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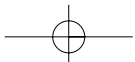
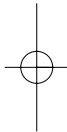
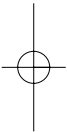
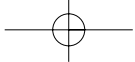
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Place attachment, sense of belonging and identity in life history narratives of Iranian Baha'i refugees

Ruth Williams

Abstract

Refugees commonly experience physical and emotional displacement. Such experiences reflect Tuan's theories relating to the anxiety of separation from home and sense of estrangement or alienation in a new land. Despite this adversity, many refugees ultimately form hybrid or trans-national identities, which allow them to operate and be accepted in two (or more) cultures. This facilitates a sense of belonging and the adaptation process to a new country and culture.

The Baha'i Faith is considered to be the second most globally widespread religion after Christianity. Thus, refugees can potentially join a community anywhere in the world and be provided with a sense of familiarity, which the commonality of values and administrative structure provides. In addition, newcomers arriving in a new land are automatically affiliated to a collective identity to which they already belong.

This paper draws on case study and secondary source evidence to argue that the refugee participants in this study have used the Baha'i writings, international administrative structure and global community, to construct and maintain a notion of home and sense of belonging, and thus ultimately reflect a hybrid or trans-national identity in a new land. Preliminary findings indicate that religion plays a vital role in the lives of these refugees as the central tenets of the Baha'i Faith appear to actively inform the resettlement process in a new country. Life history narratives were used as a tool for analysis in seven in-depth case study interviews with Iranian Baha'i refugees residing in and around the city of Melbourne, in the state of Victoria, Australia.

The participants in this study indicated that social space gave them the strongest sense of belonging, rather than place attachment. Religious identity is explored through the affiliation to a collective membership, as it is within this context that religious identity can be strengthened via official and legitimate recognition or undermined via persecution.

Collective identity on a macro scale can be associated with nationalism and trans-nationalism. The Baha'i attitude to nationalism is to afford a country its rightful respect, but discourage extreme nationalism as it is characteristically exclusionary by nature. However, the Iranian Baha'i refugees in this study identify primarily as Baha'i rather than Iranian or Australian; that is, the values underpinning their religion outweighed the importance of place or national identity. The participants in this study embraced the notion of a global home and considered themselves citizens of the world, consequently adopting trans-national and hybrid identities. This attitude ultimately impacts on the adaptation of refugees to a new country, as they do not see themselves as moving from one home to another, but merely relocating to a different part of the one global home.

Keywords

Iranian
Baha'i
refugees
narratives
belonging
identity
place

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2001 Census of Population and Housing*, (<http://www.abs.gov.au>, accessed November 2007).
2. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: a study of environmental perception, attitudes and values* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1974) 7.
3. Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern geographies: the reassertion of space in critical social theory*, (London: Verso, 1989) 78.

The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran saw an escalation in the blatant persecution of Baha'is. Large numbers of Baha'is have since fled Iran and many have entered Australia as refugees under the Humanitarian Entry Program. This study is centred on case study interviews in and around the city of Melbourne, in the state of Victoria. According to 2001 Census figures, there are 11,037 Baha'is in Australia, with 1,832 residing in Victoria. Of the Victorian Baha'is, 52% are Iranian-born and almost all of them (95%) entered Australia as part of the Humanitarian Entry Program.¹

Seven case study interviews with Iranian Baha'i refugees in the Melbourne area formed the basis of life history narratives, which were used to investigate the complexities of post-migration place attachment, sense of belonging and identity formation. The dislocation that refugees experience inevitably ruptures a secure sense of home, place and belonging. This reflects the physical and emotional displacement associated with Yi-Fu Tuan's theory. Tuan, from the field of human geography, introduced the notion of 'topophilia' (love of place) and 'topophobia' (fear of place), where the latter is an emotion often related to the anxiety of being away from home and being situated somewhere you feel you do not belong; an outsider with a sense of separation, estrangement or alienation.² Despite relocating to a new country and culture, most participants stated they were no 'strangers to strangeness' as they expressed feeling alienation in their country of origin before arriving in Australia.

Attachment to place and sense of belonging are often determined by social space more than geographic location;³ that is, affiliation to family, friends, ethnic and religious groups creates a profound sense of home and belonging. Affiliation to or membership of these groups also facilitates the construction of individual and collective identity. Collective religious identity can be strengthened by legitimate official recognition and also by persecution. Topocide or annihilation of place has been used as a weapon of persecution (for example, the deliberate destruction of significant holy sites serves to undermine religious identity).

Identity formation is a vital process that ultimately impacts on a refugee's ability to settle and adapt to a new country. The Iranian Baha'i refugees in this study indicated that their Baha'i identity facilitated the process of adaptation as the Australian Baha'i community provided a familiar administrative structure and a comfortable base from which to experience a new culture. As will be argued later, the statements and behaviour of participants in this research indicate that they have formed hybrid and transnational identities. This has been demonstrated by some specific examples where they reject/retain customs from their culture of origin while simultaneously rejecting/adopting aspects from their new culture of settlement.

The main purpose and argument of this paper is to draw on case study and secondary source evidence to argue that the Iranian Baha'i refugees in this study have used the Baha'i Faith, with its focus on the 'oneness of humankind' and 'unity in diversity,' the global administrative structure and the international community, to facilitate their notion of a universal home, sense of belonging and the construction of a cosmopolitan and hybrid identity in a new land. Thus, it appears that religion played a vital role in the lives of these Baha'i refugees as the central tenets provided a basis on which to live a 'Baha'i life', facilitating the active resettlement process to a new country.

The paper will first discuss place attachment in order to present physical locality as a source from which humans derive a sense of home and belonging. Tuan's theories will be introduced as a means to highlight the alienation refugees feel during the process of exile to and settlement in a new land. Social space as opposed to physical space will then be considered as an additional source from which humans obtain a sense of home and belonging. Excerpts from the Baha'i writings will highlight the importance of the sense of belonging and community. This will lead to a discussion on individuals deriving their identity from group affiliation and collective membership.

An examination of collective membership of ethnic and religious groups will lead to an analysis of how the participants' sense of belonging and identity creation were facilitated by being a member of the Baha'i community. Excerpts of statements from the participants will specifically demonstrate how the Australian Baha'i community also offered the familiarity of the universal Baha'i administrative structure and values through the central tenets of the faith.

Achieving a sense of belonging through recreating the familiar will be discussed, as it has resulted in many migrants and refugees clustering together and forming ethnic enclaves.⁴ Despite the explicit encouragement by the governing international Baha'i body, the Universal House of Justice, and the Baha'i writings, many Iranian-born Baha'is have not actively dispersed amongst the population and appear to be following the patterns of forming ethnic enclaves. However, the majority of the participants in this study appear to be going against the trends and have demonstrated eagerness as well as proactive behaviour leading to dispersal and integration into the new society.

Lastly, the question of identity being manifested at a macro level, such as through nationalism and transnationalism, will be discussed. A consideration of the Baha'i attitude to extreme nationalism as being characteristically exclusionary by nature will lead to an explanation on how the participants in this study primarily identify as Baha'i rather than Iranian or Australian; that is, the values underpinning their religion outweigh the importance of place or national identity.

Research approach

Narrative analysis focuses on the recording and interpretation of the life experiences of individuals.⁵ Transcripts of in-depth interviews are the data from which the complex nature of meanings and interpretations will be explored.

Narrative studies are flourishing as a means of understanding the personal identity, culture and historical world of a person. This approach is often used in research on smaller groups⁶ in order to represent the character or lifestyle of specific minorities who are frequently discriminated against.⁷ Self-narratives and identities are constructed from within a social context of memberships of particular communities and cultural groups,⁸ which reflect individual identity and the tellers' culture and social world.⁹

Life narratives were used to investigate the complexities of post migration adaptation and identity formation in seven in-depth case study interviews with Iranian Baha'i refugees in the Melbourne and surrounding areas. It is not intended that this small-scale research create grand generalisations, but it is proposed that it does offer in-depth insights into the experiences of some Iranian Baha'i refugees and possibly discern embryonic patterns. As will be discussed later, a larger quantitative study,¹⁰ examining the immigration experiences

4. Donna R. Gabaccia, 'Global geography of "Little Italy": Italian neighbourhoods in comparative perspective', *Modern Italy*, 11/1 (2006) 9–24. Jan Lin, *Reconstructing Chinatown: ethnic enclave, global change*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) 26.
5. Pranee Liamputtong and Douglas Ezzy, *Qualitative research methods*, 2nd edn, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 126.
6. Amia Lieblich, Rivka Tuval-Mashiach and Tamar Zilber, *Narrative research: reading, analysis and interpretation*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998) 2–3.
7. *ibid*, pp. 4–5.
8. Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time maps: collective memory and the social shape of the past*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) 4.
9. Lieblich, *op cit*, pp. 8–9.
10. Margaret Bluett, *Nightingales in Terra Nova: the immigration experiences of Iranian Baha'is in Sydney and Canberra from 1960 to 1998*, PhD dissertation, James Cook University, Cairns, Australia, 2006.

11. P. Knight, *Small-scale research*, (London: Sage Publications, 2002) 65.
12. Transcription of interview with 'Hamid' conducted 09/02/03, (tapes and transcription held in private collection) 13.
13. Transcription of interview with Payman conducted 05/07/01, (tapes and transcription held in private collection) 11.
14. Lewis Holloway and Phil Hubbard, *People and place: the extraordinary geographies of everyday life*, (England: Prentice Hall, 2001) 69.
15. Margaret Rodman, 'Empowering place: multilocality and multivocality', in *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, (ed. Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zuniga, Maldon: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) 205.
16. *ibid* 206–8.
17. Akhil Gupta, 'The song of the nonaligned world: transnational identities and the reinscription of space in late capitalism', in *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, (ed. Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zuniga, Maldon: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) 321.
18. Ien Ang and Michael Symonds, 'Introduction', in *Communal/Plural*, issue 5, (Research Centre in Intercommunal Studies, Home, displacement, belonging, Nepean: University of Western Sydney, 1997) v.

and settlement process of 83 Iranian Baha'is in Sydney and Canberra, reflects many of the findings in this study.

Case study participants were recruited by the snowballing method¹¹ and personal contact with networks within the Baha'i community. They consisted of four females and three males aged between 21 and 58 years. All interviewees had resided in Australia between 17 and 20 years and had family members imprisoned, tortured or die as a result of the persecution of Baha'is in Iran. Interviews were one to two hours, with some follow-up clarifications.

This paper draws on literature, interview transcripts and Baha'i writings to support its main contention. It is intended that the research will offer some insights into the complexities of post migration identity formation and how this affects notions of home and sense of belonging. It is hoped this information will add to existing understandings and potentially affect future policy-making and health service provision for refugee settlement. The preliminary understandings gained from the qualitative investigation of these case studies suggest that these Iranian Baha'i refugee participants have settled into Victoria well and that their faith has played a significant role.

Place attachment

The following statements by participants reflect their feelings of anxiety and alienation, associated with topophobia, towards their country of origin:

...we were a stranger in our own country as well in terms of the culture because of Muslim culture and Baha'i culture...¹²

Literally overnight we were strangers in our own land, nobody wants to know us any more; the neighbour doesn't even want to talk to you any more.¹³

Humans attach meaning to certain places;¹⁴ there is a 'physical, emotional and experiential reality that places hold for their inhabitants'.¹⁵ It has therefore been argued that places are culturally and socially constructed, as they have a shared and unique reality for each inhabitant that is forged from culture and history.¹⁶ But more importantly, it is the feeling of belonging to a community that binds identity to spatial location.¹⁷ It is when we belong to a community that a geographical place becomes meaningful, as it belongs to us in some way. The notion of home in our human environment can be a place of 'both immense longing and bitter rejection'.¹⁸

The following Baha'i statements reflect the importance of the community facilitating a sense of belonging:

...it is important for the National Spiritual Assemblies to work out ways and means of creating a sense of belonging in the hearts of the believers.¹⁹

...news of Baha'i activities in other communities has always been a source of encouragement and has given the friends a sense of belonging to a vital, growing, and united world-wide Baha'i family.²⁰

...cultivating an appreciation for the richness and importance of the world's diverse cultural, religious and social systems, and nurturing the feeling of belonging to and responsibility toward the world community.²¹

Relp (1976) coined the term 'insideness' to describe the phenomenon whereby the stronger the attachment to an environment or geography, the more that environment becomes a place.²² This describes the human experience of place because 'if a person feels *inside* a place, he or she is here rather than there, safe rather than threatened, enclosed rather than exposed, at ease rather than stressed'.²³ Relp suggested that the more profoundly inside a place the person feels, the stronger will be his or her identity with that place. However, it may be argued that these Baha'i refugees never experienced being totally 'inside' Iran.

The above discussion is pertinent to both the migrant and refugee experience, when sense of belonging, notions of home and insideness are threatened, or at least disrupted and put under intense pressure. The process of adapting from the role of being a 'guest' to being 'home' may be a significant one.

Sense of place and home as defined by social belonging

Although a few participants expressed a feeling of homesickness or *ghurbat* upon first arrival, it was a longing for people rather than place that fuelled this yearning.

Yes, homesick. I did to a certain extent because I was alone, I was very lonely. I didn't know many people here, I had none of my family here, so yes, I felt very homesick...but not any more.²⁴

Alternatively, some participants did not experience *ghurbat* due to being surrounded by loved ones and community, who had previously settled in Australia.

Ghurbat? No, because my family was here and a lot of friends here and I think I was very lucky because I was Baha'i. It was always gatherings together and I didn't feel very alone but many people from other countries, that they are not Baha'i, I hear from them that they feel very alone. They'd like to go back to their country, but not for me.²⁵

In addition, the following statements reflect an attitude that promotes active resettlement and adaptation. It also indicates adhering to what Derrida terms the 'rules of the house' in their new country of settlement:

Baha'u'llah emphasises about unity, integration, being with other people, love strangers, treat them as you know, your family.²⁶

...[you] cannot reach your highest level of productivity unless you communicate and integrate, wherever you live.²⁷

Recreating the familiar in an attempt to capture a sense of home is simultaneously being claimed by both refugees and citizens of the host nation. Jacques Derrida believes that the notion of Western hospitality is largely practised on a conditional basis according to the 'rules of the house'. He also believes it is expected that the 'guests' should fulfil their role as the invited by learning the host language and generally adjusting to the customs and etiquette of the 'home'. However, extending hospitality to the stranger

19. The Universal House of Justice, 'From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to various National Spiritual Assemblies February 9, 1967', in *Lights of Guidance*, (Helen Hornby, New Delhi: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1994) 251.
20. *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963 to 1986: The third epoch of the formative age*, Prepared by the Universal House of Justice, (Compiled by Geoffrey W. Marks, Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1986) 488.
21. *Valuing Spirituality in Development*. Prepared by the Bahā'ī International Community, (paper presented to the 'World Faiths and Development Dialogue', hosted by the President of the World Bank and the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace, London, England, February 18–19 1998).
22. David Seamon, 'A singular impact: Edward Relp's place and placelessness', *Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1996, 5–8.
23. *ibid.*
24. Payman, 11/02/03, 7.
25. Transcription of interview with Mrs K. conducted 10/02/03, (tapes and transcription held in private collection) 13.
26. Transcription of interview with 'Farideh' conducted 08/02/03, (tapes and transcription held in private collection) 25.

27. 'Hamid' 25.
28. Jacques Derrida, 'What is Owed to the Stranger?', *Arena Magazine*, 60 (2002) 5–7.
29. Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society*, (Australia: Pluto Press, 2003) 13.
30. A. El-Zein, 'Being elsewhere: on longing and belonging', in *Arab-Australians Today: Citizenship and Belonging*, (ed. Ghassan Hage, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002, 225–240) 228.
31. Rodman, 'Empowering place' 206 & 213.
32. *ibid* 212.
33. Lin, *Reconstructing Chinatown* 111.
34. Gabaccia, 'Global geography of "Little Italy"'
35. *Messages* 438.
36. Mehdi Bozorgmehr, 'Does host hostility create ethnic solidarity? The experience of Iranians in the United States', *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* (vol. 2, no. 1, 2000) 159–178.
37. Australian Bureau of Statistics Census 2001, (www.abs.gov.au, accessed November 2007)
38. Mark Graham and Shahram Khosravi, 'Home is where you make it: repatriation and diaspora culture among Iranians in Sweden', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 10/2 (1997) 115–133.

can only come 'from deep within an idea of home'.²⁸ When citizens of the host nation use the term 'guest' in reference to newcomers, it denies refugees inclusiveness and permanence; 'after all a "guest" is a very limited mode of belonging to a place...[as] home is elsewhere'.²⁹ According to El-Zein, a home may offer familiarity, a sense of belonging and ownership and a sense of not being a guest.³⁰

Place not only refers to a geographic location but also embodies ideas of 'social space', where values are attached to both place and relationships. Consequently, there is an inseparability between place and people as place remains integral to social life and local communities.³¹ It appears that the Iranian Baha'i refugees in this study indicated that it was not so much the geographical place in Iran that they had an attachment to but the community, which made it a 'home'. Achieving this sense of belonging within familiar communities or social spaces may lead to newcomers congregating in certain localities or geographic places.

Anyone dislocated from his or her place and identity often sees new landscapes in terms of familiar ones.³² This has led to immigrants attempting to recreate the familiar, resulting in the formation of ethnic enclaves such as Chinatown³³ and Little Italy.³⁴ The Baha'i administration has specifically encouraged Iranian-born Baha'is to disperse amongst the population, dissuading the formation of ethnic enclaves:

It is our ardent hope that, wherever possible, the Iranian friends may settle in those towns or villages which are pioneering goals, so that through their stay the foundation of the Cause may be strengthened. They must encourage each other to pioneer and disperse in accordance with the teaching plans wherever they reside, and sacrifice the happiness and joy which they may otherwise obtain from companionship with each other for the sake of the vital interests of the Cause.³⁵

Much of the Iranian diaspora has congregated in some Western cities in enclave communities, especially in the United States. Although one-third of Iranians in the United States live in Los Angeles, they are quite diverse as they contain many individuals from ethnic and religious minority groups as well as Muslims.³⁶ Despite the encouragement by the Universal House of Justice to disperse, it appears that Iranian Baha'i refugees may also congregate in comparatively large numbers in the same areas. Although Iranian-born Baha'is are concentrated in the east of the Melbourne metropolitan region, they are reasonably well dispersed across Local Government Areas (LGAs). The largest exceptions are the LGAs of Manningham and Whitehorse where Iranian Baha'is constitute approximately 65–75 per cent of the Baha'i populations.³⁷ This could possibly be the result of a desire to live close to family and friends, or to have the convenience of close proximity to work and/or educational facilities, or to live in familiar ethnic communities. The idea of a home, homeland and home culture was also recreated in Graham and Khosravi's study, where they observed Iranians in Sweden forming a diasporic culture that sought to reconstruct aspects of Iranian culture.³⁸

Despite the above statistics in Victoria, over half the participants in this study have chosen to reside in communities with low numbers of Iranian

Baha'is. These patterns of residential preference demonstrate a variety of choices, showing that many of them have heeded the encouragement to disperse amongst the population and mostly moved to areas outside of the major inner city centres. Thus it appears that the behaviour of many of the participants in this study reflects the perspective of the Baha'i 'pioneer'. This is also reflected by Warburg, who observed Baha'is in Denmark and described the dispersal and mobility among them as high, with many engaged in mission for purposes of propagating the faith.³⁹

Participants' statements appear to demonstrate a desire to become part of the new society in order to acquire a sense of social belonging and community. In addition to their statements, participants put these values into operation through being proactively involved in volunteer community groups such as non-English speaking background (NESB) groups, various charities such as the Leukemia Foundation, an annual Christmas toy distribution organized by the Harley Davidson motorcycle club, annual Red Cross door knock campaigns, inter-faith dialogue groups and a regional multicultural council. This level of social involvement served to immerse them in local community life, which facilitated their sense of belonging.

Additionally, participants in this study also appear to be very active in Baha'i activities and administration, such as serving on various local spiritual assemblies or being assistants to Auxiliary Board members. This level of activity would have surrounded them with like-minded Baha'is who are not necessarily Iranian, and immersed them in their local communities, facilitating a sense of fellowship and belonging. It appears that striving to live a 'Baha'i life', and adhering to Baha'i ideology helped these participants to integrate into their host communities. Bluett's study also appears to reflect these findings as she reports that 'the mentality engendered by Baha'i beliefs was crucial to their adaptation.'⁴⁰

The two biggest challenges participants faced regarding adaptation and securing a sense of home in their new host society was English language acquisition and obtaining employment. In addition, many could not initially find work in areas in which they were qualified.⁴¹ This was also found to be the case in Bluett's study, where she states that 'although the majority found employment soon after their arrival, a significant proportion had to accept work that did not utilize their skills...[as there] were difficulties experienced in gaining recognition for their qualifications.'⁴²

Collective identity and belonging reflected in religious and ethnic memberships

The refugees in this study found that the Baha'i community and its associated familiar administrative structure offered a sense of community in an unfamiliar place, which provided a comfortable base from which they felt confident to explore a new culture. This is reflected in the following statements by two participants, but similar sentiments were also expressed by other participants:

...a full Baha'i community [made up of] Australian people, from Malaysia, from Iran...we knew the administration...we were completely familiar...we didn't feel that we are strangers, because of that commonality of belief we were connected very quickly...⁴³

39. Margit Warburg, 'Religious organisations in a global world: a comparative perspective', Conference proceedings of the 2001 International conference, The spiritual supermarket: religious pluralism in the 21st century, London, April 2001.
40. Bluett, *Nightingales in Terra Nova* 7.
41. Ruth Williams, 'Global Citizenship and the Bahā'ī faith,' *Australian Religion Studies Review* 20/2 (2007) 217–231.
42. Bluett, *Nightingales in Terra Nova* 143.
43. 'Hamid' 13.

44. 'Mona', 17/02/03, 13–14.
45. Adam Possamai and Alpha Possamai-Inesedy, 'The Baha'i faith and Caodaism: migration, change and de-secularization(s) in Australia', *Journal of Sociology*, (vol. 43, no. 3, 2007) 308.
46. Bluett, *Nightingales in Terra Nova*, 2006, 6–7.
47. *ibid* 175.
48. Samuel Schrager, 'What is social in oral history?', in *The Oral History Reader*, (eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, London: Routledge, 1998) 287.
49. *ibid*.
50. Philip Schlesinger, *Media, state and nation: political violence and collective identities* (London: Sage Publications, 1991) 154.
51. *Building visions of growth*. Working paper prepared by the Baha'i International Teaching Centre for the Auxiliary Board Conferences held during January and February 1992.
52. Arjun Appadurai, 'Sovereignty without territoriality: notes for a postnational geography', in *The anthropology of space and place: locating culture*, (eds. Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zuniga, Maldon: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) 342.
53. Donald Taylor, 'Collective identity: a person's primary psychological blueprint', *The quest for identity: from minority groups to generation Xers*, (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2002) 45.

[the Baha'i community] kept us from feeling alone...it was a comfortable zone for us; we'd practise English with one another and were involved with different activities. So it would expand our skills [and] helped us to become part of the society without feeling alone or rejected.⁴⁴

The sentiments expressed in the above statements are also mirrored by Possamai and Possamai-Inesedy in their study of Iranian Baha'is in Western Sydney: 'the organisation of the Baha'i faith provided many migrants, Iranian or otherwise, with a safety net of support.'⁴⁵ In addition, Bluett's research also found that 'the support of the Baha'i community was a vital factor in assisting them in their settlement...Some indicated that the Australian Baha'is provided them with a path towards understanding other Australians and helped with their relationships in the wider community.'⁴⁶ Bluett also states that her interviewees 'were immediately connected to an existing religious community...[feeling] inclusion in an established social group.'⁴⁷

We essentially derive our identity and sense of belonging by sharing commonality with others within various communities. Some of these identity-determining factors include ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion and cultural practices. Having some of these factors in common with others affiliates us with groups, providing a sense of belonging to a collective identity. For example expressing image as identity can send symbolic messages that may suggest connections with likeminded people and membership of certain groups.⁴⁸ Communities become extensions of a person where individuals may be representative of a whole society that they profess to be a member of.⁴⁹ Schlesinger believes identity is a system of social relations that relies on the recognition of others. Therefore, identity is 'not a 'thing' but rather a system of relations and representations'.⁵⁰ Baha'i statements refer to activities and actions which characterize the membership of, or belonging to, a wider community:

In most parts of the world, before a community can maintain the regular activities that characterize Baha'i community life, a sense of community has to be built through a sequence of well-defined actions that are carried out in a specific time period and lead to concrete results with an assurance of success.⁵¹

There are an increasing number of global, macro communities which can transport the feeling of social belonging anywhere around the world, including interest groups, social movements and transnational religious formations⁵² such as Islam, Christianity, and the Baha'i Faith.

Religion offers a blueprint for all aspects of life.⁵³ Leaders or authorities in religion direct, advise and teach adherents, serving to shape social values and conduct and aiming to influence law, politics and family life.⁵⁴ This moral and social direction that religious affiliation provides serves to define cultures and gives individuals a sense of belonging and identity.⁵⁵

Collective identity is often interlinked with religious and ethnic identity, to the extent that many refugees in Australia have used religion as a means to preserve ethnicity. Australia still comprises a predominantly white, Christian society, currently characterized by an increasing fear of different ethnic groups.⁵⁶ Despite this environment, many religious and ethnic groups have persisted in their efforts to establish a sense of place in Australia.

Different ethnic groups within the same religion may strive to maintain their ethnic identities, but for other groups, ethnicity is relatively inconsequential compared with the universality of religion.⁵⁷ Similarly, Bozorgmehr discovered that due to host hostility in the United States, some Iranians have opted to disassociate themselves from their nationality, contrary to the theory that host hostility creates ethnic solidarity. He found that this is especially the case for persecuted religious minorities such as Christian Armenians, Baha'is and Jews, who identify more with their religious backgrounds than with their nation of origin.⁵⁸

Topocide as a weapon of persecution used to undermine religious identity

Religious identity can be strongly affiliated with physical place and attachment to place. This attachment to place can create a sense of belonging, which simultaneously facilitates identity. Religious adherents may identify with a particular geographic place due to a significant historical event that took place there, or it may be a place to which people travel in order to pay homage during pilgrimage. Religious movements often desire recognition by the government of the country in which they reside and practise. This recognition gives their identity legitimacy. Deliberate destruction of holy places has been used as a weapon of persecution to undermine religious identity. Such is the case with Baha'i holy places in Iran destroyed by the theocratic state. Porteous termed this deliberate destruction of place, topocide.⁵⁹

Official recognition of a religion by the state/government goes a long way in providing a minority with a feeling of legitimate identity amongst the larger collective, as is the case with the Kaharingan religion in Indonesia.⁶⁰ Conversely, it has also been noted that threats and hostility to religion by government and/or the host society can serve to strengthen collective religious identity.⁶¹ This has often been the case with the overt persecution of Baha'is in Iran. Religious persecution can come in many forms, including the deliberate destruction of places that are revered for their holy significance in a faith.

Places are symbolic, loaded with meaning, and provide an attachment which says something about who we are. Certain places have become synonymous with particular religious groups. For example Roman Catholics identify with the Vatican, Jews identify with the Wailing Wall and Muslims identify with Mecca and Medina. Baha'is revere their own holy places and identify with the sacredness of the space. Baha'is have witnessed the deliberate destruction or topocide of holy places in Iran at the hands of the Islamic Republic, such as the desecration of the House of the Bab in Shiraz, the demolition of the house of Mirza Buzurg and the resting place of Quddus, the last Letter of the Living.⁶²

The destruction of these sites, and the subsequent attachment many Baha'is have to these particular holy places, has consequently caused much distress within the community due to the historical significance these places embody and the meaning they carry for adherents of the Baha'i faith. Thus, their identity is heavily symbolized in these places because when a place is endowed with sacredness, it belongs to us in some way. Therefore, topocide by the Iranian Islamic regime has the potential to erode Baha'i identity.

54. Adam Jamrozik, Cathy Boland and Robert Urquhart, 'Religious diversity in a 'Christian' country', *Social change and cultural transformation in Australia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995–153.

55. *ibid* 141.

56. Ghassan Hage, *Against paranoid nationalism: searching for hope in a shrinking society*, (Australia: Pluto Press, 2003) 27.

57. Gerd Bauman, *The multicultural riddle: rethinking national, ethnic and religious identities*, (New York: Routledge, 1999) 23.

58. Mehdi Bozorgmehr, 'Does host hostility create ethnic solidarity?'

59. Porteous, *Topocide* 2.

60. Sri Kuhnt-Saptodewo, 'Religion and identity', in *Ethnic minorities and nationalism in Southeast Asia*, (eds. Thomas Engelbert and Andreas Schneider, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000) 66.

61. *ibid* 70.

62. Bahā'ī World News Service, 'Bahā'īs decry cultural cleansing in Iran', 2004, <http://news.bahai.org/story.cfm?storyid=323>, accessed 14 August 2006.

63. 'Farideh' 37.
64. Transcription of interview with Zhaleh conducted 20/07/01, (tapes and transcription held in private collection) 13.
65. Akerdahl Per-Olof, 'Pilgrimage and religious identity in the Bahā'ī faith', *Lights of Irfan*, vol. 1 (Wilmette, IL: 'Irfan Colloquia, 2000) 2. http://bahai-library.com/?file=lights_irfan_1.html, accessed 14 May 2007.
66. *ibid* 3.
67. 'Abdu'l-Baha, in Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bah'au'llah*, vol. 3, (Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1983) 64.
68. Peter Smith, *A concise encyclopedia of the Bahā'ī faith*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000) 269.
69. Wendy Momen (ed), *A basic Bahā'ī dictionary*, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1991) 15.

Baha'i identity

Living in a new land has allowed many Iranian Baha'is the opportunity to express themselves freely. Participants in this study stated they felt freer to express their individual Baha'i identity in Australia, which was denied to them in Iran.

We have chance to be more Baha'i. Because in Iran we had to be Muslim Baha'is...You have to follow the culture of Islam...But here you can practise your culture of Baha'is and you don't have to, for example, wear veil...we kind of had a chance to be more Baha'i I think. This has been our goal.⁶³

Another participant reflects on what it is to identify as a Baha'i by stating:

...we [Baha'is] grew up like that, love humanity, service to humanity...it is in our blood...you feel it, it comes natural to you.⁶⁴

Ethnicity and religion often prove to be the most volatile factors in cases of peace/conflict relations. This is because religion is rooted in culture, which in turn is embedded in our identity. Our choice of faith contributes enormously to the expression of who we are as individuals and the sense of belonging we receive from being a member of a large, structured organization. Hence, individual religious identity is also reflected in a collective faith affiliation; just as individual ethnicity and citizenship affiliation often are to a particular nation.

Baha'i culture and identity may be characterized through aspects such as people, places, administration, language, celebrations, observances and ceremonies, symbols and tenets. Central people such as the founders of the faith and early believers are collectively known and recognized by adherents of the faith, as are certain places revered for their importance because of historical events. These sites become holy places where Baha'is may pay homage via pilgrimage. It is through pilgrimage to holy sites that the importance of people and place become interlinked as an important source of religious identity.

Pilgrimage is a fundamental expression of religious belief and identity and a means by which to strengthen that belief and identity. Places related to the prophet are common sites for pilgrimage. Islam depicts pilgrimage or '*hajj*' as a religious institution or religious law; thus it becomes interlinked with religious identity among Muslims. In the Christian faith, the holy sepulchre of Jesus Christ and the tombs of the saints have been places of pilgrimage.⁶⁵ Pilgrimage enhances one's religious identity by visiting places that are holy to one's religion.⁶⁶ 'Abdu'l-Baha states that 'pilgrimage should be carried out in a state of utter humbleness and devotion. Otherwise it is not true pilgrimage; it is a form of sightseeing'.⁶⁷

In the Baha'i faith, the Kitab-i Aqdas, or most holy book, mentions two places of pilgrimage, the house of the Bab in Shiraz and the house of Baha'u'llah in Baghdad. 'Abdu'l-Baha also declared the resting place of Baha'u'llah at Bahji as a place of pilgrimage. In addition, the shrines and holy places at the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa, Israel, are places of Baha'i pilgrimage.⁶⁸

Baha'i identity is also derived from other formations such as a familiar administrative structure, the '*Allāhu Abhā'*' or 'God is most glorious' greeting,⁶⁹

various celebrations such as *Naw Rūz* or Baha'i New Year and *Ayyām-i Hā* or intercalary days devoted to spiritual preparation for the fast, hospitality and gift giving;⁷⁰ particular observances surrounding the fast, prayer, burial, marriage, divorce, teaching, deepening or studying the faith, the nineteen day feast, the *ḥuqūqu'llāh* or right of God (monetary payments to the faith);⁷¹ the Baha'i calendar; symbols such as the five- and nine-pointed stars, the ring-stone symbol and the well-known calligraphic representation of the Greatest Name;⁷² and, of course, the central tenets of the Baha'i Faith which all Baha'is refer to regarding the conduct of their daily lives.

Identifying themselves as Baha'i is a source of great pride to many Iranian refugees who were previously persecuted for doing so in Iran. It may be suggested that Baha'i identity may be stronger for some Iranian refugees, as was found by Warburg. She discovered that attitudes towards fasting and the obligatory prayer, for example, appeared to be different between Iranian Baha'is and native believers in Denmark, where Iranian Baha'is strictly observed what they saw as a duty, while Danish Baha'is, and Western Baha'is in general, tended to stress personal choice over obedience.⁷³

When asked on one occasion: 'What is a Baha'i?' 'Abdu'l-Baha replied: 'To be a Baha'i simply means to love all the world; to love humanity and try to serve it; to work for universal peace and universal brotherhood'.⁷⁴

In line with 'Abdu'l-Baha's words, one participant explains that to her, being a Baha'i is about loving humanity. Also mirrored in the above quote, loving humanity is actively demonstrated by the Baha'i values of serving humanity. The interviewees reflect this Baha'i value in the occupations attained by six of the seven participants (one participant is a retired widow), which are centred around the welfare industries of health (an optical dispenser, a nurse and a PhD student doing research into cancer) and education (two secondary school teachers and a university lecturer). This tendency to gravitate towards occupations which are considered to serve humanity was also reflected in the study by Possamai and Possamai-Inesedy, who found a high percentage of Iranian Baha'is in the 'caring professions' such as social and volunteer work, medical fields, therapists and teachers.⁷⁵

As scholars such as Bozorgmehr and Graham and Khorsravi have argued and census statistics have shown, many Iranians and Iranian Baha'is congregated in large numbers to form ethnic enclaves, which can impede adaptation and settlement into a new country and culture. However, as the participants in this study show and as is supported by the work of Bluett, many do integrate successfully. As mentioned earlier, the small sample does not allow for large claims about patterns of behaviour and adaptation to be substantiated, but it can possibly offer in-depth insights into how the refugees in this study have adapted. It is also acknowledged that many Baha'is may not live the ideals that are outlined in the Baha'i writings. But the participants' chosen occupations, their additional voluntary community services and their active involvement in Baha'i administration and activities appear to demonstrate living a life based on consideration of Baha'i ideology, and this appears to greatly facilitate their integration and adaptation to a new host society. This reflects the finding of Bluett's study that 'multiculturalism suited the Iranian Baha'is because the central theme of their ideology is recognition of the benefits of

70. *ibid* 27.

71. *ibid* 112.

72. *ibid* 90

73. Margit Warburg, *i Baha'i* (Turin, Elledici, 2001).

74. John E. Esslemont, *Bahā'u'llāh and the New Era* (rev. 4th edn., London: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1980) 71.

75. Adam Possamai and Alpha Possamai-Inesedy, 2007, 304.

76. Margaret Bluett, *Nightingales in Terra Nova*, 2006, 3–5.
77. Shoghi Effendi, *The Light of Divine Guidance*, Volume 1 (Hofheim: Bahā'ī-Verlag, 1982), p. 55, letter to the Baha'is of Germany written 11 February 1934. Available at: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/LDG1/ldg1-35.html> (viewed 8 January 2008).
78. 'Abdu'l-Bahā in *Bahā'ī world faith*; (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1943) 229.
79. 'Abdu'l-Bahā, in *Compilations: lights of guidance*, (compiled by Helen Hornby, New Delhi: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1994) 527.
80. Michael McMullen, *The Bahā'ī: the religious construction of a global identity*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000) 10.
81. *ibid* 11.
82. Payman 11/02/03, 8.
83. Transcription of interview with 'Mona' conducted 27/05/01, (tapes and transcription held in private collection) 29.
84. Payman 11/02/03, 1.
85. Paul Meredith, 'Hybridity in 3rd Space: Rethinking Bicultural Politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand', paper presented to Te Oru Rangahau Maori Research and Development Conference 7–9 July 1998, Massey University, New Zealand, <http://lianz.waikato.ac.nz/PAPERS/paul/hybridity.pdf>, accessed 3 August 2005.

unity in diversity', which meant that 'this ethnic group with a distinctive religious identity achieved an unusually high level of educational and professional achievement' leading to a situation where 'the majority prospered during their adaptation into the Australian way of life.'⁷⁶

As has been demonstrated, the central tenets of the Baha'i faith serve to shape the identity of many Baha'is. Other writings regarding identity on a collective scale involve the topic of nationalism. The Baha'i teachings state that overt nationalism is one form of prejudice which divides humanity, and is often the source of war and conflict.⁷⁷ 'Abdu'l-Baha thus taught that the 'oneness of mankind'⁷⁸ is paramount, and that 'unity in diversity'⁷⁹ renders ethnic and national loyalties insignificant compared to the unifying force of the Baha'i faith. Consequently, the Baha'is in this study refer to themselves as global citizens, emphasizing a common humanity and planetary homeland.⁸⁰ The result is a global religious identity achieved through both ideological and organizational means.⁸¹ This global or cosmopolitan identity is also manifested in a hybrid identity.

Hybrid identity

The following statements from participants reflect their feelings of hybridity and the ability to accept and reject aspects of both cultures in order to fit into two worlds:

I try to make a good blend of both [cultures]. A blend of certain principles. I never want to lose my Eastern principles because I think they are what makes me who I am... I try to make a good blend of both, that would be my perfect situation.⁸²

...it's much easier for me to blend with [Australians]...because I try to find anything that's interesting in the culture. I've got used to Aussie Rules [football] very quickly, so it didn't take me long to adapt to a new way of life.⁸³

Yeah, you would like to be part of them, you don't feel like you're not part of the community or society...you welcome all of their culture, you eat their food, you do what they do...⁸⁴

The affiliations we claim to have to certain groups and the identities these subsequently take on are continuously moving and shifting as people are increasingly moving and shifting on a global scale. The advent of globalization has seen cosmopolitan identities emerge as we increasingly live transnational existences where some consider themselves as having a foot in two or more worlds. Literary cultural studies theorist Homi K. Bhabha regards hybridity as 'the construction of culture and identity, resulting from an in-between state or third space which has its own forms of cultural meaning. Hybrid identities are able to transverse both cultures and to translate, negotiate and mediate affinity and difference within a dynamic of exchange and inclusion'.⁸⁵

Inevitably, this transcendence of cultural location creates a hybrid identity that assumes characteristics from two (or more) cultures and nations. A hybrid context allows for choice of cultural affiliations; accepting aspects of both the host culture and the culture of origin, while simultaneously rejecting others. It is this mixture of cultural elements that forms a melting together of different 'authentic' identities while also creating a highly authentic identity of itself.

Some participants outlined other features of Iranian culture such as the 'hospitality and generosity' as aspects they desired to retain but the 'back-biting...and making fun of each other...I'm trying to throw away some of those [aspects]'.⁸⁶ Additionally, a male participant commented that he shaved off his moustache after arriving in Australia as it 'didn't seem to go with the environment',⁸⁷ while another participant adopted the Australian relaxed and casual dress code and attends university lectures wearing board (surf) shorts and thongs (flip flop footwear), while another participant stated she is now an avid fan of Australian Rules Football and cricket and often debates with her work colleagues on various Australian sporting issues. Bluett's study also indicates that her interviewees formed hybrid identities, especially among younger newcomers: 'young Iranians were more easily influenced by their new environment and consequently some created a dual cultural identity.'⁸⁸ Bluett indicates that much of the cultural traditions which her participants retained involved Baha'i observances such as those rituals surrounding marriage and funerals, celebrations surrounding significant individuals, wearing jewellery with Baha'i symbols and decorating their homes with photographs of important Baha'i figures or holy places. In addition, many Iranian newcomers chose to retain their language and often spoke Persian when in large groups of predominantly Iranians. However, this behaviour of maintaining cultural communication, especially in large groups, had the adverse effect of making other Australians feel isolated and created conflict within the Baha'i communities 'causing many Australians to absent themselves from meetings dominated by Iranians, particularly in city centres where the largest number of the Iranian Baha'is have settled.'⁸⁹

It is a hybrid identity that permits refugees and migrants to choose aspects of their culture of origin that they wish to maintain and aspects from the new country of settlement that they wish to adopt. This promotes a feeling in the individual of being at home in both worlds and cultures, but can have the effect of enhancing nationalism in the host society.

Nationalism and transnationalism

The identity of the Baha'is in this study appears to transcend the boundaries of nationalistic sentiment, adopting a global, cosmopolitan outlook. This is reflected in the following statement by one participant, but which was echoed by most participants in the study:

...it's a new dimension...I belong to, it's a global dimension....I don't feel...that I have a special or particular attachment to any land...it's an element of the Baha'i belief that the whole Earth is but one country, so I can achieve that if I go to....New Zealand or....Tokyo or anywhere in the world,everywhere is my country.⁹⁰

Hobsbawm explains that nationalism is essentially the modern formation of and commitment to solidarity by common groups, which places importance on a shared language, class consciousness and mass politics.⁹¹ Rowthorn defines a nation as a 'symbolic dimension that establishes a connection between people who do not personally know each other [but] share a sense of common identity.'⁹² Nationalism is expressed in a number of

86. 'Mona' 17/02/03, 14.
87. Payman 11/02/03, 9.
88. Margaret Bluett, *Nightingales in Terra Nova*, 2006, 160.
89. Margaret Bluett, *Nightingales in Terra Nova*, 2006, 185.
90. 'Hamid' 22 & 16.
91. Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: programme, myth, reality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 9.
92. Robert Rowthorn, 'Numbers and national identity', in *The Multicultural Experiment*, (ed. Leonie Kramer, Paddington: Macleay Press, 2003) 160.

93. *ibid* 163.
94. Hage, *Against paranoid nationalism*, 29.
95. Shoghi Effendi, *The world order of Baha'u'llah; selected letters by Shoghi Effendi*, (2nd rev. ed. reprint, Willmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982) 65.
96. Stephen Castles, Mary Kalantzis, Bill Cope and Michael Morrissey, 'Racism, nationalism and Australian identity', *Mistaken identity: multiculturalism and the demise of nationalism in Australia*, (NSW: Pluto Press, 1988) 106–7.
97. Shoghi Effendi, *World order* 40.
98. Hobsbawm, *Nations* 10
99. Margit Warburg, 'Baha'i: a religious approach to globalization,' *Social Compass*, (vol. 46, no. 1, 1999) 47–56.
100. Saskia Sassen, 'Citizenship destabilized – featured topic – social and political aspects of citizenship, human rights, and immigration', *Liberal Education*, (Spring, 2003) 2.
101. Christine Inglis, 'Transnationalism: an Australian perspective', *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, (vol. 8, issue 2, 2002) 183.
102. Minoo Moallem, "'Foreignness" and be/longing: transnationalism and immigrant entrepreneurial spaces', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, (vol. 20, nos. 1&2, 2000) 204 & 206.

symbolic ways such as raising the flag, ceremony and public events.⁹³ Many examples of maintaining national identity are likely to receive popular support; however, there has also been an increase in nationalistic sentiment that is driven by fear and intolerance, that aims to exclude those who do not share common affiliations with the host nation and that leads to social exclusion and alienation.⁹⁴

The Baha'i attitude to nationalism is one which encourages the promotion, 'in the most effective manner, the best interests of their government and people', and is to be carried out 'in an unselfish, unostentatious and patriotic fashion...'⁹⁵ Thus, notions of extreme nationalism are abandoned as they are considered to promote fragmentation. Cosmopolitanists argue that overt nationalisms hold strong connotations of racism and feelings of superiority,⁹⁶ creating an 'us and them' mentality which plays on exclusion, ultimately affecting the sense of belonging and identity. Shoghi Effendi also states that 'militant nationalism' must be 'transmuted into an abiding consciousness of world citizenship'.⁹⁷ However, national identities change over time.⁹⁸

Many consider the Baha'i faith to be a global, international religion. Warburg, for example, noted that the Baha'is in Denmark have a liberal and cosmopolitan outlook that promotes world citizenship. However, she also suggests that because Baha'i religious doctrine ultimately aims to merge political and religious institutions, it may be following the same trajectory as conservative religious organizations.⁹⁹ The current cosmopolitan and global outlook of Baha'is promotes the inevitability that globalization and transglobal movements are influencing change in national exclusivity, challenging patriotism¹⁰⁰ and promoting transnationalism.

Transnationalism is a term that traditionally focuses on activities such as work, where expatriates, immigrants and refugees establish business links between their new country of settlement and their country of origin.¹⁰¹ This provides many advantages as they are familiar with the economies and cultural practices of both. Consequently, many refugees and immigrants are increasingly dismissing the idea of either permanently returning to the homeland or wholly assimilating to the host society. Instead they are concerned with both foreignness and belonging; simultaneously being here and there. Globalization has ensured the maintenance of contact between nations that challenges the traditional notion of locality, place and identity. Some immigrants and refugees maintain a connection to two or more places and cultures, serving to incorporate a process of cultural disidentification and reidentification.¹⁰²

The notion of transnationalism or cosmopolitan identities may be reflected in the participants' choice of life partners. Of the three participants who did not arrive in Australia already married, one remains single but states of any future partner 'doesn't have to be Iranian, doesn't have to be Baha'i';¹⁰³ one has married an Iranian-born Baha'i who had resided in Australia for 15 years before they married; while another has married an Australian Baha'i. It appears that preference for a particular nationality in a marriage partner may not be important, but perhaps preference for a Baha'i partner may be more of a consideration for these participants. The attitudes towards inter-marriage in Bluett's research reflect the current study as she also found that 'the majority of interviewees for this project who have married since they arrived in Australia acquired partners of non-Iranian origin'.¹⁰⁴

The notion of transnationalism is embedded in the main ideology of the Baha'i faith; 'The Earth is but one country and mankind its citizens';¹⁰⁵ consequently the Baha'is in this study often refer to themselves as citizens of the world. Thus, these Iranian Baha'i refugees identify foremost as Baha'i rather than Iranian or Australian, which means the values underpinning their religion often outweigh national or ethnic identity.¹⁰⁶

Discussion

Humans often attach meaning to place, from which they receive a sense of home and belonging. However, the sense of belonging may be attributed more to social connections than to geographic location. The participants in this study reflected the importance placed on social connections, as their longing for people superseded connection to place.

The social space associated with friends, family, ethnic and religious groups often forms the foundation of group affiliation, collective identity, sense of membership, belonging and community. This collective commonality with others ultimately helps to define identity.

The Baha'i refugees in this study indicated that their sense of belonging was severely undermined in Iran where they felt like strangers in their own land. Religious collective identity can be destabilized by state sponsored persecution and premeditated topocide of holy places, which has the potential to erode religious identity. However, official and legitimate public recognition of the faith appears to have strengthened the Baha'i identity.

The process of migration and displacement is increasingly undermining the fixed association between place, culture and identity.¹⁰⁷ As a result, the feelings of belonging which bind people to geographic place are now being transferred to transnational communities. This transnational sense of belonging has been facilitated by a recognizable Baha'i administrative structure and global community. This familiar international administrative organisation can potentially ease the trauma surrounding the uprooting of one's life and the uncertainty of exile and settlement in a new land.

The participants in this study revealed that the established Baha'i community in Australia facilitated a sense of belonging and provided a base from which they felt comfortable to actively integrate into their host country while resisting forming ethnic enclaves. Consequently, they believe they have formed hybrid or transnational identities whereby they feel free to retain/reject aspects of their culture of origin while simultaneously adopting/rejecting aspects of their new culture of settlement. This Baha'i identity has been facilitated by considering the Baha'i writings and central tenets such as 'the oneness of mankind' that aspire to the ideal creation of a transnational or global identity.

This international identity manifested on a macro level is recognized through nationalism and transnationalism. Noting that the Baha'i attitude to nationalism is essentially exclusionary, the refugees in this study appear to move beyond fundamental patriotism and allegiance to either Iran or Australia, preferring to identify themselves as global citizens.

The key Baha'i principles of 'the Earth is but one country and mankind its citizens' and 'unity in diversity' as well as the encouragement by the Universal House of Justice for Iranian refugees to disperse amongst the population, have resulted in these participants actively seeking to integrate

¹⁰³. Payman, 11/02/03, 4.

¹⁰⁴. Margaret Bluett, *Nightingales in Terra Nova*, 2006, 7.

¹⁰⁵. *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*. Prepared by the Universal House of Justice, Research Department, (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1988) 98.

¹⁰⁶. Ruth Williams, 2007.

¹⁰⁷. Gupta, 'The song' 333.

into their new country of settlement. This, in turn, has seen them adapting well and negotiating a global identity, which looks toward a broader sense of belonging to the world. Thus, the narratives of the Iranian Baha'i refugee participants in this study reveal that they do not necessarily have particular attachments to geographic place, but derive their sense of belonging and transnational identities through affiliation to an international community. They therefore do not consider themselves a displaced diaspora, they are not living in exile, nor have they moved from one home to another; they have merely relocated to a different part of the one global home.

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The Determinants of Happiness: Does Social Science Corroborate Baha'i Teachings?

Geeta Gandhi Kingdon

Abstract

Happiness is generally considered an important if not the ultimate goal of life. Religion, by giving a prescription for living, purports to give the key to happiness. It prescribes a pattern for living to promote the happiness of individuals and collectively of humankind. There are numerous references in religious writings in general, and in Baha'i writings in particular, to factors/behaviours/social arrangements that lead to happiness. But is there empirical support for the claimed happiness-enhancing effects of these factors and behaviours? The paper asks how much support there is, in the social science literature, for the religious prescription for living.

Keywords

happiness
religion
social science
survey data
Baha'i

Happiness is generally considered an important if not the ultimate goal of human life. In the secular realm there is widespread sanction for the pursuit of happiness. For example, the US Declaration of Independence in 1776 takes it as a self-evident truth that the 'pursuit of happiness' is an 'inalienable right' comparable to that of life and liberty. Surveys show that people rate life satisfaction and happiness as extremely important.¹

Religion, by giving a prescription for living, purports to give the key to happiness. It prescribes a pattern for living to promote the happiness of individuals and collectively of humankind. For instance, Baha'i holy writings state: 'whatsoever are the effective means for safeguarding and promoting the happiness and welfare of the children of men hath already been revealed by the Pen of Glory.'²

There are numerous references in the Baha'i writings to factors that lead to happiness or destroy happiness.³ For instance, marriage is described as a 'fortress for well-being'.⁴ Education is regarded as conducive to happiness⁵ and work/employment, especially when performed in a spirit of service, is deemed highly meritorious.⁶ The Baha'i writings are replete with exhortations to serve others.⁷ It is acknowledged that material acquisitions and wealth raise well-being in the physical realm. Faith, spirituality and trust in God are held up as sources of true happiness.⁸ Association with others⁹ and trustworthiness¹⁰ are exhorted for well-being. Democracy and good governance are praised;¹¹ justice and consultation are exhorted;¹² and extreme inequality in society is held as a thing to be avoided.¹³ But how much empirical support is there for the happiness-enhancing effects of these characteristics, arrangements and behaviours? In other words, how

1. E. Diener and R. Biswas-Diener, 'New directions in subjective well-being research: The cutting edge' (mimeo, Department of Psychology, University of Illinois, 2000). I would like to thank the editorial team of *Baha'i Studies Review* for thoughtful comments and suggestions that have helped to improve the clarity and accessibility of the paper.
2. Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh* (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Centre, 1978) 220.
3. A word search on MARS (a searchable database of Baha'i authoritative texts) revealed 387 references to 'happiness' in the Baha'i writings in the English language.

4. Baha'u'llah, *Bahā'ī Prayers* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1991) 104.
5. 'Education makes the ignorant wise, the tyrant just, promotes happiness, strengthens the mind, develops the will and makes fruitless trees of humanity fruitful.' ('Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1982) 84).
6. 'It is made incumbent on every one of you to engage in some occupation, such as arts, trades, and the like. We have made this – your occupation – identical with the worship of God.' (*Bahā'ī World Faith* (2nd edn., Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1976) 195).
7. Just to mention one example: '[worship] cannot afford lasting satisfaction and benefit to the worshiper himself, much less to humanity in general, unless and until translated and transfused into... dynamic and disinterested service to the cause of humanity.' (Shoghi Effendi, *Bahā'ī Administration* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1968) 186).
8. 'True happiness depends on spiritual good and having the heart ever open to receive the Divine Bounty. If the heart turns away from the blessings God offers how can it hope for happiness? If it does not put its hope and trust in God's Mercy, where can it find rest?' ('Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris*

much support is there in the social science literature for the prescriptions of religion?

Much progress has been made in the past 20 years in understanding the determinants of happiness. Indeed one could say there has been a silent revolution in the science of happiness, moving it beyond the stage of speculation and using a combination of methods in the analysis of human sensations, emotions and moods. This work has been achieved mainly within the discipline of psychology but more recently has involved groups as diverse as neurobiologists and economists, engaging different disciplines for different reasons. It has interested economists because it can potentially guide economic policy which, after all, avowedly aims to improve the population's well-being.

This paper does two things: first, it briefly summarizes the existing academic literature on happiness, drawing out some important themes and considering the strong policy implications of some of this literature. This section draws heavily from the work of Layard,¹⁴ Frey and Stutzer,¹⁵ and Diener and Biswas-Diener,¹⁶ which are overviews of the happiness literature. Second, it asks how people's self-reported happiness relates to religious teachings for happiness. In other words it asks whether and to what extent the practice of behaviours prescribed by religion leads to increases in individuals' actual happiness levels? This section summarizes work in several different studies but draws most heavily from the work of Helliwell.¹⁷

Major findings in the existing literature on happiness

1. Measuring happiness

Happiness is typically measured by psychologists by individuals' self-reports of satisfaction with life. It is measured by people's response to a 'global' happiness question such as 'Taking everything into account, how happy/satisfied are you on a scale of 1 to 5?' (the scale can vary, e.g. 1–4, 1–7 or 1–10). This measure is often also called perceived well-being or subjective well-being (SWB). Some surveys also ask separate 'domain happiness' questions in more limited spheres, for example, satisfaction with work, pay, living conditions, health, housing and so forth.

The response to a happiness question can depend on transitory states such as mood at the time of the interview or some recent experience. For instance, we may not normally think of our physical mobility when we judge our life satisfaction but Schwarz and Strack¹⁸ found that when a person in a wheelchair was in view during their satisfaction survey, respondents were more satisfied with their lives than when a person with physical disability was not present. In other words, seeing a disabled person makes health-related well-being salient for a respondent at the time of the interview. As a result of the element of transience in perceived happiness, some people have questioned the validity of this self-reported measure of happiness. Diener and Lucas propose that a person's SWB can be influenced by several judgment standards.¹⁹ Which standards are most relevant will depend in part on a person's temperament, culture and values. Highly relevant standards are likely to be enduringly salient to the person and therefore to influence his/her SWB much of the time, but situational

variables can intervene to make a particular standard salient at a particular moment.

To measure SWB more strongly than via a global happiness question psychologists have developed multi-item measures of SWB. Comparison shows that respondents' answers to the global SWB question are fairly consistent with daily mood reports, informant reports, spouse reports and with recall for positive versus negative life events. People who score high on global life satisfaction are less likely to attempt suicide or to become depressed in the future. But do the feelings that people report correspond accurately to any kind of objective reality; that is to say, when people say they feel something is there a corresponding event that can be objectively measured? Diener and Biswas-Diener report evidence showing that self-report scales correlate with smiling.²⁰ Layard finds from the neuroscience literature that feelings that people report correspond closely to activities in the brain, which we can measure from instant to instant. He cites work by Davison which shows that positive feelings correspond to brain activity in the left side of the pre-frontal cortex, somewhat above and in front of the ear, and negative feelings correspond to brain activity in the same place on the right side of the brain (for right-handed people).²¹ This can be measured with functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). MRI scan pictures show that when people are shown a nice picture (a happy baby), the left side of the brain is activated and an unpleasant picture (of a severely deformed baby) activates the right side (seen as light patches due to a change in oxygen flow in the brain). Research shows that people whose left side is especially active (left-siders) report more positive feelings and memories, smile more, and are assessed by friends as being happier than are the right-siders.²²

Thus, self-reported measures of happiness such as those on the global or domain happiness questions have external validity in other more objective measures. The global happiness response shows moderate stability and appropriate sensitivity to changing life circumstances.²³

2. An important paradox

Research on happiness notes an intriguing paradox: since about 1950 real income has increased drastically but self-reported happiness of the population has not increased. Figure 1 shows US per capita Gross Domestic Product or GDP (i.e. average income per head) and also shows the percentage of people reporting themselves as 'very happy', throughout the post-war period. It shows that the percentage of people who were 'very happy' rose in the 1950s, dipped in the 1960s and has been fairly stable ever since. Frey and Stutzer report that between 1946 and 1991, per capita real income in the United States rose two and a half times – from about \$11,000 to \$27,000 in 1996 US dollar terms – but over the same period, happiness on average remained virtually constant.²⁴ Figure 2 shows corresponding numbers for Japan. Between 1958 and 1991, per capita income in Japan rose by a factor of six but this tremendous rise in material well-being was not accompanied by an increase in average satisfaction with life. Average life satisfaction rated on a four-point scale was 2.7 in 1958 and in 1991, after more than 30 years of increasing incomes, average life satisfaction still scored 2.7 points.

Talks (12th ed., London: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1995) 108).

9. 'Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship.' (Bahā'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā'u'llah* (rev. ed., London: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1978) 94).
10. 'Trustworthiness is the greatest portal leading unto the tranquillity and security of the people.' (Bahā'u'llah, *Tablets of Bahā'u'llah* 37).
11. 'Under an autocratic government the opinions of men are not free, and development is stifled, whereas in democracy, because thought and speech are not restricted, the greatest progress is witnessed.' ('Abdul-Baha, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 197).
12. 'Say: No man can attain his true station except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation.' (Bahā'u'llah, *Bahā'ī Consultation* (London: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1970) 1).
13. 'Human beings are different in ability and should, therefore, be different in their social and economic standing. Extremes of wealth and poverty should, however, be abolished...' (Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian* (comp. Gertrude Garrida, New Delhi: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1973) 20).

