BAHÁ'Í STUDIES REVIEW
Volume 21, 2015

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Editors' Introduction

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This will be the last edition of *Bahá'í Studies Review,* at least in its present form. The sterling work of writers, researchers, editors and reviewers, over its many years of publication, is gratefully acknowledged. Their work has forged a well-deserved reputation for BSR in the field of Bahá'í studies.

It may be opportune at this juncture to reflect – if only briefly – on the future course of Bahá'í studies, to consider how we might build on the efforts of the past decades. Indeed, a vibrant discussion has already begun on both revitalizing and encouraging scholarship as it relates to the Bahá'í Faith. Introducing the latest edition of *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, John S. Hatcher explores the implications of a conceptual framework for Bahá'í scholarship and poses a number of challenging questions,

> How does Bahá'í scholarly activity serve the advancement of spiritual and material civilization? What elements of a conceptual framework does it share with other aspects of Bahá'í endeavour, such as expansion and consolidation, social action, or involvement in the discourses of society, and what elements are distinct for its specific purposes? How does the cultivation of the intellectual life of the community serve all of these actions?
>
> (28-3, 2018, 4)

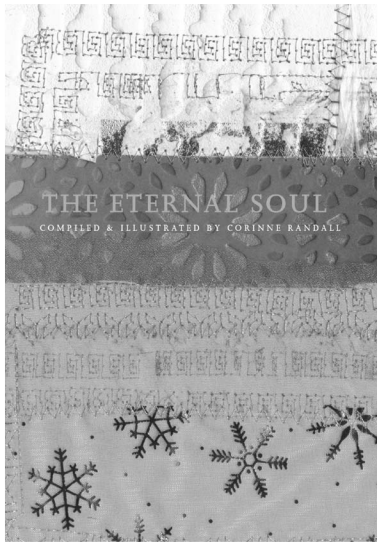
Not surprisingly, no ready answers are proffered to these 'hard questions'. At this time when the framework governing Bahá'í efforts in general is evolving, an exciting vista presents itself to those engaged in deep study of various facets of the Bahá'í revelation. The work to articulate a contemporary conceptual schema for Bahá'í scholarship is in train.

In taking up the challenge of a re-energised engagement with this important endeavour, we can surely derive fresh inspiration from these words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

> There are certain pillars which have been established as the unshakeable supports of the Faith of God. The mightiest of these is learning and the use of the mind, the expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God. To promote knowledge is thus an inescapable duty imposed on every one of the friends of God.
>
> (*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 126)

This issue of the *Bahá'í Studies Review* brings together a selection of articles on a wide range of topics. Not seeking to articulate a single thematic thread, this edition allows for a topical miscellany exemplifying some of the diverse interests absorbing those engaged in Bahá'í studies – language, textual analysis, art and artists, philosophical reflection, history, social principles and their application in society. The contributors exhibit a broad variety of approaches reflective of their interests and backgrounds.

We are grateful to all who contributed their time and work to this edition of the *Bahá'í Studies Review.*



The Eternal Soul

Edited & Illustrated By Corinne Randall

The Eternal Soul is a collection of meditational verse exploring the progress of the soul in this world and the next.

This compilation on the theme of life after death is selected from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'i Faith, 'Abdu'l-Bahá his son, and The Báb, his forerunner. The quotes are presented alongside illustrations by Corinne Randall.

The true nature of the next life is beyond anything we can comprehend but the ineffable mysteries alluded to in these quotes from spiritual exaltation to tears of separation provide an endless fountain of inspiration for the artistic imagination.

These writings offer consolation in suffering and bereavement. Abdu'l-Baha invites us to look forward to death as we may anticipate the goal of a journey and Bahá'u'lláh describes death as a "messenger of joy".

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Shoghi Effendi and the Early Development of Bahá'í Administration in North America, 1922–1927

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Abstract

One of the major innovations of Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship was the development of a worldwide Bahá'í administrative system based on locally and nationally elected spiritual assemblies. This paper identifies the key elements of this system as laid out by Shoghi Effendi in 1922–23 (almost immediately after his accession as Guardian), and elaborated in some details over the next few years in letters he wrote to the American and Canadian Bahá'ís.

Keywords

Shoghi Effendi Rabbani
The Bahá'í Guardianship
North American Bahá'ís
Bahá'í administration
Bahá'í Faith in the 1920s

Introduction

This paper describes Shoghi Effendi's establishment and elaboration of the Bahá'í administrative system based on locally and national elected spiritual assemblies at the very beginning of his ministry during the six-year period, 1922–1927. First developed in detail in collaboration with the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, it became the template for Bahá'í communities worldwide.

Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship (1922–1957) was a crucial period in the development of the Bahá'í Faith in various ways, witnessing: (1) a profound change in the nature of Bahá'í leadership from personalistic to more institutional forms (a 'routinization of charisma' in sociological terms);[1] (2) the initial development of the modern system of Bahá'í administration (the topic of the present paper); (3) the adoption of systematic planning as a means of furthering the expansion and consolidation of the Faith – which led to what might be described as the 'globalization' of the Bahá'í movement from the 1950s onwards;[2] and (4) the establishment of modern Bahá'í creedal forms and expressions of belief and practice.[3]

The first major series of administrative developments during Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship – what Bahá'ís now term their 'Administrative Order' – took place during the first six years of his ministry (1922–1927), and was crucially focused on developments in the Bahá'í community of the United States and Canada, although not confined to it.[4]

I have divided the account into two sections: (I) Establishing the basic system of modern Bahá'í administration, 1922–1923; and (II) Development and detail, 1923–1927.

I. Establishing the Basic System of Modern Bahá'í Administration, 1922–1923

'Abdu'l-Bahá died on 28 November 1921. Due to passport difficulties, Shoghi Effendi was not able to reach Haifa until 29 December. He was then in a state of nervous collapse and had to be confined to bed for a number of days to recover. He was not present for the reading of his grandfather's Will to senior family members on 3 January, in which it was revealed that Shoghi Effendi – then only 24 years old – was to be 'Abdu'l-Bahá's successor, serving as the first of a series of hereditary 'Guardians' of the Cause. We may date the beginning of his Guardianship from this first reading of the Will. Shoghi Effendi himself had no foreknowledge of his appointment.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Will and Testament* created the institution of the Guardianship, naming Shoghi Effendi as the first Guardian and defining the system of future successions. It set out the method of electing the future Universal House of Justice, and described the formation of Secondary Houses of Justice (what were to become the national spiritual assemblies established by Shoghi Effendi). The Will also condemned the actions of members of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's family, led by his half-brother Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí, in opposing him and disinherited them from the line of succession from his father.[5]

The Will was first read publicly on 7 January, and on the same day, Bahíyyih Kh<u>á</u>num, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sister, cabled to the Bahá'ís in Iran announcing Shoghi Effendi's appointment. She informed the American Bahá'ís on 16 January. Shoghi Effendi wrote to the Iranian and American Bahá'ís on 21 January, urging them to arise in service to the Cause. In his letter to the Americans, Shoghi Effendi wrote of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's promises and assurances for the future, called on them to be vigorous in their service to the Faith, to be selfless, united and detached, and assured them of the 'effective power' and support of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's grace [BA 15–17].

In the early months of his Guardianship, Shoghi Effendi had both to come to terms with his new situation and deal with the wide and often challenging array of work that confronted him as head of a complex and widely-spread religious movement. Thus, at a personal level he was undoubtedly suffering from enormous stress at this time. Not only was he mourning the death of his beloved grandfather to whom he had been deeply attached, but he had to try to understand and come to terms with what his own appointment as Guardian signified and entailed. Meanwhile, he was having to deal with the enormous amount of correspondence that he was receiving as the new head of the Bahá'í Cause and respond to two immediate crises concerning the Bahá'í holy shrines at Bahjí in Palestine (where Bahá'u'lláh was buried) and Baghdad (one of Bahá'u'lláh's former residences).[6]

He also devoted much attention to the question of the future development of the Bahá'í Faith in the aftermath of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing, evidently making a detailed study of the Will, a document hitherto unknown to the Bahá'í world as well as to Shoghi Effendi himself. Significantly, one of his first actions as Guardian was to translate the lengthy document into English. In the United States, at least, a copy was available from February 1922 onwards, and, it (or parts of it?) was read aloud to an assemblage of Bahá'ís.[7]

Selected extracts also seem to have been circulated, but it was not until November 1924, that Shoghi Effendi decided that conditions were now

favourable for the general circulation of the Will amongst the Bahá'ís in North America, but even then only in manuscript form and with only one copy each being sent to every 'recognized' Bahá'í. Duplicate copies were not to be made or published anywhere [BA 74].[8] The reasons for this extreme caution are not clear, but it is plausible that this was an example of Shoghi Effendi's stated appeal to the Bahá'ís to focus on the 'constructive dynamic principles' of the Faith rather than its more negative teachings [BA 18] – in this case 'Abdu'l-Bahá's denunciations of His own family members for their opposition to his leadership.

In addition, in February and March 1922, he met with various eminent Bahá'ís whom he had invited to Haifa to discuss the present state and future progress of the Faith. These comprised the Americans Emogene Hoagg (already living in Haifa), Roy Wilhelm, Mountford Mills, and Charles Mason Remey; from England, Lady Sara Blomfield, Ethel Rosenberg and Major Wellesley Tudor Pole; Laura and Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney from France; and Consul Albert Schwarz and his wife Alice from Germany. Syed Mustafa Roumie (Siyyid Muṣṭafá Rúmí) from Burma and Corinne True and her daughter Katherine from the United States arrived later, but travel difficulties prevented the attendance of two leading Iranian Bahá'í teachers, Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Ḥusayn (Ávárih) and Mírzá Asadu'lláh Faḍíl Mázandaráni.[9]

After the consultations, Shoghi Effendi evidently decided that it would be premature to immediately elect the Universal House of Justice – a decision contrary to the opinion of both some of the Bahá'ís and local British authorities.[10] Instead, he embarked on a longer-term project of establishing what would be an eventually uniform system of Bahá'í administration worldwide. This system would centre on the formation of elected Local and National Spiritual Assemblies wherever possible as a firm basis for the future election of the Universal House of Justice. In the event, although Shoghi Effendi did consider the possibility of having the election for the House held during his lifetime, it was not until 1963 – five-and-a-half years after his death – that it was first elected.[11]

1a. The Letter of March 1922

This new vision was communicated in a lengthy letter dated 5 March 1922 – that is roughly two months after Shoghi Effendi's accession to the Guardianship [BA 17-23].[12] The section on Spiritual Assemblies comes after a long 'prologue' in which Shoghi Effendi called on the Bahá'ís to try to understand the significance of this 'Hour of Transition', and carry on the Master's ['Abdu'l-Bahá's] work. This was a 'challenging hour' in Bahá'í history and 'we' all needed to subordinate our personal likings and local interests to the 'interests and requirements' of the Cause. 'We' should present a solid united front to the world, desiring only to serve and propagate the Faith. The Bahá'ís should give 'absolute' prominence to the 'constructive dynamic principles' of the Faith rather than give undue attention to the more negative teachings (presumably a reference to 'Covenant-breaking').[13] This was particularly true for the American Bahá'ís. It was necessary to abandon suspicion of other Bahá'ís and forget 'past impressions' [BA 17–19].[14]

The need to protect Bahá'í unity placed heavy responsibilities on the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies – which would eventually evolve into the future local and national Houses of Justice referred to in the Bahá'í

writings.[15] Thus, it was vitally necessary for a Local Spiritual Assembly to be established in every locality where the number of adult declared Bahá'ís exceeded nine, and to make provision for the indirect election of a National Assembly to represent the interests of all the American Bahá'ís and Local Assemblies [BA 20].[16]

As seen from their writings (which Shoghi Effendi cited at length), Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá had laid out the duties and functions of Spiritual Assemblies, revealing their sacred nature, their grave responsibilities and the wide scope of their activities [BA 20–23]. So great was their authority, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had once directed that the Spiritual Assembly of Cairo should decide whether or not a translation which he himself had corrected should be published [BA 23]. Clearly, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wanted the Assemblies not only to approve all Bahá'í publications, but also to decide upon all matters that concerned the interests of the Cause, whether individually or collectively. Local matters should be decided by the responsible Local Assembly and national matters by the National Assembly. There was no exception [BA 23]. It was up to the National Assembly to determine which matters were of national or only local interest.[17]

It was vital for the unity of the Cause, solidarity amongst the Bahá'ís and the 'full, speedy and efficient working' of all Bahá'í spiritual activities for there to be complete harmony and cooperation between the various Local Assemblies and their members and particularly between each of the Local Assemblies and the National Assembly [BA 24].

All major Bahá'í activities [in North America] were to come under the authority of the National Spiritual Assembly which should appoint special committees with responsibility for each activity. These committees would superintend the management of *Star of the West* and any other Bahá'í periodical designated by the National Assembly; all publication, reprinting and distribution of Bahá'í literature; the stimulation and maintenance of the teaching campaign; the work on the Bahá'í House of Worship (the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* ['Dawning-place of the mention of God'] then beginning construction near Chicago);[18] the 'racial question'; receiving and associating with Oriental Bahá'ís; the care of the film of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to the United States and the original matrix and records of His voice; and any other national activity. The National Assembly should constantly superintend all these committees. None of these activities were to be under the exclusive jurisdiction of any particular Local Assembly or group of Bahá'ís [BA 24].

The time had come for all Bahá'í activities to be harmonized and 'conducted with unity, cooperation and efficiency'. Their devout and earnest activities should be combined and systematized. With an all-powerful spirit pouring through them, the results of their efforts would transcend anything that had been achieved in the past, and stand as a 'convincing testimony' of the potency of the 'ever living' spirit of a now-departed Master [BA 24–25].

As to the question of dissension within the Bahá'í community (so evidently then of concern to the American Bahá'ís), when a careful observer was assured that an evil action was being committed and felt that forbearance and kindness were no longer sufficient, he or she should quietly report the matter to the responsible Local Spiritual Assembly of that area and submit the case to their consideration. If the majority of the Local Assembly members were convinced of the case, then they should report it to the

National Spiritual Assembly as this was a matter which affected the entire body of [North] American Bahá'ís. The National Assembly would then obtain all the available information about the case and carefully consider the situation. It alone could make the 'ultimate decision', consulting with 'the Holy Land' (i.e. Shoghi Effendi) if it needed to [BA 19].

Meanwhile, those eminent Bahá'ís who had gathered in Haifa to consult with Shoghi Effendi about the future of the Bahá'í Faith were returning to their homes, in some cases taking verbal messages from him back to their homelands – for the Germans and British, instructions to begin forming Local Spiritual Assemblies according to the framework he had established in preparation for the establishment of National Assemblies, and for the Americans, to transform the existing Executive Board of the Bahá'í Temple Unity into a National Spiritual Assembly – with directive, legislative functions rather than simply a committee to implement the decision of the Temple Unity.[19]

Coming back to Haifa in December 1922 after a lengthy absence in which he had tried to come to terms with his new position, Shoghi Effendi quickly returned to the matter of Bahá'í administration, clearly wanting to ensure that the project he had launched was being implemented and to encourage its participants in their work. Thus, in his first letter to the members of the now renamed American Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly (on 16 December 1922), he expressed his great pleasure at their work, including the 'efficient manner' in which they had carried out his 'humble suggestions'. He had read 'and re-read' their reports, and strongly approved of the way in which they had both centralized Bahá'í work in their hands and distributed it to various committees [BA 26–28].

He was even more pleased to learn that the National Assembly reported that it had the support of the North American Bahá'í community as a whole for 'if genuine and sustained cooperation' and 'mutual confidence' between the Bahá'ís and their Local and National Assemblies ceased, then the work of the Cause would also cease, and it would be impossible for it to function 'harmoniously and effectively' in the future. Inevitably, difficulties and differences would arise over time, but the Cause inspired a spirit of faith and devotion which would induce the Bahá'ís to overcome them. He hoped to hear of the Assembly's renewed efforts and determination to maintain the unity, effectiveness and dignity of the Cause [BA 28].

Shoghi Effendi asked the Assembly to convey his gratitude to all the members of the national Bahá'í committees, naming their members individually, emphasizing the importance of their work, assuring them of his prayers, and welcoming their own reports on their activities and plans for the future [BA 28–29], a practice he continued over the years.[20]

He also noted that he wanted detailed and official reports from each of the Local Spiritual Assemblies as soon as possible regarding their activities, organization, public and private gatherings, the 'actual position' of the Cause in their localities, and plans and arrangements for the future. He conveyed his best wishes and 'hearty assistance' in their work [BA 30].

1b. The Letter of March 1923

In March 1923, Shoghi Effendi penned a second lengthy letter on the subject of administration, addressing it collectively to the Bahá'ís of America, Europe, Japan, and Australia [BA 34–43]. The section on administration

deals with five topics: (1) The formation of Spiritual Assemblies; (2) The duties of Assemblies; (3) Individual responsibilities; (4) The Bahá'í Fund; and (5) The development of the administration.

Placing administrative matters in the context of a world which had suffered World War I and its aftershocks, he initially emphasized the Bahá'ís' responsibility to diffuse a 'regenerating Spirit of God' to the world [BA 34–35], before turning to the urgent need to establish the system of Spiritual Assemblies as based on the explicit texts of the *Aqdas* and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will.

1. The Formation of Spiritual Assemblies

Local Spiritual Assemblies should be established in 'every locality' – city or hamlet – where the total number of adult declared Bahá'ís 'exceeded nine' ('adult' here being defined as being aged 21 or above). All matters relating to the Faith in a particular locality were to be 'directly and immediately' referred to the Local Assembly for 'full consultation and decision' [BA 37].

Similarly, it was vitally important that National Spiritual Assemblies be 'immediately' established in every country where there were sufficient Bahá'ís and conditions were favourable.[21] These National Assemblies would represent all the Bahá'ís in their country. Their immediate purpose would be both to 'stimulate, unify and coordinate' the activities of all the Bahá'ís and Local Assemblies they were responsible for by means of frequent personal consultations; initiate and provide general direction for Bahá'í activities in their respective countries; and keep in close and constant contact with the 'Holy Land' (i.e. Shoghi Effendi in Haifa). Beyond this, they would eventually evolve into 'National Houses of Justice' (the 'secondary' Houses of Justice referred to by 'Abdu'l-Bahá), and in conjunction with the other National Assemblies throughout the world directly elect the International House of Justice, that 'Supreme Council' that would 'guide, organize and unify' Bahá'í affairs globally [BA 39].[22]

Similarly, the 'absolute necessity' of the formation of Local Assemblies was based on their eventual evolution into local Houses of Justice. They were the 'firm foundation' on which the Bahá'í administrative structure was to be built [BA 37].

From 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings it was clear that unlike the Local Spiritual Assemblies and the International [Universal] House of Justice, the National Assemblies were to be indirectly elected by the Bahá'ís: the Bahá'ís in a country would elect delegates who would in turn elect the National Assembly. Each country would have a set number of delegates (with each locality with more than nine adult Bahá'ís having an assigned number of delegates proportional to its Bahá'í population size).[23] The delegates would constitute a [national] Convention, and would first deliberate together concerning the affairs of the Faith in their country before electing the members of the National Assembly. Ideally, the delegates would gather together, but if not, they could communicate through correspondence. Until the Universal House of Justice was elected, the National Assemblies would be reelected annually [BA 39–40]. So too would the Local Assemblies – in their case on the first day of the Bahá'í Riḍván festival, with the results ideally being announced on the same day [BA 41].[24]

2. The Duties of Assemblies

Shoghi Effendi also listed a number of what he held to be the Spiritual Assemblies 'vital' duties:

a) The direction, extension and consolidation of the teaching work (i.e. the propagation of the Faith). This work was 'essential' to the interests of the Cause.
b) Protecting the Faith from 'the dart of the mischief-maker and the onslaught of the enemy' (i.e. Covenant-breakers and – presumably – persecutors of the Faith). To this end, the Assemblies should be both 'vigilant and cautious', 'discrete and watchful'.
c) Promoting unity and concord amongst the Bahá'ís, effacing 'every lingering trace' of distrust, coolness and estrangement, and securing their 'active and whole-hearted cooperation' in service to the Cause.
d) Doing their utmost to extend 'at all times' the helping hand to the poor, sick and disabled, and to orphans and widows – regardless of colour, caste or creed.
e) Promoting, as much as they were able, the material and spiritual enlightenment of youth and the education of children, and instituting and supervising systems of Bahá'í education.
f) Trying to maintain regular, official and frequent correspondence with other Bahá'í centres 'throughout the world', reporting their own activities to them and sharing their news.
g) Encouraging and stimulating the development of the various Bahá'í magazines around the world, subscribing to them and sending them reports and articles.[25]
h) Arranging regular Bahá'í meetings, including the feasts and anniversaries, and any special gatherings designed to serve and promote 'the social, intellectual and spiritual interests' of humanity.[26]
i) Supervising all Bahá'í publications and translations (during these days when the Cause was 'still in its infancy'), and providing for a 'dignified and accurate' presentation of all Bahá'í literature and its distribution to the general public [BA 37–38].

These were among the 'most outstanding' obligations of Assembly members everywhere. In those localities in which there was a large Bahá'í community, each function was to be assigned to a specialist committee. These committees would be appointed by the individual Assembly, and it would exercise 'constant and general supervision' over them [BA 39].

The National Assemblies bore 'grave responsibilities', for each had to exercise 'full authority' over all the Local Assemblies in its 'province'; direct, 'control and supervise' Bahá'í activities in general; and guard the Cause 'vigilantly' [against attacks]. Vital national issues over which it had full jurisdiction included the translation and publication of Bahá'í writings, the Bahá'í temple [*Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*], the propagation of the Faith, and any issues which were 'national' rather than local in nature. As with the Local Assemblies, particular responsibilities were to be assigned to committees appointed by the National Assembly and supervised by it [BA 40].

Each National Assembly would also define what it considered to be matters of national concern, so local matters could be left to the Local Assemblies.

Each National Assembly would also decide which matters should be referred to the Holy Land (i.e. to Shoghi Effendi) for consultation and decision [BA 40–41].

The efficient, harmonious and vigorous functioning of the Local and National Assemblies was the sole means for the future establishment of the Supreme House of Justice. When that Supreme House had been properly established, it would consider anew all aspects of Bahá'í administrative functioning, and lay down the directing principles that would govern Bahá'í affairs – for as long as it deemed advisable [BA 41].

3. Individual Responsibilities

Shoghi Effendi also emphasized the responsibilities of the individual Bahá'í in the system he was trying to build. Every adult Bahá'í had a sacred duty to take part in the election of his or her Local Assembly, as well as its consolidation and efficient working. Certainly, he or she shouldn't stand aloof and assume an attitude of indifference or independence from it [BA 39].

All Bahá'ís should take an active part in the Assembly elections, abide by and enforce their decisions, and wholeheartedly cooperate with them in stimulating the growth of the Faith. By so doing, the Bahá'ís would avoid division and disruption, the Faith would not fall victim to conflicting interpretations, and would thus retain its purity and 'pristine vigour' [BA 41].

For their part, the members of Assemblies had to totally disregard their own likes, dislikes, personal interests and inclinations. Instead, they should concentrate their minds upon those measures that would contribute to the welfare and happiness of the Bahá'í community, and 'promote the common good' [BA 41].

4. The Bahá'í Fund

Effective financing was basic to efficient administration. For Shoghi Effendi, the 'progress and execution' of spiritual activities was dependent on 'material means'. Therefore, it was essential for each newly established Local or National Assembly to establish a 'Bahá'í Fund'. This would be under the exclusive control of the Assembly. Each Assembly's treasurer would receive contributions from the Bahá'ís for the promotion of the interests of the Faith in its particular locality or country. It was the sacred obligation of every 'conscientious and faithful' Bahá'í who desired to see the Cause advance to contribute 'freely and generously' to this Fund. The members of the Spiritual Assembly would decide how to spend the money – whether on propagating the Faith ('teaching'), helping the needy, establishing Bahá'í educational institutions, or to extend their sphere of service 'in every way possible'. Shoghi Effendi hoped that Bahá'ís would realize the importance of this measure and contribute to the Fund – 'however modestly at first' [BA 41–42].

5. The Development of the Administration

The Bahá'ís should realize that the 'full implications' and exact significance' of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's instructions in His Will were not yet grasped. Nor had the Bahá'í Movement as a whole 'sufficiently crystalized' in the eyes of the world. In this period, when the Bahá'í Faith was still in a stage of 'tender growth' and transition, it was necessary to centralize authority within the community in the National Spiritual Assemblies, and concentrate power in the Local Assemblies.

At the same time, the Bahá'ís 'primary task' was to keep a 'vigilant eye' on the growth of this administrative system in order to combat effectively the forces of separatism and sectarian tendencies, lest the spirit of the Cause be obscured, its unity threatened, or its teachings corrupted. The Bahá'ís should guard against both the extremes of orthodoxy and 'irresponsible freedom'. Either could cause the Faith to deviate from the 'Straight Path' which alone could lead it to success [BA 42].

II. Development and Detail, 1923–1927

Although Shoghi Effendi devoted much attention to building up the administrative system, he also emphasized that it was not an end in itself. As he wrote in a letter in January 1926, even as the administration grew and its activities diversified, it was essential to remember that it was all but a means to an end. It was an instrument for the propagation of the Faith, and it was teaching the Faith that was the Bahá'ís 'primary concern' and obligation: not administration, important though that was [BA 103]. Indeed, in his March 1923 letter on administration, he had pointedly reminded the Bahá'ís their most essential and urgent obligation was to bury their own cares and teach the Cause, delivering its message of salvation to a 'sorely-stricken world'. 'We' should ensure that concern with the secondary details of our affairs and activities didn't cause 'us' to neglect this primary duty. The Bahá'ís should heed 'Abdu'l-Bahá's call to action and service and, 'unfettered and unafraid', fulfil their glorious destiny [BA 42–43].

Accordingly, after his general letters of 1922 and 1923 on administration, his focus changed. He was still concerned with the development of the administrative system, but now that the basic principles and structures had been established, he sought to ensure that the framework he had provided was successfully implemented rather than adding to it. He still commented on administrative issues, but most often in the form of elucidation and encouragement rather than establishing new principles.[27] He also still closely followed administrative developments across the Bahá'í world, writing to the Americans in January 1926, for example, that he had read their Convention minutes with 'deep pleasure and keen interest' [BA 102].

Indeed, by May 1926, he opined that the Bahá'í administrative machinery (at least in America) was now 'sufficiently evolved', and the Bahá'ís had come to grasp its purpose and method sufficiently well, that they should employ it 'fully and consciously' to advance the purpose for which it had been created, namely, to both (i) promote 'the steady and gradual expansion of the Movement' along 'broad, sound and universal lines', and (ii) insure the 'internal consolidation' of whatever had already been achieved. Thus, the 'dynamic forces' latent in the Faith could unfold and shape the lives of humankind, whilst the 'interchange of thought' and 'coordination of activities' amongst the 'diverse elements' which constituted the Bahá'í community could be fostered [BA 109].

In what was a general policy worldwide, all secondary administrative matters were to be decided by the individual National Assemblies in the light of their particular circumstances [BA 96]. He was concerned to establish a system that was universal without insisting on uniformity, although on some issues – such as pluralist voting (see below) - he favoured one

national variant over another and encouraged its general adoption, effectively ensuring that it became the international norm.

We may describe the topics covered under nine headings: (1) On National Spiritual Assemblies; (2) National Conventions; (3) Elections; (4) A spiritual approach to the administration; (5) The link with the future Universal House of Justice; (6) The Bahá'í fund; (7) Titles and lists; (8) The example of North America; and (9) The Declaration of Trust. Together with the two general letters of 1922 and 1923, these various directives and guidelines quickly became normative for the entire Bahá'í world.

1. On National Spiritual Assemblies

In a number of letters, Shoghi Effendi commented both on the powers of the National Assembly and the style of leadership its members should aspire to.

Thus, in April 1923, he reiterated and commented on several points he had already made about the National Assembly's powers and functioning:

a) That National Assemblies were to direct and manage all Bahá'í activities in their 'territory' and were the official representatives of the Faith to the general public, promoting and safeguarding the interests of the Cause. They had to be a 'true example' to all other Bahá'í institutions of what 'absolute harmony, mature deliberation and whole-hearted cooperation' could achieve. If any National Assembly failed to do this then the great plan for the future unfolded in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will would be disturbed and delayed [BA 46].
b) That the National Assembly should send him official, frequent and comprehensive reports of its activities, including the 'inner and outward currents' of the Movement, the inter-relations between the Local Assemblies, and the general standing and progress of the Cause. He also wanted reports from the various national committees forwarded and approved by the National Assembly [BA 46].
c) That as part of its directive role, the National Assembly was in charge of the *Star of the West* (and any other similar American Bahá'í publication). It fell under the 'exclusive control' of the Assembly, which, together with a responsible committee, would 'minutely guide' it and scrutinize its content, tone and language. It was not the personal organ of any particular locality or group [BA 46].
d) Again, the National Assembly was responsible for the holding of all state Bahá'í congresses, Amity Conventions and any other 'universal associations' of the American Bahá'ís. It was up to the Assembly to direct and supervise their work via specific responsible committees. The same was true for receiving Oriental Bahá'ís [BA 47].

In January 1925, Shoghi Effendi clarified that the National Assembly ultimately determined who had voting rights within the Bahá'í administrative system, both when a Local Assembly was being established in a particular locality for the first time, and when differences arose between a new applicant and an established Local Assembly [BA 80].

Writing to the National Assembly in October 1927, Shoghi Effendi also advised the Americans not to allow national activities to become overextended. He noted that their letters indicated a steady multiplication of

activities and 'newly conceived plans'. This was excellent, but he warned them to be cautious so as to ensure that over-enthusiasm didn't lead to a dissipation of resources. They needed to carefully estimate the extent of the resources available to them. Correspondingly, there had to be full consultation between the National Assembly and the Bahá'ís about any plans additional to those set by the National Assembly. Projects should not be started unless there was the assurance that there would be 'adequate and continuous' support for them [BA 140–41].[28]

In the same letter, he also noted that the National Assembly had placed a lot of detailed implementation of national activities into the hands of its committees. It was important to ensure that the committees reported fully to the Assembly, however, and that the Assembly reviewed the work of the committees each year. It was necessary to avoid both the evils of excessive centralization and of excessive decentralization. Balance was needed, and in the case of excessive control, there was the danger of it lessening the value of the ordinary Bahá'ís contributions, as well as embedding the Assembly itself in a mass of detail [BA 141–42].

Shoghi Effendi expressed the hope that the National Assembly members were aware of their 'mighty responsibilities', fully realizing that they needed to secure the 'sustained cooperation' and 'full understanding' of the Bahá'ís (May 1923) [BA 49].

To this end, in February 1924, he emphasized how important it was to realize that the 'keynote' of the Cause was humble fellowship and the spirit of 'frank and loving consultation'. It was not 'dictatorial authority' or 'arbitrary power'. The principle of the 'undoubted right of the individual to self-expression' and 'his freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views' lay at the 'very root' of the Cause [BA 63]. Only the spirit of a true Bahá'í could reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, freedom and submission, the right of the individual and self-surrender, and 'vigilance, discretion and prudence' and 'fellowship, candour and courage' [BA 64].

The duties of those 'freely and conscientiously' elected by the Bahá'ís as their representatives were just as vital and binding as the obligations of their electors. Assembly members should consult both with their fellow Assembly members, and, as much as possible, with the Bahá'ís who they represented. This was their 'function'. They were not to dictate to the Bahá'ís. They should see themselves as the 'chosen instruments' for a more efficient and dignified presentation of the Cause, but never suppose that they were superior to others in capacity or merit, or the sole promoters of the Bahá'í teachings. They were not the 'central ornaments' of the Cause. They should approach their task with 'extreme humility' and seek to win the confidence, 'genuine support and respect', esteem and 'real affection' of those they served. This would be achieved through open-mindedness, a 'high sense of justice and duty', candour, modesty, and 'entire devotion' to the welfare and interests of the Bahá'ís, the Cause and humanity as a whole. They had to avoid the 'spirit of exclusivity' at all times, along with the 'atmosphere of secrecy', and a domineering attitude. They had to banish all forms of prejudice and passion from their deliberations. Within the limits of 'wise discretion' they should take the Bahá'ís into their confidence, acquainting them with their plans and anxieties, and seek their advice and counsel. In decision-making, they should first consult with the other Assembly members

dispassionately, earnestly and cordially, and then turn to God in prayer, and record their vote with 'earnestness', 'conviction' and 'courage'. They should abide by the voice of the majority, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá had said that this was the 'voice of truth', which was never to be challenged and always whole-heartedly endorsed. The rest of the Bahá'ís should 'heartily respond' to these assembly decisions, regarding them as the only means that could ensure the 'protection and advancement' of the Cause [BA 64].

2. National Conventions

In the North American context, perhaps the most difficult aspect of Shoghi Effendi's policies to implement was changing what we might term the 'power balance' between the annual Bahá'í Convention and the newly-established National Spiritual Assembly. Unlike in other parts of the Bahá'í world, the Americans and Canadians had a long-established tradition of annual meetings of the Bahá'í Temple Unity at which an Executive Board would be elected.[29] Authority resided with the Temple Unity meeting in convention and the Executive Board then implemented its decisions. Shoghi Effendi's 'system' reversed this relationship, vesting power in the National Assembly and considerably reducing the decision-making role of the annual meeting. The change from the old to the new system appears to have been a process of transition requiring both guidance from Shoghi Effendi and presumably careful collaboration between him and the National Assembly.[30]

Writing to the National Assembly in November 1923, Shoghi Effendi opined that in order to become 'potent instruments' for the realization of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's plan, both the National Assembly and the annual Convention had to endeavour to exemplify the high ideals of Bahá'í service and fellowship. They had to have strict regard for the dignity, welfare and 'unity' of the Cause [BA 53].

Then, in January 1925, he outlined the ways in which the National Convention should develop and function:

a) Hitherto, its primary function had been the election of the members of the National Spiritual Assembly, but this should change, reflecting both the growing importance of administration in Bahá'í affairs, the general sentiment amongst the Bahá'ís, and the increasing contacts between the various National Assemblies around the world. Traditionally, the annual meeting held under the auspices of the Bahá'í Temple Unity consisted of a series of inspirational speeches held over several days. There was also an opening banquet and musical interludes. The 'business' part of the events consisted of reports of progress on the temple project and the election of the executive board that would oversee the oncoming year's activities.[31]

   Now, Convention should also serve as a consultative body to the incoming National Assembly, which should seek the advice, opinions and 'true sentiments' of the delegates. Without any trace of reticence or aloofness, the newly elected Assembly members should unfold their plans, hopes and cares to the delegates, familiarize them with the matters they would have to consider in the coming year, and study and weigh the delegates' opinions and judgements. Both during the Convention, and after it had ended and the delegates dispersed, the Assembly should find ways to cultivate understanding and a continuing

exchange of views with them, and to deepen their confidence. Great regard should be given to the delegates by the Assembly members, and [everyone] should remember that it was often the most lowly, untutored and inexperienced amongst the Bahá'ís who would be the one who added particular value to Assembly discussions by the inspiring force of their devotion [BA 79].

b) As frequent and long-standing sessions of Convention were impractical, the National Assembly retained final authority on all matters that affected the Cause in [North] America (i.e. the reverse of the former practice of the Bahá'í Temple Unity). This included the right to decide whether any Local Assembly was functioning in accordance with Bahá'í principles. He hoped that the National Assembly would use its 'highly responsible position' both to conduct Bahá'í affairs wisely and efficiently and to extend the spirit of cooperation and mutual support with the American Bahá'ís as a whole [BA 80].
c) Regarding the seating of Convention delegates, that is, the right to decide who could be a delegate, this was vested in the outgoing National Assembly [BA 80].
d) When the Convention was in session, it was of 'infinite value' (and essential unless circumstances made it impossible) for all matters requiring immediate decision to be fully and publicly discussed by the newly-elected Assembly members and delegates. Ideally, as in all Bahá'í decision-making, these discussions would lead to unanimous agreement, but if this was not possible, the majority verdict should prevail to which the minority would fully submit [BA 80].

In April 1925, Shoghi Effendi noted that the basis for the allocation of delegates might change in the future if the condition of the community altered (e.g. an increase in the number of localities). Matters such as proxy voting at the Convention were up to the National Assembly to rule on [BA 83].

In May 1925, he reiterated his earlier statement (based on the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá) that the National Assembly should be elected indirectly by the Bahá'ís by means of locally-elected delegates. As a corollary of this principle, the Local Assemblies could not directly appoint the delegates. Nor would it be fair for the Assembly members themselves to be the delegates as some localities had much larger Bahá'í populations than others. The central principle for the present administration of the Faith was that the National Assemblies should be as independent as possible within their 'province' and not be hampered by the direct or indirect influence of any other institution [BA 84–85].

In October 1925, Shoghi Effendi made several points:

a) Although it was not essential to convene a Convention and Congress every year, it was highly desirable to do so, both because the gathering performed a unique function in promoting harmony and good-will amongst the Bahá'ís, and to remove any misunderstandings between them, and in enhancing the prestige of the Faith [BA 91].
b) Ideally, the election of the National Assembly should coincide with this great gathering of Bahá'ís. However, if it was ever not possible to hold a Convention in a particular year, the election could be accomplished by means of a postal ballot, as long as this was able to be done efficiently.

Certainly, in the case of individual delegates who were unable to attend the Convention, their votes could be received by post, although all delegates should be reminded that attendance was a 'sacred responsibility', and that their personal attendance enabled them to take an active part in the proceedings and report back to their fellow Bahá'ís when they returned home [BA 91].

c) The National Assembly should set the date of the Convention during the Riḍván period every year (whereas in previous years, it had varied) [BA 91].

3. Elections

Shoghi Effendi also gave attention to several aspects of the American National Assembly election procedure which had carried over from the old Bahá'í Temple Unity, specifically limiting the role of 'alternate members', and opposing both the [American] practices of nominating members and using majority rather than plurality voting.

The first of these issues was addressed in a letter to the American Assembly in November 1925, in which he stated that whilst it was permissible to elect 'alternate' members to the National Assembly for the purposes of consultation, they would not be entitled to vote, or be regarded as part of the required quorum for holding the meeting (i.e. 5 members out of the 9 full members) [BA 96].

Then, in a letter to the American National Assembly in May 1927, Shoghi Effendi noted that certain matters of administration were still uncertain. As the Bahá'í writings did not provide a detailed description of the manner of electing Local and National Assemblies, it would be the responsibility of the future Universal House of Justice to specify the relevant laws for Bahá'í elections. He himself had therefore chosen not to establish a uniform procedure for all Assemblies worldwide, allowing different National Assemblies to pursue their own procedures.

However, the practice that prevailed in the East had merit, being based on a plurality of votes rather than an absolute majority, and he recommended that the North American Bahá'ís consider adopting it. It entailed that those elected on to a Spiritual Assembly were those who received the most votes cast, but these did not have to be the majority of the electors. Although this meant that Assembly members might be elected who had not received an absolute majority of the votes, it enabled voters to vote freely for whoever they felt was best suited to serve on the Assembly. It also avoided the practice of nomination which was both detrimental to a silent and prayerful election, was difficult to organize when some voters sent in postal ballots, and excluded absent voters from any subsequent votes when the initial results were not clear cut [BA 136].

Shoghi Effendi also emphasized that the Bahá'ís should view elections as having a 'spiritual aspect', as in a letter of February 1924, in which he appealed to the American Bahá'ís to try to elect their Convention delegates – as well as their National and Local Assembly members – with that 'purity of spirit' that was the only means by which 'Abdu'l-Bahá's 'most cherished desire' could be obtained. They should recall 'Abdu'l-Bahá's explicit and oft-repeated assurance that every Assembly elected in a rarefied atmosphere of selflessness and detachment was truly 'appointed of God', that its verdict was truly inspired, and that everyone should submit to its decisions cheerfully

and 'unreservedly'. These were difficult but essential conditions for a productive year ahead [BA 65].

4. A Spiritual Approach to the Administration

There is as yet no detailed account of the development of what I will term 'administrative consciousness' amongst the North American Bahá'ís – a proper study of American Bahá'í history during the 1920s has yet to be written. Clearly, there were already divisions within the American community about questions relating to 'Bahá'í organization' during the lifetime of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and these came into sharper focus with Shoghi Effendi's emphasis on administrative development.[32] I am not going to attempt to track those divisions here, however. Rather, I will describe Shoghi Effendi's general comments on what might be described as the 'spiritual approach to the administration'.

We see this in a brief comment in a letter of January 1925, in which he stated that only the 'all-encompassing' and 'all-pervading' power of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's guidance and love could enable the newly-established Bahá'í administrative order to gather strength and to flourish amid 'the storm and stress of a turbulent age'. Ultimately, it would vindicate its high claim to be the sole 'Haven of abiding felicity and peace' [BA 80].

Shoghi Effendi made more substantial comments in a message to those attending the American Convention in June 1925. Individually, 'we' should seek to reinforce the 'motive power' of our spiritual activities, whilst collectively working to raise the standard of 'administrative efficiency' so vitally needed at this 'advanced stage of our work'. 'High aims and pure motives' by themselves were not enough. Practical means of success were also needed, and these could only be achieved through concerted common effort [BA 87].

In this second context, the election of the members of the National Assembly bore great importance. The National Assembly had a 'unique significance', and was presently the 'pivot' round which all Bahá'í activities in America revolved. The members of the Assembly had to shoulder great responsibilities, and the delegates had a privileged and delicate task in their voting. The high qualifications of membership enumerated in the Bahá'í writings were daunting, and it was only the assurance of help from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's 'all-conquering spirit' which brought comfort. Accordingly, in electing the new year's Assembly, the delegates had to set aside all passion and prejudice as well as any 'material consideration', and choose those they thought best combined the necessary qualities of 'unquestioned loyalty', 'selfless devotion', a 'well-trained mind', 'recognized ability', and 'mature experience'. He hoped that the elected members – the 'privileged and chosen servants of the Cause' – would be worthy stewards, whose loving service would redound to the honour, glory and power of the Faith [BA 87–88].

5. The Link with the Future Universal House of Justice

Shoghi Effendi also described the developing administration in terms of the concept of what he saw as a 'new world order' laid out in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will.[33]

Thus, in a letter in February 1924, he stressed the need to clear 'our' minds from any 'unhappy misunderstandings' that might obscure our clear conception of that order. As yet, we were unable to discern its full value or significance: only time and the guidance of the future Universal House of Justice

would enable us to better grasp its provisions and implications. We should not judge it by human standards. God's ways were not necessarily those of men [BA 62]. It would be the Universal House of Justice that would define the broad lines that would guide the future activities and administration of the Bahá'í Movement. Prior to its establishment, the Bahá'ís should strive to get as clear a view as possible as to how to conduct the affairs of the Cause and then apply that to their activities with single-minded determination [BA 63].

The Local and National assemblies were the bedrock on which the future Universal House of Justice was to be established. They needed to be strong, and the transition period would continue until they were functioning vigorously and harmoniously. The promised era of universal recognition and accomplishment would be brought nearer if we consolidated the foundations of these Assemblies and gained a fuller understanding of their purpose [BA 63].

If certain instructions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá were particularly emphasized at the present time, these were but provisional measures whose purpose was to protect the Cause in its infancy and growth until it had developed to the stage where it could withstand the 'unwisdom' of the Bahá'ís and the attacks of its enemies [BA 63].

Again, writing in January 1925, Shoghi Effendi stated that the system he had described would guide the administration of the Faith until the Universal House of Justice was established in the future [BA 78].

6. The Bahá'í Fund

In his general letter of March 1923, Shoghi Effendi had emphasized the importance of establishing and supporting Bahá'í funds. He reiterated the urgent need for the National Assembly to establish a central Bahá'í fund in May 1923. Only by so doing could they conduct their activities effectively [BA 49].

In later letters, he emphasized that contributions to the Bahá'í funds were to be entirely voluntary and could be tied to supporting particular projects. Thus, in November 1923, whilst stating that it would be a sign of 'absolute confidence' in the National Assembly if the Bahá'ís and Local Assemblies contributed freely to the central Bahá'í fund, letting the National Assembly decide how to spend the monies received in meeting its various responsibilities, it was a basic principle that the Bahá'ís were absolutely free to specify the object and purpose of any donations they made to the national fund [BA 54]. Again, in January 1926, he emphasized that it was a 'cardinal' principle that all contributions to the Bahá'í funds were strictly voluntary in nature. It was allowable to make general appeals for support, but any contributions should be left entirely to the individual's discretion. Even the slightest and most indirect form of compulsion was wrong. [BA 101]

7. Titles and Lists

Shoghi Effendi gradually instituted a standard system of administrative rules and procedures.

Thus, in April 1925, he 'suggested' what became the American Assembly's formal title for letterheads and the like as 'The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í's of the United States and Canada' [BA 82-83]. All National and Local Spiritual Assemblies eventually came to share a common nomenclature.

He also attached much importance to up-to-date data bases for efficient administration. Thus, in May 1925, he requested that immediately after its annual election, each Local Assembly should send the complete list of its members to the National Assembly secretary, along with the name and full address of its own secretary. Copies of all these details should then be forwarded to Shoghi Effendi by the national secretary, along with a list of the names of the National Assembly members for the year and the national secretary's address [BA 85].

