc.org
(819) 743-7778

Atlantic Provinces

313 Arcona St. Summerside, PE,
C1N 2X1
regional.council@atlantic.bahai.ca
(902) 439-7263

GENERAL INFORMATION

Purchase Bahá'í books online in English and French: <https://distribution.bahai.ca/>
Email: bds@bahai.ca
Phone: 905-889-8168

For inquires regarding Bahá'í books in French, contact

75 d'auteuil Street, Québec, QC, G1R 4C3
Email: sdbc@bahai.ca
Phone: 418-692-2402

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

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

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

Pilgrimage requests (nine-day pilgrimage or three-day visit) are to be made directly to the Bahá'í World Centre through the Bahá'í Pilgrimage Website <https://pilgrimage.bwc.org> or by post or email: Office of Pilgrimage, PO Box 155, 3100101, Haifa, Israel; Email: pilgrimage@bwc.org

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

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

The Right of God ~ Ḥuqúqu'lláh

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

ḤUQÚQU'LLÁH PAYMENT INFORMATION

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

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

Payments should not be made through a Local Spiritual Assembly.

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

Members of the Board of Trustees:

اعضای هیات امنای حقوق الله در کانادا

Mrs. Golru Azizi-Ashraf

Mr. John Bruce MacLeod, Treasurer

Mrs. Charlotte Mosleh, Secretary

(613) 290-1004

bot.huquq.canada@gmail.com

Dr. Afsaneh Oliver

Dr. Faran Vafaie, Chair

اطلاعیه مهم در خصوص نحوه پرداخت "حقوق الله"

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

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

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