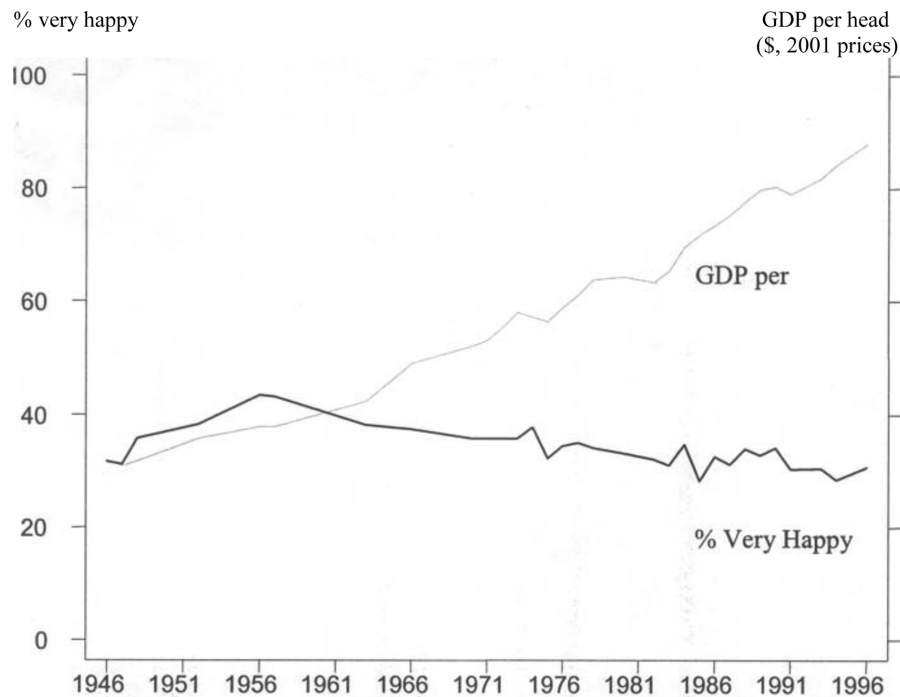


Figure 1: Income and happiness in the USA.

Source: Richard Layard, 'Happiness: Has social science a clue?', Lionel Robbins Memorial Lectures, 3, 4, 5 March 2003, London School of Economics. Available at <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/events/lectures/layard/RL030303.pdf>.

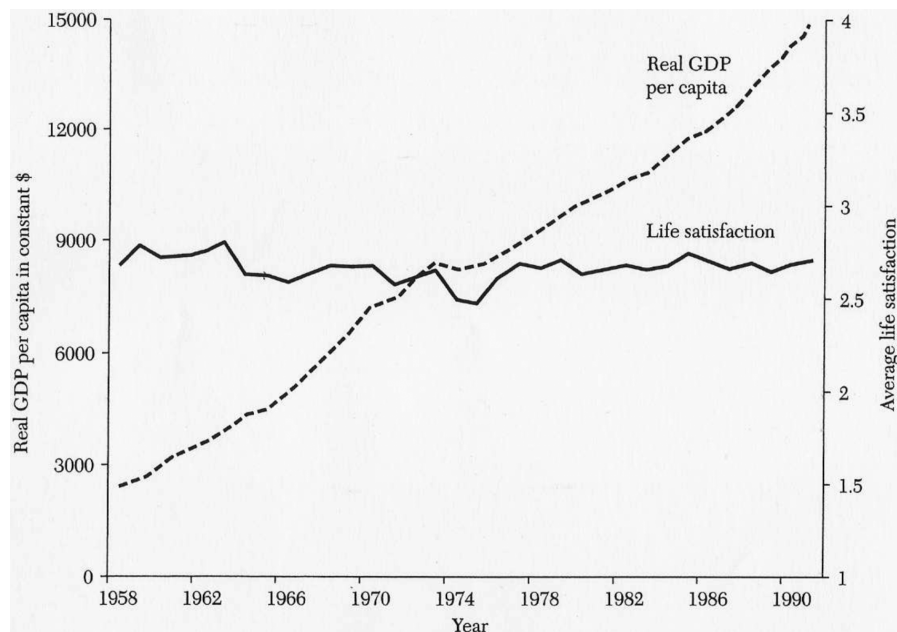


Figure 2: Income and happiness in Japan.

Source: Bruno Frey and Alois Stutzer, 'What can economists learn from happiness research?', *Journal of Economic Literature*, vol. 40 (2002) 402–35, see p. 413.

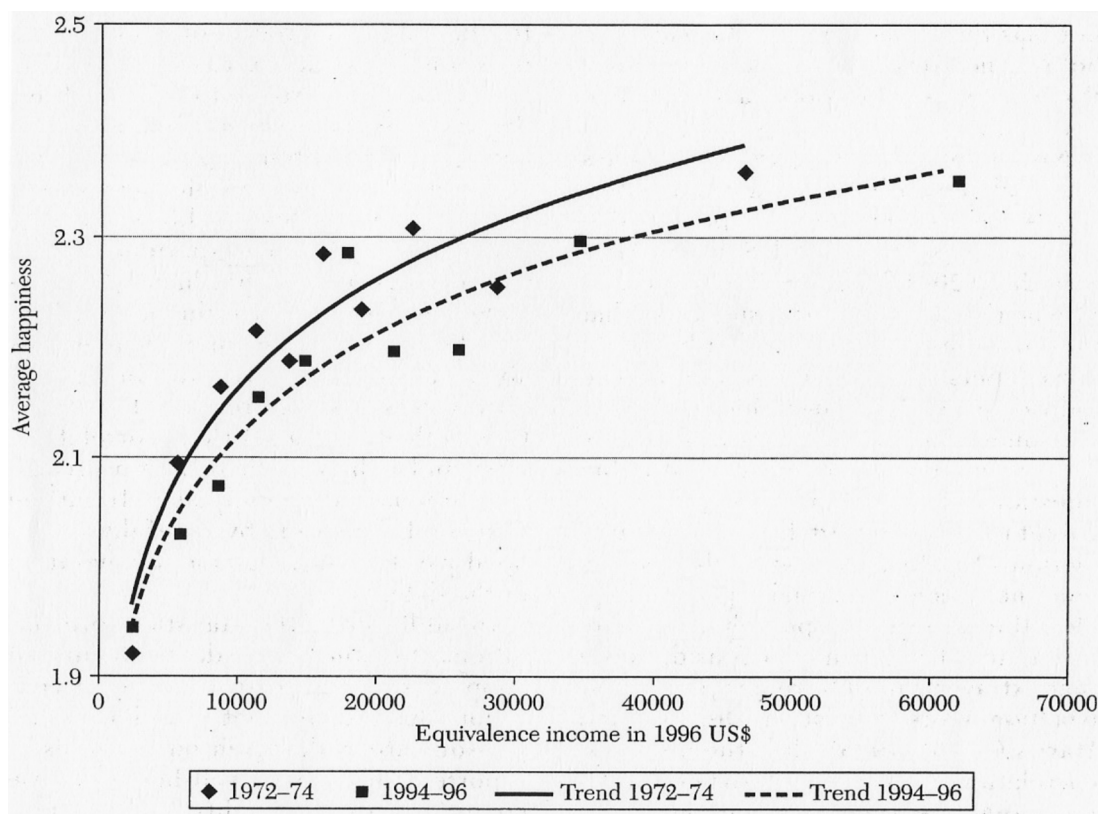


Figure 3: Income and happiness in the USA.

Source: Frey and Stutzer, 'What can economists learn' 408.

The puzzle is deepened when we note that at any given point in time, better-off people are significantly happier than worse-off people. Figure 3 shows a positive relationship between income and happiness in the United States of America from 1972 to 1974 and also from 1994 to 1996, even though happiness increases with income at a decreasing rate (the slope becomes flatter at higher income levels). Figure 4 shows a very similar relationship between per capita income and happiness level across countries, using World Values Survey data from the early or mid-1990s.²⁵

Thus, on the one hand, an individual in a given country at a given time becomes happier if he is richer (and presumably that is why people want to become richer) but, at the same time when the whole society becomes richer, nobody seems to be any happier.

3. What explains the paradox?

What explains why all efforts to become richer are largely so self-defeating in terms of the overall happiness of society? The answer to the puzzle is that people must be comparing their income with some norm or aspiration which is moving up in line with actual income. Layard²⁶ cites a Gallup poll for many years in the United States which asked, 'What is the smallest amount of money a family of four needs to get along in this community?' The answer – representing perceived needs – rose in line

14. Richard Layard, 'Happiness: Has social science a clue?', Lionel Robbins Memorial Lectures, 3, 4, 5 March, 2003, London School of Economics. Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from A New Science* (London: Allen Lane, 2005).

15. Bruno Frey and Alois Stutzer, 'What can economists learn from happiness research?', *Journal of Economic Literature*, 40 (2002) 402–35.

16. Diener and Biswas-Diener, 'New directions'.

17. John Helliwell, 'How's life? Combining individual and

Happiness (index)

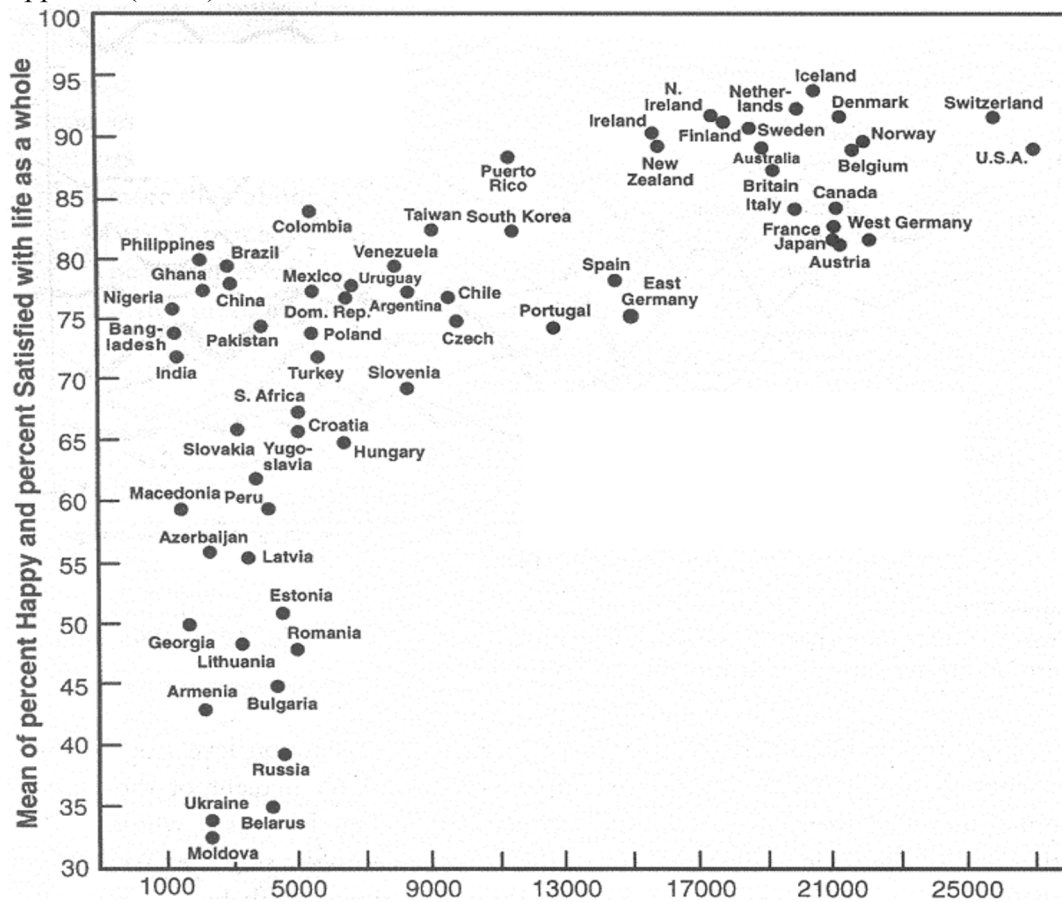


Figure 4: Income and happiness.

Source: R. Inglehart and H.D. Klingemann, 'Genes, culture, democracy and happiness', in E. Diener and E.M. Suh (eds), *Culture and Subjective Well-being* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2000).

- national variables to explain subjective well-being', *Economic Modelling*, 20, no. 2 (2003) 331–60.
18. N. Schwarz and F. Strack, 'Reports of well-being: A review of context effects in reports of well-being and their conceptual and methodological implications', in *Well-being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (eds. Kahneman, Diener and Schwarz, New York: Russell Sage, 1999) 61–84.

with average real income over time, as seen in Figure 5. Similarly, Layard reports that since 1972 Americans have been asked whether they are satisfied with their financial position. Although real income per head rose over the time period under consideration, the proportion of people who say they are pretty well satisfied with their financial situation actually fell, suggesting that the norm with which people compare themselves has risen faster than incomes.

There are two potential reasons why over time this norm is moving up in line with (or somewhat above) the average income level and thus why happiness levels have remained constant or fallen somewhat, despite huge income growth:

- The importance of comparison with others (labelled somewhat negatively as 'rivalry')
- The fact that people adapt to higher income levels and their aspirations rise ('habituation')

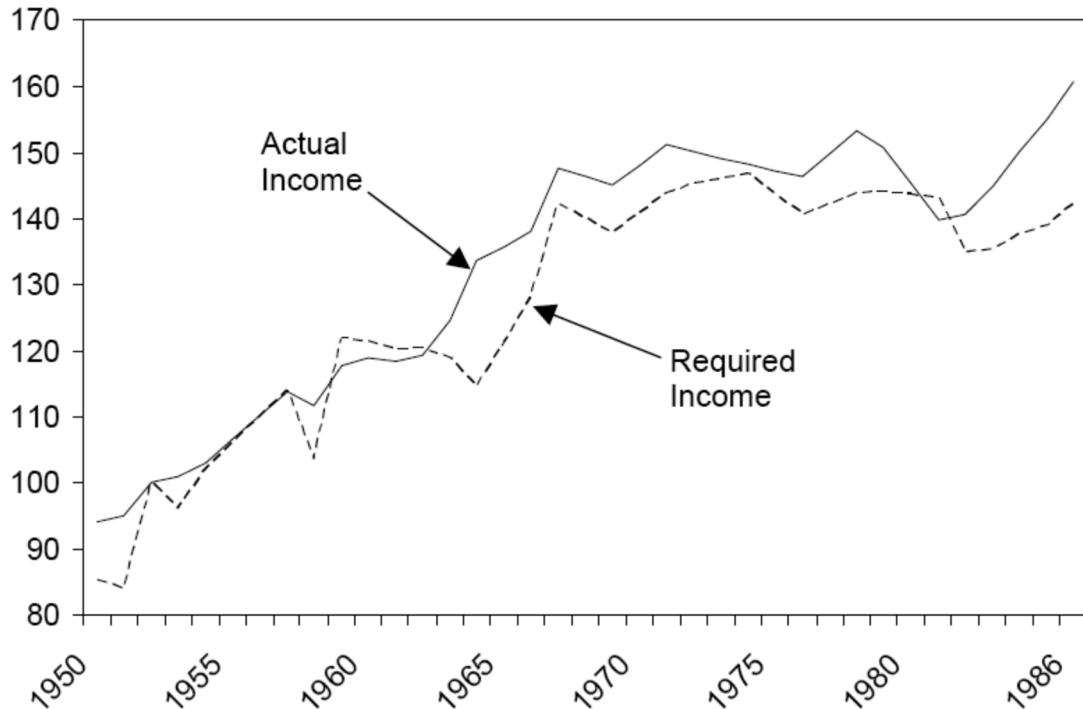


Figure 5: Required real income and actual average real income (1952 = 100).

Source: Layard, 'Happiness'.

Rivalry: First, the rivalry explanation: this suggests that if others become better off, I need more in order to feel as good as before. There is much evidence that among people whose basic needs are satisfied, relative income matters a great deal (and sometimes more than absolute income) to a person's happiness. This seems to describe the common concern to 'keep up with the Joneses'.

An interesting line of research on rivalry asks 'relative to whom'? People compare their incomes with 'relevant others' such as work colleagues, proximate others, and others of their own race/education level/occupation, etc.²⁷ People's comparator groups are typically others close to themselves (rather than dissimilar others) because the outcomes of people like oneself are seen as feasible for oneself. Thus, in 1993, the final year of apartheid in South Africa, blacks compared themselves with blacks and not with whites, presumably because the status attained by whites were not perceived as feasible for blacks.²⁸ Much of the most intense comparisons are with other employees within one's own organization (a reason for keeping salaries secret) and even with one's spouse: Clark and Oswald find that the more your spouse earns, the less satisfied you are with your own job.²⁹ If people change their reference group, this can seriously change their happiness. Layard gives the example of East Germany where people became objectively better off but felt subjectively worse: living standards have soared since 1990 but the level of happiness has plummeted because they now compare themselves with West Germans rather than with the Soviet bloc.³⁰ Similarly, TV images can create ambitious aspirations. There is evidence that people who watch TV a lot are less happy and one reason suggested for this is that

19. E. Diener and R.E. Lucas, 'Explaining differences in societal levels of happiness: Relative standards, need fulfillment, culture, and evaluation theory', *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 1 (2000) 41–78.
20. *ibid.*
21. Layard, 'Social science'. Layard, *Lessons*.
22. *ibid.*
23. Diener and Biswas-Diener, 'New directions'.
24. Frey and Stutzer, 'Economists' 402–35.
25. It is striking that people in the communist-bloc countries were the most miserable. South Africans – affected

by apartheid – were also, on average, very unhappy: despite having a per capita income about four times that of India's, their mean happiness was lower than that of Indians.

26. Layard, 'Social science'.
27. A. Clark and A. Oswald, 'Satisfaction and comparison income', *Journal of Public Economics*, 61 (1996) 359–81. G. Kingdon and J. Knight, 'Community, Comparison and Subjective Well-being', *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organisation*, 64, no. 1 (September 2007) 69–90, working paper version on Oxford University website <http://www.csae.ox.ac.uk/workingpapers/pdfs/2004-21text.pdf>. Erzo Luttmer, 'Neighbors as negatives: Relative earnings and well-being', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 120, no. 3 (2005) 963–1002.
28. Kingdon and Knight, 'Community'.
29. A. Clark and A. Oswald, 'Satisfaction' 359–81.
30. Layard, 'Social science'.
31. Armin Falk and Markus Knell, 'Choosing the Joneses: Endogenous Goals and Reference Standards', *Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 106, no. 3 (2004) 417–35.
32. Oded Stark and J. Edward Taylor, 'Migration, incentives, migration types: The role of relative deprivation', *Economic*

the opulent and rich seen on television provide the standards they then aspire to. Of course, people can also deliberately choose the Joneses with whom to compare themselves; that is to say, people's reference groups can be chosen by them to achieve particular goals.³¹ For instance, if the goal is self-improvement, a person will tend to make upward comparisons, comparing herself with those who have higher achievements/income than herself. If her goal is self-enhancement, she will tend to make downward comparisons, comparing herself with people who are less fortunate/lower achievers/less well-off than herself. People may migrate to a different neighbourhood in order to change their comparator group.³²

Research shows that an increase in other people's income reduces an individual's subjective well-being (SWB) or happiness. If a person earns an extra 10 per cent and so does everyone else, they experience roughly only two-thirds of the extra happiness that would accrue if they alone had had the rise. It is as if other people's income imposes a 33 per cent tax on their own income. Layard argues that this finding has very important implications for public policy (more on this later).³³

Habituation: Second, there is the habituation explanation of rising norms/aspirations. Although material goods provide extra pleasure initially, this is usually only transitory; it wears off. Human beings are very adaptable and over time they habituate to both good and bad events. On the one hand this means that even very impoverished people can live in relative happiness because they adapt to their uncomfortable situation. On the other, it means that it is difficult for people to be permanently lifted on to a higher level of happiness because people quickly become habituated to better material circumstances. The effect of habituation is shown in a stylized illustration in Figure 6 which shows that

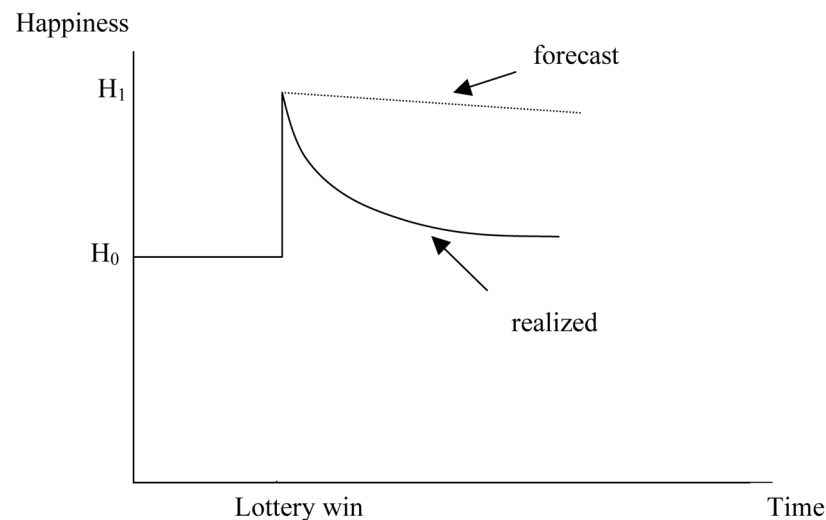


Figure 6: The effect of adaptation or habituation

Source: Stylized illustration of the findings in P. Brickman, D. Coates and R. Janoff-Bulman, 'Lottery Winners and Accident Victims: Is Happiness Relative?', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36, no. 8 (1978) 917–27; and E. Diener and S. Oishi, 'Money and happiness: Income and subjective well-being across nations', in E. Diener and E.M. Suh (eds), *Culture and subjective well-being* 185–218.

following a lottery win, which leads to a sudden large increase in happiness level, people adapt to their new situation and their happiness level bounces back, in time, to somewhere near their original level of happiness (their 'base-line' level of happiness, which may be determined by their temperament).

Evidence for habituation and adapted aspirations comes from many sources. For instance, people's 'required income' varies strongly with their actual income. Layard reports that a 10 per cent rise in actual income causes a roughly 5 per cent rise in 'required income'.³⁴ Similarly in panel data studies in the United Kingdom, job satisfaction is unaffected by the level of wages and depends only on their rate of change. Di Tella et al. find that the previous income of the individual reduced average happiness by two-thirds as much as current income increased it, implying a strong negative habituation coming from past/lagged wages.³⁵ When a person arrives at a new condition (e.g. a new level of high income), this tends to change her aspiration level to a new high as well. This leads to what psychologists call being on the 'hedonic treadmill'. In each period, a person tries to rise up a rung but quickly adjusts to his new higher level and aspires to an even higher level; thus in the next period that rung is once again at the bottom, from which he tries to rise again.³⁶ In other words, satisfaction depends on change and disappears with continued consumption.

Happiness, or lack of it, is not determined by achievement but rather by the gap between aspiration and achievement. The effects of rising aspirations on happiness can be seen in Figure 7 taken from Frey and Stutzer.³⁷ Initially people have a certain level of aspiration A_1 so that income y_1 produces happiness H_1 . Raising income to y_2 raises happiness to H_2 and if income increases further to y_3 , happiness increases to H_3 . The points a , b and c trace a curve which displays decreasing marginal utility of income. This

Journal, 101, no. 408 (1991) 1163–78.

33. Layard, 'Social science'.

34. *ibid.*

35. R. Di Tella, R. MacCulloch and R. Layard, 'Income, happiness and inequality as measures of welfare', (mimeo, 2002).

36. Some modifications have been made to the hedonic treadmill idea. For example, it has been found that the extent of habituation depends on individual temperament (not everyone comes back to the same baseline) and also that people do not habituate to certain circumstances such as unemployment; see Diener and Biswas-Diener, 'New directions'.

37. Frey and Stutzer, 'Economists' 402–35.

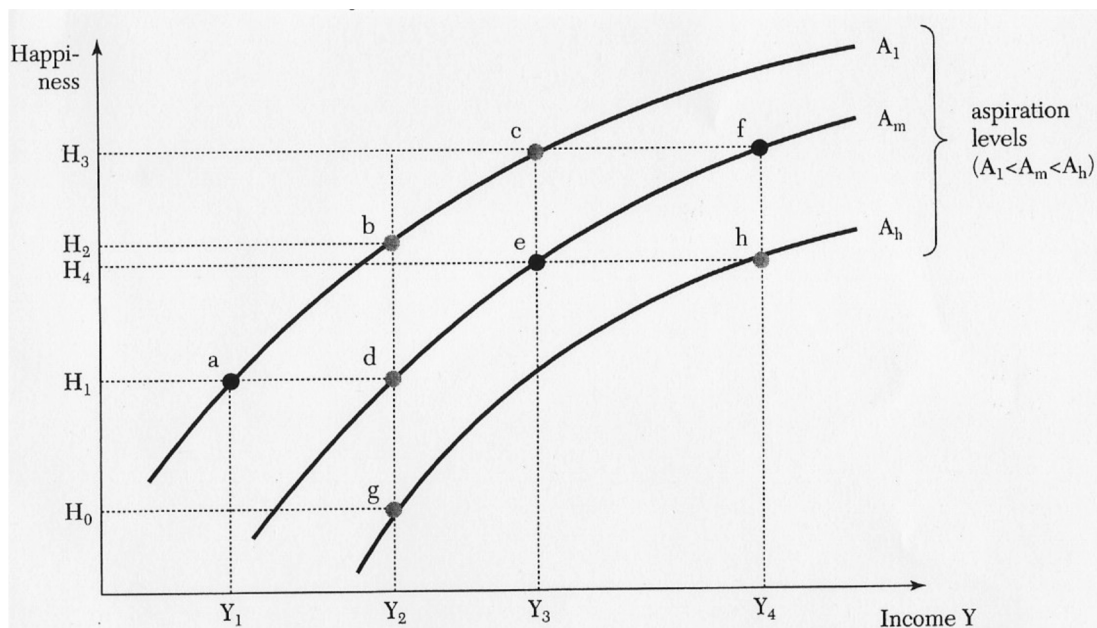


Figure 7: Happiness, income and the role of aspiration level.

Source: Frey and Stutzer, 'What can economists learn' 415.

38. Layard, 'Social science'.

39. *ibid.*

curve suggests that at a particular point in time higher income does indeed make people happier. But over time, aspiration adjusts to the higher income level. The aspiration level A_l shifts outwards to A_m . Ex post, the rise in income from y_1 to y_2 does not produce any increase in happiness if the aspiration curve indeed shifts as much as assumed in the graph. If the increase in income jacks up aspirations even higher to, say, A_h , then income Y_2 produces even less happiness than the lower income Y_1 .

The consequences of habituation and rising aspirations are that:

- People are never satisfied with what they have got. They want to achieve even more
- Wants are insatiable: the more one gets, the more one wants
- Most people think that they felt less happy in the past but expect to be more happy in the future; that is they are not able to foresee the effects of habituation and tend to over-predict the increase in happiness that would arise from the attainment of a given new, higher level of income or status.

4. Policy implications from happiness literature

Tax implications: Habituation and rivalry have potentially profound tax implications. If people do not see that they are on a self-defeating treadmill, they under-estimate the habituation process and are on a fruitless quest for status. To Layard, the policy implications are stark:

if we do not foresee how we get used to our material possessions, we shall over-invest in acquiring them, at the expense of our leisure...The result is a distortion of our life towards work and away from other pursuits...And a natural way to offset the distortion is to tax spending (just as we tax smoking) in order to discourage excessive self-defeating work.³⁸

To discourage people from making huge sacrifices of their private life (such as time with their family) in the pursuit of higher income (a self-defeating pursuit if there is a high degree of habituation), Layard advocates greater use of taxation to preserve a sensible balance between work and leisure, just as governments discourage vices such as alcohol, smoking, drugs and irresponsible behaviour such as polluting and not wearing seatbelts in cars.

Second, the tax implications of rivalry are also potentially important. Summarizing the evidence, Layard states

if my income increases, the *loss* of happiness to everyone else is about 30 percent of the *gain* in happiness to me. This is a form of pollution and to discourage excessive pollution, the polluter should pay for the disbenefit he causes. So the polluter should lose 30 pence out of every 100 pence that he earns – a tax rate of 30 per cent on all additional income. Assuming the tax proceeds are returned to him through useful public spending, he will work less hard – and the self-defeating element in work will have been eliminated.³⁹

However, Layard's tax-increasing policy prescriptions are controversial because they are interventionist. Moreover, habituation effects would have to be

large for this prescription to be valid. Furthermore, they hold only if status and habituation effects are not found in alternative activities. Clark finds that while activities such as time with family and in social life are indeed positively correlated with measures of SWB, status and habituation effects are also found in both family and social life.⁴⁰ Comparison to others and to the past seems to be a key element of many human activities, not just of work and earned income. Thus, the policy implications of SWB research need to be thought through more carefully.

Implications for measuring societal well-being: Insights arising from happiness research have also led to a re-evaluation of the ways in which countries measure well-being. By far the most enduring and commonly used measure of societal well-being and progress is per capita GDP (income). The pursuit of higher incomes has led in most countries to an overarching emphasis on economic growth, often to the detriment of other goals such as a safe ecology and a healthy environment. However, if relative income matters more than absolute income, this has powerful implications. In the extreme case, if people care only about their relative income and not at all about their absolute income, then economic growth cannot make people better off. If people's reference groups remain stable and relative incomes are unchanged, everyone's happiness would remain the same even if everyone's absolute incomes rose many fold – which is what we observed in Figure 1. This observation has given support to those who dislike the emphasis on GDP growth as the sole criterion for progress, such as those that support the 'Human Development Index' (HDI) of the UNDP. This is an index of development based on three quantities: per capita GDP, life-expectancy and education of a country.

Indeed happiness research suggests ways in which a better measure of well-being might be developed. At present, the HDI is based on three arbitrarily chosen indicators of well-being (income, longevity and education), with each arbitrarily being given an equal weight. Statistical analysis can show which factors are the most important in determining SWB and can also provide the appropriate weights that a population attaches to different factors. Kingdon and Knight attempt to do this using South African data.⁴¹ Their results show that apart from the variables representing income, health and education (the three included in the UNDP's Human Development Index), a range of other factors matter significantly to SWB as well, for instance the avoidance of unemployment, freedom from crime, availability of public amenities (such as public transport) and racial equity. Their equation (as also the equation in Helliwell's paper in Table 1 below) suggests the relative weight people attach to these different factors in determining their happiness level. Of course, the factors and weights could differ from society to society if the notion of what constitutes a good life differs by culture.

Happiness-based measures of societal well-being: The perceived inadequacy of per capita GDP as a gauge of well-being has led to attempts to measure well-being and quality of life more broadly. Work is under way currently to develop a system of national happiness accounts (to parallel national income accounts) and to calculate the gross national happiness (GNH), paralleling

40. A. Clark, 'Happiness, Habits and High Rank: Human and Social Capital' (mimeo, Paris, 2005).
41. G. Kingdon and J. Knight, 'Subjective Well-being Poverty Versus Income Poverty and Capabilities Poverty', *Journal of Development Studies*, 42, no. 7 (Oct. 2006) 1199–224. Working paper on Oxford University website <http://www.csae.ox.ac.uk/workingpapers/pdfs/2003-16text.pdf>.

42. See 'Rethinking Development: Local Pathways to Global Wellbeing', Second International Conference on Gross National Happiness, St Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada, 20–24 June 2005. <http://www.gpiatlantic.org/conference/conference.shtml>. Bhutan was the first country to have embraced this idea.
43. A. Revkin, 'A new measure of well-being from a happy little kingdom', *New York Times*, 4 October 2005.
44. Helliwell, 'How's life?' 331–60.

calculation of the Gross National Product (GNP).⁴² One approach is to study how individuals perceive the daily flow of their lives, having them keep diary-like charts reflecting how various activities, from paying bills to playing softball, make them feel. A research team at Princeton University headed by labour economist Alan Krueger is working with the US Bureau of Labor Statistics to incorporate this kind of charting into the Bureau's new time-use survey, which began in 2004 and is given to four thousand Americans each month. The idea is to start with life as people experience it and then try to understand what helps people feel fulfilled and create conditions that generate that. For example, subjecting students to more testing in order to make them more competitive may equip them to succeed in the quest for ever more income. But that benefit would have to be balanced against the problems that come with the increased stress imposed by additional testing.⁴³

Is there empirical support for the Baha'i prescription for living?

There are a number of empirical studies of the determinants of happiness – with different research or regional focuses and different variables reflecting data availability. To illustrate the general findings from this literature about the correlates of happiness, I have chosen a study by Helliwell that uses the widest set of explanatory variables of all available studies. It is also one of the most cited studies. It uses data on 87,806 individuals from 46 different countries who participated in three waves of the World Values Survey between 1980 and 1997.⁴⁴

In the World Values Survey (WVS), happiness is measured by the individual's general satisfaction with life on a ten-point scale, with 10 representing the greatest satisfaction and 1 representing the greatest dissatisfaction. Table 1 shows Helliwell's results. I supplement Helliwell's findings with those from other studies where possible. Examination of findings in the happiness literature can enable us to identify to what extent there is empirical support for the prescriptions of religion in general, and the Baha'i Faith in particular.

In interpreting the results, the 'coefficient' of a variable is a measure of the weight or influence of that variable in determining the independent variable (happiness level). However, since different variables are scaled differently (for instance, health is measured on a five-point scale but employment is measured on a two-point scale and relative income on a ten-point scale, etc.), therefore it is not possible to simply compare the coefficients of the different variables in order to say which has the greater weight in determining happiness. The t-value is a measure of the statistical significance of the variable. Any variables that have a t-value greater than 2 have a statistically significant association with happiness. A negative t-value on a variable indicates that that variable has a negative correlation with individuals' self-reported happiness levels. Thus, for example, a t-value of +5 on a given variable would mean that that variable has a statistically significant positive correlation with self-reported happiness levels and a t-value of –5 on a variable would mean that the variable has a statistically significant negative correlation with self-reported happiness.

Variable	Coefficient	t-value
Individual variables		
State of health	-0.608	-73.9
Unemployed	-0.587	-18.8
Married	0.429	19.6
As married	0.238	6.7
Divorced	-0.049	-1.2
Separated	-0.355	-6.3
Widowed	0.013	0.2
EDUC 16-19	-0.691	-3.7
EDUC 20-22	-0.660	-3.2
EDUC 23-29	0.097	2.9
AGE 25-34	-0.193	-7.9
AGE 35-44	-0.350	-13.0
AGE 45-54	-0.333	-11.4
AGE 55-64	-0.099	-3.2
AGE 65 UP	0.192	5.6
CHURCH	0.144	7.4
GOD	0.373	20.9
MEM 12	0.033	2.3
MEM 3	0.064	5.2
NOCHEAT	0.225	15.5
TRUST	0.240	15.9
INCOME RELATIVE	1.903	15.9
INCOME RELATIVE SQ	-0.955	-8.8
National variables		
LN INCOME NATIONAL	0.265	15.9
LN INCOME NATIONAL SQ	-0.773	-8.5
TRUST NATIONAL	0.319	2.8
GOVT. TOT	0.317	12.0
NOCHEAT NATIONAL	0.263	4.3
CHURCH NATIONAL	0.161	3.0
MEM 12 NATIONAL	0.578	7.6
MEM 3 NATIONAL	0.576	15.0
EDUC ATTAIN NATIONAL	0.005	0.7
WAVE 2	0.215	8.7
WAVE 3	-0.280	-7.1
FORMER SOVIET UNION	-0.815	-14.0
EASTERN EUROPE	-0.465	-10.4
LATIN AMERICA	0.322	7.9
ASIA	-0.054	-1.2
OTHER DEV. COUNTRIES	-0.124	-2.4
SCANDINAVIA	0.445	11.1
Constant	6.965	90.1
Adjusted R Square	0.263	
Number of individuals	87,806	

Table 1: Well-being explained by individual and societal variables

Note: For explanation of terms and variables see text. The adjusted R-square measures the proportion of total variation in the dependent variable explained by the independent variables, i.e. by the variables included in the equation. It is a measure of the equation's 'goodness of fit'.

45. R. Di Tella, R. MacCulloch and A. Oswald, 'Preferences over Inflation and Unemployment: Evidence from Surveys of Happiness', *American Economic Review*, 91 (March 2001) 335–41. A. Clark, 'Unemployment as a social norm: Psychological evidence from panel data', *Journal of Labor Economics*, 21 (2003) 323–51. Liliana Winkelmann and Rainer Winkelmann, 'Why are the unemployed so unhappy? Evidence from panel data', *Economica*, 65 (1998) 1–15. Kingdon and Knight, 'Subjective' 1199–224.
46. A. Clark, 'Unemployment' 323–51.
47. L. Winkelmann and R. Winkelmann, 'Why' 1–15.
48. Baha'u'llah, *Baha'i Prayers* 104.
49. Kingdon and Knight, 'Subjective' 1199–224.

Health

Ill-health (with 1 being very good health and 5 being very poor health) has a large and significant impact on SWB. From the coefficient and given the scaling of the variable, Helliwell calculates that a 1 per cent decrease in health lowers SWB by just more than 1 per cent. The effect of health is also consistently strong in other studies.⁴⁵ Religion in general, the Baha'i Faith included, clearly places an emphasis on good health.

Employment status

In Helliwell's happiness equation, unemployment takes the value of 1 and employment the value of 0. It is clear in Table 1 that unemployment significantly depresses SWB. However, since the survey did not collect information on how long the individual has been unemployed, Helliwell could not attempt to disentangle habituation effects (which would tend to lessen the effect of long-standing unemployment) from the offsetting effect of the build-up of debt and despair associated with long-term unemployment. Other studies find that the higher the unemployment rate in an individual's region or neighbourhood, the smaller is the negative effect of the individual's own unemployment on her SWB,⁴⁶ presumably because the higher the prevalence of unemployment in one's locality the less blameworthy one's own unemployment appears to be in relation to one's comparator group. Winkelmann and Winkelmann⁴⁷ find that the effect of unemployment on SWB is larger than the effect of ill-health and that it would require a tremendously large increase in income to compensate a person for loss of employment. This provides support for the Baha'i prescription that everyone must engage in some form of employment and its general exaltation of work.

Marriage status

The third set of variables relate to family status and they show a clear hierarchy of well-being with those who are married being happiest followed by the 'living as married', widows or widowers, the divorced and the separated. Helliwell calculates that the difference between being married and separated in terms of its effect on SWB is greater than the effect of unemployment on SWB. The fact that being separated lowers SWB more than being divorced may reflect that those who are currently divorced have had more time for habituation and recovery than those who are currently separated since divorces follow separations. Almost every study cited thus far finds that marriage is associated with higher SWB than other marital states. This correlates well with the emphasis in the Baha'i religion on marriage as a 'fortress for well-being'.⁴⁸

Education

Unfortunately, the question on education in the World Values Survey was imperfect, being based solely on the ages at which individuals finished their full-time education (grade repetition, different ages for starting school, etc. render this data unsatisfactory). Even so, people who completed education at age 23 to 29 (i.e. those likely to have higher education) are significantly happier than the base group, i.e. those who finished education by age 15. Kingdon and Knight have similar findings on education.⁴⁹ In every study that

has satisfactory education data, the effect of education is to significantly and substantially raise SWB.⁵⁰ This provides insights into why the Baha'i holy writings lay an important emphasis on education.

Age

Age has a U-shaped relationship with SWB. Young people (aged 18–24 years) are the happiest. SWB falls with age, reaching the lowest point at age 35–44 years, and then rises again. The effect of age is large: those aged over 65 have well-being more than one-half point higher than those aged 35–44, a difference almost as great as that between the employed and the unemployed. This U-shaped pattern is similar to that found in a number of studies in the United Kingdom and the United States and in Kingdon and Knight's studies of South Africa.⁵¹

Religious belief and activity

Few studies have access to data on belief in God or church attendance. The WVS provides a unique opportunity to look at the relationship between religious activity and life satisfaction since people were asked about the importance of God in their lives (a measure of faith in God) as well as their frequency of attending church/temple. In the sample, 33 per cent reported that God was very important in their lives and 22 per cent reported attending church weekly or more frequently. Both variables have strong linkages to SWB though the effect of frequent church attendance is only one-third as large as the effect of faith in God. Helliwell reports that tests of the differences of these effects among religions show that they apply across all major faiths.

The role of religion in determining SWB is the focus of a paper by Clark and Lelkes.⁵² This focuses on the impact of religiosity in buffering the effect of stressful life events on individual well-being. Using two recent large-scale European data sets (the 2002 European Social Survey and the British Household Panel Survey), it shows first that people who are religious, by whatever measure,⁵³ report higher levels of life satisfaction even after controlling for age, income, education, labour market status, marital status and country. The authors suggest rational choice theoretic reasons for this finding (i.e. reasons that conform to rational self-interest). They speculate that the reason may be that religious institutions provide social capital in the guise of friendship and strong social networks. There is also some evidence that religious institutions contribute to better health by helping individuals to control adverse health behaviours, such as drinking, smoking or drug use. But even when one controls for social networks and for health, as in Helliwell's 2003 study,⁵⁴ belief in God and church attendance continue to have a significant positive effect on happiness, implying that they raise happiness directly, in addition to indirectly raising happiness via improving health behaviour. Second, Clark and Lelkes find that religion does influence the impact of major life events.⁵⁵ Both regular churchgoing and prayer protect against the negative effect of unemployment on SWB; that is, religious people suffer less psychological harm from unemployment and from divorce than do the non-religious.⁵⁶ The paper also finds that the positive effect, on happiness level, of being active in a religious group is much smaller than the positive effect of belief in God. The authors establish that these results are causal, that is to say that causality runs from religion to SWB rather than the

50. Clark, 'Happiness'.
R. Di Tella,
R. MacCulloch
and A. Oswald,
'Preferences' 335–41.
51. Kingdon and Knight,
'Subjective' 1199–224.
Kingdon and Knight,
'Community'.
52. A. Clark and O. Lelkes,
'Deliver us from evil:
Religion as Insurance',
Paper presented to
the Workshop on
Economics of
Religion, Paris-
Journan Sciences
Economiques, Ecole
Normal Supérieure,
Paris, 9 June 2005.
53. Various measures
used are frequency of
churchgoing, belief
(certainty of religious
belief and perceived
strength of relationship
with the divine)
and prayer.
54. Helliwell, 'How's life?'
331–60.
55. Clark and Lelkes,
'Deliver'.
56. While Protestants
are protected against
divorce (i.e. the
adverse effect of
divorce on SWB is
lower for Protestants
compared to non-
religious people),
Catholics suffer a
greater loss of SWB
than non-religious
people.

57. J Gruber, 'Religious Market Structure, Religious Participation, and Outcomes: Is Religion Good for You?', *Advances in Economic Analysis & Policy*, 5 (2005) Article 5.
58. Shoghi Effendi in *Bahiyih Khānum* (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Centre, 1982) 225.
59. 'That one indeed is a man who, today, dediceth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth.' (Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings* 250).
60. 'Adorn your heads with the garlands of trustworthiness and fidelity, your hearts with the attire of the fear of God, your tongues with absolute truthfulness, your bodies with the vesture of courtesy.' (Baha'u'llah, *Kitab-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Centre, 1992) v. 120, p. 62).

other way round. In the British panel data, the religious have less variation in life satisfaction, consistent with an insurance role for religion – religion can mediate the impact of traumatic life events. Additional evidence for the impact of religion on a number of positive economic and social outcomes can be found in a paper by Gruber.⁵⁷ Findings about the positive relationship between SWB on the one hand and faith in God, prayer and church attendance (which is frequently associated with hearing holy writings and religious exhortations) on the other, corroborate the prescription of the Baha'i religion that man must have faith and that 'as ye have faith, so shall your powers and blessings be'.⁵⁸

Social capital

Helliwell constructs two variables relating to an individual's participation in voluntary organizations of all types except church groups (since church participation is covered as a separate variable). One variable (MEM 12) covers the first two waves of the survey while the other relates to the third wave (MEM 3), needed because in the third wave the question was asked differently, producing significantly higher average participation rates. It is clear that individuals who are involved in more voluntary associations report higher average life satisfaction. Membership of voluntary organizations could represent greater association with others (social interaction) or it could represent greater service to others, or both. The Baha'i teachings strongly emphasize the importance of working in society in such a way as to be of service to others.⁵⁹

Trust and honesty

The NOCHEAT variable takes the value of 1 for individuals who think that it is never justifiable to cheat on taxes and 0 otherwise. Table 1 shows that those who think it is never justifiable to cheat on taxes (presumably more honest people) systematically report themselves more satisfied with their lives. The same is true for people who replied 'yes' to the question whether in general people can be trusted rather than the alternative that 'you cannot be too careful when dealing with people' (the TRUST variable). This suggests that honesty and trust are conducive to well-being as emphasized in the Baha'i holy writings.⁶⁰

Income

We saw in Section 2 above that while at any given point in time the simple correlation between per capita GDP and SWB measures across countries is positive, countries with faster growing incomes over time have not shown correspondingly large increases in perceived well-being. Helliwell's review of the effect of income on SWB in various studies shows that in studies based on data from any one country, people with higher relative incomes have significantly higher SWB, though the size of the effect is often small. Studies have also found that big increases in individual income or wealth, such as due to a lottery win, raise SWB but that such positive effects decline with time to fairly small levels. Some studies have found that individuals who rate financial success highly have lower values of SWB, even when their financial aspirations were met. Helliwell's own cross-national study finds that SWB increases with relative income but at a

sharply decreasing rate; that is to say, the rate at which it increases with income falls as income increases.⁶¹ The Baha'i teachings emphasize that focusing our lives upon gaining ever greater wealth will not bring us happiness or fulfilment.⁶²

National variables

Helliwell adds national (averaged) variables to his SWB equation as well (see Table 1).⁶³ 'National variables' record the effect on the individual's SWB from living in a society where the majority of others, but not necessarily oneself, have the variable in question. Thus, NOCHEAT NATIONAL gives the effect of living in a society where a higher proportion of people do not cheat, regardless of whether one personally cheats or not. Helliwell finds that the log of national average income also has diminishing returns (as did individual level income). The next variable is national average trust. This has a large and significant effect on SWB. Since the equation also includes the individual's own estimate of the extent to which others can be trusted (i.e. since it includes the individual-level trust variable), the coefficient on the national trust variable can be taken to reflect the average perceived benefits to individuals of living in an environment where other people can be trusted. The next national variable is quality of governance (GOVT. TOT) based on a World Bank index constructed from six different aspects of governance: voice and accountability, stability and lack of violence, government effectiveness, the regulatory framework, the rule of law and the control of corruption. The coefficient on GOVT. TOT implies substantial SWB benefits from improvements in the quality of governance.

The effect of quality of government on SWB has been explored in much more detail by Helliwell and Huang.⁶⁴ They find that measures of the quality of government strongly dominate per capita incomes as determinants of life satisfaction (i.e. quality of governance has a much larger effect than per capita income on life satisfaction). They find ample evidence that better government does improve the prospects for higher per capita incomes, as revealed in their equations by reductions (sometimes significant, and generally in the 10 per cent to 25 per cent range) in the government effect when per capita incomes are included. Nonetheless, the effects of good government remain as the single most important variable explaining international differences in life satisfaction, while international differences in per capita incomes were frequently insignificant. They find that for the global sample, and especially for the subgroup of poorer countries, the efficiency and trustworthiness of the design and delivery of government is of primary importance, while for the richer countries, the electoral process (voice, accountability and political stability) is more important (i.e. in countries which already have higher and fairly uniform levels of governmental efficiency, SWB responds more to the mechanisms whereby governments are elected and made accountable).

Going back to Helliwell's 2003 paper, individual-level data showed that individuals who think it is never appropriate to cheat on taxes have higher levels of SWB.⁶⁵ The coefficient on the *national* measure of NOCHEAT in Table 1 (simply the national fraction of respondents who think it is never appropriate to cheat on taxes) shows that there are significant further benefits of living in a society with shared high standards for communal responsibility. Adding the national variable only slightly reduced the coefficient on the

61. Helliwell's study, being a cross-country study, has the challenge that it has to make incomes comparable across countries, which it does by using GDP per capita measured at purchasing power parity (i.e. taking into account differences in the cost of living across countries). To measure individual incomes, the WVS asked individuals to place their family incomes on a ten-point scale based on family-income deciles in their country in the survey year.

62. 'Thou dost wish for gold and I desire thy freedom from it. Thou thinkest thyself rich in its possession, and I recognize thy wealth in thy sanctity therefrom.' (Baha'u'llah, Arabic *Hidden Words* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990) no. 56).

63. Helliwell, 'How's life?' 331–60.

64. J. Helliwell and H. Huang, 'How's Your Government? International Evidence Linking Good Government and Well-Being', (mimeo, Department of Economics, University of British Columbia, 2005).

65. Helliwell, 'How's life?' 331–60.

66. Di Tella, MacCulloch and Layard, 'Income'.
67. Winkelmann and Winkelmann, 'Why' 1–15.
68. Helliwell, 'How's life?' 331–60.
69. Di Tella, MacCulloch and Oswald, 'Preferences' 335–41.
70. Kingdon and Knight, 'Subjective' 1199–224.

individual-level NOCHEAT variable. As Helliwell concludes, widespread acceptance of cheating lowers average satisfaction, whatever an individual's personal willingness may be to condone cheating. The results of the national average level of the weekly or more church attendance and the two variables representing national average membership of various organizations show that there are beneficial effects (of higher national membership levels) on others within the society.

The national educational attainment results in Table 1 show no net impact on SWB. Helliwell concludes that this is because the other national variables capture the 'spill-over' effects of education – since in higher educated societies, memberships of organizations and trust are higher, health is better and incomes are higher. Similarly a measure of national income inequality was not retained in Helliwell's equation because it was insignificant – because higher income inequality is associated with health and with national income, both of which are included in the equation. In other words, any negative impact of income inequality on SWB has already been captured by the variables which mediate its effects on SWB such as national income level. SWB is significantly lower in the former Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe compared with the 'base' or omitted category – OECD countries. However, in some other studies,⁶⁶ economic inequality is inimical to happiness.

Are these causal relationships?

To what extent can these results be given a causal interpretation? For instance, does a negative association between unemployment and SWB represent that unemployment causes SWB to fall or could it be that miserable people are more likely to become/remains unemployed; in other words, that causation runs the other way: unemployed people are those who are inherently unhappy. Similarly with marriage: does marriage raise happiness (relative to the divorced/separated state, for example) or is it the other way round: do happy people remain married and miserable people tend to become separated/divorced? The question of causation is important and has been considered in this literature. However, it is difficult to establish the direction of causality in cross-section data. If there is data on both SWB and on employment/marriage status at two points in time for the same set of individuals (known as panel data), then one can relate *change* in SWB to *change* in employment (or marriage) status over time. This controls for individuals' time-invariant inherent tendency to be happy or miserable. However, only a few studies have access to such data. Winkelmann and Winkelmann, who control for individual fixed effects in a happiness equation using panel data, find that causality runs from unemployment to SWB.⁶⁷ They find that the size of the effect of unemployment on SWB in their panel data model is roughly equal to that in models using their cross-section data, suggesting that cross-section estimates such as those by Helliwell,⁶⁸ di Tella et al.,⁶⁹ Kingdon and Knight,⁷⁰ etc. are not misleading.

Conclusions

The findings of social science suggest much empirical support for the happiness-enhancing effects of the characteristics and behaviours prescribed by religion as leading to happiness.

However, despite promising progress in this area, academic understanding of the factors that determine happiness remains limited. In particular, the relationship between happiness and a number of factors prescribed by religion for happiness (such as service to others, sacrifice for others, detachment, selflessness and other virtues) has not been tested because relevant questions have not been asked/measured in surveys, probably reflecting the presumption of a lack of relevance of these factors for happiness. Moreover, and more fundamentally, the mechanisms of impact are not known. For example, it is not known through what mechanisms belief in God has its effect on SWB. Is it because it fosters resignation and acceptance of whatever state a person finds themselves in (for example, because believers ascribe their state as the will of God); or is it because belief fosters reliance on God and thus on promises in religious writings such as 'good times will be followed by bad and bad by good'; or is it because religion exhorts detachment from this world and from the vicissitudes of life; or is it for all of these reasons since they are correlated?

Much remains to be done: first, there needs to be *prima facie* acceptance of the potential importance of a wider set of determinants of happiness so that future surveys of SWB measure a wider set of factors; second, there is the technical challenge of how to define appropriately, measure and scale the abstract constructs of spirituality, service and virtues. This is similar to the problem currently encountered in defining and measuring mood, emotion, affect, etc. as seen from the fact that different authors use these terms very differently. Future research also needs to ask whether the 'good life' varies across countries and cultures. Virtually all of the existing empirical research on happiness has been within western nations and it is not known how well the findings of this research will generalize to other nations. Research that has largely emanated from a western academic tradition has had a narrower focus than that possible with contributions from a range of cultures and societies.⁷¹

71. All figures in this paper appear by permission of their authors.

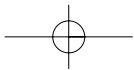
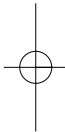
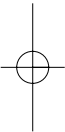
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Mysteries of *Alast*: The Realm of Subtle Entities ('*Ālam-i dharr*) and the Primordial Covenant in the Babi–Baha'i Writings

Farshid Kazemi

Abstract

One of the more esoteric terms in Shi'i–Shaykhi thought that has found its way into the vast corpus of the Babi–Baha'i sacred scriptures is called 'the realm of subtle entities' or '*ālam-i dharr* (lit. world of particles). The source of inspiration for this term (*dharr*) in the early Shi'i cosmology and cosmogony lies in one of the more important and dramatic scenes which informs the whole spectrum of Islamic thought, namely the Primordial Covenant of Qur'an 7:171–2. It is there, in what seems to be pre-existence, that God addresses humanity in the form of particles or seeds (*dharr*) saying, 'Am I not your Lord?' (*alastu bi-rabbikum*) while the archetype or potential of all future generations of humanity responds with the loving reply, 'Yes' (*balā*). In light of the significance of this term for the Covenant in the Babi–Baha'i revelations it is surprising that there has only been but passing references to it in some secondary Baha'i sources. In this paper we will outline the history and background of this term and examine some of the interpretations or hermeneutics accorded to it by select examination of its use in Shi'ism, Shaykhism, and the Babi–Baha'i religions. Among other themes that will be touched upon in relation to '*ālam-i-dharr* is the hermeneutics of the pre-existence of souls, the question of free will and predestination, the seven stages of creation (*marātib-i sab'ih*), and the mystic colour hierarchies (*alwān*).

Keywords

covenant
quaternary
will
purpose
predestination
decree
free will
pre-existence
dharr

'Hast thou forgotten the covenant that thou made with God before the creation of the universe – in the realm of the timeless [*dharr al-baqā*]?'¹

Among the cryptic terms which one encounters not infrequently throughout the whole corpus of the Babi–Baha'i scriptures, is one which designates a mysterious region known as '*ālam-i dharr* (in Arabic '*ālam adh-dharr*), the 'realm of subtle entities',² or more literally 'the world of particles'. This enigmatic term, which has its origins in a Primordial Covenant ('*ahd/ mithāq*) between God and humanity in the Qur'an, has a long heritage in early primitive Shi'ism³ (*tashayyu'*), Sufism (*tassawuf*),⁴ and Shaykhism (*shaykhiyya*). Indeed there exists a certain homology between primitive Shi'ism, Shaykhism and the Babi–Baha'i hermeneutics of '*ālam-i dharr*, yet with the writings of the Bab, Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, this term – among many other Islamic categories – undergoes a subtle transformation by way of a new and novel divine hermeneutics (*ta'wīl-i ilāhī*).

In primitive Shi'ism '*ālam-i dharr* is situated in meta-history and is subdivided into two metaphysical worlds. It is there, in pre-existence, that the

1. Bahā'u'llāh, *La'ālī' al-Hikmah* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Baha'i Brasil, 1990) 2:26–7 (provisional translation by Omid Ghaemmaghami and Todd Lawson).
2. This is the official English translation of '*ālam-i dharr* made by the Baha'i World Centre; see Baha'u'llah, *Tabernacle of Unity* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2006) 48; another similar phrase used in the Baha'i scriptures is

dharr al-baqā
(see below).

3. Here we are using 'primitive' in the sense of 'early' as used by Amir-Moezzi. This is the phase of Shi'ism in which the first compendia of the Traditions (*akhbār*) of the Imams were collected and was characterized by more esoteric and magico-theurgic elements, rather than the later influence of systematic and rational theology. See Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism* (trans. David Streight, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) 13–19. Here it should be mentioned that throughout this paper, by 'Shi'ism' we intend only *Ithnā 'asharī* or Twelver Shi'ism.
4. We will not develop the concept of *dharr* in Sufism here due to lack of space.
5. The designation 'the Day of Alast' appears particularly among the Persian poets, such as Attar, Rumi and Hafiz. Various formulations of Alast, such as the 'wine of Alast' or 'the call of Alast', or 'the song of Alast', which have a long history in Persian mystical poetry are also found in the Baha'i scriptures. It was the Sufi Sahl b. Abdullah Tustari (d. 283/896) who in his meditations on the Primordial Covenant (Q 7:172) first placed the Platonic recollecting of knowledge of this pre-existential condition of souls in the world of *dharr* at the centre of his

Covenant between God and humanity was first drawn up, not only regarding God, but with regard to the Prophet Muhammad, Imam 'Ali and all the Imams, as well as the daughter of the Prophet, Fatima, namely the Fourteen Pure Ones (*chahārdah ma'sūmin*). In Shaykhi metaphysics this same covenantal element is continued but with a clearer situating of '*alam-i dharr*' in the emanative stages of creation or arc of descent. Also, the dialectic of free will and necessity is worked out in relation to this realm and the corresponding existentialization of creatures according to their response. Finally, in Babi–Baha'i hermeneutics though all these elements are more or less present, they are radically reinterpreted so that the meta-history of the Primordial Covenant paradoxically becomes situated in the fact of history, in the historical appearance of the person of the Manifestation of God. It is through this cyclical theophanic advent that this Primordial Covenant is perpetually renewed and whereby beings are existentially differentiated according to their response to the Divine Call. Their ontological priority or pre-existence is therefore only in relation to the acknowledgment of the covenant of love which is 'outside time'. In this study we will briefly outline, by way of an introduction, this background of the term '*alam adh-dharr*' and its relation to the Primordial Covenant by select examinations of texts in Shi'ism, Shaykhism and finally its use and hermeneutics in the Babi–Baha'i writings.

'*Alam-i dharr* and the Primordial Covenant in Shi'ism

The word *dharr* under discussion here which variously means seed, particle, mote or atom, has its origin in Qur'an 7:171–2 (henceforward Q 7:171–2), and is related to a meta-temporal and meta-historical event: Sacred Time (*in illo tempore*). It was there that God entered into a Primordial Covenant with the particles or seeds or potentialities (*dharr*) of humankind (Adamic *anthropos*):

And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam,
From their loins, their seed [*dhurriyyatahum*],
And made them testify concerning themselves,
'Am I not your Lord?' [*alastu bi-rabbikum*]
They replied, 'Yes, we bear witness' [*balā shahadnā*]

This mytho-history of the Primordial Covenant, which is often referred to as *yawm al-mithāq* or the 'Day of the Covenant', has been the source of endless contemplation in Islamic thought both among the Sunni and the Shi'i, and especially among the Sufis, who longed to return to this state of pre-existential being, and among whom it was lovingly referred to as 'the Day of Alast' (*Rūz-i alast*).⁵ It has spurred such varied discussions as the problematic of the pre-existence of souls, the dialectic of free will versus predestination,⁶ God's omnipotence and humankind's loving reply.⁷ Though the term 'covenant' ('*ahd/mithaq*') does not appear in this passage, it has nevertheless been conceptually linked to it for centuries by all subsequent Islamic commentary.