If it was possible, the National Assembly should also set about the task (in collaboration with the Local Assemblies) of compiling a membership roll of all Bahá'ís under its jurisdiction, indicating their names and permanent addresses, and differentiating between those Bahá'ís who lived in Local Assembly areas and those who were either isolated individuals or members of small Bahá'í groups that weren't yet large enough to form their own Local Assemblies. The roll should be kept up-to-date [BA 85]. He enclosed a provisional list of all Bahá'í centres throughout the world, except for Iran. It was inadequate, and he welcomed any corrections or additions which the Assembly could make. He intended that this list would evolve into a valuable section of the projected Bahá'í yearbook [BA 85–86].[34]

Writing in November 1925, Shoghi Effendi also established the principle that it was not possible to have two independent Bahá'í centres in the same city. Both should come under the jurisdiction of the responsible Local Spiritual Assembly [BA 96].[35]

8. The Example of North America

From the 1890s, when the North American Bahá'í community first began to develop, it became a distinctive and prominent element within the international Bahá'í movement. Although numerically small, its members possessed a freedom of action and movement denied to the large and intermittently persecuted Bahá'í community of Iran or the small scattering of Bahá'ís across the Middle East, as well as a dynamism which the Bahá'í groups in India, Europe and later Australasia lacked. Only the well-developed Bahá'í communities of Russian Central Asia and the Caucasus were comparable, and their freedom ended after the establishment of the Soviet Union and its crusade against all forms of organized religion.

It was Natural then for Shoghi Effendi to turn to the American and Canadian Bahá'ís with particular expectation and hope for their support when he began his Guardianship. He was not disappointed. Both individually and collectively the North Americans were in the forefront of the administrative developments which he introduced in the 1920s, and later of the systematic teaching plans which he began in the 1930s. They also played an increasing role in supporting other national Bahá'í communities worldwide. In a letter in June 1925, Shoghi Effendi himself noted the importance of the Western Bahá'ís – particularly those of the United States – as now bearing the primary responsibility for achieving 'the universal recognition of the Bahá'í Faith' [BA 88]. More specifically, in October 1927, he stated that the mission of the [North] American Bahá'ís increasingly appeared to be to take the lead and set the example for Bahá'ís worldwide in laying a 'secure foundation' for permanent Bahá'í institutions [BA 140]. One of the most important expressions of this leading role was achieved in 1927 with the

writing and publication of a legal Declaration of Trust and accompanying by-laws by the American National Assembly (below).

9. The Declaration of Trust

The first period of administrative development may be said to have been brought to fruition with the American Assembly's Declaration of Trust (1927), a legal document which along with its accompanying by-laws marked an important marker in the institutionalization of the Faith.

Writing in May 1927, Shoghi Effendi welcomed his receipt of the Declaration, calling its production a 'milestone' in the development of the American Bahá'í administration. It was clear, concise, sound and complete. It was a 'worthy and faithful' exposition of the 'constitutional bases' for Bahá'í communities everywhere, and foreshadowed the future emergence of the 'world Bahá'í Commonwealth'. When this Declaration of Trust was correlated and combined with a set of by-laws which he wanted the Assembly to prepare, it would serve as a pattern for every National Assembly in the world which hoped to conform with the 'spirit and letter' of the present Bahá'í order pending the formation of the Universal House of Justice. He 'eagerly' awaited the completed by-laws which should supplement the provisions of the Declaration, clarify its purpose, and explain the underlying principles more fully [BA 134–35].

After he had reviewed it, the National Assembly should submit it to the Local Assemblies [in North America] which would seek its ratification by the body of recognized Bahá'ís. He would like to include the joint document together with the accompanying indenture of trust in the next issues of the Bahá'í Year Book, so that both Bahá'ís and sympathizers could get a 'clear and correct' vision of the 'preliminary framework' of the complete system of 'world administration' implicit in the Bahá'í teachings [BA 135].[36]

Later, in October 1927, he expressed his pleasure with the by-laws that had been drafted, and recommended that the combined document should be adopted by all of the other National Assemblies in so far as their particular circumstances permitted: the Americans should send them all copies [BA 142–43].

For the outside world, the by-laws would represent the aspirations, motives and objectives of the Bahá'ís. Whilst giving 'due emphasis' to the 'concentrated authority', rights and privileges of the National Spiritual Assembly, they should stress the responsibilities of Assembly members as 'faithful stewards' of those who had elected them. One of the most important and 'sacred' duties of Assembly members was the requirement that they seek to win the affection and confidence of those whom they were privileged to serve. They should acquaint themselves with the 'considered views' and sentiments of the Bahá'ís. There should be no 'self-contained aloofness', secrecy, or 'the stifling atmosphere of dictatorial assertiveness' by the Assembly members. The National Assembly had the 'exclusive right of final decision', but its members should 'invite discussion, provide information, ventilate grievances' and welcome the advice of all Bahá'ís, including the 'most humble and insignificant'. They should foster a sense of 'interdependence and co-partnership' between themselves and individual Bahá'ís and Local Assemblies, justifying their actions and revising their verdicts when necessary [BA 143–44].

A Concluding Comment

Administrative institutionalization has become an established part of the Bahá'í Faith as a globally dispersed religious movement, entering a new and very distinctive phase with the formation of the Universal House of Justice in 1963. The system of local and National Assemblies (with their attendant processes of consultation, elections and service committees) remains fundamental to modern Bahá'í administration, albeit now augmented by other elements. It is of note that the establishment of the Assembly system was achieved over the course of a mere six years at the beginning of what Shoghi Effendi later came to term the 'Formative Age' of Bahá'í development. This establishment was not without its problems, both in terms of the effective functioning of individual Assemblies and Bahá'í communities, and the short-lived opposition movement which emerged in the late 1920s and early 1930s,[37] but it has proven durable and continues to provide the Bahá'ís with a system of organization and planning which is both non-clerical (the Bahá'í Faith has no priests) and remarkably adaptable to a wide range of local and national communities.[38]

The administrative innovations of the 1922–1927 period represented a major change in the functioning of the Bahá'í Faith. There had been a variety of Bahá'í organizations before 1922, but they were less important in the overall functioning of the religion than eminent teachers of the Faith. With Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship, not only did he, as the new centre of the Faith, adopt a more institutional role than his grandfather had done, but he also established a framework of organization which ensured that a similar shift occurred within the local Bahá'í communities. He also established a single system internationally which came to replace the previous diversity of local forms. The new organizational system provided the Bahá'ís with institutions of directive authority on which Shoghi Effendi came to rely for the implementation of Bahá'í planning goals. As such, it appears to have greatly facilitated the global expansion of the Faith which began in earnest in the 1950s and which in turn led to an enormous increase in the diversity of Bahá'í groups and communities worldwide. The new system also came to provide a basis for legal incorporation and recognition of Bahá'í bodies in various countries.

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Endnotes

1. See Peter Smith, 'Peter Berger's early work on Bahá'í Studies', *Journal of Religious History*, 43(1), 2019, 45–69, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9809.12559.

2. See Peter Smith, 'Babi-Bahá'í expansion and "geo-cultural breakthroughs"', *Journal of Religious History*, 40(2), 2016, 225–36.

3. For a brief overview of Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship see Peter Smith, *An Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 55–69. Shoghi Effendi's widow, Ruhiyyih Rabbani, has provided a detailed account of his life and work: *The Priceless Pearl*, London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969.

4. Thus, the main source for Shoghi Effendi's early statements on the development of Bahá'í administration are found in a short selection of his letters to the North Americans in the volume *Bahá'í Administration*, first published in 1928 (I am using a later edition: Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, rev. ed., Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1945). To reduce the number of footnotes, all page references to this book are included in the text in the form 'BA [page number]'. Note that we do not presently have access to the letters from the North American Bahá'ís and their institutions to which Shoghi Effendi was frequently replying.

   The second series of major administrative developments under the Guardianship (the formation of the International Bahá'í Council and the appointment of functioning Hands of the Cause and of the members of the auxiliary boards to assist them) took place during the 1950s and are outside the concerns of the present paper. On the overall system of Bahá'í administration see Smith, *Introduction* 175–86, and Peter Smith, *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Bahá'í Faith,* Oxford: Oneworld, 2000, 24–28.

   On early institutionalization in the West see Peter Smith, 'The Bahá'í Faith in the West: A survey' in Peter Smith (ed.), *Bahá'ís in the West*, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2004, 10–15, and more generally, Peter Smith, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions: From Messianic Shi'ism to a World Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 120–22.

5. On the Will, see Smith, *Encyclopedia,* 356–57. On Muḥammad-'Alí, see *ibid* 252.

6. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's death prompted His half-brothers and long-time opponents to seize the keys to Bahá'u'lláh's shrine at Bahjí on 30 January, leading to the intervention of the governor of Acre (See Moojan Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844–1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1982, 456–57). In Iraq, King Faisal ordered the Bahá'ís to be evicted from the former house of Bahá'u'lláh in order to pacify the local Shí'ítes. The first crisis was resolvable – Shoghi Effendi got the keys back on 8 February 1923, but he had no means of effectively influencing the Iraqi government despite mounting a long-running campaign to gain international support for the Bahá'ís case (Smith, *Encyclopedia,* 66–67).

7. Loni Bramson-Lerche. 'Some aspects of the establishment of the Guardianship' in Moojan Momen (ed.), *Studies in Honor of the Late Hasan M. Balyuzi*, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1988, 270.

8. Published extracts from the Will appeared in 1923 in John E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1923, 220–25. A translation of the entire document was not published until 1935: *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee. My [1944] copy runs to 22 pages of text: Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

9. Robert Weinberg, *Ethel Jenner Rosenberg: The Life and Times of England's Outstanding Bahá'í Pioneer Worker*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1995, 207–209; Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl* 55–56. On Fazel see *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (under name). On Tudor Pole see Lil Osborn, 'The extraordinary life and work of Wellesley Tudor Pole: Bahá'í seer'. Bahá'í Library Online, 2013. (Last accessed 10 August 2018.), and *Wikipedia* (under name). On Hoagg see *The Bahá'í World, vol. 10, 1944–1946*, 520–26. On the others see Smith, *Encyclopedia* 52–53 (Avareh), 93–94 (Blomfield), 126 (the Dreyfus-Barneys), 248 (Mills), 292 (Remey), 299 (Rosenberg), 301 (Rumi), 306 (the Schwarzes), 342 (C. True), 355–56 (Wilhelm).

10. Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl*, 55–56.

11. On the Universal House of Justice see Smith, *Encyclopedia*, 346–50.

12. The letter was first published in the periodical *Star of the West* 13: 83–88. A copy also appears to have been sent to the British Bahá'ís (Shoghi Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of the British Isles*, London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981, 3–9).

13. In Bahá'í terminology, a 'Covenant-breaker' is any declared Bahá'í who rejects the official order of leadership succession in favour of some alternative. See Smith, *Encyclopedia,* 114–16.

14. There are a number of references in *Bahá'í Administration* to disharmony amongst the American Bahá'ís. We do not as yet have a proper history of the American Bahá'í community during the 1920s to estimate the extent of these problems or even to exactly identify their cause or causes, but clearly for some leading American Bahá'ís, Covenant-breaking and internal dissension were the major problem confronting the American Bahá'ís in 1922 (For example, see Bramson-Lerche, Establishment 262). For accounts of the early beginnings of the American Bahá'í community see Robert Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America*. Vol. 1. *Origins, 1892–1900*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 19985; and Vol. 2. *Early Expansion, 1900–1912*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1995, and Peter Smith, 'The American Bahá'í community, 1894–1917' in Moojan Momen (ed.), *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, vol. 1, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1982, 85–223. On early developments in Canada, see Will C. van den Hoonard, *The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of Canada, 1898–1948*, Waterloo. Ont.:Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996.

15. The reference to the 'House of Justice' (*Baytu'l-'Adl*), one of which was to be established in every city, appears in Bahá'u'lláh's book of laws, the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, as does the reference to the Universal House of Justice (*The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre,1992, 29 K30; 35 K42). The reference to the 'secondary' Houses of Justice, one of which was to be established in each country, first appears in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will (*Will*. 14).

16. In Bahá'í practice, Local Assemblies came to be established when there was a minimum of nine adult Bahá'ís, i.e. nine or above, not just over nine. Where there were more than nine Bahá'ís, the Local Assembly would be elected.

17. Shoghi Effendi clarified that 'national affairs' referred only to the spiritual activities of the Bahá'ís and not anything of a political nature as Bahá'ís were 'strictly forbidden' to meddle in any way with political matters (BA 23–24).

18. On the American temple (at Wilmette, near Chicago), see Bruce W. Whitmore, *The Dawning Place: The Building of a Temple, the Forging of the North American Bahá'í Community,* Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984. On Bahá'í temples in general see Smith, *Encyclopedia,* 235–41.

19. Weinberg, *Rosenberg* 209, 211–12; Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl* 56. On the Bahá'í Temple Unity see Smith, *Encyclopedia,* 70.

20. He specifically mentioned the committees for building the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* [Bahá'í temple], publishing and reviewing, teaching, and children's educational work.

21. Shoghi Effendi instanced three 'national' communities in which he then wanted National Assemblies formed: 'America' (i.e. the United States and Canada, and including the American Pacific islands like Hawaii), Great Britain, and Germany (BA 39, 40).

22. Shoghi Effendi variously used the terms 'International', 'Supreme' and 'Universal' House of Justice.

23. Germany and America would each have 95 delegates, whilst Britain [with fewer Bahá'ís] would only have 19 (BA 40).

24. The Riḍván (Rezvan) festival commemorates Bahá'u'lláh's initial declaration of mission to some of His immediate followers as he was about to leave Baghdad in 1863. The twelve day commemoration begins on the 21 April and ends on 2 May. See Smith, *Encyclopedia*, 296–97.

25. Shoghi Effendi listed the *Star of the West* (USA); *Magazine of the Children of the Kingdom* (USA); the *Bahá'í News* (India); the *Khurshíd-i-Khávar* [Sun of the East] (Turkestan); the *Star of the East* (Japan); and the 'Sun of Truth' (*Sonne der Wahrheit*, Germany).

26. On Bahá'í holy days see Smith, *Encyclopedia,* 182–83.

27. For an example of elucidation see a letter in January 1925, addressing 'fundamental questions of general policy' which had been raised by the American National Assembly, in which Shoghi Effendi noted that he had already outlined the 'basic principles' in previous letters, but now chose to elucidate and explain them in more detail (BA 78). For an example of encouragement see a letter to the members of the American National Assembly in April 1923, when Shoghi Effendi thanked them for their constant vigilance and care in upholding the Faith's 'fundamental principles' and guarding its 'essential interests', and their faithful, vigorous and efficient administration of its affairs (BA 45) (As was often the case with his encouragement, he presented indirectly the qualities he desired).

28. Examples could include affiliation with groups with ideals with which the Bahá'ís were sympathetic, establishing new magazines additional to those already established, and financial support for philanthropic causes (BA 140).

29. For a brief sketch of the Bahá'í Temple Unity's development see Smith, 'American Bahá'í community', 136–55.

30. It is of note that Shoghi Effendi dated the establishment of the North American National Assembly to 1925, that is two years later than the British, German and Indian Assemblies in 1923, and a year later than Egypt in 1924, despite the organizational 'lead' of the Americans with their Temple Unity (established in 1909) (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944, 333).

31. The 1921 (13th) 'Congress and Convention', for example, was held over 5 days (23–27 April) (*Star* 12/1: 18; 12/4: 71–79, 85–92); the 1922 (14th) Convention was also 5 days (22–26 April) (*Star* 13/1: 14–15, 13/4: 67–74, 89–93) and the 1923 (15th) Convention 6 days (28 April–3 May) (*Star* 14/3: 67–82).

32. For some preliminary essays see Loni Bramson-Lerche. 'Some aspects of the development of the administrative order in America, 1922–1936' in Moojan Momen (ed.) *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, vol. 1, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1982, 255–300; Bramson-Lerche, Establishment 253–93; and Peter Smith, '*Reality* magazine: editorship and ownership of an American Bahá'í periodical' in Juan R. Cole and Moojan Momen (eds.), *From Iran East and West*, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1984, 135–55. On the 'Chicago Reading Room' and other events of the 1910s, see Smith, American Bahá'í community, 85–223.

33. This was a theme he developed in more detail in a major series of long letters written between 1929 and 1936, and published as *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955.

34. This soon became a reality, with a list of National Spiritual Assemblies and of selected Local Assemblies and Bahá'í groups worldwide in 1926 (*Bahá'í Year Book*, vol 1. Reprinted, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980 [1st published 1926]). A much fuller list, a global 'Bahá'í directory' for 1928 appeared in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record*, vol 2, April 1926-April 1928, Reprinted, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980, 181–90. [1st published 1928].

35. The modern exception to this principle occurs when the civil administration for a city is itself divided – for example with London boroughs – in which case, the responsible National Assembly can call for Local Assemblies to be elected on the basis of the civil divisions.

36. For the full text see *Bahá'í World*, vol. 2, 89–97.

37. On this opposition see Smith, Bahá'í Faith in the West 12–15; Smith, *Bábí and Bahá'í Religion,* 122–26.

38. By 2001, there were a reported 182 National Assemblies worldwide together with 11,740 Local Assemblies (*The Bahá'í World, 2000–2001: An International Record*, Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre, 2002, 277). This compares to 9 National and 102 Local Assemblies in 1928 (Smith, *Bábí and Bahá'í Religions,* 161).

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The Articulation of the Equality and Rights of Women in Bahá'í Discourse and Implementation

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Abstract

The origins of the Bahá'í concept of the equality of women and men lie in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. 'Abdu'l-Bahá developed it further, first in his correspondence with western Bahá'ís and later during his travels in Europe and North America as he spoke to audiences about the social teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. While he was in London in September 1911, he met with suffragettes, among others. On one occasion he asked one visitor why she thought women should have the vote. Her response included a metaphor of humanity being a bird with two wings, male and female, both of which are required if the bird is to fly. 'Abdu'l-Bahá incorporated this metaphor into his talks in the West and eventually into his writings and it has become an enduring description of gender equality found in many documents.

This essay explores how the concepts of the equality of women and men, the rights of women and the advancement of women have been articulated over time in the talks and writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the works of Shoghi Effendi, the writings of the Universal House of Justice and the statements of the Bahá'í International Community. It also considers how these concepts have been applied and developed by individual Bahá'ís and their families, within the Bahá'í community and in its institutions, and how this experience is being shared in public discourse.

Keywords

equality of women and men
girls
two wings
advancement of women
rights
suffragettes
'Abdu'l-Bahá
Shoghi Effendi
Universal House of Justice
Bahá'í International Community
Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence

When Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence,[1] social activist and suffragette, met 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London in September 1911 her conversation with the recently-released prisoner of the Ottomans spoke at once to the feminist aspiration for equality for women, manifested particularly in the drive to give women the vote, and highlighted the focus on this issue in the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. Unwittingly, she also succinctly articulated the Bahá'í position on the equality of women and men and provided Bahá'ís with a metaphor to explain their belief that they have used to this day:

> A spirited conversation due to the visit of an ardent suffragist[2] will be long remembered by those who had the privilege of being present. The room was full of men and women, many Persians being seated in their familiar respectful attitude on the floor.
>
> After contrasting the general position of the Eastern and the Western women, and then describing how in many respects the Eastern woman has the advantage

> of her Western sister, 'Abdu'l-Bahá turned and said to the visitor: 'Give me your reasons for believing that woman today should have the vote?'
>
> Answer: 'I believe that humanity is a divine humanity and that it must rise higher and higher; but it cannot soar with only one wing'. 'Abdu'l-Bahá expressed his pleasure at this answer, and smiling, replied: 'But what will you do if one wing is stronger than the other?' Answer: 'Then we must strengthen the weaker wing, otherwise the flight will always be hampered'.
>
> 'Abdu'l-Bahá smiled and asked: 'What will you say if I prove to you that the woman is the stronger wing?' The answer came in the same bright vein: 'You will earn my eternal gratitude!' at which all the company made merry.[3]

Little could the recorder of this conversation have imagined that not only would this discussion be long-remembered by those who heard it but that a hundred years later it would form the very basis of Bahá'í discourse. So vivid is this description for Bahá'ís that although the metaphor has little scriptural basis,[4] it has now passed into their general discourse and everyday parlance on the subject of the equality of women and men. Interestingly, however, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's primary diarist, Mírzá Maḥmúd Zarqání, does not appear to have recorded this metaphor at all in his descriptions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks in North America.[5] The metaphor in this conversation has been echoed in Bahá'í discourse at every level. 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself used it when he wrote to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace in The Hague on 17 December 1919:

> And among the teachings of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh is the equality of women and men. The world of humanity has two wings – one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible. Not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they ought to be.[6]

Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st the favoured description of the equality of women and men has been the metaphor of the two wings of the bird of humanity. Since 1947 it has been incorporated into documents submitted to the United Nations by the Bahá'í International Community[7] and has appeared in letters of senior Bahá'í institutions, information leaflets, articles and books.[8]

The Concept of Equality in Bahá'í Scripture and Its Application

The origins of the Bahá'í concept of the equality of women and men lie in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, for example:

> Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God. The Dawning-Place of the Light of God sheddeth its radiance upon all with the same effulgence. Verily God created women for men, and men for women.[9]

This statement of women's equality with men does not imply that equality has ever been fully realized or even operationalized. Like many other truth statements found in Bahá'í texts – such as 'The earth is but one country,

and mankind its citizens'[10] – it identifies what Bahá'ís accept as a reality but which is still aspirational in practice. Bahá'ís anticipate that the practice of equality will evolve over time,[11] will be unevenly applied in different communities and will suffer reverses before its full realization. In the meantime, Bahá'ís are to conscientiously apply this teaching to their own relationships and work towards its application in social spaces. How well they do this is a mark of their personal maturity and that of their communities.

Bahá'u'lláh outlined in his Book of Laws, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, some first steps that society and individuals can take to effect equality. These include the education of all the children in a family,[12] which 'Abdu'l-Bahá has elucidated by stating that the 'training and culture of daughters is more necessary than that of sons';[13] and the requirement that everyone 'engage in some occupation – such as a craft, a trade or the like'.[14] In addition, all the laws set out in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas are applicable to both men and women; where Bahá'u'lláh 'has given a law as between a man and a woman, it applies *mutatis mutandis* between a woman and a man unless the context makes this impossible'.[15] Thus, whereas it was impossible for all the implications of equality to be effected in the time of Bahá'u'lláh, social circumstances changed during the course of the 19th century and early 20th, making it possible for 'Abdu'l-Bahá to champion the rights of women and the extension of the franchise to them as he travelled in the West.[16] It was this focus on women's participation in political processes, together with the education of women and girls, which appears to have attracted suffragists to his talks. His speeches were tailored to his audiences, which included not only feminists and suffragists but society women, club women, both wealthy and the poor, immigrants, African Americans and religious communities. Prior to his journeys in the West in 1911–13, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote letters to the Bahá'ís in Iran and the West, some of which were published in *Star of the West*, a Bahá'í periodical which began in the United States in 1910.

Among 'Abdu'l-Bahá's correspondents was Corinne True,[17] who had become a Bahá'í in Chicago in late 1899. She was involved in the earliest efforts to establish an organizational structure for the Bahá'í community in Chicago in 1901, the 'House of Spirituality'. She was outspoken against the decision, taken locally, not to allow women to serve on it. After receiving a letter from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, possibly in the first half of 1902 or earlier,[18] which encouraged women to 'found' 'Spiritual Assemblies',[19] she formed the Women's Assembly of Teaching as a sort of parallel institution to the House of Spirituality, becoming its first president. Chosen by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to lead the effort to establish the first Bahá'í House of Worship in the West, True was faced with the additional task of overcoming the reluctance of men to take direction from women or even to sit on the same decision-making bodies with them. It was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's guidance to True that enabled the embryonic Bahá'í community to develop a greater appreciation of the principle of gender equality and its practical applications. For example, in one letter, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained to her the basic principle of the equality of women and men found in Bahá'u'lláh's writings:

> O maid-servant of God! Know thou that in the sight of God, the conduct of women is the same as that of men. All are the creatures of God and He has created them after His form and likeness; that is to say, after the form and like-

> ness of the Manifestations of His names and His attributes. From the spiritual point of view, therefore, there is no difference between women and men.[20]

'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to True on 29 July 1909, in response to her questions:

> In the law of God, men and women are equal in all rights save in the Universal House of Justice; for the Chairman and the members of the House of Justice are men according to the Text of the Book. Aside from this, in all the rest of the Associations, like the Convention for the building of the Mashrek-el-Azkar, the Assembly of Teaching, the Spiritual Assembly, Philanthropic Associations, Scientific Association, men and women are co-partners in all the rights.[21]

'Abdu'l-Bahá also encouraged the education of women and girls and promoted the establishment of schools for girls in Iran, it being impossible at that time to establish coeducational schools. He specified that the curriculum for girls and boys be the same and linked this to the realization of the equality of women and men and to the establishment of peace.[22] The curriculum was to include 'various branches of knowledge, in sciences and the arts and all the wonders of this pre-eminent time'[23] as well as morals and good conduct.[24] The practical application of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's encouragement was the establishment of schools in Iran by the Bahá'ís at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries.[25] Principal among these were the Tarbiyat schools, the boys' school being established in 1898 and the girls' in 1910. American Bahá'í women, notably Dr Susan Moody and Dr Sarah Clock, were instrumental in establishing the girls' school.

The Women's Movement

'Abdu'l-Bahá arrived in London in September 1911 at the height of the suffragist movement and among the people he spoke with there were suffragettes, the most militant of the suffragist groups. The suffragist movement in Britain was bound up with other social movements, such as the rise of socialism and Fabianism and the birth of the Labour party (1900). Thus many of the people 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed were left of centre political activists. It was while he was staying at the home of Lady Blomfield at Cadogan Gardens that he daily met large numbers of people, including the above-mentioned Mrs (later Baroness) Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and Annie Besant, President of the Theosophical Society, herself a women's rights activist and a champion of the rights of the working class. Among them was the Bahá'í Elizabeth Herrick, who joined the militant wing of the suffragists, broke a window in a government building and was subsequently imprisoned.[26] By this time the women's movement was a powerful social phenomenon and impossible to ignore. 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself pointed to the significance of this:

> In all questions which concern the welfare of a nation is not a woman's view as important as the man's if one would get a just and true consideration of all sides of that question? Therefore I am in favour of votes for women on every subject. This great woman's movement which is stirring and vibrating all round the whole world is a sign of spirit awakening.[27]

Social Evolution of the Late 19th Century

Although it is possible to trace the emancipation of women to the Prophet Muḥammad, whose teachings were an advance on the mores of the time, it is in the 18th-century Enlightenment that the foundations for the modern women's movement are found. A cluster of related ideas born then changed the political and social landscape of Europe and North America, and eventually much of the world. What we would now call human rights concerns developed into the anti-slavery movement. For example, Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), the utilitarian philosopher, championed equality between the sexes, including women's right to vote and to participate in government. In 1792 British author Mary Wollstonecraft argued for the equality of the sexes in her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (although her book was largely ignored for about 50 years). A sense of the extent of the social evolution in Europe and elsewhere can be gleaned from a look at some of the developments that took place in the period roughly between the birth of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1844 and his arrival in Europe in September 1911. During this period what we would now call human rights concerns developed into the anti-slavery movement. In 1837 the first National Female Anti-Slavery Society convention was organized by Quaker activist Lucretia Mott in the United States. When in March 1840 the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London rejected the credentials of the female American delegates, Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton decided to take up the cause of women's rights.

In this same period in Iran, the Bábí poet Ṭáhirih (Qurratu'l-'Ayn) addressed large audiences in the home of the widow of the Shaykhí leader Siyyid Káẓim in Karbalá' and held classes in the inner quarters for the women, speaking freely about her beliefs. Bahá'ís frequently link the beginning of the emancipation of women to her activities: 'Qurratu'l-'Ayn was really the liberator of all Persian women;'[28] and Shoghi Effendi wrote of her execution in 1852:

> Thus ended the life of this great Bábí heroine, the first woman suffrage martyr, who, at her death, turning to the one in whose custody she had been placed, had boldly declared: 'You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women'.[29]

The juxtaposition of the conference Bábís held in Badasht, Iran, from around 26 June through 17 July 1848, where Ṭáhirih confronted one of the prominent Bábí leaders, Quddús, and dramatically removed her veil, and the first women's rights convention, held just a few days later from 19 to 20 July in Seneca Falls, New York, seems to some to be more than coincidence.

Lucretia Mott's *Discourse on Woman*, written in 1852, the year of Ṭáhirih's death, which argues that the apparent inferiority of women can be attributed to their inferior educational opportunities, foreshadows by 60 years 'Abdu'l-Bahá's observation: 'It is not to be denied that in various directions woman at present is more backward than man, also that this temporary inferiority is due to the lack of educational opportunity'.[30] By 1866 the anti-slavery campaign in the United States had merged with the campaign for universal suffrage. In this year Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony formed the American Equal Rights Association, an organization for white and black women and men dedicated to achieving universal suffrage. A number of

other significant developments took place in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth.

This overview gives some indication of the rapidity with which the women's movement changed, or coincided with, wide-ranging social developments which fostered the emancipation of women and their equality with men. It seems clear that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's articulation of the principle of the equality of women and men was attuned to the social movements gaining momentum in the West at the time, by the concerns of the people who asked him questions, and by the prevalent discourses of the day.

Women's Suffrage

On 'Abdu'l-Bahá's arrival in the US in April 1912, one of the first questions reporters asked him, even before he got off the ship, was his opinion on votes for women:

> 'What is your attitude toward woman suffrage?' asked one of the reporters. 'The modern suffragette is fighting for what must be, and many of these are willing martyrs to imprisonment for their cause. One might not approve of the ways of some of the more militant suffragettes, but in the end it will adjust itself. If women were given the same advantages as men, their capacity being the same, the result would be the same. In fact, women have a superior disposition to men; they are more receptive, more sensitive, and their intuition is more intense. The only reason [for] their present backwardness in some directions is because they have not had the same educational advantages as men'.[31]

This short response incorporates a number of themes that 'Abdu'l-Bahá developed further during his journey. For him, that women would get the vote was inevitable, part of the ever-advancing civilization of which Bahá'u'lláh had written.[32] He disagreed with the sometimes violent measures that were used to draw attention to the issue but he had no doubt that it would be achieved. He was similarly confident that women would participate in all social and political enterprises.[33] 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke to suffragists on several occasions while in the United States. For example, on 26 April 1912 he spoke to the Woman's Alliance, who were suffragists.[34] The audience was mainly young women from the suffrage movement. Conscious of his audience and environment 'Abdu'l-Bahá, stated:

> One of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is equality of rights for men and women ... One of the proofs of the advancement of women is this magnificent and imposing building and this large gathering.[35]

The rest of the talk was about gender equality and the necessity of giving women the same training as men.

On 20 May 1912 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke to a woman's suffrage meeting at the Metropolitan Temple, New York, where he articulated the Bahá'í tenet that 'in the estimation of God there is no distinction as to male and female' and explained that 'the education of woman is more necessary and important than that of man, for woman is the trainer of the child from its infancy. If she be defective and imperfect herself, the child will necessarily be deficient;

therefore, imperfection of woman implies a condition of imperfection in all mankind...',[36] that 'universal peace is impossible without universal suffrage'[37] and that 'when women participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world, when they enter confidently and capably the great arena of laws and politics, war will cease; for woman will be the obstacle and hindrance to it'.[38] 'Abdu'l-Bahá was entirely opposed to the use of violence to achieve women's rights. During his talk on women to the girls at Franklin Square House, a girls' school near Boston, on 26 August 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said: 'Demonstrations of force, such as are now taking place in England, are neither becoming nor effective in the cause of womanhood and equality'.[39]

On his return to England at the end of the year, he underscored this argument with the very women who were perpetrating these acts. Mírzá Aḥmad Sohráb notes in his diary for the 18 December 1912 (relating probably to 20 December), that 'Abdu'l-Bahá received many visitors at Lady Blomfield's home, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in residence. Among them was 'an ardent suffragist, a militant one'. 'Abdu'l-Bahá advised her that women working for woman's rights 'should not commit unseemly acts, nor resort to violent measures, such as window smashing, police beating, train wrecking, letter box destroying, etc. nay, rather they should demand their rights with the power of intelligence, with scientific accomplishments, with artistic attainments. Unseemly deeds would rather retard the realization of their cherished hope. In this age a weak person resorts to frightful measures, but an intelligent person uses the superior power of intelligence and wisdom'.[40] This was most likely not Emmeline Pankhurst, who had attended at Lady Blomfield's during that week, and who, H.M. Balyuzi relates, referred to 'Abdu'l-Bahá as a 'prophet': 'He said with a broad smile: "Oh, no! I am a man, like you"'.[41]

Lady Blomfield reports that Mrs Pankhurst 'was much cheered by her interview, for the Master told her to continue her work steadfastly, for women would very shortly take their rightful place in the world'.[42]

The Advancement of Women and Peace

The avowed purpose of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's journey to the United States in 1912 was to attend the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration in May, having accepted the invitation of its organizing committee. This was one of a series of conferences held between 1895 and 1916 that supported the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague and were instrumental in its establishment in 1899. The conference in 1912 attracted about 250 delegates. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the first speaker of the evening session on Wednesday 15 May. In his talk, entitled 'The Oneness of the Reality of Humankind', which lasted about 20 minutes, 'Abdu'l-Bahá outlined the basic principles of the Bahá'í Faith, including gender equality:[43]

> The sixth principle of Baha'o'llah is equality between mankind and womankind... when woman shall receive the same education no doubt her equality with man shall become a reality. The world of humanity is composed of two organizations – the male and the female. If one organ be defective, that defect will affect the other. Until perfect strength shall obtain in both, and woman shall attain equality with man, the happiness of humanity will not be insured.[44]

The men[45] attending the Lake Mohonk conference were already committed to the principles of peace and international arbitration and were working actively to establish both. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talk was warmly received.[46] Just as at Lake Mohonk, it is probable that many of the people who attended 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks were like-minded and disposed to new ideas aligned with their own. If so, then 'Abdu'l-Bahá's articulation of the relationship between peace and the advancement of women was perhaps less startling to them than might otherwise have been the case. He may well have expected his open-minded audiences to support a pro-peace, or anti-war, stance and thus he did not hesitate to equate women's equality with the abolition of war:

> Equality between men and women is conducive to the abolition of warfare for the reason that women will never be willing to sanction it. Mothers will not give their sons as sacrifices upon the battlefield after twenty years of anxiety and loving devotion in rearing them from infancy, no matter what cause they are called upon to defend. There is no doubt that when women obtain equality of rights, war will entirely cease among mankind.[47]

The nature of his audiences is significant in understanding the impact and influence on them of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements about this subject. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's travels in the West coincided with the growing fear among many that war would erupt in Europe. 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself pointed to this possibility, as he said in a talk on 5 September 1912 at St James Methodist Church in Montreal:

> 'Europe is a storehouse of explosives awaiting a spark. All the European nations are on edge, and a single flame will set on fire the whole of that continent'.[48]

Many of his talks and discussions centred around the need for governments to act in concert to avoid war, to arbitrate disputes, to do more than merely discuss peace but to find ways to implement it, based on Bahá'u'lláh's principle of collective security.[49] A major argument put forward by parliamentarians, influential men and by women anti-suffragists, was that women were not capable of defending their country by going into battle and that as a result they were not entitled to make, or capable of making, decisions about defence, which would be required if they were elected to office.[50] One of the most closely argued statements putting forward this position, was that of Helen Kendrick Johnson, whose book *Woman and the Republic: A Survey of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the United States and a Discussion of the Claims and Arguments of Its Foremost Advocates* was published in 1897 and is largely a refutation of the claims of suffragists.[51] 'Abdu'l-Bahá's response to this was two-fold. On the one hand he agreed that women should not be required to fight in wars but on the other saw that war was also beneath the dignity of men and was something to abolish altogether, which was a purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings:

> Shall we consider it an imperfection and weakness in her nature that she is not proficient in the school of military tactics, that she cannot go forth to the field of battle and kill, that she is not able to handle a deadly weapon?

> Nay, rather, is it not a compliment when we say that in hardness of heart and cruelty she is inferior to man? The woman who is asked to arm herself and kill her fellow creatures will say, 'I cannot'. Is this to be considered a fault and lack of qualification as man's equal?[52]

'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements that women would most certainly not sanction war – but seeing this as a positive thing – may well have dismayed many. However, accounts of the reception 'Abdu'l-Bahá's views received suggest that his ideas were welcomed and it may be that he was speaking largely to the converted in his public addresses. There does not seem to be any evidence that he was challenged about them, at least not at the time. This is not to say that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was presenting a popular position on this subject but rather that those who came to hear him seemed not to be opposed to it. The main audiences for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks about women were society women – often friends of prominent Bahá'ís – suffragists, club women and churchwomen. Thus, for example, Maḥmúd reports that on 23 April 1912, while 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in Washington DC, he spoke at the home of Ali-Kuli Khan to a large group of whom 'the majority attending the meeting were ladies from high society. At this meeting the Master spoke about the education and improvement of women and the promotion of unity and peace in the world of humanity'.[53] Similarly, a few days later, on 26 April, and still in Washington 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'addressed the ladies of President Taft's All Saints Unitarian Church; the room was completely filled'.[54] 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not appear to have spoken formally to many working class women, although he did visit some of the women who worked at the Passmore Edwards' Settlement,[55] a centre occupied by young professionals who in return for room and board taught classes to local working people and their children.

Women as Educators

Another theme 'Abdu'l-Bahá underscored on his western journeys was the role of women in educating the next generation. He explained that for women to fulfil this they too required to be educated. This would necessitate a change in the attitude of society towards women and a shift in the way that education was offered. First, the education of all children should be compulsory. Second, boys and girls should be taught using the same curriculum. Third, should a family lack the resources to educate all their children, they must educate the girls rather than the boys: 'If there is not money enough in a family to educate both the girl and the boy the money must be dedicated to the girl's education, for she is the potential mother'.[56] It is difficult to gauge the response of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's listeners to these ideas: his chroniclers focused on 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself, rather than on his audience. The education of girls was established across Europe and North America in the 19th century so it is likely that most people accepted this principle but the notion of giving girls priority of education over boys was certainly novel and has not been embedded into society even today.

Shoghi Effendi

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921 until his passing in 1957, highlighted the significant role of women in the Bahá'í Faith in his letter addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America on 25 December 1938:

> I am moved, at this juncture, as I am reminded of the share which, ever since the inception of the Faith in the West, the handmaidens of Bahá'u'lláh, as distinguished from the men, have had in opening up, single-handed, so many, such diversified, and widely scattered countries over the whole surface of the globe... [and] also to stress the significance of such a preponderating share which the women of the West have had and are having in the establishment of His Faith throughout the whole world.[57]

Further, he expanded the understanding of gender equality among the Bahá'í communities and extended the rights and responsibilities of Bahá'í women in those parts of the world where cultural restrictions and norms prevented women from participating in the administrative affairs of their communities. For example, on 27 December 1923, he wrote:

> Regarding the position of the Bahá'í women in India and Burma, and their future collaboration with the men in the administrative work of the Cause, I feel that the time is now ripe that those women who have already conformed to the prevailing custom in India and Burma by discarding the veil should not only be given the right to vote for the election of their local and national representatives, but should themselves be eligible to the membership of all Bahá'í Assemblies throughout India and Burma, be they local or national.[58]

In 1950-51 Shoghi Effendi extended the right of membership on Local Assemblies to women believers in Egypt[59] and in 1956 he extended them the right to be elected to the National Spiritual Assembly and to participate as delegates to the National Convention.[60] Later, in April 1954, he gave Iranian Bahá'í women 'full rights', 'removing thereby the last remaining obstacle to the enjoyment of complete equality of rights in the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Persian Bahá'í Community'.[61]

In *God Passes By* Shoghi Effendi reiterated the metaphor introduced by Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence in his review of the 'epoch-making journeys' of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who 'expounded, with brilliant simplicity, with persuasiveness and force' the principles of the Bahá'í Faith, including 'the equality of men and women, the two wings on which the bird of human kind is able to soar'.[62]

The Universal House of Justice

The Universal House of Justice, in a series of letters, reinforced the importance of gender equality and the advancement of women. It offered details of how these concepts applied to individuals, families and communities, and extended the scope of their application to subjects such as marriage, violence against women and the role of women in the economy. In January 1986 it greatly increased the understanding of Bahá'ís about the role of women by issuing a compilation prepared by its Research Department about women, 'taking into consideration the Bahá'í concepts of the equality of the sexes, the role of education in the development of women, family life, fostering the development of women'.[63] 'Abdu'l-Bahá linked the full equality of women and their advancement with the establishment of peace and the Universal House of Justice emphasized this in 'The Promise of World Peace', released for the International Year of Peace, 1986.

> The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged pre-requisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavour will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge.[64]

In its 2000 Riḍván letter the House of Justice explained what had been achieved thus far in its external affairs strategy, one line of action of which was the status of women:

> Regarding the status of women, the existence of 52 national offices for the advancement of women, the contributions of numerous Bahá'í women and men to conferences and workshops at all levels, the selection of Bahá'í representatives to crucial positions on key NGO committees... show how the followers of Bahá'u'lláh assiduously promote His principle of the equality of women and men.[65]

The Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 imposed limitations on what the Bahá'í community there could undertake and achieve.[66] The Universal House of Justice has addressed a number of letters to the Iranian Bahá'í community, praising its adherence to Bahá'í principles and explaining paths of action that could be taken to enhance the well-being and progress of the entire country. Among these letters is one that directly addresses the advancement of women and articulates the principles on which action can take place.