In Shi'ism, this mytho-history of the Primordial Covenant is extended to the Fourteen Pure Ones. It is captured in the idea of *walāyah*, which is the quintessential feature of Shi'i religious consciousness. The term *walāyah* is often inadequately translated as 'sainthood', and is notoriously difficult to render into a single English word, as it has the various shades of meanings

of love, fidelity, friendship, guardianship, etc. In Shi'ism it is the idea of the continuation of religio-charismatic authority after the Prophet through the person of the Imam, to whom fealty, loyalty and love is owed by the faithful just as it is to God and the Prophet. It is the idea of the successorship and guardianship after the Prophet's death, of the Imam as divine guide, within whom lies deposited the inner mysteries and esoteric (*bāṭin*) understanding of God's revelation, and upon whom its elucidation and elaboration devolves. The Imam is then at once the interpreter and expounder of the Word of God (i.e. the Qur'an). It is he who is called the Speaking Book, whilst the Qur'an is called the Silent Book.⁸ It was these twin repositories of guidance, namely the Qur'an and his household (*ahl-i bayt*), which according to Shi'i tradition, the Prophet left the community after his death.

The beginning of this covenant of the *walayah* on the horizontal plane, the plane of history, is first reflected in the event of Ghadir Khum in an oasis outside Mecca, where in the Shi'i liturgical calendar it is known as the 'Day of the Covenant' (*yawm al-mithaq*). It was there that the Prophet entered into a covenant with the Islamic community (*umma*) regarding the *walaya*/guardianship and successorship of 'Ali (d. 40/661) as the spirituo-temporal leader of the community after himself. In a famed Tradition (*hadith*, a traditional utterance of the Prophet Muhammad, which in a Shi'i context also includes the sayings of the Imams and is as often referred to as *akhbār*), which is attributed to the Prophet by both the Sunni and the Shi'i sources, this event is described thus:

We were with the Apostle of God in his journey and we stopped at Ghadir Khumm. We performed the obligatory prayer together ... And then he took 'Ali by the hand and said to the people: 'Do you not acknowledge that I have a greater claim on each of the believers than they have on themselves?' And they replied: 'Yea verily' [*bala*]. And he took 'Ali's hand and said: 'Of whomsoever I am lord [*mawla*], then 'Ali is also his lord. O God! Be Thou the supporter of whoever supports 'Ali and the enemy of whoever opposes him.'⁹

As is plain from the above passage the word 'Yea verily' (*bala*), which is precisely the assent of humanity at the scene of the Primordial Covenant (Q 7:171–2), is uttered by the Muslim faithful in recognition of 'Ali as their lord or master after the Prophet. It should also be mentioned that here the word *mawla* is related to the word *wali* or *walayah*, which according to a characteristically Shi'i interpretation of this event demonstrates the incontrovertible fact of the *walayah* of 'Ali, his guardianship and designation as such by the Prophet.

On the vertical plane, however, this event is said to have its archetype in pre-existence, in the realm of '*alam-i dharr*', where the covenant was taken for the *walayah* of 'Ali before all existence, as Kohlberg states,

In other traditions it is stated that the *walaya* (principle of loyalty to 'Ali and the other Imams) existed before the creation, and that the formula "*'Ali amir al-mu'minin*" is engraved on the upper part of God's throne. [Kulayni, *Kafi* 1:224] After the creation of Adam, when all future generations of man were assembled at 'Arafa in the form of atoms (... *dharr*), they solemnly acknowledged not only Allah's divinity (as stated in Qur'an 7:172), but also Muhammad's prophethood and 'Ali's *walaya*.¹⁰

theoretical conceptions of *dhikr* (remembrance of God). See Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980) 45–9, 201–7; also G. Böwering, 'Ideas of Time in Persian Sufism', in Leonard Lewisohn (ed.), *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999) 219–20. The idea of recollection of the pre-existential state of gnosis is also mentioned by the Sufi Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri (d. 246/861) who is cited in this connection by perhaps the most influential Sufi theoretician in Islam, namely Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 638/1240); see William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989) 155–5, 399. This element of pre-existential knowledge in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i hermeneutics is discussed below.

6. Regarding the issue of free will versus predestination in Shi'ism, Daniel Gimaret ('Free Will in Twelver Shi'ism', in *Encyclopedia Iranica* at <http://www.iranica.com/newsite>), citing Kulayni and Ibn Babawayh, states, 'On the question of free will, the whole view of the Imams amounts to a famous saying by Imam Ja'far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765): *lā jabr wa lā tafwīd wa lākin amr bayn amrayn* "neither complete constraint nor complete freedom but something in between". This same

middle view is espoused and elaborated in the Babi–Baha’i writings.

7. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975) 24.
8. M. Ayoub, ‘The Speaking Qur’ān and the Silent Qur’ān: A Study of the Principles and Development of Imami Shi’i *tafsir*’, in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’ān* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) 177–98; Todd Lawson, ‘The Qur’an Commentary of Sayyid ‘Ali Muhammad, the Bab (1819–1850)’ (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, 1987; forthcoming as *Gnostic Apocalypse in Islam: The Qur’an and the Babi Movement*, London: Routledge, 2009) 78–114.
9. Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi’i Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) 15.
10. Etan Kohlberg, *Belief and Law in Imami Shi’ism* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1991), ch. 16 (‘Some Shi’i views of the Antediluvian World’), p. 44; cf the Tradition of the fifth Imam Muhammad al-Baqir cited in Todd Lawson, ‘The Covenant and the Tablet of Ahmad’, in Moojan Momen (ed.), *The Bahā’i Faith and the World’s Religions* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2003) 45.
11. Todd Lawson, ‘Akhbari Shi’i Tafsir’, in Gerald

Thus in a long Tradition, God addresses the Prophet and the Imams in the ‘*alam-i dharr* (the world of the Primordial Covenant), thus: ‘I have appointed you intercessors for Me. All things are passing away except My face, and you are My face which never perishes [cf. Qur’an 28:88], and he who turns toward you will likewise never perish.’¹¹

One of the important motifs underlying the whole of these arcane Traditions, is not only that the Prophet and the Imams were pre-existent in the world of *dharr*, but that the votaries of the Imams, the Shi’i faithful, or *mu’minīn*, are also pre-existent in that world, as Corbin observed: ‘By contrast, the awareness that the *mu’min* or believer has of his origins, and of the future on which the meaning of his present life depends, is centred on facts which are *real*, but which belong to metahistory. The sense of his origin is perceived in the question which God, on the “Day of the Covenant”, asked of Adamic humanity, before this humanity was transferred to the terrestrial plane. No system of chronology can fix the *date* of this “Day of the Covenant”, which takes place during the *time* of that pre-existence of souls which Shi’ism in general affirms.’¹² In one Tradition reported on the authority of Bukayr ibn A’yan this premise seems to be demonstrated:

Verily God, blessed and exalted is He, took the Covenant from our Shi’is for *walayah* toward us when they were particles (*dharr*) on the day when He took the Covenant of the particles [*dharr*] to affirm Himself, as Lord, and Muhammad as Prophet. And He showed Muhammad his community (*ummatahu*) in the clay (*tīnah*), and they were shadows (*azillah*), and He made them from the clay from which He created Adam; and He created the spirits (*arwāh*) of our Shi’is a thousand years before their bodies and showed them to [Muhammad] and they were recognized by the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) and by ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (peace be upon him) and we recognize them by the peculiar nature of their speech (*lahn*).¹³

Similarly, Newman states: ‘...the Imams alluded to a pre-existential world in which Allah agreed with the Shi’ah, when they existed in the form of particles (*dharr*), a pact in which they pledged their affection (*al-walayah*) for the Imams. Allah then gave them form using the same clay that He used for Adam and the other prophets.’¹⁴

In primitive Shi’i cosmology and cosmogony ‘*alam adh-dharr* therefore is envisaged as a metaphysical world. Again and again the earliest Shi’i Traditions from the Imams relate to the pre-existence of the Prophet Muhammad and the Imams, as well as worlds (‘*awālim*) that they and the essence of their faithful inhabited before the creation of the world. In these Traditions as we have seen, reference is made to ‘*alam adh-dharr al-awwal*, or the first world of particles, which is precisely one of these pre-existential worlds in which the Prophet and the Imams exist as shadows (*azilla*) or silhouettes of light (*ashbāh*) before the creation of the world and wherein they enter into a covenant (*mithaq/’ahd*) with their votaries before the creation of all things. In this early Shi’i cosmology the worlds are respectively named:

1. Mother of the Book (*Umm al-Kitab*)
2. The first world of particles/the world of shadows/the world of the Covenant

3. The second world of particles
4. The material sensible world

The first metaphysical world is then the world of the Mother of the Book. It is in this world that the subtle light of Muhammad first emanated forth from God and from which the light of 'Ali originated thereafter. Amir-Moezzi indicates that the 'second world', called in the texts 'the first world of shadows' (*'alam al-aẓilla al-awwal*) or 'the first world of particles' (*'alam adh-dharr al-awwal*), is also the same 'stage that the divine throne¹⁵ was created'. Furthermore, 'the first world of shadows' is also known in the texts as the 'world of the covenant' (*'alam al-mithaq*), for it was in this first world of particles in which God concluded the Primordial Covenant with the 'pure beings'. These 'pure beings' were the shadows of future spiritual beings and non-human entities, which include the Prophets and the believers.¹⁶ Amir-Moezzi continues, stating that, 'this covenant encompassed four solemn oaths ... the promise to adore God and the promises of love for and fidelity (*walāya*) to Muhammad and his prophetic mission, to the imams and their sacred cause, and to the *Mahdi*, the universal saviour at the end of time.' It was also in the first world of particles/shadows/covenant that 'the shadows of the "pure beings" are said to have been initiated by the luminous entities of the immaculate ones [the Fourteen Pure Ones] into the secrets of the two sacred sciences of unification and glorification, well before the creation of the other shadows ... these secrets were the four sacred formulas *lā ilāha illā 'llāh*, *sobḥāna 'llāh*, *al-ḥamdo le 'llāh*, and *Allāho akbar*'. In this regard Amir-Moezzi rightly observes that, 'even the number of these formulas [i.e. four], which contain the most sublime mysteries, has a cosmic value, for it is because of these four that the throne and all the sanctuaries occupying the superimposed centers of the seven heavens and the seven earths are cubical.'¹⁷ Then comes the last stage before the creation of the sensible world, which is called 'the second world of particles' (*dharr*) where the creation of the descendants of Adam in the form of particles (*dharr*) takes place and where they are 'divided into "people of the right" (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*), characterized by their obedience to God, and "people of the left" (*aṣḥāb al-shamal*), who refused to obey the divine order'.¹⁸

In light of the above it is interesting to note that in a sermon attributed to Imam 'Ali called *Khutbat al-Tutanjiyya* (Sermon of the Gulf), reference is also made to the first world of particles (*adh-dharr al-awwal*). Here the Imam, in a series of profound theophanic utterances, states: 'I know of the wonders of God's creation, which none save God knoweth, and with me is the knowledge of what hath been and what shall be and what transpired with those who preceded the time of the first particles (*adh-dharr al-awwal*) which belongeth to the First Adam (*adam al-awwal*).'¹⁹

The whole primordial drama of the covenant is brought onto the plane of history in the episode in which the 'People of the Cloak' (*ahl al-kisā*), namely the Prophet Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn (which Persian tradition calls the *panj tan* or the Temple of the *Pentad*) were present when the famous debate (*mubalahah*) occurred between the Prophet and the Christian delegation from Najran. Here the motifs of the Imams as silhouettes of light (*ashbah*) and shadows (*azilla*, *azlal*), which we encountered in the pre-existential time of the first world of particles, serve as symbolic

R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (eds.), *Approaches to the Qur'an* (London: Routledge, 1996) 177.

12. Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London: Kegan Paul, 1993) 64; cf. Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* (trans. by Nancy Pearson, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) 326 n.71.
13. Cited in Maria Massi Dakake, *The Charismatic Community: Shi'ite Identity in Early Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007) 148.
14. Andrew J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi'ism: Hadith as Discourse Between Qum and Baghdad* (Culture and Civilisation in the Middle East, RoutledgeCurzon, Surrey, 2000) 55.
15. See discussion of the Divine Throne below.
16. In this connection, in reply to the question 'How then did they [the pure beings] respond if they were only particles (*dharr*)', Ja'far al-Sadiq said: 'In the world of the Pact [*al-mithaq*], [God] instilled in them that which they needed to answer his question.'; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide* 163n., 182. Note here that Ja'far al-Sadiq clearly equates the stage of particles (*dharr*) with the world of the covenant (*mithaq*).
17. This quaternary or four solemn oaths/pact/covenant has significant typological ramifications in the idea of the covenant

in the Babi–Baha'i revelation (see below).

18. M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Cosmogony and Cosmology, v. in Twelver Shi'ism', in *Encyclopedia Iranica*. See also Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide* 29–37.
19. 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, *Khutbat al-tutanjiyya* (Sermon of the Gulf). For the Arabic used here, see Todd Lawson, 'Coincidentia Oppositorum in the Qayyum al-Asma: the terms "Point" (*nuqtah*), "Pole" (*quṭb*), "Center" (*markaz*) and the Khutbat al-tatanjiyya', *Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1 (January, 2001). For translations, see Khazeh Fananapazir: <http://bahaistudies.net/kf/gulf.html> and Stephen Lambden: <http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/o3-Biblical-islam-BBst/TTNJ.HTM>.
20. The Crimson Sandhill (*kathib-i ahmar*) refers to one of the way stations of the pilgrimage (*hajj*). It is also mentioned in some of the early Traditions, in which it is related to the tomb of Moses. However, its visionary dimension may be discerned in the fact that the Prophet saw Moses by his tomb during his Night Journey ('*isra*'). According to tradition, it is also said to be located in the Holy Land between Jerusalem and Jericho; see Moshe Sharon, *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palaestinae*, vol. 3 (Brill: Leiden, 2007) 102–3. For a brief but useful research note

signifiers to locate the primordial in the temporal. It was upon the visionary topography of the Crimson Sandhill or *kathib ahmar*²⁰ that the luminous forms of the 'People of the Cloak' irradiated forth before the delegation. Massignon relates this initiatory scene in this manner:

The Shi'ite school of the *Mukhammisa* was interested in interpreting in all of its symbolism, the *mubahala* scene. At the cemetery in Medina, at the bottom of the Baqi', on the red dune (*kathib ahmar*), we see the Five standing under the Mantle, illuminated with thunderbolts and lightning flashes. Before them, together with the other initiated *mawali*, stands Salman pointing out the Five for the veneration of the amazed Najranian Christians. At the call of the Initiator, they recognize the Five in their glorious transfiguration (*tajalli*). Their halo of lightning flashes signifies that their authority is a divine 'right', inducing them to affirm that their bodies are shadows (*azilla*, *azlal*) cast by Divine Light, silhouettes (*ashbah*) temporarily outlined in the divine emanation, exempted from the generation and corruption of suffering and death.²¹

In this episode we see that the People of the Cloak are described as having manifested the same form of apparitional lights and luminous forms that they are said to have possessed in pre-existence in '*alam adh-dharr*' and yet this event is precisely situated in history in what is described as the Crimson Sandhill (*kathib ahmar*). It is here that we may discern the seeds of the Babi–Baha'i hermeneutics of '*alam adh-dharr*' (see below) and of the initiatory covenant of love drawn up with the faithful regarding him and the succession of lights after him, namely the covenant of faithfulness to the reality of *walayyah*.

Another Tradition attributed to Ja'far al-Sadiq, which has similar implications for our theme, is one in which at once both the theophanic station of the Imam as the locus of the knowable or revealed aspect of God is announced and the whole pre-existential drama of the Primordial Covenant (Q 7:171) is historicized.

Abu Basir has related that he said to Abu 'Abdallah [Ja'far as-Sādiq] – upon whom be peace – 'Tell me about God, the Mighty, and Majestic. Will believers see Him on the Day of Resurrection?' He answered, 'Yes, and they have already seen Him before the Day of Resurrection.' Abu Basir asked, 'When?' The Imam answered, 'When He said to them, "Am I not your Lord?" They said: "Yes, verily"' (VII, 172). Then he was quiet for a time. Then he said, 'Truly the believers see Him in this world before the Day of Resurrection. Dost thou not see Him now?'²²

Here the Imam is stating that he is the locus of the manifestation (*mazhar*) of God or *Deus revelatus*, and that seeing him in this station is to see God.²³ It is also important to note that since the Resurrection will be heralded with the advent of the Qa'im, the Twelfth Imam, it is he who is the locus of the manifestation of God, *Deus revelatus* and it is this that mankind will see as God on the Day of Resurrection, and not the essence of God, who is *Deus absconditus*, the unknowable God. Here then the whole covenantal drama has the effect of being situated in the eschatological advent of the Qa'im, which is as the day of the Primordial Covenant. It is in this light that the advent of the Bab as Qa'im and as the Manifestation of God may be discerned.

It is of interest to note that that the fourth oath in the world of the particles/shadows/covenant (see the above quotation from Amir-Moezzi) is regarding the Mahdi and that the form of its expression is *Allāhu akbar* (God is Great!). It is here that we may discern the profundity of Corbin's observation that Shaykhism was the 'revival of primitive Shi'ite Gnosis',²⁴ that is, the pure teachings of the Imams. As we shall see these four oaths are revived in Shaykhism and in the writings of the Bab, who is precisely the promised Mahdi/Qa'im. Indeed the new initiatory salutation of the faithful (Babis) of the Bab – the promised Mahdi/Qa'im – was changed from the Islamic salutation of *Salam* (peace) to *Allahu Akbar* (God is Great!), the fourth expression of the solemn oath pertaining to the Mahdi.²⁵ It is not difficult to see that the Shaykhi–Babi doctrine of the Fourth Support is already present here. This quaternary of 'an oath of worship (*'ubudiyya*) of God, oaths of love and fidelity (*walaya*) toward Muhammad and his prophetic mission, toward the Imams and their sacred Cause, and also toward the Mahdi as universal saviour at the end of time'²⁶ is therefore revived once again in a novel hermeneutical turn in the quaternary structure of the covenant in the Babi–Baha'i revelation vis-à-vis the conceptual framework of *dharr*.

The Shaykhi background of '*alam al-dharr* and the Primordial Covenant

The powerful and charismatic figure of Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa'i (d. 1242/1826) and his disciple and successor Sayyid Kazim Rashti (d. 1259/1843) are considered by Baha'is to be the twin heralds of the Babi–Baha'i religions.²⁷ Their profound works, which have as yet remained under-studied, form the immediate background for understanding some of the more philosophically abstruse and difficult aspects of the Babi–Baha'i scriptures, not least the concept of '*alam adh-dharr*. In the works of Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa'i, '*alam adh-dharr* is precisely linked to his meditations on the Primordial Covenant and the related problematic of free will and predestination, good and evil, and are developed on this basis via a complex alchemical physiology, soteriology and eschatology grounded in his contemplations and exegesis of Qur'an 7:171.

In one of his major works called *al-Fawā'id al-Hikmiyyah*, Shaykh Ahmad refers to two distinct stages of the coming into being of creation, called the 'first creation' (*al-khalq al-awwal*) and the 'second creation' (*al-khalq al-thānī*). The 'first creation' may be said to belong to the stages of will (*mashīyyat*) and purpose (*irādah*), and the 'second creation' to the stage of predestination (*qadar*) and fate (*qadā*).

The Shaykh's cosmogony starts the process of creation not in the essence of the Godhead, which for him is pure unbelief (*shirk*), but in the Primordial Will of God (*mashīyyat*). In the Shaykh's lexicon this Primal Will is coterminous with the Muhammadan Reality, and is designated variously as the Command (*amr*) of God, the Word (*kalimah*) of God and the Muhammadan Light.²⁸ Among the many reported sayings of the Shi'i Imams which informs the metaphysics and cosmology of Shaykh Ahmad, one of the utterances of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq is of particular importance in this regard, namely, the famed Tradition of *mashīyyat* (Will). Jafar al-Sadiq states, 'God created the Will through its own self (*bi-nafsihā*), and created all things (*al-ashyā*)',

on the Crimson Sandhill (*kathib-i ahmar*) in the Babi–Baha'i writings, see Stephen Lambden, 'Some Notes on the Islamic Background and Babi–Baha'i use of the phrase *Arḍ kathib al-ahmar* ("The Land of the Red Sand-Dune")', <http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/o3-Biblical-islam-BBst/K-AHMAR.HTM>. For further discussion of this, see below.

21. Massignon, quoted in Todd Lawson, 'Reading Reading Itself: The Bab's "Sura of the Bees", A Commentary on Qur'an 12:93 from the Sura of Joseph – Text, Translation and Commentary' *Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies* no. 5 (November, 1997).
22. William C. Chittick, *Shi'ite Anthology* (London: Muhammadi Trust, 1980) 42.
23. As regards the station of the Imams as the loci of manifestation of the revealed and knowable aspect of God in early Shi'i sources, Amir-Moezzi describes two ontological realms of the Divine Being, the first that of the 'Essence', 'the Unknowable', 'God in His vertiginous, unmanifested concealment'. The other being that of 'Acts performed by the organs of God, the Imams, instruments capable of making known to the creatures what can be known of God ...' Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide* 45.
24. Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body* 58.

25. Persian Bayan 6:5, cited in Denis MacEoin, *Rituals in Babism and Bahaism* (London: British Academic Press, 1994) 14. It is interesting to note here that in Shaykh Ahmad's colour mysticism, the four oaths of primitive Shi'ite cosmology and cosmogony are assigned respectively the four colours of the Hadith of the Throne: *subhāna-llah* [white], *al-hāmdu li'llāh* [yellow], *lā ilāha illā'llāh* [green], and in particular *Allāhu akbar* is related to the colour red or crimson; see Stephen Lambden, 'Kaleidoscope: Some Aspects of Angelology, Light, the Divine Throne and Color Mysticism in Bābī and Bahā'ī Sacred Scripture', <http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/o3-Biblical-islam-BBst/kaleidoscope.htm>. The importance of this colour mysticism and particularly that of crimson in relation to 'alam adh-dharr will become more evident below.
26. Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide* 34.
27. *Selections from the Writings of the Bāb* (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Centre, 1976) 51. Baha'u'llah, *The Kitāb-i-Iqān, The Book of Certitude* (trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2nd edn., Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1974) 65.
28. See Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa'i, *Sharh al-Mashā'ir* 228–30, translated by Keven Brown, in 'Translation Notes from Shaykh Ahmad's *Sharh al-Masha'ir*', at

through the Will.²⁹ For Shaykh Ahmad the process of creation, is precisely a process of action (*fi'l*) that takes place through four stages, which are most crucial for the coming into existence of any 'thing' (*shay'*).³⁰ The Shaykh states:

...the creative action that is connected to existence is the Will, and by the archetype (*al-'ayn*), i.e. the species form (*al-surat al-naw'iyah*), it becomes Purpose (*iradah*), and by the [intelligible] limitation of the created, i.e. design, like length and breadth, stability and change, fixed time, and the like, it becomes Predestination (*qadar*), and by the realization of the act of creation and the thing itself, it becomes Fate (*qada*)... The fashioning of each existent is completed by these four actions [i.e. Will, Purpose, Predestination, and Fate].³¹

According to Shaykh Ahmad 'alam adh-dharr pertains to the 'second creation'. Shaykh Ahmad states that the second creation begins in the stage of predestination (*qadar*).

...predestination [*qadar*], which is the stage of existential topography (*handasa ijadiyya*). Through it the limitations of things are set, including provisions, terms of duration, continuance and temporality, restraint of magnitudes, temporal and atemporal modes... The beginning of the second creation occurs in this stage [*qadar*], the start of felicity and misery.³²

Shaykh Ahmad refers to the attribute of existence of a thing as proceeding from the actional Will of God and its essence as proceeding from the stage of purpose. He maintains that every created thing is a composite of existence and essence, the aspect of existence being derived from the actional Will of God and being the cause of matter (*māddah*), and the essence being derived from purpose and being the cause of form (*sūrah*), which is related to the creatures own potentiality and receptivity (i.e. essence). Here Shaykh Ahmad radically turns the traditional Aristotelian doctrine of hylomorphism on its head by making form receptive and matter active, instead of the traditional formula of matter/receptive and form/active.³³ Vahid Brown has noted that early Isma'ili philosophers such as Nasafi and Sijistani were perhaps early proponents of the reversal theory³⁴ but a more detailed study is required to establish this interesting theory. However, it seems that all the sources necessary for the Shaykh's novel formulation are already present in the Traditions of the Imams, as Corbin has rightly observed regarding Shaykh Ahmad's inspiration:

The meaning of the terms of Peripatetic hylomorphism is reversed: matter is light, being itself, existence. Form is quiddity, compassion, the shadowy dimension which fixes and defines this light. This is why matter is the father, the masculine aspect, while form is the mother or feminine aspect, and the 'imaginal Form' (*sūrah mithāliyah*) is the principle of individuation. Thus the Tradition of the sixth Imam Ja'far al-Sādiq finds its justification: "The believer is the brother of the believer because of their father and mother. Their father is the Light, their mother is Mercy." *Shaykh Ahmad used the Traditions of the holy Imams in the same creative way to construct the anthropology characteristic of his school.*³⁵

The Shaykh calls the composite of existence and essence Man's *hyle*. He states that 'this hyle composed of existence and essence is suitable to both the faithful and the denier; they are only distinguishable by the second form which is the second creation' [i.e. in the first creation they are indistinguishable and undifferentiated].³⁶ Shaykh Ahmad goes on to say that, 'the act of becoming generated constitutes an act of choice on the part of the created entity in the second creation ...'³⁷ It is precisely here that the Shaykh in his reading of the Primordial Covenant of Q 7:171, which includes the covenant of the Prophet and the *walayah* of Imam 'Ali, starts his complex anthropology, soteriology and eschatology which ends with situating '*alam adh-dharr*' in the 'second creation'. Here is an extended passage:

So when they requested that He [God] question them, He, in His knowledge of them, questioned them. So He said to them, 'Am I not your Lord, and Muhammad your Prophet, and 'Ali your Guardian?' Then they said altogether, 'Yes, indeed!' [*bala*] Among them were those who, on the basis of their knowledge, each said it with his tongue and heart ... So He [God] created them from the form [*sura*] of affirmation and cognizance ... Those are the messengers, the prophets, the veracious, the martyrs, and the righteous.

And among them were those who each said it with his tongue while his heart was denying and gainsaying, not receiving. So He created them from the form [*sura*] of gainsaying, denial, and disacknowledgement. It is the devilish satanic form. Those are the rejecters, the hypocrites, and their followers among them; those for whom the truth is made clear and yet they turn away from it ... Their forms in this lower life is human only because of their [positive] answer with the tongue [i.e. yes/*bala*], which is the lowest level of response. In the hereafter their human forms will be stripped from them and their real forms, following their hearts, will self-manifest.

And among them were those who each said it with his tongue while his heart was hesitant; God created them in human form due to their acknowledgement through their tongues. He does not create their inward natures (*bawāṭin*) until they acknowledge or disacknowledge. So He creates them from their state. Now they are divergent, some of them [acknowledge or disacknowledge] in the proximate life; some in the intermediary world; and some in the hereafter. Whomsoever's inward nature (*bāṭin*) is created in human form [*sura*] will enter the garden; whoever is created otherwise will enter the fire.

These forms created from either positive response or denial constitute the clay [*tīnah*]. It is the mother in whose belly the felicitous become felicitous; and the miserable become miserable ...³⁸

Then Shaykh Ahmad concludes his profound exegesis with this statement: 'So this is the second creation, under the green light, in the world of shadows, in the leaf of myrtle, thus they were, in the world of motes [*'alam adh-dharr*] ... Then He differentiated them in the red light; this is the meaning of his saying (peace be upon him): then He returned them to clay, that is the clay of nature.'³⁹

It is interesting to note that Shaykh Ahmad equates the world of shadows (*'alam al-azilla*) and the world of particles (*'alam adh-dharr*) just as it is in the *akhbar* of the Imams in primitive Shi'i cosmogony and cosmology. He also gives two stages to the world of particles, one undifferentiated and

<http://users.sisqtel.net/kevenbrown/SHAYKH.htm>. For the concept of the Muhammadan Light (*nur muhammadi*) in Shi'ism, see Uri Rubin, 'Pre-Existence and Light: Aspects of the Concept of Nur Muhammad', *Israel Oriental Studies*, 5 (1975) 62–119. For the same concept in Sufism, see Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985) 123–44.

29. Idris Hamid, *The Metaphysics and Cosmology of Process According to Shaykh 'Ahmad al-Ahsa'i: Critical Edition, Translation, and Analysis of Observations of Wisdom* (Ph.D. thesis, State University of New York, Buffalo, 1998) 174 n. 23. The Arabic translation is my own. cf. a slightly different version of the same Tradition in Vahid Rafati, 'Marātib-i Sab'ih va Ḥadīth-i Mashīyyat', *Safinih-yi 'Irḡān*, book 1 (Darmstadt: Asr-i Jadid, 1998, pp. 53–98) 65.
30. This is the first four of the seven stages of creation (*maratib sab'ih*) or arc of descent, the last three of which have to do with the outward coming into existence of a thing (*shay'*): permission (*idhn*), fixed time (*ajal*), and book (*kitab*). On Babi–Baha'i references to these seven stages of creation, see Rafati, 'Maratib-i Sab'ih'.
31. Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i, *Sharḥ*

al-Mashā'ir 16, 38, cited in Keven Brown, *Evolution and Baha'i Belief: 'Abdu'l-Baha's Response to Nineteenth-Century Darwinism* (Studies in the Babi and Baha'i Religions, vol. 12, Los Angeles: Kalimat, 2001) 72–3.

32. Hamid, *Metaphysics* 434–6.
33. The term 'hylomorphism' comes from the Greek *hyle* meaning matter, and *morphe* meaning form. The reversal of traditional hylomorphism which is quite central to Shaykh Ahmad's metaphysics, was first noticed by Henry Corbin. See Corbin, *History* 355. See also Idris Hamid, *Metaphysics* 392 n. 38; and idem, 'The Polarity of Existence and Essence in the Metaphysics of Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa'i', in *The Passions of the Soul in the Metamorphosis of Becoming (Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology in Dialogue)* (ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, Dordrecht: Springer, 2003) 201–2.
34. Vahid Brown, 'The Beginning that hath no Beginning: Bahai Cosmogony', *Lights of 'Irfān*, 3 (Evanston: 'Irfan Colloquia, 2002) 37 n. 82.
35. See Corbin, *History* 355 (emphasis added). It must be recalled that Isma'ilis and Twelvers accept the same line of the Imams until the sixth Imam, Ja'far as-Sādiq.
36. Hamid, *Metaphysics* 309.

Will	Lahut	White	The first creation	
Purpose	Jabarut	Yellow		
Predestination	Malakut	Green	The second creation	'Ālam adh-dharr
Fate	Nasut	Red/Crimson		

Figure 1.

the second differentiated. The first is distinguished with symbolism of the green light, which in the Shaykh's lexicon corresponds to '*ālam al-malakūt* (world of the Kingdom) and the stage of predestination (*qadar*), where creatures remain undifferentiated. In the second stage it is distinguished by the symbolism of the red clay (red light), or the clay of nature (*al-tabi'at*). It corresponds to '*ālam al-nāsūt* (the physical world), and the stage of fate (*qada*), where creatures are differentiated according to their own volition. The mystical symbolism of colour acts as a signifier for designating the proper hierarchy of worlds, and is also repeated in the Babi–Baha'i sacred texts (see Figure 1).⁴⁰

It is worth mentioning here that the colour crimson also frequently occurs in the Shaykh's alchemical theories and forms the basis of his novel contemplations on the resurrection body. In one passage, Shaykh Ahmad states that if the white elixir acts upon tin, which corresponds to the elemental body, it will become silver, which corresponds to body which survives 'in the tomb' and into which the spirit enters from the paradise of this world. If the red elixir then acts upon this, it becomes gold, which corresponds with the body which departs with the spirit from the corporeal body after death and enters the paradise of this world. If the red elixir is projected onto it a second time, it becomes an elixir itself, which corresponds to the essential resurrection body which will gain admittance into the paradise of the here-after. That this gold has become an elixir is a sign and proof that this was latent in the reality of the tin.⁴¹ It is clear that the Shaykh wishes to situate the whole process of resurrection as a spiritual process occurring within the individual, for just as gold is hidden and latent within the reality of tin, so the resurrection body is hidden within the reality of the individual. It is a transformation or transmutation occurring within the same substance/person via the red elixir that brings about the resurrection. It was this profound transformation of the notion of the resurrection, which was to prove one of the most troubling doctrines for the more exoteric '*ulama* who were to renounce our Shaykh as a heretic. It is here as well that we may discern that the Shaykh's correspondence of the transmutation of the resurrection body through the symbolism of the red elixir⁴² is precisely linked to the red clay/red light related to the world of *nāsūt* (nature), and to the stage of fate/decreed (*qaḍā*) in the seven stages of creation and finally to the earth of '*alam adh-dharr*, or the pleroma of the covenant.

Idris Hamid in his reading of Shaykh Ahmad's discussion of '*alam ad-dharr*' correctly states that:

...the world of motes ('*alam ad-dharr*') is the universe in which the question, 'Am I not your Lord?' is asked at the moment of the creation of each individual soul. This world, for Shaykh Ahmad, lies in the lower regions of the *mundus intelligibilis*, where the oneness of the 'universal soul' (*an-nafs al-kullīyyat*, in the 'green light'), gives way to the diversity of individual souls in the world of nature (*at-tabi'at*, in the 'red light').⁴³

Regarding Shaykh Ahmad's discussion of Q 7:172, Hamid further observes that, 'God's question symbolizes the giving of existence. The affirmative reply (yes/*bala*) symbolizes the receiving of this existence (i.e. via the essence).'⁴⁴ He concludes that,

According to Shaykh Ahmad, the act of becoming-generated constitutes an act of choice on the part of the created entity in the second creation. In the inner reality of things, each of us chooses, at the very moment of our creation, whether we accept our existentionation or not. This accepting or rejecting is regarded as constituting an essential modality of a quintessence's act of becoming. In other words, essences are in a sense acts of self-creation.⁴⁵

It is also noteworthy that Shaykh Ahmad's first creation seems to correspond to the first world of particles/shadows/covenant in the primitive Shi'ite gnosis of the Imams, and his second creation seems to echo the second world of particles where distinctions are made from 'the people of the left' (those who reject the Imam) and 'people of the right' (those that accept the Imam) who are differentiated according to their choice.

Before we turn our attention to the Babi-Baha'i hermeneutics of '*alam adh-dharr*', we should mention here for the sake of completeness another element of the Shaykh's interpretation of the Primordial Covenant and '*alam adh-dharr*' which he seems to share with that of the Sufis: the pre-existential knowledge deposited in our souls in '*alam adh-dharr*' and its recollection. As we have seen, the Shaykh does not need to draw upon the theories of the Sufis for his interpretations on this matter, as the basic elements for a doctrine of the pre-existence of souls from a purely exoteric reading seems to be present in the earliest Shi'ite Traditions. In fact it is interesting that Shaykh Ahmad, in his rejection of the need for such figures as the Sufi Shaykh, invokes the idea of pre-existential knowledge inherent in man and cites the event of the Primordial Covenant (Q 7:172) in the world of particles ('*alam adh-dharr*') as the proof that such knowledge was presented to all creatures on that day, and consequently all that such teachers may do is to re-awaken these memories. Thus there is inherently no superiority in these Sufi guides who only awaken in chronological time before the seeker.⁴⁶ This notion of pre-existence in the writings of the Shaykh should be understood in light of the greater picture of his metaphysics and cosmology discussed briefly above. As we shall see, this idea of the pre-existence of souls in '*alam adh-dharr*' is radically redefined in the Babi-Baha'i scriptures and situated in relation to the appearance of the Manifestation of God.

37. Hamid, *Metaphysics* 243.

38. Hamid, *Metaphysics* 309–10. The Shaykh virtually repeats the same argument in his *Sharḥ al-'Arshīyya* (Commentary on the Throne), which he wrote as a critique of Mulla Sadra, while again mentioning Qur'an 7:171 and '*alam adh-dharr*'; see Corbin, *Spiritual Body* 219–21.

39. Hamid, *Metaphysics* 311.

40. This mystical symbolism of colour has its origin in the Tradition of the Throne (*al-'arsh*) ascribed to Imam 'Ali (cf. the Imam's interpretation of the Throne as 'the Religion of Truth'; see note 66 below). For an excellent treatment of the motif of mystic colour symbolism in the Babi-Baha'i writings, see Vahid Rafati, *Alvān dar Āthār-i Bahā'ī* (Muṭāli'ih Ma'ārif Bahā'ī, second series, no. 1, Dundas, Ont.: Persian Institute for Bahā'ī Studies, 1988). See also Stephen Lambden, *Kaleidoscope* at <http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/03-Biblical-islam-BBst/kaleidoscope.htm>.

41. Shaykh Ahmad, *Jawāmi' al-Kalim*, vol. 1, part 1, pp. 123–24, translated by Keven Brown in 'Some Alchemy Texts of Shaykh Ahmad', <http://users.sisqtel.net/kevenbrown/ShaykhAhmadAlchemy.htm>. See also Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* 180–221. In the Babi-Baha'i writings the elixir has various

shades of meaning and is at times equated with the person of the Bab and Baha'u'llah or their scriptures.

42. The alchemical concept of the red elixir (*iksir ahmar*) may be said to be conceptually linked with the famed red sulphur (*kibrit ahmar*), which has a long heritage in Islamic alchemy and is attested in the spiritual lexicon of Shi'ism and Sufism; see Abu ar-Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni, *Kitab al-jamahir fi ma'rifat al-jawahir* (Islamabad: Pakistan Hijra Council, 1989; web edition, http://www.farlang.com/gemstones/biruni-book-gemstones/page_108) 108; Raphael Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists: A History and Source Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 26; Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993) 112 n. 10. Baha'u'llah often in his writings equates rarity with the red sulphur; for example the station of martyrdom (Ishraq-Khavari, *Mā'idih-y i Asmānī*, 9 vols. (Tehran: Mu'assisihi Milli Maṭbā'at Amrī, 121–29 BE/1963–72) 4:348) and in the *Kitāb-i Iqān*, 2nd edn. (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1974) 79), he cites a Tradition of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq comparing the rarity of a true believer to *kibrit-i ahmar* (which is translated by Shoghi Effendi as the

'*Alam adh-dharr* and the Primordial Covenant in the writings of the Bab

According to Baha'i belief, the Bab (d. 1850), is the martyr-herald of the Baha'i Faith and at once the promised one of Islam, the Qa'im/Mahdi, and a Manifestation of God. He forms with Baha'u'llah the Twin Manifestations of God in the Baha'i dispensation. The writings of the Bab are often enigmatic and difficult to understand as they are couched in the mystical and esoteric lexicon of its Shi'i–Shaykhi milieu, and also because the Bab himself at times deliberately made out of his writings an elaborate cipher only to be properly decoded by the promised messianic figure of the Bayan, namely, 'Him whom God shall make manifest' (*man yazharullāh*), whom Baha'is believe to be Baha'u'llah. Indeed the decoding and unveiling of the true intent and nature of his revelation and writings itself was to be one of the supreme signs of 'Him whom God shall make manifest'. In the early writings of the Bab, the concept of *dharr*, echoing the Shaykhi heritage of the Fourth Support, is situated in the conceptual framework of the covenantal quaternary of Divine Unity, Prophethood, Imamate, and the Shi'i, which may be termed the quaternary logic of the covenant. In his later writings, such as the Persian Bayan, the Bab situates '*alam adh-dharr* in relation to the appearance of the Manifestation of God (i.e. himself) on the plane of history, and discusses the spiritual correspondence and unity between the heavenly worlds and the earthly domain, or what may be termed the Hermetic dictum of 'as above, so below', or the doctrine of *tashrī'* and *takwīn* (see below). Let us now first turn to the Shaykhi background and the early writings of the Bab in which the term *dharr* appears in the quaternary framework of the covenant.

As we have seen one of the emblematic paradigms of Shi'i spirituality lies in the concept of *walayah*, so much so that Corbin called Shi'ism 'the religion of Walaya'.⁴⁷ In the five pillars of Shi'i belief (*uṣul ad-din*), three of which it shares with Sunnism, the added pillars of Justice ('*adl*) and the *walayah* of the Imamate were the defining character of Shi'i mythos. The five pillars being:

1. *Tawhid* (Divine Unity)
2. *Nubuwwah* (Prophethood)
3. Imamate
4. Resurrection
5. Justice

These five pillars or *usul* were the foundation of Shi'ite religious consciousness for centuries until in the works of Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa'i (less clearly pronounced) and Sayyid Kazim Rashti (more clearly pronounced) these five pillars were in a radical turn reduced to four, corresponding to the primitive Shi'ite gnosis of the Imams, by the conjoining of Divine Unity with Justice, and Prophethood with Resurrection and by adding the doctrine of the Fourth Support (*Rukn-i Rāb'ih*) otherwise called the Perfect Shi'i (*Shi'i Kāmīl*), or the Gates (*Abwāb*).⁴⁸ The four Shaykhi pillars are thus:

1. *Tawhid*
2. *Nubuwwah*

3. Imamate

4. Perfect Shi'i, the Fourth Support, the Gates

This Shaykhi quaternary structure of the covenant is again and again repeated in the writings of the Bab and often within the conceptual framework of *dharr*. The motif of the quaternary structure as a whole has a cosmic value in the numerico-alphabetic hermeneutics of the Bab, and profoundly informs his entire scriptural cosmos, and is directly related to the mysteries of the covenant and its quaternary unity.⁴⁹ In the Persian Bayan, the Bab in his discussion of the four words (*hurūf*) that constitute *bismi llāh al-man'a al-quds* (In the name of God, the Inaccessible, the Holy) gives a veritable list of quaternities that form unities (*vāhid*) such as: essence, attributes, actions, '*ibadat* (worship); creation, *rizq* (sustenance), life and death; fire, air, water, earth (the four elements); heart, spirit, soul, inner body (the human reality); white, yellow, green and red (the mystic lights).⁵⁰ Not least among them is the quaternary of will, purpose, predestination, fate/decreed. These quaternities as we shall see are often juxtaposed with each other typifying the homology and correspondence that exists between all the worlds.

In one of the earliest works of the Bab called *Risālat as-sulūk ilā 'Allāh* (The Epistle of the Spiritual Journey towards God), the Bab mentions the interrelationship of the covenantal quaternary:

Indeed Religion is supported by four pillars (*bi-arkān arba'ah*): *Tawhīd* (Divine Unity), *Nubuwwa* (Prophethood), *Walāya* (Guardianship), and Shi'ah (the community of true believers).⁵¹ These are four gates (*abwāb*) of which no one is of any use without the others. And all of this is the Face of God (*wajh allāh*), which will never perish. And it (i.e. the 'Face of God') is the love of the Family of God (*ḥubb āl Allāh*) which is the same as the love of God.⁵²

It is important to note that the above quaternary is mentioned in light of the dialectic of the spiritual journey or mystic voyage (*sulūk*) towards God. It is through the recognition, or rather gnosis (*'irfān*) of the inseparable and conceptual unity of these four oaths of initiation that one attains the imperishable Face of God, which the Bab affirms is naught but the love of the Family of God (*āl Allāh*), that is the *walāyah* of the Imamate, or the covenant of succession after the Prophet, which is the love of God. In this precise sense the secret of the gnosis of the Divine (*'irfān illāhī, ma'rifat Allāh*) lies in the recognition of this covenantal quaternary.

Now it is important to state here that in the lexicon of the Bab, *mashhad* (place of testimony), *rukn* (support) and *dharr* are often used interchangeably in his writings and are co-extensive with one another in his discussions of the tetrad of the covenant.⁵³ The Bab in his second work, named *Tafsir Surat al-Baqara*, substitutes the term *rukn* for *dharr* in his discussion of the same quaternary covenant. Here he also equates each stage with a subtle mystical physiology typifying the spiritual organ relating to the various stages. This is a subtle juxtapositioning of the arc of ascent or *qaws šu'ūd* (the spiritual journey) and the arc of descent or *qaws nuzūl* (descent of creation).

These signs were placed within (*fī*) the dimension (*dharr*) of the hearts [which represents] the station (*maqam*) of Divine Unity (*tawhīd*), and [in] the dimension

'philosopher's stone'). See also 'Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavarī, *Qamūs-i-mukhtaṣar-i-lqān* (Bundoora: Century Press, 1992) 70; idem, *Ma'idih* 1:36.

43. Hamid, *Metaphysics* 401; cf. Shaykh Ahmad, *Sharḥ az-Ziyāra al-jāmi'a al-kabīra*, cited in Corbin, *Spiritual Body* 187.

44. Hamid, *Metaphysics* 244.

45. Hamid, *Metaphysics* 243–4.

46. Shaykh Ahmad, *Jawami' al-Kilām*, I, ii, 2, pp. 71–72. See Juan R. I. Cole, 'Individualism and the Spiritual Path in Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i' *Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies* no. 4 (September 1997).

47. Henry Corbin in *Shi'ism: Doctrines, Thought, and Spirituality* (ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Hamid Dabashi, Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, New York, 1988) 167. Here the Arabic word *madhhab* (school/branch) for Shi'ism would be more proper, rather than religion (*dīn*) as such.

48. Momen, *Introduction* 228.

49. For a discussion of these quaternities in the early writings of the Bab, see Todd Lawson, 'Qur'an Commentary' 115–45.

50. See the Persian Bayan, 5:8 (Iran National Baha'i Archives, vol. 24, Tehran, c. 1977; repr. East Lansing, MI.: H-Baha'i, 2006). J. Vahid Brown presented a paper 'Quaternities of the Writings of the Bab:

A Study in Babi and Baha'i Symbolism', at the Irfan Colloquia Session, no. 44, Louhelen Bahá'í School, Michigan, USA, 11–14 October 2002, but we have not seen this paper.

51. In yet another place the Bab explicitly mentions Sayyid Kazim Rashti as the pure or true Shi'i; see Fadil Mazandarani, *Tārīkh-i Zuhūr al-Haqq* vol. 3 (East Lansing, MI: H-Bahai, 2000) 223.
52. Cited in Lawson, 'The Bab's Epistle on the Spiritual Journey towards God' in Momen, *Bahá'í Faith* (pp. 231–47) 237. This is an Imamological interpretation of Qur'an 28:88.
53. For the same covenantal quaternary in which *mashhad* is used in the Bab's *Sura wa l-'asr*, see Todd Lawson, 'The Dangers of Reading: Inlibration, Communion and Transference in the Qur'ān Commentary of the Bāb', in *Scripture and Revelation* (ed. Moojan Momen, London: George Ronald, 1997) 185–91.
54. The Bāb, cited in Todd Lawson, 'Fatima's Religious Authority in an Early Work of the Bab', in *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of Marja' Taqlid* (ed. Linda Walbridge, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 108.
55. The Bāb, cited in Lawson, 'Fatima's' 107.
56. The principle of *tashrī'* (revelation) and *takwin* (creation) is often mentioned in the Babi–Baha'i

[*dharr*] of the intellects [which represents] the level (*rutba*) of Prophethood (*nubuwwa*), and [in] the atoms [*dharr*] of souls [which represents] the abode of the Imamate (*imama*) and [in] the dimension [*dharr*] of the bodies [which represents] the place (*mahall*) of the love of the Shi'a after God imposed this solemn binding upon all created things [which is] faith (*iman*) in Muhammad, 'Ali, Hasan, Husayn, Ja'far, Musa, and Fatima.⁵⁴

Thus in the above passage the affirmation of *tawhid* is equated to the heart, prophethood to the intellect, Imamate to the soul, and the Shi'ah to the body. In another terse passage in the Tafsir Surat al-Baqara, the Bab explicitly alludes to the transcendent scene of the Primordial Covenant in the Qur'an whilst discussing the same quaternary structure of the covenant, the importance of the *walayah* and its appearance on the horizontal plane of history in the event of Ghadir Khum.

That place of testimony is the same as the 'dimension' (*dharr*) of the Primordial Covenant (Q 7:171), when the covenant of lordship was taken: whoever was recognized [then] was recognized [for all time]. Indeed, 'those possessed of mind' know what happened there by what happened here (Ghadir Khumm), the realm of this world (or 'religion', *tashrī'*) is in accord with the realm of that world (or 'divine creation' *takwin*). But this place of testimony (viz. the Day of al-Ghadir) is greater than the first place of testimony, the dimension [*dharr*] of the affirmation of Divine Unity, while the second place of testimony is the dimension [*dharr*] of the affirmation of Prophethood – nay, rather it is the essence of the Divine Cause. This place of testimony of the day of al-Ghadir is the third place of testimony the greatest dimension. The remaining place of testimony is the last: it is the dimension of the Fourth Support, the rising of the Qa'im ... This occasion of testimony will occur in the beginning of his appearance (*zuhur*) and it is the dimension [*dharr*] of the affirmation by their Shi'a that the Family of God are the word of magnification in the midmost sanctity of praise.⁵⁵

Here then, the quaternary structure is repeated once again in the framework of *dharr*. It is important here to mention the four solemn oaths (*mithaq*) of primitive Shi'i cosmology and cosmogony – which as we have seen were drawn up in the first world of particles ('*alam adh-dharr al-awwal*') – are repeated verbatim here by the Bab. It was there that the fourth oath was precisely the oath of allegiance to the Qa'im /Mahdi. Here the Bab also makes the fourth oath/covenant coincident with the Qa'im and in a radical turn equates it with the Shaykhi Fourth Support. In this pre-proclamatory work, the Bab's novel hermeneutical turn opens the exegetical gate to his future declaration to be the Mahdi/Qa'im, the eschatological Lord of the Age (*sahib zaman*).

In the above, the Bab also mentions the doctrine of *tashrī'* (revelation) and *takwin* (creation),⁵⁶ or what we have termed the Hermetic dictum of 'as above, so below', which is one of the foundational hermeneutical categories that lies at the heart of the Babi–Baha'i scriptural cosmos. This hermeneutical category may be said to permeate the whole of the Babi–Baha'i textual universe. At the very centre of its axis is the autonomous figure of the Manifestation of God (*mazhar ilāhī*), the Primal Will (*mashiyyat awwaliyya*), the *axis mundi*, whose cyclical theophany on the plain of history enacts, or rather re-enacts events of cosmological and cosmogonic order, for which he, as the epiphany of the

Primal Will, is the motive force in the processio-perpetual creation of the world. However, it should be noted that the Bab as well as Baha'u'llah radically reverse this Hermetic dictum, so that it is properly 'as below, so above', first rather than 'as above, so below'. This is based on the insight that all that can be known epistemologically of the spiritual and heavenly worlds is primarily gained through the historical advent and lives of the Manifestations of God and not vice versa. This will be born out more clearly in the Bab's hermeneutics of '*alam adh-dharr*' in the Persian Bayan.

The Bab in the *Sahīfih-yi 'Adliyyih*, or the Book of Justice, before mentioning the same quaternary of the covenant, discusses the subject of free will (*tafwīd*) and predestination/compulsion (*jabr*) and like Shaykh Ahmad, affirms that God's Will brings forth creation via the seven stages of creation (*maratib sab'ih*). He affirms that this quality of will is inherent in all things, that is to say that each thing (*shay'*) is an event of the Will, and is existentiated according to its own volition. The Bab states:

Verily, He [God] is cognizant of the choices of all things and creates all in accordance to their choices and rewards them according to their act of choosing and if He should create them not according to the degree of their receptivity/capacity, verily He has committed an injustice towards them.⁵⁷ For, He hath created all for the sake of His love, and the love of His friends (*awliya*). Therefore, the decree of fate (*qaḍā'*) hath been established through His execution (*imḍā'*), so that all may receive their share. In the four *mashhads* (places of testimony) of Command (*amr*), He hath created all through His Will (*irādah*) and covenanted with them, so that there should not remain any excuse for a single person. In the first *dharr* [particle], He hath covenanted with all things regarding His [God] own Divinity, in the second *dharr*, He hath covenanted with all things regarding the prophethood of the messenger – upon him and his family be the peace of God – and in the third [*dharr*], He hath made firm the covenant regarding the guardianship (*wilāyat*) of the Family of God (*āl Allāh*) and in the fourth, he hath covenanted regarding the love of the people of *wilāyat* [the Shi'ah], and He hath created all things through the Will, and [created] the Will through its own self.⁵⁸

The last section of this passage evokes the same Tradition of *mashiyyat* (Will) of Imam Ja'far al-Sādiq mentioned earlier. The Bab like Shaykh Ahmad then is reiterating that every 'thing' (*shay'*) is created by the Primal Will according to its choice and that no 'thing' exists without its possibility to come to exist. Hence its existence itself is the sign of its choice; otherwise it would never have existed, as that would be against the justice of God to create it without its own volition. The statement that 'He hath created all for the sake of His love, and the love of His friends (*awliya*),' is crucial here as it subtly alludes to the fact that one cannot be compelled to love, and that it must be freely given of one's own accord. The purpose of creation is hence to love God and His chosen friends, namely the prophet and his successors, through our own free will. It is interesting to note that the stage of fate/decreed (*qaḍā'*), which is the fourth stage of the arc of descent, is mentioned here in light of the dialectic of free will and necessity. Thus it may be said that this revelation of the covenant of God on the plane of history is decreed/fated but how we respond to it is our choice.

scriptures. Another word often used interchangeably with *tashrī'* is *tadwīn* (i.e. *tadwīn* and *takwīn*). This doctrine is mentioned as one of the principle beliefs of the Shaykiyya and by extension that of the Shi'i, by Sayyid Kazim Rashti in *Uṣūl al-'Aqā'id*; see Nusratu'llah Muhammad-Hussaini, *Hadrat-i Bab* (Dundas, Ont.: Institute for Bahā'ī Studies in Persian, 1995) 122. For the alchemical and cosmogonic background of *takwīn* in the works of Jabir Ibn Hayyan and early Islamic alchemy, see Kathleen Malone O'Connor, 'The alchemical creation of life (takwīn) and other concepts of Genesis in medieval Islam', Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1994.

57. Keven Brown's provisional translation of the beginning of the above passage reads: 'He [God] knows the dispositions of all things, and through the dispositions of all, He creates all, giving each one a portion according to its disposition... Were He to create something other than in accord with the state of its own receptivity, this would be an injustice to it.' Mazandarani, *Amr va Khalq*, repr. 4 vols. in 2, Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahā'ī-Verlag, 1985, 1:76; trans. online at <http://users.sisqtel.net/kevenbrown/sevenstages.html>.

58. Provisional translation from the Bāb, *Sahīfih-yi 'Adliyyih* (Tehran: n.p., n.d.) 21.

59. Keven Brown's provisional translation of the Bab, manuscripts in the Iran National Baha'i Archives, 14:268ff; 67:38ff; 86:137ff, in 'Selections from the Baha'i Writings and from Shaykh Ahmad on the Seven Stages of Creation' at <http://users.sisqtel.net/kevenbrown/sevenstages.html>.
60. The Bāb, translated in Keven Brown, 'Selections'.
61. From Qayyum al-Asma', chap. XLI, trans. in the Bab, *Selections*, pp. 57–58.
62. Provisional translation of the Bāb, Persian Bayan, 18:8. The Bāb writes about the gradual self-disclosure of his station in the Dala'il-i Sab'ih (The Seven Proofs); see *Selections* 119.

In another place the Bab in his discussions of the seven stages of creation, mentions the stage of fate/decreed in the conceptual framework of the Qur'anic Primordial Covenant. Just as in the works of Shaykh Ahmad, the stage of fate is correlated to the Primordial Covenant where they who exclaim 'Yea, verily' are existentially according to their freedom to respond.⁵⁹ In yet another place the Bab in his discussion of the stage of fate/decreed corresponds to it the colour crimson: 'That which I set forth in explanation of the letter Hā was to extol the Tree of Bahā, for the supporters of Fate (*qada'*) recognize the decree of spontaneity (*badā'*) in the Crimson Pillar.'⁶⁰ Here then the Bab correlates the fourth mystic colour that is crimson with the fourth stage of the arc of descent, namely fate/decreed. In another instance the Bab, in the Qayyūm al-Asmā', mentions crimson in relation to his station as the alchemical elixir: 'Indeed God hath created everywhere around this Gate (*bāb*) oceans of divine elixir (*iksir*), tinged crimson (*ahmar*) with the essence of existence and vitalized through the animating power of the desired fruit; and for them God hath provided Arks of ruby, tender, crimson-coloured, wherein none shall sail but the people of Bahā.'⁶¹ Here we see that the elixir of the resurrection body in the works of Shaykh Ahmad is identified as the Bab. As we have said earlier such juxtapositioning in the writings of the Bab illustrates the unity and correspondence of all the worlds, and demonstrates the dictum of 'as above, so below', which imbues all his writings.

Here we must note that the Bab only progressively made a self-disclosure of the fullness of his station according to the dictum 'Speak to the people according to their capacity.' His station as the Manifestation of God, or the Primal Will, became more clearly pronounced in his later writings and in the Persian Bayan he explicitly links the last stage or the fourth *dharr* in which he appeared in the station of the *bab*, to the first stage or the first *dharr* which is that of the Primal Will. The Bab states:

...For at that time he manifested himself according to the fourth *dharr* and called himself as the appearance of one of the Gates (*abwab*). Thus it is for that reason that the first *dharr* is manifest in the fourth *dharr*, for it was in that *dharr* [fourth *dharr*] that he spoke the words, 'Verily, I am God; there is none other God but me.' Should there be a possessor of understanding in the world, he would set out wayfaring and attain certitude in that the Last is the same as the First, and the Manifest as the Hidden ...⁶²

Here we see that the unity and the correspondence of the various stages are invested in the very *being* of the Bab, in whom the first is the same as the last and the hidden as the manifest. Thus the dictum of 'as above so below, as below so above', is manifested in the very person of the Bab himself who in his station as the Primal Will encompasses all of the stages.

The Bab in his later writings clearly identifies the 18 Letters of the Living (*Ḥurūf-i Ḥayy*) with the 'precursors' or *sābiqūn*, namely the Imams, as they who preceded before others in their recognition of the Bab, as well as in more initiatory terms as they who responded to God's Primordial Covenant in '*alam adh-dharr*'. Just as in the Shi'i Traditions it was Muhammad and the Imams who preceded all in creation in the world of particles, so in the Bab's dispensation they return (*raj'a*) and are the first to recognize him who

is the Qa'im.⁶³ In this connection it is important to mention a Tradition ascribed to the third Imam Husayn ibn 'Alī wherein he states, 'When the Qa'im rises, the people will reject him because he will return as a youth in his best years (*shābban muwaffaqan*). No one will remain believing in him except those with whom God made a covenant in [the world of] the first particles (*fī adh-dharr al-awwal*).'⁶⁴ This Tradition is extremely interesting in light of the fact that the common Shi'i interpretation of the appearance of the Qa'im assumes that he will be universally recognized. But, according to this Tradition only those who in pre-existence, in the world of the first particles, had made a pact/covenant to accept the Qa'im will bear allegiance to him in his parousia (*zuhūr*) at the end of the age (*zamān*), and the rest of the people will reject him for being a youth. We must recall that the Shi'i believe that the twelfth Imam disappeared as a child, and therefore is now over a thousand years old. It is interesting to note that the Bab, who claimed to be the awaited Qa'im, enounced his station in the prime of his youth (*shābban muwaffaqan*) and it was the Letters of the Living, the first to believe in the Bab, who were called the 'precursors' or *sābiqūn*, namely they who arose to assent to his recognition before all created things.

In this connection the Bab in the Persian Bayan makes explicit the interpretation regarding '*alam adh-dharr*, and in a radical turn situates it in this world in relation to the appearance of the Manifestation of God: 'The first to respond' to the primordial question 'Am I not your Lord?' was 'Muhammad, who was the first to be created. So all in this day confess that, if they say that the response took place in the world of pre-existence (*alam adh-dharr*), this is that same world, for the realm above the throne (*al-'arsh*) of heaven is identical to the earth on which the Manifestation of God dwells.' We must note that it was precisely this same Divine Throne which in early Shi'i cosmology and cosmogony was created in the first world of the particles/shadows/pact, and which was interpreted in the lexicon of the Imams as 'religion' (*din*).⁶⁵ The Bab here then returns the meaning to its origin, to the hermeneutic of the Imams, which is precisely the meaning of *Ta'wil* (to bring back to its origin), and states that any other understanding of the Throne or '*alam adh-dharr* is nothing but fanciful imagination. Indeed the Bab states that nothing of that world, namely the pre-existential world, can be known, unless it has its correspondence first here in the life of the Manifestation, in whose revelation archetypal cosmogonic events are realized and become knowable. Finally in this passage the Bab then refers to the words of the Tradition relating to the visitation of the shrine of Imam Husayn: 'whoso visits Husayn with a full understanding, it is as if he has visited God upon his throne' and states that 'It is manifest to the possessors of intelligence that that is the very locus of the throne of God, and that he is the throne of Muhammad, the messenger of God.'⁶⁶

'*Alam adh-dharr* and the Primordial Covenant in the Baha'i writings

Along with the sacred texts of the Bab, it is in the writings of Baha'u'llah (d. 1892), the prophet-founder of the Baha'i revelation, and 'Abdu'l-Baha (d. 1921) his eldest son who is at once the successor and interpreter of that revelation, that '*alam adh-dharr* finds its clearest exegesis. Though elements of its Shi'i-Shaykhi heritage are present, yet it provides a new and

63. Denis MacEoin, 'Hierarchy, Authority, and Eschatology in Early Bābī Thought', published in *In Iran* (Studies in Bābī and Bahā'ī History vol. 3, ed. Peter Smith, Los Angeles: Kalimat, 1986) 104–5. For the concept of *raj'a* (return) in Shi'ism, see Amir-Moezzi's excellent article on *raj'a* in *Encyclopedia Iranica*.
64. Muhammad bin Ibrāhīm al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba* (Qum: Anwār al-Hudā, 1422/2001) 194 (no. 43). Also cited in al-Shaykh 'Alī al-Kūrānī al-'Āmili, *Mu'jam ahādīth al-Imām al-Mahdī* (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Ma'ārif al-Islāmiya, 1411/1991) 3:353 (no. 900); cf. *Bihār al-anwār* (110 vols, Tehran: Matba'a al-Islamiyya) 52:287 (no. 23). Reference and translation provided by Ormī Ghaemmaghami. The Baha'i scholar Mirza Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpaygani also cites this Tradition in his master apologetic work *al-Farā'id* (Cairo: Maṭba'ah Hindīyyah, 1315 A.H./1897) 56.
65. See the Tradition of Iman al-Baqir reported by his son Ja'far: 'the Throne [*al-'arsh*] is the Religion of Truth' (Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide* 31).
66. *The Persian Bayan of Sayyid Ali Muhammad Shirazi, the Bab*, 2.8, trans. Dennis MacEoin, [*H-Baha'i*] *Translations of Shaykhi, Babi, and Bahai Texts* (July 1997). Part of this passage has been translated in *Selections* 112–13.

67. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, rev. edn. 1995) 238–39.
68. See Nader Saiedi's two excellent articles, in which he makes references to *dharr* and '*alam-i dharr*'; Nader Saiedi, 'Kalimat-i maknūnih va aṣl-i mithāq', *Pazhūhishnāmih*, A Persian Journal of Bahā'ī Studies, vol. 3, no. 2 (Winter 1999) 90; idem, 'Tafsīr bismi llāh raḥmān raḥīm', *Pazhūhishnāmih* vol. 2, no. 2 (Summer 1998) 185. Muhammad-Hussaini also mentions *dharr* in regard to his discussions of the Bab's writings, *Haḍrat-i Bāb* 735–6.

novel element of understanding the coordinates of this mysterious region of 'the realm of subtle entities' and may be seen both as a divine *ta'wil* or hermeneutic of those Traditions of the Imams which relate to this world and the dialectic of the Primordial Covenant. Therefore, the mytho-history of the drama of the Qur'anic covenant (Q 7:172) is radically reinterpreted in the Baha'i scriptures both in the light of the Greater Covenant (i.e. the covenant made by the Manifestation regarding the acceptance of the next Manifestation) as well as the Lesser Covenant (i.e. the covenant made by the Manifestation regarding his successor). Indeed the same conceptual framework of the covenantal quaternary and its structural unity that was present in the early writings of the Bab is also present in the Baha'i revelation. As will become clear, in the Baha'i writings the whole pre-existential drama of the Primordial Covenant becomes historicized in the life of the Manifestation and finds its true meaning in relation to his revelation. '*Alam adh-dharr*' then denotes the undifferentiated station of mankind before the revelation of the Manifestation of God on the plane of history. It is the moment in which human beings freely chose their realities and essences in accordance with their response to the Divine Call. It is here that the antinomy of free will versus predestination is resolved and the problematic of the pre-existence of souls finds its solution. Thus '*alam adh-dharr*' is the spiritual topography of the Divine-human encounter and represents the mystical and atemporal realm of the covenant.

Throughout the writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha the theme of the Covenant ('*ahd/mithaq*'), both Greater and Lesser, have an unparalleled and unprecedented importance. Indeed all of the teachings of the Baha'i Faith circle around 'the pivot of the oneness of mankind' which is unrealizable in the temporal world, save through 'the power of the Covenant', namely that of the Lesser Covenant.⁶⁷ The Baha'i revelation is then the quintessential religion of the Covenant. This Covenant maybe seen in initiatory and esoteric terms as the fulfilment of that covenant which remained tragically unfulfilled in Islam, indeed in the whole of the Adamic cycle, and at last was fulfilled in the Baha'i dispensation by the reality of the Lesser Covenant in the form of a tablet penned by its author, wherewith the solidarity and oneness of the whole of existence is said to be realizable at long last. In this precise sense, the Baha'i revelation even more than Shi'ism may be termed the religion of *walayyah* par excellence.

Though there have been some general references to '*alam-i dharr*' in secondary Baha'i literature,⁶⁸ a full study of its scope and significance in the Baha'i writings have remained hitherto unexplored; this despite the fact that this term has profound implications for a deeper understanding of the esoteric mysteries of the Covenant in the Baha'i revelation. Two exceptions, however, are Fazil Mazandarani and 'Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari, who have made passing references to '*alam-i dharr*' in their respective encyclopaedias.

In his encyclopaedia *Asrar al-athar*, Fazil Mazandarani has an entry on '*alam-i dharr*' (the realm of subtle entities) and *dharr-i 'amā*' (the particles of the Unknowable Cloud). Regarding *dharr-i 'ama*, he states that it is 'a term of esoteric philosophy and gnosis which has also been mentioned in this Cause', then he cites a passage from the writings of Baha'u'llah referring to *dharr-i 'ama*: 'These sovereigns of existence (*sultān-i wujūd*) in the particles

of the Unknowable Cloud (*dharr-i 'ama*) and in the world of spirits (*awālim-i arwāh*) accepted all calamities in the Path of God – with supreme fortitude and forbearance...⁶⁹

The term *dharr* in *dharr-i 'ama* is more a reference to '*ama* or the Unknowable Cloud, which is the station of the primordial Manifestation of God, as the Primal Will or Word of God. The conjunction of *dharr* with '*ama*, typifies or signifies the spiritual ground, station or dimension of '*ama*, that is to say the station of the unknowability of the Manifestation.⁷⁰ Regarding '*alam-i dharr* or realm of subtle entities, however, Mazandarani states that 'the world of particles/realm of subtle entities is as it has been referred to in the Qur'an (Q 7:171–2) ...' and continues in this vein,

it is the same realm in which the whole of humanity before this earth/world bore witness to the oneness of the essence of God, and in Islamic sources they have written that humanity before this existence in that world of witnessing were addressed by the words 'Am I not your Lord?' Some said, 'Yes', but became unbelievers and others said, 'Yes' and were accounted as faithful, and each one received their share and due in this world according to that world.⁷¹

Here Mazandarani affirms that '*alam-i dharr* pertains to the transcendent scene of the Primordial Covenant in the Qur'an and briefly mentions the Islamic interpretation of this world. Then he cites an important passage by 'Abdu'l-Baha in which the interpretation and meaning of '*alam-i dharr* is provided. Mazandarani does not explicate the interpretation provided by 'Abdu'l-Baha any further, nor does he seem to give a clear indication of the overall meaning of '*alam-i dharr* in the Baha'i writings. We shall have occasion to discuss 'Abdu'l-Baha's interpretation of this term below.

'Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari on the other hand in his Baha'i encyclopaedia *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif-i Bahā'ī* has two entries on a cognate of '*alam-i dharr* in the Baha'i writings, namely *dharr al-baqā* or the timeless realm of eternal particles. The first entry is as follows: 'The knowledge of God wherein the essences and realities of things existed in that realm [*dharr al-baqā*] in conceptual ('ilmī) form before outward existence and were brought forth through the address of God; and God said unto them, "Am I not your Lord?" which has been revealed in the Qur'an [Q 7:171–2].'⁷²

Ishraq-Khavari again properly situates *dharr al-baqā* in relation to the Primordial Covenant in the Qur'an. He provides no textual evidence from the Baha'i writings, however, for his interpretation, though it seems to be derived from the exegesis of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha regarding '*alam-i dharr* and other similar passages which mention *darr al-baqā*. Before we turn to the most explicit interpretations of '*alam-i dharr* by Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, let us first look at some examples of how *dharr al-baqā* is often used in the Baha'i writings. In one instance, it alludes to the pre-existent station of Baha'u'llah in which his destiny to suffer as the Manifestation of God was foreordained.

Hast Thou forgotten the Covenant that thou made with God before the creation of the universe – at the beginning of time (*dharr al-baqā*) – to die a martyr's death in His path? Verily, this matter hath been foreordained in the Mother Book (*umm al-kitāb*).⁷³

69. Provisional translation from Ishraq-Khavari, *Ma'idih* 4:42.

70. See Stephen Lambden's study of the concept of '*ama* in the Babi-Baha'i scriptures, 'An Early Poem of Mirza Husayn 'Ali Baha'u'llah: The Sprinkling of the Cloud of Unknowing (Rashh-i 'ama),' *Baha'i Studies Bulletin* 3: 2 (1984) 4–114.

71. Translated from Asadu'llah Fadil Mazandarani, *Asrār ul-Āthār*, vol. 3 (Tehran: Mu'assisih Milli Maṭbū'āt Amrī, 128 BE/1972, PDF edition digitally republished, East Lansing, MI: H-Bahai, 2006) 270–1.

72. Translated from 'Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari, *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif-i Bahā'ī* [Baha'i Encyclopaedia], vol. 9 (digitally published, East Lansing, MI: H-Bahai, 2001) 82.

73. Bahā'u'llāh, La'ālī' al-Hikmah, 2:26–7. Provisional translation by Omid Ghaemmaghami.

74. Baha'u'llah, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Centre, 2002) 10–11.
75. For this same idea, in which the faithful are created from the clay of the reality of the holy Imams, see Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide* 39–40, 44–55.
76. Baha'u'llah (Sūrih-yi Qamīs), *Āthār-i Qalam-i A'lā*, vol. 4 (Dundas, Ont.: Institute for Bahā'ī Studies in Persian, 2002) 374. Provisional translation by Omid Ghaemmaghami.
77. Here Baha'u'llah echoes the prophetic Tradition in which it is said, 'I was a prophet when Adam was still between spirit and flesh.' See Javad Nurbakhsh, *Traditions of the Prophet: Ahadith* (New York, 1981) 27.

It is noteworthy to recall here the reference to the Mother Book (*umm al-kitab*) in the above passage, which as we saw in primitive Shi'ism was the first metaphysical world in which the light of Muhammad existed. It was also in '*alam adh-dharr al-awwal*', which here corresponds to *dharr al-baqā*, that the covenant with God was first made. In another place in the Surah of the Temple, Baha'u'llah refers to the covenant, which was taken with all created beings in *dharr al-baqā* in this manner:

O Living Temple! Through Thee have We gathered together all created things, whether in the heavens or on the earth, and called them to account for that which We had covenanted with them before the foundation of the world [*dharr al-baqā*]. And lo, but for a few radiant faces and eloquent tongues, We found most of the people dumbfounded, their eyes staring up in fear. From the former We brought forth the creation of all that hath been and all that shall be. These are they whose countenances God hath graciously turned away from the face of the unbelievers, and whom He hath sheltered beneath the shadow of the Tree of His own Being; they upon whose hearts He hath bestowed the gift of peace and tranquillity, and whom He hath strengthened and assisted through the hosts of the seen and the unseen.⁷⁴

Here we are already approaching the hermeneutics of *dharr al-baqā*, which is co-extensive with '*alam adh-dharr*' or the realm of subtle entities. In this passage the reality of the Primal Will as the pre-existential reality of the Manifestation of God addresses his earthly Temple, that is Baha'u'llah, that he has covenanted with all created beings before the foundation of the world (*dharr al-baqā*), regarding his Manifestation, and lo when the hour of his appearance struck, most of mankind turned away from him, save 'a few radiant faces and eloquent tongues'. In a profound turn Baha'u'llah then states that it is from them that he has 'brought forth the creation of all that hath been and all that shall be'. This would be first and foremost his son 'Abdu'l-Baha, the Centre of his Covenant, and his daughter the Greatest Holy Leaf, and his great grandson Shoghi Effendi (d. 1957), the Guardian (*walī*) of the Cause of God, namely the Holy Family; and second, his most faithful followers, or the faithful of love. Therefore the mystical earth from which 'the creation of all that hath been and all that shall be', is first and foremost the earth of the Holy Family, which is precisely the reality of *walayah* and that of the Lesser Covenant, from whom the earth of the faithful is first kneaded.⁷⁵

In another instance Baha'u'llah is addressed as him who is the bearer of the pre-existential bounties and favours of God in these words: 'O Solace of the Spirit! Speak to the people of the bounties that We bestowed upon thee before the foundation of the world (*dharr al-baqā*), before the bodies of all things were adorned with the garment of names, when the eternal Adam (*adam al-baqā*) lay concealed within the clay of the Divine Decree (*ḥinat al-qadā*).'⁷⁶

It is important to highlight in the above passage that the eternal Adam, which represents humanity is here referred to as concealed within the clay of 'Divine Decree'.⁷⁷ This as we have seen was the fourth stage in the seven stages of creation (*maratib sab'ih*) which both in the works of Shaykh Ahmad and the Bab is invariably related to '*alam adh-dharr*'. Similarly it is related to the world of nature ('*alam al-nasut*') and the mystical colour and photism corresponding to this stage is red or crimson (*ahmar*). In one instance 'Abdu'l-Baha

in his explication of a term that we encountered earlier in our section on Shi'ism, called *al-kathib al-hamra* (the crimson hill),⁷⁸ explicitly mentions the subtle mystic colours of light accorded to each of the first four stages of the arc of descent and at once illuminates the spiritual significance of that term:

By the crimson land (*arḍ-i ḥamrā*) and the crimson hill (*kathīb-i aḥmar*) the station of fate/decreed is intended, for in the terminology of the people of God, white indicates the station of the will, while green signifies the station of predestination. Crimson (*aḥmar*) indicates the station of fate/decreed and yellow the station of completion (*imḍā*). Thus it is that the crimson land signifies the station of the most great martyrdom [testimony].⁷⁹

Similarly in yet another instance 'Abdu'l-Baha in referring to these mystic colours states,

This is the terminology of the late Shaykh [Shaykh Ahmad]. White is the station of the will, for it transforms into whatsoever colour thou dost desire. The colour red/crimson is the station of decree/fate, yellow that of purpose, and green that of predestination. By the snow-white Spot the station of will is intended... The Primal Point [the Bab] in the Best of Stories (*aḥsan al-qisāṣ*, i.e. Qayyūm al-Asmā) hath said: 'By the righteousness of the One true God, I am the Maid of Heaven begotten by the Spirit of Bahā, abiding within the Mansion hewn out of a mass of ruby, tender and vibrant...' The station of crimson (*ar-rutbat al-ḥamrā*)... This is the station of fate/decreed.⁸⁰

Thus as we have seen, *dharr al-baqa* is related to the station of *qada* which is the fourth stage of the arc of descent and in the Babi-Baha'i lexicon is situated in relation to the world of *nasut* and the colour corresponding to it is red or crimson.⁸¹ All of this as we have seen has its spiritual genealogy in the works of Shaykh Ahmad and the writings of the Bab.

It is interesting to note here that the Hebrew origin for the word 'Adam' which is *adamah* means red or crimson earth, this may be typologically related to the mystical locale known as *al-kathib al-hamra* or the Crimson Sandhill, which 'Abdu'l-Baha has related to the stage of fate/decreed (*qada*) which is precisely related to *dharr al-baqa* or '*alam adh-dharr*. Therefore the Genesis drama of the creation of Adam is correlated in this manner to the Qur'anic Primordial Covenant whereby the red dust-earth from which Adam⁸² was created is the mystical locale of *dharr* or the realm of the covenant (*mithaq*), and in its highest signification designates 'the station of the most great martyrdom [testimony]' which may be the cry of 'yea verily, we bear witness' (*balā shahadnā*, Q 7:172) freely uttered by the faithful in response to the Divine Call even unto death. This is the only true existence perceived from the divine point of view and hence the red clay dyed crimson by the blood of lovers is the earth of the faithful of love kneaded from the covenant (for further Genesis symbolism in the Baha'i writings in relation to our theme, see below).

Similarly in another passage in the Sūrat al-Bayān, Baha'u'llah precisely turns this notion of sacrifice around, in that the Primordial Covenant that was drawn in *dharr al-baqa* is not only to sacrifice oneself for the Beloved but also to offer up one's life for those who have the fragrance of the love of the Beloved. Baha'u'llah, addressing the Maid of Heaven, states: 'If Thou

78. The term *kathib al-hamra* also appears in the writings of the Bab precisely in his discussion of the quaternities in the fourth stage pertaining to the Shi'i. Sayyid Kazim Rashti mentions *kathib al-hamra* in his *Sharḥ al-qasida al-lāmiya*. See Todd Lawson, 'Qur'an Commentary' 133–5. See also Stephen Lambden's note on *kathib al-hamra* here: <http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/o3-Biblical-islam-BBst/K-AHMAR.HTM>.

79. Provisional translation from Ishraq-Khavari, *Ma'idih* 2:48, 4:17.

80. Provisional translation from 'Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari, *Muhadirat* (2 vols. in 1, Hofheim-Langenhain: Baha'i-Verlag, 1987) 980. Here we have provided the longer text of the Bab's Qayyūm al-Asmā', which in Ishraq-Khavari seems to be partially quoted or missing. Also, the word *al-rutbat al-hamra* (the station of crimson) which appears in *Muhadirat* does not seem to be part of the text of the Qayyūm al-Asmā'.

81. Baha'u'llah in Lawh-i Kullu't-Ta'ām (the Tablet of all Food), allocates the colour white to the metaphysical world of Lahut, yellow to Jabarut, green to Malakut, and red to Nasut (the physical world). See provisional translation by Stephen Lambden, <http://www.bahai-library.org/provisionals/food.html>.

82. Here it is worth mentioning that one of the symbolic and spiritual dimensions inherent in the Genesis tale of Adam and Eve is precisely the freedom to choose and to will, which in the story is exercised contrary to the Divine Admonition.

83. *Athar-i Qalam-i A'la* 4:268; available at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/>. Trans. in Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah* 284. Shoghi Effendi here translates *dharr al-baqa* as, 'from time immemorial'. The other translation by the Baha'i World Centre, as we have seen, is 'before the foundation of the world'. This reference was kindly provided by Omid Ghaemmaghami and Moojan Momen.

84. Ishraq-Khavari, *Ma'idih* 8:47–48. Provisional translation by Omid Ghaemmaghami.

85. 'Abdu'l-Bahā, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahā* (Wilmette: Bahā'i Publishing Trust, 1982) 207.

smallest from any one the smell of the love of Thy Lord, offer up Thyself for him, for We have created Thee to this end, and have covenanted with Thee, from time immemorial (*dharr al-baqa*), and in the presence of the congregation of Our well-favoured ones, for this very purpose.' Here then the very purpose of existence is to sacrifice one's life not only for the Beloved, but for the lovers of the Beloved.⁸³

Before we turn to the Lesser Covenant let us look at an example of the use of the term *dharr* typifying the motif of the Greater Covenant, in which each Manifestation has made a solemn oath/covenant regarding the appearance of Baha'u'llah, as the promised one of all religions.

Say: Beware lest ye become veiled by evil suggestions from Him who is the Possessor of all Names and Attributes. This is he [Baha'u'llah] whose Manifestation the Bab hath covenanted ('*ahd*') in every particle (*dharr*) of the Bayan, whose coming Muhammad, the Messenger of God, hath promised in every particle of the Qur'an, whose advent the Spirit (Jesus) had promised in every particle of the Gospel, whose appearance he who held converse with God (Moses) had promised in every particle of the Torah, and whose revelation the Friend (Abraham) had promised in every particle of God's Decree (*amr*) – if ye be of them that comprehend.⁸⁴

In the above passage Baha'u'llah in a profound hermeneutical turn makes the holy books of each of the Manifestations to be the very world of particles (*dharr*) in which the covenant was drawn between the prophet and his ardent lovers regarding their acceptance of Baha'u'llah at the time of his promised manifestation (*zuhūr*). The covenant then in these holy books is the realm of subtle entities ('*alam adh-dharr*') in which the Primordial Covenant was drawn. It is here that paradoxically '*alam adh-dharr*' is at once related to both time and timelessness, for the event of the revelation of these books occurs in the world of time, but in respect to the covenant or origin of revelation, it is outside time. 'Abdu'l-Bahā in his interpretation of one of the Persian Hidden Words (no. 71) of Baha'u'llah mentions this phenomenon and in a radical turn as well resolves the problematic of the pre-existence of souls as related to '*alam-i dharr*'.

As for the reference in The Hidden Words regarding the Covenant entered into on Mount Pārān, this signifieth that in the sight of God the past, the present and the future are all one and the same – whereas, relative to man, the past is gone and forgotten, the present is fleeting, and the future is within the realm of hope. And it is a basic principle of the Law of God that in every Prophetic Mission, He entereth into a Covenant with all believers – a Covenant that endureth until the end of that Mission, until the promised day when the Personage stipulated at the outset of the Mission is made manifest. Consider Moses, He Who conversed with God. Verily, upon Mount Sinai, Moses entered into a Covenant regarding the Messiah, with all those souls who would live in the day of the Messiah. And those souls, although they appeared many centuries after Moses, were nevertheless – so far as the Covenant, which is outside time, was concerned – present there with Moses.⁸⁵

Therefore this covenant, 'which is outside time', is precisely with those souls who are to exist in the future, but in relation to the covenant they are

present – *in potentia* – pre-existentially in the realm of the covenant, which is the world of particles. Here we are already approaching the radical Baha'i hermeneutics of the Shi'i Tradition, which spoke of the pre-existence of the Shi'ite faithful a thousand years prior to their actual existence. As we shall see this ontological priority rather than temporal priority will become clearer in Baha'u'llah's hermeneutic of '*alam-i dharr*' in which the whole pre-existential drama of the Primordial Covenant (Q 7:172) is interpreted in relation to the theophanic appearance of the Manifestation of God on the horizon of history. This is clearly expressed in relation to Baha'u'llah in a letter addressed to an individual Baha'i by 'Abdu'l-Baha:

O thou speaker of the word 'yea verily' (*bala* – Q2:171–2)! In this Day of the Divine Presence (*yawm-i liqā*), a hundred thousand souls have contemplated for years the mysteries of Alast (*sir-i alast*), and the days of the *dharr* of existence (*wujūd*), and the reality of the Intended One (*ḥaqīqat-i maqsūd*) and who imagined [spiritual] meanings, and made esoteric interpretations (*ta'wil*) of the Traditions and Qur'anic verses, and solved problems. But when the Sun of Aloneness (*tafīd*) shone forth from the horizon of Divine Unity (*tawhid*), the Divine Call was raised and the Call of *Alast* reached the ears of the whole of existence, all became dumb of speech and were made known as deaf and dumb. But thou didst respond to the [Divine] Call and cried out 'yea verily' and entered neath the shadow of the word of Divine Unity and drank from the flowing waters of Tasnim (Qur'an 83:27), and tasted from the cup tempered at the Camphor Fountain (Qur'an 6:5–6).⁸⁶

We must now make mention of a tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha in which he provides a hermeneutic of *bismi llāh ar-rahmān ar-rahīm* (In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful) which adorns the beginning of every *surah* of the Qur'an save the ninth *surah* Tawbah. ('Abdu'l-Baha states that even this *surah* starts with the letter *bā*, with the words *bara'itu*.) While discussing the significance of the first letter of *bism*, that is '*bā*', and its significance as the Primal Will, namely Baha'u'llah, he mentions as a sign that the creation of all things have originated with this letter (which is the first letter of the name Baha'u'llah) and that all other sacred scriptures, such as the Torah and the Gospels, also start with this letter. For, indeed it is precisely with this letter that the Hebrew scriptures start, for the book of Genesis begins with the Hebrew letter '*ba*' or *bet*, that is with the word *bereshit* (in the beginning), and the New Testament which begins with the Gospel of Matthew also begins with the Greek letter *beta*, that is with the word '*byblos*' (book). Then 'Abdu'l-Baha in another linguistic turn states that this letter, which at the primordial scene of the Covenant in *dharr al-baqa* when creation first uttered the word 'yes' (*bala* which starts with the letter '*ba*'), is thus precisely the cause of the coming into being of all things: '... [and it was] The first letter [*ba*] that came out of the tongue of all beings and filled up their mouth in the beginning of the creation, when God addressed His creation [in the world of eternal particles] before the foundation of the world (*dharr al-baqa*) and said: "Am I not your Lord?" and they said: "Yes" (*bala*).'⁸⁷

Now let us turn to the Lesser Covenant, which is regarding the successorship of 'Abdu'l-Baha and that of the Guardian of the Cause of God (*walī amru llāh*) Shoghi Effendi and Universal House of Justice after

86. Provisional translation from *Safīnīh-yi 'Irfān* 9 (2006) 15.

87. Provisional translation of 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Min Makātib-i Hadrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā*, vol. 1 (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Baha'i Brasil, 1982) 38. See also Nader Saiedi, 'Tafsir bismi llah' 188–98.

88. Provisional translation from Shoghi Effendi, *Tawqī'āt-i mubārakih* (Langenhain: Bahā'ī-Verlag, 1992) 207–8.
89. 'Abdu'l-Baha cited in Shoghi Effendi, *Tawqī'at* 207–8. Provisional translation by Omid Ghaemmaghami; cf. the reference to the 'Tree of Anisa' as the 'Tree of the Covenant' which was 'entered into in primordial Origin [*dharr al-baqa*]' in *Lawḥ-i Qarn* (Tehran: Mu'assisih Milli Maṭbū'āt Amrī, 1944); provisional translation by Khazeh Fananapazir at <http://bahaistudies.net/kf/centennial.html>.
90. Helen Bassett Hornby (comp.), *Lights of Guidance: A Bahā'ī Reference File* (5th edn, New Delhi: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1997) 181. 'Abdu'l-Baha has also designated both the Lesser Covenant and the whole corpus of Baha'u'llah's writings as the Crimson Book; see Ishraq-Khavari, *Ma'idih* 3:1.
91. It is interesting to note here that Baha'u'llah evokes the imagery of *anamnesis* in relation to 'those hallowed and blessed surroundings', using Platonic tropes of forgetfulness and recollection which as we mentioned earlier were utilized in Sufism as well as Shaykhism.

Baha'u'llah. Shoghi Effendi, while discussing the significance of the Lesser Covenant, quotes from several of the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha. In one instance 'Abdu'l-Baha is cited as stating: 'The Covenant which God hath made in the realm of the eternal particles (*dharr al-baqa*), was for the sake of the Centre of the Covenant (*markaz-i mīthāq*, i.e. 'Abdu'l-Baha).'⁸⁸ Then Shoghi Effendi immediately cites another passage from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha wherein a further hermeneutical element is added:

This is the Covenant which God made in the realm of eternal particles (*dharr al-baqa*) neath the shade of the Tree of Anisa on the Day of His Revelation. It then appeared in the realm of creation in the form of a Tablet graven by the Pen of the Most High. Glorified be my Lord, the All-Glorious.⁸⁹

It is instructive to recall here that the covenant of the *walayah* of 'Ali which was drawn in '*alam adh-dharr al-awwal* or the first world of the particles, in early Shi'i cosmology and cosmogony, is repeated here in regard to 'Abdu'l-Baha precisely in *dharr al-baqa*. Here 'Abdu'l-Baha mentions the covenant that was drawn in *dharr al-baqa* by Baha'u'llah and in a profound hermeneutical turn states that this covenant appeared in the world of creation in the form of a tablet. This tablet is the Book of the Covenant (Kitāb-i 'ahdī) which is the last will and testament of Baha'u'llah in which he appoints 'Abdu'l-Baha as his successor and Centre of the Covenant. Therefore *dharr al-baqa* is here the spiritual earth of the Book of the Covenant. Here Genesis symbolism such as the Tree of Anisa which is coterminous with the Tree of Life is used in the hermeneutics of the Lesser Covenant via the realm of eternal particles (*dharr al-baqa*). Indeed, the Book of the Covenant is often referred to in Baha'u'llah's mystical lexicon as the Crimson Book, as Shoghi Effendi has stated: 'The Crimson Book refers to the Book of His Covenant.'⁹⁰ Here again we must recall that the symbolism of the colour crimson or red is precisely related to *dharr al-baqa* and corresponds to the stage of fate/decreed (*qada*) in the arc of descent and to *alam al-nasut* in the hierarchy of worlds. Thus it is that crimson is the colour of the earth of Adam, or *adamah*. It is from this mystical crimson-coloured earth associated with the Book of the Covenant, which is related to *dharr al-baqa* that 'the creation of all that hath been and all that shall be' is brought forth. In this precise sense the power of the Covenant is the cause of the new creation.

Baha'u'llah's Persian Hidden Word no. 19 reads:

O My Friends! Have ye forgotten that true and radiant morn, when in those hallowed and blessed surroundings ye were all gathered in My presence beneath the shade of the tree of life, which is planted in the all-glorious paradise? Awestruck ye listened as I gave utterance to these three most holy words: O friends! Prefer not your will to Mine, never desire that which I have not desired for you, and approach Me not with lifeless hearts, defiled with worldly desires and cravings. Would ye but sanctify your souls, ye would at this present hour recall that place and those surroundings, and the truth of my utterance should be made evident unto all of you.⁹¹

'Abdu'l-Baha has given a number of interesting different exegeses of this Hidden Word:

- 'By the "Tree of Anīsā" is meant the Tabernacle of the Lord of Grace, the Divine Lote-Tree, the Tree of Life, "the Olive that belongeth neither to the East nor to the West, whose oil would well nigh shine out even though fire touched it not" [Qur'ān 24:35].'⁹²
- 'O leaf upon the Tree of Life! The Tree of Life, of which mention is made in the Bible, is Bahā'u'llāh, and the daughters of the Kingdom are the leaves upon that blessed Tree.'⁹³
- 'The "true and radiant morn" is the dawn of the Covenant, and the first light of the Testament of the Day-Star of the world. The "Tree of Anīsā" is the blessed tree which hath flourished in the Most Great Paradise and casteth its shadow upon all regions.'⁹⁴
- 'By the term "that true and radiant morn" mentioned in the Hidden Words is meant the Dawn of divine Revelation when the Exalted One (i.e. the Bab) manifested Himself in the plenitude of His glory, while the Blessed Tree referreth to the Ancient Beauty (Baha'u'llah). By those "surroundings" is meant the realm of the heart and of the spirit, and the gathering of the people implieth a spiritual communion, not a physical one. However, when the Call of God was raised in the realm of the heart and spirit, mankind remained heedless and inattentive, and therefore was dumbfounded.'⁹⁵
- 'This is the Covenant and Testament which the Blessed Beauty established through the Supreme Pen in the Holy Land under the shade of the Tree of Anīsā and which was promulgated after the Ascension.'⁹⁶ This is the Lesser Covenant.

We must recall here that it was upon the land of the Crimson Sandhill which according to Muslim tradition was located in the Holy Land that the drama of the People of the Cloak was said to have taken place (see above). Baha'u'llah in the *Sūrih-yi Mulūk* while in prison and in exile in the Holy Land on the plain of 'Akka utters these words:

O kings of the earth! Give ear unto the Voice of God, calling from this sublime, this fruit-laden Tree, that hath sprung out of the Crimson Hill [*kathib al-hamra*], upon the holy Plain, intoning the words: 'There is none other God but He, the Mighty, the All-Powerful, the All-Wise.' This is a Spot which hath been sanctified by God for those who approach it, a Spot wherein His Voice may be heard from the celestial Tree of Holiness.'⁹⁷

Here the visionary topography of the Crimson Hill paradoxically becomes prophetically historicized by the exile of Baha'u'llah to the Holy Land and his declaration there to the whole world. It was here in 'Akka as well that the Book of the Covenant or the Crimson Book was written by Baha'u'llah, designating 'Abdu'l-Baha as the Centre of his Covenant.'⁹⁸

The Lesser Covenant, which as we have seen was drawn in the topography of *dharr al-baqa*, is further extended to the line of succession after 'Abdu'l-Baha by Shoghi Effendi and the Administration, namely both the

92. 'Abdu'l-Baha in 'Compilation: references of 'Abdu'l-Bahā and Shoghi Effendi to the Hidden Words', Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, *Bahā'ī Studies Review* 9 (1999–2000) 258–9.

93. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections* 57.

94. 'Abdu'l-Baha in 'Compilation' 258–9.

95. 'Abdu'l-Bahā, from a tablet to an individual – translated from the Persian in 'Compilation' 258–9.

96. 'Abdu'l-Baha in 'Compilation' 258–9.

97. Baha'u'llah, *Summons of the Lord of Hosts* 185.

98. See also the reference to the 'blest and crimson Spot (*al-buq'at al-mubārak al-ḥamrā*)' in Baha'u'llah, *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Centre, 1992) 56, which in the notes to this book (220 n.127) is said to be 'a reference to the prison-city of 'Akkā.'

99. Hornby, *Lights of Guidance* 181.

100. Ishraq-Khavari, *Ma'idih* 2:30; cited in Baha'u'llah, *Tabernacle of Unity* (Bahā'ī World Centre, 2006) 80.

Guardianship and Universal House of Justice. Shoghi Effendi states regarding the Lesser Covenant:

The second form of covenant is such as the one Baha'u'llah made with His people that they should accept the Master ['Abdu'l-Baha]. This is merely to establish and strengthen the succession of the series of Lights that appear after every Manifestation. Under the same category falls the covenant of the Master made with the Baha'is that they should accept the administration after Him ...⁹⁹

Thus according to Shoghi Effendi the Administration (i.e. the twin institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice) is deemed to be in the same category as the Lesser Covenant, thereby squarely situating the whole drama in the conceptual framework of *'alam-i dharr* or *dharr al-baqa*. Here it is important to state that the quaternary of the covenant (*'ahd/mithaq*), in which one cannot be divorced from another, becomes as well the foundation of the dialectic of the covenant in the Baha'i revelation echoing its Shaykhi-Babi form; where the recognition of God, His Manifestation (Baha'u'llah) and the *walayah* of the Centre of his Covenant ('Abdu'l-Baha), the Guardianship of Shoghi Effendi (who is precisely called *wali amrullah* or Guardian of the Cause of God) and the Universal House of Justice is upheld.

1. God
2. Baha'u'llah (Manifestation/prophethood)
3. *Walayah* of 'Abdu'l-Baha, *walayah* of Shoghi Effendi (*wali amrullah*)
4. Universal House of Justice

Thus, in this covenantal quaternary separating any one of the stages from the others is tantamount to the negation of all of them. The recognition of one must therefore include the recognition of all the stages and the rejection of one becomes the rejection of all four. This is the mystic unity and essence of the covenant, which is precisely framed in the mystical logic of *'alam-i dharr*. It is here again that the same gnosis of the Divine through the love of *walayah* or the succession of lights after the prophet, is couched in the framework of the quaternary of the covenant, which as we have seen was present in primitive Shi'ism, Shaykhism and finally the writings of the Bab.

Now let us turn to the most explicit interpretation of *'alam-i dharr* in the writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha. In one brief passage in response to a query made of the meaning of *'alam-i dharr*, 'Abdu'l-Baha states:

The realm of subtle entities [*'alam-i dharr*] that is alluded to refereth to the realities, specifications, individuations, capacities and potentialities of man in the mirror of the divine knowledge [*'ilm-i ilahi*]. As these potentialities and capacities differ, they each have their own particular exigency (*iqtidā*). That exigency consisteth in acquiescence and supplication.¹⁰⁰

This passage indicates that each created being has its conceptual existence in the knowledge of God, which in the Baha'i lexicon refers to the station of the Primal Will and not to the reality of the Divine Essence (*dhāt ilāhī*). It is from here therefore that being individuates and attains concrete existence according to its potentialities and capacities. Indeed it is

interesting to note that the word *iqtidā* is from the same Arabic root as *qada* (fate/decreed), the fourth stage of the arc of descent and used here in relation to the very freedom to existentiare according to each 'thing's' potentiality and capacity. This is an extremely succinct version of what we have seen in the works of Shaykh Ahmad and that of the Bab in relation to the dialectic of free will versus predestination which is worked out in relation to this realm (see above).

Here we must now turn to Baha'u'llah's hermeneutics of '*alam-i dharr*', which gives 'Abdu'l-Baha's interpretation a more concrete context. Baha'u'llah, in reference to the query of pre-existence regarding a special section of humanity, categorically denies such elitist metaphysical concepts and states that all were created through the Primal Will of God which is the same as the Word of God (*Kalimat Allah, Logos*). He squarely situates the realm of subtle entities ('*alam-i dharr*') on the plain of history whereby the Qur'anic drama of the Primordial Covenant (Q 7:172) is interpreted by way of a divine hermeneutics in the light of the historical appearance of the Manifestation of God (i.e. himself). Baha'u'llah states that any other interpretation is only superstition and imaginary. He further states that at the time of this revelation, before the Word of God is delivered by the Manifestation, all men are considered equal and are one and the same in their station and that it is only thereafter that distinctions appear, due to the various responses in relation to this call:

As to the 'realm of subtle entities' ('*alam-i-dharr*') which is often referred to, it pertaineth to the Revelation of the Prophets, and aught else is mere superstition and idle fancy. At the time of the Revelation all men are equal in rank. By reason, however, of their acceptance or rejection, rise or fall, motion or stillness, recognition or denial, they come to differ thereafter. For instance, the one true God, magnified be His glory, speaking through the intermediary of His Manifestation, doth ask: 'Am I not your Lord?' Every soul that answereth 'Yea, verily!' is accounted among the most distinguished of all men in the sight of God. Our meaning is that ere the Word of God is delivered, all men are deemed equal in rank and their station is one and the same. It is only thereafter that differences appear, as thou hast no doubt observed.¹⁰¹

In a similar instance Baha'u'llah in his discussion of cosmogony transforms the cosmogonic *moment* into the moment of the advent of Divine revelation or the hour of Divine theophany on the horizon of history. He states:

Consider the hour at which the supreme Manifestation of God revealeth Himself unto men. Ere that hour cometh, the Ancient Being, Who is still unknown of men and hath not as yet given utterance to the Word of God, is Himself the All-Knower in a world devoid of any man that hath known Him. He is indeed the Creator without a creation. For at the very moment preceding His Revelation, each and every created thing shall be made to yield up its soul to God.¹⁰²

All things are then brought forth through the revelation of His words: while this revelation of the Divine Will and Purpose are conjoined by predestination (*qadar*) in the historical reality of the manifestation, he is still hidden, 'the Creator without creation'; but then once it is articulated, revealed and manifested the stage of fate/decreed (*qada*) is actualized in which the ability to respond is available to

101. Baha'u'llah, *The Tabernacle of Unity* 80. Baha'u'llah has also stated this principle in the Tablet of Salman; see *Majmū'ih-yi Maṭbū'ih* (ed. Muhyi'd-Din Sabri Kurdi Sanandaji Kanimishkani, Cairo: Maṭba'at as-Sa'adah, 1920; reprinted, H-Bahai: East Lansing, MI, 2001) 147–8.

102. Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah* (trans. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1983) 151.

103. Rafati, 'Maratib-i Sab'ih' 60–2, 73–5.
104. For the undifferentiated stage designated as *Malakut* see Baha'u'llah, *Majmu'ih-yi Matbu'ih* 147–8.
105. Baha'u'llah in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* designates 'Abdu'l-Baha precisely as 'Him whom God hath Purposed' (*min iradah allah*). See Baha'u'llah, *Kitab-i-Aqdas* 63. I wish here to thank Moojan Momen for his encouragement to submit this paper to BSR; to Nader Saeiedi and Todd Lawson for their suggestions; and to Keven Brown for his kind permission to use his provisional translations. I especially wish to acknowledge my debt of gratitude to my friend Omid Ghaemmaghami for offering his provisional translations as well as assisting with some of my own renderings of the Arabic. His ample generosity with time and the sharing of resources are the marks of a true friend and scholar. I also wish to thank Nasim Wafaei for discussing with me some of the Arabic passages. Finally, I wish to thank my dear friend Farzin Vejdani who has given so generously of his time and who has provided valuable comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper. Any errors or shortcomings, are of course entirely my own. This article is lovingly dedicated to my parents; 'My Lord, have mercy upon them, as they raised me up when I was little' (Qur'an 17:24).

humanity, it is precisely at this stage that the dialectic of predestination versus free will, the Divine Call and the human freedom to respond is realized and determined.¹⁰³ This undifferentiated moment is then equivalent to the stage of *qadar* and to the realm of *Malakut* and to the colour green.¹⁰⁴ But differentiation and differences appear in the second stage, which is that of the stage of fate/decreed and is related to the world of *Nasut* (nature) and the colour corresponding to it is crimson/red. Put in the quaternary framework of the covenant, the stage of will (*mashiyyat*) corresponds to Baha'u'llah, purpose (*iradah*) to that of 'Abdu'l-Baha,¹⁰⁵ Shoghi Effendi (Guardian) to predestination (*qadar*) and the stage of fate/decreed (*qada*) to the Universal House of Justice. Therefore it is the recognition and combination of all these four stages that brings about the spiritual creation of the faithful.

The realm of subtle entities ('*alam-i dharr*') then becomes the mystical and meta-temporal topography of the covenant wherein the dialectic of predestination and free will, and of divine questioning and the freedom to respond, combine to existentially and realize the essences of beings. This response to the Divine Call may change within the individual's life and their essence may be changed according to that response; therefore in line with a metaphysics of process it demonstrates that the life of the soul is not static but in a process of constant motion or flux and at any moment in this world the soul may respond differently to the call of 'Am I not?' and thereby existentially itself accordingly in a processual creation.

Thus as we have seen throughout the Babi–Baha'i scriptures that which is described as taking place in primordial time is situated in historical time, in the epiphany of the Manifestation of God, whereby both *being* and *time* are historicized. However, this history is not the history and chronology of events as such, but a transformation of our perception of history, it is a hierophany of history or rather a hierohistory which has at the centre of its axis the revelation of the Manifestation to whose call 'Am I not your Lord?' at the hour of the inauguration of this revelation, all being existentially, individualizes and differentiates in accordance to their response; they that exclaim 'Yea verily', from them that proclaim 'Nay verily', including they who chose neutrality, all from the force of their own freedom to choose and to will in responding to that call. This event may be the very existential *moment* for which all human beings can properly be said to exist and for which the autonomous will of humanity has the consummation of its purpose, so that we may choose through our own free will, the Will of the Beloved, and from this mystical yielding of the will to the Primal Will (*mashiyyat awaliyya*) our being proper may be realized and actualized from 'the realm of subtle entities' ('*alam-i dharr*').

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Social and Economic Development in an Iranian Village: The Baha'i Community of Saysan

Moojan Momen

Abstract

Saysan in the north-west province of Azarbayjan is one of the villages in Iran where almost all of the inhabitants became Baha'is. This paper looks at the history of the Baha'i community in Saysan, focussing in particular on social and economic development in the village. Although facing considerable problems of geographical isolation, poverty, lack of education and persecution by surrounding villages, the Baha'i community responded to its situation in an organised, united and creative manner. It established the community institutions of the Baha'i Faith to provide consultative decision-making, leadership and a focal point of unity. It created new and innovative income-generating pathways that enabled the rising population of the village not only to survive but to establish community projects such as schools. In doing this, it also experienced the problems that many developing village communities face, the fact that their young people, once educated, find that their potential cannot be developed within the confines of the village and are attracted to the cities for further education and occupational opportunities unavailable in the village. This problem was also being tackled in the village when the Islamic Revolution of 1979 occurred, as a result of which, in an operation of 'ethnic cleansing', all of the Baha'is of the village were cleared and their houses razed to the ground by bulldozers.

Keywords

Saysan
Azarbayjan
Iran
Baha'i
village
development
school
persecutions

Saysān (or Sīsān) is a village in Iran's north-west province, Azarbayjan (Adharbāyjān). It is situated in the district of Sahand or Sahandābād, the main town of which, Bustānābād, lies on the main road between Tabriz and Tehran. Saysan lies 32 km south-east of Tabriz and 8 km west of Bustanabad, in a valley with a certain amount of agricultural land on which grains are grown, while animals can be pastured on the lower slopes of the steep mountains on either side. Its population in 1951 was 1,600; the people of the village speak Azeri Turkish. The weather is exceedingly cold in winter and the village is often cut off by snow. There is rain in spring and autumn and a dry hot summer.

A number of Baha'is from Saysan have recorded histories of the Babi and Baha'i Faiths in this village. There is one old history written by Mīrzā Haydar 'Alī Sanī'ī Uskū'ī but a copy of this could not be located. This article is based mainly on two histories, which, although of recent

1. 'Mukhtaṣarī az Tarīkh Nufūdh va Intishār-i Diyānat-i Bahā'ī dar Saysān' (A summary of the history of the spread and influence of the Baha'i Faith in Saysan), *Payām-i Bahā'ī*, no 276 (November 2002) 31–5.
2. As recorded by his son Riḍvānu'llāh Avvalī, 'Shāmihiy az tarjumihi-yi aḥvāl va sharḥ tasharruf-i Jināb-i Muḥammad Avval Saysānī' (Vignettes of the life and an account of the pilgrimage of Muhammad Avval). Mss. 11 pp. I am grateful to Haleh Rabani and Iraj Ighani for making this available to me.
3. Avvalī, 'Shāmihiy az tarjumihi'; Aqdasi, 'Aḥibba-yi Saysan' 1–3; Najafiyan, 'Tarikh Amr' 8–19; Asadu'llāh Fāḍil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i Zuhūr al-Haq* (=ZH), vol. 3 (Tehran, n.d.); vols. 6 and 7 (mss., Afnan Library); vol. 8a (Tehran: Mu'assisih Milli Matbū'āt Amrī, 131 B.E./1974) 3:44–7; Abu'l-Qasim Faizi, 'Flowers to Akka', *Bahā'ī News*, no. 458 (May 1969, pp. 8–11) 8; this article was also reprinted as a separate booklet *Narcissus to 'Akka*, New Delhi: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, n.d.; Naw'khah, 'Tarikh Nufudh va Intishar', 31–2.
4. Avvali, 'Shāmihiy az tarjumihi'; ZH 6:10. Although Abu'l-Qasim Faizi ('Flowers to 'Akka' 9–10) states that the flowers taken to Akka were narcissus, the memoirs of Muhamamd Avval states that they were 'nastaran' (Sweet-brier or Eglantine rose).

date, reflect the oral tradition in the village: 'Aḥibbā-yi Saysān' (The friends of Saysan) by Shu'ā'u'llāh Aqdasī Saysānī (written in 1985) and 'Tārīkh-i Amr-i Bahā'ī dar Saysān' (History of the Baha'i Faith in Saysan) by Fayḍu'llāh Najafiyan' (written in the 1980s). In addition, Nazhlā Naw'khāh has in recent years written a treatise on the history of the Baha'is of Saysan using oral and written materials. A copy of this treatise could not be obtained but an article based on it has been published.¹ The memoirs of Muhammad Avval² and a number of other sources have also been used.

The Message of Haji Asadu'llah

In 1825 a certain Haji Asadu'llah of Qaradāgh (d. 1842), a follower of the Shaykhi leader Shaykh Ahmad al-Aḥsa'i, took up residence in the village of Maṭanaq, near Saysan, and began to preach of the imminent advent of the Shi'i messianic figure, the Qā'im or Imam Mahdī. He predicted that the latter would come from Shiraz with a new prayer and a new fast and that the Islamic clerics would oppose him. He gained a wide following in the area, especially in Saysan, and even as far away as Tabriz. He caused a religious revival in the area and also instituted some health measures such as discouraging smoking. He died before the advent of the Bab and when the villagers of Saysan heard of the Bab a group of them tried to see him as he was being taken to Tabriz, but missed him. Two of them did, however, see him from a distance in Tabriz. When they heard he had been executed, the village was saddened and thought it was all over. Then in 1874, one of the villagers, Mashhadi Allahvirdi, met Haji Ahmad Milani, a Baha'i, in Tabriz, who told him of the Bab and of Baha'u'llah's claim. Mashhadi Allahvirdi returned to Saysan and told Mulla Asadu'llah, the grandson of Haji Asadu'llah, of what he had learned. The latter informed his uncles and the *kad-khudā* (headman) of the village, Karbala'i Asad Murad, who were all converted. Gradually the Baha'i Faith spread among the villagers, covertly at first and after about 1879 openly. Soon there was a large Baha'i group in the village and they eventually became the majority of the population of the village.³

Among the prominent Baha'is of the village were two individuals called Muhammad. The first Muhammad (Muhammad Avval, d. c. 1938) became a Baha'i in 1298/1881 and at the end of December 1881 (Safar 1299), he set off on foot alone to 'Akka to meet Baha'u'llah. It took him forty days to reach Akka; a brave venture and a considerable achievement for an illiterate villager. He rested only some three or four hours each night on the way. He remained only nine days as he had promised to return by Naw-Ruz (21 March); the way back took thirty-two days. On his second trip the next year, 1300/1882, he was accompanied by the second Muhammad (Muhammad Duvvum). Together they took with them some sweet-brier rose plants (*nastaran*) and they remained in Akka for some fifty days while they planted them and did other work in the Ridvan garden. In return, Baha'u'llah gave them a sack of seed potatoes and recommended them to plant these in their village. They did this and the result was that the village was saved from the famines that occurred from time to time when total reliance had been put on the crop of grain. The practice of growing potatoes soon spread to other villages.⁴



Muhammad Avval, the first Baha'i of Saysan to travel to Akka and visit Baha'u'llah.

Persecutions in Saysan

During the rule of the Qajar dynasty, it was the tradition that the province of Azarbaijan, the richest and most populous province of the country, was governed by the Crown Prince. The Baha'i community in Saysan had the advantage that for much of the first thirty years of its history, the governors of the province, such as the Crown Princes Muzaffaru'd-Din Mirza (later shah) and Muhammad 'Ali Mirza (later shah), tended to block persecutions of the Baha'is of the province. This did not always protect them from attack however. On one occasion when the first two villagers who had made the pilgrimage to Akka and met Baha'u'llah returned to the village in about 1883, a certain *sayyid* (descendant of the prophet Muhammad) tried to stir up trouble. The Muslim villagers, with the support of Muslim clerics in the vicinity, made plans to attack the Baha'is. The Baha'is in turn armed themselves. The Muslims then tried to make trouble by reporting this to the governor, the Crown Prince Muzaffaru'd-Din Mirza. Forty of the Baha'is went to Tabriz to present their case also. The governor sent an official to the area to impress on the Muslims not to attack the Baha'is.⁵ The attacks continued, however, and on one occasion when Muhammad Avval was returning to the village from Tabriz, the inhabitants of Yusufabad, a village on the way between Saysan and Tabriz, were incited by Haji Mirza Hasan Mujtahid of Tabriz to attack Muhammad Avval and beat him severely.⁶ In about 1889, there was a clash between the Baha'is and the Muslims of the area during the month of Muharram. Both sides were summoned before the prince governor and it became clear to him that the Baha'is were not at fault. He exiled a few of the leading trouble-makers.⁷

In 1313/1895, Masha'u'llah, the fourteen year old son of Ustad Bāyram, was grazing horses near the village of Haji Aqa (5 km east of Saysan). He drank water from a qanat and was seen doing this by some of the villagers, who raised a hue and cry that a "Babi" had drunk from their water, thus rendering it impure (*najis*). They rushed up to him and beat him so severely that he died. Haji Shujā' ud-Dawlih, the area governor, made enquiries and

5. Shu'ā'u'llāh Aqdasī, 'Shamih-iy az Sarāghāz Tārīkh Amr-i Bahā'ī dar Saysan' *Payām-i Bahā'ī*, no. 138 (May 1991, pp. 23–26) see p. 27; ZH 6:342, 8a:1025.
6. ZH 6:10–11. In his memoirs, Muhammad Avval states that because 'Abdu'l-Bahā had jokingly said to him one day in 'Akka that he would have to give him 200 strokes of the cane, when the crowd attacked him in Yusufabad with canes, he remembered those words and immediately ceased resistance, although he was a tall and well built man and could easily have defended himself; Avvali, *Shamih-iy az tarjumi* 6.
7. Ustad 'Alī Akbar Bannā Yazdī, *Tārīkh 'Ishqābād* (published as vol. 94 of the photocopied series produced by the Iranian National Baha'i Archives, Afnan Library) 260.



Picture of a SAYSAN Baha'i family taken in about 1940. In the centre is Nargis Khatun Mushtaq and around her are members of her family. In the front row, 2nd and 3rd from the right are Zaynab and Ruhu'llah Mushtaq, who were later custodians of the House of 'Abbud in Akka.

8. ZH 7:95.

9. Naw'khah, 'Tarikh Nufudh va Intishar', 32-3.

10. ZH 8a:84-5. This would have been the equivalent of £60 sterling of that time, which is about £5,000 in the money of 2006 using the retail price index or £25,000 using an average earnings index (see <http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare>, accessed 6 May 2008).

the inhabitants of Haji Aqa gave him 200 tumans which he gave to the father of Masha'u'llah.⁸

Following the passing of Baha'u'llah, Jamal Burujirdi and Jalil Khu'i visited SAYSAN in about 1896 for three days, hoping to recruit the villagers to the side of Mirza Muhammad 'Ali, the half-brother of 'Abdu'l-Baha, who was opposing 'Abdu'l-Baha's leadership. Haji Zaynal (Zaynu'l-'Abidin), the Baha'i *kadkhuda* of SAYSAN, was alert, however, to their intentions and insisted that they stay with him while he kept the Baha'is away from them.⁹

In 1315/1897, the people from around SAYSAN registered a complaint with Amir Nizam Garusi, the minister of the governor, about the Baha'is of SAYSAN. He sent ten cavalry officers to the village to investigate. The landowner of the village, Sayyid 'Abdu'r-Rahim Khan Qa'im-Maqan (SAYSAN in common with other Iranian villages was owned by absentee landlords), intervened on behalf of the Baha'is through his cousin Nizam ul-'Ulama. The officers left taking with them 15 of the senior Baha'is of SAYSAN, including Haji Zaynal and Shaykh Ahmad Mu'allim Usku'i, who had come to SAYSAN to escape persecution in Usku. In Tabriz, they were interrogated by 'Ali-Quli Khan, the steward of Amir Nizam. Although they had not done anything wrong, the corruption of the Iranian administration resulted in their being 'fined' 300 *tumans* before they could obtain their release.¹⁰

Sometime around 1899 there was a prolonged upheaval in SAYSAN. At this time a prominent Baha'i of ZANJAN, Mirza Husayn Zanjani, had been asked to reside in the village with his family, and Mirza Asadu'llah Qummi

was also visiting frequently. The *haziratu'l-quds* was built and some of the Muslims in the village were becoming Baha'is. On one occasion, a sum of money was collected for the maintenance of the shrine of the Bab in Haifa. Five of the Baha'is of the village set off to deliver this, and a large crowd accompanied them on the first stage of their journey. Some of the Muslims of the area were alarmed at the openness with which the Baha'is were demonstrating their faith and the progress they were making. They started to rouse the population, saying that it would not be long before the Baha'is would be treating the Muslims as the Muslims treat the Jews (deriding them and forcing them to wear a distinguishing badge like the Jews). They went to some clerics, such as Mulla Muhammad 'Ali and the Shaykh ul-Islam, who issued a decree of *jihād* against the Baha'is, ordering the Muslims of the area to unite and launch an attack upon them. The Baha'is of Saysan hearing of this development brought out their guns and other weapons, and those who had no weapons purchased some. Seeing this, the Muslims resident in Saysan left the village. This in turn increased the fear felt by the Baha'is, who thought that this meant that the Muslims were preparing to attack. They therefore began to build barricades and fortifications. They then decided to send a delegation of forty people to petition the prince governor in Tabriz. The latter sent some officers to the area, and they punished the ring-leaders of the agitation, who lived in the village of Haji Aqa.¹¹

The disturbed state of affairs settled for a time after this but the underlying agitation continued. The Muslims of the area continued to plot against the Baha'is and they succeeded in drawing a number of the weaker Baha'is over to their side. Then during the month of Muharram, following a recital about the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (*rawdih-khānī*), the Muslims launched an attack on a number of the Baha'i families living in the Muslim quarter of the village and beat them. The Baha'is immediately responded by going with clubs and sticks to the Muslim quarter. The Muslims, seeing this, fled. As a result those Baha'is that had gone over to the Muslim side came back to the Baha'is and begged forgiveness for their actions. A few of the Muslims came to the Baha'is also and said that they had really been on the Baha'i side all along. The Muslims who fled, however, went to the villages of the area and even to Tabriz, making accusations that the Baha'is had forbidden them to hold *rawdih-khanis*, that they had cut the beard off a *rawdih-khan* (a teller of the story of the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn) whom they had brought to the village, that they had burnt their pulpit and had carried off some of their men and women. They appealed to the authorities in Tabriz to expel all of the Baha'is from the village. The governor, the Crown Prince Muhammad 'Ali Mirza, summoned both parties to Tabriz. He questioned Haji Zaynal, the Baha'i *kad-khuda* of the village, who invited the prince to send people to the village to investigate the matter. Four officials were sent and when they asked the Muslims to produce the *rawdih-khan* whose beard had been cut or the pulpit that had been burned or to name the men and women who had been carried off, they were unable to do so. A few of the Muslims had hidden some of their furniture, claiming that the Baha'is had looted it. However those Baha'is who had weakened and gone over to the Muslim side and were now back on the Baha'i side were able to show the officials where these people had hidden their furniture. The officials punished and fined a number of the main culprits among the Muslims

11. Yazdi, Tarikh 'Ishqabad 286–88; ZH 8a:80–81n.; Mīrzā Haydar 'Alī Sanī'ī Uskū'ī, Tārīkh Amrī Ādharbāyjan (Mss., Afnan Library) Part 1, Section 4, p. 65; it is not clear whether this last reference relates to this episode or one of the other ones.