> There are, of course, many pressing issues that occupy the minds of those striving to promote the prosperity and well-being of Iran. Chief among them is, no doubt, the critical need to remove barriers hindering the progress of women in society. For you, the equality of men and women is not a Western construct but a universal spiritual truth – a statement about human nature – that was promulgated by Bahá'u'lláh nearly one hundred and fifty years ago in His native Iran. That women should enjoy equal rights with men is a requirement of justice. It is a principle consonant with the highest standard of purity and sanctity, whose application strengthens family life and is essential to the regeneration and progress of any nation. Indeed, peace in the world and the advancement of civilization depend on its realization. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained: The world of humanity has two wings – one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly ... You are particularly well placed to contribute to the promotion of this principle... For half a century now, Bahá'í women in Iran have worked shoulder to shoulder with men in administering the affairs of the community... And long ago you succeeded in eliminating in your community illiteracy among women under the age of forty... you persevere in your efforts to transcend cultural norms that impede the progress of women. True equality is not easily

> attained; the transformation required is difficult for men and women alike. We encourage you, then, to continue to enhance your understanding of the operation of this principle and to strive to uphold it more consistently in your family and community life. You can, in addition, draw upon your experience to discuss this issue with friends, neighbours and co-workers, especially the challenges it presents and ways of surmounting them, and participate in projects designed to advance the status of women, whether by government agencies or organizations of civil society.
>
> Many of your compatriots are eager to see the realization of the universal principle of the equality of men and women. They will no doubt welcome you to join them in learning how to promote, step by step, conditions that enable the women of Iran to overcome impediments blocking their progress and participate fully, as equals of men, in all areas of human endeavour...[67]

As well as generally addressing questions of gender equality, the Universal House of Justice also developed a number of specific themes not previously covered. For example, it addressed a letter to the National Assembly of New Zealand about the relationship between a husband and wife. Among other matters, it mentions while in most arenas of consultation disagreements can be resolved by majority vote, it cannot be resolved this way when a husband and wife consult. The House of Justice counsels, 'There are, therefore, times when a wife should defer to her husband, and times when a husband should defer to his wife, but neither should ever unjustly dominate the other'.[68]

The Extent of Equality

'That men and women differ from one another in certain characteristics and functions is an inescapable fact of nature; the important thing is that 'Abdu'l-Bahá regards such inequalities as remain between the sexes as being "negligible"'.[69] 'The equality of men and women is not, at the present time, universally applied. In those areas where traditional inequality still hampers its progress we must take the lead in practising this Bahá'í principle. Bahá'í women and girls must be encouraged to take part in the social, spiritual and administrative activities of their communities'.[70] "Abdu'l-Bahá strongly advocated that girls be educated, to the extent that girls have priority of education over boys'.[71] 'To this end, the Universal House of Justice has promoted children's classes and junior youth empowerment programmes as two of the four 'core activities' of Bahá'í communities and has repeatedly emphasized the importance of the education of children, especially girls'.[72]

In 1993, in a lengthy letter written on its behalf, the Universal House of Justice responded to an individual who had raised a number of questions about violence against women and the sexual abuse of women and children. This letter advanced understanding of the Bahá'í position on this subject, including physical and emotional violence, rape and coercive behaviour, which had not previously been addressed in such detail. It explained that the 'use of force by the physically strong against the weak, as a means of imposing one's will and fulfilling one's desires, is a flagrant transgression of the Bahá'í Teachings' and that there is 'no justification for anyone

compelling another', through the 'use of force' or 'threat of violence', to do something. It states that there is an increase in family violence and in the 'degrading and cruel treatment of spouses and children, and the spread of sexual abuse'. It cautions Bahá'ís 'not to be drawn into acceptance of such practices because of their prevalence', and to be 'ever mindful of their obligation to exemplify a new way of life', characterized by 'respect for the dignity and rights of all people' and 'its freedom from oppression' and 'all forms of abuse'. It explains that people cannot properly consult unless they can 'express their opinions with absolute freedom and without apprehension that they will be censured or their views belittled' or when 'the fear of violence or abuse is present'. The letter addressed rape, 'one of the most heinous of sexual offences', explaining that a victim is 'entitled to the loving aid and support' of others and that she may take legal action. If she becomes pregnant, it is 'for her to decide on the course of action she should follow'. If a Bahá'í woman is abused or raped by her husband, she may seek assistance and counsel from the Bahá'í institutions as well as seek legal protection.[73]

A frequently asked question is why there are no women on the Universal House of Justice. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had explained that 'according to the explicit text of the Law of God, its membership is exclusively reserved to men. There is Divine wisdom in this which will presently be made manifest even as the mid-day sun'.[74] Shoghi Effendi confirmed that the reason would be clear in the future.[75] The Universal House of Justice itself wrote that 'the ineligibility of women for membership of the Universal House of Justice does not constitute evidence of the superiority of men over women'. It pointed out that 'women are not excluded from any other international institution of the Faith', and that they have served as Hands of the Cause, members of the International Teaching Centre and Continental Counsellors, nor is there anything in the scriptures to 'preclude the participation of women in such future international bodies as the Supreme Tribunal'.[76]

Direct Participation in Social Action

Bahá'ís often ask whether they can participate in marches and demonstrations such as the 2017 Women's March on Washington. The Universal House of Justice has explained that 'individual Bahá'ís in every country are, in principle, free to participate in efforts and activities, for instance in peaceful rallies, that aim to further laudable objectives such as the advancement of women, the promotion of social justice, the protection of the environment, the elimination of all forms of discrimination, and the safeguarding of human rights'. The only restriction is when 'such activities begin to deviate from their original purpose and assume a partisan character or degenerate into violence', they are to be 'avoided'.[77]

The House of Justice has also addressed the practical application of the advancement of women and equality at the institutional level. In 1975 it asked 80 National Spiritual Assemblies to organize Bahá'í activities for women and to observe International Women's Year by developing programmes to 'stimulate and promote the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of Bahá'í community life'.[78] It called for the establishment of national offices for the advancement of women; by 2000, 52 had been established.[79] It established an Office for the Advancement of Women

within the Bahá'í International Community in 1992 to interact with 'international organizations concerned with matters affecting the rights, status and well-being of women' and to advise National Assemblies on programmes and projects which 'encourage efforts towards the realization of the equality of men and women'.[80] Gender equality is currently (2018) one of its six focus areas.[81]

Bahá'í International Community (BIC)[82]

After the United Nations (UN) was established in 1945, its Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), one of its six main organs, established in 1946 the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Shoghi Effendi, wishing to secure the full recognition of the religion, and its equal treatment with other world religions and also desiring to advance the Bahá'í vision of establishing the oneness of humanity, universal peace and a world commonwealth of nations, saw in the UN a means for achieving these goals. When it came to his attention that the UN accredited representatives of NGOs were to attend certain of its conferences, he encouraged the National Assembly of the United States and Canada to apply for accreditation.[83] In spring 1947 it was accredited to ECOSOC as a national NGO with observer status.[84] It had already submitted a formal statement to the first session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, on 1 February 1947: *A Bahá'í Declaration of Human Obligations and Rights*.[85] Significantly, in August 1947 it submitted a second formal statement, *A Bahá'í Statement on the Rights of Women*.[86] The first *Declaration* sets out the Bahá'í perspective that the 'source of human rights is the endowment of qualities, virtues and powers which God has bestowed upon mankind without discrimination of sex, race, creed or nation. To fulfil the possibilities of this divine endowment is the purpose of human existence'.[87] The document touches on the equality of women and men briefly and only in the context of the family: 'The equality of men and women in the modern community gives the family a new and more powerful connection with the forces making for moral evolution'.[88] The more detailed *Bahá'í Statement on the Rights of Women* was submitted a few months later to the Commission on the Status of Women,[89] a functional commission of ECOSOC. It articulates the Bahá'í principle of the equality of women and men; links the education, participation and advancement of women to the establishment of universal peace – a major goal of the United Nations – and sets out some of the principal social conditions that need to be addressed to enable women to enjoy the full extent of their rights. The document draws upon the many statements made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in his talks in the West in 1911–13,[90] as well as on explanations found in his letters. It included these statements:

- Sex equality is a basic Bahá'í principle.
- The present imbalance in society, which results from the dominance of man over woman, is a dangerous phenomenon and may be considered as one cause of war. This condition accustoms man from his earliest years to the spectacle of aggression, resentment, and retaliation; it leads him to disparage woman's opinions, including her antipathy to war. Bahá'ís believe that neither male nor female dominance is desirable; a

status based on equality of value and worth and expressed in harmony of interest is the ideal.
- Sex equality is the safeguard of peace. Made socially effective, women's repugnance to warfare can create a world block against aggression.
- Sex equality connotes an organic change in the social structure. The Bahá'í teachings advocate for women an education equal to that received by men, since woman is the first educator of the child; and opportunity to pursue any career for which they are qualified, with special emphasis on their role as keepers of the peace.
- Woman... is not inherently the weaker sex... Lack of education and opportunity has prevented woman from manifesting her innate equality of value and this repression is responsible for her less favoured status as human being and citizen.
- Bahá'ís uphold as essential to the practice of sex equality: monogamous marriage; abolition of concubinage and prostitution; employment on the basis of skill alone; freedom to own and to dispose of property; freedom of the ballot; eligibility to public office; right to be honoured by husband and children; recognition of the economic value of child-raising and home-making; removal from world opinion of any sexual stigma attached to womankind.
- This question of the status of women is to the Bahá'ís, for all its political and economic ramifications, primarily a spiritual matter pertaining to the order of truth and therefore interconnected with other universal matters such as world order, peace or spiritual unity of religions claiming the attention of mankind today.[91]

On 5 June 1947, Shoghi Effendi wrote 'The Challenging Requirements of the Present Hour',[92] urging Bahá'ís to associate themselves 'with the various organs, leaders and representatives of the United Nations and kindred organizations'.[93] He himself responded to a letter of 9 July 1947 from the chairman of United Nations Special Committee on Palestine requesting a statement on the relationship between the Bahá'í Faith and Palestine and soliciting his views on the political future of the country. Shoghi Effendi responded on 14 July, pointing out that the Bahá'í Faith was non-political, did not take sides in the dispute, that three major spiritual figures of the Faith were buried in the Holy Land, making it a place of pilgrimage, and that it was the home of its international administrative institutions.[94] In the winter of 1947–8 application was made to, and granted by, the UN to register a group of eight National Spiritual Assemblies as an international non-governmental body named the Bahá'í International Community (BIC), acting through the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada. This gave the institution greater status within the UN system. Today the BIC represents the worldwide membership of the Bahá'í Faith and its network of National Spiritual Assemblies.[95]

The BIC's first international UN conference was on human rights, in Geneva, May 1948. The delegation comprised Mildred Mottahedeh, Ugo Giachery and Charles Mason Remey. Prior to the conference the BIC submitted a brief statement on the Bahá'í contribution to the promotion of human rights, 'The Work of Bahá'ís in Promotion of Human Rights'.[96] While

not specifically mentioning the rights of women, its opening paragraph states: 'The Bahá'í international community believes that all human beings have the right to live in a society whose laws and institutions conform to the truths of a progressive and universal religion'. The Bahá'í delegates submitted two resolutions to the Geneva conference, which were adopted. The second of these recommended that the NGOs present set an example within their own organizations by eliminating within them 'all sorts of prejudice whether it be that of race, creed or colour', thus presenting 'a living example of the implementation of Article No. 1'.[97]

The BIC continues to produce a number of statements and thought pieces on a wide variety of topics concerning the well-being, development and prosperity of humanity and the advancement of civilization, both materially and spiritually. Frequently these statements include questions that invite thought and consultation, which lead to new insights and knowledge. The BIC offers to the discourses currently taking place the insights learned within the Bahá'í community through its direct experience of capacity-building at the grassroots. It continues to contribute to policy discussions at the international level, often collaborating with individuals, groups and organizations with whom it may co-organize events, seminars and discussion groups. It collaborates with the UN and its specialized agencies, member states, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, academia and practitioners. It participates in committees and forums at the UN and other spaces. It has consultative status with ECOSOC and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), is accredited to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN Department of Public Information (DPI). It also provides information to National Spiritual Assemblies and to the wider Bahá'í community on a variety of subjects.

The BIC has considered many aspects of how equality can be established and women's advancement can take place, at every level from the neighbourhood to the global. Statements are often in response to discourses and programmes set out by the United Nations and other international agencies. In several statements the metaphor of the two wings of the bird is used to describe the equality of women and men.[98] The BIC's many statements treating the subjects of the equality of women and men and the advancement of women and girls presented at United Nations conferences, including sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, in recent years can be found on its website.[99]

Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP) and Training Institute[100]

A Bahá'í-inspired organization founded in 1999, the ISGP aims to build capacity in individuals, groups and institutions to contribute to current discourses concerning the betterment of society. Among the documents developed through experience and consultation which it offers to the discourse on gender equality is its December 2009 discussion paper 'Advancing Toward the Equality of Women and Men'.[101] It explores five areas relevant to this theme: Expanding the basis of human identity, Overcoming oppression through the acquisition of self-knowledge, Moving beyond cultural relativism, Transforming economic structures and processes, and Redefining power. Each topic asks a number of questions to stimulate discussion and to share insights.

A significant development within the Bahá'í Faith that has helped foster gender equality is the implementation of the training institute. Since 1996 the worldwide community has been embarked on a programme of capacity- and community-building, stimulated by the training institute, which has encouraged people to 'walk a path of service', to be 'active agents of their own learning' and 'to build their capacity to apply the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to the transformation of society',[102] one of which is the equality of women and men. The training institute helps develop the capacity of those who participate to build and sustain the communities and neighbourhoods in which they live. Its egalitarian approach to learning for adults, its ability to undermine barriers to women's participation, its expectation that everyone is able to take charge of their own learning and to build their capacity, has enabled women across the globe to consult with both men and women, to participate in making the decisions that affect their own lives and the lives of their families and to undertake improvements in their communities, often increasing literacy, numeracy and decision-making skills.

Other Voices, Other Themes

Individual Scholars and Writers

There is a long tradition of discussion and commentary on the theme of the equality of women and men in English-language Bahá'í literature. The very first edition of *Star of the West*[103] carried two letters from Dr Susan Moody, a Bahá'í doctor serving in Tehran, describing the condition of the women – 'I cannot describe to you how they are deprived'... [help] 'free the women from their dreary life'[104] – and encouraging the Bahá'ís in the US to sponsor a girl at the new Bahá'í school for $1.50 a month, as 'the way to help lift Persia from her otherwise hopeless condition'.[105] Another early example of Bahá'í research and writing on the subject of gender equality is an article of some three thousand words by Dr Orrol Harper in the *Bahá'í Year Book, 1925–1926*, 'The Equality of Men and Women', which discusses feminism and 'Sex-Antagonism' – 'the seen and unseen conflict which exists between the sexes for supremacy and self-expression'.[106]

Since these early examples, a number of Bahá'í scholars and authors, both women and men, have contributed to a growing corpus of texts relating to gender equality, women and the Bahá'í Faith, and related topics. Much critical work was begun in the 1980s and 90s. Trevor R. J. Finch's *Unclipping the Wings: A Survey of Secondary Literature in English on Bahá'í Perspectives on Women*[107] provides a useful overview and analysis of such publications up to 1994.

One of the largest categories of literature comprises biographies of Bahá'í women:[108] women related to the families of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh;[109] women of social standing and prominence;[110] a few about those from working classes[111] and the global south.[112] Such biographies generally describe their subjects' lives and services to the Bahá'í Faith, rather than to the cause of feminism.[113] Most mention their subjects as examples of the equality of women and men; a few analyse their subjects' contribution to the advancement of women. Some consider their subjects in roles that are aligned to Bahá'í teachings or Bahá'í service, e.g. women as educators, mothers, teachers of the Bahá'í Faith, administrators, advocates of peace,[114] or in roles that contribute to social development, e.g. suffragists,

social activists, businesswomen. Others underscore the persecution they have suffered as Bahá'ís.[115] Autobiographies by Bahá'í women also focus on similar life experiences rather than on their feminism or how they assisted the advancement of women or gender equality.[116]

There are several studies of the Bábí scholar and poet Ṭáhirih,[117] whose identification with the emancipation of women was, as noted above, remarked upon by Shoghi Effendi. Described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as 'the calamity of the age' in her eloquence and 'in ratiocination the trouble of the world',[118] 'a brand afire with the love of God' and 'a lamp aglow with the bounty of God',[119] Ṭáhirih was sometimes depicted by later authors as a champion of women's rights.

Biographies and autobiographies highlight the lives and efforts of individuals. However, as Martha Leach Schweitz points out, some feminists emphasize that 'women are oppressed not only as individuals but as a class'.[120] Bahá'ís researching the concept of gender equality offer a similarly wide range of understanding of it. For example, Schweitz's own thought-provoking 'Of Webs and Ladders: Gender Equality in Bahá'í Law' in the Fall 1995 issue of *World Order*[121] approaches head-on what appear to be gender distinctions in the Bahá'í writings, such as privileging girls over boys for education, and only men being able to serve on the Universal House of Justice.[122] She proposes that the common reading of 'equality' in Bahá'í texts may not reflect the way in which the concept was used by Bahá'u'lláh:

> ...when it comes to matters of economics or government, one is likely to assume that *equality* means *freedom to be treated without regard to sex*. This is the assumption that must be inspected. It is evident that such a definition will serve in the vast majority of situations as a standard for applying the principle of equality.
>
> But apparently it does not fully describe what Bahá'u'lláh means by equality... Equality need not be understood as *freedom to be treated without regard to sex*. A major theme in recent feminist legal critique is rather that *equality is freedom from systematic subordination because of sex*...[123]
>
> The implications of the latter definition are vast, as it challenges the underpinnings of longstanding traditions and institutions. This understanding touches the essential character of inequality as it has existed in practice – the relationship of subordination – rather than the symptoms and thus can be usefully applied in all societies, regardless of the extent to which formal equality has been achieved. Moreover, it is submitted that this definition is consistent with the Bahá'í vision of equality. Nothing less will enable a practical reconciliation between the public and private lives of women or do justice to the full range of relevant Bahá'í teachings.[124]

Lata Ta'eed, 'Sex, Gender, and New Age Stereotyping',[125] also seeks to 'assess some of the present interpretations of Bahá'í Writings on the equality of the sexes so that we can move into the future with some degree of clarity', looking at concepts such as masculinity and femininity; redefining power from 'the ability to do what one chooses' to 'the capacity to influence, alter, affect the lives of those around us'; and using the word

'complementarity' to 'denote a symmetrical relationship between a man and a woman, whereby mankind and womankind are "parts of composite humanity"'.

Authors, both male and female, of essays in *Equal Circles: Women and Men in the Bahá'í Community* relate some of the challenges they have had in trying to apply the principle of gender equality in their own lives and within their Bahá'í communities in the face of what they see as 'systematic subordination because of sex'. In her introduction to the book, Peggy Caton describes the Bahá'í study class which gave rise to the essays. The men were perceived by the women to be 'dominating' and dismissive of the women's contributions; the women, when they protested, were perceived by the men to have 'nothing substantial to say' and that their 'objections had nothing to do with gender'.[126] Similar to Schweitz's observations, the essayists in this book 'face the dilemma' of how to understand the Bahá'í writings on equality.[127] 'Our further development', Caton asserts, 'requires us to keep an open mind, to regard equality as a process, one that will always call for questioning, probing and seeking new understanding'.[128]

Feminism as it relates to the Bahá'í teaching of gender equality is explored by Hoda Mahmoudi in her essay 'From Oppression to Equality: The Emergence of the Feminist Perspective'.[129] She asks,

> What is the female world and in what ways is it similar or different from the present hierarchical, male-oriented social system?... what do we know about the female counterpart and what are possible feminine characteristics which must become integrated into the present social system as it progresses toward achieving equality between the sexes?

To answer this she discusses the feminist perspective in relation to morality, reason, and science, concluding that in these areas

> ... the emerging feminist view speaks to the complementarity (as opposed to the inferiority) of the feminine character. In fact, given the present dangerous and chaotic status of the global social system, the feminine perspective emerges as an imperative model for creating a sane balance. This conceptualization appears to be in agreement and convergent with the Bahá'í concept of the equality of men and women.[130]

Moojan Momen, in his exploration of feminism and society in 'In All the Ways that Matter, Women Don't Count',[131] also explores an understanding of equality that creates a society with more feminine characteristics but suggests that it does not come about by 'empowering' women to act as men do within a basically patriarchal social framework, nor by 'a mere intellectual assent to the equal position of men and women; nor just the movement of women into all areas of society; but rather, a far more fundamental change to the foundations and values of society, the evolution of a new reality'. While many, he writes, 'imagine that the goal of the advancement of women should be to change things so that women do "count" in society', 'what we should be aiming for is to change "the ways that matter" in our society'.

Other researchers have focused on subjects of great importance to feminists such as domestic violence, sexuality and reproductive rights. That

these are appropriates topics for investigation is suggested by Bahá'u'lláh's statement that, as a matter of principle, men need to take responsibility for preventing violence against women:

> The friends of God must be adorned with the ornament of justice, equity, kindness and love. As they do not allow themselves to be the object of cruelty and transgression, in like manner they should not allow such tyranny to visit the handmaidens of God. He, verily, speaketh the truth and commandeth that which benefitteth His servants and handmaidens. He is the Protector of all in this world and the next.[132]

The theme of domestic violence was taken up in 1994 by the Bahá'í International Community at a symposium on 'Creating Violence-Free Families', co-sponsored by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and UNICEF in May 1994, on the occasion of the International Year of the Family.[133] In 1995, Michael Penn, clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at Franklin & Marshall College, called violence against women a 'global epidemic'.[134] In his article 'Violence Against Women and Girls', he wrote that it is 'unlikely that gender-based violence will be eliminated until gross disparities in male/female income, opportunity, and socio-political participation are also reduced. Furthermore, to ensure a lasting foundation for the equality of men and women, the importance of moral and spiritual prerequisites for the establishment of viable human relationships cannot be ignored'.[135]

> Although gender-based violence is correlated with gender-related inequities, replacing the present patterns of violence, conflict, and domination with family and societal processes that reflect men's and women's interdependence will require more than the establishment of economic and/or socio-political parity. It will require transformation in every aspect of human life and functioning. It will also require the active and willing involvement of men.[136]

That men need to actively promote and practise the equality of women and men is the subject of another article by Hoda Mahmoudi, 'The Role of Men in Establishing the Equality of Women' in the same journal.[137] She asks,

> By what means will man champion the qualities 'in which woman is strong'? It would be missing the point altogether to think that such a change could be imposed by force, in effect, by means of the same dominance and aggression that such values are intended to replace. Thus the notion of responsibility as voluntary action, of sacrifice of self-interests for the welfare of others, is central to the process of change. The means is, in a sense, also the end.[138]

Psychiatrist Agnes Ghaznavi addressed another issue, which was of interest to feminists, but somewhat challenging for some Bahá'ís of the time: sexuality. In her book *Sexuality, Relationships and Spiritual Growth*, she discusses the qualities and attitudes necessary for a relationship of equality.[139] 'Sexuality', she writes, 'is a bodily expression of many spiritual principles, among them reciprocity', which 'is similar to fairness and justice'.[140] Drawing on her experience as a specialist in relationships, Ghaznavi wrote

about female sexuality, the attitudes of men towards women and attitudes of women towards men, the sexual exploitation of women and girls and violence against them, as well as adolescent sexuality, relating the Bahá'í teachings to all these areas of research.

Some attention has been given by scholars, notably Lil Osborn, to feminist theology with its focus on women-specific spirituality, the concept of the goddess, the use of male imagery in the scriptures and in language relating to God. In her 1994 essay 'Female Representations of the Holy Spirit in Bahá'í and Christian writings and their implications for gender roles', she examines the suggestion of some feminists that if the Holy Spirit were recast as female, women would have a better position in society, and contrasts this with the symbol of the Maid of Heaven found in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Osborn concludes that:

> God is God, indivisible and all-powerful. Male domination of patriarchal culture means that men, rather than women, interpreted and expanded the meaning of symbols. God cannot be 'feminised' or replaced with a goddess. Rewriting the scriptures in 'femspeak' is an artificial construction. The true equality of men and women must be within the context of the unity of humankind. That means changing society so that women matter, not changing the symbols.[141]

Institutional Articulation of Gender Equality

National Bahá'í institutions have also contributed to the articulation of the equality of women and men, in the appeals made to their communities,[142] the education they offer to the Bahá'ís, the guidance they provide on such issues as domestic violence and abuse,[143] their actions in response to perpetrators and survivors, their encouragement of the exploration of issues relating to gender and women,[144] and the provision of study days, consulting fora and workshops where Bahá'ís and their friends can discuss these issues and share experiences. For example, the Spring 1975 issue of *World Order* was devoted to the rights of women and its Fall 1995 issue to gender equality and complementarity.[145] In 1989 *Bahá'í Canada*, the journal of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, dedicated the whole of its March/April issue to 'Their Cry Shall Rise: A View of Sexual Equality'.

Conclusion

For over 150 years the concept of the equality of women and men, found in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, has been explained in a variety of ways to different audiences, from those steeped in the traditions of cultures that deny the very humanity of women, to feminists who agitated for the vote, to women who deny the value of men, and to those wishing to create a more just, peaceful, thoughtful and prosperous society. The articulation of the equality and rights of women by Bahá'í leaders, scholars and researchers, the implementation of strategies, at all levels of social organization, to embed the concepts and to put them into practice, the efforts of the Bahá'í International Community and others to introduce the theory and the practice of equality into social discourse, and the establishment of an educational system that enables all people to learn how to build their own capacities and develop their communities – all these have contributed to making a

reality of the metaphor of the bird of humanity needing two wings, male and female, to progress. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence would no doubt have been pleased.

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A social activist, she focuses on a cluster of issues that promote social justice: business ethics, the advancement of women, poverty eradication, health, criminal justice, interfaith harmony, housing and the environment.

Dr Momen has been a magistrate in the criminal court since 1982 and a lay family judge since 1984; she is currently vice chair of the Family Panel. She is cofounder and chair of ebbf (Ethical Business Building the Future) and board member of the International Environment Forum, both Bahá'í-inspired organizations. She is a Trustee of the National Alliance of Women's Organizations, Widows' Rights International, the Ward and Brown Foundation, the Ashworth Charitable Trust, the Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation and the Bedford Council of Faiths. She has been mentioned in editions of *Who's Who of Women* since 1997.

She was awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in June 2014 for 'services to the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and to the community in Bedfordshire'.

She has been married to Moojan Momen since 1971 and is a mother of two and a grandmother of two.

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Endnotes

1. An ardent socialist, Mrs (later Baroness) Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence helped establish the Independent Labour Party. See, https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?div=t19120514–54. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)

2. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence is identified as the 'ardent suffragist' in an article written by Mary Hanford Ford in *Star of the West*. The article describes a meeting between Pethick-Lawrence and 'Abdu'l-Bahá at the home of Lady Blomfield. Ford gets the date of the meeting wrong by a year, as is clear from the rest of the article (compare '*Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, Eric Hammond (ed.), London: Green & Co., 1912, 102–3) the meeting took place in September 1911.

3. Quoted in *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London*.

4. The concept of the 'two wings' appeared in authoritative text when, many years later, 'Abdu'l-Bahá used this same image in *Letter and Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, The Hague*, Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1920, 7.

5. See Maḥmúd Zarqání, *Maḥmúd's Diary*, trans. Mohi Sobhani, Oxford: George Ronald, 1998.

6. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Hague,* 7.

7. See, for example, *Toward Prosperity: The Role of Women and Men in Building a Flourishing World Civilization*, 13–24 March 2017: https://www.bic.org/statements/toward-prosperity-role-women-and-men-building-flourishing-world-civilization. (Last accessed 21 August 2018.), *Empowering Girls*, 3 March 1998: https://www.bic.org/statements/empowering-girls. (Last accessed 21 August 2018.) and, *Women and Development in the Pacific*, 9 March 1985: https://www.bic.org/statements/women-and-development-pacific. (Last accessed 21 August 2018.)

8. See, for example: The Universal House of Justice, 'Letter to the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith', 20th June 2008: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20081020_001/1#893552861. (Last accessed 21 August 2018.) Also, Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By,* rev. edn., Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995, 281; https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/shoghi-effendi/god-passes-by/1#337700484. (Last accessed 21 August 2018.) Janet A. Khan and Peter L. Khan, *Advancement of Women: A Bahá'í Perspective*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1998, 48–9, 299–303.

9. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Women*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, rev. edn., Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1990.

10. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983, 250.

11. 'The principle of the equality between women and men, like the other teachings of the Faith, can be effectively and universally established among the friends when it is pursued in conjunction with all the other aspects of Bahá'í life. Change is an evolutionary process requiring patience with one's self and others, loving education and the passage of time as the believers deepen their knowledge of the principles of the Faith, gradually discard long-held traditional attitudes and progressively conform their lives to the unifying teachings of the Cause'. Universal House of Justice, letter of 25 July 1984 to an individual.

12. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992, para. 105.

13. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *ibid*, Notes, 199–200.

14. Bahá'u'lláh, *Aqdas*, para. 33.

15. Bahá'u'lláh, *Aqdas*, 7.

16. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982, provides much useful source material on the subject of the equality of men and women. For talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá citing historical examples, see particularly: 'Talk to the Federation of Women's Clubs' 74–7, 'Talk to a woman's suffrage meeting' 133–7 and 'Talk at Franklin Square House', 280–4.

17. See Nathan Rutstein, *Corinne True: Faithful Handmaid of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1987.

18. The Women's Assembly of Teaching was already operational by May 1902 when they rented a hall for Bahá'í meetings (Rutstein, *Corinne* 37–8).

19. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978, 80.

20. *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas*, Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, vol. 1, 1909, 90. The modern translation undertaken by a Committee at the Bahá'í World Centre reads: 'Know thou, O handmaid, that in the sight of Bahá, women are accounted the same as men, and God hath created all humankind in His own image, and after His own likeness. That is, men and women alike are the revealers of His names and attributes, and from the spiritual viewpoint there is no difference between them. Whosoever draweth nearer to God, that one is the most favoured, whether man or woman. How many a handmaid, ardent and devoted, hath, within the sheltering shade of Bahá, proved superior to the men, and surpassed the famous of the earth'. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 79–80).

21. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, From a letter written to Corinne True, prov. trans. Dr Ameen U. Fareed, 29 July 1909. Letter to Corinne True: https://bahailibrary.com/abdulbaha_letter_true_women. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)
22. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, 175.
23. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Women*, 18.
24. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, 135–6.
25. See Soli Shahvar, *The Forgotten Schools: The Bahá'ís and Modern Education in Iran, 1899–1934*, London: I B Tauris & Co Ltd., 2009.
26. Elizabeth Herrick's name has been recorded on the Roll of Honour of Suffragette Prisoners, 1905–1914: http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/ee5a777f-1d7c-416b-a249-c7cb64fcc0a8#. (Last accessed 22 August 2018.)
27. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Constance Maud, 'Abdul Baha', *Fortnightly Review* (London), 91, April 1912, 544.
28. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, 252.
29. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 75.
30. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks,* London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1967, 161.
31. Wendell Phillips Dodge, 'Abdul-Baha's Arrival in America', *Star of the West*, 3(3), 28 April 1912, 4.
32. 'All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization' (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 215).
33. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 182–3.
34. *Agnes Parsons' Diary,* ed. Richard Hollinger, Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1996, 50.
35. Maḥmúd, *Diary*, 63.
36. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, 133.
37. *ibid* 134.
38. *ibid* 135.
39. *ibid* 283.
40. Mírzá Aḥmad Sohráb, 'With Abdul-Baha in London', *Star of the West,* 3(19), 5.
41. H.M. Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, 2nd edn., Oxford: George Ronald, 1987, 347.
42. Lady Blomfield [Sitárih Khánum; Sara Louise], *The Chosen Highway*, rpt. Oxford: George Ronald, 2007, 154.
43. It is likely that the translator for 'Abdu'l-Bahá was Mírzá Aḥmad Sohráb, who is listed in the proceedings as a participant representing Orient Occident Unity, Washington DC.
44. *Report of the Annual Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, Volume 18, Part 1912*: http://www.archive.org/details/reportstdannual09unkngoog, http://www.archive.org/stream/reportstdannual09unkngoog#page/n12/mode/2up.
45. In keeping with the practice of the times, only men were invited to present papers at the conference. Delegates who brought their wives were marked with an asterisk on the list of those attending.
46. Maḥmúd, *Diary*, 102.
47. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, 175.
48. *ibid* 317.
49. See, for example, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London* 29–30, 60–2, 70–1; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 102–3, 118–19, 121–2, 123–4.
50. See, for example, the speech of Samuel Evans, MP for Mid-Glamorganshire, British Parliament, 25 April 1906, in *Parliamentary Debates*, Hansard, 4th Series, 155, 30 March to 25 April 1906, cols. 1582–7.

51. Helen Kendrick Johnson, *Woman and the Republic: A Survey of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the United States and a Discussion of the Claims and Arguments of Its Foremost Advocates*, New York: D. Appleton, 1897. It was published in a new edition in 1913. See particularly chapter 3, 'Woman Suffrage and the American Republic': http://womenshistory.about.com/library/etext/bl_watr_ch03.htm. (Last accessed 1 August 2018.) ('Arguments against Women's Suffrage'. A similar argument was made by Grace Saxon Mills: http://www.johndclare.net/Women1_ArgumentsAgainst.htm. (Last accessed 1 August 2018.)
52. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 75; Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, 34.
53. Maḥmúd, *Diary*, 56.
54. Allan L. Ward, *239 Days: 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Journey in America,* Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979, 45.
55. *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London,* 85.
56. *Abdul Baha on Divine Philosophy*, Boston: The Tudor Press, 1918, 83.
57. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990, 68–9.
58. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent 1923–1957*, comp. and ed. Írán Fúrútan Muhájir, rev. edn., New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995, 10.
59. Shoghi Effendi, Cablegram of 25 April 1951, in Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World,* Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971, 12.
60. Shoghi Effendi, Letter of April 1956, in *ibid* 96–7.
61. April 1954, published in Shoghi Effendi, *Messages*, 65.
62. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By,* 281.
63. Letter of the Universal House of Justice, 1 January 1986, and compilation 'Women': https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/compilations/women/. (Last accessed 24 September 2018.)
64. Letter of the Universal House of Justice addressed to the Peoples of the World, October 1985: https://www.bahai.org/documents/theuniversalhouseofjustice/promiseworldpeace. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)
65. Letter of the Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2000: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritativetexts/theuniversalhouseofjustice/messages/20000421_001/1#361534303. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)
66. See Bahá'í International Community, 'Situation of Bahá'ís in Iran': https://www.bic.org/focus-areas/situation-iranian-bahais/current-situation. (Last accessed 23 September 2018.)
67. Letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith, 20 June 2008: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20081020_001/1#893552861. (Last accessed 23 September 2018.)
68. Letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, on 28 December 1980: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritativetexts/theuniversalhouseofjustice/messages/19801228_001/1#207456958. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)
69. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, 28 December 1980.
70. From a letter of the Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 1984. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)
71. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Philosophy,* 83.
72. See, for example, letter of the Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2013: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritativetexts/theuniversalhouseofjustice/messages/20130421_001/1#489916485. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)
73. From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 24 January. 1993: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritativetexts/theuniversalhouseofjustice/messages/19930124_001/1#717196623. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)

74. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 26 May 1971.

75. See, for example, Shoghi Effendi, letter of 14 December 1940, in Shoghi Effendi, *Subcontinent,* 193.

76. Universal House of Justice, from a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, 31 May 1988: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritativetexts/theuniversalhouseofjustice/messages/19880531_001/1#807975517. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)

77. Universal House of Justice, from a letter written on its behalf to an individual, 22 January 2010: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritativetexts/theuniversalhouseofjustice/messages/20100122_001/1#792353859. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)

78. Universal House of Justice, from a letter to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 25 May 1975: https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritativetexts/theuniversalhouseofjustice/messages/19750525_001/1#947875287. (Last accessed 26 September 2018.)

79. See Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2000.

80. See Overview of Activities Related to Women, 18 March 1993: https://www.bic.org/statements/overview-activities-related-women. (Last accessed 25 September 2018.)

81. Bahá'í International Community, 'Equality of Women and Men': https://www.bic.org/focus-areas/equality-men-and-women. (Last accessed 25 September 2018.)

82. A time line of the work of the BIC can be found at: https://www.bic.org/about/about-us#history. (Last accessed 25 September 2018.)

83. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith*. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, 148–9.

84. *The Bahá'í World*. vols. 1–12, 1925–54. rpt. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980; hereinafter BW.

85. Bahá'í International Community, *A Bahá'í Declaration of Human Obligations and Rights*, Presented to the first session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Lake Success, NY 1 February 1947: https://www.bic.org/statements/bahai-declaration-human-obligations-and-rights. (Last accessed 17 September 2018.)

86. Bahá'í International Community, *A Bahá'í Statement on the Rights of Women*. Submitted to United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, August 1947, by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, Wilmette, Illinois. The text of this document was published in *World Order*, 13:7 (October 1947), 231–2: https://bahai.works/World_Order/Volume_13. (Last accessed 18 September 2018.)

87. Bahá'í International Community, *Obligations,* para. I.1.

88. *ibid* para. IV.2.1.

89. The CSW met for the first time at Lake Success, New York, in February 1947. At that time the government representatives from 15 countries were all women.

90. See, for example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 283; Dodge, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Arrival', 4–6.

91. *World Order*, 13:7, 231–2: https://bahai.works/World_Order/Volume_13. (Last accessed 18 September 2018.)

92. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America 1947–1957*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995, 4–38.

93. *ibid* 9.

94. The full text of the article, including its covering letter and formal registration documents can be found at: United Nations Palestine Commission, Communication Received from National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada concerning the Organization's position with regard to Palestine and the preservation of religious rights: https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/0074E155E7831EE3852570610068A609. (Last accessed 25 September 2018.)

95. Bahá'í International Community, 'History of Active Cooperation with the United Nations': https://www.bic.org/statements/bah%25C3%25A1%25C3%25AD-international-community-history-active-cooperation-united-nations. It was granted consultative status (now called 'special' consultative status) with ECOSOC in 1970 (http://undocs.org/E/2015/INF/5), with UNICEF in 1976 and with UNIFEM (now UN Women) in 1989. (Last accessed 18 September 2018.)

96. This statement is at https://bahai.works/World_Order/Volume_14/Issue_2.

97. BW12: 42–3.

98. The range of statements made by the Bahá'í International Community, documents, videos and news are at: https://www.bic.org/documents-and-news-s.

99. https://www.bic.org/documents-and-news-s?type_2%5B%5D=2&type_2%5B%5D=4&field_category_tid%5B%5D=28&tid=All&combine=&field_article_date_value%5Bvalue%5D%5Bdate%5D=&field_article_date_value_1%5Bvalue%5D%5Bdate%5D=&field_language_tid=37&items_per_page=20. (Last accessed 29 September 2018.)

100. Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity: https://www.globalprosperity.org/.

101. Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, 'Advancing Toward the Equality of Women and Men', 8 December 2009: https://www.globalprosperity.org/documents/ISGP_Advancing_Toward_the_Equality_of_Women_and_Men.pdf?2ddadebc. (Last accessed 29 September 2018.)

102. See 'The Training Institute': https://www.bahai.org/action/response-call-bahaullah/training-institute and http://www.ruhi.org/. (Last accessed 25 September 2018.)

103. *Star of the West*, 3 April 1910, originally titled *Bahai News*.

104. *ibid* 10.

105. *ibid* 11.

106. Dr Orrol Harper, 'The Equality of Men and Women' *Bahá'í Year Book, 1925–1926*, New York, NY: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1926, 151.

107. Trevor R. J. Finch, '*Unclipping the Wings: A Survey of Secondary Literature in English on Bahá'í Perspectives on Women', Bahá'í Studies Review* 4(1), 1994, https://bahai-library.com/finch_unclipping_wings.

108. e.g. Dorothy Freeman Gilstrap, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker.* Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984, 1999; Wendy Heller, *Lidia: The Life of Lidia Zamenhof, Daughter of Esperanto*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1985.

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111. e.g. Madeline Hellaby, *Sarah Ann Ridgway*, First Bahá'í in the North of England, Oxford: George Ronald, 2003.

112. e.g. Enoch Tanyi: *The Story of David and Esther Tanyi: Adam and Eve of the Bahá'í Faith in Cameroon*, Oxford: George Ronald, 2017.

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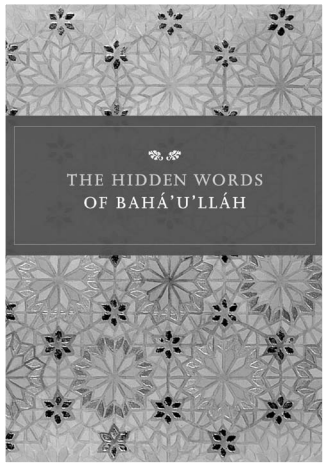

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The First Recorded Bahá'í Fireside

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Abstract

This article presents an episode recounted by Cambridge orientalist, Edward Granville Browne (7 February 1862–5 January 1926), as narrated in his travel classic, A Year Amongst the Persians, *first published in 1893 (second edition published by Cambridge in 1927). This may be characterized, with some poetic licence as the first recorded 'fireside' in Bahá'í history. That is; the first-hand account given in the course of his historic contacts with the Bahá'ís in Persia (present-day Iran), during his stay in Shíráz, from Thursday 22 March 1888 to Saturday 6 April 1888 – at which time Browne, at long last, succeeded in his quest to discover further information on the Bábí religion which, by this time, had evolved into what is today known as the 'Bahá'í Faith' now an independent world religion established in all countries except for North Korea and the Vatican. Special focus is devoted to a meeting that took place in Shíráz on 'Friday, March 30th', 1888 – and which here is characterized as 'the first recorded Bahá'í fireside'. Browne's account – loosely compared, in the present study, to his original diary entries, digital scans of which are now made available by Pembroke College, Cambridge, as part of the 'Browne Archive Project' – is energized by his intense curiosity, which may fairly be described as a 'passion' for his research interest as a scholar. To ascertain the degree to which Browne's narrative is a composite, reworked account – and not strictly sequential and chronological – it makes sense to draw some correspondences between Browne's diary entries, and the Shíráz narrative in Chapter XI in* A Year Amongst the Persians, *as to both topics and dates. Briefly, the present article highlights Browne's diary entries, folio by folio (page by page), from Vols. II and III of Browne's diary, and offers some observations on corresponding passages in* A Year Amongst the Persians.

Keywords

Edward Granville Browne
Persians
Shíráz
diary
Bahá'í
Bábí
fireside

This article presents an episode that took place in Shíráz, Persia (present-day Iran) on Friday, March 30, 1888, as recounted by Cambridge orientalist, Edward Granville Browne (7 February 1862–5 January 1926), as narrated in his travel classic, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, first published in 1893 (second edition published by Cambridge University Press in 1927). This may be characterized, with some poetic licence as the first recorded 'fireside' in Bahá'í history.[1] It forms part of Browne's first-hand account of his contacts with the Bahá'ís in Persia (present-day Iran), during his stay in Shíráz, from Thursday 22 March 1888 to Saturday 6 April 1888. During this time Browne, at long last, succeeded in his quest to discover further information on the Bábí religion which, by this time, had evolved into what is today known as the 'Bahá'í Faith now an independent world religion established in all countries except for North Korea and the Vatican. Of course, Browne already had

extensive knowledge of the Bábí and Bahá'í religions, which he acquired during the course of his research. During the 1880s, moreover, Browne was a personal friend of an Iranian Bahá'í in London.[2] Throughout the present article, Browne's account is compared to his original diary entries, digital scans of which are now made available by Pembroke College, Cambridge, as part of the 'Browne Archive Project'. Browne's record of this event is energized by his intense curiosity, which may fairly be described as a 'passion' for his research interest as a scholar. A sense of discovery pervades the narrative, which recreates and memorializes Browne's encounters with the Bahá'ís of Shíráz, during a time in which they had to carry on a rather subterranean, secretive existence, in order to avoid further acts of violent persecution perpetrated by state and clerical authorities which, although abated, continues to this day.

Here, by 'recorded' is meant a published, historical narrative – to the extent that an autobiographical account may function as history. 'History' is largely, if not primarily, based on such primary sources as eyewitness accounts, personal memoirs, diaries, contemporaneous notes, autobiographies, documents of various kinds and so forth. To the extent that an autobiography may function as a primary source of history, the narrative of interest here is Edward Granville Browne's autobiographical *A Year Amongst the Persians: Impressions as to the Life, Character, & Thought of the People of Persia Received During Twelve Months' Residence in That Country in the Years 1887–8*,[3] acclaimed as one of the most notable travel classics set in the Middle East, and which Bahá'í historian, Hasan M. Balyuzi (1908–1980, and appointed a 'Hand of the Cause of God' by Shoghi Effendi) praised as an 'imperishable book'.[4]

In the present article, reference will also be made to Browne's travel diary (on which *A Year Amongst the Persians* is based). The Cambridge Shahnama Centre for Persian Studies, established in 2010 at Pembroke College, Cambridge, launched the Browne Archive Project. Thanks to this project, Browne's diary is now available online, uploaded as high-resolution, digital scans. The scans of interest here are contained in Vols. II[5] and III.[6] Of particular interest, as previously stated, is Browne's account of his meetings with various 'Bábís' (i.e. Bahá'ís) in the city of Shíráz, Persia (present-day Iran), as Moojan Momen notes: 'Browne relates the story of his stay in Shíráz in two chapters. In the tenth chapter of the book, Browne gives a general account of what happened to him in Shíráz while he devotes the whole of the eleventh chapter to describing his contacts with the Bahá'ís of Shíráz'.[7]

As previously noted, the term 'fireside' – here used in a specifically Bahá'í context – is for purely descriptive purposes only, since this term is admittedly anachronistic, having gained currency considerably later in Bahá'í history – in Montreal, not Persia, as William Hatcher and Douglas Martin note.[8] A Bahá'í 'fireside' is an informal informational meeting in which the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith are introduced to one or more interested individuals. The term 'fireside' 'originated with the early Bahá'í group in Montreal, Canada' and 'describes small study groups held at regular intervals in private homes, to which friends and acquaintances are invited'. This 'informal activity' has been 'a prolific source of new members', as it 'allows inquirers to explore the Bahá'í concepts, laws, and teachings at their

own pace' and 'free from the concern that their private spiritual search may be 'on display', as might be the case in an open meeting.[9] This venerable Bahá'í teaching activity was much vaunted and valorized by Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921–1957.[10]

As applied to Professor Browne, his encounters with the Bahá'ís in Shíráz had the advantage of remaining personal and private, so as to not attract attention, which would otherwise have placed Browne, and his Bahá'í contacts, in some peril, if not in mortal danger, given the volatile situation at that time. In a sense, therefore, Browne, in furtherance of his original research, was engaged in a risky pursuit, fraught with potential, although not imminent danger. As to his diary, which Browne paginated in red ink, Browne notes (also in red ink), at the top of 338:

> This is the 3rd volume of my journal. The first contains from Trebizonde to Teheran (1–128): The second from Teheran to Shíráz (129–337). This volume, the 3rd, contains Shíráz, Yezd, & part of Kirmán: & the fourth & last vol. the rest of Kirmán, & the return thence to Teheran and Mázandarán, – thence home.[11]

A Year Amongst the Persians does not fit neatly into any single category. Browne's narrative is a tapestry, a woven, colourful and rich account of his experiences throughout his year in Persia, documenting his journey by way of a chronological travel narrative, recording, at every step of the way, his sundry impressions of Persia itself (with an emphasis on the Persians as a people), providing scenic details about Persian flora[12] and fauna, with close attention to the surrounding landscapes which he traversed, interspersing, if not spicing his narrative with quotations from Persian poetry (with English translations followed by transliterations of the original Persian), setting down observations that read like incipient anthropology notes of his field-work, all the while memorializing autobiographical accounts of his experiences in impressive detail, replete with extended conversations – given *verbatim* (whether real or imagined, or a mix of both) – to which Browne adds amusing anecdotes, offers occasional social critique, muses by way of personal and philosophical reflections, while offering an abundance of information on the history, literature and beliefs of the Bahá'í Faith, consistently referred to as the 'Bábí' religion, acquired first hand – all of which is based on his diary accounts.

To ascertain the degree to which Browne's narrative is a composite, reworked account – and not strictly sequential and chronological – it makes sense to draw some correspondences between Browne's diary entries, and the Shíráz narrative in Chapter XI in *A Year Amongst the Persians*, as to both topics and dates. Browne's corresponding diary entries, where 'SHÍRÁZ' appears as the heading at the top of each page, runs from Vol. II, 302, referring to the handwritten page number marked in red ink at the top of each page and corresponding to 212 of the online pagination[13] – to 329 (247 of the online) inclusive,[14] and, in Vol. III, from 338 to 349, inclusive.[15]

A natural place to begin is Wednesday March 21 1888, when Browne caught his first glimpse of Shíráz, and, with a sudden surge of surprise and delight, exclaimed:

> Rode on full of expectancy, till after a sudden turn to the right, I suddenly came in view of Shíráz, lying green & beautiful almost at my feet. I shall never

> as long as I live forget the thrill of ecstasy which I experienced as at last the long expected sight burst upon me. Yes, after so many weary miles march, there at last was beautiful Shíráz, the goal of my long pilgrimage – I almost wept for joy. No illusion – no disappointment here—: more beautiful than I had dreamed of or hoped for – smiling fair amidst its lovely gardens of cypresses & plane trees – its green domes standing in the pure air – was Shíráz, the darling city of Háfiz and Sa'dí.[16]

Here, the corresponding passage in *A Year Amongst the Persians*, expands this episode in the following narrative, offering a fuller account of Browne's experience in seeing Shíráz for the very first time:

> We were, I gathered, quite close to it now, and I was so full of expectancy that I had but little inclination to talk. Suddenly we turned a corner, and in that moment – a moment of which the recollection will never fade from my mind – there burst upon my delighted gaze a view the like of which (in its way) I never saw.
>
> We were now at that point, known to all students of Háfiz, called *Tang-i-Alláhu Akbar*, because whoever first beholds Shíráz hence is constrained by the exceeding beauty of the sight to cry out in admiration '*Alláhu Akbar*' – 'God is most great!' At our very feet, in a grassy, fertile plain girt with purple hills (on the loftier summits of which the snow still lingered), and half concealed amidst gardens of dark stately cypresses, wherein the rose and the judas-tree in luxuriant abundance struggled with a host of other flowers for the mastery of colour, sweet and beautiful in its garb of spring verdure which clothed the very roofs of the bazaars, studded with many a slender minaret, and many a turquoise-hued dome, lay the home of Persian culture, the mother of Persian genius, the sanctuary of poetry and philosophy, Shíráz.
>
> Riveted on this, and this alone, with an awe such as that wherewith the pilgrim approaches the shrine, with a delight such as that wherewith the exile again beholds his native land, my eyes scarcely marked the remoter beauties of the scene – the glittering azure of Lake Mahálú to the east, the interminable gardens of Masjid-Bardí to the west. Words cannot describe the rapture which overcame me as, after many a weary march, I gazed at length on the reality of that whereof I had so long dreamed, and found the reality not merely equal to, but far surpassing, the ideal which I had conceived. It is seldom enough in one's life that this occurs. When it does, one's innermost being is stirred with an emotion which baffles description, and which the most eloquent words can but dimly shadow forth.[17]

Here, British orientalist, Arthur John Arberry (better known as 'A. J. Arberry'), comments: 'This brief extract may be taken as a fair illustration of how the printed record differs from the written journal'.[18] To be fair, one would expect an author to expand upon incomplete, sketchy diary entries to render a complete, fully fledged narrative. In the process, some poetic licence may be permitted to enhance and vivify the retelling, which is in evidence here. The authenticity of this experience is not in question. It is a dramatic moment which Browne brings alive with narrative skill.

In *A Year Amongst the Persians*, Chapter XI, 'Shíráz (continued)', from a purely literary perspective, represents a significant departure from Browne's preceding narrative, as he explains in the opening of this chapter:

> In attempting to convey a correct impression of past events, it is often difficult to decide how far their true sequence may be disregarded for the sake of grouping together things naturally related. To set down all occurrences day by day, as they actually took place, is undoubtedly the easiest, and, in some ways, the most natural plan. On the other hand, it often necessitates the separation of matters intimately connected with one another, while the mind is distracted rather than refreshed by the continual succession of topics presented to it. For this reason I have thought it best to include in a separate chapter all that I have to say concerning my intercourse with the Bábís in Shíráz. . . As it was, it was a thing apart; a separate life in a different sphere; a drama, complete in itself, with its own scenes and its own actors.[19]

Browne's first few diary entries in Shíráz have no significant mention of anything related to Bahá'í topics or personal encounters.[20] The situation soon changes. The very first 'Bábí' (i.e. Bahá'í) whom Browne recounts in this chapter is 'Mírzá Muḥammad':

> Those who have followed me thus far on my journey will remember how, after long and fruitless search, a fortunate chance at length brought me into contact with the Bábís at Iṣfahán. They will remember also that the Bábí apostle to whom I was introduced promised to notify my desire for fuller instruction to his fellow-believers at Shíráz, and that he further communicated to me the name of one whose house formed one of their principal resorts. I had no sooner reached Shíráz than I began to consider how I should, without attracting attention or arousing comment, put myself in communication with the person so designated, who occupied a post of some importance in the public service which I will not more clearly specify. His name, too, I suppress for obvious reasons. Whenever I have occasion to allude to him, I shall speak of him as Mírzá Muḥammad.[21]

Momen identifies this individual, to wit: 'Mírzá Muḥammad-i-Báqir-i-Dihqán, son of Ḥájí Abu'l-Hasan-i-Bazzáz, and head of the Post Office in Shíráz, was one of the mainstays of the Shíráz Bahá'í community'.[22] Nothing specific is said about him at this point in the narrative.

In his entry for 'Sunday, March 25th', 1888, a certain 'Mírzá 'Alí Áḳá' paid Browne a visit, promised to obtain for Browne a copy of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, and 'agreed to collaborate in translating their book called *Lawh-i-Aḳdas*' *sic* i.e. the *Kitáb-i-Aḳdas,* i.e. the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* in Bahá'í transliteration).[23] This agrees with Momen's brief note to the same effect, and who discloses his identity as follows:

> Mírzá 'Alí Áqá, later known as 'Alí-Muḥammad Khán, Muvaqqaru'd-Dawlih father of the Hand of the Cause Mr. Hasan Balyuzi. Mírzá 'Alí Áqá had met Browne while studying in England. The date of this first meeting of theirs in Shíráz was Saturday, 24 March. Some of what Browne attributes to him was, however, said on 5 April. Mr. Balyuzi has kindly allowed me to publish

> some extracts from his father's diary which describe Browne's stay in Shíráz. Concerning this first meeting, Mírzá 'Alí Áqá writes: 'I stayed about two hours. We talked a great deal. He had stopped in Teheran [Tehran] for some months. His purpose is touring the country'. Mírzá 'Alí Áqá was an Afnán (family of the Bab on the maternal side) on his mother's side, and was in later years to become Governor of the Gulf Ports and Minister for Public Works before his death in 1921.[24]

So 'Mírzá 'Alí' (i.e. Mírzá 'Alí Áqá, later known as 'Alí-Muḥammad Kháan, Muvaqqaru'd-Dawlih, and also known as Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad Afnán Shírází) was the father of Bahá'í historian, Hasan Balyuzi (1908–1980, and appointed a 'Hand of the Cause of God' by Shoghi Effendi). Balyuzi writes that his 'father knew Edward Browne intimately in London in the eighties of the last century, was featured as Mírzá 'Alí in Browne's *A Year Amongst the Persians*, corresponded with him for some years, and more significant, he was instrumental in facilitating Browne's visit to 'Akká and to Bahá'u'lláh'.[25] Of his Sunday 25 March 1888, meeting with Mírzá 'Alí Áqá, Browne recounts:

> I withdrew my eyes from the tablet and turned them on Mirza 'Ali, who had been attentively watching my scrutiny. Our glances met, and I knew at once that my conjecture was right.
>
> 'Do you know Mírzá Muḥammad?' I asked presently.
>
> 'I know him well', he replied; 'it was he who informed me that you were coming. You have not seen him yet? Then I will take you there one day soon, and you shall meet other friends. I must find out when he will be disengaged, and arrange a time'.
>
> 'I did not know', said I, 'that you ... Tell me what you really think ..'.
>
> 'I confess I am puzzled', he answered. 'Such eloquence, such conviction, such lofty, soul-stirring words, such devotion and enthusiasm! If I could believe any religion it would be that'.
>
> Before I left he had shown me some of the books which he possessed. One of these was a small work called *Mudániyyát sic* ('Civilisation'), lithographed in Bombay, one of the few secular writings of the Bábís. Another was the *Kitáb-i-Aḳdas sic* ('Most Holy Book'), which contains the codified prescriptions of the sect in a brief compass. The latter my friend particularly commended to my attention.
>
> 'You must study this carefully if you desire to understand the matter', he said; 'I will get a copy made for you by our scribe, whom you will also see at Mírzá Muḥammad's. You should read it while you are here, so that any difficulties which arise may be explained. I am acquainted with a young Seyyid well versed in philosophy, who would perhaps come regularly to you while you are here. This would excite no suspicion, for it is known that you have come here to study'.[26]

Of this Sunday, 25 March 1888 episode, Momen comments:

> In Browne's diary, there is none of the excitement of discovering that his friend is a 'Bábí' that is evident in this passage. The diary states, however, that the two of them agreed to collaborate in translating the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. In Mirza 'Ali Aqa's diary there is the following entry: 'In the afternoon Dr Browne came as promised . . . [He] was here for as much as three hours. We were sitting in my room'.[27]

At this juncture, Browne came to a sudden realization – a moment of truth – that the religion of the Báb had undergone a fairly sudden and decisive development, i.e. the ascendancy of Bahá'u'lláh ('Glory of God', a spiritual title by which Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí Núrí Mázandaráni was known) and the decline of his meantime rival, Mírzá Yaḥyá (Ṣubḥ-i-Azal, 'Morn of Eternity'):

> Rejoiced as I was at the unexpected facilities which appeared to be opening out to me, there was one thing which somewhat distressed me. It was the Báb whom I had learned to regard as a hero, and whose works I desired to obtain and peruse, yet of him no account appeared to be taken. I questioned my friend about this, and learned (what I had already begun to suspect at Iṣfahán) that much had taken place amongst the Bábís since those events of which Gobineau's vivid and sympathetic record had so strangely moved me... Of Mírzá Yaḥyá, whom I had expected to find in the place of authority, I could learn little. He lived, he was in Cyprus, he wrote nothing, he had hardly any followers ... At any rate I had found the Bábís, and I should be able to talk with those who bore the name and revered the memory of one [the Báb] whom I had hitherto admired in silence – one whose name had been, since I entered Persia, a word almost forbidden. For the rest, I should soon learn about Behá, and understand the reasons which had led to his recognition as the inaugurator of a new dispensation.[28]

Browne's entry for 'Wednesday, March 28th', 1888 states, in part: 'In the morning, I went & saw Mírzá 'Alí Áḳá. I had a long talk with him. He promised to take me to see Mírzá Muḥammad Báḳir, & others of the proscribed sect, and to bring a Seyyid of the same to read the *Lawh-i-Akdas* to me, so that I might translate it into English'.[29] This agrees with Momen's note:

> Browne called again on Wednesday, 28 March and it was on this occasion that Mírzá 'Alí Áqá promised to bring along a young Sayyid who would assist Browne in his study of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. The young Sayyid's name, which Browne never discovered, was Áqá Sayyid Muḥammad-'Alí. He was a theological student at this time, and in later years he taught logic and philosophy in Shíráz.[30]

The entry for 'Thursday, March 29th', 1888, documents this significant event:

> Woke about 8 [8:00 a.m.] Ar [Around] 10 [10:00 a.m.] Mírzá 'Alí Áḳá came, accompanied by the Seyyid he spoke of yesterday, a young but sharp-looking man. They stayed till 11.30 & the Seyyid talked much, and asked endless questions about Natural Sciences – Anatomy, Physiology, Chemistry, etc. He talked little

> of his peculiar ideas till the end – then he promised to come repeatedly [?], & read the *Lawh-i-Aḳdas* to me. It was arranged that we should go tomorrow afternoon to see Mírzá Muḥammad Báḳir, as he is busy this afternoon at the post office. The scribe of the Law is to be there: & one of 'Alí Áḳá's uncles, a great man...'.[31]

Bearing in mind that *A Year Amongst the Persians* spans 650 pages, the present article simply cannot do justice to the entire work itself, but seeks to give a fair impression of Browne's masterful narrative by focusing on what is characterized here (with poetic licence) as 'the first recorded Bahá'í fireside' which is the focus of the next section.

The First Recorded Bahá'í Fireside: Friday 30 March 1888

At the Home of Mírzá Muḥmmad-i-Báqir

Whoever is familiar with Browne's life and work knows that he had a deep and abiding interest in the Báb and his religion. It was his passion. Driven by the desire to know more, Browne's journey throughout Persia took on the added dimension of a spiritual quest which ultimately led, in April 1890, to Browne's several audiences with Bahá'u'lláh himself, in Acre ('Akká) in Ottoman Palestine, now Israel.[32]

During his year-long (1887–1888) sojourn, little did Browne suspect the degree to which the Bábí religion had undergone profound changes and irreversible developments in the course of its evolution into what is now known as the Bahá'í Faith – information regarding which Browne documents in considerable detail – with an accuracy actuated by curiosity and the passion with which he pursued his investigation into all things 'Bábí' – yet with a certain begrudging air of disappointment in discovering that the Báb was no longer the sole, or even central, focus of the 'Bábí' religion, with primary attention having shifted to Bahá'u'lláh, whose writings eclipsed those of the Báb. In *A Year Amongst the Persians*, Browne resumes his narrative as follows:

> On the following afternoon I sallied forth to the house of Mírzá 'Alí, accompanied by my servant, Hájí Ṣafar, whom I would rather have left behind had I been able to find the way by myself. I met Mírzá 'Alí at the door of his house, and we proceeded at once to the abode of Mírzá Muḥammad. He was not in when we arrived, but appeared shortly, and welcomed me very cordially. After a brief interval we were joined by another guest, whose open countenance and frank greeting greatly predisposed me in his favour. This was the scribe and missionary, Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥasan, to whose inopportune meeting with Murshid in my room I have already alluded. He was shortly followed by the young Seyyid who had visited me on the previous day, and another much older Seyyid of very quiet, gentle appearance, who, as I afterwards learned, was related to the Báb, and was therefore one of the Afnán ('Branches') – a title given by the Bábís to all related, within certain degrees of affinity, to the founder of their faith. One or two of my host's colleagues completed the assembly.[33]

Momen reveals the identity of a 'Bábí' (Bahá'í) who is given the pseudonym 'Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥasan' to protect this individual's identity, whose life might be placed in danger if his true identity were publicly disclosed:

> This was Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥusayn of Shíráz known as Kharṭúmí on account of his having been exiled to Khartoum with Ḥájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí... He was one of the leading Bahá'ís of Shíráz and a fine calligrapher... After the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, however, he sided with the supporters of Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí and was expelled from the Bahá'í community.[34]

Hasan Balyuzi adds that 'Muḥammad-Ḥusayn Kharṭúmí' joined two other Bahá'í calligraphers in Bombay, where 'the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh were printed for the first time'.[35]

As for the 'much older Siyyid', Momen identifies this gentleman so: 'This was Áqá Sayyid Ḥusayn Afnán, a merchant resident in Shíráz and Mírzá 'Alí Áqá's maternal uncle. He was the son of Ḥájí Mírzá Abu'l-Qásim and grandfather of Shoghi Effendi. He died about 1929'.

This particular meeting appears to have taken place on 'Friday, March 30th', 1888, about which Browne, in his diary, writes: 'Woke at 2.15 [p.m.], but again slept till 3.15 [p.m.], when I hastily had tea, & set off with Hájí Safar to Mírzá 'Alí Áḳá's. We met him at the door, & went . . . on to Mírzá Muḥammad Báḳir's'.[36] And further: 'He was out when we arrived, but came soon. The scribe & propagandist, Hájí Mírzá Huseyn, was the first to arrive: a nice genuine looking man: my friend the Seyyid who came yesterday, & another very quiet-looking Seyyid, an uncle of Mírzá 'Alí Áḳá's, were there, & later on another employee of the post-office came'.[37]

As to the extended discussion on Bahá'í theophanology, however, that took place in the afternoon and early evening of 'Friday, March 30th', 1888, Browne's narration is somewhat of a variation on, and elaboration of, the corresponding diary account found on pages 213–214 of the diary. In *A Year amongst the Persians*, the heart of this discussion begins so: 'Then began a discussion between myself on the one hand, and the young Seyyid and Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥasan on the other, of which I can only attempt to give a general outline'.[38] This is somewhat of an understatement, as Browne's narration extends over the next several pages, ending on page 345, which ends so:

> It was now past sunset, and dusk was drawing on, so I was reluctantly compelled to depart homewards. On the whole, I was well satisfied with my first meeting with the Bábís of Shíráz, and looked forward to many similar conferences during my stay in Persia. They had talked freely and without restraint, had received me with every kindness, and appeared desirous of affording me every facility for comprehending their doctrines; and although some of my enquiries had not met with answers as clear as I could have desired, I was agreeably impressed with the fairness, courtesy, and freedom from prejudice of my new acquaintances. Especially it struck me that their knowledge of Christ's teaching and the gospels was much greater than that commonly possessed by the Musulmans, and I observed with pleasure that they regarded the Christians with a friendliness very gratifying to behold.[39]

Since this 'first recorded Bahá'í fireside' (as the present writer has characterized it) is easily accessible on the Internet (and easily readable, since it is printed, rather than handwritten, considering that Browne's cursive, though fairly clear in its own way, is not always easily decipherable), the reader may

appreciate an extended citation of Browne's original diary account of the discussion surrounding the relationship of Bahá'u'lláh to Christ especially as to their respective claims to divinity and as to Bahá'u'lláh's claims to prophecy fulfilment:

> At first the conversation was very fitful – I not being sure whether it would do to talk before the servants, but on my telling 'Alí Aḳá this, he spoke to Mírzá Báḳir, who dismissed them. Then we began talking on religious matters, my conversation being chiefly with the scribe, Ḥájí Mírzá Huseyn, & the Seyyid, who however became very silent towards the end, I having rather worsened him in an argument about the *nufús-i-sayf* [in Persian script, i.e. 'influence of the sword'] in Islám. I found it very difficult to get satisfactory answers out of them, as they shifted their ground continually. For instance they began arguing with me on the basis of their religion using the perfecting of the law of Christ, & likened the *ahḳám* ['precepts'] to his commands – e.g. 'prefer rather that you should be killed than that you should kill'. They said Behá was Christ come back 'as a thief in the night' according to his promise – nay, even 'the Father' himself. I asked them what they meant by this: whether they meant that Behá was God.
>
> They asked me what I understood by Christ's divinity, & they said – 'As if in the present company, there were one present much more learned than all the rest, he might be said spiritually speaking, to be the Father of the rest, so might Behá be said to be the Father of Christ'. I then asked them, if their religion were the perfecting of Christ's Law, what they thought of Islám, which would then appear an interpolation. This they would not admit, but avoiding discussing the question, saying it would take up too much time. The Seyyid & I then differed as to the right any 'prophet' had to use force to propagate his religion. He talked about *qahr* [wrath] & *lutf* [grace] [in Persian script], but I declined to admit the latter as an attribute of God. All along I was more & more struck with the insight which Gobineau had obtained with the matter.[40]

In the corresponding passage in *A Year Amongst the Persians*, this very same conversation is amplified and elaborated, in nearly ten full pages (from the last two words on page 343 through to the middle of 353) and quoted, in full, below, in order to demonstrate the degree to which Browne expanded the narrative from the diary notes provided above, with a few comments by the present writer interspersed throughout:

> Secondly, though I admit that your religion possesses these proofs in a remarkable degree (at least so far as regards the rapidity with which it spread in spite of all opposition), I cannot altogether agree that the triumph of Islám was an instance of the influence of the prophetic word only. The influence of the sword was certainly a factor in its wide diffusion. If the Arabs had not invaded Persia, slaying, plundering, and compelling, do you think that the religion of Muḥammad would have displaced the religion of Zoroaster? To us the great proof of the truth of Christ's teaching is that it steadily advanced in spite of the sword, not by the sword: the great reproach on Islam, that its diffusion was in so large a measure due to the force of arms rather than the force of argument. I sympathise with your religion, and desire to know more

> of it, chiefly because the history of its origin, the cruel fate of its founder, the tortures joyfully endured with heroic fortitude by its votaries, all remind me of the triumph of Christ, rather than the triumph of Muḥammad.

Comment: Browne's criticism of Islam being spread by the 'influence of the sword' rather than by the 'influence of the prophetic word only' is a common objection raised by Westerners who are asked to accept the divine origin and nature of the Qur'án, the holy book of Islám – or of the *sui generis* (i.e. unique) nature of Islám itself as a divine religion – whatever that means, whether in terms of Islamic origins, or the rise of Islamic civilization itself, and or of Islám in its totality in the grand scheme of things. Browne's reference to 'slaying, plundering, and compelling' is fair objection based on history, rather than scripture *per se*. Objectively speaking, the Qur'án is arguably the most influential book in history, next to the Bible.[41] 'Spiritual literacy' – one of the justifications for teaching world religions at public universities – naturally includes (or should include) a kind of 'music appreciation' of the Qur'án as revelation.[42] But the Qur'án is not even mentioned in Browne's account of this intense – and very tense – dialogue, in which Browne reiterates his objection – actually, his rejection – of the claim that Islam is a divine religion:

> 'As to your first observation', rejoined the Bábí spokesman, 'it is true, and we do recognise Zoroaster, and others whom the Musulmans reject, as prophets. For though falsehood may appear to flourish for a while, it cannot do so for long. God will not permit an utterly false religion to be the sole guide of thousands. But with Zoroaster and other ancient prophets you and I have nothing to do. The question for you is whether another prophet has come since Christ: for us, whether another has come since Muḥammad'.

Comment: Here, the Bahá'í teacher tries his best to shift the focus away from Muḥammad to refocus on Bahá'u'lláh, as the discussion, in Browne's words, was getting rather 'fitful'. While persuading Browne of the divine origin of Islam – including the divine mission of the prophet Muḥammad and the status of the Qur'án as divine revelation – was a worthy goal, it was not the primary goal of the discussion. But Browne does not relent, which is why he interrupts and raises his objection once again:

> 'Well', I interrupted, 'what about the propagation of Islám by the sword? For you cannot deny that in many countries it was so propagated. What right had Muḥammad – what right has any prophet – to slay where he cannot convince? Can such a thing be acceptable to God, who is Absolute Good?'

Comment: At this point, the discussion is going around in circles, with Browne now confounding the actions of Muḥammad with later Islamic history, such as the invasion and conquest of Persia. The 'young Seyyid' then gives an answer that, although cogent and well-made in its own way, fails to persuade Browne:

> 'A prophet has the right to slay if he knows that it is necessary', answered the young Seyyid, 'for he knows what is hidden from us; and if he sees that

> the slaughter of a few will prevent many from going astray, he is justified in commanding such slaughter. The prophet is the spiritual physician, and as no one would blame a physician for sacrificing a limb to save the body, so no one can question the right of a prophet to destroy the bodies of a few, that the souls of many may live. As to what you say, that God is Absolute Good, it is undeniably true; yet God has not only Attributes of Grace but also Attributes of Wrath – He is *Al-Ḳahhár* (the Compeller) as well as *Al-Laṭíf* (the Kind); *Al-Muntaḳim* (the Avenger) as well as *Al-Ghafúr* (the Pardoner). And these Attributes as well as those must be manifested in the prophet who is the God-revealing mirror'.

Comment: At this point, the Bahá'í teacher offers more of an Islamic perspective rather than a Bahá'í position on the so-called 'wrath' of God. In the Qur'án – and in the most widely known version of the list of ninety-nine 'most beautiful names of God' – among God's names are: 'the Subduer' (*al-Qahhár*) (Q. 12:39; 13:16; 14:48; 38:65; 39:4); 'the Compeller' (*al-Jabbár*) (Q. 59:23); 'the Avenger' (*al-Muntaqim*) (see Q. 44:16, although derived from the active participle, *muntaqimúna*); 'the Humiliator' (*al-Mudhill*) (Q. 3:26, although derived from the imperfect verb, *watudhillu*), such that some of the various names that appear in the most popular list of ninety-nine are not taken *verbatim* from the Qur'án[43] Browne takes issue with this argument which, in any case, is predicated on a classical Islamic perspective, and does not do justice to the Bahá'í understanding of God's 'wrath' as an experiential metaphor for the natural and foreseeable (and sometimes unforeseeable) consequences and ramifications of unjust acts and omissions.

Both Browne and Áqá Sayyid Muḥammad-'Alí ('the young Seyyid'), moreover, failed to distinguish between 'defensive *jihád*' (*jihád al-daf'*, as instanced by Muḥammad's defensive and preemptive military actions)[44] and 'offensive *jihád*' (*jihád al-ṭalab*, i.e. militarized missionary campaigns, as in the Arab invasion and conquest of Persia). Either way, Browne cannot accept defensive *jihád* as a 'just war'.

'I do not agree with you there', I answered. 'I know very well that men have often attributed, and do attribute, such qualities as these to God, and it appears to me that in so doing they have been led into all manner of evil and cruelty, whereby they have brought shame on the name of their religion. I believe what one of your own poets has said:

> *'Az Khayr-i-Maḥz juz nikú'í náyad'*,
>
> 'Naught but good comes from Absolute Good',
>
> and we cannot falsify the meaning of words in such wise as to say that qualities which we universally condemn in man are good in God. To say that revenge in man is bad, while revenge in God is good, is to confound reason, stultify speech, and juggle with paradoxes. But, passing by this question altogether, you can hardly imagine that a prophet in whom the 'Attributes of Wrath' were manifested could attract to himself such as have believed in a prophet in whom were reflected the 'Attributes of Grace'. Admitting even that a prophet sent to a very rude, ignorant, or froward people may be justified in using coercion to prepare the way for a better state of things,

> and admitting that Muḥammad was so justified by the circumstances under which he was placed, still you cannot expect those who have learned the gentle teaching of Christ to revert to the harsher doctrines of Muḥammad, for though the latter was subsequent as regards time, his religion was certainly not a higher development of the religion of Christ. I do not say that Muḥammad was not a prophet; I do not even assert that he could or should have dealt otherwise with his people; but, granting all this, it is still impossible for anyone who has understood the teaching of Christ to prefer the teaching of Muḥammad'.

Comment: In the Bahá'í conception of this expression, God's 'wrath' is metaphorical and refers to the 'justice' of God, as Shoghi Effendi explains: 'As regards the passages in the sacred writings indicating the wrath of God, ... [t]he wrath of God is in the administration of His justice, both in this world and in the world to come'.[45] Otherwise – as Browne reasonably points out – wrath and anger are primal and base emotions that are unworthy of human beings, how much more so of God. So this Islamic argument simply does not work, since Browne does not share these classical Islamic assumptions about the nature of God. So Áqá Sayyid Muḥammad-'Alí missed this golden opportunity to distinguish between the classical Islamic and the later Bahá'í conceptions of the so-called 'Attributes of Wrath'. This exchange may be characterized as a reflection of the religious understanding that one Bahá'í had at the time of his encounter with Browne. Browne continues his lengthy and substantive objections:

> You have said that the God-given message is addressed to the people of each epoch of time in such language as they can comprehend, in such measure as they can receive. Should we consider time only, and not place? May it not be that since the stages of development at which different peoples living at the same time have arrived are diverse, they may require different prophets and different religions? The child, as you have said, must be taught differently as he grows older, and the teacher accordingly employs different methods of instruction as his pupil waxes in years and understanding, though the knowledge he strives to impart remains always the same. But in the same school are to be found at one time pupils of many different ages and capacities. What is suitable to one class is not suitable to another. May it not be the same in the spiritual world?

Comment: Here, Browne offers a sophisticated and perhaps more realistic proposal that the Bahá'í doctrine of 'Progressive Revelation' might recognize what may be described as uneven and asynchronous 'stages of development' in various parts of the world, that simply do not, phenomenologically and historically speaking, neatly and uniformly 'progress' in as sequential and straightforward a way as 'the young Seyyid' had abstractly articulated.

At this point there was some dissension in the assembly; the young Seyyid shook his head, and relapsed into silence; Mírzá 'Alí signified approval of what I had said; Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥasan strove to avoid the point at issue, and proceeded thus:

> 'I have already said that what is incumbent on every man is that he should believe in the 'manifestation' of his own age. It is not required of him that he should discuss and compare all previous 'manifestations'. You have been brought up a follower of Christ. We have believed in this 'manifestation' which has taken place in these days. Let us not waste time in disputing about intermediate 'manifestations'. We do not desire to make you believe in Muḥammad but in Behá. If you should be convinced of the truth of Behá's teaching you have passed over the stage of Islám altogether. The last 'manifestation' includes and sums up all preceding ones. You say that you could not accept Islám because its laws and ordinances are harsher, and, in your eyes, less perfect than those laid down by Christ. Very well, we do not ask you to accept Islám; we ask you to consider whether you should not accept Behá. To do so you need not go back from a gentle to a severe dispensation'.

Comment: Browne had confounded Áqá Sayyid Muḥammad-'Alí ('the young Seyyid'), who 'shook his head, and relapsed into silence'. Mírzá 'Alí Áḳá ('Mírzá 'Alí') actually took sides with Browne in this argument (i.e. 'signified approval of what I had said'), at which point, Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥusayn Shírází, 'Kharṭúmí' ('Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥasan') diverted and presented some Bahá'í 'proofs' that Bahá'u'lláh was foretold by Christ:

> 'Behá has come for the perfecting of the law of Christ, and his injunctions are in all respects similar; for instance, we are commanded to *prefer rather that we should be killed than that we should kill*. It is the same throughout, and, indeed, could not be otherwise, for Behá is Christ returned again, even as He promised, to perfect that which He had begun. Your own books tell you that Christ shall come '*like a thief in the night*', at a time when you are not expecting Him'.
>
> 'True', I replied, 'but those same books tell us also that His coming shall be "*the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven and shineth unto the other part under heaven*"'.

Comment: Here, in stating that 'we are commanded to *prefer rather that we should be killed than that we should kill*', Kharṭúmí is referring to this well-known passage by Bahá'u'lláh:

> It followeth, therefore, that rendering assistance unto God, in this day, doth not and shall never consist in contending or disputing with any soul; nay rather, what is preferable in the sight of God is that the cities of men's hearts, which are ruled by the hosts of self and passion, should be subdued by the sword of utterance, of wisdom and of understanding. Thus, whoso seeketh to assist God must, before all else, conquer, with the sword of inner meaning and explanation, the city of his own heart and guard it from the remembrance of all save God, and only then set out to subdue the cities of the hearts of others.
>
> Such is the true meaning of rendering assistance unto God. Sedition hath never been pleasing unto God, nor were the acts committed in the past by certain foolish ones acceptable in His sight. *Know ye that to be killed in*

> *the path of His good pleasure is better for you than to kill.* The beloved of the Lord must, in this day, behave in such wise amidst His servants that they may by their very deeds and actions guide all men unto the paradise of the All-Glorious.[46]

Kharṭúmí adroitly shifts his focus from arguing that Bahá'u'lláh has perfected the laws of Christ to the argument that Bahá'u'lláh fulfils the prophecies of Christ (under the rationale that 'Behá has come for the perfecting of the law of Christ, ... for Behá is Christ returned again'), and goes on to explain that these predictions must be understood figuratively, not literally:

> 'There can be no contradiction between these two similes', answered the Bábí; 'and since the phrase "*like a thief in the night*" evidently signifies that when Christ returns it will be in a place where you do not expect Him, and at a time when you do not expect Him – that is, suddenly and secretly – it is clear that the comparison in the other passage which you quoted is to the suddenness and swiftness of the lightning, not to its universal vividness. If, as the Christians for the most part expect, Christ should come riding upon the clouds surrounded by angels, how could He be said in any sense to come "*like a thief in the night*"? Everyone would see him, and, seeing, would be compelled to believe'.

Comment: Kharṭúmí's response to Browne's questions about Christ's well-known prophecies is a classic 'appeal to absurdity', i.e. demonstrating that their literal occurrence is highly unlikely, if not impossible. Moreover, such predictions demand consistency, when read together. So two hermeneutical principles are advanced here: (1) such prophecies must be read figuratively; and (2) such prophecies must be read together consistently. (Such views are grounded in Bahá'u'lláh's most important doctrinal work, the Kitáb-i Íqán, 'The Book of Certitude', revealed in January 1861). Browne does not reject Kharṭúmí's argument, as stated.[47]

Kharṭúmí then goes on to explain that, as a general rule, popular messianic expectations are typically at variance with the way that the prophetic claimant actually fulfils (or is said to fulfil) the prophecies at issue. Such 'realized eschatology' (as academics would say) is proclaimed by the messianic claimant (and understood by followers) as spiritual in nature – and therefore figurative as to discourse itself – inviting metaphorical and symbolic interpretations, which can be consistent with the natural laws of the universe, while allowing for a major spiritual event in the course of history to occur, but without the literal fulfilment of prophecies that would contravene the laws of nature:

> It has always been through such considerations as these that men have rejected the prophet whose advent they professed to be expecting, because He did not come in some unnatural and impossible manner which they had vainly imagined. Christ was indeed the promised Messiah, yet the Jews, who had waited, and prayed, and longed for the coming of the Messiah, rejected Him when He did come for just such reasons. Ask a Jew now why he does not believe in Christ, and he will tell you that the signs whereby the Messiah was to be known were not manifest at His coming. Yet, had he understood

> what was intended by those signs, instead of being led away by vain traditions, he would know that the promised Messiah had come and gone and come again. So with the Christians. On a mountain [Mount Carmel] close by Acre is a monastery peopled by Christian priests and monks, assembled there to await the arrival of Christ on that spot as foretold. And they continue to gaze upwards into heaven, whence they suppose that He will descend, while only a few miles off in Acre He *has* returned, and is dwelling amongst men as before.

Comment: Kharṭúmí refers to the Templers (also spelled 'Templars') to whose leader, Georg David Hardegg (1812–1879), Bahá'u'lláh addressed a special 'Tablet' (epistle), which proclaimed Bahá'u'lláh's eschatological advent, albeit in a very oblique and opaque way.[48] Kharṭúmí resumes his discourse, as follows:

> O be not blinded by those very misapprehensions which you condemn so strongly in the Jews! The Jews would not believe in Christ because He was not accompanied by a host of angels; you blame the Jews for their obstinacy and frowardness, and you do rightly. But beware lest you condemn yourselves by alleging the very same reason as an excuse for rejecting this 'manifestation'. Christ came to the Jews accompanied by angels – angels none the less because they were in the guise of fishermen. Christ returns to you as Behá with angels, with clouds, with the sound of trumpets. His angels are His messengers; the clouds are the doubts which prevent you from recognising Him; the sound of trumpets is the sound of the proclamation which you now hear, announcing that He has come once more from heaven, even as He came before, not as a human form descending visibly from the sky, but as the Spirit of God entering into a man, and abiding there'.

Comment: Here, Kharṭúmí defines heavenly 'angels' as human 'messengers', who proclaim, with the metaphorical 'sound of trumpets', the very 'proclamation which you now hear' – which implies, of course, that Browne is in the presence of these very angels, with Kharṭúmí being among them. Browne rejoins that to assert is not to prove, and demands more evidence that Bahá'u'lláh is indeed the return of Christ:

> 'Well', I replied, 'your arguments are strong, and certainly deserve consideration. But, even supposing that you are right in principle, it does not follow that they hold good in this particular case. If I grant that the return of Christ may be in such wise as you indicate, nevertheless mere assertion will not prove that Behá is Christ. Indeed, we are told by Christ Himself that many will arise in His name, saying, 'See here', or 'See there', and are warned not to follow them'.
>
> 'Many have arisen falsely claiming to be Christ', he answered, 'but the injunction laid on you to beware of these does not mean that you are to refuse to accept Christ when He does return. The very fact that there are pretenders is a proof that there is a reality. You demand proofs, and you are right to do so. What proofs would suffice for you?'

Comment: Inviting Browne to be more specific (by asking, 'What proofs would suffice for you?') is a sign of a skilled Bahá'í teacher (at this time in history, since Kharṭúmí, after Bahá'u'lláh's death on 29 May 1892, became a schismatic 'Covenant-breaker'). Browne readily offers 'three signs' for consideration:

> 'The chief proofs which occur to me at this moment', I replied, 'are as follows: You admit, so far as I understand, that in each 'manifestation' a promise has been given of a succeeding 'manifestation' and that certain signs have always been laid down whereby that 'manifestation' may be recognised. It is therefore incumbent on you to show that the signs foretold by Christ as heralding His return have been accomplished in the coming of Behá. Furthermore, since each 'manifestation' must be fuller, completer, and more perfect than the last, you must prove that the doctrines taught by Behá are superior to the teaching of Christ – a thing which I confess seems to me almost impossible, for I cannot imagine a doctrine purer or more elevated than that of Christ. Lastly, quite apart from miracles in the ordinary sense, there is one sign which we regard as the especial characteristic of a prophet, to wit, that he should have knowledge of events which have not yet come to pass. No sign can be more appropriate or more convincing than this. For a prophet claims to be inspired by God, and to speak of the mysteries of the Unseen. If he has knowledge of the Unseen he may well be expected to have knowledge of the Future. That we may know that what he tells us about other matters beyond our ken is true, we must be convinced that he has knowledge surpassing ours in some matter which we can verify. This is afforded most readily by the foretelling of events which have not yet happened, and which we cannot foresee. These three signs appear to me both sufficient and requisite to establish such a claim as that which you advance for Behá'.

Comment: Here, Browne sets forth 'three signs' which, if conclusively substantiated, may demonstrably prove Bahá'u'lláh's theophanic claims: (1) specific 'signs foretold by Christ as heralding His return' that Bahá'u'lláh has fulfilled; (2) such 'doctrines taught' by Bahá'u'lláh that 'are superior to the teaching of Christ'; and (3) 'the foretelling of events which have not yet happened' that Bahá'u'lláh has foretold and which in fact, came true. Since the first two signs were previously discussed, Kharṭúmí ('Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥasan') addresses the third sign for Browne's consideration:

> 'As regards knowledge of the future', replied Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥasan, 'I could tell you of many occasions on which Behá has given proof of such. Not only I myself, but almost all who have been at Acre, and stood in his presence, have received warnings of impending dangers, or information concerning forthcoming events. Some of these I will, if it please God, relate to you at some future time. As regards the superiority of Behá's doctrines to those of Christ, you can judge for yourself if you will read his words. As regards the news of this 'manifestation' given to you by Christ, is it not the case that He promised to return? Did He not declare that one should come to comfort His followers, and perfect what He had begun? Did He not signify that after the Son should come the Father?'

Comment: At this juncture, Browne is taken aback – astounded by the sheer audacity of what sounded like an incredible and perhaps heretical

claim – that Bahá'u'lláh is somehow to be understood as having the station of 'the Father':

> 'Do you mean', I demanded in astonishment, 'that you regard Behá as the Father? What do you intend by this expression? You cannot surely mean that you consider Behá to be God Himself?'
>
> 'What do you mean by the expression "Son of God"'? returned the Bábí.
>
> 'Our learned men explain it in different ways', I answered; 'but let us take the explanation which Christ Himself gave in answer to the same question – 'As many as do the will of God are the sons of God'. Christ perfectly fulfilled the will of God; He had – as I understand it – reached the stage which your Ṣúfís call 'annihilation in God' (*fená fi'lláh*); He had become merged in God in thought, in will, in being, and could say truly, 'I am God'. Higher than this can no one pass; how then can you call Behá 'the Father', since 'the Father' is Infinite, Invisible, Omnipresent, Omnipotent?'

Comment: It was now Kharṭúmí's turn to respond, who answers:

> 'Suppose that in this assembly', replied the other, 'there were one wiser than all the rest, and containing in himself all, and more than all, the knowledge which the others possessed collectively. That one would be, in knowledge, the Father of all the others. So may Behá be called 'the Father' of Christ and of all preceding prophets'.
>
> 'Well', I answered, by no means satisfied with this explanation, 'apart from this, which I will pass by for the present, it appears to me that you confuse and confound different things. The coming of the Comforter is not the same thing, as we understand it, as the return of Christ, yet both of these you declare to be fulfilled in the coming of Behá. And whereas you spoke of Behá a little while ago as Christ returned, you now call him "the Father"'.

Comment: Kharṭúmí's answer fails to persuade Browne, who might have considered Khartumi's response on the issue of 'the Father' to be somewhat evasive – and perhaps far-fetched as to its reasoning. In any case, Kharṭúmí's explanation also fails to distinguish between what appear to be two distinctive uses of the term 'Father' in the Bahá'í Writings: (1) God, 'the Father', as a transcendent and unmanifest; and (2) God, 'the Father', as imminent and manifest, Who eschatologically and theophanically 'appears' in a 'God-revealing mirror' (what Bahá'ís refer to as the 'Manifestation of God') as Kharṭúmí has previously indicated.

As for the first meaning (i.e. God as 'the Father'), the following Bahá'í text discusses 'God, the Father' in the received, traditional Christian understanding – and what therefore informed Browne's own conception of what is meant by 'the Father':

> Remind them of these words and say unto them: 'Verily did the Pharisees rise up against Messiah, despite the bright beauty of His face and all His comeliness, and they cried out that He was not Messiah [Masíh] but a monster

> [Masíkh], because He had claimed to be Almighty God, the sovereign Lord of all, and told them, "I am God's Son, and verily in the inmost being of His only Son, His mighty Ward, *clearly revealed with all His attributes, all His perfections, standeth the Father*". This, they said, was open blasphemy and slander against the Lord according to the clear and irrefutable texts of the Old Testament. Therefore they passed the sentence upon Him, decreeing that His blood be shed, and they hanged Him on the cross.[49]

As for the second meaning (i.e. Bahá'u'lláh as 'the Father'), this harks back to the so-called 'Yuletide prophecy' of Isaiah 9:6, in which the advent of the 'Everlasting Father' is foretold, which Bahá'u'lláh claimed to fulfil: '*This is the Father foretold by Isaiah*, and the Comforter [Jesus] concerning Whom the Spirit had covenanted with you. Open your eyes, O concourse of bishops, that ye may behold your Lord seated upon the Throne of might and glory'.[50]

Kharṭúmí, moreover, also fell short in failing to disambiguate between 'Behá... as Christ returned' and 'as... the Father'. Browne was confused by the claims that Bahá'u'lláh was, at one and the same time, 'Christ returned' and the Father'. One can easily understand why Browne was perplexed and strenuously objected to these dual claims, for if God is the 'the Father', and Christ is 'the Son' (which, after all, is the traditional Christian understanding), then how could Bahá'u'lláh be the eschatological advent of both 'the Father' and 'the Son'? Such a claim must have struck Browne as every bit as untenable (i.e. contradictory) as improbable (i.e. against the received Christian expectations of the signs that would herald Christ's return). On the issue of 'the Comforter', Browne states:

> 'As regards the Comforter, we believe that he entered as the Holy Spirit into the hearts of the disciples soon after the Jews had put Christ to death. I know that the Muḥammadans assert that the prophecies which we apply to this descent of the Holy Spirit were intended to refer to Muhammad; that for the word παρακλητος [*paraklētos*] they would substitute περικλυτος [*periklutos*] which is in meaning nearly equivalent to Aḥmad or Muḥammad, signifying one 'praised', or 'illustrious'. But if you, as I suppose, follow the Muḥammadans in this, you cannot apply the same prophecy to Behá. If the promise concerning the advent of the Comforter was fulfilled in the coming of Muhammad, then it clearly cannot apply to the coming of Behá'.

Comment: At this point in the dialogue, Browne explains to Kharṭúmí the traditional Christian understanding (i.e. 'we believe') that the Comforter was the Holy Spirit. That said, Browne of course is equally aware of the traditional Muslim understanding of Muḥammad as the 'Comforter' as well. So, one can appreciate Browne's objection here when he remonstrates: 'If the promise concerning the advent of the Comforter was fulfilled in the coming of Muḥammad, then it clearly cannot apply to the coming of Behá'. Stephen Lambden has provided the most extensive discussion and analysis of Bahá'u'lláh's eschatological claim to be the Christ-promised 'Comforter'.[51] Browne goes on to say:

> And, indeed, I still fail to understand in what light you regard Islam, and must return once more to the question concerning its relation to Christianity and

> to your religion which I put some time ago, and which I do not think you answered clearly. If news of the succeeding 'manifestation' is given by every messenger of God, surely it is confined to the 'manifestation' immediately succeeding that wherein it is given, and does not extend to others which lie beyond it. Assuming that you are right in regarding Islam as the completion and fulfilment of Christianity, your religion must be regarded as the completion and fulfilment of Islam, and the prophecies concerning it must then be sought in the ḳur'án and Traditions rather than in the Gospel. It is therefore incumbent on you, if you desire to convince me, first of all to prove that Muḥammad was the promised Comforter, and that his religion was the fulfilment of Christianity; then to prove that the coming of the Báb was foretold and signified by Muḥammad; and only after this has been done, to prove that Behá is he whom the Báb foretold. For it is possible to believe in Muḥammad and not to believe in the Báb, or to believe in the Báb and not to believe in Behá, while the converse is impossible. If a Jew becomes a Muḥammadan he must necessarily accept Christ; so if a Muḥammadan becomes a believer in Behá he must necessarily believe in the Báb.

Comment: Browne's further demand for demonstrable proofs of Bahá'í claims is formidable. Browne was highly intelligent, and could readily perceive inconsistencies (whether actual or not) in Kharṭúmí's discourse. This, of course, puts Kharṭúmí on the spot, and so he rejoins by deftly pointing out prophetic patterns, in the grand scheme of salvation history, by which repeated or recurring eschatological motifs may be appreciated as consistent, rather than contradictory:

> 'To explain the relations of Islám to Christianity on the one hand, and to this manifestation on the other, would require a longer time than we have at our disposal at present', replied the Bábí apologist; 'but, in brief, know that the signs laid down by each prophet as characteristic of the next manifestation apply also to all future manifestations. In the books of each prophet whose followers still exist are recorded signs sufficient to convince them of the truth of the manifestation of their own age. There is no necessity for them to follow the chain link by link'.

Comment: Kharṭúmí's assertion that there is 'no necessity for them to follow the chain link by link' is perhaps somewhat disingenuous, but clearly was intended to concede to one of Browne's objections, and to then argue around it. Kharṭúmí resumes:

> Each prophet is complete in himself, and his evidence is conclusive unto all men. God does not suffer His proof to be incomplete, or make it dependent on knowledge and erudition, for it has been seen in all manifestations that those who have believed were men whom the world accounted ignorant, while those who were held learned in religion were the most violent and bitter opponents and persecutors. Thus it was in the time of Christ, when fishermen believed in Him and became His disciples, while the Jewish doctors mocked Him, persecuted Him, and slew Him. Thus it was also in the time of Muḥammad, when the mighty and learned among his people did most furiously revile and reproach him. And although in this manifestation – the last

> and the most complete – many learned men have believed, because the proofs were such as no fair-minded man could resist, still, as you know, the Muḥammadan doctors have ever shown themselves our most irreconcilable enemies, and our most strenuous opposers and persecutors.