12. Yazdi, Tarikh 'Ishqabad 288–91; Aqdasi, 'Ahibba-yi Saysan' 10–12; ZH 6:342–3, 8a:81–84n.; 8b:1025.
13. Usku'i, Tarikh Adharbayjan, Part 1, Section 4, pp. 83–4; ZH 8a:77–8.
14. Aqdasi, 'Ahibba-yi Saysan' 13.
15. ZH 8a:85.
16. Naw'khah, 'Tarikh Nufudh va Intishar', 33.
17. Faizi, 'Flowers to 'Akka' 8; Hushang Āqābālā'i, Tārīkh-i Diyānat-i Muqaddas-i Bahā'i dar Qariyyih-yi Maṭanaq, Adharbayjān, Tabriz, 1374, p. 21.
18. Aqdasi, 'Ahibba-yi Saysan' 14–15; Najafiyan, 'Tarikh Amr' 52.
19. Najafiyan, 'Tarikh Amr' 99; Yazdi, Tarikh 'Ishqabad 286.

and left. After this there were many more conversions, such that at one stage only seven or eight Muslim families remained in the village.¹²

On another occasion, in the early 1900s, the owner of the village ordered his steward to arrest a number of the leading people of the village on the charge of being Baha'is and take them to Tabriz, where they were imprisoned with chains around their neck by the *farrash-bashi* (head chamberlain) of Nizam us-Saltanih (who was the steward and agent of the prince governor). Nizam us-Saltanih's cook, Javad, and tailor, Ustad Mirza Shirazi, who were both Baha'is, sent the best food and tea from Nizam us-Saltanih's kitchen to the prisoners. The *farrash-bashi* asked why this had happened, but the cook paid him no attention. When Nizam us-Saltanih enquired about this from the cook, he responded by challenging Nizam us-Saltanih to make enquiries about why these men were in prison. The *farrash-bashi* was sent to make enquiries and the injustice of the landowner's actions was presented to the Crown Prince, who ordered the landowner not to interfere with the affairs of Saysan but merely to collect his rent each year.¹³

One author attributes this success of the Saysan Baha'is to the fact that they always stood up for themselves and, since they included among their number some of the most influential people of the village, the enemies of the Baha'is were never able to get the upper hand as they did in other parts of Iran.¹⁴ One account states that the Baha'is of Saysan numbered 1,200 at the end of the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Baha¹⁵ and another that there were 2,000 Baha'is in the time of Shoghi Effendi.¹⁶ Keith Ranson-Kehler, who visited the village in 1932, estimated that the population was 1,500 of whom 1,250 were Baha'is. According to other accounts, some 2,700 of the 3,000 inhabitants of the village were Baha'is, but it is not clear to what period that relates and, since it is a larger figure than given elsewhere it may refer to the whole area (there were also Baha'i communities in the nearby villages of Maṭanaq and Dīznab).¹⁷

The Development of Baha'i Institutions and Laws

An important part of the social development of the village was the establishment of community institutions that could provide the leadership and consultative mechanisms that could organise and guide the community. In 1315/1897, Ibn Abhar visited, bringing instructions from 'Abdul-Baha that a local assembly be formed. Initially the membership was chosen from among the more prominent Baha'is of the village, often by passing travelling Baha'i teachers (*muballighs*), but later elections were held. This local assembly had many more responsibilities than other local assemblies in Iran and indeed became possibly the first local spiritual assembly in the Baha'i world to become effectively the local administrative body for an entire locality. It dealt with all social and agricultural issues and registered land transactions as well as settling disputes. Even the Muslim villagers would often bring their disputes before it. The Iranian government authorities used to deal with villages through a *kadkhuda* or headman. Therefore the assembly also appointed a *kadkhuda* to deal with the government.¹⁸ A Baha'i centre was built where meetings were held. It was called the *musāfir-khānih* (travellers' hospice). Later, in 1318/1900, because they had outgrown this building a new structure was erected as a *hazīrat ul-quds* (a meeting facility for the Baha'i community).¹⁹



A group of Baha'is standing in front of the old *Haziratu'l-Quds* of Saysan, *Ridvan* 1954. Left to right, back row: 'Abbās Sulṭānī; Sītāriḥ Muṭallabzādih; 'Aẓīm Dimashqī; Rūḥu'llāh Mushtāq; Fu'ād Rawshanī. Sitting in front: Jamāl Ḥusaynpūr.

For several decades, on the instructions of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, the Baha'is of Saysan maintained two parallel sets of religious institutions. This was to minimize the antagonism towards them from the surrounding area. They continued a number of Muslim institutions such as *marāthiyyih-khānī* or *rawdih-khānī* (recitals of the sufferings of the Imams), *sīnih-zanī* (beating of the chest in grief over the suffering of the Imams) and sacrificing a sheep at the *Id Qurbān* (the festival at which Muslims commemorate Abraham's intended sacrifice of his son). The Baha'i meetings (such as nineteen-day feast and assembly meetings) were held in the *hazirat ul-quds* and the Baha'i *rawdih-khanis*, funerals and memorial meetings in the mosque. The Baha'is had one mosque in which they met and the Muslims of the village had a separate mosque. The Baha'i *rawdih-khanis* would be held in exactly the same way as a Muslim one and there was a Baha'i *rawdih-khan*, Mulla Asadu'llah, the grandson of Haji Asadu'llah, or Sayyid Muhammad Partuvi, who would recite the story. However the Baha'is would fast and say their obligatory prayers (*ṣalāt*) only according to Baha'i law.

In 1931, Shoghi Effendi told Yadu'llah Tabrizi (see below) to write to the Baha'is of Saysan conveying his instructions that they leave aside Muslim

20. Aqdasi, 'Ahibba-yi Saysan' 14; Najafiyan, 'Tarikh Amr' 65; Shu'a'u'llāh Aqdasi, 'Madrasiḥ Bahā'ī dar Saysān Adharbayjān,' *Payām Badī* no. 79 (July 1989, pp. 24–9) 24–5. The first source states that the Baha'i marriage ceremony became the norm when Furutan came to the village in 1932–3 but the same author in the third source gives this account.
21. Aqdasi, 'Ahibba-yi Saysan' 16.

customs such as *rawdih-khani* and sacrificing at Īd Qurban. They immediately complied. Up to the end of the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Baha, Islamic marriage ceremonies were held presided over by one of the converted mullas of the village or by Sayyid Muhammad Partuvi. Then there was a period when both Baha'i and Islamic ceremonies were held, until 1935, when Shoghi Effendi sent instructions that the 95-day betrothal period should be observed and only the Baha'i marriage ceremony held.²⁰

The two-year period of 'Ali-Akbar Furutan's residence in Saysan transformed many aspects of the Baha'i community there, as they had a good knowledge of what Shoghi Effendi was trying to achieve. 'Ali-Akbar Furutan (later to become secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran and a Hand of the Cause) and his wife 'Ata'iyih came to Saysan in late 1931, accompanying the New Zealand Baha'i Effie Baker, and later returned to stay until 1933. Mr Furutan brought to the community the administrative changes that had been going on in the Baha'i world, establishing for example a number of committees. He encouraged the Baha'i community to set aside the few remaining Islamic customs that it had retained. On Fridays there would be a meeting (*ihtifāl*) for the women during the day and one for the men in the evening, at which Furutan would expound the Baha'i teachings and administrative principles.²¹



Youth committee of Saysan, about 1951. Front row, left to right: Thanā'iyih Khādimī, Faṭimih-Sulṭān Samandārī; Parvīn Rasūlī; Davūd Šādiqī; Zārīfih Luṭfī; Tūbā 'Alī-zādiḥ. Second Row: Khusraw Sāysanī; Farahangiz Qurbān-pūr; 'Azīm Damishqī; Tūbā Akbarī; Jamāl Husayn-pūr; Majīd 'Abdu'llāhī. Third Row: Ruḥu'llāh Mushtāq; Fu'ād Rawshanī; 'Alī-Qulī Šidq.

Social and economic development

With the establishment of the local assembly the Baha'is of Saysan had a focus of unity and a consultative decision-making organ. They were thus enabled to address the problems that faced them and consider measures to improve their prosperity.

Based on the Baha'i teachings about the importance of education, one of the priorities of the village was to establish schools. On the instruction of Baha'u'llah, Mirza Husayn Zanjani had come to Saysan to start a traditional school (*maktab*) in about 1888. He remained about a year but was forced to leave after the above-mentioned clash. He returned, however, in about 1900.²² A number of mullas who had become Baha'is (Mulla Isma'il Mithāqī, Mulla Valī, Mulla Asadu'llah Iqani, Sayyid Muhammad Partuvi) also taught in the village from about 1890 until, in 1334/1915, the local assembly decided to establish a modern school, which was set up in the old *musafir-khanīh*. There were a number of different teachers at the school. One of these 'Abbas 'Alī Bunābī tried to get benches and desks made for the school, but as no-one in the village had any experience of such things they did not come out well. Bunabi established three classes, not according to the age of the pupils but according to their existing level of literacy.²³

As mentioned above, in early 1933 'Alī-Akbar Furutan took over as head of the school and established it on a modern basis of classes. His sojourn in the village only lasted just over a year, however, since he was then elected secretary of the new-established national spiritual assembly. Mr Furutan had just graduated in the field of education from the University of Moscow. He reorganized and modernised the school and, in conjunction with his wife, opened a girls' school. He would teach the boys up to mid-day and the girls after mid-day. The schools had both Baha'i and Muslim pupils and some came from surrounding villages. The two schools reached a total enrolment of 700. The curriculum included the teaching of some Baha'i texts such as the Hidden Words and the Kitāb Iqan and all of the pupils participated in these classes. The Baha'i schools in Saysan only closed in 1947, after a government school opened in the village.²⁴

The Baha'is of the village of Saysan faced various problems in social and economic development. The village had limited agricultural land and not much pasturage. Thus only about a hundred families could be supported by the traditional agricultural pursuits of the village. As their numbers increased and those who became Baha'is in surrounding villages moved to Saysan for security from attacks by Muslims, the population of the village began to exceed the number that could be supported by agriculture alone. They had to look for other ways of generating an income that would support their numbers.

In the first place, the Baha'is set up some 21 water-mills in and around the village and people from other villages to a distance of 35 kilometres would bring their grain to be ground. This provided additional income to support the people of the village, but it soon became insufficient. The Baha'is had a school and were educated, which the other villagers were not, and so they used their education to find new ways of

22. Yazdi, Tarikh 'Ishqabad 260; Aqdasi, 'Madrasah Baha'i' 25.
23. Aqdasi, 'Madrasah Bahā'i' 26; Aqdasi, 'Ahibba-yi Saysan' 15–16; Najafiyān, 'Tarikh Amr' 54–5; Naw'khah, 'Tarikh Nufudh va Intishar' 33.
24. Aqdasi, 'Madrasah Bahā'i'; Aqdasi, 'Ahibba-yi Saysan' 15–16; Najafiyān, 'Tarikh Amr' 54–5; Furutan, *The Story of My Heart* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1984) 43–7. Naw'khah, 'Tarikh Nufudh va Intishar' 34 gives the date of the closure of the Baha'i school as 1949.

25. Aqdasi, 'Ahibba-yi Saysan' 16–17.
26. Aqdasi, 'Ahibba-yi Saysan' 16–17.
27. Naw'khah, 'Tarikh Nufudh va Intishar' 34.
28. Oral information from Mrs Zaynab Mushtaq, Mrs Bahiyyih Tabrizi and Mrs Gloria Momen (24 October 2007).

supporting themselves. Among the ways that they found to earn money were the following:

- some took to trade;
- some began a carpet-weaving business, making an agreement with the major carpet merchants of Tabriz to make carpets to their specifications and then farming the work out to weavers in the surrounding villages;
- some of the Baha'is bought sewing machines, that had only recently arrived on the market, and set themselves up making clothes for Saysan and the surrounding area where there were no other tailors;
- some planted alfalfa grass on part of their land in autumn and would buy young lambs at that time when the price was at its cheapest, keep them over winter and sell them in late winter and early spring when the price was at its highest;
- some would buy one-year-old mules and raise them and sell them in the market of Qaradagh for a good profit; and
- some started making cheese from the ewe's milk of Saysan and the surrounding villages, which was then sold in Tehran and Tabriz.²⁵

As mentioned above, when Muhammad Avval went to Akka to see Baha'u'llah, the latter gave him some seed potatoes and told him to plant them in Saysan. From this the planting of potatoes grew in Saysan and soon spread throughout Azarbayjan. In 1917, when many Iranians were dying of famine, the Baha'is of Saysan were able to feed on potatoes not only themselves but also many from the surrounding villages who took refuge with them. Later they learned how to extract starch from the potatoes and set up a factory to do this in Saysan. They would then turn the starch into a glucose syrup (*bātkā* or *bādkā*) and sell this to the sweet-makers in Tabriz and Tehran. This practice spread to other villages in Azarbayjan.²⁶

In addition, the Baha'is of Saysan did not allow their isolated rural position to deprive them of modern advances. They built their houses of modern materials rather than the mud of other villages; they established a modern public baths with showers and a modern hot water system (see below); they dug wells to ensure the water supply; they asphalted the road to the village; and applied for a telephone wire connection.²⁷

A number of the villagers of Saysan have performed various functions at the Baha'i World Centre. In the time of 'Abdu'l-Baha, Aqa Isma'il became the first caretaker of the Pilgrim House on Mount Carmel (later known as the Eastern Pilgrim House, completed in 1909) and undertook gardening there for a period of 20 years. In 1922, at the invitation of Bahiyyih Khanum, Aqa Yadu'llah, who was from Saysan but later took the surname Tabrizi, the son of the above-mentioned Haji Zaynal, became the caretaker of the shrine of Baha'u'llah and the Mansion of Bahji (he remained until 1934). He was accompanied to Haifa by 'Ali Ashraf Saysani, who assisted at the Eastern Pilgrim House, and Ya'qūb Gulkār and Īmān-Qulī Bahā'ī (Rawshanī) who were gardeners. In more recent years, Mr Ruhu'llah and Mrs Zaynab Mushtaq were custodians of the House of 'Abbud.²⁸

Visitors to Saysan

A number of Western visitors boosted the morale of the Baha'is of Saysan and demonstrated to the Muslims of the area the international nature of the Baha'i Faith. When Hippolyte Dreyfus, Laura Clifford Barney and Madame Lacheney, the first European Baha'is to come to Iran, visited Tabriz in 1906, the Baha'is of Saysan came en masse to the village of Haji Aqa on the main road to greet them as they passed. Martha Root visited in the winter months of 1930, battling through deep snow to reach the village.²⁹ Effie Baker visited in late 1931, accompanied by Mr and Mrs Furutan as mentioned above. Keith Ransom-Kehler visited in about June 1932 and has left an account of her one-day visit, which is of interest as it gives an outsider's view of the community:

29. M. R. Garis, *Martha Root: Lioness at the Threshold* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1983) 347.

Tucked away in the mountains of Adhīrbāyjan is the Bahā'ī village of Sisan, a community of about fifteen hundred souls, I would say, of whom twelve hundred and fifty are Bahā'is. So great is their reputation for justice, understanding and enlightenment that the Muslims of the community frequently submit their conflicts and problems to the Bahā'ī Assembly rather than to the Muslim Courts...

A little group of Sisāns [sic] were waiting at the fork of the road to direct us, and then began a triumphal progress so extravagant that it will remain forever, not an episode, but an acute emotional experience. As our car turned into the crude new-made roadway, from every field and farmstead, from every lodge and pasture they came running – all those who perforce must remain at their work, unable to join the holiday-makers in the village. 'Allāh-u-Abhā' [God is Most Glorious, the Baha'i greeting] rang from every side: 'Allāh-u-Abhā' joyously cried the little shepherd as his frightened flock fled away. 'Allāh-u-Abhā' pealed the stalwart young farmer leaving his stolid bullocks in the half-finished furrow; old men ran breathlessly from their herds calling 'Allāh-u-Abhā' as they came; 'Allāh-u-Abhā' was the shout of the donkey boy, and 'Allāh-u-Abhā' the glad greeting of the camel-driver who had hurried all night to arrive at this rendezvous until at last the very birds, trees, streams, yes, rocks, had joined the mystic chorus and the earth herself was pulsating with the power of the Greatest Name...

And then, turning sharply to enter the main road of the village there in two mighty rows were drawn up before us these hundreds of men and women rocking the houses with their joyous welcome of 'Allāh-u-Abhā.' I still have the feeling that this day is something that I have read somewhere; it doesn't seem as if it could actually have happened.

Unlike the hideous black chuddar worn by the women of the towns and cities, these villagers were alive with colour, and vivid, almost barbaric, it gave a very dramatic background to the scene.

We stopped in front of a villa set on a hill with a very long narrow garden in front... Seating myself in an upper window I watched with dazed awe the happy, reverent throngs who crowded through the gate to do me honour. Strangely enough the women came first, every one of them carrying a baby, the mothers their infants, the grandmothers the 'second youngest.'

Above the marvel of this sight my senses danced with delight at the gorgeous colourings, orange, red, grass-green, magenta, Chinese pink – it was none too brilliant for the occasion. It took about twenty minutes for the

30. Keith Ransom-Kehler, 'Letters Home. Persia:- Visit to a Bahā'ī Village,' *The Bahā'ī Magazine* vol. 23 (Feb. 1933, pp. 378–82) 379–381.
31. Aqdasi, 'Ahibba-yi Saysan' 17.

women to file in, in orderly fashion; they stood to the right, around the pool. The men followed more rapidly to the opposite side and then I was to come down to the garden and speak.

Turkish is the vernacular of the whole province of Adhīrbāyjan. It was very complicated: Mr. Cayvais, the interpreter who accompanied me from Tīhrān, translated to Mr. Frutān (a national teacher stationed in the village at the time) who in turn rendered it into Turkish...

A pathetic little group stood apart on an adjoining housetop as I was speaking. 'Who are those? Why don't they come into the garden?' I asked. 'They are Muslims,' I was told. 'Allāh'u'Akbar,' [a Muslim greeting] I shouted to them to the delight of the Friends.

I went... to the Hazīrat-ul-Quds [Bahā'i meeting hall] to meet the Spiritual Assembly and say farewell. The place was packed and lined with old and young, many who had been in the fields having been replaced by those who had attended the morning session.

As I walked between these rows of shining faces the real meaning of Bahā'ī solidarity suddenly penetrated me. Here were Persians speaking Turkish, fixed in a tiny town in the mountains of Adhīrbāyjan, and I, a sophisticated and effete Occidental, peripatetic, artificial, cosmopolitan; but we were bound together by ties 'more lasting than bronze and higher than the exalted site of the Pyramids.' For knowledge of the coming of Bahā'u'llāh and knowledge of His All-enfolding Covenant is not a question of locality, education or perferment but an unshakable spiritual reality that welds those who know it into an indissoluble human brotherhood. Here is a true solidarity that can withstand all the forces of disruption in the universe.

The farewells were just as moving as the welcome had been. I was tremendously agitated for fear someone would be hurt; women running, with babies in their arms, to touch my hand as I waved from our moving motor, men jostling, boys under the very wheels it seemed to me, shouting their goodbyes.

And once again the two long brilliant lines raising the glad paeon 'Allāh-u-Abhā.' Once more the fields streaming with those leaving their occupations to give 'Allāh-u-Abhā' as their Godspeed; babies in their mother's arms swelling the chorus 'Allāh-u-Abhā'; again the skies were raining back the great refrain with which these simple, earnest, devoted souls were assaulting heaven.³⁰

Later developments

Even as the Baha'is of Saysan became very successful and prosperous, however, they were constantly battling the Muslims of the area who spared no efforts in undermining and sabotaging the economic basis of the Baha'i community. They would copy the innovations of the Saysan Baha'is, such as cheese-making, and then prohibit the selling of any ewes' milk to the Saysan Baha'is, thus forcing the Baha'is to travel to Kurdistan for supplies. They would prevent the sale to the Baha'is of the fodder that was necessary for their animals to survive the harsh Azarbayjan winters. They would stop and sometimes loot lorries coming to the village with sheep or supplies.³¹

In 1933, a certain Askar Muhsini had purchased a quarter of the village and rented the other three-quarters from the Damishqi family. The Damishqi family had been enemies of the Baha'i Faith and were constantly involved in plots against the Saysan Baha'is, but Muhsini was an even

greater enemy and announced his intention of driving the Baha'is out of Saysan. He had friends in the government, the army and the gendarmerie. On public holidays, he would bring lorry-loads of army personnel and gendarmerie into the village. Some of the Baha'is would be arrested and 'fined', others fled the village and had their homes looted. He expelled five of the members of the local spiritual assembly from the village from 1935 to 1937. After three years of this harassment, a delegation of seven Baha'is went to Tehran. With the assistance of the National Assembly and a number of highly-placed Baha'is, they managed to get the government to intervene and alleviate their situation. A wealthy Baha'i, Ahmadpur, then purchased the quarter of the village that Muhsini owned and the Damishqi family eventually sold their three-quarters to the Baha'is of Saysan. A new Haziratu'l-Quds was built in 1939.³²

Other problems that the Saysan Baha'is faced included the arrest of a number of Baha'is for carrying out Baha'i marriages in 1938 when the government effectively made these illegal, the closure of the *hazirat ul-quds* and Baha'i school in the same year (the pupils continued to be taught in the homes of the Baha'is), and the murder of a Baha'i, Gulmuhammad Thabiti, in 1950. On 25 December 1966, at the instigation of a local notable called Bālā Khan, two ruffians attacked Yadullah Karimi, a father of seven children, and beat him to death. Following this, the windows of the local mosque were smashed before onlookers and nine Baha'is, who had nothing to do

32. Aqdasi, 'Ahibba-yi Saysan' 18–21; Naw'khah, 'Tarikh Nufudh va Intishar' 35.



Two Baha'is standing in front of the New Haziratu'l-Quds of Saysan; on the left is 'Ālishān Samadī and on the right is Nūrandīsh Samandārī; photograph taken by Kourosh Valizadeh.

33. *The Bahā'ī World*, vol. 14 (Haifa: The Universal House of Justice, 1974) 349–50.
34. Aqdasi, 'Ahibba-yi Saysan' 20.
35. Aqdasi, 'Ahibba-yi Saysan' 16, 18.
36. Aqdasi, 'Ahibba-yi Saysan' 18.
37. Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Part 2, Article 7 (<http://untreaty.un.org/cod/icc/statute/romefra.htm>); Updated Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Article 5 (www.un.org/icty/legal/doc-e/basic/statut/statute-febo6-e.pdf).
38. Naw'khah, 'Tarikh Nufudh va Intishar' 35; Interview with Mrs Zaynab Mushtaq November 2007. A satellite view of Saysan, showing the village flattened save for a few houses, can be seen at <http://wikimapia.org/3624119/Sisan> (accessed 19/04/2008).

with the crime, were accused of the act and sentenced to six months imprisonment and a fine.³³ In 1955, during the height of the Falsafi episode, the only place in Azarbayjan which was well-known to have Baha'is was Saysan and so a great deal of attention was focussed on it. But the government took the step of placing soldiers on the roads approaching Saysan and these turned back lorry-loads of people headed for Saysan to attack the Baha'is there. Within Saysan itself, the Baha'is spread abroad the rumour that they had armed themselves and even had a machine-gun; thus the Muslims of the village did not dare attack them.³⁴

One of the problems facing development in villages is the fact that as it proceeds many leave the village for the better educational and occupational opportunities afforded by towns and cities. This also happened in Saysan, where there was the additional factor of the persecutions to cause the Baha'is to leave. Many Baha'is left for Tabriz or Tehran, where their education enabled them to gain an easier livelihood. In addition, from 1943, during the first 45-month national teaching plan of the Iranian Baha'is, the Baha'is of Saysan began to play a significant role in the spread of the Baha'i Faith by sending out 'pioneers' to other towns and villages in Azarbayjan, and later further afield. The Muslims in the village, on the other hand, had adopted the practice of writing to the *mujtahids* in Tabriz about their 'dire situation' as a minority in a Baha'i-dominated village and obtaining financial support in this way – a practice which encouraged more Muslims to come to the village. The consequence of all this was that the Baha'is in Saysan went from being by far the majority in the village to becoming a minority.³⁵

Because of the decline of the Baha'i Faith in Saysan, the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran set up a Committee for the Strengthening of the Cause in Saysan from among the Saysan Baha'is in Tehran. This committee carried out a number of actions including collecting money for the repair of the Saysan *hazirat ul-quds*, which had fallen into disrepair, arranging for the sinking of two deep wells in the village, which improved the water supply of the village greatly, stopping the sale of Baha'i lands to Muslims and repurchasing some of the land that had already been sold. These measures revived the numbers, the economic status and the prestige of the Saysan Baha'is.³⁶

The 1979 Islamic Revolution again put the Baha'is of Saysan under pressure. In certain areas of Bosnia in the 1990s, all Muslims were expelled from an area so as to make it exclusively Christian. This was called "ethnic cleansing" and is considered a "crime against humanity" by the International Criminal Court ('Deportation or forcible transfer of population') and the War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia ('deportation' and 'persecutions on political, racial and religious grounds').³⁷ Similarly in Iran, the policy of the Islamic Republic has been to "cleanse" rural areas by forcible removal of all Baha'is from the villages where they live. Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, a certain 'Ali Vilayati was sent from the religious centre in Qumm to try to convert the Baha'is of Saysan. The fact that the Baha'is largely ignored him was then made a pretext for persecution of the Baha'is. In the spring of 1982, this pressure built up, causing the remaining 2,000 Baha'is to leave the village and settle in Tabriz, Tehran and elsewhere. The homes of the Baha'is, their businesses and the Baha'i centre were torn down and levelled and the Baha'i cemetery was bulldozed (as can clearly be seen in satellite photographs of the village). Some 15 or so Muslim families remain in a small enclave.³⁸

Conclusion

The Baha'i community of Saysan had many obstacles to its development. The village was geographically isolated; its inhabitants were poor and illiterate, and the community was persecuted and ostracised by the neighbouring Muslims. Despite this, the Baha'is of the village managed to establish the Baha'i administrative institutions, thus creating a consultative decision-making leadership around which the community could unite, defend itself and go forward. Out of this, and with assistance from the Baha'i leadership in 'Akka and Haifa and nearby Baha'i communities such as that of Tabriz, they began to try to develop their community along the lines advocated in the teachings of the Baha'i Faith.

Their situation meant that there was a limit on the numbers of people who could subsist on the traditional farming activities of the village as the population grew. They dealt effectively and creatively with this problem, developing new ways of earning income and taking on what for the area were innovative technologies and manufactures. They were able to establish educational facilities well above the standard of Iranian villages of the time. Their progress became a model for the surrounding area to emulate.

Their very success led, however, to problems that typically occur in developing societies. The village children, once educated and aware of the world around them, were not content to remain in the village once they had grown up, when the education they had received in the village and the contacts they had through the Baha'i community meant they could lead more prosperous and interesting lives in Tabriz or Tehran.

The Baha'i community was in the process of addressing these problems and reversing the decline of the Saysan Baha'i community when the Islamic Revolution of 1979 occurred. In the wake of this, the entire Baha'i community of the village was expelled in a programme of 'ethnic cleansing' that qualifies for the definition of a 'crime against humanity'. The village itself was flattened by bulldozers. Nevertheless, the spirit of Saysan still exists in a diaspora of Saysani Baha'is living in Iran, Europe and North America.³⁹

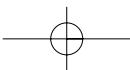
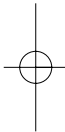
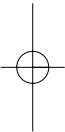
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39. The largest community of exile Saysan Baha'is appears to be in the Vancouver area of Canada. See also the web-site: <http://www.seysan.org/> (accessed 19 April 2008).



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The Suppression of the Baha'is of Iran in 1955

Bahram Choubine (translated by Ahang Rabbani)

Abstract

This is the translation of that part of Dr Choubine's Introduction to 'Ali Dashti, 23 Sāl (23 Years) that deals with the persecutions of the Baha'is of Iran during the reign of Muhammad Reza Shah. It has been published in Persian on the Internet as a separate work and covers such episodes as the forged Dolgorouki memoirs and the collusion between the shah and the highest-ranking cleric of the Shi'i world, Ayatu'llah Burujirdi, in the campaign of persecutions that occurred in 1955 following the radio broadcasts of Falsafi. Dr Choubine also deals with the role of Ayatu'llah Khomeini, Ayatu'llah Muntaziri and the Hujjatiyyih in this period.

Keywords

persecution
Baha'is
Iran
Reza Shah
Muhammad Reza Shah
Falsafi
Burujirdi
Khomeini
Montazeri

Translator's introduction

In introducing 'Ali Dashti's seminal work, *23 Sal (23 Years)*, Dr Choubine has penned an enlightening essay that places the events of 20th-century Iran in their fuller perspective. More recently, the erudite author has considerably expanded this essay and has included more analysis and documentation, and has offered it as a preface to a new edition of 'Ali Dashti's *23 Sāl (23 years)*, distributed by Alburz Publishing, in Frankfurt, Germany. A section of this expanded essay (pp. 34–42), appearing under the heading, 'Sarkūb-i Bahā'iyān' (The Suppression of the Baha'is), has been widely available on the Internet.¹ It is published below in translation with the kind permission of the author.² All footnotes are by the author, unless otherwise noted, as are all comments in parentheses. Clarifying remarks in square brackets [...] are by the translator. Subheadings have been added in the translation to provide clarity and assist the reader's understanding.

The Suppression of the Baha'is

The persecution and slaying of the Babis and Baha'is was part of the daily activities of the clerics and monarchs of the Qajar dynasty. For religious and political reasons, this propensity to kill Babis and Baha'is continued up to the conclusion of the Qajar era.

1. See for example:
http://www.jamali.info/minorities/index.php?page=111206_A1;
http://www.negah.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=382&Itemid=15 (both accessed 25 December 2007);
<http://www.cyrusnews.com/news/fa/?mi=2&ni=17649> (accessed 4 June 2008).
2. It should be noted that Dr Choubine has never been a member of or affiliated with the Baha'i community. He has, however, on numerous occasions spoken strongly in support of the human rights of Baha'is in Iran and written

extensively about the beleaguered religious minorities on that country (Translator).

3. The forced abdication of Reza Shah by the allies during World War II and the installation of his son Muhammad Reza Pahlavi as Shah (Translator).

The [Azali] Babis had an important role in the Constitutional Movement of Iran and indeed one could claim that their efforts to advance the Constitutional Revolution were critical and constructive. However, this fact does not imply that the Baha'is were not supportive of constitutional rule, as it must be understood that their leaders insisted that Baha'is should not participate in political activities, in order that the newly-founded Baha'i community would remain immune from the attacks of those who sought to establish a Shari'ah-based constitution and were among the leading clerics of the time.

Reza Shah's reign

During the rule of Reza Shah, several towns witnessed Baha'i killings. However, as a whole, persecution of Baha'is was not one of the political objectives of Reza Shah's era, as his main goal was to limit the influence of religious clerics. It was during his reign that the notion of *millat* [national identity] acquired its roots, and to some degree, the religious identity of *ummat* [body of believers] was gradually replaced by *millat*. That is, the country was moving in a direction such that citizens considered themselves *Iranians* without concern for religious belief, political orientation or tribal affiliation. However, in the years after Reza Shah's demise, gradually that policy was abandoned and, once more, the idea of *ummat Islāmī* [body of Muslims] entered political discourse. Moreover, the cold war against the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc reinforced this idea among the political figures of Iran. The organization of *Fidā'iyan-i Islām* [Devotees of Islam] was founded after Reza Shah had been deposed and was an effort to combat leftist tendencies in Iran.

Post-Reza Shah

In the 1940s and 1950s the persecution of religious minorities, particularly Baha'is, on the pretext that they opposed the Shi'i religion or had leftist tendencies, forced the government and the shah, especially after the events of September 1941,³ to follow the blind alley of *ummat Islami* and obliged them to openly contravene the principles of the Constitutional Revolution and the country's adopted constitution. Almost all political and prominent personalities of every faction significantly contributed to this wayward political path and forced Iranian society's accelerated departure from the established norms of the democratic principles enshrined in the goals of the Constitutional Revolution. A golden opportunity for strengthening democracy in Iran was lost and the chance to gain popular support for the implementation of improvements and reforms, even within a controlled framework, was lost to the shah and the government.

With Reza Shah's departure, intense criticism of his reign began. The clerical establishment, like ants, began gnawing at the foundations of the nation's democratic system. As a result, every aspect of modern life, enlightened thought, social progress and liberty became a toy in the hands of reactionary forces in Iran. After September 1941, the entire Shi'i clerical establishment, joined by the ruling class, arose and once again forced women to wear chadors and veils, and strove to close all mixed-gender schools. Islamic propaganda groups and societies were organized throughout the country and began disseminating publications on the 'truths and teachings of Islam' as well as various religious pamphlets, daily newspapers and weekly or monthly journals – all of which had the suffix of *Islam* or *Islamic* in their titles.

In summary, the clerics' long-held hatred of the Babis and then of the Baha'i movement surfaced once again and the field for expressing animosity and abhorrence of religious minorities, particularly Baha'is, as well as of exponents of enlightened and progressive thought among Iranians, opened up. At the insistence of the religious leaders (*marāji'-yi taqlīd*, literally: 'focuses of emulation'), Islamic training and religious propaganda were interjected in the curricula of all elementary and high schools throughout the nation.

All of these developments took place in Tehran and other cities during the 1940s and centred on opposition to Baha'is, to Ahmad Kasravi and his supporters, and to the Tudeh [Socialist] Party and its members – and occurred under the supervision of the government and in most instances with the financial and organizational support of the authorities. In truth, it was the clerical order that established the notion of *Dā'ī Jān Napoleon*⁴ among the Iranians who suspect that whatever occurs in Iran is the work of foreign agents. Fabricated documents, such as the *Memoirs of Prince Dolgorouki*,⁵ which was manufactured by the fiction-weaving pen of 'Ali Javāhir-Kalām⁶ and published with the financial support of Āstān Quds Raḍavī,⁷ and the backing of the leading Shi'i clerics (*marāji'*), were disseminated. This was just one example of many such products that originated from the clerical establishment.

In reality, the widespread perfidious belief that 'any non-Islamic idea is the creation of foreigners' stemmed from the fusty minds of the mullas. Through this devious approach, they attached such labels as 'anti-Iranian' and 'foreign' to everything that was not Islamic and which could threaten or undermine the power of these religion-mongers of Iran. This deceitful 'Othering', this spreading of the seeds of conflict and enmity, not only engulfed religious minorities, progressive nationalistic parties and independent leftist groups, but, in the long run, it even raised questions about the government itself and about constitutional rule. It became an excuse for the clerics to canvas widely the claim that the people's Constitutional Revolution, which in reality had taken place in protest against clerical influence and the absolutist rule of the Qajar, was an exploit of the Russian and British governments in order to serve their own interests. They occupied themselves with propagating this baseless idea, insisting that constitutional rule and secular law were fundamentally at variance with the true religion of Islam and with Iran's historical tradition.

Early 1955 opposition to Baha'is

It was stated earlier that after the *coup d'état* of 28 Murdād 1332 [19 August 1953],⁸ the mullas insisted that their significant contribution to the *coup d'état* be recognized and that this was only possible by suppression of the Tudeh Party and the Baha'is. The disreputable and notorious preacher Ḥujjat al-Islām Muḥammad Taqī Falsafī has stated in his memoirs that his sermons against the Baha'is took place with the prior consent of Ayatu'llah Burūjirdī and Muhammad Reza Shah. In an interview on 10 May 1955⁹ with a reporter of *Ittīḥād-i Millī*, Falsafi described his meeting with Ayatu'llah Burujirdi in these words:

Before the blessed month of Ramadan, I went to Qum where I met Ayatu'llah Burujirdi and found him deeply distressed. He stated, 'Now that the situation of

4. *Dā'ī Jān Napoleon* is a masterpiece of socio-political satire by the renowned satirist Iraj Pizishkzād. In the course of this entertaining and fascinating novel, which was later made into a popular play, Pizishkzad discloses the Iranian tendency to think that behind every misfortune is the hand of foreigners, particularly the British. For a discussion of the Iranian preoccupation with conspiracy, see Moojan Momen, 'Conspiracy Theories and Forgeries: The Baha'i Community of Iran and the Construction of an Internal Enemy', paper presented at the Sixth Biennial Conference of Iranian Studies, August 2006 (Translator).

5. Prince Dimitri Dolgoroukov [Dolgorouki] was the Russian Tsar's ambassador to Iran during 1845–54. The book, *Memoirs of Kinyaz Dolgorouki*, a creation of the troubled mind of 'Ali Javāhir-Kalām, endeavours to connect the Babi and Baha'i movements to Tsarist Russia. At first, this book attracted considerable attention in Iran, but soon the fact that it was a mere forgery was thoroughly established by historians and religious researchers. In a well-regarded article, Professor 'Abbās Iqbāl Āshtiyānī proved these memoirs to be a forgery created by troublemakers (*Yādīgār*, Year 5, numbers 8 and 9). Professor Muḥtabā Mīnuvī considers these memoirs to be a forgery and the forger

to be an Iranian (*Rāhnāmih-yi Kitāb*, Year 6, numbers 1 and 2). Similarly, refer to Firaydūn Ādamiyat, *Amīr Kabīr va Irān* (*Amir Kabir and Iran*, 5th printing, Tehran: Khwarazmi, 1976) 456.

6. Ādamiyat, *Amīr Kabīr* 456n.
7. Āstān Quds Razavī is responsible for maintenance and supervision of the Sacred Shrine of Imam Riḏā in Mashhad. It has a strong publishing arm as well as administering many religious schools and endowments (Translator).
8. This is a reference to the coup of 28 Mordād 1332 against the government of Dr Muhammad Musaddiq (19 May 1882–5 March 1967). It is commonly called by Iranians the '28 Mordad coup' and will be referred to as the '1953 coup' in the rest of this translation. Musaddiq, who was the elected prime minister of Iran from 1951 to 1953, was a nationalist and passionately opposed foreign intervention in Iran. He was also the architect of the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry, which had been dominated and exploited by the British through the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (today known as British Petroleum). Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi removed him from power in a CIA-orchestrated coup, supported and funded by the British and the US governments (Translator).

the oil industry has been resolved and the matter of the Tudeh Party has been disposed of, we must make plans for Baha'is and confront this challenge.'

In *Khātirāt va Mubārizāt* [*Memories and Struggles*], Muhammad Taqi Falsafi writes:

Ayatu'llah Burujirdi sent me a message to convey the issue [of Baha'is] to the government authorities...Eventually, after May 1953 (Ramadan 1332), he sent me a letter instructing me to meet with the shah and to express the Ayatu'llah's disapproval and displeasure over the matter of [the relative freedom of] the Baha'is...Before May 1954 (Ramadan 1333), I asked Ayatu'llah Burujirdi, 'Are you supportive of the idea that I discuss the situation of Baha'is during my radio sermons which are broadcast live from the Shah Mosque?' He thought for a moment and then responded, 'If you did, it would be good. For now, the authorities are paying little attention [to the suppression and annihilation of Baha'is]. At least that would put them [the Baha'is] in a bad light in the field of public opinion.'

He added further, 'It is necessary to mention this to the shah beforehand so that he would not have an excuse later to intercede, ruin everything and terminate the radio broadcasts. Such a thing would be most unfortunate for the Muslims as it would embolden the Baha'is.'

I called the shah's office and requested an appointment. When I met the shah, I stated, 'Ayatu'llah Burujirdi has consented that the issue of Baha'is, which is a cause of concern for the Muslims, be dealt with and discussed in my radio sermons during the month of Ramadan. Would your Majesty consent as well?'

Falsafi relates that the shah remained silent for a moment and then said, 'Go and preach accordingly.'¹⁰

From 1948 (1327), each Ramadan, Falsafi used to deliver sermons against the Tudeh Party. Elimination and annihilation of the Babis and Baha'is was the cherished desire of the mullas and their partners in the government. During those days, it was widely said that strikes against Baha'is and destruction of their administrative and religious centres were government objectives. However, this had to wait until May 1955 (Ramadan 1334).

1955 Baha'i persecution

In accordance with Ayatu'llah Burujirdi's wishes, immediately after the 1953 coup, the attack against the Baha'is began with Falsafi's sermons delivered during Ramadan of 1334 [1955]. The brutal attack led to the confiscation of Baha'i properties in every city by the government. In Tehran, in front of the cameras of both foreign and domestic reporters, General [Nadir] Bātmānqlīch, the chief of staff of the Iranian army, along with [General] Taymūr Bakhtiyār, the military commander of Tehran, took pickaxes and demolished the dome of the Baha'i Centre. For many years, that building was impounded by the military and used as its own command centre.

General Muhammad Āyarmalū, the deputy-chief of the most powerful branch of government, namely, the Department for Security and Information [SAVAK], writes the following in his memoirs:

One morning, General Batmanqlīch, the chief of staff of the army, along with General Taymur Bakhtiyar, the military commander, climbed the dome of the

Haṣṣrat al-Quds (the Baha'i Centre in Tehran) and using pickaxes began to demolish it.

The next morning, the military attaché of the United States came to my office and in a voice shaking with rage protested, 'What was this act that the chief of staff committed? Why would the military chief take up an axe, and before the gaze of multitudes, demolish a building? Furthermore, he destroyed a building that is deeply respected and cherished by many of your citizens! My country is assisting Iran to repair the ruins, and now you turn a beautiful building into a ruin...?'

As I, too, could not find any logical reason for this destruction – particularly by the hands of such a high-ranking officer – I remained quiet and said nothing in the face of the rebuke of the American attaché. A few hours later, the late Batmanqlich summoned me into his office and impatiently asked, 'What are the military attachés saying about yesterday's occurrences?' I openly shared the comments of the American military attaché and added, 'Several more of the military attachés have expressed their perplexity and disappointment over this incident.' When I saw signs of distress in his face, I asked, 'General, what truly motivated you to undertake this act?' He lifted his head and responded, 'I had no motives. It was the chief's order.' And by that he meant the late Muhammad Reza Shah.

As later I read in various publications, Muhammad Reza Shah had given this order in order to appease several influential clerics, particularly Sayyid Abu'l-Qasim Kashani...It is ironic to note that twenty-five years later [in the Islamic Revolution of 1979], the late Muhammad Reza Shah witnessed the result of giving so much licence to the clerics. Also twenty-five years later, when General Batmanqlich was arrested and prosecuted at the height of the 1357 (1978) Revolution, he recounted this incident in his semi-successful defence."¹¹

Clerical influence over the government

The activities of Ayatu'llah Burujirdi, and essentially the entire efforts of the Shi'i clerical establishment against the Baha'is, were not only aimed at securing the 'foundation of the true religion of Islam'. In fact, this undertaking was an instrument for the clerics to portray themselves as actual participants in the 1953 *coup d'état* and the restoration of the shah to his throne.

By yielding to the illegal wishes of the religious leaders (*marāji'-yi taqlīd*) and the clerical establishment after the 1953 *coup d'état*, the shah and his government, in effect, placed a stamp of approval on the clerics' participation in the government's exercise of power. Through a study of documents, letters and communications of the clerics after the 1953 *coup d'état* until the 1979 Revolution we can see how intertwined and aligned the relationship between the royal court, the government and the clerics had become. This friendly association developed into such a close relationship that hoping to realize his malevolent fancies, Ayatu'llah Burujirdi asked the Shah and Prime Minister Husayn 'Alā' to modify the contents of the nation's Constitution through parliamentary action. This is the text of his letter:

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

To his Excellency [Husayn 'Alā'] the Prime Minister, may his glory last!

9. 19 Urdibihisht 1334.

10. Falsafi, *Khāṭirāt va Mubārizāt-i Hujjatu'l-Islām Falsafi* (*Memories and Struggles of Hujjatu'l-Islām Falsafi*, 4th printing, [Tehran:] Markaz Asnād Inqilāb Islāmī) 200ff. In the same book, various documents and accounts are found that illustrate how the mullas and political figures worked hand-in-hand against the Baha'i community and strove to suppress and harm them. They even entertained the idea of adopting a parliamentary measure that would make it illegal to be a Baha'i. These documents clearly prove that the Shah and his appointed prime minister, Asadu'llah 'Alam, were active partners in these undertakings. In the book, *Ā'in-i Bahā'ī Yik Nihdat Siyāsī Nist* (*The Baha'i Faith is not a Political Movement*, [Langenhain]: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahā'īs of Germany, 1361/1983), after proving that the Baha'i Faith has no political objective, the various objections raised by the leaders of the Islamic Republic are addressed and answered. For example, the author(s) of this book have noted the manifold problems that the Baha'is had with the government during Reza Shah's reign. In 1941 (1320), a number of Baha'is of Yazd were imprisoned on the charge of being Baha'is. In 1943 (1322), local Baha'i centres in various cities were confiscated and some were destroyed. In 1946 (1325), a number of

Baha'is were killed in Kashan and Shahrud, and the perpetrators were never arrested. In 1951 (1330), a *jihad* (religious war) against Baha'is was proclaimed and they were accused of collaboration with the communists. After Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Falsafi's sermons in 1955 (1334), Baha'is were persecuted throughout Iran and a number of them were killed. In 1956 (1335), the Baha'is complained to the United Nations about these persecutions and discriminations. From 1956 until 1963, Baha'i gatherings were proclaimed unlawful by the government. Finally, in September 1978 (1357), SAVAK organized anti-Baha'i riots in Shiraz aimed at diverting the Revolution and turning it into an uprising against the Baha'is. Over 300 Baha'i homes were plundered and then set on fire. In Paris, Ayatu'llah Khomeini spoke of this incident and pointed out its true character.

11. Muhammad Ayarmalu, *Yādvārih Yik Bachih-yi Qafqāz (Memoirs of a Lad from the Caucasus)*, 1st edn., Germany, 2003) 213–14.
12. Sayyid Muḥammad-Ḥusayn Manzūru'l-Ajdād (ed.), *Marja'iyat dar 'Arṣih Ijtīmā' va Siyāsat (The Position of Marja' in the Arena of Society and Politics)*, Tehran: Shīrāzi, Autumn 1379/ 2000) 498.
13. *Zabān Gūyā-yi Islām: Hujjatu'l-Islām Muḥammad-Taqī Falsafī (The Eloquent*

Your Excellency's letter of 27 June 1955 (5 Tir 1334) conveying the necessary instructions of his Majesty to the government regarding my suggestions as communicated in my letter of 29 June 1954 (27 Shavval 1373) was received through Ḥāj Qā'im Maqām al-Mulk Raft'. The essence of my suggestions, as noted in your letter, are:

1. The Baha'i sect must be prevented from propagation [of its teachings], which is against the true religion of Islam.
2. Their assemblies and centres for propagation, wherever found across the country, must be closed.
3. Any employee who is not of one of the religions mentioned in the Constitution must be expelled after due investigation, in accordance with the law of the country. Consequently, the Baha'is would fall into this category [and be expelled]...

May God, exalted be He, protect the sacred Islamic religion and the independence of Iran from the harm of events that occur and the attack of enemies. And may He confirm and succour his Majesty and the government authorities in their work of protecting the country and supporting the sacred religion [of Islam].

Upon thee be the peace, mercy and bounty of God.

7 Dhu'l-Qa'dah 1374/7 Tir 1334 (28 June 1955)

Husayn at-Ṭabāṭabā'ī [Burujirdi].¹²

During that period and subsequently, Muhammad Taqi Falsafi would cry out in warning in every mosque and place of worship in Tehran or other cities where he preached:

Brave merchants, employees, students and workers of Iran! Arise and combat these irreligious people [i.e. the Baha'is] and Baha'i-sympathizers (by this he meant the shah, the prime minister and members of the national parliament) and completely exterminate them, so that it will be proven that (Imam) 'Alī is alive, the Prophet (of Islam) is alive and the religion of Islam will not fade away. Do not permit this illegal government to belittle Islam any longer!

After its successful role in the 1953 *coup d'état*, the clerical establishment would attribute every political, social or economic reform to being the work of the Baha'is and through this stratagem would provoke religious sentiments, as well as inflame the latent anti-Baha'i attitude of the Iranian people. Whenever the shah or the government retreated on these announced reforms, the clerics and Shi'i religious leaders would refer to 'an agreement having been reached between the government and the clerics', or to 'the defeat of the government', or would say, 'Through God's will, the strivings of the courageous nation of Islam and the indefatigable clerics, we won a mighty victory!'¹³

In a telegram to the shah, Ayatu'llah Sayyid Muhammad Bihbahani stated, 'I offer my heartfelt gratitude for closing this centre of religious and national sedition (the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds, the Baha'i centre in Tehran)

through the efforts of the Islamic army and consider this auspicious event to be among the annual religious events worthy of celebration.' In response to Ayatu'llah Bihbahani, the shah noted, 'As you have repeatedly heard us state, we consider ourselves bound to carry out the requirements of Islam and beseech the Almighty to continue confirming us in this undertaking.'

In a cable to the shah, Ayatu'llah Burujirdi referred to Baha'is as 'enemies and trouble-makers' to the royal throne, and stated, 'May God, exalted be His station, protect the sacred religion of Islam and Iran's monarchy from the harm of the enemy and mischief-makers, and may He preserve your Majesty over all Muslims.'

In a letter to Muhammad Taqi Falsafi, Ayatu'llah Burujirdi – the *marja' at-taqlid* (focus of emulation) for all the Shi'ih – had expressed gratitude for his 'precious services' to 'the sacred religion of Islam, and indeed to all religions, and to the holy Qur'an.' He wrote that since Baha'is held many high positions in the government, the highest priority was therefore to remove them all from every agency, department and bureau of the government, and from every other position of influence. In an interview with the newspaper *Kayhān*, he expressed his wish for the destruction of the Hazirat al-Quds in Tehran, the expulsion of Baha'is from all governmental and official positions, and the adoption of a parliamentary plan to forcibly expel all Baha'is from Iran.

From the pulpit, Muhammad Taqi Falsafi never hesitated to spread every manner of untrue and vicious rumour intended to provoke the simple-minded, fanatical and superstitious people against Baha'is. He used the well-tried techniques of such preachers¹⁴ and made up false stories, saying:

One of the members of the Tudeh [Communist Party] disclosed to me: 'As every arena of activity was closed to us and since we heard that the Baha'is intended to initiate a *coup d'état* the following year, we, therefore gravitated towards them so that we could make a big impact. In order to prove our interest in the Baha'i religion, we even married Baha'i women in accordance with their ceremonies.'

In response to objections from the international community and its agencies, and possibly also the protests from western countries against the maltreatment of Baha'is in Iran, Falsafi devised a new trick. From the pulpit he would say, 'We have not spoken of religion. Our only concern is a group who wears a religious mask, and it is against them that we speak.'

Falsafi's ties to America

Falsafi himself declared from a pulpit that he had close affiliations with the agents of the American embassy – a place described by Ayatu'llah Ruhullah Khomeini as 'the nest of spies'. In a resonant voice he would proclaim, 'I told the Americans that the Muslims were fighting the Tudeh Party and, if they were to support the Baha'is, it would be like supporting the Tudeh Party, which is an enemy of America.'

In this way, Muhammad Taqi Falsafi painted himself as an American supporter in their fight against communism and socialism in Iran and

Tongue of Islam:
Hujjatu'l-Islam
Muhammad-Taqi
Falsafi, Tehran:
Markaz-i Barrisi-yi
Asnād-i Tārikhī-yi
Vizārat-i Ittīlā'āt),
vol. 9.

14. *Rawḍih-khān* – these reciters of the story of the Imams would also preach as part of their performances (Translator).

15. For more details, see *Īrān-Nāmiḥ*, a journal of Iranian Studies, published in America, special issue, vol. 19: 1–2 (Winter/Spring 2001), devoted to religious minorities of Iran.

insinuated that the cold war waged by the Americans and their European allies was in reality also aimed at combating the Baha'is and that their suppression was part of the same policy framework. His implication was that the suppression of Baha'is was not a religious issue but a struggle to guard Iran's national unity as part of the overall plan in fighting worldwide communism.¹⁵

Muntaziri's role in the persecution of Baha'is

The anti-Baha'i activities of Ayatu'llah Burujirdi were not limited to launching Falsafi, the preacher, on his theological outbursts against Baha'is. He dispatched his seminary students and hired thugs to every corner of the country to provoke the already inflamed religious fanatics to murder Baha'is and plunder their properties. Based on information from hundreds of relevant documents, the present author can only briefly draw attention to the activities of Shaykh Husayn 'Alī Muntaziri, who was one of the most mischievous clerics under the tutelage of Ayatu'llah Burujirdi.

At that time, Husayn 'Ali Muntaziri was a young seminarian, but in the winter of his life he reached the rank of Grand Ayatu'llah and was a deputy to Ayatu'llah Ruhu'llah Khomeini, the supreme leader of the Islamic Revolution. He has made public a lengthy account of his life and without any hesitation – indeed with great pride – has recounted many events. Here we note only a few passages:

The late Burujirdi was extremely anti-Baha'i. For instance, they had killed a Baha'i near Yazd and planned to execute his murderer... Burujirdi had lost sleep over this and wanted to prevent this hanging by any means possible (through the illegal efforts of Ayatu'llah Burujirdi and the collusion of the government, the murderer was freed).

One year, Burujirdi instructed Falsafi to give sermons against Baha'is on the radio during Ramadan. Ayatu'llah Kashani also concurred with this. At the beginning of Ramadan, Falsafi began his preaching against Baha'is. That year his sermons became very popular and people would gather around the radio to listen to him...

[It was about this time that Muntaziri was given a mission to go to Najafabad.] I asked Ayatu'llah Burujirdi about business dealings, trade and commerce with Baha'is, and in response, he issued a written *fatwa* (religious judgement) stating: 'In His Name, the Exalted! It is incumbent upon all Muslims to leave off all association, relationship and dealings with this sect [Baha'is]...'

News of this proclamation spread throughout the city and received a great deal of publicity in mosques and other public places... With the announcement of this religious ruling, an atmosphere of extreme tension was created against Baha'is in Najafabad.

At that time, I gathered representatives from every class and occupation of Najafabad and each was asked to produce a proclamation against Baha'is. For instance, the bakers wrote, 'We will not sell bread to Baha'is.' The taxi-drivers wrote, 'We will not permit Baha'is in our cabs.'... In short, a taxi ride between Najafabad and Isfahan which had previously cost one tuman, could not be had for fifty tumans by a Baha'i no matter how much he pleaded. Of course, these actions were not always based on religious

faith. Many participated because they feared others or were forced to, due to the general social mood...

Eventually, as a result of this campaign, they [the Baha'is] were all dislodged from Najafabad... After they were dispersed, they would hide themselves from public view... We extended this hostility to Isfahan as well, where a widespread uproar against Baha'is was initiated... After a while, it became known that I was the instigator and the author of these affairs.¹⁶

It was through the scheming of this 'fair-minded' cleric – Ayatu'llah Muntaziri – that the homes of the Baha'is of Najafabad were plundered and looted, and they were made to wander homeless after being compelled to leave their native town while the government took no action to protect them. Further, it was by the instructions of this 'propagandist' and the 'brilliant mind behind *vilāyat-i faqīh* (leadership by religious jurists¹⁷)' that the Baha'i Centre of Najafabad was set on fire and burned to the ground. Muntaziri admits that Ayatu'llah Burujirdi 'was completely aware of what was going on and was most pleased with my activities'.

Owing to the machination of clerics more cunning than him, Muntaziri failed to become the deputy of the Imam and even received a letter from his supreme leader dated 6 Farvardin 1368 (26 March 1989) that will live forever in the history of the 'militant clerics'. In this letter, Khomeini addressed Muntaziri without the title of Ayatu'llah:

Your Excellency Mr Muntaziri,

With a broken heart and great sadness, I write this short letter so that one day the people may become apprised of the situation... You have forfeited the necessary prerequisites and qualifications to become the next leader of the nation...

(From now on), tell the seminarians who bring you money to take the funds to Qum, to the home of Mr Pasandidi (my brother) or to bring them to Tehran to Jamaran (my residence). Praise unto God that you have no shortage of financial means (thanks to the religious taxes of the Islamic Revolution and the plundering of the possessions of Muslims and non-Muslims).

At this point in the letter, the Imam refers to his deputy as dim-witted and with the customary language of a cleric addresses Muntaziri, 'Since you are a simpleton', you must remain under house arrest, 'perchance God would pardon you your sins'. At the letter's conclusion, Khomeini writes the reason for this communication:

You have committed a treasonous act against the nameless soldiers of the Hidden Imam¹⁸ and the sacred blood of the martyrs for Islam and the Revolution. So that you will not burn in the depths of hell, you should confess your mistakes and sins, perchance God will aid you.

In response to this insulting letter, the deputy of Imam Khomeini, the illustrious Grand Ayatu'llah Husayn 'Ali Muntaziri, wrote most pathetically and meekly, 'Please allow me to continue my studies and teachings as before, like a small and insignificant seminarian, under the wise shadow of your exalted leadership.'¹⁹

16. *Khāṭirāt Āyatū'llāh Husayn-'Alī Muntazirī* (Memoirs of Ayatu'llah Husayn-'Ali Muntaziri, Germany: Nimā, 2000) 94–6 [can also be downloaded at <http://www.amontazeri.com> – in this edition this reference is at vol. 1, pp. 179–80, accessed 21 May 2008].

17. This was the theory that Islam requires that the government be controlled by the clerical class. It was promulgated by Khomeini and justified his seizure of power (Translator).

18. The author is referring to treason against the agents of SAVAMA and VEVAK. SAVAMA is stands for Sāzmān-i Ittīlā'at va Amniyat-i Millī-yi Irān, which was the successor of the Shah's secret police, SAVAK. Later, SAVAMA was transformed into Vizārat-i Ittīlā'at va Amniyat-i Kishvar, or VEVAK for short (Translator).

19. *Khāṭirāt Āyatū'llāh Husayn-'Alī Muntazirī* 539–40 (in on-line version at vol. 1, pp. 673–6, 681–2).

20. *Marja'iyat dar 'Arṣih-yi Ijtīmā' va Siyāsāt*. In this book, we encounter many documents discussing the relationship between the Shah and his governments with various high-ranking clerics such as Ayatu'llahs Mirza Muhammad Husayn Na'ini, Haji Sayyid Abu'l-Hasan Isfahani, Haji Aqa Husayn Qumi, Haji Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Karim Ha'iri Yazdi, and Haji Aqa Husayn Burujirdi. Indeed these documents would be most illuminating and surprising for any researcher. Citing all these documents would, however, unduly prolong this brief essay.

The collusion of the clerics and the government

At the conclusion of Ramadan 1334 (May 1955), the most distinguished of the clerics, the religious leaders, the renowned preachers and those who promoted Shi'ism from the pulpits, along with a representative of Ayatu'llah Burujirdi gathered in the residence of Ayatu'llah Khunsārī. After discussions and consultations, the participants composed a communication addressed to 'the presence of his Majesty the King', requesting urgent and ultimate disposal of the Baha'is of Iran. In this letter, the Muslim clerics stated at length their submission and fidelity to the Crown and pleaded with the shah to conclude the situation of Baha'is in much the same brutal and bloody way that he had eliminated the members of the Tudeh Party, insisting that delay would only prolong the inevitable.

The struggle to cleanse Iran of the presence of 'the wayward and misguided Baha'i sect' gradually turned into an anti-western and anti-American struggle and in the course of several decades ultimately evolved into a rebellion intent on toppling the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran.

The presence of the two highest-ranking military chiefs at the destruction of the Baha'i Haḡīratu'l-Quds in Tehran was a clear sign of the shah's support, and his government's encouragement, of persecution and suppression of Baha'is – an act devoid of foresight and solely intended to appease the high-ranking clerics...