Comment: Here, Kharṭúmí skilfully sketches out a pattern of rejection and persecution that occurs each time a new messenger of God appears. The implication is that the converse may also hold true, i.e. that the followers of each succeeding prophet have believed, notwithstanding the objections of contemporary detractors. In other words, Kharṭúmí succeeds in demonstrating that an historical and paradigmatic pattern can be seen when each prophet, in a series of prophets, is rejected (by opponents), yet accepted (by proponents). Kharṭúmí concludes his argument so:

> 'But those who are pure in heart and free from prejudice will not fail to recognise the manifestation of God, whenever and wherever it appears, even as Mawlaná Jalálu'd-Dín Rúmí says in the *Masnaví* –
>
> '*Díde'í báyad ki báshad sháh-shinás*
>
> *Tá shinásad Sháh-rá dar har libás*'.
>
> 'One needs an eye which is king recognising
>
> To recognise the King under every disguise'.[52]

Comment: This is an exquisite climax in his presentation, whereby Kharṭúmí quotes Rumi, just as Browne earlier quoted Persian poetry to register one of his points. The foregoing dialogue between Browne and Kharṭúmí is poignant, erudite and sophisticated – albeit inconclusive. Although Browne was not persuaded, he must have been impressed. For his part, Browne's intellect and curiosity were checked by his religious assumptions and intellectual obstinacy. In several profound ways, Browne was a captive of his own biases – although, to be fair, Browne went on to gain several audiences with Bahá'u'lláh in Acre, Palestine (now Israel) in April 1890, of which Browne left a memorable account.[53] In retrospect, Browne would have done well to pay far greater attention to the scholarship of his contemporaries, Russian orientalists, Baron Viktor Rosen (1849–1908)[54] and Alexander Grigorevich Tumanski (1861–1920).[55]

While Browne took some liberties in expanding the discussion above in his retelling in *A Year Amongst the Persians*, the next part of the discussion – which shifted to the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh – adheres more faithfully (i.e. more literally) to the actual diary entry itself:

> Finally, abandoning discussion, I asked them about their books... They told me that Mírzá 'Alí Muḥammad [i.e. the Báb] had written 100, all called '*Biyán*' [i.e. *Bayán*], that translated by Gobineau being the *Kitábu'l-Ahkám*. The present 'Masdar' [sic: *maṣdar*, 'source'] has also produced the like number, so that the literature of the sect is very extensive. . . Of the most well-known (though they look on all which have emanated from the '*maṣdar*' as of equal value) they mentioned the following: (1) The *Lawḥ-i-Aḳdas*: (2) The *Íḳán* (which I have)...[56]

Comment: This entry perfectly corresponds to Browne's narrative in *A Year Amongst the Persians* in this particular account:

> As it was growing late, and I desired to make use of the present occasion to learn further particulars about the literature of the Bábís, I allowed the discussion to stand at this point, and proceeded to make enquiries about the books which they prized most highly. In reply to these enquiries they informed me that Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad the Báb had composed in all about a hundred separate treatises of different sizes; that the name *Beyán* was applied generally to all of them; and that the book which I described as having been translated into French by Gobineau must be that specially designated as the *Kitábu'l-Ahkám* ('Book of Precepts'). Behá, they added, had composed about the same number of separate books and letters... 'If that be so', I remarked, 'I suppose that some few works of greater value than the others are to be found in every community of believers; and I should be glad to know which these are, so that I may endeavour to obtain them'.
>
> 'All that emanates from the Source (*maṣdar*) is equal in importance', they answered, 'but some books are more systematic, more easily understood, and therefore more widely read than others. Of these the chief are: (1) The *Kitáb-i-Aḳdas* ('Most Holy Book'), which sums up all the commands and ordinances enjoined on us; (2) The *Íḳán* ('Assurance'), which sets forth the proofs of our religion...'.[57]

After the meeting, Browne writes: 'I left about 6:30 [p.m.] with Mírzá 'Alí Áḳá...'.[58] So ends this historic evening, which has been documented both by way of Browne's original diary notes, followed by his polished published account in *A Year Amongst the Persians*. A lengthy work (650 pages) in the Cambridge (i.e. second) edition, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, is based on an even longer, and far more detailed, diary account. If the present study stimulates further research into Browne's 1887–1888 Persia diary, then one of its objectives will have been achieved.

Aftermath and Epilogue

Browne's remaining stay in Shíráz lasted until 'Sunday, April 13th' [*sic*: read 'Sunday, April 14th'], 1888, when it was cut short by a medical emergency, whereupon Browne was called upon to render his services as a trained medical physician, obliging him to leave Shíráz, never to return.[59] One of his great disappointments was not being able to visit the house of the Báb, which had previously been arranged, and which, for Browne personally, would have served as a spiritual pilgrimage, as it were. As stated earlier, Browne did go on to make another spiritual pilgrimage, by way of attaining several audiences with Bahá'u'lláh himself, a fuller account of which has been made possible by Browne's diary notes of his visit to Acre ('Akká) in Ottoman Palestine, now Israel.[60] Given the limitations of space, an account of the rest of Edward Granville Browne's remaining stay in Shíráz cannot be recounted at length here, but remains for a subsequent article, if invited.

For the rest of Browne's memorable visit to Shíráz – particularly as it relates to his further remarkable encounters with illustrious 'Bábís' (i.e. Bahá'ís) – the reader is referred to the remainder of Chapter XI of Browne's *A Year Amongst the Persians*. To give a preview of some of the interesting

encounters in Shíráz that Browne documents in his diary, however, mention may be made of one of Browne's diary entries for 'Saturday, April 6th', 1888, in which the Bahá'í interpretation of the Prophet Muḥammad's designation as the 'Seal of the Prophets' (Q. 33:40) was discussed, and in which the Bahá'í teacher, this time, was not Kharṭúmí, but rather Mullá 'Abdu'lláh, known as Fáḍil-i-Zarqání (d. circa 1915), and described by Momen as 'a scholar, particularly in the fields of logic and philosophy'. In *A Year Amongst the Persians*, however, Browne discreetly protects Fáḍil's identity by calling him 'Kámil'.[61] In his diary, Browne writes,

> I finally asked him a question which I thought would puzzle him: I said 'if the references to Christ's coming in the Gospel refer to this manifestation, then they cannot be applied (as the Muslims will) to Muḥammad & Islám is thus false: & vice versa?' To this he replied that in each manifestation news was given of future manifestations in general, & that what Christ saw was both to Muḥammad & this *zuhúr*.
>
> He also explained the expression *Khátam al-Anbiyá'* [in Arabic script, i.e. 'Seal of the Prophets'; see Qur'an 33:40] as meaning the perfection of the prophets who had come up to that time' [emphasis in the original], not as the last of the prophets, & quoted in demonstration thereof a prayer used at Kerbala & Nejef, where Muḥammad is called 'the seal of the prophets who have come before, & the key of those to come'. I asked him as to their opinion of Zoroaster, & he said they regarded him as a prophet, for he said all religions which had obtained currency & permanence must have been in a measure true, however corrupted they may have become now.[62]

Comment: Browne's published account of this conversation, in *A Year Amongst the Persians*, closely tracks with his diary entry:

> I now put to Kámil the following question, which I had already propounded in my first meeting with the Bábís of Shíráz: 'If the references to Christ's coming which occur in the Gospel refer to this manifestation, then they cannot be applied, as they are by the Muslims, to Muḥammad; in which case Muḥammad's coming was not foretold by Christ, and Islám loses a proof which, as I understand, you regard as essential to every dispensation, viz. that it shall have been foreshadowed by the bearer of the last dispensation'.
>
> To this he [Kámil] replied that in each dispensation announcement was made of future manifestations in general, and that what Christ said concerning His return applied equally to the advent of Muḥammad, and of the Báb, and of Behá. Muḥammad's title, *Khátamul-Anbiyá'* ('Seal of the Prophets'), did not, he explained, signify, as the Muḥammadans generally suppose, 'the last of the Prophets', as is proved by a passage occurring in one of the prayers used by pilgrims to Kerbela and Nejef, wherein Muḥammad is called 'the Seal of the prophets who have gone before, and the Key of those who are to come'.[63]

The passage referred to here invites further comment: In the Sura of Patience (*Súriy-i-Ṣabr*) – revealed on April 22 1863 in Baghdad on Riḍván, the first day of the Bahá'í Festival of Paradise – Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

> Recite then unto them that which the celestial Dove of the Spirit hath warbled in the holy Riḍván of the Beloved, that perchance they may examine that which hath been elucidated concerning 'sealing' by the tongue of him he who is well-grounded in knowledge in the prayer of visitation for the name of God, 'Ali [Imám 'Alí]. He hath said – and his word is the truth!:
>
> > '[He (Muḥammad) is] the seal of what came before Him and the harbinger of what will appear after Him'.
>
> In such wise hath the meaning of 'sealing' been mentioned by the tongue of inaccessible holiness. Thus hath God designated His Friend [Muḥammad] to be a seal for the Prophets who preceded Him and a harbinger of the Messengers who will appear after Him.[64]

Here, Bahá'u'lláh quotes from a 'visitation' prayer to be recited in commemoration of Imám 'Alí, Muḥammad's first male follower. This prayer is universally recognized and used by Shia Muslims, and is variously ascribed to the Sixth and Tenth Imams. In his book entitled, in Persian, *Sayrí dar Bústán-i Madínatu'ṣ-Ṣabr* – a monograph on Bahá'u'lláh's Sura of Patience – Dr Foad Seddigh has located and validated this visitation prayer in several authoritative sources.[65]

This exchange between Browne and Fáḍil-i-Zarqání ('Kámil') includes a brief discussion of Zoroaster as well:

> [Browne] 'Do you', I asked, 'regard Zoroaster as a true prophet?'
>
> [Kamil] 'Assuredly', he replied, 'inasmuch as every religion which has become current in the world, and has endured the test of time, must have contained at least some measure of truth, however much it may have been subsequently corrupted. Only a Divine Word can strongly affect and continuously control men's hearts: spurious coin will not pass, and the uninterrupted currency of a coin is the proof of its genuineness'.[66]

Concluding Observations

In the present study, special focus has been devoted to an historic meeting that took place in Shíráz on 'Friday, March 30th', 1888 – here characterized as 'the first recorded Bahá'í fireside'. Browne's account, as set forth in both his original diary entries (of March–April 1888) and in his published (and polished) account in *A Year Amongst the Persians* (1893) – is energized by Browne's intense curiosity, which may fairly be described as a 'passion' for his research interest as a scholar. To ascertain the degree to which Browne's narrative is a composite, reworked account – and not strictly sequential and chronological – it made sense to draw some correspondences between Browne's diary entries, and the Shíráz narrative in Chapter XI in *A Year Amongst the Persians*, as to both topics and dates.

Whether or not this episode may be regarded – poetically albeit anachronistically – as 'the first recorded Bahá'í fireside', is up to the reader to judge. Howsoever characterized this episode is historic in nature – to the extent that it offers an eyewitness account in which the observer [Browne] is also

a participant of a meeting in which information was sought and therefore gladly given by Browne's Bahá'í informants – on what Browne consistently (although anachronistically) refers to as the 'Bábí' religion.

When read in the present tense, the discourse is dynamic. The exchanges are sometimes tense – and suspenseful. Yet the tone remains respectful and cordial throughout. The Bahá'í proofs offered – cogent in their own way, given their faith-based presuppositions – ultimately fail to persuade Browne, who, as a Westerner and Christian, comes to the discussion with his own assumptions and biases. Curiosity, driven by both the personal as well as professional interest, animates the exchanges throughout, energized still further by the enthusiasm of Browne's Bahá'í teachers themselves. Browne's accounts are generally faithful to his original diary entries, with some embellishments (extensive at times), in the published narrative in *A Year Amongst the Persians*.

The present study has also demonstrated that Browne's Persia diary is a valuable primary source for a study of the origins of the Bahá'í religion in its native land of Persia (present-day Iran). Browne's contemporaneous notes also provide insights as to Browne's own intellectual odyssey. As a well-meaning and sympathetic orientalist, Browne's interest in the Bábí/Bahá'í religion became as much a personal, spiritual quest as it was a professional, scholarly enterprise quest, which Browne pursued with extraordinary verve and vigour, passion and perseverance. Browne's Persia diary therefore invites further research, insofar as it offers a treasure trove of fascinating details and insights into the life and thought of nineteenth-century Persians – especially those of the 'Bábí' religion. Fruitful investigation may be undertaken in further exploring corresponding accounts in Browne's enduring *A Year Amongst the Persians*, and the Persia diary entries upon which the entire narrative is based – brought alive and vivified by Professor Browne's masterful account of his yearlong sojourn, as he draws the reader into the heart and soul of Persian life, culture and spirituality.

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Endnotes

1. By way of a disclaimer and caveat, this conceit, i.e. the 'first recorded Bahá'í fireside', although patently an anachronism, has conceptual value, considering that most, if not all, Bahá'í readers will quickly understand and appreciate the analogy being drawn here. Bahá'í firesides are informal meetings wherein teachings of the Bahá'í Faith are introduced to interested individuals. Here, by the term 'recorded' is meant 'recorded in detail', i.e. a descriptive and full account of the encounter. As one peer reviewer has pointed out during the manuscript stage of this publication, there was at least one prior encounter between a Westerner and a Bahá'í, during which information on the Bahá'í Faith was given. See Charles James Wills, *In the Land of the Lion and Sun; Or, Modern Persia: Being Experiences of Life in Persia from 1866 to 1881,* London, Macmillan and Co., 1891. Dr Wills, a physician who lived and worked in Persia for several years (as a Medical Officer for Her Britannic Majesty's Telegraph Staff in Persia.), describes becoming the intimate friend of Ḥájí Siyyid Muhammad Ḥasan and Ḥájí Sayyid Muhammad-Ḥusayn (the 'King of Martyrs' and 'Beloved of Martyrs', respectively), in which 'they discoursed much on the subject of religion, and were very eloquent on the injustices perpetrated in Persia' (153). (Qtd. in Moojan Momen (ed.), *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844–1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts,* Oxford: George Ronald, 1981, 274–277. However, the details of their discourse are sketchy at best.

2. Mírzá 'Alí' (i.e. Mírzá 'Alí Áqá, later known as 'Alí-Muḥammad Khán, Muvaqqaru'd-Dawlih, and also known as Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad Afnán Shírází). See Hasan M. Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1979, 6.

3. Edward Granville Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians: Impressions as to the Life, Character, & Thought of the People of Persia Received During Twelve Months' Residence in That Country in the Years 1887–8.* London: Adam and Charles Black, 1893; Second Edition: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926; Third edition: With a memoir by E. D. Ross and foreword by E. H. Minns, London: A. and C. Black, 1950; New Edition, with introduction by Denis MacEoin, London: Century, 1984. For some interesting comments and valuable sights regarding this work, see: C. Edmund Bosworth, 'E. G. Browne and his *A Year Amongst the Persians*', *Iran* (British Institute of Persian Studies) 33 (1995): 115–122. See also: Geoffrey P. Nash, 'Edward Granville Browne and the Persian 'Awakening'' *From Empire to Orient: Travellers to the Middle East, 1830–1926*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2005; Christopher Buck, 'Edward Granville Browne'. *British Writers*, Supplement XXI. Edited by Jay Parini. Farmington Hills, MI: Charles Scribner's Sons/The Gale Group, 2014, 17–33.

4. Hasan Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1985, 42.

5. Description: 'E. G. Browne's diaries 2 (MS LC.II.74) This second volume consists of Edward Granville Browne's diary written on his journey from Teheran to Shíráz 25 November 1887–6 April 1888, being a continuation of Vol. 1. The volume also contains letters, notes, drawings, telegraphs, etc. and samples of plants which he collected locally and pressed between pages. . . . Foliation: Red ink pagination in upper corner of every page'. Available online at https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS–LC-II-00074/1. (Last accessed 4 July 2018.)

6. Description: 'E. G. Browne's diaries 3 & 4 (MS LC.II.75) The third and fourth volumes of Edward Granville Browne's travel journal written on his journey from Shíráz on 6 April 1888 to Yazd and Kirmán and back to England on 10 October 1888. In addition to letters, notes, drawings, travel documents, etc., the volume also contains a number of indices'. Available online at https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00075/1. (Last accessed 2 September 2018.)

7. Momen, *Browne Selections*, 37 (headnote).

8. In a footnote, Hatcher and Martin credit their source of information: 'The authors are indebted for this information to Mrs Rúḥíyyih Rabbání, widow of the late Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, whose mother organized the original firesides in Montreal. The widespread use of the term no doubt owes much to its incorporation in the Guardian's correspondence'. William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion*, New York: Harper & Row, 1985, 179 (footnote #256). Thanks to Omid Ghaemmaghami for this information. (Tarjuman listserve post, 25 August 2018.)

9. Hatcher and Martin, *Emerging*, 179.

10. Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf, states: 'I would like to comment that it has been found over the entire world that the most effective method of teaching the Faith is the fireside meeting in the home'. From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the Bahá'í Group of Key West, Florida, 31 March 1955, *Bahá'í News*, No. 292, 9–10. Qtd. in Helen Bassett Hornby, compiler, *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust India, 1994, No. 828 ('Firesides More Effective Than Publicity'.) http://bahai-library.com/hornby_lights_guidance_2.html&chapter=1#n828. (Last accessed 26 August 2018.)

11. E. G. Browne's diaries 3 & 4 (MS LC.II.75), 338 (online: 7 of 392), https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00075/7.

12. Among Browne's samples of plants which he collected locally and pressed between pages in his diary, see, the image of a pressed plant from Shíráz, with violet flowers (Vol. II, [no page] (online: 217)), https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00074/217; and another image of a pressed, flowering plant from Shíráz (Vol. II, [no page] (online: 218)), https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00074/218. See also this plant specimen that Browne collected and pressed: https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00074/259.

13. The header on this page reads 'ZARGÁN – SHÍRÁZ', apparently as a transitional header. E. G. Browne's diaries 2 (MS LC.II.74), 302 (online: 212), https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00074/212.

14. E. G. Browne's diaries 2 (MS LC.II.74), 329 (online: 247 of 266), https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00074/247.

15. E. G. Browne's diaries 3 & 4 (MS LC.II.75), 349 (online: 26 of 392), https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00075/26, where the header on this page reads, transitionally: 'SHÍRÁZ – ZARGÁN'.

16. E. G. Browne's diaries 2 (MS LC.II.74), p 302–303 (online: 212–213), https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00074/212 and https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00074/213.

17. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926; Reprinted 1927), 283–284 (Chapter IX, 'From Isfahan to Shíráz').

18. A. J. Arberry, 'Edward Granville Browne', *Asian Review*, New Series, Vol. LVIII, No. 215 (July 1962): 168–181 (173). Also separately published as: A. J. Arberry, 'Edward Granville Browne 1862–1962: A Centenary Address', *The Iran Society Occasional Papers*, Vol. 6 (London: Iran Society, 1962). (Citation to original paper courtesy of Steven Kolins, 26 Aug. 2018.)

19. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, (1927), 326.

20. Brief notes on the next few digital images: Vol. II, 303 (online: 213): The entry for 'Thursday, March 22nd', 1888. Nothing related to Bahá'í topics or encounters. Vol. II, 304 (online: 214): The entry for 'Friday, March 23rd', 1888. Nothing related to Bahá'í topics or encounters. Vol. II, 305 (online: 215): The entry for 'Saturday, March 24th', 1888. Nothing related to Bahá'í topics or encounters. Vol. II, 306 (online: 216): A continuation of the same diary entry. Vol. II, [no page] (online: 217): Image of a pressed plant from Shíráz, with violet flowers. Vol. II, [no page] (online: 218): Another image of a pressed, flowering plant from Shíráz. Vol. II, 307 (online: 219): A continuation of the same diary entry. Nothing related to Bahá'í topics or encounters.

21. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, (1927), 326–327.

22. Momen, *Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne on the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, 38 (footnote).

23. E. G. Browne's diaries 2 (MS LC.II.74), 308 (online: 220), https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00074/220. No mention of Bahá'í topics or encounters is found in the entry for 'Monday, March 26th', 1888 entry. Same for entry for 'Tuesday, March 27th', 1888.

24. Momen, *Browne Selections*, 38 (footnote).

25. Balyuzi, *Browne*, 6.

26. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, 327–328.

27. Momen, *Browne Selections*, 39 (footnote).

28. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, 328–329.

29. E. G. Browne's diaries 2 (MS LC.II.74), 309 (online: 221), https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00074/221.

30. Momen, *Browne Selections*, 39 (footnote).

31. E. G. Browne's diaries 2 (MS LC.II.74), 310 (online: 222), https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00074/222. The next three scans have no Bahá'í content: Vol. II, [no page] (online: 223): A document, in Persian. Vol. II, [no page] (online: 224): Reverse image of the same document. Vol. II, 311 (online: 225): The entry for 'Friday, March 30th', 1888. Nothing related to Bahá'í topics or encounters until Vol. II, 312.

32. Christopher Buck and Youli A. Ioannesyan, 'Scholar Meets Prophet: Edward Granville Browne and Bahá'u'lláh (Acre, 1890)'. *Bahá'í Studies Review* 20 (2014): 21–38. https://doi.org/10.1386/bsr.20.1.21_1

33. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, 329–330.

34. Momen, *Browne Selections*, 41 (footnote).

35. Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís* 121. See also Farzin Vejdani, 'Transnational Bahá'í Print Culture: Community Formation and Religious Authority, 1890–1921', *Journal of Religious History* (Special Issue: Bahá'í History) 36.4 (December 2012): 499–515.

36. E. G. Browne's diaries 2 (MS LC.II.74), 312 (online: 226), https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00074/226.

37. E. G. Browne's diaries 2 (MS LC.II.74), 313 (online: 227), https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00074/227.

38. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, 330.

39. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, 345.

40. E. G. Browne's diaries 2 (MS LC.II.74), p 313–314 (online: p 227–228), https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00074/227 and https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00074/228.

41. See, e.g., Christopher Buck, 'Discovering' [the Qur'án], *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*. Second edition. Edited by Andrew Rippin and Jawid Mojaddedi, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017, 23–42.

42. See, e.g., Todd Lawson, *The Quran: Epic and Apocalypse*, London: Oneworld Academic, 2017.

43. Mohammad Hassan Khalil, 'Is Hell Truly Everlasting?: An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Universalism', in Christian Lange (ed.), *Locating Hell in Islamic Traditions*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016, 165–174 [171–172].

44. See Q. 2:190 (i.e. the general nature of *jihád* is defensive, to be waged in response to military attacks on the Muslim community); Q. 9:5 (a later verse, justifying offensive preemptive strikes, i.e. preventive war, as a strategy against credible threats, but only after the enemy is first given advance warning); and Q. 5:33 (specifying punishments for 'those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger', Mohsin Khan's translation).

45. Shoghi Effendi, Letter, dated 29 April 1933, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, *Arohanui: Letters from Shoghi Effendi to New Zealand*, Suva, Fiji Islands: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982, 32–33.

46. Bahá'u'lláh, [Tablet to] 'Násiri'd-Dín Sháh', *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2002, 109–110 (emphasis added).

47. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, translated by Shoghi Effendi (). See also: Sholeh Quinn and Stephen N. Lambden, '*Ketáb-e Iqán*', *Encyclopaedia Iranica,* 2010, published online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ketab-iqan. (Last accessed 9 September 2018.); Christopher Buck, *Symbol and Secret: Qur'an Commentary in Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i Íqán,* Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1995/2004; Buck, 'Beyond the "Seal of the Prophets": Bahá'u'lláh's Book of Certitude (*Ketáb-e Iqán*)', in Clause Pedersen & Fereydun Vahman (eds.), *Religious Texts in Iranian Languages*, København (Copenhagen): Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 2007, 369–378.

48. This recondite epistle has been translated, in full, by Stephen Lambden, 'The Tablet to Hardegg (*Lawḥ-i-Hirtík*): A Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to the Templer Leader Georg David Hardegg'. *Lights of 'Irfán: Papers Presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars, Book IV*, Evanston, IL: 'Irfan Colloquia, 2003, 97–110. Online at http://irfancolloquia.org/pdf/lights4_lambden_ekbal.pdf. (Last accessed 9 September 2018.)

49. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,* Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982, 40 (emphasis added).

50. Bahá'u'lláh, [Tablet to] 'Pope Pius IX' in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, 63 (emphasis added).

51. Stephen Lambden, 'Prophecy in the Johannine Farewell discourse: The Advents of the Paraclete, Aḥmad and the Comforter (*Mu'azzi*)', 69–124, in Moojan Momen (ed.), *Scripture and Revelation*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1997.

52. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, 333–343.

53. See, e.g., Buck and Ioannesyan, 'Scholar Meets Prophet', 21–38.

54. See, e.g., Christopher Buck and Youli A. Ioannesyan, 'Bahá'u'lláh's *Bishárát* (Glad-Tidings): A Proclamation to Scholars and Statesmen', *Bahá'í Studies Review* 16 (2010): 3–28, https://doi.org/10.1386/bsr.16.3/1.

55. See, e.g., Christopher Buck and Youli A. Ioannesyan, 'The 1893 Russian Publication of Bahá'u'lláh's Last Will and Testament: An Academic Attestation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Successorship' *Bahá'í Studies Review* 19 (2013): 3–44. https://doi.org/10.1386/bsr.19.1.3_1.

56. E. G. Browne's diaries 2 (MS LC.II.74), 314 (online: 228), https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00074/228.

57. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, 343–344.

58. E. G. Browne's diaries 2 (MS LC.II.74), p 347–348 (online: p 228), https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00074/228.

59. E. G. Browne's diaries 3 & 4 (MS LC.II.75), 348 (online: 26), https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00075/26.

60. Buck and Ioannesyan, 'Scholar Meets Prophet', 21–38.

61. Momen, *Browne Selections*, 68 (footnote).

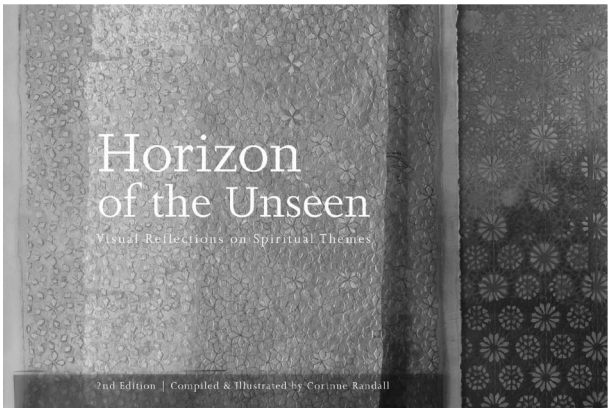
62. E. G. Browne's diaries 2 (MS LC.II.74), 329 (online: 247), https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LC-II-00074/247.

63. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, 357–358.

64. Bahá'u'lláh, Sura of Patience (*Súriy-i-Ṣabr*), provisional translation by Omid Ghaemmaghami. Qtd. in Christopher Buck, 'Muḥammad: the Last Prophet?' (May 15, 2017), http://bahaiteachings.org/last-prophet-muhammad. (Last accessed 9 September 2018.)

65. Dr Seddigh states that this visitation prayer in commemoration of Imám 'Alí is found in a book called *Kámilu'z-Ziyárát*, a well-known Muslim collection of prayers of visitation (i.e. prayers meant to be read at the graves of the Prophet Muḥammad, the Shia Imáms, and other Shia figures). The collection of commemorative prayers was probably compiled by the Shia scholar, Ibn Qúlúya (d. 978 or 979 CE). The visitation prayer for Imám 'Alí's shrine, in fact, has the exact words Bahá'u'lláh revealed – *verbatim*. The eleventh chapter – entitled: 'Visiting the grave of the Commander of the Faithful [Imám 'Alí], how the grave should be visited, and what to pray at the grave' – begins on page 92, and the statement to which Bahá'u'lláh refers is found on page 97 (and is the second '*ḥadíth*' (tradition) cited). This very same statement is also found in prayers of visitation for the shrine of Imám Ḥusayn and in a prayer to be said at the shrines of all of the Imáms. (References courtesy of Omid Ghaemmaghami and Dr Foad Seddigh.)

66. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, 357–358.



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The Awakening of Spirit: Artistic and Thematic Influences on the Evolution of Mark Tobey's 'White Writing'

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Abstract

This paper is a distillation of the author's dissertation submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts by Research in History of Art: Renaissance to Modernism to the School of Humanities at the University of Buckingham in September 2016. The dissertation sought to answer the question, 'What were the artistic and thematic influences on the evolution of the "white writing" style of the American painter, Mark Tobey?' Tobey's distinctive approach to abstraction brought him great acclaim and considerable success in the middle decades of the 20th century but today barely receives a footnote or a few brief sentences in art history texts and courses. It is the intention of this author to argue for the originality and importance of Tobey's contribution to modern painting, and explain how he arrived at this unique style.

This paper is divided into three parts. The first explores the artistic figures and movements that had an impact on Mark Tobey's early development. The second focuses on the wide and varied range of thematic sources for Tobey's painting throughout his life. The painter cited them as 'the Orient, the Occident, science, religion [and] cities...' In the third part, the years Tobey spent as a teacher at Dartington Hall in Devon will be examined, including the painter's travels to the Far East with his friend, the potter Bernard Leach, and the particular circumstances and influences that resulted in the painter's artistic breakthrough when he produced his first so-called 'white writing' paintings at Dartington.

Keywords

abstract expressionism
art history
Bahá'í
Dartington
Mark Tobey
modern art
modernism
painting
white writing
20th Century art

Introduction

Mark Tobey was without a doubt one of the most cosmopolitan artists of the 20th century, living out his long life and career in New York City, Chicago, Seattle, Paris and Basel, Switzerland. He was honoured with some of the highest distinctions that the European art scene of his time could bestow. In 1958, alongside Mark Rothko, Tobey represented the USA at the 29th Venice Biennale where, out of some 3,000 works exhibited that year, Tobey's painting *Capricorn* was awarded the Grand Prize. Not since Whistler won the gold medal in Venice in 1895, had an American artist won it. Three years later, a major retrospective of Tobey's work was held at the Louvre in Paris, which was an unprecedented achievement for a living artist.

It might be expected that such accolades would have ensured that Tobey would be equally fêted in the United States and would today continue to enjoy an enduring popularity and significance among the artists of the 20th

century. Yet his influence on the emergence of what has been termed 'all–over abstraction' in the early 1940's, has been generally ignored. Even at a time when there were those among Europeans who considered him to be 'the foremost living American painter',[1] Tobey was often overlooked in his own homeland, his reputation overshadowed by the louder, more muscular practitioners of Abstract Expressionism, although he has sometimes been listed as a painter in that vein. In comparison to his contemporaries – Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning foremost amongst them – Tobey's name is hardly known, particularly in America.

Tobey's non-demonstrative personality, the small scale and delicacy of his works, his background in commercial illustration, his interest in Zen Buddhism and his dedication to the Bahá'í teachings with their accompanying spirituality and sobriety, his stated intention to convey a spiritual philosophy through his work and his distance both geographical and temperamental from the New York School – perhaps it was these factors that resulted in Tobey's name being deliberately, and almost completely, removed from the narrative of America's modern art history promoted by the critic Clement Greenberg. Dedicated to his mission that Pollock was the true American original, Greenberg appears to have consciously blocked Tobey's inclusion among all that was innovative and dynamic in American art in the middle of the 20th century. Greenberg even categorically – and erroneously – stated that Pollock had never seen any examples of Tobey's work. However, recent research has revealed that Pollock would visit Tobey's work at the Willard Gallery as early as 1944 and wrote to friends saying how impressed he was by it.[2]

Yet, with the inclusion of two Tobey paintings in the major Abstract Expressionism show at London's Royal Academy in 2016, and an ambitious retrospective held at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice in 2017, it appears that Tobey's work is ripe for reappraisal.

I. Tobey's Artistic Influences

Tobey's own artistic influences are not easily separated from the integral contribution made to his development by the insights and inspiration he derived from a wide variety of other sources – in particular city life, the Bahá'í and Zen teachings, science, nature and music. In chronological terms these interests were simultaneously woven in with his exposure to artistic stimuli; together both presaged the emergence of his unique personal style.

Tobey was an artist who understood and keenly appreciated the history of art, and whose own work was rooted in his knowledge, not only of his artistic antecedents, but also of what was emerging during his own time. As one writer puts it, Tobey's route was '[e]rratic but logical in retrospect...a rigorous discipline as well as a self-conducted apprenticeship'.[3] For Tobey, art represented the deployment of visual language that had its own centuries-old evolutionary narrative, a language which could – and should – be studied and learned by all inclined to continue making art. Tobey averred that, while artists certainly derive inspiration from the world around them as subject matter, the visual language with which they choose to respond is primarily built upon the breakthroughs made by others. 'You must have roots. You have to care about things and be excited by them,' he said. 'Art

comes from art,' he argued, 'as men come from men and flowers from flowers...'[4]

Tobey arrived at his own particular and, for him, most enduring, version of abstraction in the mid–1930s with a deep knowledge of the history and techniques of Western art, combined with an acute awareness of work being made by his contemporaries around the world, as well as of traditions not widely accessible to North Americans in the first half of the 20th century. He was a keen visitor to art galleries as well as other museums where he gained visual inspiration from the study of the microcosmic patterns in geological specimens. But it was through looking at art that Tobey was able to connect his own development – and aspire to longevity for his own work – with the achievements of the past. 'My sources of inspiration have gone from those of my native Middle West to those of microscopic worlds,'[5] Tobey said of his personal, developmental journey, yet there seems to have been little in his upbringing that would have naturally inclined him towards a career in art.

He was born on 11 December 1890 in Centerville, Wisconsin. He recalled an idyllic childhood spent fishing, swimming and playing by the Mississippi in Trempealeau. Tobey's only exposure to artistic activity during this period was his father's sketching of animals using a thick, carpenter's crayon or sculpting small creatures out of stone. In 1906, the Tobey family moved to the steel-manufacturing town of Hammond, Indiana, a suburb of Chicago. It was here that, for the first time, he experienced mechanized, urban America. The city also offered him his introduction to the fine arts, a passion that was actively encouraged by his parents. 'I was interested in everything when I was young,'[6] Tobey recalled, and this insatiable curiosity never seems to have deserted him. When the family moved into Chicago in 1909, he made regular visits to libraries and museums and started taking Saturday morning classes in watercolour and oil painting at the Art Institute of Chicago. One image that attracted him, and probably enticed him into his first career as a fashion illustrator, was the commercial depiction of the glamorous American girl. Tobey described it as 'the most beautiful thing you could put on canvas'.[7]

In 1908, Tobey was forced to abandon his studies when his father became unwell. He took various jobs, including in an iron and steel factory as an industrial designer. In his spare time, he was constantly sketching, refining his skills by drawing any subject he could. By the age of 20, he was working as an illustrator. In 1911, he went to New York City where he soon obtained a position with *McCall's* magazine and received classes from the painter and teacher, Kenneth Hayes Miller. Miller's depictions of classically posed, fashionable women in city settings appear to have made an impact on Tobey's own stylized rendering of the human form and excited his fascination with urban themes.

Tobey's own fashion illustrations were clearly a product of their time, dictated by the limitations imposed by the demands of the client. But his handling of tone and the active line shows how fine artists were commanding his attention. Masters of bravura brushwork such as John Singer Sargent, who possessed, as Tobey described it, 'the handling bug', were immensely appealing to him. 'Soon my eyes began to discern others,' he said, 'as the stately stars of the renaissance swung into view... Hals'

brush was lashed to Sargent's as the 'handling bug' bit deeply into all those like myself'.[8] It is evident from Tobey's own portrait drawings that he took figurative, classical draughtsmanship seriously and was soon accomplished at it. Between 1912 and 1917, when he was in his mid–twenties, he began to move away from the stylization of commercial design and, drawing from life, particularly experimented with studies of the human figure in motion and at rest. There was some success as a portraitist; an exhibition of his depictions of well–known figures was held at the Knoedler Gallery in 1917, displaying images of such celebrities as the opera singer, Mary Garden.

While he worked mostly in New York, it was on a return visit to Chicago in 1913 that Tobey saw the International Exhibition of Modern Art – which became known as The Armory Show – the first major exhibit of modern art ever staged in the United States. At the three locations where the works were displayed, some 250,000 Americans – who up until that moment were predominately familiar with classical, figurative art – encountered the full range of experimental styles from the European avant-garde: Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism and even one piece by Kandinsky representing German Expressionism. The majority of visitors to the Armory Show, including Tobey, were largely dumbfounded by the explosion of vivid, non-naturalistic colours, the distortions of form, the abstractions celebrating a mechanized, modern world and other experiments on display. Even the former President Theodore Roosevelt publicly announced, 'That's not art!'[9] It was the works of the Cubists that provoked the most confusion, and Marcel Duchamp's Cubist/Futurist style *Nude Descending a Staircase*, painted the year before, became the butt of most of the jokes, newspaper cartoons and criticism. Tobey, along with most of the critics and public, found it incomprehensible, describing it as a 'chaotic explosion'.[10]

In 1918, Tobey made his own first important foray into modernism when he became a close associate with the Arensberg circle. During the final days of the Armory Show in 1912, journalist Walter Arensberg had reportedly experienced a sudden epiphany viewing the works on display. Fifty-one paintings by Picasso, Braque, 'Miro'and Juan Gris, covered the walls of his apartment on West Sixty–Seventh Street. It became a gathering place for the *avant-garde*, among them Duchamp and Francis Picabia; Americans Man Ray, Charles Demuth, Charles Sheeler and Marsden Hartley; the dancer Isadora Duncan; the writer William Carlos Williams and composer Edgard Varèse. Under the leadership of Duchamp and Man Ray, the circle would evolve into an American branch of the Dada movement. It was at the Arensbergs' that Mark Tobey's sensibilities appear to have finally become attuned to more contemporary forms of pictorial innovation. When he saw Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* again after his first encounter with it six years earlier, he described it as a 'wonderful abstraction'.[11]

A profound challenge that arose for Tobey around this time was the question of form in painting. 'The only goal I can definitely remember,' he later told an interviewer, 'was in 1918 when I said to myself, "If I don't do anything else in my painting life, I will smash form"'.[12] 'I felt keenly that space should be freer. As I remember, I really wanted to smash form, to melt it in a more moving and dynamic way'.[13] Tobey, by then, was familiar with Cubism's attempts to represent multiple views of subjects fragmented on a single plane, as well as Futurism's practice of capturing the speed and

dynamism of modern life, often by repeating subjects many times over as if in a multi–exposure photograph. But, while his muted palette was clearly influenced by Picasso and Braque, Tobey was not sympathetic towards 'the dismemberment, deformation, and fragmentation of the figure for mere shape and pattern, or its devaluation into still life'.[14]

> A terrible mutilation of the figure isn't very impressive either... I've seen pictures in which the human figure has been chopped up, looked like leprosy, chewed to bits by dogs. This is not to me humanistic art at all.[15]

Perhaps by wanting to smash or melt form, Tobey was aiming to reach deeper into the spirit of the subject or object in his painting, to explore its reality and its context within multiple planes of existence.

Seattle and Travels in Europe

Although Tobey seemed to be following a promising path as an artist in New York, he chose to move to Seattle in 1922 after learning of the existence of the Montessori-influenced Cornish School. It had been founded in 1914 by pianist and teacher Nellie Cornish. Tobey was unknown in Seattle when Cornish invited him to teach painting classes, but she recruited talent when she instinctively sensed originality and quality. Teaching launched Tobey into 'a period of much experimentation... It was here I finally realized I could penetrate forms'.[16] Thus, the majority of paintings and drawings that Tobey executed in Seattle display his interest in a kind of 'vitalism' – a theory that the origin and phenomena of life are dependent on a life–force or principle distinct from purely chemical or physical forces. Tobey's amoebic, botanic forms – some reminiscent of human flesh and hair – seemingly emerge from swirling currents of energy, subduing more formal geometric lines that suggest the built environment.

In the mid-1920s, eager for new visual and cultural experiences, Tobey made his first extended travels through Europe, the Mediterranean and the Near East. He stayed the summer and autumn of 1925 in Paris where he not only spent long hours closely studying the masterpieces in the Louvre, but was also able to open his mind more to modernism through the extended visits he made to galleries and museums. He further explored the works of Braque (whom he met), Picasso and André Masson, whose works appeared in at least three exhibitions while Tobey was in Paris. Masson moved from a Cubist/Futuristic approach to capturing movement to being among the first to attempt automatic drawing. In an almost trance-like state, he would allow his hand to move freely across the surface of the paper, producing a fluid and unconscious play of line. It was an approach that drew upon ideas emerging in Surrealism of the power of the unconscious and the dream.

In addition to painting naturalistic portraits and city scenes, Tobey's travels led to a further absorption of modernist influences. The mysterious compositions of Giorgio di Chirico, almost surrealistic stage set designs, combined with Cubism, also find echoes in Tobey's depiction of sparse or almost empty scenes; for example, *Near Eastern Landscape*, *Interior,* with its peculiarly dislocated, perpendicular fish in the right-hand corner.

Another source of great encouragement to Tobey was Marsden Hartley. Hartley was set upon a spiritual quest 'for art's deeper meaning beyond

the empirical world'.[17] Along with many of his contemporaries, Hartley was deeply affected by Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* and the German expressionist's assertion that, 'The mood of nature can be imparted ... only by the artistic rendering of its inner spirit'.[18] As early as 1912, Hartley had renounced still life painting in favour of a spontaneous abstraction, creating a series of Kandinsky-like images, scattered with lines, mystic symbols and colours picked for their particular resonance and meaning. Hartley had also associated closely with the Arensberg circle prior to 1920, but his and Tobey's paths may have crossed on a number of occasions. Hartley was an attendee at Green Acre, the residential spiritual retreat centre in Eliot, Maine. Hartley's friendship with Alfred Lunt and Harlan Ober led him into the then small circle of followers of the Bahá'í Faith. Green Acre was also to play a key role in Tobey's own attraction to the Bahá'í teachings. As a result of their interaction, Tobey too ventured into creating sensuous, swelling, curvaceous shapes, to depict an idealized state or place, based on people, plants and elements of landscape. Reminiscent of Hartley's landscapes, Tobey's work began to deploy outlines, thick paint, arbitrary use of colour and ethereal light, as in *Toward the Light*.

Tobey also began to experiment with Japanese methods of two–dimensional composition. His long affair with the calligraphic line, however, truly began when he met a young Chinese painter, Teng Baiye, who was completing his graduate studies in art at the University of Washington. Alongside his teaching responsibilities at the Cornish School, Tobey set time aside to study calligraphy with his new friend, who was also lecturing at his university on aesthetics. The life and movement Teng gave to his brushwork made a strong impression on Tobey, who 'found that one could experience a tree in dynamic line as well as in mass and light'.[19] From Teng, Tobey began to be exposed to a different approach to painting which recognized 'the difference between volume and the living line – a means of opening solid form, giving tangibility to empty space, and of breathing life into static Western realism'.[20] On one particular occasion in 1929 when Tobey was looking at a goldfish tank, Teng asked him why Western artists painted fish only when they are dead.[21]

II. Tobey's Thematic Sources

Despite the pictorial similarities between his mature works and those of his contemporaries, Tobey railed against his style being described as 'pure abstraction'. 'I know very little about what generally is termed abstract,' he said. 'Pure abstraction would mean a type of painting completely unrelated to life, which is unacceptable to me'.[22] Even at times when his imagery was at its most abstract, the title he gave to a piece was often suggestive of some natural form or phenomenon that might offer a clue to its inspiration or meaning. Rather, his very diverse sources were firmly rooted in 'the Orient, the Occident, science, religion [and] cities...'[23]

Innovation and the quest for knowledge held much excitement for Tobey. 'I am accused often of too much experimentation,' he said, 'but what else should I do when all other factors of man are in the same condition? I thrust forward into space as science and the rest do'.[24] Tobey had a lifelong love affair with the natural world and, unlike many of his American contemporaries – particularly those termed Abstract Expressionist – he rarely

abandoned references to nature. Perhaps he was inspired by his early love of Blake with his professed ability 'to see a World in a Grain of Sand and a Heaven in a Wild Flower'.[25] Tobey could find reflections of the immensity of space in the patterns of a single leaf or rock, 'as though the whole world were contained therein and from a leaf, an insect, a universe appeared'.[26] The forms, textures and colours of fossils, minerals and crystals became a particular source of inspiration for Tobey. The patterning in such specimens would provide the starting point for many of Tobey's paintings. 'On pavements and the bark of trees I have found whole worlds',[27] he said.

It might seem an anomaly that an artist who responded to the natural world with such passion could find an equal fascination in modern cities. From the time in 1906 that he and his family moved from rural Wisconsin to Hammond, Tobey found mechanized, urban America a profound source of fascination. Quite aside from the exposure to the fine arts that life in the city offered, his visual sense was captivated by the market places, the electric lights and signs, the variety of buildings, the microcosmic patterns in the most mundane of physical phenomena and the spirit and density of human life. This feeling was particularly captured in his stepping out into the streets of New York City on Armistice Day 1918 and being carried along by a dancing, heaving mass of humanity, 'completely integrated with the mass spirit',[28] as he put it.

Despite his 20th century Western sensibilities, Tobey was not sympathetic to the Communist–leaning inclinations of many of his contemporaries, disagreeing with its fundamental atheism. 'When godlessness is taught to the young they are godless and will remain so,'[29] he said. There was always a yearning for transcendence in Tobey's painting, which he described as 'more subconscious than conscious', a 'kind of self-contained contemplation... One is so surrounded by the scientific naturally one reflects it, but one needs... the religious side. One might say the scientific aspect interests the mind, the religious side frees the heart. All are interesting'.[30]

In 1918, at the age of 28, Tobey thought of art as a 'medium through which one could experience inspiration, therefore heightening the value of living'.[31] Yet with all this, he said,

> [W]hen I went out into the social world I found that while art was discussed, liked etc. that it appeared to have but a small influence on the spiritual side of these people. I remember one night after an evening at a party in Marcel Duchamp's studio, while waiting for an elevated train, I kept wondering if by chance there might be something else greater than art. This idea remained with me for several days – during which I thought considerably about the expression, 'the love of God'. What it is, what it could mean to one like myself. This led to prayer to know about this profound state. [32]

At a dinner party in New York, he met the portrait painter Juliet Thompson and afterwards, since they both lived in the same direction, the two walked home together. Before they parted, Thompson asked Tobey to sit for her. It was while posing in her studio that Tobey noted a photograph of a man with a white beard, wearing a turban. Tobey thought the face remarkable but felt no particular curiosity to find out any more about it. However, during the period of sitting for Thompson, Tobey felt that he had a 'very strange and

powerful dream which concerned this person in the photograph, or seemed to. When I told Miss Thompson about the dream she grew quite excited but didn't say anything'.[33] The picture was of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

At Thompson's instigation, Tobey was invited to visit Green Acre and stayed for several months. While knowing little of the Bahá'í Faith's tenets, it 'gradually dawned' on him, 'that this little group of people with their prayers, their smiling faces, and their unbounded enthusiasm regarding this new religion really had a new spirit; anyway something I couldn't exactly put into words, but convinced me that what they believed was the truth'.[34]

In 1919, Tobey himself is mentioned in a letter to Juliet Thompson from 'Abdu'l-Bahá in which he asks her to '[c]onvey warmest, most loving greetings to Mark Tobey on my behalf'.[35] In that same message, 'Abdu'l-Bahá delineates a spiritual perspective on the value of making art which would be of profound significance to Tobey, and indeed all artists in the Bahá'í Faith to this day:

> I rejoice to hear that thou takest pains with thine art, for in this wonderful new age, art is worship. The more thou strivest to perfect it, the closer wilt thou come to God. What bestowal could be greater than this, that one's art should be even as the act of worshipping the Lord? That is to say, when thy fingers grasp the paintbrush, it is as if thou wert at prayer in the temple.[36]

Encountering the Bahá'í Faith undoubtedly provided Tobey with the spiritual direction he had been seeking. His interest in the coming together and cross-fertilization of Eastern and Western culture, of science and religion, of nature and modernity, must have been further excited by the Bahá'í teachings.

After this time, Bahá'í concepts of unity, the 'progressive revelation' of God to humanity, the forces of spirituality versus materialism, the positive and equal value given to diverse elements, the dominance of light over darkness, become manifest in Tobey's painting. Initially he attempted to depict explicitly Bahá'í themes, portraying martyr and prophet figures, or visualizing a future era of universal peace. *Rising Orb* – a study for a mural – suggests the arrival of a new revelation from God into the world in the form of a sun at dawn and the commotion it stirs in both the human and angelic realms.

When Tobey made his first of two pilgrimages, Shoghi Effendi[37] told him that it would not be appropriate to paint the Faith's prophetic figures, but that he could, if he wished, depict the early, self–sacrificing heroes of the religion. Shoghi Effendi also said to him, 'Art must inspire. Personal satisfaction is not enough'.[38] Tobey was greatly relieved that Shoghi Effendi stated that there could be no such thing as 'Bahá'í art' at such an early period in the Faith's development. He saw this as a great liberation. A set of beliefs that had no iconic tradition enabled him to visualize Bahá'í concepts freely and develop his own pictorial expression, without feeling that he was bound to convey ideas in a prescribed or restricted way.

III. Writing a Painting

Mark Tobey finally arrived at his 'white writing' style in 1935, while a teacher at Dartington Hall school in Devon, England. Four years earlier, Tobey had received an invitation to teach at Dartington as a result of his being

acquainted with Beatrice Straight – a drama pupil at the Cornish School – who was the eldest daughter of the heiress, Dorothy Payne Whitney Straight, one of the richest women in America in the early 20th century. She had established Dartington Hall in 1929 with her husband, Leonard Elmhirst. Their school was a hotbed of new thinking, where Eastern thought combined with modern theories about the relationship of people to each other, to the environment, to culture, extending out to the entire planet. To realize her vision, and inspired by the model of the Cornish, Straight personally invited to Dartington those artists whose beliefs she respected and which corresponded to her own. Her sense that a fundamental unity could be found at the heart of all things made Tobey a natural fit for the school.

Tobey would go on to become Dartington's most influential and longest serving member of staff, returning repeatedly there over a period of eight years. By all accounts, Tobey became known as a remarkable teacher. On one particular occasion he observed that his students needed to loosen up. '[L]eave your boards – dance! Let go! That's better – dance, you emotionally tied–up English! Now stand up and dance with your chalk on your drawing boards!'[39]

Curiously though, there is little evidence that Tobey himself was loosening up in his own work. Certainly he continued to experiment with a hybrid of motifs and compositional ideas – some of them fusing European classicism with Cubism and what he observed from his new friends among the English modernists, such as Ben Nicholson. There remained a sombre, heavy formality to Tobey's paintings. Yet Dartington would also expand Tobey's outlook even further; the site was rich with Indian dance, Japanese prints and ceramics and Oriental calligraphy. Tobey mingled with some of the most progressive minds of the period, many of whom were opening Westerners' eyes to the East. Tobey was by all accounts successful at attracting a number of his colleagues and new friends at Dartington to the Bahá'í teachings. A kindred spirit was found in Bernard Leach, who had devoted his career to seeking a bridge between Eastern and Western cultures. 'Mark Tobey was the profoundest influence in my life,' wrote Leach. 'It was through him I became a Bahá'í'.[40] Others who responded to Tobey's spiritual convictions included the South African artist Reginald Turvey – an old friend of Leach's from their days at the Slade School – and the painter Cecil Collins who had moved with his wife to Totnes near Dartington after becoming friends with Tobey, and later became a full-time art teacher at the school.

Bernard Leach had arrived from his home in St Ives, Cornwall, to teach pottery at Dartington not long after Tobey's arrival. To learn more about making stoneware in larger quantities than he had been able to achieve in St Ives, Leach secured funding from the Elmhirsts for a visit to Japan in 1934. Dorothy asked him if he would like Tobey to travel with him at their expense, and Leach – who had grown close to Tobey – was very happy at the prospect. Tobey's sojourn in the Far East would have a major impact on the future course of his artistic pursuits, unexpectedly inspiring a visual language to express his ideas in an entirely unique way. In Shanghai, he spent several weeks studying calligraphy intensively with his friend Teng Baiye. During time off, Tobey was dazzled by the congestion, the traffic,

the dance halls, the night-time buzz and the neon signs of Shanghai, which reminded him of New York. After China, Tobey travelled on to Japan. While he had been thrilled by the dynamism of Chinese cities, he appears to have been equally seduced by the quietness and simplicity of the Japanese aesthetic. Most of his time in Kyoto was spent practicing and watching archery. On one occasion at the monastery, Tobey was given a freely brushed, *sumi* ink painting of a large circle upon which to meditate. The experience made a lasting impact upon him.

Soon after arriving back at Dartington, Tobey sat down one night and spontaneously created a small work, in tempera on cardboard that depicts a continuous, tangled mesh of white lines, occasionally woven through with darker blue and black threads, and an amoeba-like shape trapped at its centre. Tobey later entitled his picture, *Broadway Norm*, saying that it evoked for him New York City's renowned street, with its citizens and visitors caught in the lights. For Tobey, the lines seemed to trace the buzzing around of people and traffic while, at the same time, entangling them all in the unifying energy of the environment. This painting represented the beginning of the turning point in Tobey's approach. A few nights later, Tobey painted *Broadway*. Drawing on his imagination and his training with Teng Baiye, Tobey translated his memory of New York into a swirling, pulsing calligraphy, expressing his personal experience of the nightlife of the city. No one was more surprised at the creation of *Broadway* than the artist himself; he said he had had no conscious plan to create a calligraphic painting. It seemed simply to develop like a kind of dance or music making. 'I've painted *Broadway* which I must say astonishes me as much as anyone else', he wrote to friends in Seattle. 'Such a feeling of Hell under a lacy design – delicate as a Watteau in spirit but madness'.[41]

'At last,' Tobey said,

> I had found a technical approach which enabled me to capture what specially interested me in the city – its lights – threading traffic – the river of humanity chartered and flowing through and around its self-imposed limitation, not unlike chlorophyll flowing through the canals of a leaf. Line became dominant instead of mass but I still attempted to interpenetrate it with a spatial existence. 'Writing' the painting, whether in colour or neutral tones, became a necessity for me. I often thought of this way of working as a performance, since it had to be achieved all at once or not at all –the very opposite of building up as I had previously done. In the process I probably experienced the most extraordinary sensations I have ever had in art, because while one part of me was creating these two works, another part was trying to hold me back. The old and the new were in battle. It may be difficult for one who doesn't paint to visualize the ordeal an artist goes through when his angel of vision is being shifted.[42]

Despite his pictorial discovery at Dartington in the autumn of 1935, his internal struggle between the old and the new remained with Tobey, who continued to pursue multiple approaches to painting. 'I must say I don't see much future for the white writing,'[43] he initially stated. In the 1950s, he put himself through intensive training in Japanese *Sumi* techniques, using opaque black ink thrown and splashed in a controlled way onto paper. The restless experimenter could never be satisfied with just one approach to

picture making. Yet it was the 'white writing' works that he produced over the subsequent decades of his life that won Tobey most acclaim, especially in Europe. In masterpieces such as *Edge of August* (1953), this approach reached its apotheosis. As if in a piece of music, Tobey strives to evoke the essence of an ineffable feeling, the almost unnoticeable transition between summer and autumn, perhaps between East and West, or one era and another. All of this is conveyed with minute, calligraphic marks which *en masse* shimmer like a waterfall through a pale tonal spectrum. This is not 'action painting'; it is supremely controlled and deliberate, inviting the viewer to immerse himself in dimensions beyond the physical.

Surrendering to the 'calligraphic impulse' opened up new horizons for Tobey. With it, he discovered a visual medium by which he 'could paint the turmoil and the tumult of the great cities, the intertwining of the lights and the streams of people caught up in the mesh of their net'.[44] But his 'white writing' was not just a means by which he could express the energetic hubbub of city life. As with Chinese and Japanese characters, or the calligraphic work he may have seen in the Holy Land, Tobey learned to convey meaning through line. His 'white writing' brought a coherence to his many diverse preoccupations: his seemingly dichotomous fascination both with urban living and the patterns in nature; the harmonizing and unifying of the spirit of humanity with its material environment; the quiet contemplation of Zen meditation with the rhythms of music; the tensions between spirit and form, between classicism and modernity, between the world of bodies and the worlds of God, between the microcosm and the macrocosm.

While Tobey's formal, visual sources were varied, his Bahá'í beliefs had given his work its spiritual context as well as the freedom to find his own pictorial language to express it. The Bahá'í recognition of 'the primal oneness deposited at the heart of all created things',[45] prompted him to give equal weight and value to the diversity of the visual elements that inspired him, while at the same time stimulating in him a quest to establish their unity and interdependence. 'The writing style is not an abstraction,' he said. 'Each line has a purpose and a meaning important to the whole. And here I must emphasize it is the whole which is important'.[46]

Conclusion

Tobey's journey to discovering his own voice had been a long and tortuous path. In sum, in his teaching or in his works, he seems to have been essentially engaged in a quest to find an art that awakened spirit, which reconciled the ethereal and material aspects of life and nature. One appreciation, written after he died in 1976 at the age of 86, stated that Tobey 'could appreciate and respond to the physical beauties of the world to an extraordinary degree, yet he was always aware that there was much more than this, and his painting stretched to discover new means and dimensions of expression and vision, offering special insight into man's eternal quest to grasp the nature of reality'.[47]

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An Introduction to the Bahá'í Religiolect

Adib Masumian *MA BS*

Abstract

Religious dialects like Judeo-Arabic and Christianese have become popular topics of study in recent years. First proposed in the world of academia, the mass media – including public radio stations like PRI (Public Radio International) – have now begun to cover these 'religiolects' in their programmes. The purpose of this paper is to offer an introductory look at the religiolect of the Bahá'í Faith, a relatively recent religion founded in 19th century Persia (present-day Iran). To that end, we will explore the origins of the Bahá'í religiolect; examine the most essential loanwords of the religiolect; discuss some of the phraseology, both contemporary and historical, which composes the religiolect; and review especially extensive efforts to codify the religiolect. In striving to achieve the aforementioned goals, it is hoped that this paper will serve as a stepping-stone that others may use in their endeavours to further a greater understanding of the Bahá'í religiolect.

Keywords

Religiolect
religious terminology
religious parlance
religious vocabulary
religious dialect
cryptolect

Religiolects Defined

Benjamin Hary, Director at New York University Tel Aviv, defines a religiolect – a term he coined,[1] apparently a portmanteau of 'religious' (or 'religion') and 'dialect' – as '...a language variety with its own history and development, which is used by a religious community'.[2] Research seems to show that religiolects range from formal languages, such as the Judeo-Arabic languages,[3] to parlances used within the religious context of their parent languages, such as the relationship between Christianese and English.[4] The Judeo-Arabic languages draw on a specialized kind of Hebrew and Arabic vocabulary with religious undertones. Thus, the Judeo-Arabic languages are largely unintelligible to those who speak either Hebrew or Arabic exclusively. Christianese, on the other hand, refers to a set of English words and phrases that take on special meanings when used in a culturally Christian context.

As we will see below, the Bahá'í religiolect lies somewhere between these two ends of the linguistic spectrum. While perhaps not completely inscrutable to those unfamiliar with this religiolect, the words that compose it are numerous and opaque enough so that it merits study as a special kind of parlance. It is a parlance, in fact, which transcends the lexicon of any one language; it is a kind of supraparlance that cuts across those languages into which an adequate number of Bahá'í texts have been translated. In his writings, Bahá'u'lláh calls for the implementation of a universal auxiliary language:

> It is incumbent upon all nations to appoint some men of understanding and erudition to convene a gathering and through joint consultation choose one

> language from among the varied existing languages, or create a new one, to be taught to the children in all the schools of the world.[5]

Though it may be a stretch to relate religiolect with the adoption of a universal language, one could argue that, on a limited level, this ideal has already been realized for the Bahá'í community through the presence of this supraparlance, insofar as it offers a religious universal auxiliary language to the members of that community worldwide. As we will see below, however, there are differences in the Bahá'í religiolect as it is spoken by English speakers, Persian speakers and speakers of other languages. The primary focus of this paper, however, is to evaluate the Bahá'í religiolect within the context of the English language.

The Roots of the Bahá'í Religiolect

There is abundant evidence recorded in the literature of the Bahá'í Faith – a religion only some 170 years old – which demonstrates that it has a religiolect all its own. Take the following sentence, for instance:

> The Blessed Beauty, a Manifestation of God, was born in the Cradle of the Faith.

This sentence is written entirely in English, but the terms that compose it – 'Blessed Beauty', a title of Bahá'u'lláh, the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith; 'Manifestation of God', a term applied to certain prophetic figures who founded independent religions; and 'Cradle of the Faith', a reference to Iran – are all distinctly Bahá'í terms with special meanings that are not obvious to those unfamiliar with Bahá'í parlance. We will explore the above terms and others like them later on. For the most part, the origins of the vocabulary that constitutes the Bahá'í religiolect can ultimately be traced back to the Bahá'í scriptures themselves. While usage of certain terms (typically more esoteric) has not persisted, there are many other words and phrases that are still used by Bahá'ís today. Virtually all of the Bahá'í scriptures were originally written in Persian and Arabic – and while a considerable number of those scriptures have now been translated into many languages, there are certain Bahá'í terms that have been retained in those various target languages as loanwords that are invoked in their original language, regardless of the speaker's mother tongue.

Loanwords in the Bahá'í Religiolect

Perhaps the most essential example of such loanwords is the Arabic Bahá'í greeting, 'Alláh-u-Abhá' ('God is the Most Glorious').[6] This salutation was actually conceived by the Báb,[7] who founded the Bábí religion, the short-lived messianic precursor to the Bahá'í Faith. After Bahá'u'lláh founded the Bahá'í Faith, he affirmed the spiritual potency and significance of that phrase and enjoined its use upon Bahá'ís. In an explication of the phrase Alláh-u-Abhá, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the eldest son of Bahá'u'lláh and his eventual successor as leader of the Bahá'í Faith, said:

> ...in this day, the call raised by the Concourse on High is 'Alláh-u-Abhá', and the soul of this servant ['Abdu'l-Bahá] is stirred thereby...this salutation,

> 'Alláh-u-Abhá', is a clarion that pealeth out the lordship of the divine Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh], and produceth an effect upon the very heart of creation.[8]

Elsewhere in that same address, 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirmed that the object of this greeting – as well as other, similar salutations unique to the Bábí religion – is none other than Bahá'u'lláh.[9] Shoghi Effendi, the great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh and Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, also went on to reinforce this interpretation of Alláh-u-Abhá in English letters written on his behalf.[10] It is evident, therefore, that the Bahá'í greeting itself – the most fundamental element of Bahá'í parlance – is actually a testimony to Bahá'u'lláh's station and an affirmation of the truth of his message.

Beyond the above, Alláh-u-Abhá is the focus of every Bahá'í's daily *dhikr*, a meditative repetition of a word or phrase. Bahá'u'lláh enjoined the repetition of 'Alláh-u-Abhá' 95 times once a day upon every Bahá'í, a practice rooted in Sufism.[11] The phrase is also a common refrain in Bahá'í songs composed in various languages. The chief significance of this phrase certainly lies in its latter part, 'Abhá', which means 'most glorious'. This word is derived from the Arabic triliteral root B-H-W, and the many derivatives of that root – including Bahá', which means 'glory' or 'splendour', and is known to Bahá'ís as 'the Greatest Name' – are ubiquitous in Bahá'í history and culture. Indeed, one need look no further than the very name of the religion and the title of its founder for proof of this.

In that vein, there is another important Arabic phrase that merits discussion, and that is the invocation 'Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá' ('O Thou the Glory of Glories', or more literally, 'O Thou Glory of the All-Glorious').[12] This phrase is found repeatedly throughout the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The following is one example from his Will and Testament:

> It behooveth them [the Bahá'ís] not to rest for a moment, neither to seek repose. They must disperse themselves in every land, pass by every clime, and travel throughout all regions. Bestirred, without rest, and steadfast to the end, they must raise in every land the triumphal cry 'Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá!'...[13]

The connotation of joy associated with Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá has also found expression in other ways. It is not uncommon, for instance, to hear Western Bahá'ís – particularly those of Christian background – invoke Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá at moments of elation, similar to how one might say 'Hallelujah' when one feels particularly glad or moved. In addition, there is also a precedent for invoking Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá in times of trouble or distress. Below is another passage from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to that effect:

> Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá!...I have renounced the world and the peoples thereof, and am heartbroken and sorely afflicted because of the unfaithful. In the cage of this world I flutter even as a frightened bird, and yearn every day to take my flight unto Thy Kingdom. Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá! Make me to drink of the cup of sacrifice, and set me free. Relieve me from these woes and trials, from these afflictions and troubles.[14]

Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá also holds a special place in Bahá'í iconography through a calligraphic rendering of the invocation that was produced by Mírzá

Figure 1: Mishkín-Qalám's iconic calligraphic rendering of the invocation Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá Image produced by 'Parsa' of the Wikipedia community.

Ḥusayn-i-Iṣfahání (familiarly known as Mishkín-Qalám[15]), an early Bahá'í and one of Bahá'u'lláh's contemporaries. This iconic rendering of Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá, pictured above, is typically framed and displayed prominently in Bahá'í homes and centres all across the world.

Apart from Alláh-u-Abhá and Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá, there are other loanwords used in the Bahá'í religiolect. Ayyám-i-Há ('the Days of Há' – literally 'the Days of H'), the intercalary days of the Bahá'í calendar that precede the Bahá'í month of fasting; Naw-Rúz ('New Day'), the Persian New Year; and Riḍván ('Paradise'), the festival commemorating Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of his mission, are all Bahá'í holy days. Ḥuqúqu'lláh ('The Right of God') refers to a voluntary tax paid by Bahá'ís to the Universal House of Justice – the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith – for the promotion of their religion, donation to charities and social and economic development projects and so on. The original titles of certain significant Bahá'í scriptures, such as Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i-Aqdas ('The Most Holy Book') and Kitáb-i-Íqán ('The Book of Certitude'), are also well known to Bahá'ís around the world, and may be said to figure into their vocabulary as loanwords. As the former contains the bulk of Bahá'í law, and the latter is the religion's primary theological work, these books stand out as preeminent in the extensive corpus of Bahá'u'lláh's writings. In addition, the fact that leading Bahá'í figures and institutions, such as Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, have repeatedly referred to these books by their original titles throughout their own communications to the Bahá'í world – as well as the fact that, whenever published, these original titles invariably appear on their front covers, throughout their front matter and in other prominent places (a practice not observed with the publication of other Bahá'í sacred texts in English) – have added to the prevalence of their use in Bahá'í culture.

Other loanwords – used by the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá to represent religious ideas by way of metaphor – are not employed by the community as actively as the above terms and, apart from more scholarly discussions, their occurrence is generally limited to the translations of

certain Bahá'í scriptures. Sadratu'l-Muntahá ('The [Lote-]tree beyond which there is no passing') refers to 'a tree which, in ancient times, the Arabs planted to mark the end of the road',[16] but it is also a term that appears in the Qur'án[17] and holds significance for Muslims. This term has been interpreted in the Bahá'í framework as a reference to the Manifestation of God, a phrase discussed further below. 'Urvatu'l-Vuthqá ('The sure handle') is another term used in the Qur'án, where it signifies a monotheistic belief in God[18] – but in a Bahá'í context, it refers more specifically to the Covenant of God,[19] a phrase discussed further below. Kawthar and Salsabíl are both proper names of rivers (or other bodies of water) in the Islamic depiction of paradise.[20] In Bahá'í parlance, these terms represent a means of transmission from God to humanity, through which man can acquire a range of divine virtues (knowledge of God, renunciation, detachment, etc.). Afnán ('twigs') is a term that refers to the maternal relatives of the Báb, and Aghṣán ('branches') refers to the male descendants of Bahá'u'lláh. The Qá'im ('the one who arises') and the Mihdí[21] ('the one who is guided') are world-redeeming saviours in Islamic eschatology – the former a distinctly Shí'ih term, while the latter transcends sectarian divides. Bahá'ís believe that both of these titles refer to the Báb.

Contemporary Phraseology

With a better understanding of the roots of the Bahá'í religiolect, we can begin to explore some of its distinctive phraseology that Bahá'ís use today.

The Repurposing of Ordinary Words and Phrases

In addition to its neologisms, the Bahá'í religiolect includes a variety of pre-existing words that have taken on new meanings.

One of the most fundamental of these is the word Manifestation, a term Bahá'ís often use as shorthand to refer to a Manifestation of God. As mentioned above, this term is applied to certain prophets and founders of world religions, such as Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muḥammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. At first glance, the term may give the impression that Bahá'ís believe these individuals were the literal incarnations of God on earth, which is not the case. Rather, they believe these prophets were 'the manifestations of the names and attributes of God'[22] – in other words, the perfect mirrors of those virtues that have been associated with God throughout the ages, such as kindness, patience, steadfastness, etc. To elaborate, Bahá'ís believe that God Himself is unknowable to humanity because humans do not have the capacity to comprehend their creator. For this reason, they believe that God has instead graciously designated certain individuals throughout history to be the perfect mirrors of His attributes, and has invested them therewith. Being human, these 'mirrors' are infinitely more accessible to their fellow men than the transcendent, unfathomable entity that created them. Viewed in this light, we see that the term is in reality not a misnomer, because what is meant by a Manifestation of God is a specially chosen kind of deputy who manifests God to the limited degree to which a person can recognize and know him. Thus, for a human bound by their innately finite capacities, the Manifestation of God is as much ''God'' as they will ever be able to comprehend.

A word that features prominently in discussions of the Bahá'í writings is tablet.[23] Put simply, a tablet is a letter written by the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh

or ʻAbdu'l-Bahá and addressed to a specific audience, usually a single person. These tablets, which have always been entitled retrospectively, are sometimes known by the name of their addressee. Examples of this include the Báb's tablet to Muḥammad Sháh, Bahá'u'lláh's tablet to Mánikchí Ṣáḥib and ʻAbdu'l-Bahá's tablet to Auguste Forel. Other tablets have been entitled in accordance with their content or overall message, such as Bahá'u'lláh's *Tablet of the World* or ʻAbdu'l-Bahá's *Tablets of the Divine Plan*. Because prayers and tablets both constitute types of Bahá'í writings, it is not uncommon to see Bahá'ís use these words interchangeably. The two words, however, do not mean the same thing. While a tablet typically refers to a letter from one of the aforementioned 'Central Figures'[24] to one or more of their contemporaries, a prayer is an earnest, heartfelt supplication to God. In other words, the former is epistolary in nature, while the latter is decidedly devotional. Furthermore, the composition of prayers is not exclusive to the Central Figures. Shoghi Effendi, for instance, composed many prayers in Persian and Arabic.[25] Indeed, Shoghi Effendi has even stated that it is permissible for any Bahá'í to compose his or her own prayers when he or she feels moved to do so, with the caveat that it would be preferable to use the ones written by the Central Figures because of the special power with which they have been endowed.[26] In reality, if we examine the provenance of Bahá'í texts, we will find that, more often than not, prayers constitute smaller parts of tablets – that is, in the Bahá'í writings, prayers actually tend to be features of tablets. The fact that the two generally appear together as one cohesive unit originally may well add to the confusion that sometimes attends these two categories of Bahá'í writings.

One word which is especially integral to understanding the relationship between God and humanity in the Bahá'í framework is covenant. This word, of course, has a special meaning in the Abrahamic religious tradition, but a treatment of that subject lies beyond the scope of this paper. In Bahá'í nomenclature, there are technically two kinds of covenant: the 'Lesser Covenant' and the 'Greater Covenant'. The former refers to a pact that a Manifestation of God makes with his followers, exhorting them to accept and abide by a designated successor who will continue to lead the religion after his passing. The purpose of this pact is to establish a chain of unbreakable succession throughout the lifetime of a religion. In the case of the Bahá'í Faith, the Lesser Covenant was established by Bahá'u'lláh in his *Book of the Covenant* (*Kitáb-i-ʻAhd*), and extended by ʻAbdu'l-Bahá in his Will and Testament. The Greater Covenant, on the other hand, takes a much wider perspective; it is an overarching kind of pact 'which every Manifestation of God makes with His followers, promising that in the fullness of time a new Manifestation will be sent, and taking from them the undertaking to accept Him when this occurs'.[27] This belief has ramifications across religions, not merely within them, and it is an essential aspect of what Bahá'ís call 'progressive revelation' – the idea that God has always sent His Manifestations to humanity, at different times and in different places, proclaiming missions and bearing messages commensurate with the maturity and capacity of the peoples who received them. This divine guidance is guaranteed to be continuous, and in fact unending. There are, moreover, many tablets from Bahá'u'lláh and ʻAbdu'l-Bahá in which they praise the addressee for his or her 'firmness in the covenant'. Here, 'firmness' signi-

fies a steadfast belief, and 'the covenant' in this sense is essentially synonymous with the Bahá'í Faith itself, since Bahá'ís regard the founding of their religion as marking the present stage of the Greater Covenant.

Two terms that feature prominently in the Bahá'í religiolect are the Faith and the Cause, which are both used as references to the Bahá'í religion itself.[28] They appear to be contractions of 'the Faith of God' and 'the Cause of God', respectively – both phrases that appear throughout the writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In contemporary usage, it is very common to hear Bahá'ís talk about 'teaching the Faith', or articulating the tenets of their religion in some capacity (as part of a presentation, during conversation, etc.). This is a major aspect of Bahá'í life that will be discussed in more detail in the section on institutional terminology below. Furthermore, 'the Faith' and 'the Cause' have become parts of longer locutions. The aforementioned 'Cradle of the Faith' refers to present-day Iran, inasmuch as it is the birthplace of both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, and the place to which the ultimate origins of the religions they founded can be traced. There is also 'friends of the Faith',[29] a term that refers to those who enjoy a cordial relationship with Bahá'ís or have a favourable opinion of their religion, but do not identify as Bahá'ís themselves. In addition, we have 'the Hands of the Cause of God' (or simply 'Hands' for short), a now discontinued institution comprising individuals distinguished for their service to the religion in the areas of community safeguarding and advancement.

The last term we will explore in this section is pioneer. Pioneers are Bahá'ís who have migrated to another city or country to help promote the Bahá'í Faith. Unlike missionaries – whose religious work is vocational and sponsored by a church or other religious organization – pioneers are not necessarily employed in a capacity relevant to their religious affiliation, and they do not receive any kind of stipend from the Bahá'í institutions. The bulk of their day-to-day teaching efforts, therefore, tends to manifest itself during conversation, in the invitations they extend to their friends and colleagues to attend Bahá'í gatherings and so on. Pioneers have existed since the time of Bahá'u'lláh, when Persian Bahá'ís emigrated to India, Myanmar and other countries to promote their religion in those lands. Many Bahá'ís who pioneered to countries where Bahá'í communities did not exist during the 'Ten Year Crusade', an initiative launched by Shoghi Effendi in 1953 that was designed to spread the message of the Bahá'í Faith across the world, were given the title 'Knight of Bahá'u'lláh'. Those Bahá'ís who relocate to another state or province within their country of residence – or, on a smaller scale, even to another county or city within that state or province – are known as 'homefront pioneers'.

Locutions Rooted in Primary Bahá'í Texts

There are several locutions Bahá'ís use today that originated in the primary Bahá'í texts. These include the titles by which the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi are known to Bahá'ís. To begin, it may be immediately obvious to the reader that the 'names' most commonly used to refer to each of the Central Figures are actually titles themselves. Beyond those titles, the Báb has been called 'the Exalted One' (also 'the Most Exalted One'),[30] and is perhaps most commonly known as 'the Primal Point' – an appellation he gave himself; this has been reused by the succeeding generations of Bahá'í leaders and institutions. Bahá'u'lláh is also known by many

titles, including 'the Blessed Beauty' (probably the most common choice in contemporary usage), 'the Ancient Beauty', 'the Ancient King' and others. While he did style himself with some of these titles – such as the latter two in the list just mentioned – others, like the first in that list, were used of him by his son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, or by some other eminent Bahá'í. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, for that matter, is also known by multiple titles. These include 'the Perfect Exemplar', conferred on him by Shoghi Effendi; the Centre of the Covenant, which has its conceptual origins in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and was used repeatedly by 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself; the Mystery of God, conceived by Bahá'u'lláh; and, most commonly, the Master,[31] a title used of him by virtually all of his Bahá'í contemporaries – including Bahá'u'lláh.[32] Lastly, we have Shoghi Effendi, who is really known only by one title – the Guardian. One of the measures 'Abdu'l-Bahá took to ensure the continuity of the Lesser Covenant was to establish the office of a 'guardianship' in his Will and Testament. In this vital document, 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly indicated that, upon his passing, Shoghi Effendi would assume the role of 'Guardian of the Cause of God', and would immediately succeed him as the leader of the Bahá'í world. It is for this reason that he is often called by the abbreviated title of 'the Guardian'.

A phenomenon that should not go unnoticed is the colloquialization of certain distinctly Bahá'í terms. A prime example is the abbreviation of the greeting 'Alláh-u-Abhá' to just 'Abhá'. This usage seems to be popular chiefly among Iranian Bahá'ís, and it may in fact be exclusive to them. Since, however, Iranians have a considerable presence in most Bahá'í communities across the world, it is difficult to overlook behaviours and practices associated with their culture that are sometimes carried over into general Bahá'í culture.[33] Here are two examples of 'Abhá' in action, both taken from exchanges on Facebook Messenger:

Interestingly, use of Abhá has generated backlash from other Iranian Bahá'ís. Indeed, there is even an anonymous[35] brief essay written in Persian – apparently untitled, but featuring the incipit 'Why is it not permissible for us to use Abhá instead of Alláh-u-Abhá?'[36] – which has recently been making its rounds on Facebook and other media.[37] To summarize, the essay asserts that usage of 'Abhá' by itself is improper, and actually incomplete, in two ways. The first is that Abhá alone is grammatically incomplete; it is a descriptor that is not describing anything. The second is that Abhá alone is spiritually incomplete. While 'Alláh-u-Abhá' is clearly an affirmation of

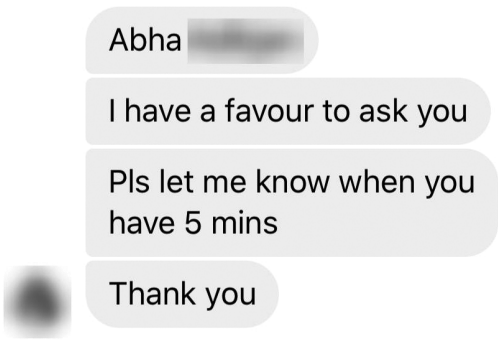

Figure 2: Usage of 'Abhá' by an Iranian Bahá'í as part of informal conversation.

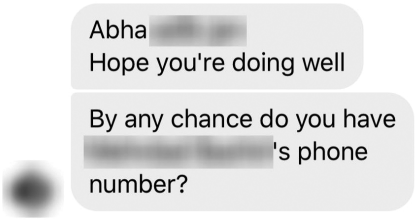

Figure 3: Similar usage of 'Abhá' by another Iranian Bahá'í.[34]

Bahá'u'lláh's station as a Manifestation of God, the word 'Abhá' – unaccompanied by the name of God, Whom it describes – is stripped of its spiritual significance.

Institutional Terminology

Over the past century, the Bahá'í religiolect has been further expanded through Shoghi Effendi's and the Bahá'í World Centre's[38] use of new terminology that is not found in the primary Bahá'í texts. This set of words will be referred to here as institutional terminology, so named because these words constitute a distinctive phraseology that is often employed in the messages of Shoghi Effendi, as well as those of the institutions which succeeded him and now make up the Bahá'í World Centre, such as the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Centre. Other institutions, such as National Spiritual Assemblies, often use this same terminology in their communications as well.

According to Bahá'í theology, God wished to be made known, therefore He brought humanity into existence and has dispatched His Manifestations over time to serve as channels for recognizing Him.[39] In promulgating their faith, Bahá'ís are extending an invitation to adhere to a moral framework which they believe is ideally suited to humanity's present needs, and participate in carrying forward the ever-advancing civilization that has been envisioned in their writings. It follows, then, that the heads of the Bahá'í Faith going back to Bahá'u'lláh himself have stressed the vital importance of sharing the Bahá'í Faith with others – whether directly or simply by example – in a way that is tactful, commensurate with the listener's level of receptivity and free of coercion or other methods one might use to pressure others to convert.

This sort of mass promulgation can most effectively be executed through an organized and clearly defined approach – and this brings us to the concept of the plan, arguably the bedrock upon which all other Bahá'í institutional terminology rests. The Bahá'í Administrative Order, which really began to develop with Shoghi Effendi's accession to the Guardianship in 1921, has played a central role in facilitating the spread of the Bahá'í Faith on a global scale. Ever since that time, the blueprints that have charted a course for these efforts have been 'plans', which Smith defines as 'organized campaigns to fulfil specific goals'[40] – among them typically the expansion of the Faith into new territories – for a fixed number of years. Smith then continues:

> The 'charter' for much of this activity is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Tablets of the Divine Plan* (1916–17), addressed to the American and Canadian Bahá'ís, in which he called for a systematic endeavour to teach the [Bahá'í] Faith throughout the world...[41]

Smith then goes on to list a series of national and international plans that have been launched since the 1920s.[42] Some of the words and phrases that compose institutional terminology have existed since the time of Shoghi Effendi. Examples of such terms include expansion and consolidation. Put simply, expansion refers to efforts to promote the Bahá'í Faith by sharing it with others. Consolidation is the next step, and arguably the logical corollary, to expansion. Those who have become Bahá'ís through expansion efforts are invited to participate in Bahá'í community life, and increase their knowledge of the religion's beliefs and principles. As they become more integrated into their local communities, and their abilities are enhanced through the acquisition of new knowledge (both acts of consolidation), these Bahá'ís become empowered to assist with ongoing expansion and consolidation efforts. In this way, the process of expansion and consolidation constitutes a self-subsisting cycle that facilitates the religion's perpetual growth at the grassroots level.

The bulk of institutional terminology chiefly in use today, however, has only been developing for about the past twenty years through the directives of the Universal House of Justice. With their inauguration of the Four Year Plan (1996–2000), the Universal House of Justice laid the theoretical groundwork for achieving 'a significant advance in the process of entry by troops [an influx of new converts]'.[43] In their Four Year Plan message to the Bahá'ís of the world, training institutes – systems designed to 'assist individuals to deepen their understanding of the Bahá'í teachings, and to gain the spiritual insights and practical skills they need to carry out the work of the community'[44] – are identified as the main instrument to be used to accelerate this growth on a global scale. The following excerpt from that message encapsulates this vision well:

> The next four years will represent an extraordinary period in the history of our Faith, a turning point of epochal magnitude. What the friends [Bahá'ís] throughout the world are now being asked to do is to commit themselves, their material resources, their abilities and their time to the development of a network of training institutes on a scale never before attempted. These centres of Bahá'í learning will have as their goal one very practical outcome, namely, the raising up of large numbers of believers who are trained to foster and facilitate the process of entry by troops with efficiency and love.[45]

In a document they prepared for the Universal House of Justice in February 2000, entitled 'Training Institutes and Systematic Growth', the International Teaching Centre noted the extraordinary success of the curriculum developed by the Ruhi Institute, which consists of a sequence of courses (often called the Ruhi sequence) designed to help Bahá'ís learn more about the principles and history of their Faith. Reports of this success soon led the Universal House of Justice to endorse the Ruhi Institute's sequence of courses as the primary method of systematic training to be implemented by Bahá'í communities throughout the world. The main goal of these courses is to help Bahá'ís become more effective teachers of their religion, such that they will be better equipped to assist with the twin processes of expansion and consolidation. In facilitating this training, Bahá'í communities are building capacity – a term that has its origins in social theory, but which has

been used repeatedly in communications from Bahá'í institutions to denote an increase in the number of human resources at a Bahá'í community's disposal. In periodically-held reflection meetings (or reflection gatherings), Bahá'ís residing within the boundaries of a cluster (a geographic area that constitutes an 'intercommunity partnership'[46]) come together to evaluate what has taken place during their previous intensive programme of growth, or IPG, and discuss how they might proceed with their efforts to build additional capacity in the next IPG. These IPGs consist of two phases: an expansion phase and a consolidation phase (see the above for a discussion of expansion and consolidation).

Subsequent messages from the Universal House of Justice discuss the execution of a number of core activities, which have accompanied the spread and development of training institutes and are typically employed in consolidation efforts.[47] It is generally accepted that there are four of these core activities: (1) devotionals, gatherings where people recite and reflect on passages from religious holy books (not necessarily just Bahá'í texts); (2) study circles, tutor-led group studies of the Ruhi books, designed with the aim that participants will be able to serve as tutors of their own study circles once they have reached an advanced stage in the sequence; (3) children's classes, which offer spiritual and moral education to children; and (4) junior youth groups (more formally, the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Programme, or JYSEP), where those in early adolescence are guided by one or more animators (group facilitators) through a series of special books and activities designed to help participants engage in artistic expression, render service to their local communities and forge a strong moral identity. The classification of the age groups just mentioned is more or less arbitrary, but it is generally considered that in Bahá'í nomenclature, youth are those between the ages of fifteen and thirty; junior youth are those between eleven and fifteen; and children are ten or younger.

For the most part, these terms have not been codified in any authoritative way; there is no officially sanctioned pamphlet or other resource, for instance, which prescribes fixed definitions for them. Rather, the nature of this terminology, which typically appears in the context of institutional communications, seems to lend itself to reflection and subsequent application in order for their full implications to be discovered. This would mean that institutional terminology has been (and is still being) developed and employed in a way that, in most cases, eludes objective definition.[48] Instead, one is left to arrive at approximations of meaning through the subjective conclusions one draws from individual or group study of institutional communications, as well as from one's personal experience in the field of action. (Indeed, even the present author's attempts to define these terms in the preceding pages are mostly personal inferences themselves.)

The foregoing list of institutional terminology is by no means exhaustive. This particular set of words includes many other special terms, offices of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, and acronyms, but to delve any deeper into this subject would lie beyond the scope of this paper. For those who wish to study this terminology further, it is recommended that they consult two books that feature collections of messages from the Universal House of Justice (as well as other pertinent documents) concerning recent plans:

(1) *Turning Point: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice and Supplementary Material (1996–2006)*; and (2) *Framework for Action: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice and Supplementary Material (2006–2016)*. Also recommended is a document recently prepared by the International Teaching Centre, *Training Institutes: Attaining a Higher Level of Functioning*,[49] which offers an in-depth analysis of messages from the World Centre about the Ruhi sequence, the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Programme, the programme for the spiritual education of children, and the processes involved in developing institutional capacity.

Historical Phraseology

Earlier in this paper, reference was made to phraseology in the Bahá'í religiolect that has not survived, referred to here as historical phraseology. It would be of historical interest to explore this phraseology, if only on a cursory level, now that we have discussed the more contemporary aspects of the religiolect. There are a number of terms in the Bahá'í religiolect that were formerly used to refer to women. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá often used the word 'leaf' (waraqa) in this sense.[50] Indeed, 'the Greatest Holy Leaf' – the sister of 'Abdu'l-Bahá – is well known to and greatly revered by Bahá'ís. Other, more conventional but now archaic words – such as 'handmaid', 'handmaiden', and 'maidservant' (all three usually either ama or kaníz) – have also been used in the Bahá'í writings to this effect. Another term that is used to refer exclusively to Bahá'í women is 'handmaids of the Merciful' (imá' al-raḥmán), also translated as 'maidservants of the Merciful'. 'Abdu'l-Bahá often used this term in his tablets to refer to female Bahá'ís, as did Shoghi Effendi in his letters to the Bahá'ís of the Middle East. Like the previous terms, this one is not used in contemporary English Bahá'í parlance, but it is still used occasionally by Persian-speaking Bahá'í authors in their works.

The remainder of the discussion in this section will focus on some of the more esoteric aspects of historical Bahá'í phraseology that were intentionally cryptic. A general consensus among Bahá'í scholars indicates that this opaque language was designed to protect a fledgling community of persecuted Bahá'ís during the early days of their religion. Abu'l-Qásim Afnán has observed that it was intended to protect the identities of the addressees of tablets in the event that they fell into the hands of malicious people outside the Bahá'í community.[51] Furthermore, throughout his *Asráru'l-Áṯhár* ('The Mysteries of the Writings'), the eminent Bahá'í scholar and lexicographer, Fáḍil Mázandaráni, repeatedly used the word *stewart ramz* ('code') to characterize this language. It is, therefore, a sort of cryptolect that should be regarded as a historically vital component of the larger Bahá'í religiolect.

One can hardly explore this dimension of the Bahá'í religiolect without encountering the Abjad numeral system. A brief definition of this system is included in the glossary of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas:

> The ancient Arabic system of allocating a numerical value to letters of the alphabet, so that numbers may be represented by letters and vice versa. Thus every word has both a literal meaning and a numerical value.[52]

The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh would often employ the Abjad system in their writings to conceal identities, particularly those of their followers, by converting

their real names to other names that have the same numerical value in the Abjad system. The name Muḥammad, for instance, would often be converted to Nabíl, both of which have a numerical value of 92. There are, however, several tablets from Bahá'u'lláh that actually contain coded references to himself (when read from right to left). One example is the number 152, the discrete Abjad equivalent of 'Bahá', which appears at the end of some of his tablets.[53] The number 669, which discretely equates to 'Bahá'u'lláh', is used in many of his written benedictions in the literal Arabic sense of 'glory of God'; for instance, 'O Faḍlu'lláh! Upon thee be 669...'[54]

In his tablets, Bahá'u'lláh would occasionally recast the names of his followers as prepositional phrases. One example involves a certain believer named Muḥammad-ʿAlí. In one of his tablets to him, Bahá'u'lláh recasts this believer's name as Muḥammad qabl-i-ʿAlí ('Muḥammad before ʿAlí').[55] Another example – one with an added layer of complexity – can be found in a tablet of Bahá'u'lláh entitled 'Riḍvánu'l-ʿAdl' ('The Paradise of Justice').[56] This tablet was addressed to a Bahá'í named Muḥammad-Riḍá Shahmírzádí, and at one point in the tablet, Bahá'u'lláh refers to this believer with the phrase 'Riḍá baʿd-i-Nabíl' ('Riḍá after Nabíl'). Here, Bahá'u'lláh has employed two strategies to conceal the identity of the recipient. He started by converting the first part of the believer's compound first name (Muḥammad-Riḍá), Muḥammad, to a numerically-equivalent counterpart, Nabíl, resulting in the new compound name of Nabíl-Riḍá. He then took this new name and recast it as the prepositional phrase 'Riḍá after Nabíl'. There were also instances where Bahá'u'lláh alluded to the Báb in his tablets (after the latter's execution) with the same level of complexity, referring to him as 'Alí qabl-i-Nabíl' ('ʿAlí before Nabíl').[57]

The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh would also refer to certain cities and provinces by using the phrase 'land of', followed by individual letters that compose the place's name. For instance, when referring to Ṭihrán, Bahá'u'lláh would often write Arḍ-i-Ṭá ('The Land of Ṭá'). Interestingly, the use of these codenames was not limited to the names of Persian cities. While 'Abdu'l-Bahá was visiting Beirut, Bahá'u'lláh wrote him a tablet known as the 'Tablet of the Land of Bá'. The following table lays out some of the more commonly encountered appellations in this vein:

Fáḍil Mázandaráni has noted the multivalence of these locational codenames – observing, for instance, that while Arḍ-i-Bá can refer to Beirut, it can also refer to the Iranian city of Bárfurúsh (now known as Bábul), the birthplace of an eminent Bábí figure known as Quddús.[58]

The last feature of historical phraseology that will be mentioned here is another kind of written encryption technique, in which the names of people and cities would be reduced to certain constituent letters. For instance, in some of his unpublished tablets to the eminent Bahá'í merchant, ʿAzízu'lláh Jadhdháb, Bahá'u'lláh would refer to this man with the phrase ʿayn qabl-i-zih ('the letter ʿayn before the letter zih'). In cases like these, Bahá'u'lláh has actually combined different encryption techniques; he not only reduced the recipient's first name (ʿAzízu'lláh) to the first two letters that compose it (ʿayn and zih), but he also recast those two letters as a prepositional phrase. Bahá'u'lláh also applied this 'reduction technique' to the names of places, a strategy that necessarily has some overlap with the aforementioned strategy of using codenames. Table 1 already includes

Translation of the Signifier	Translation of the Signified
The Land of Bá	Beirut
The Land of Káf	Káshán
The Land of Káf and Rá	Kirmán
The Land of Khá	Khurásán
The Land of Mím	Mázandarán
The Land of Ṣád	Iṣfahán
The Land of Shín	Shíráz
The Land of Tá	Tabríz
The Land of Ṭá	Ṭihrán
The Land of Yá	Yazd
The Land of Zá	Zanján

Table 1: Examples of codenames used in Bahá'í texts and the places they typically represent.

one such example ('the Land of Káf and Rá', meaning Kirmán). Another example involves a tablet Bahá'u'lláh addressed to the Bahá'ís of the small town of Zavárih, which begins with these words: 'O ye loved ones of the All-Merciful in Zá and Rá...'[59]

Attempts to Define Terminology used in Bahá'í Scripture

Over the past several decades, there have been formal attempts to produce reference materials that define words and phrases used in the Bahá'í writings. The most serious and comprehensive of these endeavours have been undertaken in Persian, which is unsurprising considering that is the language in which much of the religion's primary texts were written, and in which early Bahá'í scholarship inevitably first developed. A distinguishing feature of these Persian-language dictionaries is their inclusion of Arabic terms that occur in Bahá'í scripture – no doubt helpful to the reader of Persian seeking to grasp the meaning of Bahá'í scripture written in that language that also draws on Arabic vocabulary, or even the Arabic Bahá'í writings themselves.