The mullas' activities against Baha'is were not only to protect 'the foundation of the true religion of Islam', it was also an instrument by which the clerical establishment sought to demonstrate their power and influence to the government and people alike. It was the clerical establishment (and not, as was commonly believed among the people, due the unwise assertions of the Tudeh Party, Sha'ban Khan Ja'fari), who were the '*tājbakhs*' (king-makers). The truth was something other than [what the ordinary people believed]. Whenever social reforms appeared to conflict with the interests of the clerics, the clerical establishment would remind the shah and his government that he wore the crown and sat on the throne solely due to its active role in the 1953 *coup d'état*. In the letters of Ayatu'llah Burujirdi, the communications or speeches of Ayatu'llah Khomeini prior to 15 Khurdad [the Islamic Revolution], and the memoirs of various clerics that are presently being published by the Islamic regime in Iran, we repeatedly see that the shah was warned that he owed the return of his crown to the actions of the 'militant clerics' against Dr Musaddiq's government. In some letters, we note that they cautioned the shah that if he were to undertake any act that would displease the clerics or jurists, they had the power and ability to remove him from the throne.²⁰

Recollections of Dr Ha'iri-Yazdi

Ayatu'llah 'Abdu'l-Karīm Hā'irī-Yazdī was a focus of emulation (*marja' at-taqlīd*) of the Shi'ih and the founder of the religious school in Qum. His son Dr Mahdi Ha'iri-Yazdi studied in Qum and later continued his advanced studies in western philosophy in England, the United States and Canada. He remained in the West continuing to teach and research in philosophy. Dr Habib Ladjevardi has published, in the form of an interview, the memoirs of Dr Mahdi Ha'iri-Yazdi as part of Harvard University's

Iranian Oral History Project. Some of these memoirs relate to events after the 1953 coup, the role of clerics, the fall of Dr Musaddiq, and the collusion of the shah with the clerics in running the country. They are most illuminating in understanding the evolution of modern politics and religion in Iran.

Regarding the issue of *vilāyat-i faqīh* [the rule of religious jurists], Dr Mahdi Ha'iri-Yazdi states, 'The way [the Islamic Republic] has defined this theory has no basis whatsoever. At least I have been unable to find any evidence in the Book (Qur'an), the Traditions (*sunnat*) or in logic to support such a system.'

Ha'iri-Yazdi had a close relationship with Ayatu'llah Burujirdi and relates:

On religious matters, Burujirdi would instruct the regime what to do, and the government would follow his wishes. For instance, he did not approve of Dr Musaddiq. However, when the shah returned from Italy [after the coup], Burujirdi approved of him.

Dr Musaddiq showed Burujirdi great respect, to the point that he used his position to pass special legislation such that any publication which printed anything that offended the person of the *marja' at-taqlid* (focus of emulation) would be banned immediately without even a trial. This law was passed solely for Burujirdi. It even caused annoyance to Ayatu'llah Kashani. In fact, one of the reasons that Kashani disassociated himself from Dr Musaddiq was this very legislation and the feeling that Dr Musaddiq had sided with Burujirdi.

Dr Ha'iri-Yazdi relates a recollection of Ayatu'llah Mir Sayyid Muhammad Bihbahānī which is most interesting and instructive. According to this recollection, Ayatu'llah Bihbahani had knowledge of the 1953 *coup d'état* before it took place. Ha'iri-Yazdi states, 'On the morning of 19 August 1953 (28 Mordad), the sun had not yet risen, when the phone rang.' The call was from the residence of Ayatu'llah Bihbahani with the instruction that he should immediately come before the Ayatu'llah for 'an urgent matter'. Ha'iri-Yazdi quickly went to Bihbahani's home and was told by the Ayatu'llah:

This morning you should leave for Qum. Go before Burujirdi and convey to him on my behalf, 'Master, the country is on the verge of dismemberment. Soon it will be ruined because there is talk of forming a republic. The shah has left and any day now, the country will be thrown into chaos and disorder. It is certain that the country will move to the other side of the Iron Curtain. No name will remain of religion; no name of him [Burujirdi]; no mention of religious guidance; no memory of principles of the faith. The country will become communist. He should devise a plan – perhaps a communication, or a ruling – so that people would be made aware of the truth of the matter and would rise to oppose the Tudehis. In short, do not allow the country to become communist.'

Ha'iri-Yazdi continues, 'I should mention that just as he considered Baha'is to be the disruptors of security and a threat to the country's independence, Ayatu'llah Burujirdi also viewed the Tudeh Party in the same light. And so, he combated the Tudeh party in the same way that he combated the Baha'is.'

21. Habib Ladjevardi (ed.), *Khatirat Dr Mahdi Ha'iri-Yazdi*, Iran Oral History Project (Tehran: Nadir, 1382/2003) 34–59.
22. After the Islamic Revolution, a number of SAVAK's secret documents were discovered. The *Mujāhid* newspaper, in its 9 June 1980 issue, printed a facsimile of a document related to the year 1350 [1971], which is not without interest: 'Regarding Anjuman Tablighat Islami [Society for the Promotion of Islam]. The supervisor of Anjuman Islami in the central office [Tehran?] has requested SAVAK to provide necessary aid in combating Baha'is scientifically and intellectually. In sharing this request of the supervisor of the Anjuman Islami, you are requested that, in your contacts with the aforementioned operatives in the provinces, you should make them realize that their activities should not become a [political] campaign or cause disorder. In simpler terms, while maintaining public order, Anjuman Tablighat Islami is permitted to use SAVAK's assistance to combat the Baha'is.' The chief of SAVAK's Third Department signed this document. Also, the *Subh-i Azādigān* newspaper, in its Bahman 1360 (February 1982) issue, in an article under the title 'A Look at the Anjuman Hujjatiyyih', described at length the deep relationship between SAVAK and Anjuman Hujjatiyyih. For a more detailed discussion of the

A question was asked of Dr Ha'iri-Yazdi regarding Ayatu'llah Burujirdi's 'intense and open battles against Baha'is after 1953'. Dr Ha'iri-Yazdi responded:

[Burujirdi] had a grand strategy... At that time, Khomeini was one of the confidants of Burujirdi. In fact, it was widely acknowledged that he was Burujirdi's foreign minister. This was at a time when he had not, as yet, come into conflict with Burujirdi. At least on one occasion during that episode, Khomeini went to the court and met with the shah on Burujirdi's behalf. After this meeting, I met with Khomeini. He himself explained: 'Yes, I went as the emissary of Burujirdi and met with the shah.' In telling this, Khomeini seemed very joyful and vigorous. Khomeini, continuing what he said to me, related: 'I said to his Majesty, "The late shah, your Majesty's father, had this wayward group [Baha'is] completely reduced and immobilized. And now the people of Iran expect the same from you."' This is exactly what Khomeini related to me...

Burujirdi had conspired with the shah to suppress and control these people [Baha'is] as much as possible. For example, their Hazirat al-Quds, which was their propaganda centre located on Hafez Street, was closed. At that time, they had agreed on this plan – a plan in which the shah himself was involved. They instructed Falsafi to commence his sermons from the pulpit in the Shah Mosque during the month of Ramadan and prepare people for this. And they accomplished their plan.²¹

To appease and placate the mullas, the shah sacrificed an innocent religious minority, when in reality, every Iranian, young and old, knew that the Baha'is had no opposition to the parliamentary government and were not enemies of the state...

Hujjatiyyih

After that, once more in order to indulge the mullas, SAVAK created the Hujjatiyyih Mahdaviyyih Charitable Society for combating Baha'is. This Society had many branches throughout Iran under SAVAK's supervision²² and was engaged in religious activities and training people in intelligence gathering and propaganda methods, thus causing uproar and unrest among religious minorities, particularly among Baha'is. Although the Hujjatiyyih Society was undoubtedly founded with the shah's collaboration, gradually and unanticipated by its founder, it became a recruiting ground for the 'Islamic Coalition Societies' and the Mujahidin Khalq organization [organizations that came to oppose the shah and led to his downfall].

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Contributor details

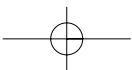
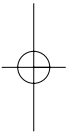
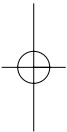
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relationship between SAVAK and Anjuman Hujjatiyyih, see the book by 'Imādu'd-Dīn Bāqī, *Ḥizb Qā'idīn Zamān* [*The Party of Those Who are Passive in This Age*], which is a title of Anjuman Hujjatiyyih.



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Two Early Accounts of the British Baha'i Community

Abstract

Two manuscript accounts of the early history of the Baha'i Faith in the British Isles are published for the first time. The first is by Prudence George (with the assistance of Mary Virginia Thornburgh Cropper, the first Baha'i in the British Isles, and Lady Blomfield). This history was probably produced in response to a request from Shoghi Effendi and takes the history up to the 1920s with much of it dealing with the visits of 'Abdu'l-Baha to the British Isles. The second account is by Isobel Slade and has been written in the form of a history, taking events up to the 1920s, followed by pages of reminiscences mainly of individual British Baha'is but also of some American Baha'is who visited or resided in the British Isles and also some later episodes in which the author participated up to the 1950s.

Keywords

British Isles
 United Kingdom
 Baha'i history
 Florence George
 Isobel Slade
 Lady Blomfield

The texts here printed for the first time are two early accounts of the British Baha'i Community. Neither of these hand-written accounts is dated but the shorter of the two appears to be older in that it only deals with the early period of British Baha'i history, up to the second visit of 'Abdu'l-Baha. This account is by Florence George (with the help of Mrs Thornburgh Cropper and Lady Blomfield). The second account, by Isobel Slade, takes events up to the 1920s with accounts of individuals extending to the 1950s. In both accounts, some minor changes of punctuation and paragraphing having been made and a few simple spelling mistakes corrected. A few omitted and explanatory words have been added in square parentheses. Otherwise the text is reproduced exactly.

The Account by Florence George

It does not seem to have been recorded how and when Florence George (1859-5 November 1950) became a Baha'i but she was certainly a Baha'i in the time of 'Abdu'l-Baha and had visited him in Haifa. He had told her to be like a mother to the younger Baha'is and she spent much of the rest of her life trying to live up to her designation of 'Mother George'.¹

The present account is a hand-written manuscript of nine pages found among Mr Balyuzi's papers in the Afnan library. On the back of the last page of this manuscript is written 'Beginnings of the Bahai Movement by Mrs Cropper² and Lady Blomfield'³ and 'Mrs Cropper's and Lady Blomfield's account of the beginning [of the] Bahai Movement', both in the same hand-writing. However, the document is signed 'Florence George', and the following is a description written in Mr Hasan Balyuzi's handwriting on the cover of the folder containing

1. See account by Alfred Sugar in *Bahā'ī World* (reprint vols. 1–12, Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1980) 12:697–8; Philip Hainsworth in Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny* (London: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1981) 485–6.
2. Mary Virginia Thornburgh Cropper (d. 1940); see *Bahā'ī World* 8: 649–51; O. Z. Whitehead, *Some Bahā'īs to Remember* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1983) 17–30.
3. Lady Sara Louisa Blomfield (d. 1939); see autobiographical information in Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1967). See also Mary Basil Hall in *Bahā'ī World* 8:651–6; O. Z. Whitehead, 'Lady Blomfield: an aristocrat of the spirit', *Bahā'ī News* no. 515 (Feb. 1974) 7–12;

- idem, *Some Early Bahā'īs of the West* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1976) 101–110.
4. Shoghi Effendi to the Central Assembly of Tehran, 28 October 1925, in *Tawqī'āt Mubārakah* 1922–1926 (Tehran, 130 B.E./1973 A.D.) 259.
 5. Shoghi Effendi, *Bahā'ī Administration* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1968) 75–76.
 6. Shoghi Effendi, *Tawqī'āt-i Mubārakah* 107.
 7. Robert Weinberg, *Ethel Jenner Rosenberg: The Life and Times of England's Outstanding Bahā'ī Pioneer Worker* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995) 281.
 8. Phoebe Hearst (1842–1919); on her relationship with the Baha'i Faith, see Robert Stockman, *The Bahā'ī Faith in America: vol. 1: Origins 1892–1900* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1985) 137, 140–45, 168–9, 155, 178.
 9. The words 'accompanied by Mrs Hearst' have been deleted from the end of the sentence and inserted here.

this manuscript: 'A History of the Baha'i Faith in Britain by Florence George and amended by Lady Blomfield'.

From the earliest years of his ministry, Shoghi Effendi attached great importance to the history of the Baha'i Faith and in about 1924, he wrote to the Baha'is of Iran encouraging them to gather historical material from the older Baha'is for the compilation of a history of the Baha'i Faith. On 28 October 1925, Shoghi Effendi wrote to the Central Spiritual Assembly, the precursor of the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran, expressing the hope that work on the history would proceed without delay.⁴ Shoghi Effendi even expressed the hope that an abridged version of this history would be translated and made available in English.⁵ At first a committee was appointed to supervise the collection of material and the writing of this history, but not much progress was made and eventually Mīrzā Asadu'llāh, known as Fāḍil-i Māzandarānī, who was a member of the Central Spiritual Assembly and was its liaison with the committee, took over responsibility, finally producing the nine-volume work called *Zuhūr al-Haqq*. By May 1932, it appears that the early volumes on the time of the Bab had been completed and Fadil was requesting the Central Assembly of Iran to ask the Assemblies in India, Iraq, Egypt, America and Europe to collect historical materials for this history, a course of action which received the approval of Shoghi Effendi.⁶ It is probable therefore that it was as a result of this, that Shoghi Effendi asked the London Spiritual Assembly to prepare a history of the Baha'i Faith in Britain and Mrs Cropper, Lady Blomfield and Mrs George were asked to carry out the task.⁷ It seems likely that this manuscript resulted from this request and was written at about this time.

The manuscript consists of nine pages. It is written in ink and there are corrections in pencil, a few of which have been overwritten in ink. From Mr Balyuzi's description on the folder, it seems that the original account is by Florence George (perhaps based on the oral accounts of Mrs Cropper and Lady Blomfield – hence the annotation on the back) which has then been amended in pencil by Lady Blomfield. The original text is blunter, less refined, than the pencilled amendments. In the following transcript, the text has been given as Florence George wrote it and the corrections by Lady Blomfield are given in the footnotes with any amended word in the text being in italics.

Beginnings of the Bahai Movement

In future days when the Bahai Revelation is known and accepted all over Great Britain everyone will ask who were the pioneers of the Cause here? Who sowed the first seed?

England must ever be grateful to Mrs Thornborough Cropper (who was born in America, but living in this country) [who] gave us the first news of the Promised One in 1898. She must have been one of the 'waiting servants' ever ready to receive the message of their Lord, of whom Abdul Baha speaks; for while in England her faith was kindled by letters from Mrs Phoebe Hearst⁸ in America. The very next year,⁹ she had the zeal and the faith to make the pilgrimage to Acca to see Abdul Baha in prison, accompanied by Mrs Hearst.

Those were difficult days for pilgrims desirous to see him, as visitors were suspected of political intrigue by the Turkish authorities, and it was only possible to go to him in the prison under cover of the night. Mrs Cropper and Mrs Hearst could only stay two nights, longer would not have been safe! Later on Mrs Cropper's mother, Mrs Thornborough, went to Acca and was able to stay six months and taught Abdul Baha's daughters their first English.

As soon as Mrs Cropper returned to England she gave the wonderful news to her friend Miss Ethel Rosenberg,¹⁰ who at once believed in it. Miss Rosenberg's mother had had a strong premonition of the coming of a Divine Manifestation and had talked to her daughter about it. Here was another of 'God's waiting servants' spiritually prepared to accept the Messenger.

*Of course*¹¹ at this epoch, there were hardly any translations of the Persian and Arabic writings, and mere scraps of paper, with the sacred words copied out by hand, were lent round among the believers. The pioneers trusted to the evidence of their own hearts and the scanty knowledge they could gather as best they could.

Miss Rosenberg's clear and logical brain quickly seized on all the salient points of the teaching, and she never wavered in a correct and unexaggerated conception of it. This was a most valuable asset for the Bahai movement in England, and kept its adherents from fanaticism, and from division of opinion about it. One could always trust her to give a true account on any point in the teaching without colouring from her own personality. This is surely a valuable quality in one who is conveying the teachings of a great master to others.

Mrs Thornborough Cropper met Professor Brown [*sic*]¹² in 1899 and he told her that 'Bahais he saw in Persia were the most truly religious people he had ever met'. She found Professor Cheyne¹³ a most enthusiastic believer in the Bahai Revelation. Mrs Cropper spread the great news among her friends, and she was in close touch with many of the early Bahais of America who came to see her as they passed through London on their way back from Acca to America. She gleaned¹⁴ much precious news from them that they had learnt from the Master [Abdul-Baha].

Miss Rosenberg soon began to hold little meetings at her own house on Sunday afternoons and talked individually to friends; while Mrs Cropper gave larger gatherings on the Bahai festivals, which included many important people.

When at last Abdul Baha came to Europe and to London in September 1911, Mrs Cropper gave receptions at her house which were crowded with those who wished to come in contact with him. The Master's personality was made known to many, and her drawing-room was always at his disposal – there must be numbers of grateful hearts who cherish the remembrance of that opportunity given them to have their first epoch-making glimpse of him.

Lady Blomfield, who was another ardent pioneer in the Cause, *moved out of her flat with her family and put it*¹⁵ entirely at the Master's disposal for the whole month of his visit to England. Her friend and secretary, Miss Beatrice Platt, undertook¹⁶ the housekeeping¹⁷ for Abdul Baha and his suite and *the guests he so frequently invited to meals quite unexpectedly*.¹⁸

10. On Ethel Rosenberg (1858–1930), see Robert Weinberg, *Ethel Jenner Rosenberg and Bahā'ī World* 4:262–3.

11. The words 'Of course' have been deleted.

12. Professor Edward Granville Browne (1862–1926); on his relationship with the Baha'i Faith, see Hasan Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahā'ī Faith* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1970); Moojan Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions 1844–1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981) 29–36, 225–32, 494–5.

13. Professor Thomas Kelly Cheyne (1841–1915); on his relationship with the Baha'i Faith, see Hasan Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Bahā: *The Centre of the Covenant of Bahā'u'llāh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1971) 352–4; Moojan Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions* 52–3, 496; Stephen Lambden, 'An Annotated Bibliography of the Hebraist and Biblical Scholar Thomas Kelly Cheyne (1841–1915), with some biographical data pertinent to his Baha'i status' at: http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/BIBLIOGRAPHY-HYP/o-T-K-CHEYNE.BIB/rev_t_k_cheyne-bib.htm (accessed 12/7/2008).

14. The phrase 'from them' has been moved here from after 'precious news', written in pencil and then overwritten in pen.

15. This has been deleted and changed to: 'gave

up her flat in Cadogan Gardens putting it...'

16. The words 'to superintend' have been added here.
17. The words 'part of the arrangements' have been added here.
18. The word 'whom' has been inserted after 'guests' and 'to meals quite unexpectedly' has been replaced by 'to remain to lunch or to dinner'.
19. This has been altered to 'Lady Blomfield's daughters' and a word after 'Blomfield' has been deleted in ink so as to make it illegible.
20. Albert Basil Wilberforce (1841–1916), Archdeacon of Westminster.
21. The words 'at Lady Blomfield's invitation' have been inserted here.
22. The words 'the flat' are replaced by 'her home'.
23. The word 'prison' is inserted here in pencil and overwritten in pen.
24. This has been deleted.
25. The words 'who was' are deleted.



Lady Blomfield – signed photograph.

*Lady Blomfield and her daughters*¹⁹ took notes of the addresses given by him, and arranged the private interviews which were eagerly sought for by interested inquirers, and which include the names of important and influential people.

Some of the notes of the Master's talks were put together and published under the title of *Abdul Baha in London*. Archdeacon Wilberforce²⁰ was full of enthusiasm for him and²¹ came to see him at *the flat*.²² He had been watching the Bahai Movement with interest for some time, and had sent a message to Abdul Baha saying: 'We are all one, there behind the veil.' Abdul Baha had replied from his²³ home in Acca: 'Tell him the veil is very thin and will vanish quite'. At *Lady Blomfield's suggestion*²⁴ Archdeacon Wilberforce invited the Master to speak at his church, St John the Divine, Westminster. A full account of this event is given in *Abdul Baha in London*.

The meetings and addresses of Abdul Baha were all fully reported in that most useful newspaper the *Christian Commonwealth*, for at that time it was edited by Mr Albert Dawson *who was*²⁵ a man of broad culture and enlightened views. He was most sympathetic towards the Bahai Cause, and all Bahais are grateful to him for publishing the reports, and also the photographs of the Master, in his paper.

Lady Blomfield used all her great gifts as hostess, and her *position in*²⁶ London society, to get together²⁷ people of capacity and importance to hear Abdul Baha and to make him known to them. The Master went away telling her²⁸ to have a meeting every Friday at her house till he came again. In²⁹ the winter of 1912 *he*³⁰ made his second visit after his six months stay in America, *and she*³¹ again put her residence at his disposal and has many most interesting stories to tell of incidents which happened at her *flat*.³² These little familiar touches reveal the great loving heart of the Master and carry to us all-important lessons of love and forbearance. Visitors who desired interviews would come to the house as early as the *street*³³ door was opened, and sit on the stairs till they could gain admission *to the flat*;³⁴ and people would be waiting about till 11 o'clock *at night*³⁵ *when the house was shut up*.³⁶ London had³⁷ every chance of knowing who *was*³⁸ in their midst! But their eyes were holden,³⁹ they could not see what stared them in the face.

Mrs Cropper and Lady Blomfield arranged meetings and addresses for Abdul Baha at the Theosophical Headquarters⁴⁰; at the City Temple where the Rev. R. J. Campbell⁴¹ offered his pulpit; the Kings Weigh House Church invited by Mr Lewis;⁴² and at the Passmore Edwards Settlement.⁴³ He visited a 'Salvation Army shelter' where a Christmas dinner was taking place and gave money for *the*⁴⁴ men to have another similar feast.⁴⁵ There are many interesting newspaper reports of 1911, 1912 and 1913 on all these things and of his visit to Clifton. The Esperanto Society invited him to speak at a big meeting in Edinburgh and Professor Patrick Geddes⁴⁶ took the chair.

While we stand aghast with amazement that the crowds of people who met Abdul Baha *should*⁴⁷ have lost all interest in the movement, we must ask ourselves what have *we* done who, with more opportunity and the privilege of understanding a little, did accept the Cause? How lamely we have carried our responsibility!

Florence George

Isobel Slade

Isobel Slade became a Baha'i in the summer of 1921, shortly before the passing of 'Abdu'l-Baha. Over the subsequent decades until her death in September 1972, she remained an active Baha'i, serving on the first National Spiritual Assembly to be elected under present procedures in 1928. She was at various times chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, treasurer and assistant secretary to this body. She travelled to Haifa in 1926. She lived in a house called Whitehall in Wraysbury, near Staines, Middlesex.

The manuscript here published was found among the papers in the national archives of the British Baha'i community. It consists of 18 numbered pages ending with the death of Dr Esslemont. There are an additional 17 unnumbered pages about various individuals and events. The manuscript appears to have been delivered to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom in 1965 and a carbon copy of a letter, probably from Betty Reed, secretary of the National Spiritual

26. The words 'position in' have been changed to 'knowledge of'.

27. Inserted at this point is 'from amongst her wide circle of friends and acquaintances'.

28. Inserted here is 'when she should return from Paris and Switzerland to London'.

29. The word 'When' is inserted before 'In' in pencil and over-written in ink.

30. The word 'he' is replaced by 'Abdul Baha'.

31. The words 'and she' are replaced by 'Lady Blomfield'.

32. The word 'flat' is replaced by 'home'.

33. The word 'street' is replaced by 'outer'.

34. These words deleted.

35. These words deleted.

36. These words replaced by 'when the hall porter locked the doors for the night'.

37. The word 'indeed' inserted.

38. The word 'was' replaced by 'sojournd'.

39. Cf. Luke 24:16 (King James Authorised Version).

40. The words 'by invitation of Mr A.P. Sinnett' inserted here.

41. Rev. R.J. Campbell (1867-1956); see Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Bahā' 144, 371.

42. The words 'a large reception at Westminster Palace Hotel given by Mrs Cropper;' inserted here.

43. The words 'where Sir Michael Sadler took

the chair' inserted here.

44. Replaced by 'a thousand'.
45. The words 'on New Year's Day' inserted here.
46. Sir Patrick Geddes (1854–1932); see Anjam Khursheed, "Abdu'l-Bahā, Jane Whyte and Patrick Geddes," *Edinburgh Review*, no. 88 (Summer 1992) 120–142; Philip Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes, Biologist, Town Planner, Re-educator, Peace Warrior* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Bahā 363–65.
47. The words 'seem to' have been written above 'should' but the latter has not been deleted.

Assembly, acknowledging its receipt is attached to it. In part, this letter, dated 8th June 1965, says:

Marion Hofman kindly brought along for the National Assembly the copy of your Memoirs and the valuable photographs of the early believers. The NSA is most grateful to you for all this material. The Faith is developing quickly now, from 1946 to 1962 the number of local assemblies increased from five, all in England, to 50 spread throughout the whole of the British Isles; this year we shall open another batch of goal towns and develop those opened last year, which will soon add another twenty-five places to the ever-growing number of groups, destined to become assemblies. It's important that the new, young Baha'is as they come into the Faith are able to claim their heritage, for this is the way they will put down strong roots. That heritage lies in the past experience



Nellie S. French – photograph signed "To my dear Baha'i friend Mrs. Isobel Slade from Nellie S. French, London 1934".

of the Friends who have served the Cause loyally and steadfastly over so many years. These are precious memories that we cannot afford to lose, and the National Assembly values your help in crystallising your own memories.

Thank you also for your recent message. I do hope that you'll be able to come to the Hazira and spend a few hours here one day this summer. I look forward to your annual visit.

Donald Millar will have told you of the healing prayer read at the 19 Day Feast on Saturday for your son-in-law. We were all so sorry to hear of his serious illness, and he has been remembered in many prayers in the last few days.

The photographs published with this article are those that are in this file and, as appears from the above letter, were sent by Mrs Slade together with her memoirs. All have been published here although one or two are of poor quality. Two of the photographs are of Baha'is who do not appear in the account: Nellie French, an American Baha'i who visited London, and Effie Baker, an Australian Baha'i, whom Isobel Slade met in Haifa.



Effie Baker. Photograph signed "Yours lovingly Effie, Haifa, 21.12.25".

48. Ecclesiasticus is one of the books of the Apocrypha and in Jewish sources is often referred to as Sirach or Wisdom of Sirach.

Isobel Slade's Account of the Early British Baha'i Community

I have been asked to give some account of the early days of the Faith in this country, that is at the time when I first heard of the Message.

We all come into this Fellowship by different paths led by the Mercy of God, and Grace of the Holy Spirit. I was fortunate, in that I had a definite religious background to life; and my father who was a clergyman of the Church of England was a true saint and very broad-minded. It was curious that he was often mistaken by strangers for Basil Wilberforce, who was a supporter of the Faith in the days of the Master's visit. In my father's last illness in 1906, he asked that on the stone which should mark his grave, he should be named 'Priest of the Church of God', for he had the wider vision than the sectarian outlook of the Christian Faith as it then was. When at a loss to account for the bounty given me in the recognition of the truth of the Bahai Message, I have always thought it a fulfilment of the promise (Ecclesiasticus 44: 9-10): 'These were merciful men and their children are within the Covenant.'⁴⁸

After living abroad, outside the religious circle of my youth, I had begun to question several of the dogmas, as taught by the Christian Churches. I was helped at this time by reading Sir Oliver Lodge's *God and the Universe*. I could not repeat the creeds (with my own reservations) as some must do; but I felt the need for unity that religion should bring – who was I to claim to be a Christian and yet choose for myself what I should believe? About this time I received one of those guidances which come to us at times. A light seemed to flash into my mind and I said 'That is what is meant by the Second Coming of Christ, God will send us a direct Messenger to tell us the Truth in the light of the wider knowledge that science has brought to the world.'

My first feeling was a sort of panic. 'Suppose He has come and I have not heard of Him!' I decided to watch and pray – if I were sincere I should be led to Him.

I waited nine years; there were many changes in my life and I often seemed to be near to my object; but still was far off. Once I read a novel in which the scene was laid in the Holy Land – I recollect there was a wicked Sheik who created trouble, and a scene when this man was seen being shown out of a gate in a walled garden by an old man with a white beard and a spectator said: 'Have you not heard, he has become a follower of the New Prophet and is a changed man?' I thought then: I wonder if that is fact, or fiction – but I waited. Then one day I went to a London hotel to meet a Canadian friend whom I had met on my travels. She had been in London during the war, 1914-18, working for Canadian soldiers and I had given her some help.

At this hotel she had invited several friends of war years none of whom I knew; but I found myself sitting near one to whom I spoke. Shortly I was saying, 'I don't know why people quarrel over religion - there is only one thing that matters: love God and love your neighbour.'

She looked at me and said: 'You must be a Bahai.'

I said: 'What on earth is that?'

She said: 'Have you never heard of Abdul Baha?'

At these words a great peace seemed to surround me and I knew I had come to the end of my search.

My new acquaintance, she was Helen Grand⁴⁹ a Canadian, as she took leave asked if she might send me some books to read.

They arrived by post next morning and I read and read. At first I came up against things that were a shock to me, for instance that Baha'u'llah's station was the same as that of the Christ. I felt all my loyalty, all my love and reverence and trust was assailed. Yet somehow I read on leaving aside what seemed like obstacles in my path – I knew I was being led as an answer to my waiting prayers. Gradually all opened out to me and I realised that my allegiance to Christ was part of my recognition of the New Covenant and the Oneness of the Manifestations.

When I returned the books, Miss Grand asked me if I would come to her flat in London to meet her friend Claudia Coles,⁵⁰ who had known Abdul Baha in America and in England. From these two, I learned much and also from the books they lent me. I was satisfied with the happiness and peace that had come with the new outlook on life and the world. Later in the summer of 1921 I was asked if I would write to the Master, which was the only form of declaration that was then required.

In November and December 1921 we spent two months in London – I had only just arrived, when I received a note from Miss Grand: 'Abdul Baha passed from earth Nov 29th' It was a great blow to me – as to all.

I was invited one evening to Miss Grand's flat and met other believers who were gathered to say farewell to Shoghi Effendi and Lady Blomfield who were departing for Haifa in response to the cable recalling him. At this meeting I remember him, looking very young and obviously crushed by the suddenness of the blow that had fallen, though he did not hear the Will⁵¹ till he arrived in Haifa. He was wearing a heavy overcoat, although the room was heated and when asked if he would remove it, he replied that the Master had told him always to wear it in winter time in England. It was a touching glimpse of the anxious solicitude of the Grandfather for the welfare of his precious grandson; and the loving exact obedience accorded to Him.

I now began to meet other members of the London Group. Miss Rosenberg who had been on her way to Haifa; and heard the news of the Master's passing while on the railway journey from Port Said. She was present at the funeral ceremonies; and was able to send accounts to England. She had before visited Acca and spent much time with the family teaching them English which all the younger members spoke fluently.

She was one of the first teachers in England and several times visited America at the invitation of Mrs Phoebe Hearst. She first heard of the Faith through her friend Mrs Thornburgh Cropper who had visited Acca with her mother in a party from America. Her devotion to the Master was great. She was a beautiful woman as can be seen by her portrait, now in Rutland Gate. It was largely through her friendship with the Master of Balliol – I have been told – that a vacancy had been obtained for Shoghi Effendi in that College. She was also a friend and guide to various members of the [Holy] Family who came as students to this country. When the Master left England, He left with her some rosaries to be given to friends who should later come into the Movement. She gave me one later which I valued as a precious trust. Later I was moved to hand it to Violet McKinley.⁵² It was not such a

49. Helen Grand (d. 1944) was a Canadian who lived mainly in Toronto. She first heard of the Baha'i Faith from Lua Getsinger in Egypt and later became a Baha'i. She was in England until 1924. See Helen Grand, 'How I became a Baha'i', *Star of the West – The Bahā'ī Magazine* 15 (1924) 363–4; Will van den Hoonard, *The Origins of the Bahā'ī Community of Canada, 1898–1948* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1996) 101, 104; *Bahā'ī News* no. 171 (Nov. 1944) 20.

50. Claudia Coles (d. 1931) was an American Baha'i from Washington who moved to England in 1920. She was elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles and served as its secretary. See *Bahā'ī World* 5:263–4; *Bahā'ī News* no 53 (Jul. 1931) 7.

51. Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha that appointed Shoghi Effendi as the successor to 'Abdu'l-Baha as head of the Baha'i Faith and gave him the title of Guardian of the Baha'i Faith.

52. Violet McKinley (1882–1959), became Knight of Baha'u'llah for Cyprus in 1952. See Hugh McKinley in *Bahā'ī World* vol. 16 (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Centre, 1978) 512–4; Philip Hainsworth in *Unfolding Destiny* 478–9.

53. Munīrih Khānum (1847–1938), the wife of ‘Abdu’l-Baha. See *Munīrih Khānum: Memoirs and Letters* (trans. Sammireh Anwar Smith, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1986).
54. Mary Basil Hall (d. 1950); see Philip Hainsworth in *Unfolding Destiny* 473.
55. Dr Lutfu’llah Hakim (1888–1868), Iranian Baha’i of Jewish origin; later became a member of the first Universal House of Justice. See A.Q. Faizi in *Bahā’ī World* vol. 15 (Haifa: Bahā’ī World Centre, 1976) 430–34.
56. George Palgrave Simpson (d. 1934), was elected onto the first ‘Spiritual Council’ and later onto the National Spiritual Assembly and served at various times as chairman, assistant secretary and treasurer. See Hainsworth in *Unfolding Destiny* 468.

great sacrifice as it sounds for I had one also, given to me by the Holy Mother⁵³ when I left Haifa. It also had a special message to me, though I was not accustomed to make frequent use of them. One day I was praying with special intention in my room and went to a drawer and took this rosary to use. I became conscious of a Presence with me. Next day I went to London to Lady Blomfield’s where she was holding a Feast. When I arrived I found a sad group. They had just received a cable announcing the Passing of Moneerah Khanum.

Then there was also Lady Blomfield who must be well known by Bahais through her books, and her loving service to the Master. She had the privilege of receiving Him into her home in Cadogan Gardens when He was in England and had numberless precious memories to treasure. She showed me once a Tablet from Him in which he conferred the wonderful title of ‘Daughter of Baha’u’llah’.

Her daughter Mary⁵⁴ became a friend of mine later after her mother’s passing and when after her husband’s death she was free to give her whole devotion to the Faith.

I was often with Claudia Coles whose home in Addison Gardens was open to all the believers. Often two or three of us would gather for prayer together; her wonderful magnetic personality seemed to lift us to heights beyond the ordinary.

Mrs. George was often there. She had known the Master during His visit to England and also made the pilgrimage to Haifa with her daughter.

There was a weekly meeting at that time in Lindsey Hall in Notting Hill Gate for the purpose of teaching and devotion. There is only one member of that group now living, Dr. Lotfullah Hakim⁵⁵ who was studying massage and therapy. He impressed me by his quiet self-effacing personality, and I always remember gratefully the first time I was suddenly asked to ‘say something’ at the meeting. As I sat down I said I felt it difficult to speak among so many who had been long in the Faith. His reply was, ‘We are all of us learners.’

In [the] course of time I was asked to form a Committee – I suppose the equivalent of what would now be N.S.A. There were no elections so far as I know. Our chairman was Mr. Simpson,⁵⁶ head of some Insurance Company who was business-like and also a linguist. I remember he corresponded with friends especially German in their own language.

The other members were Miss Rosenberg (secretary), Mrs. Thornburgh Cropper (Treasurer), Mrs. Coles, Mrs. George, Lady Blomfield, who was not always present as she was engaged in work for ‘Save the Children’ and was often in Geneva, Mr. Joseph of Manchester and Mr. Asgarzadeh a Persian from Russian Turkestan, whom the Master had sent to live in England. His English never became very good and I have heard that his Persian was not always intelligible to his countrymen owing to his sojourn in Russia; that did not prevent his being beloved here, and a shining example of a true Bahai; also a valuable aid in our counsels. It was worthwhile to listen patiently to his long-drawn-out contributions and at the end we would look at each other and say: ‘He’s right.’ He had an English wife and daughters, but towards the end of his days, he volunteered as a pioneer to Jersey, a rather lonely life and he was missed by those accustomed to see him week by week at the meetings in London.



Group photograph taken in Haifa 1926. The original photograph is not of good quality. Identifications on the back are (R to L): 'Miss Rosenberg, Effie Baker, IS [Isobel Slade], Mountford Mills, Ruhi Afnan.'

If there were visitors from abroad they were often invited to join our councils [sic]. In those days we often had the presence of Ruhi Effendi.⁵⁷ I particularly remember the relief we all experienced when we had a difficult and embarrassing problem before us; he suddenly took charge and solved it tactfully and with wisdom beyond his years. I saw a good deal of him one year during his Easter vacation for he came to stay in our village with Dr Esslemont.⁵⁸ The doctor was studying Persian with his help and they often came to our house. It was curious that when they asked if I could find them somewhere to lodge, the first house I tried belonged to a widow who turned out to be an Aberdonian and knew all the Esslemont family and was delighted to look after the doctor.

Dr Esslemont began life as a prospective medical missionary – but was not somehow satisfied and practised as a trades union official. I knew friends of his at this time and these people were Quakers. They attended a meeting at the Quaker Centre in London at which the Master spoke. When it was over they said to one another, 'This would just suit Esslemont!' He did through them study the movement and worked as physician in a Home for Tubercular Patients in Bournemouth.

He is memorable for the standard work *Baha'u'llah and the New Era*. His first chapters were sent to Haifa and approved by the Master. He later went to Haifa to continue his work. He developed the disease that he had done so much to relieve and I believe when he went to Haifa that he had the hope that the Master would cure him. He lived for some time and went to Germany one summer to escape the heat of Palestine but returned to Haifa to die and is buried in the Baha'i Cemetery there.

Grace Challis⁵⁹ was another bright light in these early days. She worked as a trained nurse in Doctor Esslemont's Home at Bournemouth and was a very sincere believer. Hers was a dedicated life from the beginning and when Dr Esslemont left, she started a Home for Tuberculous Patients at Broadstone [Dorset].

I often stayed at the Home which was the brightest and happiest home which no sadness could mar. Sister herself embodied that spirit. Her

57. Ruhi Afnan (1899–1971), a cousin of Shoghi Effendi who was later expelled from the Baha'i community.

58. Dr John Esslemont (1874–1925) became a Baha'i in 1915. He visited 'Abdu'l-Baha in Haifa in 1918–19 and moved there in 1924 to assist Shoghi Effendi. Shoghi Effendi named him a Hand of the Cause. See *Baha'i Year Book* (New York: Bahā'ī Publishing Committee, 1926) 132–6; Moojan Momen, *Dr John Ebenezer Esslemont, Hand of the Cause of God* (London: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1976).

59. Sister Grace Challis (d. 1948) was a Quaker and became a Baha'i in late 1921 through Dr Esslemont. She was a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles for 15 of its first 18 years. See Hainsworth in *Unfolding Destiny*, pp. 471–2.



Dr John E. Esslemont.

immaculate white veil surrounded her fair pink and white cheeks and bright blue eyes, and gave her a look of perpetual youth. She would appear at meals very often cooked by herself cool and unhurried; and what wonderful dainty repasts! Sister was not out to make money; her fees were often, I suspect, reduced to allow patients of small means [to stay] and, during the 1st War, when the L.C.C. [London County Council] used to send patients from London at a rate fixed by themselves, I noticed that the meals sent out to patients in the different huts in the garden were of the same quality as those provided for the private patients. Unlike some homes of that nature Grace Challis never refused a patient however hopeless the case; and we shall never know of the souls healed and cared for equally with the bodily ill. The day at Broadstone always began with a short meeting for prayer which visitors and those patients who were able to get about could attend – short readings from Bahai Scriptures and prayers. And on Sunday afternoons there was always a gathering for prayer and a talk to which interested friends were always welcome.



Sister Challis – identified on back

60. Mountford Mills (d. 1949) was a Harvard graduate (1900) and prominent New York lawyer. He became a Baha'i in 1906 and was a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada. He was the principal Baha'i lawyer involved in the case of the House of Baha'u'llah in Baghdad and represented the Baha'is when the case came to the League of Nations in Geneva. See Horace Holley in *Bahā'ī World* 11:509–11.

61. The House of Baha'u'llah in Baghdad is one of the holiest places in the Baha'i world. It had been seized by Shi'is in 1920 and the struggle to get these houses back eventually took the Baha'is to the League of Nations. Although they won there, the Iraqi authorities never returned the House.

62. Hippolyte Dreyfus was the first French Baha'i. See *Bahā'ī World* 210, 214.

63. Harry H. Romer (1871–1935) became a Baha'i in 1922 and moved to England in 1926; see Jean Anthony and Isabel Slade in *Bahā'ī World* 6:488–91. His wife Annie (née Brown, 1876–1955) was secretary of the London Spiritual Assembly. After her husband's death Annie returned to North America; see Charlotte Linfoot in *Bahā'ī World* vol. 14 (Haifa: Universal House of Justice, 1974) 375–77.

After the war the home did not prosper so well. The influx of patients from London did not increase its popularity, yet Grace carried on valiantly till at last the sad news came that her health too was failing. I visited her often in her room at the Brompton Hospital – still with her wonderful look of youth and her calm sweet smile. There was a beautiful service at her graveside at which I specially recall the presence of Dr Lotfullah Hakim. She saved others, herself she could not save.

Mountford Mills⁶⁰ was often in London travelling back and forth from Paris or the near East. He was trying to obtain possession of the Bagdad Houses⁶¹ for the Bahai Faith and met with continual obstruction from the authorities. When I visited Haifa in 1926 he and M. Dreyfus Barney⁶² were there also. I remember he was very helpful over acquiring our first Bahai centre in London in Upper Regent Street and was present at its opening.

For several years we had the help of two visiting Bahais from America – Harry and Annie Romer.⁶³ He represented the Associated Press in London and she was secretary for some time to the National Assembly where her experience of office work and publicity were useful. Also her freedom from other ties gave her much leisure [time]. Harry was one of those souls with simple faith and [a] selfless nature. He was often kept late at his office and could not be punctual at weekly meetings. I always felt a [sense of] relief when I saw him enter the room at the back. Somehow the affairs went more smoothly when he was there. He died very suddenly. She had to go north to visit a contact and left him for a night recovering from influenza. When she returned to the flat, she found him very ill and in spite of efforts could not find a doctor. He died before morning. It was a terrible shock to her and she was very ill. Miss Kilford⁶⁴ came to be with her – it seemed a complete breakdown was feared.



Group photograph taken in Haifa 1926. Identifications on the back are (L to R): 'M[ountford] Mills, Miss Rosenberg, IS [Isobel Slade], [Hippolyte] Dreyfus, Effie Baker.'

One day I suggested that a blind friend, who had often joined us in prayer, and had a power of spiritual healing, should come to see her. He fixed a day when he was free; I met him at the Hampstead tube station. As we came out into the street there stood a man selling flowers. I said, 'let us take her some flowers'. I chose a bunch of red rose-buds and we carried them with us.

After a while I left him with her and went into the kitchen where Miss Kilford and I made tea for us all. When I said goodbye, Annie said, 'Do you know this was our wedding day and you brought the red roses?' I said, 'Was there anything special about them?' and she said, 'Harry always brought me red roses on our anniversary.'

After we left I heard that he had repeated to her some verses that Harry had written on their wedding day and had never been published or seen by anyone else. From that day she always seemed to feel his presence very near and helping her in her work for the Cause. She did faithful work in the South USA where prejudice made many difficulties and the climate was trying. She laboured on in poor health and only left shortly before her death. After that day at Hampstead she always signed her letters to me 'Harry and Annie' in death 'they were not divided'.

Martha Root⁶⁵ was another who visited England at holiday time, which was difficult as regards public meetings; but I think she addressed one or two rotary clubs. She came to stay with me, and I took her to visit Oxford. She wished to visit Balliol College and had also been promised an interview with the head of Manchester College. It was characteristic of Martha that she liked to have a bodyguard on these occasions. I remember on that day we had Mountford Mills with us as well as my younger daughter.

When I think of Martha I see her a small figure not remarkable to the outward eye, and dressed in a flimsy little white dress. With my worldly wisdom I felt the advantage on a platform of a focusing point for the eye. At that time it was the fashion to make shawls of white cashmere, embroidering the corners and adding a deep silk fringe. I had just finished one and gave it to her as the weather was cold; and thought it might also enhance her importance in the public eye. I never heard of her wearing it; and knowing Martha, have a suspicion that she gave it away!

Contacts with Bahais in Former Days *George Townshend*⁶⁶

I first met him one summer – I think in [the] late '20s or early '30s. He came to London in August, where he had exchanged duties with an English clergyman, for a month's holiday. Unfortunately most Bahais in London were away for the holidays. I spent a day with them and I remember giving the children each a little framed photograph of the Master which had belonged to Miss Rosenberg. Later I remember Mr and Mrs Townshend spending a weekend with us in the country. It was before he had given up his appointment in Dublin, and I remember he was most punctilious in attending church services in the parish church on Sunday.

Later on when he had finished his first book *The Promise of All Ages*, he sent me the manuscript which I did my best to place with various publishers. I remembered that Sir Michael Sadler had once taken the chair for

64. Miss Kilford was a nurse who had become a Baha'i in Bournemouth through Dr Esslemont and Sister Challis. She later lived in the London area.

65. Martha Root (1872–1939), a prominent American Baha'i international teacher and writer, named posthumously by Shoghi Effendi a Hand of the Cause. See M. R. Garis, *Martha Root, Lioness at the Threshold* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1983). Her writings are collected in Martha Root, *Herald of the Kingdom: A Compilation* (compiled by Kay Zinky and edited by A. Baram, New Delhi: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1983). See also Doris McKay in *Bahā'ī World* 8:643–48.

66. George Townshend (14 June 1876–25 March 1957), named by Shoghi Effendi a Hand of the Cause; see David Hofman, *George Townshend* (Oxford, George Ronald, 1983) and *Bahā'ī World* vol. 13 (Haifa: The Universal House of Justice, 1970) 841–6.

67. This relates to the letters written to E.G. Browne by an American woman (named only as 'A.H.') about the lectures given in New York by Ibrahim Khayru'llah; Edward G. Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Bābī Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918) 115–142; the statement about being excused is on p. 124. Khayru'llah was the first to teach the Baha'i Faith in North America but later when 'Abdu'l-Baha tried to correct some of his erroneous teaching and declined to give him a position of authority in the religion, Khayru'llah rebelled against 'Abdu'l-Baha and was declared a covenant-breaker; see Robert Stockman, *The Bahā'ī Faith in America: vol. 1: Origins 1892–1900* (Wilmette: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1985) 3–110, 146–93.

68. Dr Henry Major (1871–1961) was Vice-Principal and then Principal of Ripon Clergy College and was editor of the *Modern Churchman*.

69. Heb.XII.26 'I shake not the earth only but also heaven....that those things which are shaken as of things that are made that those things that cannot be shaken may remain.' – Footnote by Mrs Slade.

Abdul Baha at a public meeting. At that time he was master of University College, Oxford. I made bold to write to him enclosing the manuscript, asking if it would be possible for him to write a foreword.

He asked me to go and see him. I found him in bed with bronchitis. We had a long talk but he did not feel able to comply with my request. Perhaps he was old and tired and did not feel equal to any difficulties that might arise owing to his position; but I do remember him looking at me very earnestly as he said, 'You know He was more than a man.' I tramped around London with that manuscript and found difficulty in placing it but eventually Allen and Unwin agreed. It was fortunate that at [that] time a relative of my husband was Editor of the Times Literary Supplement and he very kindly arranged for a very good review in that paper.

When I first came into the Cause I was told that the Master had advised George Townshend to remain in his posts in the Church of Ireland. Though it was against his inclination, I feel that it was in his mind that one day there would be reconciliation with the Faith; it seemed always at the back of his mind. However later on he was permitted to follow his conscience; a real sacrifice for it meant the loss of old friends as well as deprivation of worldly wealth and honour; [it] also entailed persecution of which he never spoke but must have cost him suffering.

Shortly after I came into the Cause I attended a conference in Oxford on Religions. It had been suggested to the Modern Churchman Movement that they should have a paper read on the Bahai Religion. I went to it full of enthusiasm and found to my horror that they had contented themselves by inviting a Christian Minister, a missionary from Persia, to read this paper which of course was a travesty of the reality and given in a critical spirit – ending by an account of a Bahai meeting attended in New York at which, when questions were asked that were difficult to answer, they were met by the speaker with the words: 'You are excused'. I was overwhelmed by the whole meeting which ended in laughter, but so ignorant in those days that I could not raise my voice in reply. Years after I found that the meeting in question was one held by Keirallah (an early Covenant-breaker) and quoted by Prof Edward Browne in one of his books.⁶⁷

Just before the Guardian's passing I came across a sermon preached by the same Dr Major⁶⁸ in which he took as a text Hebrews XII.26: 'I shake not the earth but the heavens also'⁶⁹ which seemed to me spoke of a wide vision of the great changes to come in the earthly progress of the world and also the spiritual. The day following the funeral at Hampstead I felt guided to go down to the city and try to trace the offices of the *Modern Churchman*. I found of course the devastation of the war had altered everything; but by some strange guidance I found the offices of the magazine in a little alley. It appeared that that same day Dr Major was retiring from the society owing to old age and deafness. I could only talk [to] the secretary, give her the newspaper cutting of the sermon which had been preached some time before at Oxford Assizes, and ask if any lines of teaching looked towards the shaking of the heavens. I still wandered among the ruins of that part of the city feeling frustrated. I found one of the many small chapels or churches somewhere at the back of the Mansion House open in lunch hour for private prayer, and there on a table at the back I left *Christ and Baha'u'llah*.

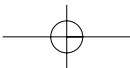
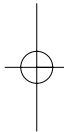
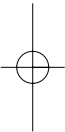
Miss Rosenberg once told me that the Master speaking of the words of Christ from the cross 'Eloi Eloi lama sabachtani'⁷⁰ once told her that a slight alteration in one of the Aramaic words would give the following reading, 'My God, my God, how hast Thou glorified Me.' Those who heard the words of a dying man might well have taken them to be a quotation from Psalms 22:1.

At one time a correspondence was being printed in the *Modern Churchman's* Magazine and various alternative translations were suggested for the words in the gospel. I wrote to Dr Major saying that I had heard yet another explanation given by 'a wise man from the east' and these two letters were received by me.⁷¹

70. Mark 15:34

71. These letters are not in the file. Thanks are due to Oliver Christopherson and Zhamac Lee for typing out these manuscripts.

Edited by Moojan Momen



Research Note

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The Global Distribution of Baha'is in the 1930s

Peter Smith

Abstract

This note provides a summary of information presently available on the extent and distribution of the Baha'i communities around the world during the 1930s.

I have previously provided a brief note on basic Baha'i statistics during the 1920s.¹ This present note continues that study into the 1930s, summarizing the information presently available. As before, I have utilized the data provided by the *Bahā'ī World* series – in this case volumes 3–8, which give lists of local spiritual assemblies and Baha'i groups and localities for 1930, 1931–32; 1933–34, 1935–36, 1937–38 and 1939–40.² These enable us to gain some sense of the differential distribution of the Baha'i Faith worldwide during the period.

1. Global distribution

The data: The reader should be aware that in looking at the figures for localities and local spiritual assemblies worldwide, we are provided with different types of data for different parts of the world. For each available year, there are three main data sets: one each for Iran, North America and the rest of the world (the North American and Iranian data were compiled and submitted by their respective national spiritual assemblies; those for the rest of the world by the International Baha'i Bureau in Geneva). The most significant difference is between Iran and everywhere else, with Iran subdivided into a number of 'administrative divisions', each with its own administrative and communications centre and linked localities, whilst elsewhere there are listings for local spiritual assemblies and 'groups'. In order to produce global figures, I have counted the Iranian administrative centres as the equivalent of local spiritual assemblies in the rest of the world, but the reader must be aware that this is unlikely to be a comparison of like with like (I therefore also provide separate totals for the Baha'i world excluding Iran). Of the non-Iranian data, the North American locality figures for 1930, 1931 and 1933 (as earlier for the 1920s) are evidently different from those of the rest of the world, as they comprise only registered groups whilst the others often or perhaps generally include all localities in which there were Baha'is, even if no formal group had been formed. By contrast, the North

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1. Peter Smith, 'The global distribution of Baha'is in the 1920s', *Baha'i Studies Review* 14 (2008) 109–22. Note that there is an error of calculation in the global local spiritual assemblies figures in the earlier article: there were 48 (not 47) local spiritual assemblies in North America in 1930 (p. 110). The global totals for local spiritual assemblies in 1930 in Table 1 should therefore read as 101 (not 100), and excluding Iran as 84 (not 83). The figures at the foot of p. 111 should be similarly adjusted.
2. BW 3: 217–27 (1930); 4: 271–82 (1931); 5: 426–49 (1933); 6: 507–24 (1935); 7: 556–75 (1937); 8: 688–712 (1939). The abbreviation 'BW' is here being used for the successive volumes of

The Bahá'í World (vols. 2–12, 1928–54. Rpt. Wilmette IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980–81).

American figures for 1935, 1937 and 1939 also include 'registered isolated believers', presumably so as to bring them in line with those for the rest of the world. For purposes of comparison, I have given separate figures both including and excluding these figures for American isolated Baha'is for the relevant years (the exclusive figures are in brackets in Table 2).

Countries and territories: By 1925, at least a minimal Baha'i presence had been established in 27 countries and colonial territories throughout the world, not counting separately the long-established Baha'i communities of the Caucasus and Turkestan, which were an integral part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. By 1930, this figure had risen to 42, an increase of 15 (Table 1). In the Middle East, there were by then Baha'is in 7 countries and territories: Iran, Turkey and the mandated territories of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Transjordan (modern-day Jordan); in North Africa 2 territories: Egypt and Tunisia; in sub-Saharan Africa 3: in South Africa, South West Africa (modern Namibia) and [Southern] Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe); in Asia apart from the Middle East, 7 territories: India, Burma,

	1925	Changes by 1930	Changes by 1939
Middle East	[6] Iran Turkey Iraq Syria Lebanon Palestine *Also communities in the Caucasus and Turkestan (both USSR)	[+1 = 7] Transjordan	[+1 = 8] Afghanistan
North Africa	[2] Egypt Tunisia	[2]	[+1 = 3] Sudan
Sub-Saharan Africa	[1] South Africa	[+2 = 3] South West Africa [Southern] Rhodesia	[−1 = 2] -South West Africa*
South, East and SE Asia	[4] India Burma China Japan	[+3 = 7] Dutch East Indies Philippines Hong Kong	[−2 = 5] -Dutch East Indies* -Philippines*
The Pacific	[3] Australia New Zealand Hawaii (US overseas territory)	[+2 = 5] French Polynesia (Tahiti) Fiji	[−2 = 3] -French Polynesia (Tahiti)* -Fiji*

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (continued)

The Americas	[3] Brazil Canada USA	[3]	[+18 = 21] 7 in South America: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela. 7 in Central America: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, the Panama Canal Zone. 4 in the Caribbean: Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica
Europe	[8] Austria France Germany Great Britain Italy Sweden Switzerland Union of Soviet Socialist Republics [European Russia]	[+7 = 15] Denmark Netherlands Hungary Irish Free State Norway Poland Yugoslavia	[+7 = 22] Albania Belgium Bulgaria Czechoslovakia Finland Iceland Romania
World totals	27	+15 [= 42]	+27-5 [= 64]

Table 1: Countries and territories in which there were Baha'is in 1925, 1930 and 1939.

Key: * = Territories in which there were no longer Baha'is.

China, Hong Kong, Japan, the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) and the Philippines; in the Pacific 5: Australia, New Zealand, French Polynesia (Tahiti); Fiji and Hawaii (then an overseas American territory); in the Americas 3: Brazil, Canada and the United States; and in Europe 15: Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain (the United Kingdom), Hungary, the Irish Free State (Ireland), Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, Yugoslavia and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (with Baha'is in European Russia as well as the Caucasus and Turkestan).

By 1939, the world total was 64, a net increase of 22, with Baha'is now newly established in 27 countries and territories but 5 territories no longer having recorded Baha'i localities. The newly opened territories were mostly in the Americas (18): Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, the Panama Canal Zone, Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica; and Europe (7): Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Finland, Iceland, Romania; but there were also 2 in what I have termed the Faith's 'Islamic Heartland': Afghanistan and the [Anglo-Egyptian] Sudan. The territories in which there were no longer a Baha'i 'presence' were South West Africa, the

Dutch East Indies, the Philippines, Fiji and French Polynesia (Tahiti). There had also briefly been Baha'is in Abyssinia (Ethiopia), Barbados and Lithuania in the mid-1930s, but these localities were no longer recorded in 1939.

Localities and local spiritual assemblies: The total number of listed localities in which Baha'is reside provides us with a crude measure of the Baha'i distribution worldwide whilst the figures for local spiritual assemblies are an indication of the degree of administrative consolidation. Neither set of figures reveals the total number of Baha'is in a particular place. A locality may represent a single isolated Baha'i (e.g. the lone Baha'i in Iceland) and a local spiritual assembly may represent a community of no more than its own nine members, but a listed locality or assembly may also represent a very large community (e.g. perhaps tens of thousands of people in a city such as Tehran).

By 1930, there were Baha'is living in 738 recorded localities worldwide. Of these, the largest concentrations were in Iran, with 473 localities (65%); Europe, with 75 localities (10%); North America, with 74 localities including Hawaii (10%); and the 'Islamic heartland' excluding Iran (i.e. the Middle East, the Soviet Caucasus and Central Asia and North Africa), 68 localities (9%). The rest of the world (Africa, Asia, Australasia, Latin America and the Caribbean together) only had 41 localities (6%). By 1939, the global total of localities had increased significantly to 1,142 (a 55% increase) if we include the newly included North American 'isolated believers'; to 902 (22%) if we don't. Iran, with 560 localities (49% and 62% of the respective totals), remained the largest concentration, followed by North America (127 under

	Local spiritual assemblies (LSAs)						Total listed localities					
	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939	1930	1931	1933	1935	1935	1939
Iran	17 ¹	17 ¹	20 ¹	20 ¹	22 ¹	22 ¹	473	473	439	560	560	560
Rest of Islamic heartland	5	32	27	27	28	11	68	74	73	76	79	46
North America	48	55	58	68	68	86	74	79	84	245 ² [91]	268 ² [93]	367 ² [127]
Europe	11	13	12	12	12	14	75	73	83	95	88	91
Rest of the world	20	16	19	11	12	12	41	39	42	56	58	78
Totals excl. Iran	84	116	116	118	120	123	258	265	282	472 ² [318]	493 ² [318]	582 ² [342]
Totals	101	133	133	138	142	145	731	738	721	1032² [878]	1053² [878]	1142² [902]

Table 2: Local spiritual assemblies and localities by region, 1930–39.

(a) Major regions

Source: Calculated from BW 3: 217–27; 4: 271–82; 5: 426–49; 6: 507–24; 7: 556–75; 8: 688–712.

Notes: 1. LSA figures for Iran are for divisional centres.

2. Includes figures for 'registered isolated believers' in North America. Figures excluding these are in brackets.

	Local spiritual assemblies (LSAs)						Total listed localities					
	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939
Australasia	7	7	6	3	4	4	10	9	11	13	15	17
Asia	10	9	12	8	8	8	23	25	25	34	37	36
Africa	2	0	1	0	0	0	6	3	4	7	4	3
Latin America & the Caribbean	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	2	2	2	22
Totals	20	16	19	11	12	12	41	39	42	56	58	78
Rest of the world												

(b) *'The rest of the world'*

Source: Calculated from BW 3: 217–27; 4: 271–82; 5: 426–49; 6: 507–24; 7: 556–75; 8: 688–712.

the old system excluding isolated Baha'is; 367 including the isolates) and Europe (91). The number of localities in the 'Islamic heartland' apart from Iran had declined in real terms (from 68 to 46), whilst the number in the rest of world had almost doubled (from 41 to 78, see Table 2b). The overall spread of Baha'is was evidently increasing in most of the major world regions considered here.

Turning to the figures for local spiritual assemblies, we see a 46% increase in the number of assemblies outside of Iran (from 84 to 123). Of these, the largest share was in North America – up from 48 to 86 (57% and 70% of the respective years' totals), reflecting the lead of the North American Baha'is in developing the new assembly system.

2. Iran

During the 1930s, the majority of the world's Baha'is still lived in Iran, a fact reflected in Iran's pre-eminence in the world locality figures just considered. At this time, the Iranian Baha'i administrative system was distinctive in that regional 'administrative divisions' rather than local spiritual assemblies provided the Baha'is with their sub-national organizational structure. This divisional system was first adopted in 1927, with the delineation of 17 areas, each with its designated central town and associated towns and villages. The number of divisions was subsequently raised to 20 (by 1933), and by 1937 there is reference to a total of 22 divisions, although the available statistics still follow the 1933 framework.³ The system, which covered most or perhaps all of the country, largely mirrored the Iranian provincial divide, but was modified in some areas, presumably to reflect the unevenness of Baha'i distribution. Thus, whilst the former divisions of Sistān (in the remote south-east) and the southern ports (Banādir-i Junūb) were abandoned by 1933, new divisions were created for Sangsar (in the north to the east of Tehran), the Qā'ināt (the southern part of the north-east) and Ābādih, and the former division of Māzandarān was replaced by three new divisions (for Sārī, Bābul [Bārfurūsh] and Bandar-i Jaz).

3. The directory of centres ('leading assemblies') of administrative divisions for 1937 and 1939 lists two additional divisions, Zāhidān and Nayrīz (BW 7: 575; 8: 712), but these are not listed separately in the detailed lists of Baha'i centres.

Division ¹	Centre	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939
North-west		103	103	94	116	116	116
Azerbaijan (Ādharbāyjān)	Tabrīz	37	37	44	56	56	56
Qazvīn (& Zanjān)	Qazvīn	18	18	14	14	14	14
‘Irāq [Ajamī]	Sulṭān-Ābād	12	12	9	9	9	9
Hamadān	Hamadān	22	22	22	28	28	28
Kirmānshāhān	Kirmānshāh	14	14	5	9	9	9
North		64	64	71	83	83	83
Tehran (Tīhrān)	Tehran	23	23	35	39	39	39
Sangsar (Sang-i Sar)	Sangsar			4	6	6	6
Gilān	Rasht	8	8	7	12	12	12
Māzandarān	Sārī	33	33				
Sārī	Sārī			10	10	10	10
Bābul	Bābul			10	10	10	10
Bandar-i Jaz [Astarābād]	Bandar-i Jaz			5	6	6	6
North-east		96	96	80	114	114	114
Khurāsān	Mashhad	96	96	59	93	93	93
Qā’īnāt	Bīrjand			21	21	21	21
Central		177	177	159	197	197	197
Kāshān	Kāshān	20	20	15	18	18	18
Isfahan (Iṣfāhān)	Isfahan	81	81	54	60	60	60
Ābādih	Ābādih			16	28	28	28
Yazd	Yazd	55	55	52	62	62	62
Kirmān	Kirmān	21	21	22	29	29	29

(continued on next page)

Table 3 (continued)

South		33	33	35	50	50	50
Fārs	Shīrāz	20	20	27	27	27	27
Khuzistān	Ahvāz	8	8	8	23	23	23
Banādir-i Junūb	Bushire (Būshīhr)	4	4				
Sistan	Duzdāb	1	1				
Number of administrative divisions		17	17	20	20	20/22 ²	20/22 ²
Totals		473	473	439	560	560	560

Table 3: Baha'i administrative divisions and localities in Iran, 1930–39.

Source: Calculated from BW 3: 217–27; 4: 271–82; 5: 426–49; 6: 507–24; 7: 556–75; 8: 688–712.

Notes: 1. The division into geographical regions (North-west, North, North-east, Central, South) is my own.

2. The directory of centres ('leading assemblies') of administrative divisions for 1937 and 1939 lists two additional divisions – Zāhidān and Nayrīz (BW 7: 575; 8: 712), but these are not listed separately in the detailed lists of Baha'i centres.

It will be noted that there is a significant increase in the number of centres during our period, from 473 for 1930–31 and to 560 for 1935, 1937 and 1939. Whilst there were a large number of localities throughout Iran's northern (north, north-west and north-east) and central provinces, the concentration of localities in the south was relatively meagre (7%–9% of the total during our period).

3. The 'Islamic heartland' apart from Iran

The region I have termed the Baha'i Faith's 'Islamic heartland' comprises those areas of the Middle East and North Africa in which the Faith first developed (i.e. Iran, the Ottoman Empire and Egypt), together with the old Imperial Russian provinces in the Caucasus and Central Asia into which large numbers of Iranian Baha'is migrated. I have extended it to include culturally cognate areas such as Afghanistan and the rest of the Arab world.

Looking at the Baha'i data for this region excluding Iran (Table 4), we see quite different patterns for the Arab world and the Soviet territories, with increases in both localities and local assemblies in the Arab territories from 1930 to 1939 (from 25 to 38 and 4 to 11 respectively), whilst government repression in the Soviet Union led to the almost total disappearance of the Caucasus and Turkestan for statistical purposes (34 localities in 1930 reduced to a presumably symbolic 2 (1 in each area) in 1939; 14 local spiritual assemblies in 1931 to none in 1939). Turkey meanwhile faced difficulties, with locality numbers down from 9 to 5 and no spiritual assemblies from 1933 onwards. The Faith was re-established in the Sudan at this time (initially in Darfur, later Khartoum) and established for the first time in Afghanistan. In the Arab world, Egypt, Iraq and Palestine remained the areas of greatest strength in terms of localities (18, 5 and 6 by 1939). There were as yet no Baha'is in the Arabian peninsula, Libya, Algeria or Morocco.

	Local spiritual assemblies (LSAs)						Total listed localities					
	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939
Iran (Persia) ¹	17	17	20	20	22 ²	22 ²	473	473	439	560	560	560
Turkey	1	2	0	0	0	0	9	6 ³	6 ³	6 ³	6	5
Afghanistan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
THE ARAB WORLD												
Iraq	0	5	4	3	3	3	8	5	7	7	7	5
Palestine ⁴	1	2	2	2	2	0	7	9	6	5	5	6
Lebanon ⁵	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	2	2	2
Transjordan ⁴	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3
Syria ⁵	1	2	1	2	2	2	3	3 ⁶	3 ⁶	2 ⁶	2	2
Egypt	1	4	4	4	4	4	4	11	10	15	18	18
Sudan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
Tunisia	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Subtotals	4	16	13	13	14	11	25	34	33	36	38	38
SOVIET ASIA												
Caucasus	0	6	6	6	6	0	17	17	17	17	17	1
Turkistan	0	8	8	8	8	0	17	18	18	18	18	1
Subtotals	0	14	14	14	14	0	34	35	35	35	35	2
Totals excluding Iran	5	32	27	27	28	11	68	74	73	76	79	46
Totals	22	49	47	47	50	33	541	547	512	636	639	606

Table 4: Local spiritual assemblies and localities in the 'Islamic heartland', 1930–39.

Source: Calculated from BW 3: 217–27; 4: 271–82; 5: 426–49; 6: 507–24; 7: 556–75; 8: 688–712.

Notes: 1. LSA figures for Iran are for divisional centres.

2. An additional two divisional centres are listed in the address list (BW 7: 575; 8: 712).

3. This includes Mersin(e), a locality wrongly located in Syria in several of the *Bahā'ī World* directories.

4. The data for Palestine and Transjordan are listed together (both territories were part of the British mandate).

5. The data for Syria and the Lebanon are listed together (both territories were part of the French mandate).

6. Mersin(e) is wrongly listed under Syria in the directory and is here counted under Turkey.

4. North America

Outside of Iran, the most important Baha'i community in the world during the 1930s was that of 'North America', i.e. the United States of America and Canada (Table 5). There was a significant increase in the community's extent during this period, with the overall number of localities excluding isolated Baha'is going up from 74 to 127, a percentage increase of 72% (up to a total of 367 if we include the isolated Baha'is), and the number of local

	Local spiritual assemblies (LSAs)						Total listed localities ¹					
	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939
Canada	2	2	2	2	2	4	2	2	2	10 [2]	2 [2]	15 [4]
USA	46	53	56	66	66	82	72	77	82	235 [89]	266 [91]	352 [91]
Totals	48	55	58	68	68	86	74	79	84	245 [91]	268 [93]	367 [127]

Table 5: Local spiritual assemblies and localities in North America, 1930–39.

Source: Calculated from BW 3: 217–27; 4: 271–82; 5: 426–49; 6: 507–24; 7: 556–75; 8: 688–712.

Notes: LSAs and recognized groups for 1930–33. Primary figures for 1935–39 also include ‘registered isolated believers’. Figures excluding these are in brackets.

spiritual assemblies going up from 48 to 86 (a percentage increase of 79%). The joint ‘community’ was predominantly American, with Canada contributing only a small number of local spiritual assemblies and total localities to the joint totals (less than 5% for all years). The pre-eminence of the North American community in administrative development compared with the rest of the world is indicated by American and Canadian local assemblies constituting 57% of the global total excluding Iran in 1930, increasing to 70% of the total in 1939.

Within each country, there was considerable regional diversity. In the United States of America, 24 out of the 48 contiguous states did not have any recorded Baha’i presence in 1930, and 30 did not have a local spiritual assembly (Table 6). These states were heavily concentrated regionally, with 5 of the Mountain states (Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming) not having any Baha’i localities, together with 5 of the farming states of the Midwest (Indiana, Kansas, Missouri, North and South Dakota), and 13 states in the South (Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia). Outside of these regions, only rural Vermont in New England was without Baha’is. By 1939, there were Baha’is in all contiguous states apart from West Virginia, however, reflecting concerted efforts to ensure a widespread Baha’i presence throughout the country. There were still major regional disparities, with most Baha’i localities still concentrated in the Pacific seaboard states, the eastern Midwest and the Northeast.

The distribution of local spiritual assemblies reveals a similar picture, with a concentration of assemblies in 1939 in the Pacific coastal states (14), the eastern Midwest (28) and the Middle Atlantic (14) census regions. Between them, these three regions contained over two-thirds (68%, 56 out of 82) of all the American local assemblies. Of the 23 states without assemblies, 4 were Mountain states; 4 in the Great Plains; 3 in (rural) New England; and 12 in the South. Of the two non-contiguous territories, there was a small Baha’i presence in Hawaii throughout the period, but Alaska remained without Baha’is until the very end of the period.

Census division and state	LSAs						Total listed localities ¹					
	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939
WEST	15	14	16	15	14	20	19	21	23	76 [21]	81 [20]	100 [31]
<i>Pacific (3)</i>	14	12	13	12	11	14	16	17	19	58 [18]	68 [16]	74 [23]
California	12	10	9	8	7	9	13	13	15	45 [14]	53 [12]	55 [18]
Oregon	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3 [1]	4 [1]	5 [1]
Washington	1	1	3	3	3	4	2	3	3	10 [3]	11 [3]	14 [4]
<i>Mountain (8)</i>	1	2	3	3	3	6	3	4	4	18 [3]	13 [4]	26 [8]
Arizona	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	7 [1]	1 [1]	9 [2]
Colorado	0	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	3 [2]	3 [2]	5 [2]
Idaho	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3 [0]	3 [1]	2 [1]
Montana	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	4 [0]	4 [0]	4 [2]
Nevada	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 [0]
New Mexico	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1 [0]	2 [0]	3 [1]
Utah	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 [0]
Wyoming	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 [0]	1 [0]
NORTH CENTRAL	13	20	21	27	27	32	24	27	29	71 [31]	84 [35]	102 [44]
<i>West North Central (7)</i>	1	2	2	4	3	4	5	4	4	14 [5]	16 [6]	20 [7]
Iowa	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	4 [0]	3 [0]	4 [0]
Kansas	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1 [1]	2 [1]	1 [1]
Minnesota	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	4 [3]	5 [3]	5 [3]
Missouri	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	4 [1]	3 [1]	3 [1]
Nebraska	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1 [0]	3 [1]	3 [1]
North Dakota	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 [0]	2 [0]
South Dakota	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2 [0]	2 [1]

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East North Central (5)	12	18	19	23	24	28	19	23	25	57 [26]	68 [29]	82 [37]
Illinois	4	5	6	8	9	9	5	5	6	17 [8]	20 [9]	25 [11]
Indiana	0	0	1	2	2	2	0	0	1	3 [2]	5 [2]	5 [2]
Michigan	3	5	4	4	4	5	5	6	6	13 [5]	20 [7]	22 [8]
Ohio	2	5	5	6	6	7	5	8	8	16 [7]	15 [6]	16 [9]
Wisconsin	3	3	3	3	3	5	4	4	4	8 [4]	8 [5]	14 [7]
NORTH EAST	14	14	13	15	16	19	21	21	22	54 [26]	56 [24]	82 [32]
Middle Atlantic (3)	9	9	9	11	11	14	14	14	14	34 [17]	32 [16]	48 [19]
New Jersey	3	3	3	3	3	4	5	5	5	9 [5]	8 [4]	10 [6]
New York	4	4	4	6	6	7	7	7	7	22 [10]	19 [10]	29 [10]
Pennsylvania	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	3 [2]	5 [2]	9 [3]
New England (6)	5	5	4	4	5	5	7	7	8	20 [9]	24 [8]	34 [13]
Connecticut	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	3 [2]	4 [2]	8 [4]
Maine	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	4 [1]	7 [1]	8 [1]
Massachusetts	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	7 [5]	8 [4]	11 [6]
New Hampshire	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	4 [1]	4 [1]	3 [2]
Rhode Island	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1 [0]	0	3 [0]
Vermont	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 [0]	1 [0]	1 [0]
SOUTH	3	4	5	7	7	9	6	6	6	32 [9]	43 [10]	63 [14]
West South Central (4)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	4 [0]	9 [1]	19 [2]
Arkansas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5 [1]
Louisiana	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2 [0]	2 [0]	2 [0]
Oklahoma	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1 [1]	1 [1]
Texas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2 [0]	6 [0]	11 [0]

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East South Central (4)	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	7 [1]	7 [1]	8 [3]
Alabama	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2 [1]
Kentucky	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3 [0]	4 [0]	1 [0]
Mississippi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2 [0]	1 [0]	2 [0]
Tennessee	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	2 [1]	2 [1]	3 [2]
South Atlantic (9)	3	4	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	21 [8]	27 [8]	36 [9]
Delaware	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 [0]
Florida	1	2	2	3	3	3	2	2	3	9 [4]	10 [4]	15 [4]
Georgia	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	3 [1]	3 [1]	2 [1]
Maryland	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	3 [2]	3 [2]	3 [2]
North Carolina	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 [0]	4 [0]	5 [0]
South Carolina	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3 [0]
Virginia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4 [0]	6 [0]	6 [1]
West Virginia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Washington DC	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 [1]	1 [1]	1 [1]
NON-CONTIGUOUS	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2 [2]	2 [2]	5 [2]
Alaska	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3 [0]
Hawaii	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2 [2]	2 [2]	2 [2]
US totals	46	53	56	66	66	82	72	77	82	235 [89]	266 [91]	352 [123]

Table 6: Local spiritual assemblies and localities in the USA, 1930–39.

Source: Calculated from BW 3: 217–27; 4: 271–82; 5: 426–49; 6: 507–24; 7: 556–75; 8: 688–712.

Notes: 1. LSAs and recognized groups for 1930–33. Primary figures for 1935–39 also include ‘registered isolated believers’. Figures excluding these are in brackets.

As for Canada, there were only two localities (both with local assemblies) recorded in 1930, Montreal (Quebec) and Vancouver (British Columbia) (Table 7). By 1939, an additional two assemblies had been formed (one each in Ontario and New Brunswick), and eight out of the country’s nine provinces had been opened to the Faith (Manitoba was the exception). The North West Territories, the Yukon and the then still independent dominion of Newfoundland still had no Baha’is.

	Local spiritual assemblies (LSAs)						Total listed localities ¹					
	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939
WESTERN												
Alberta	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 [0]	0	3 [0]
British Columbia	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2 [1]	1 [1]	4 [1]
Saskatchewan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 [0]	0	1 [0]
CENTRAL												
Ontario	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3 [0]	0	3 [1]
Quebec	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 [1]	1 [1]	1 [1]
MARITIME												
New Brunswick	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1 [0]	0	1 [1]
Nova Scotia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 [0]
Prince Edward Island	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 [0]	0	1 [0]
Totals	2	2	2	2	2	4	2	2	2	10 [2]	2 [2]	15 [4]

Table 7: Local spiritual assemblies and localities in Canada, 1930–39.

Source: Calculated from BW 3: 217–27; 4: 271–82; 5: 426–49; 6: 507–24; 7: 556–75; 8: 688–712.

Notes: 1. LSAs and recognized groups for 1930–33. Primary figures for 1935–39 also include 'registered isolated believers'. Figures excluding these are in brackets.

5. Europe

By 1930, there were Baha'is present in 15 out of the then 29 European countries (roughly half), excluding the several mini-states: Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino, the Vatican and Danzig, which are excluded from our analysis here. Those countries in which there were then no Baha'is were concentrated in the Baltic and Nordic regions (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland and Iceland) and the Balkans (Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and Romania), but there were also no Baha'is in Belgium, Luxembourg, Czechoslovakia, Spain and Portugal. Of the other European states, just over half of the recorded localities (38 out of 75) were in a single country, Germany. The only other countries to have a significant number of localities were the United Kingdom and Italy (respectively 12 and 6 (16% and 8%) of the total) (Table 8). Six countries had only a single locality each. There was a modest increase in the overall number of localities by 1939, up to 91 (a 21% increase), with Britain and Germany accounting for 44% of the total (21 and 19 localities respectively). By this date, 7 additional countries had Baha'is residing in them, leaving only 7 countries (and all of the mini-states) still unopened.

	Local spiritual assemblies (LSAs)						Total listed localities ¹					
	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939
Albania	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	3
Austria	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	3	2	1	1
Belgium	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
Bulgaria	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	3	4	8	8	8
Czechoslovakia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	2	3	1
Denmark	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	2
Finland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
France	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	5	6	7
Germany	5	7	7	6	7	7	38	21	19	25	19	19
Hungary	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2
Iceland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Irish Free State	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	1
Italy	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	5	3	3 ¹	3	3
Lithuania	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Netherlands	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	4	4	6	4
Norway	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	2	1	2
Poland	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	3
Romania	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Russia	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	1
Sweden	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	3	3	3	3
Switzerland	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	5	8	8	5	5

(continued on next page)

Table 8 (continued)

United Kingdom	3	3	2	3	2	4	12	18	19	22	22	21
Yugoslavia (Jugoslavia)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	2	1	1
Totals	11	13	12	12	12	14	75	73	83	95	88	91

Table 8: Local spiritual assemblies and localities in Europe, 1930–39.

Source: Calculated from BW 3: 217–27; 4: 271–82; 5: 426–49; 6: 507–24; 7: 556–75; 8: 688–712.

Notes: 1. Rome is listed as having two addresses but is here only counted once.

The meagre development of local Baha'i administration in Europe is of note. In 1930, only 11 local spiritual assemblies were recorded, 5 in Germany, 3 in Britain and 1 each in France, European Russia and Switzerland (This compares to 48 in North America at this time). Nine years later, the total number of assemblies had only increased by 3 (for a total of 14, compared to 86 in North America): 7 in Germany; 4 in Britain; and 1 each in Austria, Bulgaria and France. Twenty-four countries had no local assemblies.

6. Australasia

As in the 1920s, the only relatively substantial Baha'i community in the Pacific at this time was that of Australia, which together with the Baha'is of New Zealand formed a new joint national spiritual assembly in 1934. The number of localities in the two countries together increased from 8 to 17 during the 1930s, but the weakness of the administrative base was indicated by a substantial reduction in the number of local spiritual assemblies, from 7 to 4 (Table 9). Baha'is were also present since the late 1920s in Fiji and Tahiti (with a local assembly briefly formed in Tahiti, recorded in 1931), but by 1939, there was no longer a Baha'i presence recorded on these islands. Apart from American Hawaii, the rest of the Pacific remained devoid of Baha'is.

	Local spiritual assemblies (LSAs)						Total listed localities					
	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939
Australia	6	5	5	2	3	3	6	6	7	8	10	13
New Zealand	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	3	4	4	4
Fiji	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Tahiti, French Polynesia	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0
Totals	7	7	6	3	4	4	10	9	11	13	15	17

Table 9: Local spiritual assemblies and localities in Australasia, 1930–39.

Source: Calculated from BW 3: 217–27; 4: 271–82; 5: 426–49; 6: 507–24; 7: 556–75; 8: 688–712.

	Local spiritual assemblies (LSAs)						Total listed localities					
	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939
South Asia												
India	4	6	6	5	5	5	10	11	11	21	22	23
Burma	4	3	4	3	3	3	7	5	6	6	8	8
South East Asia												
Dutch East Indies	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Philippines	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
East Asia												
China	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	2	2	1
Hong Kong	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Japan	1	0	2	0	0	0	2	4	5	4	4	3
Totals	10	9	12	8	8	8	23	25	25	34	37	36

Table 10: Local spiritual assemblies and localities in Asia, 1930–39.

Source: Calculated from BW 3: 217–27; 4: 271–82; 5: 426–49; 6: 507–24; 7: 556–75; 8: 688–712.

7. Asia

Outside of the Middle East, the only major Asian Baha'i communities were those of India and Burma, linked under a joint national Baha'i administration since 1923. There was a substantial increase in the number of localities in India during this period, from 10 to 23, but the overall number of local spiritual assemblies in the two countries, whilst increasing slightly in the early 1930s, was the same (at 8) in 1939 as it had been in 1930 (See Table 10). There were then no Baha'is in other parts of South Asia (Bhutan, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Nepal).

Apart from the Middle East, India and Burma, there were hardly any Baha'is in Asia. There was a minimal Baha'i presence in East Asia, with a total of only five localities in the whole region by 1939 (three in Japan and one each in China and Hong Kong). Local spiritual assemblies that had earlier been formed in China and Japan had apparently ceased to exist by the mid-1930s. There was no re-establishment of the former Baha'i presence in Korea at this time.

In South East Asia, there were initially isolated Baha'is in the Dutch East Indies (modern Indonesia) and the Philippines, but this presence had ceased by the middle of the decade. There were no Baha'is in the British colonies of Borneo, Malaya and Singapore, nor in French Indo-China or in Siam.

8. Africa

The Baha'i presence in Sub-Saharan Africa during this period was minimal, with only six localities in 1930, down to three by 1939 (Table 11). The two

Country	Local spiritual assemblies (LSAs)						Total listed localities ¹					
	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939
Abyssinia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	—
South Africa	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	3	3	5	2	2
South West Africa	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Southern Rhodesia	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	—	—	1	1	1
Totals	2	0	1	0	0	0	6	3	4	7	4	3

Table 11: Local spiritual assemblies and localities in Africa, 1930–39.

Source: Calculated from BW 3: 217–27; 4: 271–82; 5: 426–49; 6: 507–24; 7: 556–75; 8: 688–712.

extant local spiritual assemblies in existence in 1930 had both lapsed by 1939, and after 1930, there were no longer any recorded Baha'is in South West Africa. A new country, Abyssinia (Ethiopia), was opened to the Faith by 1933, although its status was uncertain in 1939 (Italy had launched a disruptive invasion of the country in 1935).

9. Latin America and the Caribbean

For most of the period there were hardly any Baha'is in Latin America and the Caribbean, apart from Brazil and Barbados, and what had been the only local spiritual assembly in the region (in Brazil) lapsed in 1931 and was not reformed (Table 12). The situation had changed dramatically by 1939, however, with Baha'is establishing residence in 21 new localities and 18 new countries or territories being opened to the Faith. The new localities included 9 in South America, 8 in Central America, and 4 in the Caribbean. A new local spiritual assembly was also established, in Mexico City. The importance of American pioneer moves in these developments is indicated by the new addresses being care of the US consulates in eight of the countries.

	Local spiritual assemblies (LSAs)						Total listed localities					
	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939
Brazil	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	2
Barbados	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0
Others	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	20 ¹
Totals	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	2	2	2	22

Table 12: Local spiritual assemblies and localities in Latin America & the Caribbean, 1930–39.

Source: Calculated from BW 3: 217–27; 4: 271–82; 5: 426–49; 6: 507–24; 7: 556–75; 8: 688–712.

Notes: New countries/territories in which localities were established in 1939 comprised 7 in South America: Argentina, (1 locality), Bolivia (1), Chile (1), Ecuador (1), Peru (1), Uruguay (1), Venezuela (2); 7 in Middle and Central America: Costa Rica (1), El Salvador (1), Guatemala (1), Honduras (1), Mexico (2), Nicaragua (1), Panama (1, in the Canal Zone); and 4 in the Caribbean: Cuba (1), Haiti (1), the Dominican Republic (1), and Jamaica (1), in the British West Indies.

4. BW 4: 269; 5: 425; 6: 505; 7: 555; 8: 687.
5. A listing of 'National and regional spiritual assembly formation', prepared by the Department of Statistics at the Baha'i World Centre in January 1989 (in the author's possession) confirms these dates. The local spiritual assemblies of Tehran (Iran) and Baghdad (Iraq) had originally functioned as national coordinating bodies for their respective countries. These 'central assemblies' were listed as 'national spiritual assemblies' in all the early volumes of *Bahā'ī World*. For brief notes on their re-creation as nationally elected bodies see BW 4: 75 (for Iraq, 1931) and BW 5: 28 (for Iran, 1934). This was the Baha'i year 91, which BW 6: 94 wrongly gives as 1935). A similar arrangement of central assemblies seems to have pertained in the Caucasus and Turkistan.
6. 'National and regional spiritual assembly formation'. List prepared by the Department of Statistics at the Baha'i World Centre (January 1989). The precarious status of the two Soviet assemblies prior to their dissolution is suggested by their being given only forwarding addresses in London in the successive volumes of *Bahā'ī World* throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

10. National spiritual assemblies

By 1930, nine national spiritual assemblies or their equivalent had been established: Iran (Persia), Iraq and Egypt in the Middle East; the Caucasus and Turkistan in Soviet Asia; Germany and the United Kingdom in Europe (with Germany being styled 'Germany and Austria' in 1935 and 1937; and the United Kingdom being variously styled 'the British Isles' (1930), 'Great Britain' (1931, 1933), and 'Great Britain and Ireland' (1935, 1937, 1939)); and joint assemblies for India and Burma, and the United States and Canada in Asia and the Americas respectively.⁴ A tenth assembly, for Australia and New Zealand, was formed in 1934, and the former central assemblies for Iraq and Iran converted into nationally elected bodies in 1931 and 1934 respectively.⁵

The 1930s saw the loss of three of these assemblies: the German assembly being dissolved in 1937 as a consequence of the banning order against Baha'i organization and activities issued by the (Nazi) government, and the two assemblies in Soviet states being dissolved in 1939 due to persecution by the Communist government. After 1939, then, there were only seven national assemblies in the Baha'i world until the joint German and Austrian assembly was reformed after World War II (1947).⁶

11. Total population

It is not yet possible to come to any firm conclusion about the size of the global Baha'i population during the 1930s. Although there was some modest increase in the overall distribution of the Baha'is worldwide, my impression is that many of these gains were the consequence of Baha'is moving to open new territories, or, as in Europe, represented the conversion of tiny numbers of new Baha'is. I therefore do not see any reason to assume that the overall Baha'i population of the world was much different in the 1930s than the 1920s, and my best 'guesstimates' for the earlier decade will do as well for our period for most of the world: perhaps 100,000–200,000 Baha'is in Iran, 5,000 Baha'is in Soviet Asia and at most 2,000 Baha'is in Turkey and the Arab world; and probably less than a thousand Baha'is in Europe, East and South East Asia, Australasia, Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa combined. Given the evidence for growth in North America and South Asia, I am willing to raise my estimates for these from 2,000 each for the late 1920s to 3,000 each for the late 1930s. These 'guesstimates' give us a maximum total of 9,000 Baha'is worldwide outside of Iran and the culturally cognate Baha'i communities of Soviet Asia.

The fragile nature of these guesses must be emphasized, and it will only be through detailed and solid research into each of the national Baha'i communities of the period that we will be able to gain a proper picture of the extent of the Baha'i population.

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Methodology

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The Preservation of the Baha'i Sacred Writings

Patrick Ravines

Abstract

The Baha'i Faith is in a unique position compared to other religions in that it possesses numerous original writings of its central figures, Baha'u'llah, the Bab and 'Abdul-Baha. These original writings are a source of guidance and inspiration to over five million Baha'is around the world. They are also critical to the spiritual and administrative development of the worldwide Baha'i community. Possession of original writings such as these carries a dual responsibility, the delicate balancing of preserving and providing access to them. During his lifetime, Baha'u'llah addressed the issues of preservation of and access to his writings. He stated, for example, general principles on the way his writings should be preserved, and gave practical advice on how to handle his tablets and documents. Preserving this body of original writings will ensure their availability in the future, and allow historians and scholars to delve into past, present and future religio-historical developments of the Baha'i Faith. This paper reviews modern preservation and conservation theory and compares them with Baha'u'llah's statements on preservation. Examples of current conservation and restoration practices at the Baha'i World Centre are also presented.

Keywords

Baha'i scripture
cultural heritage
preservation
conservation
original immaculacy
pristine quality
manuscripts

Introduction

The Baha'i Faith finds itself in a singular position regarding the preservation of its collection of sacred writings.¹ The collections of Baha'i writings, which are located throughout the world with a large number in the Baha'i International Archives in Haifa, contain holographs,² original writings, of the Bab, Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, as well as writings in the hand of their secretaries. In addition, Baha'u'llah has provided explicit guidance on the preservation of the Baha'i writings.

Libraries, museums and archives have a dual purpose: to collect (and thereby preserve) and to make collected items accessible to humanity. The balance between preservation and access shifts according to fashion and time. Current preservation theory within the library and archival field includes all actions taken to ensure the long-term survival of the documents' physical format and/or the content. Similarly within the museum field with works of art, preservation is seen as any intervention that allows for the work's future survival. There are differences between works of art, library collections,

1. This paper was presented at a special session of the First International Conference on Modern Religions and Religious Movements in Judaism, Christianity and Islam and the Babi-Baha'i Faiths, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel, 17–21 December 2000. The author would like to express his appreciation for the support of his colleagues and co-workers in the

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2. A holograph is a document written by hand entirely in the hand of its author.

archival documents, sculptures, monuments, architectural structures and other products of human activity with respect to how their preservation is executed. The goal, that of long-term survival into the future, is, however, common to all areas dealing with the cultural heritage of mankind.

Hence the term 'preservation' encompasses a wide variety of activities to ensure the longevity of the many manifestations of cultural heritage. Conservation, one of the activities under the umbrella of preservation, is the action of physically stabilizing a historic or artistic work, which may also involve restoring its former look. Interestingly, historic and artistic works spend most of their institutional life in storage and a small amount on display or being accessed by the public – researchers, scholars and others. Preventive conservation is critically important in providing collections with healthy environmental conditions. The preservation of content or information preservation is also important. This was previously done photographically with microfilm and microfiche, which many have experienced, and has graduated to using viable modern electronic and digital systems.

At the Baha'i World Centre, the Conservation Office is responsible for the conservation and preservation of the Centre's library and archival collections. The Conservation Office is composed of several sections that perform various tasks:

1. The conservation laboratories physically treat or conserve archival documents, rare and modern books, works of art on paper, and photographic materials.
2. The preventive conservation section works together with other offices and deals with collection issues such as storage environments (environmental monitoring of temperature and relative humidity), pest and insect control and management, and studies indoor air pollution of storage areas.
3. The digital imaging and restoration section's work is responsible for generating facsimiles (exact copies) of works of art through electronic imaging and printing techniques. The facsimiles then replace such originals as have been on permanent display with the original being conserved and preserved in environmentally controlled storage.
4. The last section is the science laboratory where research and analyses of the materials used in the construction of the objects is carried out. In this case the documents and works of art on paper are composed of inks, paper, adhesives and other materials. The research provides valuable information on the object to be treated and assists conservators in treatment planning.

The following sections will review the philosophical and practical aspects of preservation and conservation and will present examples of conservation treatments and how they relate to the preservation principles outlined.

The Baha'i views on preservation

Safeguarding the Baha'i writings: a historical perspective

The birth of most major world religions has been accompanied by upheavals. The Baha'i Faith, founded in 1844 in Iran, is no exception, and its emergence was not an easy one. From the outset until the end of the

19th century there were systematic attempts to eradicate it, and many early Baha'is were killed. On a smaller scale and with lesser intensity, these events still occur in Iran. In view of these difficult beginnings, it is fortunate that the Baha'i community has been able to collect and hold for the future such a large number of original documents from the central figures of the Baha'i Faith.

There are three central figures in the Baha'i Faith. The founder of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah (Mirza Husayn 'Ali Nuri, 12 November 1817, Tehran, Iran – 29 May 1892, Bahji, north of Acre, then part of the Ottoman Empire and now in Israel). During his long and productive life as founder and head of his new faith, Baha'u'llah, himself or through the assistance of secretaries, committed his writings to paper. Baha'u'llah's forerunner was Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad, who had the title of the Bab, hailed from Shiraz and claimed to be the promised Mahdi of Islam. The Bab died young; he was 30 when he was executed in 1850 by firing squad in Tabriz. Baha'u'llah in his Will and Testament named his eldest son 'Abdu'l-Baha ('Abbas Effendi, 23 May 1844, Tehran, Iran – 28 November 1921, Haifa) as the Centre of the Covenant, successor and head of his faith, and interpreter of his writings. All three central figures left a legacy of their original writings on paper. Most of these in the case of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha are in the form of letters sent to their followers, often in reply to questions asked. These letters have been painstakingly gathered at the Baha'i World Centre from all over the Middle East, mainly during the time of Shoghi Effendi, head of the Baha'i Faith from 1921 to 1957, and more recently under the supervision of the Universal House of Justice. These texts are in Arabic and Persian, with a few by 'Abdu'l-Baha in Turkish.

Baha'is regard everything written or dictated by these three central figures as part of their sacred scriptures and thus the question of preservation of the original texts in order to guarantee authenticity becomes of great importance. This matter is alluded to in many places in the authoritative Baha'i texts, such as the following statement by Shoghi Effendi:

According to the Teachings of Bahā'u'llāh no authority can be attached to a mere hearsay, no matter through whom it may come. The Tablets that bear the seal or signature of Bahā'u'llāh and the Master are the only parts of the literature that have any authority and that constitute the basis of our belief. All other forms of literature may bear points of interest but they cannot be considered as authentic.³

The success in collecting the written legacy of Baha'u'llah, the Bab, 'Abdu'l-Baha and others may have had to do with Baha'u'llah's early exhortations to his believers regarding the importance of safeguarding his writings. Given the violent and intense nature of the early period of the faith, Baha'u'llah made emphatic statements, using cultural metaphors, to convey clearly to the believers that they should protect the writings sent to them. This metaphor is a Persian proverb related to the care of one's eyes:

Guard thou the verses of thy Lord as thou wouldst guard thine own eyes. He, verily, is the Preserver, the Mighty.⁴

3. *Lights of Guidance*, (2nd ed., New Delhi: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1988) no. 1437, p. 439.
4. Archives Office, 'The Importance of Collecting and Safeguarding the Baha'i Writings: A Compilation', *Bahā'ī Studies Review*, 11 (2003) 100.

5. *ibid.*
6. *ibid.*
7. *ibid.*

In the early days of extreme danger some of the early Baha'is saved themselves first and did not take into consideration the protection of the writings. It is likely that documents that fell into hostile and unsympathetic hands were destroyed and lost. Baha'u'llah had observed this and stated:

Truly, none must be careless in the matter of safeguarding the divine Tablets. In former times, when plans were laid to seize some of the friends, before all else it was the writings that fell into the hands of the enemy. This is not permissible. The friends should designate a strong, secure place for storing the divine verses so that they may not be exposed to the touch of unworthy hands, even though these verses are, and shall always be, such as 'none shall touch but the purified'.⁵

He also observed that the believers were not exercising sound judgement and made it clear that this was not how the writings should be treated. In this case he again invoked the same Persian proverb related to eye care and expands it to illustrate the importance and value of these writings. The tone of reprimand in the passage is also noteworthy:

We have commanded all to observe wisdom, but from the friends we see heedlessness and negligence. They should guard the Tablets as they guard their eyes, nay with greater vigilance, if they be of them that comprehend.⁶

It is evident that during Baha'u'llah's lifetime, he himself firmly established that his writings be well protected. These statements can be projected into the future to be used as encouragement and support for a systematic preservation programme. Other aspects of conservation and preservation are also treated in Baha'u'llah's writings.

Preservation and conservation of the Baha'i writings

To date only two quotations have been translated which directly address the issue of the preservation of the Baha'i writings. In the first instance, Baha'u'llah provides both general information and practical advice on how his writings should be preserved. The practical advice concerns proper handling and safe storage:

The treatment of the Tablets should be such that they remain preserved in their original immaculacy. When being read they should be placed within a second sheet, and thereafter deposited in some special place for safe keeping.⁷

The second quotation is longer and discusses the extent to which preservation should be pursued. Like the first quotation, it also states how they should be preserved:

Thou shouldst alert the company of the faithful to the need for all to exert every effort and to spare no pains in preserving and honouring the Tablets and Holy Writings. Blessed the regions in which the Fragrance of the Pen of the Most High is spread abroad. The preservation of the peerless, incomparable and blessed Tablets is highly requisite and beloved in the sight of God, lest either the pages of which they are composed or the ink in which they are inscribed

should lose their pristine quality. Do thou guide and instruct the friends in the method of preservation. All that hath been said in this regard was at His sacred and exalted behest. Blessed be those who do his bidding.⁸

It is interesting to note that in these two quotations Baha'u'llah has explicitly stated how his writings should be preserved. The first states that the writings be 'preserved in their original immaculacy' and the second that they be preserved so that they should not 'lose their pristine quality'. To have two quotations of Baha'u'llah clearly focusing on preservation is unprecedented in religious history.

The life of a work of art as well as that of a letter or archival document can be divided into two parts. The first phase of its life is when it is being made or penned and the second is its life away from the creator, in the hands of owners, and open to experiences that will affect its survival into the future.⁹

A letter by Baha'u'llah will also have followed such a path. In light of the letter's life and Baha'u'llah's exhortation regarding the preservation of his writings, many issues require consideration. The quotes above set a high standard for the preservation of his writings: they are to be 'preserved in their original immaculacy' and 'should not lose their pristine quality'. This raises questions as to how their preservation will be accomplished; how their conservation, restoration and physical stabilization will be executed; and how long it will be necessary to hold on to and preserve them.

The preservation of the Baha'i scriptures is guided by the assertion in these scriptures that another messenger from God will come some time after a thousand years. This implies that the writings of Baha'u'llah need to be preserved and maintained for a minimum of another 850 years. This requirement, as well as Baha'u'llah's assertion of 'the need for all to exert every effort and to spare no pains in preserving and honouring' his writings, has far-reaching implications for the custodians of his writings and invokes every facet we now know of preservation.

Preservation has its metaphysical side: by preserving the physical components, the appearance and content are maintained. This phenomenological approach is critical in understanding the relationship between matter and appearance, for without it one will not see matter as the 'vehicle for the epiphany of the image'.¹⁰ Preserving the paper and ink, the matter of which the writings are composed, preserves the essence of Baha'u'llah's writings.

From a more tangible and practical view, consideration of the preservation needs of Baha'u'llah's writings leads us on a scientific and technological quest, which is necessary to ascertain the physical needs of the writings and how to best meet them. Some of the preservation needs that must be considered, for example, are proper storage facilities and internal environment, which includes consideration of temperature, relative humidity and indoor air quality. Many other architectural and engineering needs, such as fire and water safety, also require consideration. As time passes, advances in engineering will necessitate upgrading of the environment in which these valuable writings are kept, to maintain optimal conditions for their preservation.

Other aspects of preservation are the types of materials used to house the writings properly and the reformatting of the writings into other formats

8. Aqa Jan Khadimu'llah (dictated by Baha'u'llah), translation 1986, Archives Office, Baha'i World Centre. Photocopy.

9. Marguerite Yourcenar, 'That Mighty Sculptor, Time', in *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, ed. Nicholas Price et al. (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1996) 212–15.

10. Cesare Brandi, 'Theory of Restoration, I' In *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, ed. Nicholas Stanley Price et al. (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1996) 230–5 (see 232).

11. Archives Office, 'Importance' 100
12. Richard B. Siebring and Mary Ellen Schaff, *General Chemistry* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1980) 361.

such as electronic/digital and/or microfilm. Unfortunately, this latter aspect preserves only the content of the writings, while many intangible aspects of the original document or book are lost. Preserving content and safeguarding the original are complementary activities. Although original works will always be valued for their uniqueness, their beauty, their evidentiary value and impact on humanity and history, something a copy can never do, they both serve different purposes. Content preservation is subservient to the original; a preservation copy is not a replacement of the original but a vehicle for safeguarding its content. The importance of preserving content by way of micro-reformatting or digitizing lies in that it allows for content to be stored at multiple locations and provides wider access.

Baha'u'llah has referred to the types of materials that should be used to house the writings. He stated: 'When being read they should be placed within a second sheet,'¹¹ implying that high-quality materials would need to be used to provide the 'second sheet' in which the original writing would be placed. It also implies that documents should not be handled directly and should, moreover, be handled with extreme care. Direct handling of a document without proper hand coverings will cause fine dirt and natural oils to deposit onto the paper surface. The accumulation of fine dirt and oils will eventually darken and disfigure the paper and document, changing its look and accelerating its deterioration. This practical advice is important, since handling is critical in the preservation of all documents, rare books and works of art. Such handling advice is new to research libraries and archives and is enforced. This is a necessary preservation step required if original documents are to be safeguarded and made available for future researchers. It is an aspect that has a significant impact on the future life of an object.

Many scientific and technological issues surface in connection with the conditions of 'original immaculacy' and 'pristine quality'. One issue is related to the materials of the document or tablet – the most basic components being paper and ink. These materials are physical in nature and are thus bound by the laws of nature – chemistry and physics. Hence, they have a life span, which depends on several factors, such as the inherent stability of each component, interactions between the components, their environment and how they are handled. The inherent stability of the materials is a chemical aspect that deserves further consideration.

To maintain a document or a work of art in a condition of 'original immaculacy' and 'pristine quality' is, in a sense, going against nature's tendencies of degradation and decomposition. The second law of thermodynamics states that for an irreversible or spontaneous process, the entropy of the system increases.¹² In other words, the disorder or chaos of a system will increase in an irreversible process. Because the chemical process of decay or degradation is irreversible, entropy – chaos and/or disorder – will increase until the reaction is completed. From a preservation and conservation viewpoint, this thermodynamic law presents many difficulties.

A complementary duality exists between these two apparently contradictory concepts: nature's tendency toward increasing disorder and Baha'u'llah's exhortation to preserve his writings in their original and pristine condition. The dynamic metaphysical tension between preservation and decay is ever present in nature, in life and in libraries, archives and museums. This

duality and tension is of great importance when it involves the safeguarding and longevity of the Baha'i sacred writings. Given Baha'u'llah's requirements of 'pristine quality' and 'original immaculacy', and nature's tendencies toward chaos, how is it possible to achieve the goal of preserving these writings?

We invoke the third law of thermodynamics in the hope that it will assist our preservation efforts. This law states that the 'entropy of any pure perfect crystal at absolute zero is zero'.¹³ Thus, the chaos and/or disorder for a spontaneous or irreversible system at absolute zero, zero degrees Kelvin or minus 273 degrees Celsius, does not exist. If it were possible to achieve the construction of a repository that could reach and maintain absolute zero, then collections could be kept indefinitely. Keeping the body of Baha'u'llah's writings in cold – very cold – storage should stabilize their condition and preserve them for a long period. If the temperature of the repository were to approach absolute zero, then it seems the writings could be kept indefinitely. Reaching close to absolute zero temperatures is not necessary for preservation. Recent research has demonstrated that decreasing temperatures of document storage environments below zero degrees Celsius will considerably extend the life of paper-based collections.¹⁴

In the end, the custodians of the writings will have to focus on minimizing nature's destructive effects. It is and will be a formidable challenge to fulfil Baha'u'llah's exhortation to preserve his writings in their original and pristine condition.

Modern conservation theory

Modern-day conservation has two components: the historical and humanities component, and the technical and scientific component.¹⁵ The historical humanist component started developing at the beginning of the 19th century. The concept of 'conservation as a historical discipline' was the result of a radical change in attitude towards the old school of restoration, which stated that works of art and other artefacts of human activity should be restored according to a set of classical rules. The new conservation views were more universal and considered the work of art on its own merits, the artist's intent and the style and influences of the period when it was created as a formal system.¹⁶ Interestingly, the historical humanist component of modern-day conservation developed concurrently with the beginnings of the Baha'i Faith.

The technical scientific component was developed over a century later, with a focus on oil paintings at the end of World War II. Adding science to the study of historic and artistic works changed the nature of the conservation field from being a traditional craft associated with working-class artisanship to a professional science.¹⁷

In his *Teoria del Restauro*, Italian art historian and critic Cesare Brandi defines conservation/restoration as the 'methodological moment in which the work of art [and other products of human activity] is appreciated in its material form and in its historical and aesthetic duality, with a view to transmitting it to the future'.¹⁸

Only the material form of the work of art is treated in conservation and restoration. The treatments are directed at the complex structure of the

13. *ibid.*

14. Image Permanence Institute, <http://www.imagepermanenceinstitute.org/> (accessed November 2007).

15. Paul Phillipot, 'Restoration from the Perspective of the Humanities' in *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage* (ed. Nicholas Stanley Price et al. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1996) 216–29.

16. *ibid.*

17. *ibid.*

18. Brandi, 'Restoration', 231.

19. *ibid.*

work of art (painting, letter, rare book, etc.) and pertain to the structure and material form in which the image is manifested.

The goal of conservation and restoration is to 're-establish the potential unity of the work of art, as long as possible without producing an artistic or historic forgery and without erasing every trace of the passage of time left on the work of art'.¹⁹

Since the mid-20th century when these definitions and principles were first proposed, they have been refined and expanded to suit various types and products of human activity throughout the world. These include paintings, works of art on paper, archival documents, rare and special books, photography, sculpture, decorative arts, archaeological sites and remains, architectural structures and many more that require conservation and preservation. Although the goal of preservation is the same for all, the execution of the conservation and restoration treatment differs, for various reasons, from one type of object to another. For example, the proposed conservation and restoration of an old French oil painting from the 17th century would require a different treatment approach than a 19th-century Nigerian ceremonial drum.

Another important aspect that must be considered when preparing to undertake a conservation treatment of a work of art is the creator's intent. Since conservators deal with the physical aspects – structure and matter – of the work of art and could conceivably alter the work of art, it is their responsibility not to impose their views onto the creator's work. They may introduce alterations knowingly or – as is most often the case – unknowingly, for example, by making judgements based on their own personal taste, using incompatible materials or changing the object's shape and structure.

For artistic and historical objects where the artist is not available for comment, conservation treatment would need to be undertaken in conjunction with an art historian or specialist of the period. The historian may have information gleaned from records or correspondence that can provide guidance as to the artist's intentions. This historical information, in combination with the material knowledge provided by conservators and scientists, provides a better background from which the conservator can plan the best treatment for the work of art.

In the case of the preservation of Baha'u'llah's writings, we know the creator's intent. He has clearly stated that his writings should be preserved in their 'original immaculacy' and 'pristine quality'. There is a high degree of concurrence between Baha'u'llah's intent and the goals of modern-day conservation and restoration.

In the same passage cited above, Baha'u'llah also refers to the 'matter' of his writings and how it should be cared for: that neither the paper nor the ink should lose their 'pristine quality'. These high standards have implications for the practical aspects of conservation and restoration. The documents comprising the collections at the Baha'i World Centre have led different lives before finally arriving at this depository. Some of these lives were good and full, and the documents are in exquisite condition. Others have had less fortunate lives and have been damaged. The best that can be done for damaged documents and works of art at this time is to physically stabilize them so they can be accessed and do not continue to degrade.

Although this may appear to limit the conservator's or restorer's work, there is a wide range of treatments that can be performed to physically stabilize the objects. The minimum amount of intervention or treatment is neither a minimalist nor an unthinking position; it respects the integrity of the object.²⁰ Additionally, the environment in which the objects are kept or stored also plays a critical role in their future survival.

To be able to realize the third law of thermodynamics is, at this stage in scientific history, impossible. Scientists and engineers have been able to approach absolute zero for their specialized research, but these ultra-cold temperatures have not been achieved on a commercial scale. Eventually reaching these ultra-cold temperatures will become a reality, but at this time it is not possible to carry out Baha'u'llah's requirements to the fullest degree possible. As mentioned earlier, the reduction of storage environment temperatures will prolong the life of documents and other collections. These steps taken today, however, bring us closer to our preservation goal and should make the efforts of future generations of custodians easier.

Another significant aspect in the conservation and restoration treatment of works of art, documents, rare books, etc. is the concept of 'reversibility', or the ability to undo a treatment or series of treatments on a work of art and leave it as it was before treatment was started. The concept is valuable, but 'absolute reversibility is a myth'.²¹ There are many treatments that can be undone – and there are just as many that, once applied, are impossible to remove without causing more damage. Reversibility may be possible on a macroscopic scale in some instances, but at a microscopic level it is not possible to reverse even the simplest of treatments. How then can conservation/restoration treatments be executed? At this time, it appears that the best that conservation and restoration practice can do in regard to works of art, documents, rare books and other such items is to treat them in such a way that future treatments will not be impossible and that no harm will be caused to the work of art.²²

A widely held view is that conservation and restoration is another way of looking at art and objects of human activity.²³ The following section presents three conservation and restoration treatments on a work of art on paper, a rare book and a photograph.

Conservation and restoration treatment examples

1. Art on paper: calligraphy

A calligraphic piece in the shape of a face by Iranian calligrapher Mishkin Qalam was received rolled up, as seen in figure 1. First, to be able to determine what was on the inside, it had to be opened, which was achieved after mild humidification made the paper supple. Figure 2 shows the calligraphy opened, when it became possible to see the image and determine its condition. Attached to the image was a layer of thin white paper, which had served as a protective sheet. However, when the entire piece was in a high humidity environment the ink softened and became tacky, and the protective paper stuck to most of the image. Following this discovery, attempts were made to remove the layer of paper. There are also two tears, a long one on the top edge and a smaller one on the bottom edge. The conservation treatment was to relax and flatten the entire piece, mend the tears and remove the paper that had adhered to the image. In this case, any image

20. A. M. Vaccaro, 'The Emergence of Modern Conservation Theory' in *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, ed. Nicholas Stanley Price et al. (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1996) 202–11.

21. *ibid.*

22. Brandi, 'Restoration' 339–42.

23. Vaccaro, 'Emergence'.

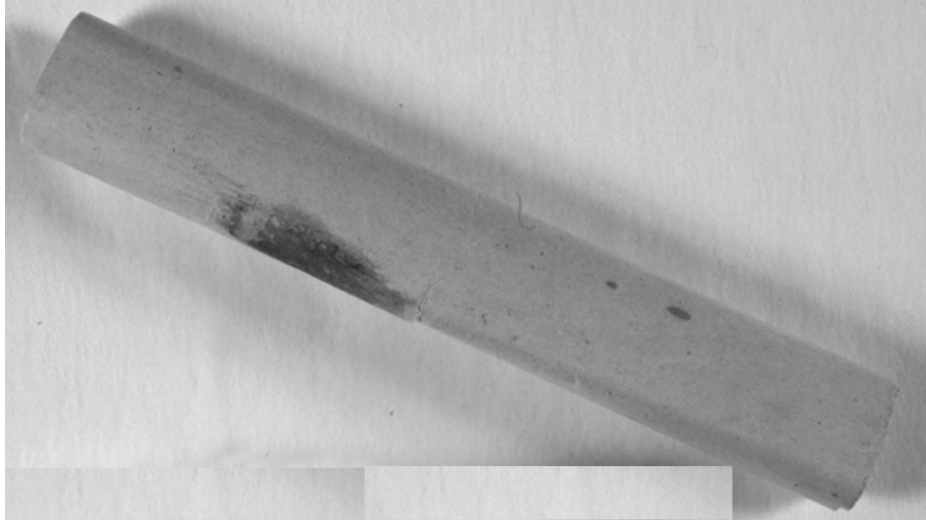


Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.

lacunae were in-painted to restore the unity of the image. For storage the calligraphy was hinged and matted. Figure 3 shows the physically stabilized and restored piece.

2. Rare books

The structure of books is very different to that of documents or calligraphy. Their three-dimensional quality and their need for motion – to open and close – makes them more like articulated sculptures. Their conservation and

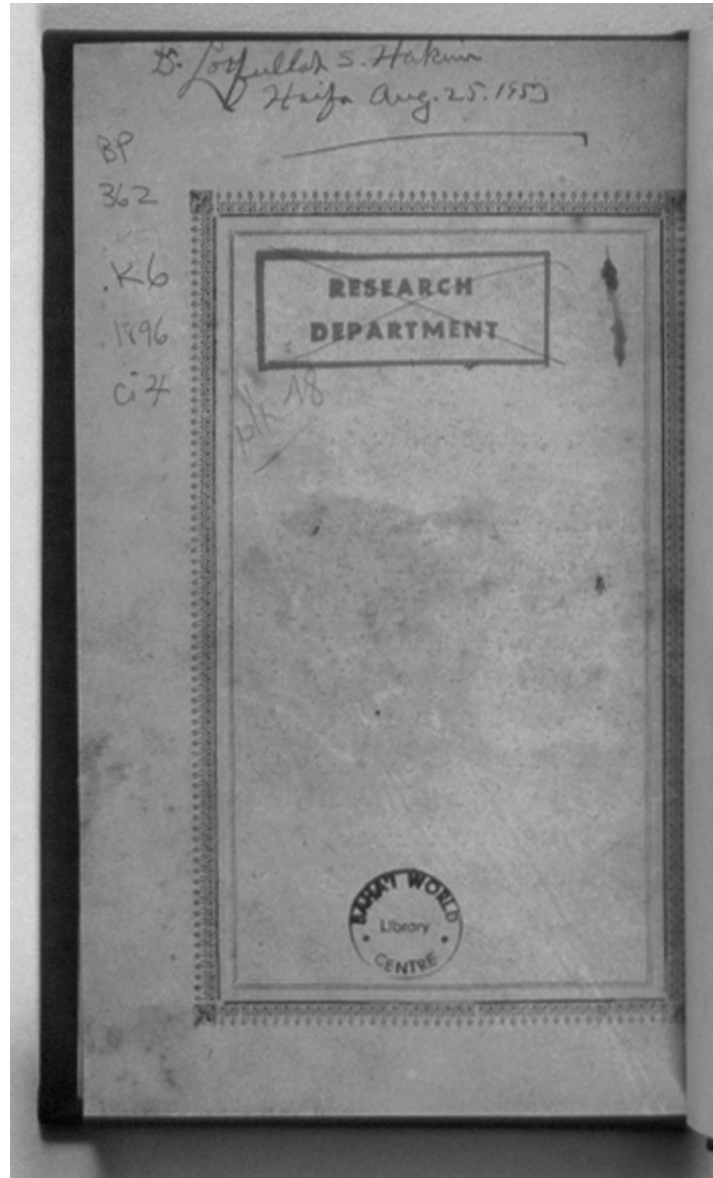


Figure 4.

restoration require consideration of additional factors not necessary for two-dimensional works of art and documents.

For example, an early copy of the *Kitab-i Aqdas*, printed in 1896, had been rebound in a modern style, simple brown-cloth that was disintegrating. Figure 4 shows the first page that includes a signature of Dr L. Hakim on the top border, the pencilled-in call number on the top left corner, and two stamps – the rectangular red stamp of the Research Department on the top and the Library's circular black stamp in the lower portion of the page. And figure 5 shows the inner gutter edge and the binding coming apart. The adhesive

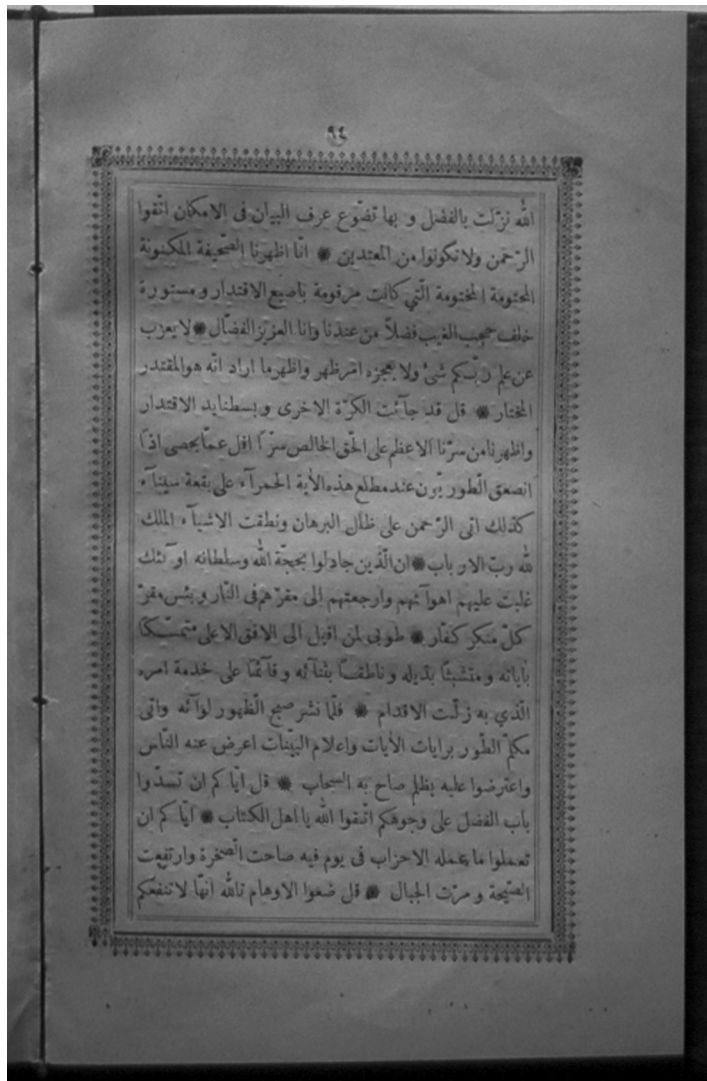


Figure 5.

used in the modern case binding, which was rebound about 15 years ago, had lost its adhesive power and was no longer holding the book together.

The conservation treatment required that the book be dismantled. Since the back of the entire book had been cut off to accommodate the modern case binding, the gatherings were individually rejoined. The book's new binding was designed to be sympathetic with the period and location of its original printing. Figures 6 and 7 show the conserved book. Figure 6 shows the book rebound in full red leather in an Islamic style and the front and back leather covers decorated with a central cartouche containing a floral pattern modelled after a 19th-century Persian historical binding. The endbands were sewn with silk, also in an Islamic style and pattern (figure 7).