Perhaps the first truly large-scale attempt at such an endeavour in any language was conducted by the aforementioned Fáḍil Mázandaráni when he wrote *Asráru'l-Áthár*.[60] This work spans several volumes, only some of which have been published, and it is essentially a dictionary of terms that appear in the Bahá'í writings or stem from other religious traditions that bear some relevance to the Bahá'í Faith. The work features entries of various terms, laid out in alphabetical order, complete with definitions of those terms and examples of their usage derived from scripture. Mázandaráni apparently completed *Asráru'l-Áthár* sometime between 1955 and 1956, but the work did not appear in print during his lifetime.[61] About a decade after his death, the Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Iran finally began to publish Mázandaráni's manuscript – a process that lasted from 1967 to 1972.

There is also an important set of Persian-language works in this vein, which will be referred to here as the *Lughat* ('Words') series. In 1970, the Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Tehran published a glossary of Bahá'í terms entitled *Dou-Hizár Lughat* ('Two-thousand Words').[62] This book exclusively

features brief definitions of Arabic terms that appear in the Bahá'í writings, all of which have been vocalized for the benefit of the Persian reader. Four years later, in 1974, an expanded version of this work – entitled *Shish-Hizár Lughat* ('Six-thousand Words') – was published by the Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Iran.[63] An interesting feature of this book – one that was absent in its precursor – is the list of dictionaries and other sources that the compilers consulted in preparing it, which appears at the end of the work. Among them is listed the aforementioned *Asráru'l-Áthár*.

More than a decade afterwards, in 1986, the work was expanded to its largest iteration yet,[64] *Núzdah-Hizár Lughat* ('Nineteen-thousand Words'),[65] published by the University of Toronto Press. In their helpful introduction to the work, the publishers note that, in a sense, the production of *Núzdah-Hizár Lughat* was some 30 years in the making. This effectively means that initial work on the Lughat series would have begun in the 1950s. In addition, they make explicit reference to the iterations that preceded *Núzdah-Hizár Lughat* (both of which were reprinted at least once), and note that *Núzdah-Hizár Lughat* itself took eight years to prepare (1978–1986). The scope of this work was expanded to include terms outside of exclusively Bahá'í language, such as the names of historical figures, places and so on – but the publishers did note that even these terms still appear in the Bahá'í writings, and therefore bear some relevance to the religion. Thus, unlike its two precursors, the entries in this work are not limited to Arabic terms (though it is still the primary focus), but Persian entries are still not included.[66] This is apparently because the purpose of this work, like those which preceded it, was to acquaint the Persian Bahá'í reader with non-Persian Bahá'í terminology. Apart from the greater number of entries, the definitions featured in this work are, generally, also much more comprehensive than those of the iterations that came before it.

There have also been notable attempts along these lines in English. It seems the first serious effort to define Persian and Arabic Bahá'í and Bahá'í-related terms in a proper book was carried out by Marzieh Gail, the eminent Bahá'í author and translator, with the publication of her *Bahá'í Glossary* in 1955.[67] The book was rather small, spanning just under 60 pages, but it no doubt served as an immensely useful reference work for English-speaking Bahá'ís. The main body of the book was broken up into three columns: the entry (which would be transliterated into the Latin alphabet, if Persian or Arabic; there were some English entries) on the left; the phonetic pronunciation, where applicable (again, represented with Latin characters) in the middle; and the definition on the right. The entries are diverse, in that they include many proper names, the names of the months that make up the Bahá'í calendar (all Arabic) and so on. Several of the definitions are corroborated by passages from the Bahá'í writings or other literature, the sources being explicitly cited in-line. The introductory pages of Gail's *Bahá'í Glossary* feature some of her own helpful remarks on the subject of transliteration, as well as a table that lays out each letter of the Persian alphabet and its corresponding transliteration, pronunciation, and numerical value (according to the aforementioned Abjad numeral system). A reference work of this kind probably served as a useful companion to the reader in his or her study of the well-known English-language Bahá'í histories of the time – such as Shoghi Effendi's *God Passes By* and his translation of Nabíl-i-Zarandí's

narrative, which he entitled *The Dawn-Breakers* – as they make frequent allusions to Persian and Arabic terms and names.

A more recent attempt in this vein was conducted by Jonah Winters in 2010, with the digital publication of his *Glossary of Bahá'í Terms*.[68] It is a bit smaller than Gail's *Bahá'í Glossary* – but unlike Gail's work, this glossary features a preponderance of English Bahá'í vocabulary, rather than one of Persian or Arabic entries. In addition, the bulk of Gail's book consists of terms, names of historical figures, and so on which are not necessarily particular to Bahá'í parlance (for instance, Persian titles like páshá and mírzá), whereas Winters's glossary was prepared with a greater view to defining terms that are uniquely Bahá'í. Because the work was prepared digitally, Winters's glossary is an especially rich resource in that hyperlinks are embedded throughout, which point the reader to all sorts of useful reference materials to corroborate the definitions he has provided.

Conclusion

The foregoing pages are intended to offer an introductory look at the features of the Bahá'í religiolect. The above study, however, should by no means be misconstrued as an exhaustive attempt to codify the Bahá'í religiolect, or as anything more than a cursory survey of an elaborate language stemming from a rich religious tradition. To capture befittingly the plethora of terminology, the depth of meaning and the subtlety of nuance inherent to the Bahá'í religiolect, further study by future scholars will undoubtedly be required. It would likely prove enlightening, for instance, for future researchers to evaluate the Bahá'í religiolect within the framework of those languages other than English (an admitted limitation of the present study) into which an adequate number of Bahá'í texts have been translated. For the time being, however, it is hoped that the reader will be content with this foray into the features of the Bahá'í religiolect.

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Endnotes

1. Benjamin Hary, *Multiglossia in Judeo-Arabic*, Leiden & New York: E.J. Brill, 1992.
2. Benjamin Hary, *Religiolect,* Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2011, 45.
3. Patrick Cox, 'Arabic has a Jewish dialect, and these women speak it', Public Radio International, The World in Words. 16 March 2017. Available online: https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-03-15/arabic-has-jewish-dialect-and-these-women-speak-it. (Last accessed 20 May 2017.)
4. Patrick Cox, '"What a total God shot!" Understand that? Then you speak Christianese', Public Radio International, The World in Words. 29 March 2017. Available online: https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-03-28/what-total-god-shot-understand-then-you-speak-christianese. (Last accessed 20 May 2017.)
5. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978, 165–166.
6. A minor orthographical note: Instead of using hyphens, most Bahá'ís use apostrophes on either side of the 'u' in Alláh-u-Abhá when writing out the word in a Latin-based script, despite the precedent established by Shoghi Effendi for using the former. Bahá'ís probably do this in the manner of writing the name Bahá'u'lláh, which clearly does use apostrophes, without realizing that the a postrophes in this transliteration of Bahá'u'lláh's name serve a purpose that does not apply to Alláh-u-Abhá. The first apostrophe in Bahá'u'lláh's name represents a standalone hamza, an Arabic character; the second indicates that the initial A in Alláh, an alif waṣla in the original Arabic, has been elided by the morphological marker 'u' that represents the nominative conjugation of 'Baha' in the compound name 'Bahá'u'lláh'. The phrase 'Alláh-u-Abhá', on the other hand, does not have any standalone hamzas, nor does it include any elisions. For that reason, it does not make orthographical sense to write out the phrase as 'Alláh'u'Abhá'.
7. Stephen Lambden, 'The Word Bahā: Quintessence of the Greatest Name', *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 3(1), note 31 (DOI: BSR.3.1.19). Available online here: http://bahai-library.com/lambden_quintessence_greatest_name.
8. From a Persian discourse by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Fáḍil Mázandaráni, *Amr va Khalq*, vol. 3, Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1986, 76–77. Provisional translation by the present author.
9. *Ibid* 74–75.
10. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand, 26 December 1941. Published in *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, 1923–1957* (Sydney, Australia: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia, 1970), 41.
11. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992, para. 18.
12. This invocation has been the subject of extensive commentary and scholarship. For example, see Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání, 'Elucidation of the Meaning of The Greatest Name' (https://bahai-library.com/gulpaygani_elucidation_greatest_name); Abu'l-Qásim Fayḍí, 'Explanation of the Symbol of the Greatest Name' (https://bahai-library.com/faizi_symbol_greatest_name); Stephen Lambden, 'The Word Bahā: Quintessence of the Greatest Name' (http://bahai-library.com/lambden_quintessence_greatest_name), and 'Greatest Name, The (al-Ism al-A`zam)' (https://bahai-library.com/lambden_encyclopedia_greatest_name).
13. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), 10.
14. The words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as translated by Shoghi Effendi and quoted in *The Promised Day is Come* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980, 15.
15. Pen of Musk.
16. Shirley Macias, *The Verse of Light, the Sadratu'l-Muntahā (Divine Lote Tree), and the Unfoldment of God's Plan,* Bahá'í Library Online, 1991. Available online: http://bahai-library.com/macias_verse_light. (Last accessed 26 May 2017.)
17. Qur'án 53:10–18, 34:16, 56:28. (Last accessed 26 May 2017.)
18. Qur'án 2:256 offers the clearest example of this. The term is also used in Qur'án 31:22.

19. In one of his letters 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes, 'Know thou that the "Sure Handle" ['Urvatu'l-Vuthqá] mentioned from the foundation of the world in the Books, the Tablets and the Scriptures of old is naught else but the Covenant and the Testament'. Quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979, 238.

20. When not rendered in loanword form, these two terms are often translated as 'living waters', 'soft-flowing waters' or similar phrases.

21. Alternatively, 'Mahdí' – a spelling based on the Arabic pronunciation of the word, rather than Persian. Generally speaking, the Persian variants of Arabic words and phrases are used most commonly in Bahá'í orthography.

22. Moojan Momen, 'Mazhar-e Elahi', *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2016. Available online here: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/mazhar-e-elahi. (Last accessed 28 May 2017.)

23. Occasionally, other words – such as 'epistle' – are used synonymously with 'tablet'. Both of these locutions are often used to render the same Arabic word (*lawḥ*) into English.

24. A Bahá'í locution conceived by Shoghi Effendi that refers to the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá collectively.

25. There is, for example, a collection of Shoghi Effendi's prayers published under the title *Majmú'íy-i-Munáját: Ḥaḍrat-i-Valíyy-i-Amru'lláh* (*A Collection of Prayers by the Guardian [Shoghi Effendi]*) (Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1995 [2nd ed.]).The full contents of this collection are available in Persian online here: http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/se/PSE/.

26. Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny: The Messages From The Guardian Of The Bahá'í Faith To The Bahá'í Community Of The British Isles,* London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981, 154.

27. The Universal House of Justice, 23 March 1975, *The Covenant*, originally published in *Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1, Mona Vale, New South Wales: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 199). Available online here: https://bahai-library.com/pdf/compilations/covenant.pdf.

28. In fact, because of their belief in progressive revelation, Bahá'ís contend that there has only ever been, and will only ever be, one religion – 'the Faith of God' – which has been revealed to humanity in different stages. Interpreted in this light, Christianity, Islam, and the other world religions are actually just names that represent different stages of a single religion's evolution. This belief is encapsulated in the following declaration from Bahá'u'lláh: 'This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future' (*Aqdas* 27–28). Because, however, the Bahá'í Faith represents the current stage in that trajectory of religious progression, it is convenient for Bahá'ís to use 'the Faith' or 'the Cause' to refer to their own religion in shorthand.

29. Not to be confused with 'the friends,' an expression used in Bahá'í parlance to refer to Bahá'ís collectively.

30. Originally Ḥaḍrat-i-A'lá, the term most Persian-speaking Bahá'ís use to refer to the Báb.

31. Originally Sarkár Áqá.

32. cf. Youness Afroukhteh, *Memories of Nine Years in 'Akká* (trans. Riaz Masrour), Oxford: George Ronald, 2003, 36, and Adib Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh,* Oxford: George Ronald, 1992, 138.

33. The arrangement of a *haft sín* during Naw-Rúz is an excellent example. While Naw-Rúz is considered a holy day for Bahá'ís, it is originally an ancient Persian celebration, and the rituals traditionally associated with it – including the arrangement of a *haft sín* – have not been retained as sacred practices in the Bahá'í framework. It is, therefore, a cultural tradition that many Iranian Bahá'ís continue to practice in their observance of a holiday that holds a dual significance (religious and cultural) for them. This duality, in fact, often manifests itself in the items Iranian Bahá'ís include in their *haft sín*. While many Iranians will display the *Díván* of Ḥáfiẓ, Iranian Bahá'ís will often opt for a book of Bahá'í prayers, the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, or some other Bahá'í text.

34. From a private Facebook Messenger communication dated 23 February 2017.

35. Evidently written by a Bahá'í, given the content and tone of the essay.

36. Translation of the incipit by the present author.

37. A side-by-side translation of this essay, produced by the present author, is available online here: http://bit.ly/EssayOnAllahuAbha.

38. The Bahá'í World Centre refers to the spiritual and administrative Centre of the religion. The Centre's chief operations are conducted in Haifa, Israel, but they also possess property – such as buildings associated with Bahá'í history and similarly special sites – in 'Akka (Acre), Mazra'ih, and other places in northern Israel, many of which Bahá'ís visit during pilgrimage.

39. Refer to *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 174–176, note 23.

40. Smith, *Concise Encyclopedia*, 271.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid* 271–272. Another helpful summary of these plans can be found in the preface to *Turning Point: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice and Supplementary Materials, 1996–2006*, West Palm Beach, Fla.: Palabra Publications, 2006, see v–vii.

43. Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván 1996 (Four Year Plan): Bahá'í Era 153* (Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 1996), para. 17. Available online: http://bahai-library.com/uhj_ridvan_1996. (Last accessed 3 July 2017.)

44. Bahai.org. 'The Training Institute | What Bahá'ís Do'. Available online: http://www.bahai.org/action/response-call-bahaullah/training-institute. (Last accessed 3 July 2017.)

45. Universal House of Justice, *Four Year Plan*, para. 29.

46. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, *Five Year Plan, 2001–2006* (n.p., n.d. [2001?]), 6. Available online: https://bahai-library.com/nsa_five_year_plan. (Last accessed 4 July 2017.) For more on clusters, refer to a letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States addressed to all Local Spiritual Assemblies in that country, dated 19 July 2001.

47. It is worth noting that participation in the core activities is not exclusive to Bahá'ís. Much to the contrary, Bahá'ís are actually encouraged to invite people of all religious persuasions (as well as those who do not identify with any religion) to these activities. The Universal House of Justice themselves highlighted the outward-facing nature of these activities in their Riḍván 2002 message to the Bahá'ís of the world: 'These core activities, which at the outset were devised principally to benefit the believers themselves, are naturally becoming portals for entry by troops.' Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván 2002: Bahá'í Era 159*, para. 4. Available online: http://bahai-library.com/uhj_ridvan_2002). (Last accessed 4 July 2017.)

48. There have, however, been unofficial efforts to codify institutional terminology. For example, see Susan Gammage's *Bahá'í Glossary*, available online here: https://susangammage.com/a-bahai-glossary.

49. Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 2017. Available online here: https://bahai-library.com/pdf/uhj/uhj_training_institutes.pdf.

50. Examples include Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 255, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament*, 18.

51. Abu'l-Qásim Afnán, *Chahár Risáliy-i Táríkhí dar báriy-i Ṭáhirih Qurratu'l-ʿAyn,* Darmstadt, Germany: ʿAṣr-i-Jadíd, 1999 [2nd ed.], 64n.

52. *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 252. For more detailed information, refer to Smith, *Concise Encyclopedia* 21, and G. Krotkoff, "ABJAD," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/2, 221–222. Available online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abjad. (Last accessed 19 August 2017.)

53. In this numerical representation of his title, Bahá'u'lláh has not included the additional value of 1 associated with the isolated *hamza* at the end of the word 'Bahá'.

54. *Laʾáliʾu'l-Ḥikmat*, vol. 1, Brasilia, Brazil: Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Brazil, 1986, 143. Provisional translation of this excerpt by the present author.

55. Bahá'u'lláh, *Muntakhabátí az Áthár-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-Bahá'u'lláh,* Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 2006 [2nd ed.]), 196, #140. Shoghi Effendi's translation of this tablet has been published in Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990, 305, CXL.

56. A complete provisional English translation of this tablet is available online here: https://adibmasumian.com/translations/lawh-i-ridvanul-adl/. For more on this tablet, refer to Christopher Buck and Adib Masumian, 'Bahá'u'lláh's "Paradise of Justice"', *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 20(1), 97–134. https://doi.org/10.1386/bsr.20.1.97_7.

57. For example, refer to Bahá'u'lláh, *Muntakhabátí* 57, #33. Shoghi Effendi's translation of this tablet has been published in Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 77, XXXIII.

58. Fáḍil Mázandaráni, *Asráru'l-Áthár*, vol. 2, Ṭihrán, Iran: Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Iran, 1967, 5.

59. Mázandaráni, *Asrár*, vol. 4 70. Provisional translation of this excerpt by the present author.

60 The published volumes of *Asráru'l-Áthár* are available online here: http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/mazandarani/asrar.htm.

61. Mázandaráni, *Asrár*, vol. 1 j–d [ﺝ–ﺩ].

62. More precisely, the book has entries on 2,150 terms. *Dou-Hizár Lughat*, p. 3. This work is now out of print, but the full text is available online here: https://adibmasumian.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/2000-words.pdf.

63. More precisely, the book has entries on 6,400 terms. *Shish-Hizár Lughat*, first page of introduction (unnumbered). This work is now out of print, but the full text is available online here: https://adibmasumian.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/6000-words.pdf.

64. In fact, *Núzdah-Hizár Lughat* was eventually succeeded by a much more comprehensive work, entitled *Ríyáḍu'l-Lughat*. This work was named after Riaz Ghadimi, the Bahá'í scholar who spearheaded the preparation of *Dou-Hizár Lughat*, *Shish-Hizár Lughat*, and *Núzdah-Hizár Lughat*. The scope of *Ríyáḍu'l-Lughat*, however, is so broad that it extends far beyond terms used in the Bahá'í writings (though those terms are certainly included as entries). For that reason, *Ríyáḍu'l-Lughat* is considered beyond the scope of our discussion here, and *Núzdah-Hizár Lughat* is treated as the culmination of the *Lughat* series.

65. This work is also less commonly known by its formal title, *Farhang-i Lughát-i Muntakhabih* (English title: *An Arabic Persian Dictionary of Selected Words*). This work is now out of print, but the full text is available online here: https://adibmasumian.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/19000-words.pdf.

66. For instance, in their introduction to the book, the publishers state explicitly that there are no entries for words that start with the letters P (ﭖ), G (ﮒ), ZH (ﮊ), or CH (ﭺ). These letters are part of the Persian alphabet; standard Arabic does not have them.

67. Marzieh Gail, *Bahá'í Glossary: A Glossary of Persian and Arabic Words Appearing in the Bahá'í Writings*, Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955. Available online here: https://bahai-library.com/pdf/g/gail_bahai_glossary_original.pdf.

68. Available online here: https://bahai-library.com/winters_bahai_glossary.

Book Review

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***Islam at the Crossroads*, Lameh Fananapazir (2015)**
Oxford: George Ronald, xxvi, 660, index, 254 x 156 mm
ISBN: 978-0-85398-589-1 (hbk – now out-of-print) £24.95 / $49/95; 978-0-85398-598-3 (pbk) £19.95 / $39.95;
Kindle ASIN: B01BT5RRM8 £9.99 / $13.37
http://www.grbooks.com

Reviewed by ***Moojan Momen,*** *Independent Scholar, Bedfordshire*

Muslims who read this book will find a presentation that addresses many of their present-day concerns. The problems of the Islamic world such as extremism, authoritarian religious governments, suppression of religious freedom, forced conversions, terrorism and the subsequent reaction of Islamophobia are all addressed in this book, using the Bahá'í authoritative texts to present analyses of and solutions to these problems. The aim of the author is to show that the dilemma facing many Muslims is caused by the fact that the teachings of Islam were meant for a past age and are no longer suitable for the age in which we live and that a new Divine Revelation has come to the world, the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, which is more suited. Thus Muslims are faced with the choice of either trying to force upon the world teachings that all can see are no longer suitable or else they can try to adapt their religion to the modern world, but then they are deviating from the text of their scriptures and this will be rejected by many Muslims. The only way out of this dilemma, the author asserts, is to move forward to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

In addition, Muslims are provided with the more traditional proofs of the Bahá'í Faith based upon verses from the Qur'án. In this the author is very thorough in dealing with such subjects as the necessity for each individual to investigate the truth independently (and not rely on or follow religious leaders), the interpretation (and misinterpretation) of the Qur'án, the question of the corruption of the scriptures, the interpretation of prophecy and the question of the 'Seal of the Prophets'. There are also chapters on true religious enquiry, terms such as 'the Summoner', 'the Great Announcement', 'the Day' and 'the Hour' in the Qur'án, as well as the concept of 'Progressive Revelation' in the Bible, Qur'án and the Bahá'í teachings.

Although this book is advertised as being intended for Muslims, it could also be profitably read by Christians and Jews. In his wide sweep of the subjects that he covers, the author includes texts from the Bible in parallel with those of the Qur'an. Indeed in many places, the attention given to Biblical texts exceeds that given to the Qur'án (for example on pp. 76–7,

a point is demonstrated by making a general statement about the Qur'án followed by fourteen texts cited from the Bible). This has the effect of proving the same points to Christians and Jews that the author is making for Muslims. But it also has the effect of demonstrating the harmony and unity of these scriptures, thus helping Christians and Jews to understand the truth of Islam and the Bahá'í Faith and the general reader to appreciate the coherence and progressive nature of religion.

My main criticism of the book is that, given that it is a book that is presumably intended to be read by Muslims and others who are not Bahá'ís, it uses Bahá'í terminology and names of Bahá'í leaders with inadequate explanations of these for anyone unfamiliar with them. This goes from the start of the book, where the Preface written by Glenford Mitchell uses the term 'Manifestation of God' (p. x) with no indication of what that means in a Bahá'í context, and the Foreword by Douglas Martin, where 'Shoghi Effendi' and 'the Guardian' are used in the same sentence with no explanation of who this is and no indication that these two designate the same person (pp. xix–xx). It is not, however, just these other writers who fail to help the uninformed reader. The author also uses 'Shoghi Effendi' and 'the Guardian' on the same page (p. 26), with no explanation of who this is nor any indication that both designations refer to the same person. More attention to such matters would have made this book much easier for readers who are not familiar with the Bahá'í Faith.

I am also somewhat puzzled by the transliteration of Arabic and Persian words and phrases in the book, which appears idiosyncratic and inconsistent. See for example the way that the Arabic definite article and the initial *ḍamma* (u or o) is rendered in '*Al-Ummat-ul Islámiyyah*' (p. 55) and '*alnnabiyya al-ommiyya*' (p. 49, which should in any case be *al-nabi al-ummi* or *an-nabi al-ummi*). Other examples of problems with transliteration include: *'Ahli alkitáb* (p. 117) and Nasir'i-Din Shah (p. 132), while the transliteration of '*Rabb alAAalameen*' (p. 15) is completely inexplicable. There is also inconsistency in whether accents and diacriticals are employed or not; see for example p. 76, where the top line has accents but the next three lines do not.

These are, however, relatively minor points which the majority of readers will neither notice nor care about. They scarcely detract from a valuable book that presents well-structured arguments and proofs that will be helpful for Bahá'ís whether they are speaking to Muslims, Christians or Jews and will also be food for thought for any open-minded Muslims who may read the book.

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The Conceptual in Human Nature: Learning to Perceive the World

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Abstract

Human beings are conceptual in ways unique to our species, different in kind from animal rationality. Our conceptual capacity goes beyond the cognitive and shapes our emotions, our moral and spiritual capabilities and our perception of the world. That conceptual capacity is formed by culture and language where language plays a central role in how we experience the world. The role of language, especially spiritual or religious language, can inform our perception of the world in ways that represent genuine 'spiritual perception' of the material, social and spiritual dimensions of reality. Human beings' conceptual capabilities are fallible, even in how we use perception as a capacity for knowing the world. Conditions in modernity have increased our vulnerability to fallibility. Consequently, collective exercise of our conceptual capacities in deliberation and coordinated assessments of reality are more necessary than ever. Science and religion are influential models of how collective deliberation, or consultation, enhances our conceptual capabilities and the ways in which perception takes in a world that is both material and spiritual.

Keywords

conceptual
perception
spiritual
philosophy
language
human nature

Introduction

This essay looks at insights from some contemporary philosophy that are correlated with Bahá'í concepts, helpful in understanding the conceptual in human nature. Our conceptual capacity involves our understanding, imagination, memory and actions in the world. It also involves how we perceive the world. The most we can manage to explore in an essay is a mere sketch of our conceptual capacity, and here we focus primarily on how we know the world by way of facts, and especially facts that perception of the world gives us.

In looking at the issue of our conceptual capacity, four ideas emerge. First, our conceptual capacity is unique to the human being as a capacity of mind different in kind from animal rationality. Second, conceptual capacity is a broad human capacity beyond the merely cognitive. It informs and mediates our moral, affective and spiritual sensibilities and perceptions. Third, individual conceptual capacities are embedded and nourished in the collective exercise of our conceptual capacities as a human community. Our conceptual capacity is a learned capacity developed through our upbringing and culture in a shared world in which language plays a central role. Fourth, conceptual capacity includes perception as a capacity for knowledge. That includes the capacity for what we might call 'spiritual perception'. This essay aims to provide reasonable grounds for the idea that 'spiritual perception'

can play a central role in how we come to understand and engage the world in both its spiritual and material reality.[1] One of the implications of this is an understanding of 'spiritual' as neither opaque, mysterious or of only inner subjectivity. Spirituality is about seeing and acting in the world, in the here and now, and in the collective life of humanity – though there are other dimensions to its meaning too.

It should be stated straight away that the functioning of our conceptual capacity is both limited and enabled by the brain and its neurological health, but the importance of our understanding of those physical factors does not undermine the non-physical nature of the mind and consciousness that set the terms and possibilities of human conceptual engagement with the world. This essay will come to include, among the features of the mind, qualities of moral, spiritual and affective conceptuality. However much the mind and its moral and spiritual capacities work necessarily through the material constraints and physical properties available to them, the mind itself and its conceptual capacity are not well understood by an approach that is constrained by a worldview of materialism or naturalism. The relationship of mind and brain, and generally of the spiritual and the material, is an unavoidable issue in an essay such as this, but understanding the dynamic between the material and the spiritual will occupy humanity's intellectual interests for a long time to come, and is not of central concern here.

In section 1, the essay looks at two ways philosophy has conceived of reason as a way to approach issues important to how we view conceptual capacities. The distinction is between, first, the formidable reasoning power of science as it comes to know reality, and second, what philosophers call 'practical reason' – how we necessarily know and engage the world by way of reasons, including our beliefs, desires, interests, values and our immediate perception of situations, problems and possibilities that are relevant to our lives.[2] These two separate approaches to how mind understands the world, science and practical reason, are thought to be fundamentally different though both involve the use of our conceptual capacities. This essay comes to the view that we needn't hold to that distinction, important in some respects, too strongly.[3]

In section 2 the essay summarizes our conceptual nature, focusing in particular on our reliance on facts, and more especially facts of perception in so far as perception is a capacity to know the world. This sketch of an understanding of our conceptual nature as a capacity unique to our species draws on insights of John McDowell correlated with explanations using Bahá'í concepts about human conceptuality.[4]

In section 3, we consider McDowell's views on how we come to learn and develop our conceptual capacity through our upbringing, culture and language. The process he describes is considered from within a worldview of naturalism, albeit one that McDowell extends generously to include features of human reality that, from a Bahá'í perspective, are understood more from the perspective of a spiritual worldview.

Section 4 considers our fallibility and vulnerability to errors in individual conceptual capacities. Increasing vulnerability to error is related to conditions of modern life. McDowell's concept of learning involves culture and language, but he does not consider collective conceptual capacity in any

detail, but simply as the matrix within which individual capacity is learned. Individual fallibility, recognized by McDowell, is today heightened by information overload, social complexity and fragmentation of experience at a time of hyper-individualism. These conditions confound our capacity to make rapid judgements by way of perception as a capacity for knowledge. As language, upbringing and our culture are central to learning processes, a slower and collective exercise of human conceptual capacity can serve as a corrective to errors in individual judgements about the world, and help adjust and continue to educate and refine our conceptual capacities including our capacity of perception.

The essay concludes by considering the concept of 'spiritual perception' as a feature of perceptional capacity in general. It involves simply seeing the world as it is, but by way of a guided and intentional practice of that capacity, learning how to perceive the world spiritually through appropriate attention to language, upbringing and experience. If our perception as a capacity for knowledge is to be improved, like other human capacities, it requires systematic and intentional consideration rather than being left to the vagaries of an unreflected, fragmented and nominalist modern culture. Spiritual perception is an aspect of a refined conceptual nature, and by understanding its relationship to our more general conceptuality, the idea of spirituality is brought into relationship with practical reason.

1. The 'Space of Reasons' and the 'Space of Natural Law'

Philosophy has long recognized the difference between science and what philosophy calls 'practical reason'. The distinction between *'theoria'* and *'phronesis'* (practical wisdom) was established in antiquity. Modern philosophy keeps an approximate version of that distinction, struggling with how to bring our perception and understanding of the practical and moral challenges of life into relationship with the scientific understanding of a reality of invisible physical forces, causality and natural law.

In the 1950s, the American philosopher, Wilfrid Sellars, worked out his particular version of that distinction between practical reason and science, between the knowledge that we use as we think, talk, act and carry forward our individual and collective lives, and the conventional way we conceive of science as theoretical knowledge that explains reality beyond mere appearances. Our practical reason relies, in his words, on a 'manifest image' of the world, and science, on 'a scientific image'.[5]

In our practical lives, we manage within a social and material reality, attending carefully to the intentions and projects of individuals and communities, the day-to-day patterns, norms and conventions of society and institutions. How we perceive the social and material world by way of our perception plays a large role in this. We rely on a range of different kinds of reasons to explain to ourselves, and to others, why we conduct our lives in the way we do, how and why we make judgements to do this or that, take actions and express our views on matters important to us. We pursue a process of giving and taking, accepting and rejecting reasons in our personal lives and in deliberation with others.[6] Sellars called this 'the space of reasons', and contrasted it with that 'space of natural law and causality' that is the realm of scientific discourse.[7] Sellars felt the scientific view was the more important one, 'science is the measure of all things,

of what is that it is, and what is not that it is not'.[8] Practical reason is not so much about providing empirical descriptions as it is about giving our reasons for our intentions and our actions in 'the space of reasons'.

Understanding this distinction has to do with a scientific view of reality constituted by entities and forces that follow laws of causality and relationships that are determined. The human mind, however, and the nature of reasoning that goes on in our practical lives, has the quality of freedom and spontaneity. How then, the question is asked, does the reality that science studies, a world determined by law-like regularities, reside in the same world as 'the space of reasons' with its quality of freedom and spontaneity? 'Cause' is central to 'the space of natural law', and 'reasons' are central to 'the space of reasons'. Yet, physical 'cause' and human 'reason' are entirely different in character.

2. The Conceptual Nature of Human Beings

In order to think a little differently about the 'space of reasons' and the 'space of natural law', it is helpful to gain a deeper view of the conceptual nature of human beings, relying on the project of John McDowell.[9]

McDowell developed a set of arguments that he feels dispels our anxieties about the place of mind in the natural world. He argues, not from an ontological perspective that tries to bring mind and brain together as one substance or even directly related, but from an epistemological perspective as to how we understand and know the mind in a way that brings our conceptual capacities within a worldview of naturalism in order to avoid an otherwise 'supernatural' quality to the operations of mind.

McDowell developed his understanding of the conceptual nature of human beings by reflecting on Kant's efforts to overcome the weaknesses in two contrasting efforts we make to understand how we come to know reality: the rationalists and the empiricists. Rationalists generated views of reality that were brilliantly reasoned but speculative in their effort to determine how reality was constituted. Empiricists emphasized the 'empirical world' by explaining that our sensations of the world are brought into the mind as discrete sensations, and through their association, we gain a picture of the world.[10]

Kant attempted an alternative conception because of difficulties with both views. The rationalist approach had little connection to our actual experience of the world, and the empiricist view failed to account for how mere sensations, in succession, can possibly give an understanding of reality with order, structure and causality, let alone how we come to know our mind and its conceptuality. Kant viewed the mind as providing the forms and order (time, space and causality) by which new sensate experience is given structure and conceptual reasonability. Kant came to the conclusion that 'without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions [or 'sensations' in the vocabulary of his times] without concepts are blind'.[11] McDowell drew on this insight in the development of his thinking about how we experience the world by way of the only consciousness we have of it, by way of our unique human conceptual capacity.[12]

This term 'conceptual capacity' refers to how we understand, know and engage with the world by way of abstract concepts, or general ideas – 'universals'

in technical philosophical language – and where such concepts bear relationships to each other. Facts, commitments and the judgements involved in both, operate in our minds by way of our experience and perception of the world. In our thoughts and actions, we understand and act by relying on abstract ideas or concepts. Our facility to perceive, think, talk and act, necessarily uses concepts:[13] and that is what constitutes our conceptual capacity.[14]

John McDowell argues that this conceptual or knowing capacity is unique to the human species. McDowell's understanding is most easily understood in his contrast of human conceptuality with animal intelligence, a contrast also used by a Bahá'í approach to this same issue.[15] For McDowell, animals have a differential response capacity,[16] which explains their animal 'rationality'. They may appear to reason in a manner that might compare to human reasoning, but they actually respond directly to an environment to which they are acutely sensitive and well-endowed by their evolved instincts and their acute memory of that environment.

Human beings engage and respond, not to an environment, but to a world that is shaped conceptually where even perceptual states for human beings are mediated by the conceptual in order to be taken into consciousness. The quality that allows consciousness to be receptive to the world by perception relies on a conceptual idea of a world that is already 'there' in mind, in some background sense. A perceptual state is always a conceptual state as it takes in a sensible deliverance as a feature of a world accessible to the mind. The particular feature can only be perceived as a feature available to possible placement within that world, or close enough to allow relative adjustments to that world as we grow in our knowledge of it. Human perception is not merely an occasion of sentient capacity at work, but always of conceptual responsiveness to 'a world' – a sapient capacity – while the animal's responsiveness is to that of an environment and is only sentient.

This is close to the way that 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains our human conceptual nature as one that is distinct from animal functioning,[17] writing that 'the animal perceives sensible things but cannot perceive conceptual realities'.[18] 'Of this power of discovery which belongeth to the human mind, this power which can grasp abstract and universal ideas, the animal remaineth totally ignorant...[19] 'The animal cannot conceive of intellect. Of these powers it is bereft. Therefore, these powers are peculiar to man...'[20] Human beings have this extraordinary capacity, involving of course our faculties of sense, but also imagination, understanding, comprehension and memory, while of these animals have only sensory powers and memory.[21]

> ...in man there is present this supernatural force or faculty which discovers the realities of things and which possesses the power of idealization or intellection...The mind itself, reason itself, is an ideal reality and not tangible.[22]

'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments give a possible explanation of what is apparent in contemporary animal studies. The demonstration of remarkable 'animal intelligence' is by way of the animal's heightened sensory acuity, added to which is a kind of animal memory for the sensate that, 'Abdu'l-Bahá notes, is often superior to human memory.[23] Those two powers working together can exhibit an impressive 'reasoning' ability by way of exceptional differential

response repertoires, learned over repeated trials in animal training. However impressive that capacity, it remains – in the absence of the conceptual, and the abstract language of human conceptuality – a rationality of a quite different kind than the human.

McDowell writes of the 'world' shaped conceptually by the human mind,

> ...we could not recognize capacities operative in experience as conceptual at all were it not for the way they are integrated into a rationally organized network of capacities for active adjustment of one's thinking to the deliverances of experience. That is what a repertoire of empirical concepts is. The integration serves to place even the most immediate judgements of experience as possible elements in a worldview.[24]

From the Bahá'í perspective, the 'world' is also shaped by the conceptions of the human mind. That is one way of understanding the Bahá'í passage:

> To whatever heights the mind of the most exalted of men may soar, however great the depths which the detached and understanding heart can penetrate, such mind and heart can never transcend that which is the creature of their own conceptions and the product of their own thoughts.[25]

Our understanding of the conceptual should not be confused with an excessive intellectualism. Our conceptual nature includes feelings and sensibilities. That we are self-conscious about our feelings and sensibility, come to understand them, and give them expression and communicate with others about them by way of language, provides evidence of our conceptual involvement with feeling and sensibility. Feelings and sensibilities are informed by the conceptual and are a form of perception with conceptual content.

> I have claimed that we make sense of rational relations between experience and judgement only in the context of an equation between the space of concepts and the space of reasons. Thought can bear on empirical reality only because to be a thinker at all is to be at home in the space of reasons.[26]

Facts

Our conceptual capacity as human beings relies on facts in order for us to know and engage the world. The facts we take to be true of the world, and the way facts work together in shaping our understanding of the world, require our commitment to their truth – that we claim to know such facts. And, of course, facts can be about the world of our mental concepts, facts that we have about commitments, desires, hopes, values, beliefs, and all facts bear relationships, some to each other, and to various kinds of facts.[27] Facts can be about complex realities, scientific findings and mental concepts like desires and beliefs, or about situations. Our world is in this way heterogenous, made up of physical, social and mental realities. They can be about composites, and perceptions are never single sense data but always a composite.

Facts and commitments, together, are basic elements in human reasoning, as well as human agency or empowerment.[28] Holding facts that

we take to be true is our way of coming to know an objective world. We have the world in mind by way of the facts we feel entitled to know by way of self-conscious judgements regarding their reliability. Their warrant depends on our having learned to rely on the capacity of our perception to know facts to be true or by the relationship of more abstract, non-perceptual facts that are logically or substantially supported by their inferential relations with each other among the many facts that give shape to the world we know. The facts and reasons that give them warrant are related to each other by inferences, of the paradigmatic logical form, 'if... then...'. Facts rely on reasons as premises or implications in support of the fact at issue, and facts are available as premises or implications for other facts.[29] In the deepening and multiplying of those facts in relationship, we come to know a world we take to be objective.

This is a way to understand something of the structure of our conceptual understanding of the world, both in its physical as well as its social and self-conscious nature. We hold facts, not as isolated pieces of information, but as statements about reality that hang together with what else we know about reality. If a fact is interrogated, we make efforts to trace its inferential basis to other facts that give support to our claim to know something. In this way, we shape 'a world' with which we engage by placing our experience of it in relationship to what we already know.

Facts are judgements, thoughts or statements – but understood as propositions whether spoken or merely thought. In propositional form, facts are basic to our conceptual view of the world. They are 'primitive' or fundamental elements in the structure of how we think of the world. As a proposition or sentence, a fact is a composite, and not a singular term or object term. Singular terms (nouns and predicates) take their meaning from their function and place in the sentence by how we actually learn language and how to think. They are not as basic as facts or propositions in our conversation, discourses and understanding of the world.[30] The ensemble of inter-related facts we hold to be true provide the framework for our understanding of that world. If there was no 'world' constituted by facts we know, we would be unable to know any single fact about that 'world'.

We know or express a fact, accompanied by a commitment to it, but that does not guarantee its validity. Validity is something different. We believe we have reasons, and are prepared if necessary to justify the fact. But human fallibility is always there, so a fact may not be valid since reasons may be wrong, and adjustments will need to be made. Corrections and new facts with renewed commitments come with effort. But if the responsibility that accompanies a fact is missing, by bad faith or lack of truthfulness, that is a more serious problem and would require another kind of essay than this one.[31]

Perception as a Capacity for Knowledge

Perception of facts about the world is one category of facts of central importance to our practical lives. Our perceptions are themselves facts, not mere sense data or isolated visual or auditory arrays. They are facts that we know in conceptual form since sense data or isolated sensory arrays are not of the nature of the conceptual, and we have learned to perceive the world out there, not the irritations of nerve endings in the eye or ear. Without

that conceptual, conscious quality or nature, they could not be brought into consciousness. Our awareness of anything in consciousness can only be of something that has already a quality of consciousness and a relationship with other facts available to consciousness, and where a deliverance from our experience is taken up by a perceptual state that is itself a conscious state.

For instance, when we see a table, we do see a table. We do not see a two-dimensional patch of brown with objects projecting from our particular perspective with its quadrilateral shape on the retina of the eye. Of course, on reflection we can analytically divide the table into bits of sense data that are involved in our seeing table. But that analysis is conceptual, and only possible once the perceptual state, that is already a state of knowing what is perceived, is turned over in the mind in a self-conscious act of further understanding. In the initial perception, we do see a table since we have learned to see a table, not a combination of colours or shapes of different dimensions in our visual array. The composite we see is already a composite as we perceive it.

There have been, of course, in philosophy important questions raised about the claim that perception is a direct way of knowing, but McDowell counters that scepticism in Western philosophy. It is a scepticism that has its reasons: we do have hallucinations, see mirages, and images and objects that we find later were mistaken judgements about what we perceived. But rather than being sceptical of our perceptual capacity to know the world, we should realize that such mistakes by their self-correcting nature count only as a recognition of our fallibility in perceptual knowing, not our inability to perceive the world. It is usually our perceptual capacity of knowing that also corrects the initial mistake. There is an intellectual overreach to say that we cannot perceive, and perceive directly, facts about the world – so argues McDowell.[32]

McDowell understands perception, not by a two-step process of considering a sensation, a patch or some visual array, then thinking or reflecting, 'is it a table?', and only then deciding we have seen a table, but within the act of perception itself. We know how to see a table. It is an immediate conceptual fact of direct perception, and something we can claim to know. Of course, we do have other facts in mind that provide an inferential basis for also accepting this perceptual fact: the lighting conditions are good, I know what a table looks like from various angles, I can recognize a table even if made of an unexpected material. We have learned how to see a table by our culture and language acquisition.

While there have been many efforts to explain the gap between a non-conceptual physical happening in the sense faculties and brain, and the perception of the world in the mind, such efforts have failed to offer a satisfying explanation of the way a mere datum, physically sensed, becomes, as an immediate perception, an object or a recognized feature of a situation. Selectivity in perception is part of our learning and is itself inexplicable without an understanding of the conceptual basis for the world, informed by the conceptual as to what is salient and what isn't.[33]

This account of our learning to see a table also applies to our learning to perceive others, social interactions, under various concepts available to our learning by way of language used in the world by significant others. We

have learned to perceive moral scenarios that become paradigmatic for us and are generalized as patterns in the same way we have learned a generalized pattern of what a table is. We have concepts in mind of tables and objects, and other concepts of various kinds of interactions that are loving, funny, awkward, and the long list of discriminations in our social world is enormous – just as our conceptual discriminations in our physical environment are enormous.

So, in taking account of such different worlds, and of how our perception and experience of the world depends on the conceptualization of the world, we realize this is not merely at the level of the perception of objects, but there is also a genuine perception of moral facts and situations that are included in McDowell's considerations,[34] as it is in the Bahá'í view by my reading. It is a matter of learning to 'see', to perceive by way of culture, language acquisition and experiences with others in life and where language is present, serving as a guiding rail in the engine of our learning to see a world rich in qualities – physical, social, moral and spiritual. Feelings, emotions, the exercise of spiritual and moral sensibilities, are not merely interpreted conceptually as a second stage in understanding, but they are lived and felt and perceived at the level of the self-conscious deliverance of such feelings and sensibilities to conscious awareness as situations in life are encountered, and learning advances. They are conceptually mediated from the moment of their inception in our minds. Sona Farid-Arbab understands McDowell in this way as she explains moral capacities.[35] Her explanation of 'spiritual sensitivity', which translates McDowell's idea of 'second nature' into the context of her work, illustrates this. This 'spiritual sensitivity' is a kind of perception, and using the words of McDowell she notes it allows for a 'certain sort of requirement which situations impose on behaviour'. 'The reliably kind behavior' has to do with a learned and reliable sensitivity to occasions for kindness – and that is 'a sort of perceptual capacity.'[36]

We learn how to perceive by way of our language coupled with experience in situations calling for kindness, generosity, love and so forth through our upbringing, and by way of accompaniment,[37] how to perceive moral situations and also how to respond to such realities of the world.[38] If that kind of learning, just at the level of perception and action in the light of perception, seems overly demanding and complicated, it seems hardly more difficult than language learning (to which it is surely associated) by infants who from eighteen months to six-year-olds are learning the meaning of a new word every two hours, an astonishing learning rate, along with intricate syntax and creative complexity for language use,[39] just as they are learning complex patterns of norms and conventions signalled by discursive and non-discursive interactions.

That infants learn language on sparse exposure to experience is evidence for 'the general ability to learn very rapidly and accurately from limited and incomplete input. Experiments reveal that eight-month-old children learn to segment speech into words on the basis of nothing but statistical relationships between adjacent sounds, and they do this after only two minutes.'[40] Infants enter quickly into the realm of speech and thought, and gain mastery of vocabulary, syntax and a network of concepts that generates propositional facts about the world; 'language is not an ordinary learned skill; it is,

or has become [for human beings] a mode of perception...essential to the other senses if they are to yield propositional knowledge. Language is the organ of propositional perception...Perception, once we have propositional thought, is direct...in the sense that there are no epistemic intermediaries on which perceptual beliefs are based...'[41]

Language that is of a spiritual nature, with spiritual concepts, is the way by which perception itself becomes spiritual, and though not turning away from the material (for our language is full of that conceptual content), but by providing the necessary language in the context of experience with others, it is language that is learned in propositional or sentence-like forms regarding morality and spirituality (not simply as a list of nouns or predicates).

A reading of Ronald de Sousa and Martha Nussbaum on emotion also suggests, by the same series of arguments, how our perception of paradigmatic scenarios with emotional characteristics are learned or mislearned. Emotions are a form of – often embodied and frequently non-discursive – judgement or evaluation of a scenario, often about matters not under our control. We make judgements about paradigmatic situations that have been 'learned' along with a set of emotional responses – joy, love, happiness – or often 'mislearned' in poorly conceived upbringing and exposure to angry or dysfunctional language and behavioural outbursts. But they are judgements that are at once both affective and conceptual. They can be sound, or often they can go wrong. Yet, even in their 'fallibility' or misdirection and dysfunction they remain conceptual or conceptually informed.[42]

Thus, both moral and emotional responsiveness are also of the conceptual.[43] It should be added here, of course, that the argument regarding emotion as akin to perception, at a minimum analogically, is a complex matter. Emotions are not well classified by distinctive kinds or categories, mixing attitudes, moods, perspectives, projections, involving relationships between self and situation, or as a more objective evaluation of a situation, or self and others – and that kind of study is at an early stage.

In the same way, 'spiritual perception' operates in complex ways, differing from mere perception of objects or colours by the compounding of concepts and especially human presentations and relationships in paradigmatic scenarios that, even so, involve learning through language, a shared world of experience and in accompaniment of significant others so that perceptual facts that may be called 'spiritual' are developed in both language, and in relationship to non-discursive features, too. There is considerably more learning, accompaniment and a way of entering into the subtle differences in situations of life and with other people as one 'learns' or comes to understand a practice and way of life in which 'spiritual perception' is developed.[44] And, of course, the study of spiritual and moral learning is merely an insight at this stage, not yet a theory.

Sona Farid-Arbab has made an admirable start in that regard, and explains well the relationship between conceptual capacity and moral and spiritual qualities, attitudes, and how an appreciation of the full palette of human experiences and achievements are part of that overall capacity which education should address.[45]

'Abdu'l-Bahá has said in explaining the Bahá'í teachings on this that the soul

> can discover the realities of things, comprehend the peculiarities of beings, and penetrate the mysteries of existence. All sciences, knowledge, arts, wonders, institutions, discoveries and enterprises come from the exercised intelligence of the rational soul.[46]

3. Learning to See and Know the World

McDowell characterizes perception as a capacity of knowledge, explaining it as one acquired by way of our 'second nature'. He writes, 'by ethical upbringing…resulting habits of thought and action are second nature'. 'This should defuse the fear of supernaturalism…This gives human reason enough of a foothold in the realm of [natural] law to satisfy any proper respect for modern natural science.'[47]

Our conceptual capacity is distinct from the natural in terms of a narrow view of naturalism, but McDowell's idea of a second-order dimension to the natural allows him to avoid what he characterizes as having to think of mind as 'supernatural'. The Bahá'í understanding of that capacity is that it is 'spiritual'. Bahá'ís believe that God,

> …has chosen the reality of man and has honored it with intellect and wisdom, the two most luminous lights in either world. Through the agency of this great endowment, He has in every epoch cast on the mirror of creation new and wonderful configurations. If we look objectively upon the world of being, it will become apparent that from age to age, the temple of existence has continually been embellished with a fresh grace, and distinguished with an ever-varying splendor, deriving from wisdom and the power of thought.[48]

The difference between McDowell's and the Bahá'í approach is that Bahá'ís have a view of human reasoning and perception that relies on the rational soul. '[T]he power and attributes of man are human and hereditary in origin – outcomes of nature's processes – except the intellect, which is supernatural.'[49] Though we cannot understand the soul we can understand something of its consequences in the functioning of the various faculties.

> Consider the rational faculty with which God hath endowed the essence of man. Examine thine own self, and behold how thy motion and stillness, thy will and purpose, thy sight and hearing, thy sense of smell and power of speech, and whatever else is related to, or transcendeth, thy physical senses or spiritual perceptions, all proceed from, and owe their existence to, this same faculty. So closely are they related unto it, that if in less than the twinkling of an eye its relationship to the human body be severed, each and every one of these senses will cease immediately to exercise its function, and will be deprived of the power to manifest the evidences of its activity. It is indubitably clear and evident that each of these afore-mentioned instruments has depended, and will ever continue to depend, for its proper functioning on this rational faculty, which should be regarded as a sign of the revelation of Him Who is the sovereign Lord of all.[50]

The approach of McDowell in analyzing the difference between animal and human reasoning is persuasive, but he stops short of recognizing anything like a spiritual capacity of the human being. He brings our

conceptual capacity into what he argues is a coherent naturalism within the discourse space of science, as that is currently conceived, while at the same time stretching conventional naturalism as a worldview towards a more nuanced view able to accommodate the unique conceptual capacity that is human.

From a Bahá'í view that takes 'spiritual' as useful to mark the distinction between human conceptuality and the 'natural', McDowell's use of the concept of 'second nature' by way of our upbringing, culture and language may simply represent a difference of words, not of actual meanings. The Bahá'í conception of 'spiritual' is close in many ways to McDowell's use of the term 'second nature'. Bahá'ís understand the cultural and linguistic capacities of the human being as part of the spiritual reality and spiritual potential of human beings which, if misused, can bring the human mind to something less than animal 'rationality', but if developed well, can generate a heightened spirituality and morality that still is conceptual. Bahá'ís understand 'supernatural', sometimes used in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's language, as a contrast to the reductive sense of a 'naturalism' that discounts an idea of reality beyond the physical and the reductive understanding of a worldview that is exclusive naturalism. This idea of the 'spiritual' or 'supernatural' does not, then, leave those terms mysterious and other-worldly, beyond conceptual range. For Bahá'ís, it is the soul that provides the human being with the conceptual capacity to respond to the right kind of upbringing and education by way of language and culture. Though the soul itself cannot be understood, its effects and the faculties it powers can be. It is of a 'supernatural' character relative to the 'natural' features of animal and plant realities.

Further, a Bahá'í understanding of reality sees the physical as dependent on the spiritual, without undermining current scientific understanding of the physical forces at work by which so much physical phenomena has been usefully explained. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says 'the rational soul is the substance upon which the body depends'[51] – the spiritual is not dependent on the body. While that statement is, itself, not scientifically validated, neither is it contradicted by current scientific findings. The issue remains open for further exploration as the debate continues between a worldview of strict naturalism or one that accommodates explanations of higher human and spiritual realities from the 'top down' rather than from the 'bottom up' by way of reducing those 'higher' realities to material explanations, and which accommodate a view of 'extended reality' beyond the physical and natural in the ways Thomas Nagel explains.[52] The literature on this remains divisive and extensive, and arguments in that debate are left aside here.[53]

In referring to upbringing, culture and language, McDowell emphasizes language as central to our upbringing. As 'a central element in the normal maturation of human beings, we give pride of place to the learning of language'.

> In being initiated into a language, a human being is introduced into something that already embodies putatively rational linkages between concepts, putatively constitutive of the layout of the space of reasons…or, what comes to the same thing, living their lives in the world…the sort of language into which human beings are first initiated, serves as a repository of tradition, a story of historically

> accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what. The tradition is subject to reflective modification by each generation that inherits it. Indeed, a standing obligation to engage in critical reflection is itself part of the inheritance.[54]

What we understand of the conceptual nature of human faculties is that reason, or concepts, are developed by way of language learned within our shared human experiences, and language, as McDowell notes, is 'a repository of tradition'.[55]

Given the extent to which our growing into our conceptual capacity to see and know the world by way of the culture in which we are embedded – and over millennia culture has been shaped by religion – it is worth exercising our imagination to gain a better idea of how the world has been conceptualized and, therefore, perceived through different ages from antiquity to the 'Christian world' of the Middle Ages, and today's 'secular world'.

One of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century, W.V.O. Quine, makes a curious point about the conceptuality of what we 'secular moderns' perceive when he writes that as we take in a material world of objects, those 'physical objects are imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries...The myth of physical objects is epistemologically superior to most in that it has proved more efficacious than other myths as a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience.'[56] He writes this to emphasize just how much experience itself has to be shaped by our conceptual capacity as there may be quite different ways of perceiving experience and making sense of it.

For example, in a different cultural 'world', that of an Indigenous hunter on the western plains before encountering a Eurocentric 'world', the hunter saw quite directly, not objects so much as a world of spirits that animated the natural world. The sky, the land, rivers and streams, trees and grassland, 'spoke' to him, and by doing so, did so with a richness of perceptual detail and acuity, shaped by his cosmology, or what are called pejoratively, 'myths' – that were likely self-correcting cosmologies that adjusted over generations in the collective tribal experiences. They enabled the hunter to guarantee a conceptually sound relationship to nature, to the transcendent and to his community.[57] His success in the hunt or in finding the right location to camp was assured by an exceptional acuity of perception by way of the natural world 'talking to him' by the smells and variations of wind, of bend of trees and grasses, that would allow effective tracking of the buffalo or elk. He learned by his culture and language how to perceive the world.

Or, as Charles Taylor notes, the world is seen differently by today's secular person with her or his disbelief in God – today's default position – than it was by the 14th century Christian or Muslim believer, whose default option is belief in God. It requires little imagination to recognize that those two 'worlds', 500 years apart, would be experienced and perceived differently, where relationships between people, the objects and tools of practical life would all be noticed and seen in very different ways.

4. Fallibility in the Individual Exercise of Conceptual Capacity

Today the conceptual demands on us are greater than ever as the complexity of contemporary life increases. The information explosion, the disruption of

routine ways of life and new and unexpected and virtual experiences upset our confidence in the facts we think we know about the world; and our ability to perceive the social and natural world can become confused and unsteady however much we need to rely on our perception of the world as a capacity for knowledge.

Joseph Heath has explained well the collapse of sound reasoning in public life currently in the social, economic, political and media environment. We skip too often the hard work that reasoning requires, taking account of the facts we think we know, the responsibility we should take for facts we think we know, or to take care with regard to our perception of the world.[58]

Heath acknowledges the extraordinary capacity of the human mind to develop our conceptual capacities for quick judgements and perceptual knowledge in a variety of circumstances, in the way we perceive social situations, patterns of phenomena in social reality, in our ability to make judgements about people and problems we encounter. This is a kind of reasoning that operates at the level of perception or very close to it. The problem, however, is that over-reliance on that ability can also generate mistakes, and go seriously wrong, especially in situations that require the kind of reasoning and deliberation that our ever-changing and complex experience in modern life give us.

The research that Heath documents falls under the 'dual process' theory of reasoning, illustrated in the distinction between 'fast' thinking and 'slow' thinking made popular by Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman.[59] Simplifying that research, 'fast' thinking has to do with rapid response, quick pattern recognition, gut responses and intuition, the reliance on heuristics that become shortcuts in quick problem solving by pattern recognition, by analogies, by perceptual judgements of astonishing versatility. But here mistakes can quickly mount up when faced with problems and issues involving numbers, estimation, patterns that invite the bias of optimism, self-interest, confirmation bias, inappropriate framing or mistaken 'anchoring' effects. There is a tendency to overestimate the probability of suffering 'losses' against 'gains' in quick judgements about situations in front of us, and to overestimate errors connected to quick, but erroneous probability judgements, or reliance on facts that have been poorly and mistakenly justified in the past, that have become habitual and yet are not relevant to a current, similar-appearing 'fact'. Errors in misapplying, conflating and distorting facts overcome sound judgement.[60]

An 'age of information explosion' lends itself to such errors, and at the individual level, is a world that is fragmented and incoherent, resulting in perceptions and judgements wrongly linked to this fragment of a 'world' rather than to seeking coherence in the facts and explanations we have in mind. 'Fast' thinking contrasts with what is needed more than ever in society and in our lives as the world becomes more complex – a much 'slower' kind of thinking, deliberation and care in how we perceive the world. At the same time with respect to our complex social reality in the 21st century, we might ask how the development of spiritual perception might help us develop more open, positive, coherent and adaptive perception of complexity and the less tangible, but significant, human realities that are easily overlooked but which are crucial to cooperation and sociability.

To get to that, however, 'slow' reasoning and deliberation is a necessary learning stage from which, over time and with much practice, 'faster' perceptual judgements can be learned.

Heath summarizes this kind of slow reasoning. Genuine reasoning is not merely slow, but sequential, systematic, and linked with language that is explicit and reflective, involving close attention and working memory (where steps in problem solving are taken off-line, resolved, and then brought back into the sequential problem solving process). Such hard work at reasoning is usually relatively abstract and hypothetical. It requires a great deal of effort and attention to salient details, setting aside irrelevant details and the flux of so much that is available for perception but may only confuse the central problem. The ability to extract a particular issue or problem and read it in its abstracted form with the most important details, is an important part of such deliberate thinking, but patience is also required to determine which among successive efforts at resolving issues need to be re-examined and what forces and tendencies are at work in a given problem to ensure errors of salience are avoided. Explicit and reliable documenting of situations is always needed.

All this duplicates much of what we know about some aspects of scientific practice.

While this kind of reasoning seems daunting, it is much helped by what Heath describes as 'scaffolding'. That involves the institutionalization of the steps of reasoning across collective communities of researchers or planners or policy decision-makers, where decisions are slowed down by collective deliberation, and through the use of external aids of different kinds, among which are the use of reports, documents, language and writing of course: all ways of slowing down our thinking, giving time for reflection.

Of course, the institutionalization of processes of deliberation where a collective group brings its mutual capacities together, shares perceptions, reasons and the like, the power of 'slow' thinking becomes very quickly much greater than that of individual conceptual capacities, but with important learning at the individual level.

Science has developed in ways that provide the most exemplary illustration of collective conceptual capacity at work. It is now timely to consider science from a perspective that brings its practices and methods into the way we pursue practical reasoning, if not all the detail of the hard won theoretical and conceptual achievements of science.

By the way in which science is so important to Bahá'ís and because of the central role that science has in our age, it appears that 'Abdu'l-Bahá sees little value in maintaining a distinction or dichotomy between science and practical reason. McDowell, too, in enlarging the worldview of naturalism seems to suggest the value of setting aside such a sharp distinction between the scientific image of the world and our practical image of the world.

McDowell writes of how science has become a matter of common sense in the modern age:

> What is at work here is a conception of nature that can seem sheer common sense, though it was not always so; the conception I mean was made available only by a hard-won achievement of human thought at a specific time, the time of the rise of modern science.[61]

For science to inform our 'common sense' there needs to be a genuine understanding of the actual practice of science, and not merely a superficial acquaintance with a few random facts that headline some new scientific discovery.[62]

Facts and commitments are central to science. Explanations are based on facts: facts about laws and relationships, and facts that come by way of careful perception, instrumentation and measurement. Scientists commit to those facts by way of their research and proven, reliable methods of ensuring accurate findings. Taking responsibility for what we claim to know with regard to reality involves communities of scientists in systematic and constant exchange, giving and accepting reasons, explanations and new insights.

Philosophers and historians of science have generated helpful insights regarding the practice of science.[63] Close studies of the specific practices of scientists have contributed to a much sounder understanding of science as a practice than in Kant's time, or even 70 years ago when philosophy was concerned at overcoming the distinction philosophy saw between practical reason, the so-called 'space of reasons', and the nature of reasoning in science, 'the space of natural law'.

One summary of what we now know about science is to simply say that science involves 'inference to the best explanation' by which we understand explanations that take account of facts, including laws of causality or correlations relative to the phenomena under study, and where the 'best explanation' is one with the greatest breadth of coverage, where simplicity and explicitness of the explanation are good, and where its integration or combination with other explanations is higher than with competing explanations.[64]

Another summary of scientific method states that 'scientific knowledge differs from other kinds of knowledge, especially everyday knowledge, primarily by being more systematic', and includes systematic descriptions, explanations, predictions, justification of claims, connectedness (integration of explanations), and the ability of knowledge to generate new knowledge, and (where considerable care and attention are given to data and findings) avoiding errors as much as possible.[65]

It is not that science is alien to our everyday knowledge, but rather it is more systematic, detailed and explicit, relying on a sense of commitment to a thoroughness and care that is greater than in our practical reasoning. Science has perhaps been too long considered *sui generis* – distinct from practical reasoning, partly due to an emphasis on theory. However important theory is (even to know what to look for and perceive in reality), it is also practised in ways closer to the practical than previously understood.[66] Today practical life requires greater facility in applying the knowledge of science, and even more importantly something of the different methodologies of science, to the life of everyday reasoning and policy and planning at the community level, if society is to advance.

The methods of science vary from direct observation of phenomena to classification or taxonomy, from the use of basic mathematics to probability and statistical methods, and now advanced mathematical modelling, from experimental approaches and laboratory work to historical-genetic studies and engineering techniques, all carried out with careful attention to

documentation of data and refinements in measurement and instrumentation.[67] We have learned more, too, about heuristic approaches and implicit practices in science as well as the place of imprecise values like simplicity, even beauty, that influence the evaluation and selection of theory and contribute to the advance of scientific research programmes.[68] To think that freedom and spontaneity of mind is not at work in science is to discount the imagination and the practical deliberations that select the focus of scientific research programmes.

Conclusion

To this point we have developed a view of the conceptual nature of the human being that understands our experience by way of an evolving view of a world that we already have in mind with new facts and perceptions giving us reasons to adjust that view. We have also come to understand our perception of reality as one permeated by the concepts we have of the world. We learn to perceive by way of our concepts.

To manage with a measure of reason and reliability in our interactions with others, and in our participation in the decisions and directions of our collective lives together in communities, to live well and flourish as a society, we have to rely on facts we know to be true, not mere fancy or facts without warrant, and we have to trust that we are perceiving the world accurately.

How do we know when a fact is true? And how can we be sure our perception of the world gives us genuine knowledge about our reality, and the situations and the people that we encounter? These are important questions at a time when 'false facts', virtual and fabricated realities, and a proliferation of 'theories' and contradictory claims regarding the world as it is, and as it should be, obscure the sense and shape of the world we try to come to know.

The exercise of our collective conceptual capacity is a way towards overcoming sources of error. In its astonishing versatility and power to know and respond to the world, its development and refinement are dependent on the collective exercise of our human conceptual capacities, in families, communities, in our work places and institutions, and in the wider public life. It is in our upbringing and connection to culture and language that we learn to use that capacity in our understanding and engagement with the world.

Science and religion are two of the more important collective institutions in civilization that can educate and help discipline our exercise of conceptual capacity – though to see their relevance requires a sound understanding of the actual practice of science, and a conception of religion that departs from conventional ways in which religion is understood.[69] In that respect, the Bahá'í view of religion is worth considering.

Philosophy has long characterized modernity as an age of scepticism, and even suspicion,[70] especially so with respect to religion. The university and public intellectual life continues to be roiled by doubts regarding rational views of human affairs that make claims to objective truth. Sceptical arguments for relativism, subjectivism and the impossibility of escaping particular cultural bias undermine confidence in any claims to objective truth; how much more is religion considered doubtful. At the same time,

modernity has seen the dissolution of social bonds as religion and tradition fell away from their role in upholding solidarity. Less noticed has been the attendant collapse of that collective conceptual capacity that was, as problematic as it may have been, conveyed within the culture, language and norms of religion and tradition which served as a foundation for conceptual engagement with society in a way that was coherent and consistent, if also rigid, authoritarian and inequitable.[71]

We know we have learned to see a table and the physical world of objects and colours, and the like, but we also learn to perceive others – what they say, how they look, behave, gesture and act – and we learn to perceive situations and interactions among people in discriminating ways. And we can also learn to see interactions that are cooperative, kind, uplifting, generous – all the norms that religion and spirituality should uphold.

There is a place, then, for giving attention to the development of a spiritual conceptuality that can inform our perception in ways that are spiritual where we learn to see what is spiritual in the interactions, episodes and situations of our lives.

McDowell writes that our learning to perceive kindliness and moral situations is not all that dissimilar to some of the ways Aristotle describes the process of learning moral sensitivity and ethical responsiveness. Aristotle wrote about the importance of our upbringing and accompaniment by others – friendship was a key concept of Aristotle – in our learning to 'see' the world and its ethical features and qualities.[72] Distinguishing our modern era from antiquity, McDowell notes – giving modernity its most ideal construction – that today's world serves to develop a critical and reflective individuality that contrasts positively with the fixed individuality of previous ages that was tied to social roles and conventional norms in stable and enduring societies.[73] However, the costs due to the superficiality, depravity, dysfunctional family and community lives, and incoherence and fragmentation of much of modern life damages efforts to learn a genuine moral and spiritual language, and a conceptual grasp of the world that is able to influence our perception. The importance of learning about how we can perceive (and then act) on ways of interacting with others that builds human solidarity, spiritual values, and establishes collective norms that have excellence and nobility in view is a role for religion, if conceived appropriately.

In the terms by which the Bahá'í Faith understands religion, there is much that recommends study of its practices and tenets as a collective institution, working with science to advance the refinement and development of our conceptual capacity. For millennia religion served as an important institution that evolved hand in hand with human conceptual capacity as Robert Bellah and others have argued.[74] Today, science is playing a crucial role in advancing our conceptual acuity, but religion can also play an important role.

In the Bahá'í Faith the methods of science and sound reasoning are being brought into its community practice. Rather than a system of rites, 'blind faith', or mystery and superstition, this is what religion should be, by our reading of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who often repeated that 'religion must be in conformity with science and reason', that 'religion must stand the analysis of reason', and that 'religion is essentially reality and pure reason'.[75]

Just how much reason plays a role in the Bahá'í Faith would require several books to adequately document. Central to the life of the Bahá'í community is its reliance on institutional and community processes in which collective discussion, conversation and exchange of understanding serve to advance the reasoning which underlies systematic decisions as plans are pursued across the community. Bahá'ís call this process 'consultation': a diverse group of people reflects and discusses issues together, sharing different perspectives, and contributing what they feel is the way to resolve an issue, giving respect and careful attention to each person's views. The value of systematic approaches embedded in institutions where explicit records and an attention to learning is valued, are of importance. This attention to collective institutional processes and continued learning are embraced as a matter of religious conviction.

The Bahá'í community, in its educational processes and action plans, understands well the relationship between an evolving conceptual framework shared at the collective level of the community. By way of study, reflection, action and consultation based on collective experience concepts and plans are adjusted in the light of experience. Perception and responses to social situations, to moral and spiritual situations are a matter for learning that aims to be explicit, with further reflections and actions advancing learning processes. Efforts to learn systematically to 'read' (or perceive) society, to understand the social forces at work, to learn in practical and specific ways what spiritual perceptions and genuine actions to transform society are reliable, and which are not, also brings the exercise and learning about how to reason together into the repertoire of personal conceptual capacities.

The process of learning itself, as in science, is seen as a practice that evolves in the culture, the community and the institutions. Individual learning also evolves through practice and action, reflection, study and further collective consultation. In all of this, facts and responsibility to those facts are important in learning new ways of perceiving social situations, and of perceiving each other, with a bias to seeing positive, rather than negative, qualities. This is taken as a genuine kind of learning that is as central as any other kind of learning. This effort to bring the conceptual into community life by way of a systematic and collective process is needed if the capacity for the conceptual that is so central to human nature is to engage the social and the spiritual as much as the material – if mind is to come to know the world in all its heterogeneity, material and spiritual, in an objective way by which action can then transform the world.

Of course, we need to know how best to distinguish and draw on concepts that are genuinely spiritual from those that are superstitious, entirely other-worldly, merely imagination gone sideways, or illusions that are nothing more than self-centred dreams. But with science as a guide to setting aside spiritual claims that contradict science, and by the use of collective reasoning and deliberation, the giving and taking of reasons with others about what spiritual reality may involve, a way forward becomes clear.

The Importance of Spiritual Language

In all of this, far and away the most important factor is having a language that is able to inform how we take in and see the world.

The greatest novelists and writers have gifts not only of language but also of observation. As a great writer has said, it is the 'observational ability', 'the God-given attitude of perception and articulacy' that takes good writers and lifts them to a higher plane. It is their ability not just to use language well but to observe and perceive the world, people, human situations, that helps the rest of us see the world in different ways.[76] The non-discursive arts, visual and musical also help us to see the world in different ways.

Religion has long generated the arts and shaped the language of cultures. It can again, in a new form and expression appropriate to an age in which humanity is now coming to know itself in all its diversity of cultures, an age too, of science and technology. The language of the Bahá'í revelation seems to offer that measure of spirituality and reason, sound counsel and elevated ideals, in a language that marries concept with action, the transcendent with the practical. And Bahá'u'lláh, the founder-prophet of the Bahá'í Faith, recognized that, although words alone are not enough – 'How great the multitude of truths which the garment of words can never contain'[77] – religion has always had language, the Word of God, at the centre of its approach to the education of humanity.

Genuine religious language is about unity, love and understanding, and moral qualities, and living a life that moves a person closer to God. Having drawn the linkage between language and conceptual capacities, more precisely between language and perception, it is surely neither a great leap of faith nor of argument to make the claim that the sort of language we try our best to learn from, to draw on, to live with and share with others, is a language that deals with those features of the world that guide our perceptual attention to see the world in the light of qualities of love, mutual understanding, care, kindness and justice. In doing so we might learn to see with our 'own eyes and not through the eyes of others', and that 'justice is My [God's] gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes'.[78]

The faculty of perception can operate not merely with concepts related to the material realm of our existence, not merely within a constrained, secular 'space of reasons' but within an expanded 'space of reasons' that accommodates spiritual reality. We are always vulnerable to our own fallibility and limited capacity, and our fallibility in spiritual perception is at least as great as our general fallibility, but spiritual perception includes ways of correcting that kind of perception just as we rely on our perception of the material world as a self-correcting capacity.

In considering the role of science and religion as institutions that pursue the collective exercise of our conceptual capacities, it is worth recalling how attentive science has always been to its receptivity to the deliverances of experience of the natural world. Consider the care with which data and findings are documented, the care with which instrumentation and measurement rest on a deliberation of inferences related to facts about how human perception is augmented by way of appropriate instruments that help to take away the veils of more limited perception. An important advance in our understanding of scientific practice comes from Thomas Kuhn's understanding of the apprenticeship of young scientists as a process of learning how to actually see natural phenomena directly by way of their introduction into scientific practice and by way of instruments in new ways.[79] One might

illustrate, thus: 'Where I once saw the moon as a planet, I now see the moon as a satellite of the earth', or 'I once saw simply a mess through the microscope, but now I see bacteria of definite type and form.'

It is interesting to consider a comment of Francis Bacon, a key figure in the revolution that launched modern science. He stressed the actual perception of the world as having to be different.

> But by far the greatest hindrance and aberration of the human understanding proceeds from the dullness, incompetency, and deceptions of the senses; in that things which strike the sense outweigh things which do not immediately strike it, though they be more important. Hence it is that speculation commonly ceases where sight ceases; insomuch that of things invisible there is little or no observation.[80]

With respect to spiritual perception, 'Abdu'l-Bahá comments,

> The bestowals of God which are manifest in all phenomenal life are sometimes hidden by intervening veils of mental and mortal vision which render man spiritually blind and incapable, but when these scales are removed and the veils rent asunder, then the great signs of God will become visible, and he will witness eternal light filling the world.[81]

A passage from a Bahá'í learning document notes the importance of spiritual perception:

> Early adolescence is a period of life during which we greatly enhance our capacity to go beyond outer appearances and seek a deeper understanding of what we witness and what we experience. This implies that junior youth are in need of spiritual perception and should be assisted to recognize spiritual forces, to see the reality of every condition and to identify relevant spiritual principles.[82]

'Abdu'l-Bahá writes, 'Let them open wide their eyes and uncover the inner realities of all things..while man possesses powers in common with the animal he is distinguished from the animal by intellectual attainment, spiritual perception, the acquisition of virtues, capacity to receive the bestowals of Divinity, lordly bounty and emanations of heavenly mercy.'[83]

> Our spiritual perception, our inward sight must be opened, so that we can see the signs and traces of God's spirit in everything. Everything can reflect to us the light of the Spirit.[84]

Though the spirit is reflected 'in everything', we think of spiritual perception as most significant in how we perceive the social world. McDowell, in embracing a naturalism that includes our 'second nature', is concerned that his understanding does not imply a re-enchantment of nature, but is merely a way 'of bringing meaning back into the picture when we consider human interactions'.[85] He does not envisage a view of the world where 'the movement of the planets, or the fall of a sparrow, is rightly approached in the sort of way we approach a text or an utterance of some other kind of

[human] action'.[86] But, from a spiritual angle, need we be so closed to a spiritual view of nature, too, now when it may be more necessary than ever? Bahá'u'lláh writes about nature:

> Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world. ... It is endowed with a power whose reality men of learning fail to grasp. Indeed a man of insight can perceive naught therein save the effulgent splendour of Our Name, the Creator. Say: This is an existence which knoweth no decay, and Nature itself is lost in bewilderment before its revelations, its compelling evidences and its effulgent glory which have encompassed the universe.[87]

Even better if we should strive to see the 'extended reality' of the world as God sees it, 'Thy hearing is My hearing, hear thou therewith. Thy sight is My sight, do thou see therewith...'[88] To do that, we have to keep in mind a world that is always, for human beings, beyond the immediately perceptible, while yet paying close attention to learning to see what is immediately there, in front of us – in both the natural world and the social world.

> '...by the light of the name of the All-Seeing God, make your escape from the darkness that surroundeth you. Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self.'[89]

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Endnotes

1. Bahá'í readers may find it helpful to know that this essay was inspired by the learning objectives of Book Five of the Ruhi Institute publication series, though this essay is not by any means an explanation of the idea of 'spiritual perception' or any other concept in that Book. Evidence for the soundness of the idea of 'spiritual perception' is, however, abundantly validated in practice judging by conversations the author has had with young people who have learned from Book Five and its related practices in concert with others. For an excellent treatment of the framework of concepts contributing to that Book, see Sona Farid-Arbab, *Moral Empowerment – In Quest of a Pedagogy*, Wilmette, Ill: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2016.

2. 'Practical reason' is not to be confused with 'instrumental reason'. 'Practical' refers to the problems and challenges we face in the course of our lives, alone and with others, distinct from 'theoretical' or 'purely abstract'.

3. The distinction has some value in classifying curriculum in formal education. See Farid-Arbab, *Moral Empowerment* 293–94, Ch. 9, 'Pedagogical Choices'.

4. John McDowell, *Mind and World*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994 (1996 edn.).

5. Willem deVries, 'Wilfrid Sellars' in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/sellars/, Winter 2016 Edition.

6. Charles Larmore, *The Practices of the Self*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, 97.

7. Jürgen Habermas addressed the distinction between the 'space of natural law' and the 'space of reasons' by introducing a classification of reason, distinguishing 'instrumental reason' of science from 'communicative reason' aimed at reaching intersubjective agreement. Habermas notes the difference between cause and reason with cause, the linchpin of scientific conceptuality, and reasons central to intersubjective deliberation and coming to agreements. See Martin Jay, *Reason After Its Eclipse*, Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016, 150. And Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, *Volume 1*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984 (English translation). Original German edition published in 1981.

8. deVries, Willem, 'Wilfrid Sellars' in Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/sellars/, Winter 2016 Edition.

9. The main reference books here are McDowell, *Mind and World*, and John McDowell, *Perception as a Capacity for Knowledge*, Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 2011.

10. A brief introduction to the history of how we have understood human reasoning, is the first chapter of Jay, *Reason After Its Eclipse*. The most important rationalists were Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza, and the empiricists of note were Francis Bacon, John Locke and David Hume.

11. Cited by McDowell, *Mind and World*, 5.

12. It is of interest that 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Head of the worldwide Bahá'í community from 1892 to 1921) comments on how we understand the abstract, or concept, by way of the concrete; and he makes the point, as cited further on in this essay how our understanding of the world (that it is round, that is far more than merely what is available to our senses, and so forth) is abstract or conceptual.

13. For the best explanation of how human action always operates under concepts, or 'under a description' to distinguish it from unintentional activity, see Donald Davidson, *Truth, Language and History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Actions depend on intentions that, like beliefs, desires, facts, and the like, are amenable to propositional form, noting that the intention is propositional but the action may be non-discursive (see next note). McDowell sees perception and action as 'entry' and 'exit' in our engagement with the world, and both are conceptual, but we have no space here for that discussion.

14. This 'definition' makes language to be the conceptual vehicle of thought, speech and action, where it quite rightly plays the central role, but I don't discount the non-discursive in our conceptuality. It can be demonstrated that the non-discursive operates structurally through our learning paradigmatic situations in ways similar to language learning by way of our learning concept or universals along with complex syntactical 'rules' that are, themselves, often non-discursive even with respect to language use (see Wittgenstein). That case can be made, but it is lengthy, so is set aside here.

15. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 2014, 213–219. See McDowell's discussion of human rationality's contrast with animals', *Mind and World*, especially 114–119.

16. That phrase is used by Robert Brandom, a colleague of McDowell, in *Articulating Reasons*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.

17. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 213–219.

18. *ibid* 216.

19. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978, 194.

20. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982, 258.

21. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 213–219.

22. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, 360.

23. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 213–219.

24. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 29.

25. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1954, 317. There is an important and different sense, as Sona Farid-Arbab has explained in *Moral Empowerment* 75 that understanding is also infinite. Bahá'u'lláh refers to the 'limitless...favors...conferred upon man' with the 'gift of understanding' (*Gleanings* 194), but that may mean in terms of the range of knowledge accessible to mind, yet still understood within the conceptions of the mind. The humility of human reason in this passage reflects an important spirit in modern philosophy which also emphasizes the finitude and limitations of even the kind of questions we can ask with language. See the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Richard Rorty and John Dewey especially. The finitude of human intelligence was a key feature of John Dewey's work throughout his thirty volumes of work.

26. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 125.

27. This relates to Habermas' condition of truthfulness or sincerity in communicative reasoning as he develops it, a criteria that is added to the criterion of truth relative to the 'object world'. Time would not allow translating McDowell's approach into Habermas' 'minimal naturalism', but it would be a fascinating project.

28. For a way of applying Bahá'í and philosophic insights to education and empowerment, see Farid-Arbab, *Moral Empowerment*.

29. We use 'facts' here in the manner of Robert Brandom, in their propositional sense and with reference to states of affairs, and also in a way that includes the idea of intentionality and commitment of the subject who claims to know a fact. See Robert Brandom, *Articulating Reasons – An Introduction to Inferentialism*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000. The idea of knowledge as a coherent, inferentially related set of facts about the world is developed by Brandom in *Articulating Reasons*.

    For a general article on facts see Kevin Mulligan and Fabrice Correia, 'Facts', in Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2017, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/facts/.

30. 'Nouns, names, and predicates may refer to...one or more things, but they cannot, by themselves, represent facts or states of affairs. Only sentences can do this...' Davidson, *Truth, Language and History* 130. And also from Brandom, *Articulating Reasons*, and, 'Facts, Norms, and Normative Facts: A Reply to Habermas', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 8(3), 2000, 356–374.

31. Again truthfulness, or sincerity, is an additional criterion of reason for Jürgen Habermas. See, for example, Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1987, 27. In this essay there is no discussion of 'false consciousness' and other psychological issues, important as they are.

32. McDowell, *Perception as a Capacity for Knowledge*.

33. Psychologist Timothy Wilson estimates that the brain is inundated with '11 million discrete bits of information per second, of which no more than 40 can be consciously processed', cited by Joseph Heath, *Enlightenment 2.0 – Restoring Sanity to Our Politics, Our Economy and Our Lives*, Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014, 73.

34. Honneth, Axel, 'Between Hermeneutics and Hegelianism – John McDowell and the Challenge of Moral Realism', in Smith, Nicholas H., *Reading McDowell on Mind and World*, Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2002, 246.

35. Farid-Arbab, *Moral Empowerment*, 140–150 and 235–8.

36. Farid-Arbab, *Moral Empowerment* 309, citing McDowell from 'Virtues and Reason', in R. Crisp and M. Slote (eds.), *Virtue Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979, 142.

37. Or, as Aristotle said, by friendship we learn wisdom and virtue.

38. Space prevents a summary of McDowell's explanation of the action side, echoing the perception side, in a similarly conceptual manner with commitments and facts, and where the conceptual is inseparable from action. *Lecture V, Mind and World*.

39. Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language*, New York: HarperCollins, 1994, 267–268. Though by other estimates, since a six year old has a vocabulary of 13,000 words, my calculation is that a new word is learned every 45 minutes from two to six years of age. See Davidson, *Truth, Language, and History* 13. Davidson also refers to John L. Locke, *The Child's Path to Spoken Language*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993.

40. Davidson, *Truth* 135, citing the research of Jenny R. Saffran, Richard N. Aslin and Elissa L. Newport, 'Statistical Learning by 8-month-old Infants', *Science*, 274, 13 December 1996, 1926–8.

41. Davidson, *Truth*, 135.

42. See Ronald de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990. Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 'I now want to argue that emotions...share with perception the feature that they must be in some sense essentially perspectival.' '...paradigm scenarios, in setting up our emotional repertoire, quite literally provide the meaning of our emotions...[at] the axiological level of reality that they pick out' – de Sousa, *Rationality* 156 and 189. And, 'for Descartes, emotions are a species of perception: they are "perceptions...of the soul which we relate specially to it, and which are caused, maintained, and fortified by some movement of the spirits"' – cited in de Sousa, *Rationality* 28. These studies of emotional responses as conceptual in nature are, however, also entangled with 'fast' pattern recognition and deep-seated and learned responses, and often result in erroneous judgement errors that are discussed near this essay's end.

43. de Sousa, *Rationality*, already cited, and Nussbaum, *Upheavals*, already cited.

44. I have written of emotions here as there is an existing and well-argued literature on the rationality of emotions. 'Emotions' is a term which covers a wide range of heterogenous passions, attitudes, behaviours, impulses and responses, and the treatment here is inadequate as a sufficient philosophical analysis, but by the Bahá'í terms with which spirituality is understood, there is important work to be done in this area in the years ahead.

45. See Farid-Arbab, *Moral Empowerment*.

46. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 217.

47. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 84.

48. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret of Divine Civilization*, Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1957, 1.

49. 'Supernatural' is taken to mean beyond the mineral, plant and animal reality. 'Abdu'l-Bahá *Promulgation,* 49.

50. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 164.

51. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, Section 66, para. 4.

52. Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, and see a good summary of the meaning of 'extended reality' in Farzam Arbab, 'An Inquiry into the Harmony of Science and Religion' in Geoffrey Cameron and Benjamin Schewel (eds.), *Religion and Public Discourse in an Age of Transition*, Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018, 131–162.

53. The failure of that dominant conception to explain by reducing all phenomenon to physical, chemical and sometimes biological explanations, with Daniel Dennett among the most articulate in that regard, is argued extensively by those who are not themselves 'religious' philosophers, or idealists like John Haldane or Alvin Plantinga, but by more 'secular' philosophers like Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, or Hilary Putnam and others whose several publications on multiple realization offer contrasts with a strict naturalism. And there are more popular recent publications, for example, Gabriel Markus, *I Am Not a Brain*, Cambridge: The Polity Press, 2017.

54. McDowell, *Mind and World* 125–6. And McDowell cites Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose book *Truth and Method* has as its principal theme the idea that the concept of tradition is central to understanding. As Gadamer claims, 'man's relation to the world is absolutely and fundamentally verbal in nature', cited by McDowell in *Reading McDowell*, 297, from Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, rev. trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshal, New York: Crossroad, 1992, 475–476.

55. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, very much in keeping with explanations in philosophy categorizes 'sources of knowledge' or 'criteria of knowledge' as (1) sensible, (2) rational, (3) traditional (or conventional)

and (4) inspirational (intuitive). 'Abdu'l-Bahá does that to contrast those sources that demonstrate human fallibility, not to introduce the scepticism that has characterized philosophy, but to contrast those fallible sources of knowledge with the only infallible one, 'the Holy Spirit'. He also notes, in one of the explanations on this subject, that by using more than one of those four criteria one's judgement is improved.

56. W. V. O. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View*, New York: Harper and Row, 1963 edn., 44.

57 For a well-supported argument that specific cognitive advances go hand in hand with the evolution of myth and religion, see Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution*, Cambridge, Mass.: Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011. And for the relationship of reason to perception of justice, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.

58. Heath, *Englightenment, 2.0.*

59. There is a large body of research on this issue but Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky are the headliners, and Kahneman's book the central reference, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2011.

60. Some of that ability to think 'fast' is the result of slow physiological evolutionary developments over aeons, but much is due to cultural evolution that has become a part of early childhood patterns of upbringing, often associated with language development, and that have become a part of human culture over successive millennia of human history; and a lot of that ability regarding pattern recognition and quick problem solving is developed within the life of an individual, especially during the early years, and also by developing particular expertise through hours and hours of practice and work in specific fields of human endeavour.

61. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 70.

62. Few philosophers have been as concerned about science education for the public and its relationship to 'common sense' as John Dewey.

63. For an accurate summary of this, see Arbab, 'An Inquiry into the Harmony of Science and Religion' in Cameron and Schewel (eds.), *Religion and Public Discourse,* 131–162.

64. Alexander Bird, *Philosophy of Science*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998; and see Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality*.

65. Citing Hoyningen-Huene in Hanne Andersen and Brian Hepburn, 'Scientific Method', in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/scientific-method/. The Hoyningnen-Huene quote is from that article in 'The Conclusion'.

66. As Einstein famously said, to paraphrase, 'theory enables us to know what to look for in reality.'

67. Ian Hacking, 'Finding Out: Prolegomena to a Theory of Truthfulness and Reasoning in the Sciences', keynote address, Canadian Philosophical Association, Saskatoon, 28 May 2007.

68. Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, Ch. 14.

69. For an exploration of ways of understanding religion that depart from the conventional, in search of more appropriate and modern concepts see Benjamin Schewel, *Seven Ways of Looking at Religion*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2017.

70. The 'masters of suspicion' being Freud, Marx, Feuerbach and Nietzsche. Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 367–8.

71. See MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?* for a description of the tight relationship between the nature of reasoning and the culture in which conceptual capacities are embedded, with particular attention to the relationship between justice and reason.

72. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 84.

73. McDowell, John, 'Responses' in Smith, Nicholas H.(ed.), *Reading McDowell*, 296, 297.

74. On the relationship of religion to our conceptual capacity, see Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution*.

75. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, 107.

76. In an article about Martin Amis by Nathaniel Rich, 'Downhill Racing', *The New York Review of Books*, September 27, 2018, 40–42.
77. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 176.
78. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970 edn., 4.
79. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962, 110–134.
80. Sir Francis Bacon, from Aphorism 50, *Novum Organum, Book I* (1620). Collected in James Spedding (ed.), *The Works of Francis Bacon*, Vol. 4, 1858, 58.
81. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, 90.
82. *Releasing the Powers of Junior Youth*, Book 5 of the Ruhi Institute, Prepublication Version 6.3.1.PP, Cali, Colombia: Ruhi Foundation, 29 April 2009, Unit 3, 8.
83. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Ruhi Institute Book 5, *Releasing,* Unit 3, 8.
84. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Ruhi Institute Book 5, *Releasing,* Unit 3, 9.
85. McDowell, *Mind and World*, 72.
86. *Ibid.*
87. Bahá'u'lláh, 'Lawh-i-Hikmat', *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas*, Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978, 142.
88. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, 4.
89. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 94.