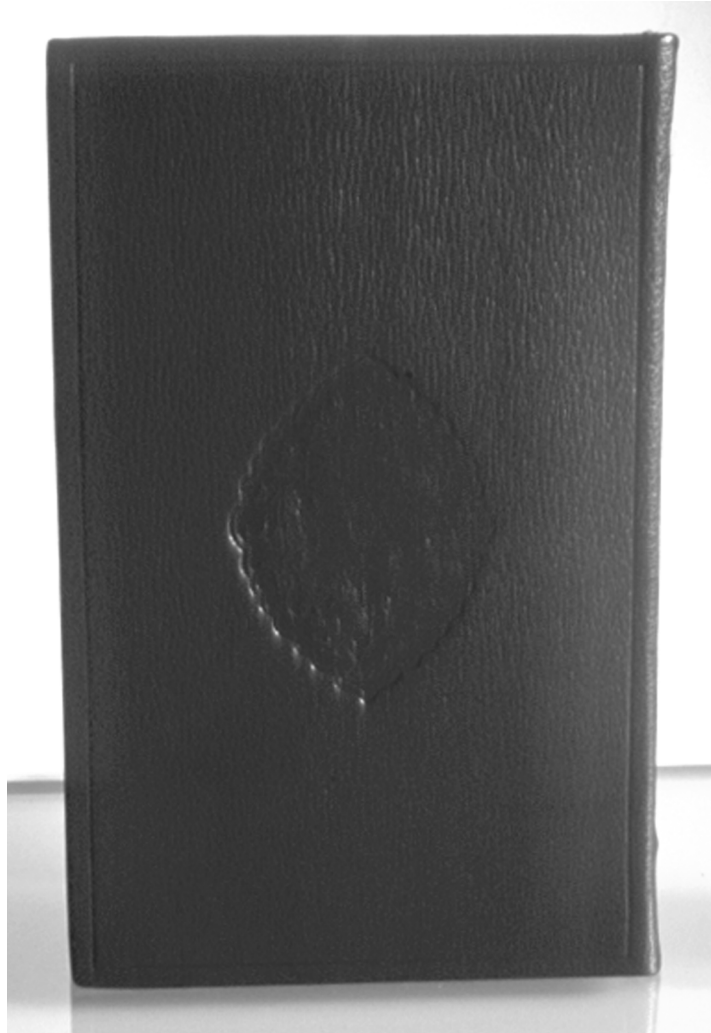


Figure 6.

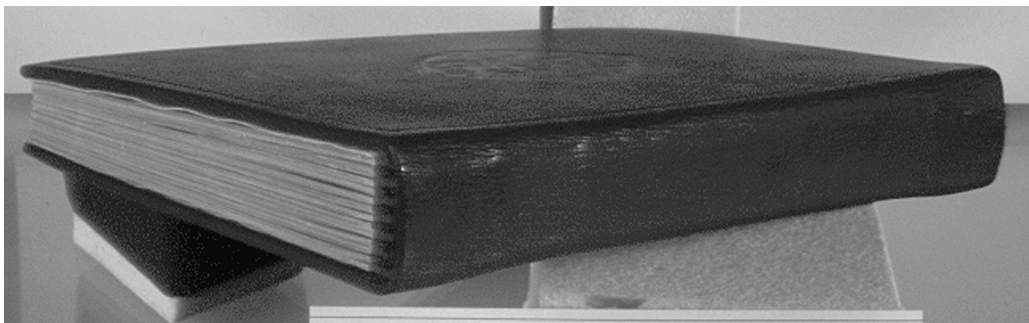


Figure 7.

In general, conservation treatments of rare books are labour intensive, especially when they contain multiple components.

3. Photographic images

An unusual and interesting photographic image that required minor treatment arrived in the laboratory. Figure 8 shows an image on an enamel base – photo-enamel – of ‘Abdu’l-Baha when he was in Paris at the beginning of the 20th century. This is unlike the more familiar silver-gelatine paper photographic prints. Because of its uncommon nature it was necessary to investigate the type of photographic object and determine appropriate conservation treatment approaches. The materials composing photo-enamels are chemically stable. The enamel is composed of a copper metal core that has had white ceramic baked on. The image is based on platinum metal. In view of this and its good condition, the treatment it required was minimal. The piece was surface cleaned, since it had accumulated dirt along the edges, and a box was custom made to house and protect it.

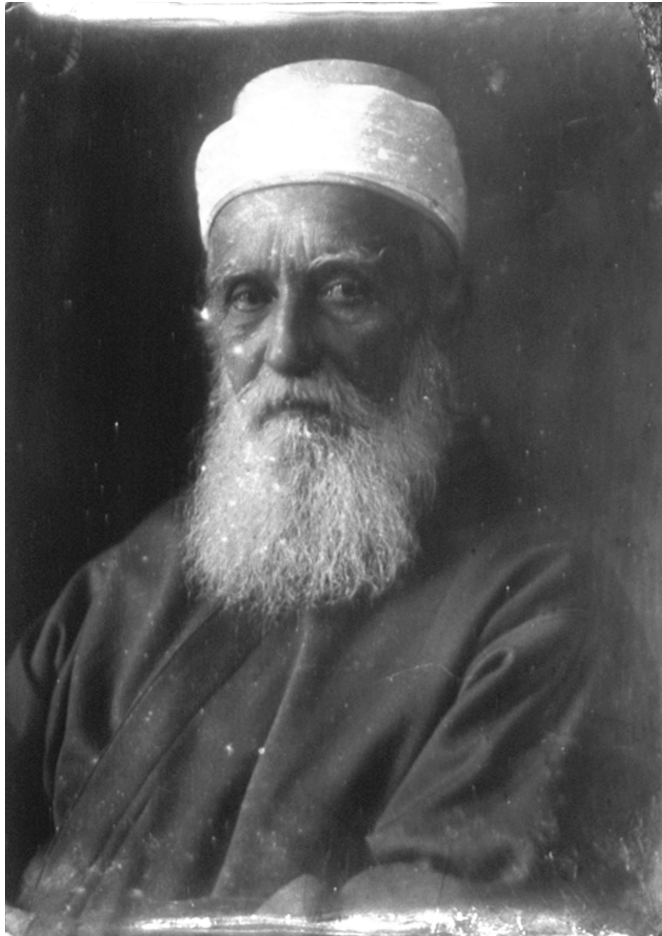


Figure 8.

Conclusion

The three treatment examples given show the varied conservation and restoration approaches taken for each object. Since conservation can be seen as another way to appreciate art, it seems that the best approach to appreciating art, documents and rare books is to limit intervention to a minimum so as to maintain as much as possible the unity, the original character and the history of the object. The treatment approach the Conservation Office has followed has been based on Baha'u'llah's writings on preservation and current conservation principles and theory. As scientific advances in the area of conservation continue, it should be possible to do more to preserve this treasured collection of original writings.

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Reincarnation, Rebirth and the Progress of the Soul

The following is a memorandum from the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice on the subject of Reincarnation, Rebirth and the Progress of the Soul, dated 25 April 1995. Attached to the memorandum is a compilation from the Bahā'ī authoritative texts. The memorandum and compilation are reproduced below exactly as they appear; this includes the footnotes.

Memorandum

A letter dated 25 December 1994 written on behalf of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahā'īs of... requests material from the Bahā'ī Writings on the subject of reincarnation. This Assembly is in contact with some people who believe in reincarnation and have challenged the Bahā'ī perspective on life after death. They argue that 'psychological data' such as the regaining of past life memories through hypnosis supports the view that this life and one's previous life are somehow connected to each other, and that this cycle of physical death and physical rebirth repeats itself many times. The Assembly wishes to deepen its understanding of these issues in order to present the Bahā'ī perspective accurately. Their request was forwarded to the Research Department and the following is our response.

With reference to the subject of reincarnation, the Spiritual Assembly might wish to study 'Abdu'l-Bahā's *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1984), chapters 33, 60, 63, 66 and 81. The attached compilation entitled 'On Reincarnation and the Nature and Progress of the Soul' may also be helpful. Outlined below are some points drawn from this compilation; the numbers in brackets identify the extracts from which a point is taken.

1. Reincarnation, the Soul and the Concept of 'Return'

1.1 The Spiritual Assembly is correct that Bahā'īs do not believe in reincarnation. We have several references in the Bahā'ī Writings which state that the concept of reincarnation is based on an incorrect view of the progress of the soul and life after death. For example,

- Reincarnation is a 'man-made doctrine' [15, 16]. 'No Revelation from God has ever taught reincarnation' [15]. Bahā'u'llāh would have mentioned it in His Teachings if it had any importance or reality [17].

- The Bahā'ī view of life after death does not accord with the idea that the human soul can pass from one body to another. 'We come on to this planet once only.' [12, 17]
 - 'The concept of the soul returning to this physical world is erroneous, and an outgrowth of man-made doctrines which have grown up about the fundamental concept of the progress of the soul.' [16]
- 1.2 It is interesting to contrast the concept of reincarnation with the Bahā'ī view of the nature of the soul and its progress toward attaining 'nearness to God'. Contrary to the view expressed by the Assembly that 'death is the beginning of our spiritual journey', the Bahā'ī Writings emphasize the important contribution that life in the physical world makes to the soul's... 'movement... towards perfection' [7, 8]. From the moment of conception, man's soul begins to progress. However, life on the physical plane is only the first stage of a spiritual journey which does not require us to return to this world again. The progress we have achieved at the moment of death will continue in the 'invisible realms which the human intellect can never hope to fathom nor the mind of man conceive' [4]. Thus, to progress, the soul is not required to take a circular path moving again and again through the material world as reincarnationists suggest, but a linear one, moving through this physical world once and then continuing eternally in the worlds of spirit. [7, 8, 9, 16]

From the attached compilation, we wish to call attention to the following points concerning the soul and its progress:

- The soul is itself 'a testimony' to the existence of the contingent world and to the reality of 'a world that hath neither beginning nor end' [2]
- The soul is independent of the physical body. 'It is entirely out of the order of the physical creation' [6, 8]. It comes into being at conception [15]; after death it keeps its individuality and consciousness [13, 14] and, 'it remains in the degree of purity to which it has evolved during life in the physical body.... From the moment the soul leaves the body and arrives in the Heavenly World, its evolution is spiritual, and that evolution is: *The approaching unto God*' [10].
- The purpose of life on earth is to develop ourselves, both intellectually and spiritually. What we are doing in this physical life is similar to what the baby does before birth. Before birth, the baby develops all the physical and mental potential it will need for its life here. [4] During our life here, we must develop spiritually 'what we will require for the life after death' [17].
- Bahā'īs look at the difficulties in this life as challenges inherent in this plane of existence and we are encouraged to rise above our sufferings. [3]
- In our life after death, 'God, through His mercy, can help us to evolve characteristics which we neglected to develop while we were on this earthly plane. It is not necessary for us to come back and be born into another body in order to advance spiritually and grow closer to God.' [17]

- ‘Abdu’l-Bahā states that a major argument of the reincarnationists was that ‘according to the justice of God, each must receive his due.’ He explains that we are like infants in the womb and cannot see the ‘effects and fruitage’ of all that we are learning and doing here. But, He assures us that ‘reward and punishment, heaven and hell, requital and retribution for actions done in this present life, will stand revealed in that other world beyond’. [4]
- Both ‘the spirits of heavenly souls’ and ‘the spirits of the heedless souls’ will have eternal life, but the former will ‘attain the highest and most great stations of perfection’ while the latter ‘are in a world of imperfection, concealment and ignorance’. [5]

1. *The Kitab-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Haifa: Bahā’ī World Centre, 1992), paragraph 129, p. 65.

1.3 The Bahā’ī Writings also provide a perspective on the concepts of ‘return’ and ‘rebirth’ which stand in contrast with the reincarnationist view.

- The concept of ‘return’ in the Holy Scriptures refers to the ‘return of the qualities, conditions, effects, perfections, and inner realities of the lights which recur in every dispensation.’ ‘Return’ does not refer to ‘specific, individual souls and identities’. [4, 5, 13]
- ‘Abdu’l-Bahā reminds us that the lives of the Manifestations of God were extremely difficult and filled with hardship and suffering when He asks: ‘What peace, what ease and comfort did the Holy Ones of God ever discover’ during Their lives in this world that They should wish to return and live this life again? On the contrary, They sought ‘that ease and solace which will abide forever’ in the Realm of Glory. [4]
- In the Bahā’ī Writings, we find the concept of ‘rebirth’ used in two different contexts. The first ‘rebirth’ occurs ‘while [one is living] in the world of nature’ or the physical world, and refers to awakening to spiritual realities or becoming ‘informed of the divine world’. The second kind of ‘rebirth’ refers to life after death when ‘the human soul begins to lead a new life’. In both instances, ‘rebirth means his release from the captivity of nature, freedom from attachment to this mortal and material life’. [11, 12]
- On the other hand, the Bahā’ī Writings contain many instances in which ‘return’ refers to the soul’s return to God, for example, Bahā’u’llāh’s promise that if the soul is ‘faithful to God, it...will, eventually, return unto Him’ [1] and ‘it will, assuredly, return and be gathered to the glory of the Beloved’ [2]. It is important to emphasize, here, that ‘return’ in this context should not be confused with pre-existence, as we have been assured that the soul does not pre-exist [14]. Instead, we are reminded of the verse which Bahā’u’llāh revealed to be engraved on the Bahā’ī burial ring: ‘I came forth from God, and return unto Him, detached from all save Him, holding fast to His Name, the Compassionate’.¹

2. The Mind and ‘Former Life Memories’

The Research Department has not, to date, located any references in the Bahā’ī Writings which address the issue of the ‘former life memories’ which have been reported by some individuals when under hypnosis. It is interesting

to note, however, that although the believers are warned against 'psychic practices', Shoghi Effendi apparently considered hypnosis to be an acceptable form of medical treatment when used by properly qualified physicians. In a letter dated 15 February 1957 written on his behalf to several believers, it states:

What comes under the heading of psychic practices 'Abdu'l-Bahā has warned us against; but any form of auto-suggestion or hypnotism which is used by medical science and by properly qualified physicians we are free to take advantage of, if we feel that the doctor using such practices is qualified and will not abuse his rights.

It appears significant that in this statement, hypnosis is associated with 'auto-suggestion', a hypnosis technique whereby, for example, an individual can learn to free himself from unhealthy habits, unreasonable fears and anxieties, or to live with chronic pain. Thus, it is fair to argue that while we are free to accept hypnosis as a useful tool in medical treatment, we are by no means obligated to accept as valid all of its applications, or accept as true all of the 'memories' it may elicit from people.

There are also several statements in the Bahā'ī Writings concerning the nature of the mind and memory which may be of use to the Assembly in its deliberations on this matter. For example, the following are statements from letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to individual believers:

Very little is as yet known about the mind and its workings.

(9 April 1948)

Now concerning your question as to whether man can recall experiences prior to the present state of his evolution in this world: he certainly cannot have any such recollection, and the experiences he can remember are confined solely to those through which he has passed in the post-embryonic or earthly stage of his existence.

(30 June 1938)

You yourself must surely know that modern psychology has taught that the capacity of the human mind for believing what it imagines is almost infinite. Because people think they have a certain type of experience, think they remember something of a previous life, does not mean they actually had the experience, or existed previously. The power of their mind would be quite sufficient to make them believe firmly such a thing had happened.

(22 April 1954)

It is, therefore, suggested that one might well look for explanations for the phenomena of 'former life memories' which do not depend upon the reality of the concept of reincarnation.

On Reincarnation and the Nature and Progress of the Soul Extracts from the Bahā'ī Writings

From the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh

Thou hast asked Me concerning the nature of the soul. Know, verily, that the soul is a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel. It is the first among all created things to declare the excellence of its Creator, the first to recognize His glory, to cleave to His truth, and to bow down in adoration before Him. If it be faithful to God, it will reflect His light, and will, eventually, return unto Him. If it fail, however, in its allegiance to its Creator, it will become a victim to self and passion, and will, in the end, sink in their depths.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh (Wilmette: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1983), pp. 158–159) [1]

Thou hast, moreover, asked Me concerning the state of the soul after its separation from the body. Know thou, of a truth, that if the soul of man hath walked in the ways of God, it will, assuredly, return and be gathered to the glory of the Beloved. By the righteousness of God! It shall attain a station such as no pen can depict, or tongue describe. The soul that hath remained faithful to the Cause of God, and stood unwaveringly firm in His Path shall, after his ascension, be possessed of such power that all the worlds which the Almighty hath created can benefit through him. Such a soul provideth, at the bidding of the Ideal King and Divine Educator, the pure leaven that leaveneth the world of being, and furnisheth the power through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest. Consider how meal needeth leaven to be leavened with. Those souls that are the symbols of detachment are the leaven of the world. Meditate on this, and be of the thankful.

In several of Our Tablets We have referred to this theme, and have set forth the various stages in the development of the soul. Verily I say, the human soul is exalted above all egress and regress. It is still, and yet it soareth; it moveth, and yet it is still. It is, in itself, a testimony that beareth witness to the existence of a world that is contingent, as well as to the reality of a world that hath neither beginning nor end. Behold how the dream thou hast dreamed is, after the lapse of many years, re-enacted before thine eyes. Consider how strange is the mystery of the world that appeareth to thee in thy dream. Ponder in thine heart upon the unsearchable wisdom of God, and meditate on its manifold revelations....

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh, pp. 161–162) [2]

O My servants! Sorrow not if, in these days and on this earthly plane, things contrary to your wishes have been ordained and manifested by God, for days of blissful joy, of heavenly delight, are assuredly in store for you. Worlds, holy and spiritually glorious, will be unveiled to your eyes. You are destined by Him, in this world and hereafter, to partake of their benefits, to share in their joys, and to obtain a portion of their sustaining grace. To each and every one of them you will, no doubt, attain.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh, p. 329) [3]

2. cf. Qur'ān 3:35; 2:254.

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahā

Thou didst write of reincarnation. A belief in reincarnation goeth far back into the ancient history of almost all peoples, and was held even by the philosophers of Greece, the Roman sages, the ancient Egyptians, and the great Assyrians. Nevertheless such superstitions and sayings are but absurdities in the sight of God.

The major argument of the reincarnationists was this, that according to the justice of God, each must receive his due: whenever a man is afflicted with some calamity, for example, this is because of some wrong he hath committed. But take a child that is still in its mother's womb, the embryo but newly formed, and that child is blind, deaf, lame, defective – what sin hath such a child committed, to deserve its afflictions? They answer that, although to outward seeming the child, still in the womb, is guilty of no sin – nevertheless he perpetrated some wrong when in his previous form, and thus he came to deserve his punishment.

These individuals, however, have overlooked the following point. If creation went forward according to only one rule, how could the all-encompassing Power make Itself felt? How could the Almighty be the One Who 'doeth as He pleaseth and ordaineth as He willeth'?²² Briefly, a return is indeed referred to in the Holy Scriptures, but by this is meant the return of the qualities, conditions, effects, perfections, and inner realities of the lights which recur in every dispensation. The reference is not to specific, individual souls and identities.

It may be said, for instance, that this lamplight is last night's come back again, or that last year's rose hath returned to the garden this year. Here the reference is not to the individual reality, the fixed identity, the specialized being of that other rose, rather doth it mean that the qualities, the distinctive characteristics of that other light, that other flower, are present now, in these. Those perfections, that is, those graces and gifts of a former spring-time are back again this year. We say, for example, that this fruit is the same as last year's; but we are thinking only of the delicacy, bloom and freshness, and the sweet taste of it; for it is obvious that that impregnable centre of reality, that specific identity, can never return.

What peace, what ease and comfort did the Holy Ones of God ever discover during Their sojourn in this nether world, that They should continually seek to come back and live this life again? Doth not a single turn at this anguish, these afflictions, these calamities, these body blows, these dire straits, suffice, that they should wish for repeated visits to the life of this world? This cup was not so sweet that one would care to drink of it a second time.

Therefore do the lovers of the Abhā Beauty wish for no other recompense but to reach that station where they may gaze upon Him in the Realm of Glory, and they walk no other path save over desert sands of longing for those exalted heights. They seek that ease and solace which will abide forever, and those bestowals that are sanctified beyond the understanding of the worldly mind.

When thou lookest about thee with a perceptive eye, thou wilt note that on this dusty earth all humankind are suffering. Here no man is at rest as a reward for what he hath performed in former lives; nor is there anyone so blissful as seemingly to pluck the fruit of bygone anguish. And if a

human life, with its spiritual being, were limited to this earthly span, then what would be the harvest of creation? Indeed, what would be the effects and the outcomes of Divinity Itself? Were such a notion true, then all created things, all contingent realities, and this whole world of being – all would be meaningless. God forbid that one should hold to such a fiction and gross error.

For just as the effects and the fruitage of the uterine life are not to be found in that dark and narrow place, and only when the child is transferred to this wide earth do the benefits and uses of growth and development in that previous world become revealed – so likewise reward and punishment, heaven and hell, requital and retribution for actions done in this present life, will stand revealed in that other world beyond. And just as, if human life in the womb were limited to that uterine world, existence there would be nonsensical, irrelevant – so too if the life of this world, the deeds here done and their fruitage, did not come forth in the world beyond, the whole process would be irrational and foolish.

Know then that the Lord God possesseth invisible realms which the human intellect can never hope to fathom nor the mind of man conceive. When once thou hast cleansed the channel of thy spiritual sense from the pollution of this worldly life, then wilt thou breathe in the sweet scents of holiness that blow from the blissful bowers of that heavenly land.

(*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahā* (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Centre, 1982), pp. 183–185) [4]

Thou hast asked concerning reincarnation: Reincarnation as understood by the people, is untrue; but in the Gospel, 'return' is referred to, and that is the return of qualities³ and not the return of entities. This matter is explained in detail in the Book of Ighan, which is translated and published. Study that Book.

Thou hast asked concerning the spirits of men: They are not at all annihilated – they are immortal.⁴ The spirits of heavenly souls will find eternal life, that is, they will attain the highest and most great stations of perfection; but the spirits of the heedless souls, although they are eternal, yet they are in a world of imperfection, concealment and ignorance. This is a concise answer. Contemplate and meditate upon it, in order that thou mayest comprehend the reality of the mysteries in detail. For instance: No matter how much the mineral has an existence and life, yet in comparison to man, it is entirely non-existent and deprived of life. For where man is translated from life to death, his comparative station will be that of a mineral existence.

(*Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, vol. III (Chicago: Bahā'ī Publishing Society, 1930), pp. 549–550) [5]

With the soul it is different. The soul is not a combination of elements, it is not composed of many atoms, it is one indivisible substance and therefore eternal. It is entirely out of the order of the physical creation; it is immortal!

(*Paris Talks: Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahā in Paris in 1911–1912* (London: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1979), p. 91) [6]

Thus it is evident that movement is essential to all existence. All material things progress to a certain point, then begin to decline. This is the law which governs the whole physical creation.

3. i.e., the return of the qualities, powers and attributes in another human being.
4. i.e., in the sense of continued existence after the death of the body.

Now let us consider the soul. We have seen that movement is essential to existence; nothing that has life is without motion. All creation, whether of the mineral, vegetable or animal kingdom, is compelled to obey the law of motion; it must either ascend or descend. But with the human soul, there is no decline. Its only movement is towards perfection; growth and progress alone constitute the motion of the soul.

Divine perfection is infinite, therefore the progress of the soul is also infinite. From the very birth of a human being the soul progresses, the intellect grows and knowledge increases. When the body dies the soul lives on. All the differing degrees of created physical beings are limited, but the soul is limitless!

(*Paris Talks*, p. 89) [7]

The rational soul – that is to say, the human spirit – has neither entered this body nor existed through it; so after the disintegration of the composition of the body, how should it be in need of a substance through which it may exist? On the contrary, the rational soul is the substance through which the body exists. The personality of the rational soul is from its beginning; it is not due to the instrumentality of the body, but the state and the personality of the rational soul may be strengthened in this world; it will make progress and will attain to the degrees of perfection, or it will remain in the lowest abyss of ignorance, veiled and deprived from beholding the signs of God.

(*Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1984), pp. 239–240) [8]

'Progress' is the expression of spirit in the world of matter. The intelligence of man, his reasoning powers, his knowledge, his scientific achievements, all these being manifestations of the spirit, partake of the inevitable law of spiritual progress and are, therefore, of necessity, immortal.

My hope for you is that you will progress in the world of spirit, as well as in the world of matter; that your intelligence will develop, your knowledge will augment, and your understanding be widened.

(*Paris Talks*, p. 90) [9]

As to the soul of man after death, it remains in the degree of purity to which it has evolved during life in the physical body, and after it is freed from the body it remains plunged in the ocean of God's Mercy.

From the moment the soul leaves the body and arrives in the Heavenly World, its evolution is spiritual, and that evolution is: *The approaching unto God*.

(*Paris Talks*, p. 66) [10]

In another place He [Christ] said, 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.' The meaning of this is that if man is a captive of nature, he is like unto an animal because he is only a body physically born – that is, he belongs to the world of matter and remains subject to the law and control of nature. But if he is baptized with the Holy Spirit, if he is freed from the bondage of nature, released from animalistic tendencies and advanced in the human realm, he is fitted to enter into the divine Kingdom. The world of the Kingdom is the realm of divine bestowals

and the bounties of God. It is attainment of the highest virtues of humanity; it is nearness to God; it is capacity to receive the bounties of the ancient Lord. When man advances to this station, he attains the second birth. Before his first or physical birth man was in the world of the matrix. He had no knowledge of this world; his eyes could not see; his ears could not hear. When he was born from the world of the matrix, he beheld another world. The sun was shining with its splendours, the moon radiant in the heavens, the stars twinkling in the expansive firmament, the seas surging, trees verdant and green, all kinds of creatures enjoying life here, infinite bounties prepared for him. In the world of the matrix none of these things existed. In that world he had no knowledge of this vast range of existence; nay, rather, he would have denied the reality of this world. But after his birth he began to open his eyes and behold the wonders of this illimitable universe. Similarly, as long as man is in the matrix of the human world, as long as he is the captive of nature, he is out of touch and without knowledge of the universe of the Kingdom. If he attains rebirth while in the world of nature, he will become informed of the divine world. He will observe that another and a higher world exists. Wonderful bounties descend; eternal life awaits; everlasting glory surrounds him. All the signs of reality and greatness are there. He will see the lights of God. All these experiences will be his when he is born out of the world of nature into the divine world. Therefore, for the perfect man there are two kinds of birth: the first, physical birth is from the matrix of the mother; the second, or spiritual birth, is from the world of nature. In both he is without knowledge of the new world of existence he is entering. Therefore, rebirth means his release from the captivity of nature, freedom from attachment to this mortal and material life. This is the second, or spiritual, birth of which Jesus Christ spoke in the Gospels.

(The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahā during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912
(Wilmette: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 304–305) [11]

From letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to individual believers

As to your question concerning reincarnation: The Bahā'ī view of the life after death can in no way be reconciled with certain Indian and Sufi doctrines which teach that the human soul can pass from one body to another. This doctrine, known as metempsychosis, is not only too materialistic in its view, but is purely imaginary and fatalistic. Bahā'u'llāh teaches that after its separation from the body, the human soul begins to lead a new life, of which we can have no definite knowledge, in the same way as the child in the embryo cannot visualize the type of life it is destined to lead in this world.

(10 August 1934) [12]

The Bahā'ī view of 'reincarnation' is essentially different from the Hindu conception. The Bahā'īs believe in the return of the attributes and qualities, but maintain that the essence or the reality of things cannot be made to return. Every being keeps its own individuality, but some of his qualities can be transmitted. The doctrine of metempsychosis upheld by the Hindus is fallacious.

(27 March 1938) [13]

Evolution in the life of the individual starts with the formation of the human embryo and passes through various stages, and even continues after death in another form. The human spirit is capable of infinite development.

Man's identity or rather his individuality is never lost. His reality as a person remains intact throughout the various stages of his development. He does not pre-exist in any form before coming into this world.

The passage on page 156 of 'Gleanings' regarding the evolution of the soul after death clearly proves that the soul after its separation from the body keeps its individuality and its consciousness both in relation to other souls and to the human beings in this world.

(26 November 1939) [14]

No Revelation from God has ever taught reincarnation; this is a man-made conception. The soul of man comes into being at conception; we do not believe it goes on to another planet.

(1 April 1946) [15]

Regarding your question about reincarnation: we Bahā'īs do not believe that one individual soul keeps returning to this earthly life in different bodies. This is a very ancient belief, and based on a great truth – namely that the soul *does* go on developing and unfolding and returning towards its Creator. But the concept of its returning to this physical world is erroneous, and an outgrowth of man-made doctrines which have grown up about the fundamental concept of the progress of the soul. It would be like putting the child over and over again back into the world of the womb. It is unnecessary; but from state to state spiritually, after death, the soul does go on and go higher, so to speak.

(26 December 1948) [16]

We know from His Teachings that reincarnation does not exist. We come on to this planet once only. Our life here is like the baby in the womb of its mother, which develops in that state what is necessary for its entire life after it is born. The same is true of us. Spiritually we must develop here what we will require for the life after death. In that future life, God, through His mercy, can help us to evolve characteristics which we neglected to develop while we were on this earthly plane. It is not necessary for us to come back and be born into another body in order to advance spiritually and grow closer to God.

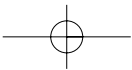
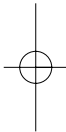
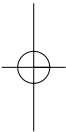
This is the Bahā'ī Teaching, and this is what the followers of Bahā'u'llāh must accept, regardless of what experiences other people may feel they have. You yourself must surely know that modern psychology has taught that the capacity of the human mind for believing what it imagines is almost infinite. Because people think they have a certain type of experience, think they remember something of a previous life, does not mean they actually had the experience, or existed previously. The power of their mind would be quite sufficient to make them believe firmly such a thing had happened.

We must use the Writings of the Prophets as our measurement. If Bahā'u'llāh had attached the slightest importance to occult experiences, to the seeing of auras, to the hearing of mystic voices; if He had believed that

reincarnation was a fact, He, Himself, would have mentioned all of these things in His Teachings. The fact that He passed over them in silence shows that to Him, they had either no importance or no reality, and were consequently not worthy to take up His time as the Divine Educator of the human race.

We must turn our faces away from these things, and toward the actual practice of His Teachings in our everyday life through our Bahā'ī Administration, and in our contact with other people and the examples we give.

(22 April 1954) [17]



Reviews

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***The Equality of Women and Men: The Experience of the Bahā'ī Community of Canada*, Deborah K. van den Hoonaard and Will C. van den Hoonaard (2006)**

Douglas, New Brunswick: Deborah K. and Will C. van den Hoonaard. 266 pp. (including index), ISBN 0-9685258-1-4 (pbk), Can\$20.00

Reviewed by **Peter Smith** *Mahidol University, Bangkok*
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This study by the wife-and-husband team, Deborah and Will van den Hoonaard, represents one of the few pieces of sociological research as yet conducted on a specific Baha'i community. It is a useful pioneering effort that deserves study and emulation.

The van den Hoonaards' concern is mainly to investigate perceptions of gender issues amongst the Canadian Baha'is. To this end, they formed 12 focus groups located across Canada comprising a total of 119 participants. The choice of locations reflected their wish to involve a wide cross-section of the Canadian Baha'i community in terms of social characteristics and local community size and age. One of the groups conducted its discussions in Persian and at least one in French, but the majority were in English. The distinctive perspectives of the Iranian group were noted. Unfortunately, it proved impossible to form a First Nation group representing Canadian Amerindian Baha'is – a serious lacuna in the research.

Each group was led by a facilitator and was asked to consider various issues relating to the implementation of the Baha'i principle of gender equality within the Baha'i community. The recorded discussions were evidently fairly open ended, the facilitators being instructed to ensure that all participants had ample opportunity to express their views and personal understandings. The van den Hoonaards then conducted a lengthy analysis of transcripts of the discussions, studying an average of fifty transcript pages for each group.

The results of the work are difficult to summarize: the authors' analysis is nuanced and reflects the range of views expressed. Clearly, the issue of gender equality was one that was important to group participants, and the methodology employed encouraged those involved to think seriously about the extent to which a normative Baha'i belief finds expression in actual practice. Thus, whilst the groups often began by denying that there were any problems in the implementation of the gender equality principle within the Baha'i community, they later questioned that assumption as their discussions proceeded, identifying areas of inequality and difference.

Although the primary data for the study was qualitative rather than quantitative in nature, demographic data was also collected for each of the

local communities involved in the study, and the book contains statistical tables of the proportion of women amongst delegates in Canadian Baha'i national conventions and the membership and office-holders of local spiritual assemblies for selected years.

It is of note that a number of participants voiced their appreciation of the focus-group method as a means of studying the application of Baha'i social principles and raising their own consciousness of the issues involved, and apart from the book's value as a pioneering piece of Baha'i sociological research, it could also be used as a stimulus to consultation on such topics by any local or national Baha'i community.

It should also be noted that the research project itself was instigated and facilitated by the Canadian Baha'i national spiritual assembly as a means of investigating the application of the principle of gender equality within the Baha'i community. The assembly left the manner and substance of the research entirely up to the researchers, however, and the van den Hoonards declined the offer of Baha'i financial assistance (presumably to further emphasize the independence of their work).

Reflecting the practical difficulties faced by many Baha'i authors at the present time, the van den Hoonards were unable to find a publisher for their work and after the manuscript had been 'floating' among 16 publishers over eight years, they decided to print it privately themselves.

Beyond the Culture of Contest: From Adversarialism to Mutualism in an Age of Interdependence, Michael Karlberg (2004)

Oxford: George Ronald, xvii + 265 pp. including index.

ISBN 0-85398-489-1 (pbk), £13.95/US\$26.95

Reviewed by Kurt Hein who holds a Ph.D. in Development Communication from Northwestern University; he is the author of Radio Bahā'ī Ecuador, Oxford: George Ronald, 1988
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In this comprehensive work, Michael Karlberg conducts a reflective examination of the theories and the practices of culture and communication. He studies cultural ways of talking and thinking, and the influence these processes have on our construction of material and social worlds. Asserting that metaphors provide clear and obvious examples of these actions, he invokes Thomas Hobbs and Confucius as model theoreticians who provided fundamental 'discursive constructs' on human nature and social reality. As their discourses contrast significantly, Dr Karlberg provides details on the differing economic, political and legal structures that have emerged from each. He creates comprehensive schemas and system models to portray this.

Given the Hobbsian perspective, Karlberg reveals the significant emergence of 'adversarialism' in the economic, political, judicial and academic realms, and in forms of social activism. These contentious standards of human behaviour, contests of power, have come to dominate and control virtually every dimension of our individual and collective lives, for example

socio-culturally and psycho-structurally. Karlberg defines this view of human nature as *homo economus*. Significant to this perspective is the absence of moral regulation. He offers medical practices and commercial mass media as pervasive contemporary examples of this pernicious view.

He then offers emergent forms of culture and communication that are reminiscent of Confucius. Labelled as 'mutualism', these forms are cooperative, altruistic and self-sacrificing behaviours. Such models have long existed in Asian and non-western societies; yet structural examples from recent western history include the United Nations and several cooperative international agencies. Social examples of this include the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, feminism, systems theory and an ecological world-view. He provides detailed examinations of these activities, thereby substantially validating his proposition. He demonstrates their stipulation of adopting viewpoints that are complementary rather than competitive, mutually enabling rather than debilitating. Given this new perspective, he suggests that struggles for clean water, arable land and other ecological resources may be among the most significant sources of international conflict in the 21st century.

Karlberg conducts a comprehensive review of historic and current 'hegemonic' applications of communication theory. This appraisal concludes by contrasting various 'discursive constructs' that he has identified. He then launches an in-depth examination of non-adversarial social change, 'Alternative Cultural Formation', by conducting a thorough case study of the Baha'i community. This analysis is based on more than two decades of participant observation research as a member of the Baha'i community. Identifying the Baha'i community as a unified microcosm of the numerous diversities of the human race, he asserts that its steady, global emergence as a community invites and deserves significant attention. Karlberg's concluding chapter, 'Beyond the Culture of Contest', summarizes the limitations of the theoretical propositions he has examined and states that new, more just models are emerging, replacing archaic systems through a combination of creation and attrition.

A review of the bibliography and footnotes show that Michael Karlberg has considered numerous philosophies, theories and scholarly documents (included are several statements of the Universal House of Justice) and he has conducted extensive analyses of these. Readers not drawn to media theory may find it hard to be attracted to such scholarship and are not likely to sustain an interest in this book. The intended audience also may find it difficult to transfer their interest from professed research to an abrupt introduction to a faith. Given these significant challenges, I wish that *The Promise of World Peace* had been appended in full, as it contextually could have provided a lucid and inspiring climax to this rigorous study.

***The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies.* Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (eds.) (2008)**

London: Routledge. xv + 283 pp. (index, 14 photographs and 3 tables). ISBN 978-0-415-35673-2. Hardback £75.00

Reviewed by **Peter Smith** *Mahidol University, Bangkok*

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This collection of essays is a major contribution to studies of the Iranian Baha'i community, a topic that has been sadly neglected by scholars both of the Babi and Baha'i religions and of modern Iran. It is to be hoped that these insightful essays will stimulate much further research in this important area of scholarship. Much research still needs to be done. The ideas put forward by the book's various authors deserve wide circulation and discussion. The high price of the volume is understandable, but is regrettable, as it imposes a potential limitation of access to what one would wish would be the first in a series of such volumes.

The book's eleven essays address three topics: minority conversions; aspects of the functioning of the Baha'i community; and the persecution of the Baha'is. The first two essays by Mehrdad Amanat ('Messianic expectation and evolving identities: The conversion of Iranian Jews to the Baha'i faith') and Fereyduh Vahman ('The conversion of Zoroastrians to the Baha'i faith') deal with the conversion of Jews and Zoroastrians to the Baha'i Faith, and should be read together. Both focus on the late Qajar period, when large numbers of each of these minority communities became Baha'is, and the authors provide overviews of the conversion process and suggest possible factors to explain it. Both note that these conversions were paradoxical, in that the new Baha'is entered a religious community which was even more despised and persecuted than their natal religions and that becoming Baha'is entailed acceptance of Islam as a 'true' religion, even though Iranian Jews and Zoroastrians had been ill-treated by their Muslim co-nationals for centuries and thus had good reason to be prejudiced against Islam.

Amanat and Vahman identify both intellectual and social factors that may have underlain conversion. Thus, on the one hand, the Baha'i Faith offered Jews and Zoroastrians a sense of millennial hope for a new age after centuries of persecution and expressed a new and 'modern' way of thinking starkly in contrast to the archaic and parochial ideas of the traditionalists in both communities: to become a Baha'i was to embrace modernity. At the same time, by becoming Baha'is, the new converts did not have to deny their own heritages as would have been required if they had become Muslims. The Baha'i leaders and teachers clearly respected many aspects of the Jewish and Zoroastrian religious traditions and those who became Baha'is could see themselves as remaining true to the essential core of their natal faiths. Again, regardless of whether traditional messianic expectation played a significant role in preparing the converts to accept the Baha'i faith, it was certainly presented by its teachers as the fulfilment of Jewish and Zoroastrian prophecy and as such addressed the converts' own religious heritage.

At a social level, conversion provided Jews and Zoroastrians with social respect from Muslim-background Baha'is who deliberately disregarded the

Shi'i concept of ritual impurity and freely associated with them, creating a new world of possible fraternity in stark contrast to their customary despised status. Also, by becoming Baha'is, the new converts did not have to cut their existing family and business ties with other Jews and Zoroastrians as would have been required if they had become Muslims. They also rejected the authority of their own tradition-bound religious leaders and in some instances became for a while a modernizing force within their natal communities. Again, the Baha'i community encouraged its members to promote the education of their children and pursue upward social mobility. The emotional impact of Baha'i heroism in the face of persecution and martyrdom was also a factor in some conversions as it was for some Muslim conversions to the Faith.

Both Amanat and Vahman note that minority conversions tailed off during the early Pahlavi period in the 1920s and 1930s, Amanat suggesting that stricter rules of membership within the Baha'i community were a key factor here, whilst Vahman relates the change to Reza Shah's presentation of an alternative model of Iranian modernity in which traditional Persian culture was valued and the Zoroastrians protected from many of the disabilities that had formerly blighted their lives.

The two essays also address the question of identity: the new Jewish- and Zoroastrian-Baha'is assumed an identity which transcended the religious boundaries of their past, enabling them to function both as Baha'is and as members of their natal communities. Ultimately, Baha'i identities predominated for most of the new Baha'is, both because of opposition and persecution by traditional Jewish and Zoroastrian leaders pushing them away, and later changes in official Baha'i policies from the 1920s onwards which stressed the exclusive nature of membership of the Baha'i community so that the former fluidities of association were abandoned. This was also a time of closer social integration with Muslim-background Baha'is, including intermarriage.

The next four essays examine aspects of the Baha'i community. Dominic Parviz Brookshaw ('Instructive encouragement: Tablets of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha to Baha'i women in Iran and India') examines a large number (over 250) of mostly recently published letters ('Tablets') from Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha to Baha'i women in Iran and India, searching for common themes. The letters examined comprise 49 letters addressed to women in certain prominent Baha'i families; some letters to Baha'i women in the communities in Hamadan and Najafabad; and 153 letters to women of Zoroastrian background. They are in both Arabic and Persian including a 'pure' de-Arabicized Persian for some of the Zoroastrian-Baha'i recipients. Brookshaw notes that in the collections he has studied, letters to women constitute between ten and twenty percent of the total, indicating that despite their lack of a public voice in traditional Iranian society, women were an important part of the Baha'i community and readily corresponded with the successive heads of the Faith.

Brookshaw discovers considerable diversity in the letters. Many are short messages of encouragement, but others deal with more substantive themes. In particular, the addressees are called upon to be steadfast in their faith; to strictly adhere to the Baha'i teachings – especially those of chastity and personal morality; and to try to convert other women to the Faith.

'Abdu'l-Baha also stressed the role which women could play in the education of girls (then almost non-existent in Iran).

A comparative approach is also advocated by Brookshaw, who suggests that future studies of Baha'u'llah's and 'Abdu'l-Baha's letters look for systematic differences between the letters addressed to Baha'is in different towns, so that, for example, the perhaps divergent realities faced by women in different localities could be discerned, together with their roles in the development of their respective local communities.

Moojan Momen ('Baha'i schools in Iran') provides us with a survey of the development of Baha'i schooling in Iran up until 1934, when most of their schools were closed by government order. Leaving aside earlier, more informal institutions, at least 37 boys' schools and 37 girls' schools were opened by the Baha'is between 1900 and the 1930s (there is no systematic record and Momen provides the first available provisional listing). These schools ranged from highly prestigious secondary schools in Tehran that attracted children from the Iranian elite to more rudimentary village schools, and collectively they made a major contribution to Iranian society (in 1918–19, over ten percent of those Iranian children attending school were enrolled in the Baha'i schools). Often opposed by religious conservatives, the Baha'i schools made pioneering contributions to the introduction of modern teaching methods and curricula in Iran, as well as to the introduction of girls' schooling and of education in remote rural areas.

Momen notes that the establishment of schools represented the first collective enterprise by which the Baha'is stepped back into the public arena in Iran after the collapse of the Babi movement in the 1850s. Also of note is the role of the schools, and of the American Baha'i women who helped with the Tehran Baha'i school, in introducing new and more socially active role models for Iranian girls.

Seena Fazel and Minou Foadi ('Baha'i health initiatives in Iran: A preliminary survey') offer a pioneering survey of Baha'i health ideas and projects. At a general level, these included basic Baha'i laws and principles that inculcated both cleanliness and hygiene (in a society in which infectious diseases used to be rife) and respect for modern scientific medicine. More specific developments were the construction of Baha'i bathhouses from the early 1900s onwards as an alternative to the then grossly insanitary Muslim ones. The Baha'is pioneered the provision of showers – considered at the time to be reprehensible by religious conservatives – and the establishment of two hospitals in Tehran, the Sihhat (1909–mid-1920s) and Mithaqiyyih (1949–79); a college for medical assistants; a nursing school; an old people's home; and two rural outpatient clinics. As with the Baha'i schools, these institutions were open to non-Baha'is as well as Baha'is. It is also of note that the Baha'is were early promoters of modern medical care for women, and that at least some of the Baha'i schools taught hygiene and basic health education and that one pioneered the use of modern vaccination campaigns. As with all other Baha'i institutions, Baha'i health care centres faced persistent opposition from religious conservatives and were closed down by government decree following the Islamic Revolution (1979).

Finally, Kavian Milani ('Baha'i discourses on the Constitutional Revolution') addresses the question of Baha'i attitudes towards the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905–11. Milani's argument is that under

'Abdu'l-Baha's leadership, the Baha'i response to the revolution passed through a number of stages as the revolution unfolded, and cannot be simplified to a single response as has been suggested by commentators such as E. G. Browne and Ahmad Kasravi, who both marginalized and distorted the Baha'i role. He also notes that the Baha'i ideals of constitutional government and the rule of law advanced in the writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha from the 1860s onwards presaged the questions raised by the later constitutional movement and suggests that, as such, they had an impact on the emergence of constitutionalism within Iranian society.

Reviewing some of the Baha'i sources of the time, Milani sees the initial Baha'i response to what 'Abdu'l-Baha clearly identified from the beginning as a revolution (*inqilāb*) as being enthusiastically supportive but constrained by the belief that open Baha'i support would in fact doom the constitutional movement by association with the despised Baha'is (as indeed, some anti-constitutionalists endeavoured to do). The Baha'is therefore refused to provide practical support for the revolution and maintained a policy of political neutrality, calling for national unity whilst 'Abdu'l-Baha apparently offered unheeded advice to both royalists and constitutionalists. He was conscious of parallel developments in Russia at the time (and a comparable failure of constitutionalism) and warned that divisions amongst the Iranian political elite would allow foreign powers to intervene in the country.

The Baha'i stance changed markedly in mid-1911, when 'Abdu'l-Baha called upon selected Baha'is to seek membership of the Majlis. This proved impossible given the strength of anti-Baha'i sentiment, and by 1913, 'Abdu'l-Baha's policy had reverted to one of advocating political non-involvement by the Iranian Baha'is. Milani suggests that this reversal was due to a perception that a window of opportunity had closed and 'Abdu'l-Baha's distress at continuing Iranian division and the intervention of Russia.

The final five essays look at various aspects of the persecution of the Baha'is. Eliz Sanasarian ('The comparable dimensions of the Baha'i case and prospects for change in the future') places anti-Baha'i prejudice and persecution in the context of the treatment of other religious minorities in Iran (Zoroastrians, Jews and Armenian, Assyrian and Chaldean Christians). In all cases, the minorities are subject to dehumanizing language and stereotyping, which Sanasarian argues fuel hatred for the minorities, legitimize massive oppression, and create the potential for persecution. The actual histories of the minority groups have varied, including geographically from one region of Iran to another, and reflect the various contingencies of their existence. As a post-Islamic religion, the Baha'is face particular difficulties as their very existence challenges Islamic identity as 'the final' religion. Again, unlike the other minorities, the Baha'is have not led a segregated and separate social existence and actively seek converts from amongst the Muslim majority and therefore appear as the 'enemy within' with whom no coexistence is possible.

What can be done to end the oppression of the Baha'is and other religious minorities in Iran? Sanasarian stresses the importance of state action, in that the state has an immense capacity to protect its citizens of all religious groups and to institute change. Prejudicial attitudes towards minorities are difficult to overcome. Legal recognition and political representation are essential. By contrast, minorities can do little for themselves; they lack

the power even to rebut the prejudicial attitudes that underlie their oppression. Again, external groups can seek to engage the Iranian regime in 'dialogue', but unless such dialogue seriously addresses issues of substance it has no effect. Brave individuals from the dominant group can speak up for minority rights, as some Egyptian Muslims have done in protection of Egyptian Christians, but this may pose a risk to themselves. Those intellectuals who seek to minimize the sufferings of minority groups are themselves opposed and challenged by society.

Abbas Amanat ('The historical roots of the persecution of Babis and Baha'is in Iran') focuses on the persecution of the Babis and Baha'is in Qajar Iran, rooting it in a tradition of animosity towards religious nonconformity dating from the Safavid era and three centuries of Shiitization finally dominated by the Usuli mujtahids. The frenzied pogroms to which the Babis and their Baha'i successors were periodically subjected were perpetrated by three sets of actors: the 'ulama, government agents and the common mob. A mixture of motivations were involved. For the 'ulama, the Babis and Baha'is were heretics who directly challenged their own doctrinal legitimacy and material interests. Leading mujtahids could use attacks on the Baha'is as a means of enhancing their reputations and asserting their leadership both against other clerics and against the steadily weakening government. Nasiri'd-din Shah never differentiated the peaceful Baha'is from the militant Babis who had earlier tried to assassinate him. Qajar governors cynically collaborated with the 'ulama for their own advantage (sometimes gaining wealth and women from the Baha'is whom they executed), or to use the Baha'is as scapegoats to deflect popular discontent. The mob were easily inflamed by zealous clerics and mobilized by the bands of thugs who provided the clerics with militant force. Only with the Constitutional Revolution did the pattern of persecution change with the rise of secular modernity and a significant loss of power by the Qajar regime.

Whilst Amanat believes the incidence of persecution to broadly reflect periods of socio-economic and political crisis (such as the Tobacco Régie of 1891–92), he argues against seeing class conflict as the prime underlying factor in the attacks on the Baha'is. The Baha'is did include members of the newly-emergent 'modernizing' bourgeoisie who had adopted the 'Protestant' work ethic and established international trading links, and these might easily have gained the animus of proletarian Shiites and traditional merchants in the bazaar, but the Baha'i community as a whole was not significantly different from the Shiite majority in terms of its class composition. More important, he feels, was the psycho-cultural crisis engendered by Iranian political and economic weakness vis-à-vis the European powers, whereby the ideas of Iranian and Shi'i uniqueness and importance were severely challenged. In this context, the Baha'is came to play the role of an indigent 'other' against whom these frustrations could be safely vented and the potency of the collective self could be asserted.

H. E. Chehabi ('Anatomy of prejudice: Reflections on secular anti-Baha'ism in Iran') examines what he terms 'secular anti-Baha'ism' in Iran. He sees as problematic the antagonism towards the Baha'is displayed by many secular Iranian intellectuals both before and since the 1979 revolution. (By contrast, he thinks it is easy enough to understand why zealous Iranian Muslims hate the Baha'is.) Such secularists are in the anomalous

position at the present time of simultaneously condemning abuses of human rights carried out under the Islamic Republic and ignoring the specific abuses meted out to the Baha'is. Why should this be?

Unlike the religious opponents of the Baha'is who see the Baha'is as condemnable heretics, the secular writers considered – including such earlier figures as Adamiyat and Kasravi – criticize the Baha'is on secular grounds, accusing them of being unpatriotic; tools of foreign imperialism; creators of discord in the Iranian nation; and being present in significant numbers around the former Shah as his advisors and cronies. All of these claims are untrue, states Chehabi, so why then are they so readily believed? Key to our understanding here, he suggests, is the very real cosmopolitanism of the Baha'is that implicitly challenges the narrow nationalism of many Iranian intellectuals. This he sees as ironic, as the Baha'is can more accurately be portrayed as custodians and carriers of many aspects of Persian culture, both in the overt patriotism of 'Abdu'l-Baha's *Secret of Divine Civilization*, and more obliquely at the present time in the worldwide diaspora of Iranian Baha'is and the consequent diffusion of Persian language and culture amongst non-Iranian Baha'is. The problem, he contends, lies in the way in which modern Iranian nationalism remains rooted in a Shiite identity even for those Iranians who are not religious.

Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi ('Anti-Baha'ism and Islamism in Iran', a translation of an article which first appeared in Persian in *Īrān Nāmih* in 2001) traces the emergence of the anti-Baha'i movement during the 1941–55 period, linking it to the creation of an Islamist 'public sphere' in opposition to the nationalistic and non-religious public sphere which had been promoted during the reign of Reza Shah (1925–41). Prior to the 1940s, opposition to the Baha'is had been on religious grounds, but a new pattern of anti-Baha'i polemic developed in the 1940s in which the Baha'is were accused of being agents of foreign powers who threatened Iran's religious and national unity. Although developed by secularists – notably Ahmad Kasravi, who saw the Babi and Baha'i religions as based on the same 'imaginary foundations' as the mainstream Shi'ism from which they arose – the new polemic was also adopted by the Islamist anti-Baha'i movement which emerged after the fall of Reza Shah as various previously-suppressed political forces became able to operate.

Consisting of a number of separate organizations dedicated to the defence of traditional Shi'i, which they saw as under attack by secularists as well as Baha'is, the Islamists succeeded in constructing a nationwide network of mosques and centres for the propagation of their beliefs through education, the circulation of newspapers and journals, and later the use of radio. The increasing activity and visibility of the Baha'is played a crucial role in stimulating this movement, with the Baha'is (along with Iran's Jews and Communists) being subjected to a process of 'Otherization', in which they were portrayed as an evil and alien element in Iranian society against which the virtue of true Islamic society could more adequately be seen. The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 introduced a new element, with the Islamists alleging that the Baha'is were Zionist agents. By the 1950s, the Pahlavi state (for reasons which Tavakoli-Targhi does not seek to explain) cooperated with the Islamists in launching an anti-Baha'i campaign, culminating in the destruction of the Baha'i centre in Tehran. Alarmed by

international condemnation of the persecution of the Baha'is, the government subsequently distanced itself from the Islamists, gaining their enmity, and leading to the transformation of their movement into one which was determined to overthrow the Pahlavi regime altogether and establish governance by the religious institution (the *vilāyat-i faqīh*).

Finally, Reza Afshari ('The discourse and practice of human rights violations of Iranian Baha'is in the Islamic Republic of Iran') reviews the sad succession of human rights abuses suffered by the Baha'is in Iran since 1979. The victims of deep-rooted and widespread prejudices and the specific antagonism of newly influential anti-Baha'is groups and clerics, the Baha'is were vulnerable from the outset of the Revolution to a range of persecutions (Afshari characterizes the Revolution as a Leninist-tinged reinterpretation of Shii'sm). Although a number of Baha'i writers have voiced their fear of genocide against the Baha'is and of a planned scheme of cultural extermination, Afshari sees these persecutions as relatively unsystematic. Rather, he believes the persecutions to be a usually haphazard expression of the fanaticism of individual clerics and a by-product of factional struggles within the ruling elite, in which widespread official corruption and government incoherence often prevents a clear and sustained policy from emerging. Afshari divides the persecution of the Baha'is into discrete phases. He notes that most of the over two hundred Baha'is murdered by the Islamic regime were killed during the early years of the Revolution (up to the mid-1980s), when the regime was itself insecure and subject to serious attacks by political opponents, and various factions within the Islamic movement were competing for power. In this context, the murder of many Baha'i leaders at the instigation of local anti-Baha'is was a matter of indifference to the Revolutionary leadership who, whilst focused elsewhere, were implicitly hostile to the Baha'is even though they recognized that they were not a serious threat to the regime. As the Revolutionary leadership consolidated its power, however, the situation changed, with the Tehran government seeking to control local Islamist activists and present a more responsive image to the wider world. In these new circumstances, the Baha'is were still endangered, and the state acted harshly in response to all perceived signs of Baha'i organization and resilience, but overall the persecution became more muted, with the Baha'is systematically marginalized and chronically disadvantaged rather than subject to widespread murder. Gradually, government leaders came to realize that any hopes of forcing the Baha'is to become Muslims were doomed to failure and a grudging acceptance of the continued existence of the Baha'is as a despised minority took hold.

Whilst condemning the indifference of the majority of Iranian Muslims to the sufferings of the Baha'is, Afshari nevertheless sees signs for hope, both in the inability of anti-Baha'i zealots to mobilize mob action against the Baha'is (such as their counterparts had succeeded in doing in the Qajar period), and in the growing rejection on the part of many ordinary Iranians of both fervent religious prejudice and the usual accounts that Iran's government has given of global conspiracies in which the Baha'is are assigned an evil role by their opponents.

***Between Foreigners and Shi'is: Nineteenth-Century Iran and its Jewish Minority*, Daniel Tsadik (2007)**

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This book is a study of the persecutions suffered by the Jewish minority in Iran over the period 1848–1896. It begins with a consideration of the legal position of Jews in Shi'i law and the disabilities that they suffered from it. The subsequent chapters cover four phases of the experience of the Jewish minority in Iran throughout the reign of Nasir ud-Din Shah. There is also some limited consideration of the period before Nasir ud-Din's reign. It is commonly thought that the Qajar shahs were autocratic despots with unlimited absolute power. One of the interesting features that this study brings into focus is how little the shah could in fact assert his authority, especially in the provinces. The story told by Dr Tsadik is one of European Jews pressuring their governments to assist and protect the Jews of Iran (although at first the initiative came from the European governments themselves, especially the British one), the shah and his government submitting to this pressure and sending orders to the provinces, but these orders then having only minimal or temporary effect because of the actions of governors, local notables and especially the local Shi'i clerics. The picture presented is that of a shah who meant well and wanted to improve the condition of his subjects but who did not have the drive and perseverance to carry out his intentions. Indeed as his reign progressed, even the pretence of bringing about reform disappeared and he appeared to be acting only on the basis of his own greed and European pressures.

In the early part of his reign in 1865, Nasir ud-Din Shah professed to want to act with 'justice and kindness' toward his Jewish subjects (p. 58). Despite this, his administration vacillated, sometimes giving Jews in a particular locality protection and even improving their condition and sometimes giving way to those who were persecuting the Jews – in all instances falling short of granting fully equal rights of citizenship to the Jews. Repeated government promises and decrees to ameliorate the conditions of the Jews only highlighted its inability to impose change in Iranian cities where the reactionary forces of tradition were well entrenched. Outbursts of persecution in cities such as Barfurush, Yazd, Isfahan, Shiraz and Hamadan were ineffectually and belatedly dealt with only after much damage had been done and lives lost. During the late nineteenth century, the Iranian Jewish community, which had been very isolated previously, established good communications with European Jewry. It was Jewish organisations such as the British Jewish Board of Deputies and the French Alliance Israélite Universelle, as they became increasingly familiar with the plight of their Iranian co-religionists, that brought pressure to bear on the British and French governments to act to stem the persecutions and relieve the

pressure under which the Jews lived. All this is fully described by Tsadik based on Jewish, European and Iranian archival and primary sources.

In all Daniel Tsadik has written an excellent book, illuminating the complexities of the social dynamics of Iranian cities in the late nineteenth century. He highlights the tension between the standards of justice and equality demanded by the modern world that, in Iran, was just beginning at this time to have an impact on the traditional Islamic (and Shi'i) view that made all non-Muslims (and even all non-Shi'is) second-class citizens. He has skilfully revealed the local rivalries and the interplay of power relationships in Iranian cities that greatly affected minorities, as indeed they affected everyone. He distinguishes between instances when the Jews were suffering alongside most of the rest of the population due to maladministration, economic conditions or natural disasters; and instances when they were specifically targeted. He is careful to point out that not all of the local governors and religious leaders persecuted the Jewish community and sometimes even Islamic clerics protected them.

The book does rather concentrate, however, on the persecutions and one may have hoped for more information on the relations between Jews and Muslims during periods when there were no persecutions (though there is some information on this in the Introduction and the first chapter). It would also have been interesting to find more details on the payment of the *jizyah*, the Islamic tax levied on the 'people of the Book'. In Iran it was usually farmed out to a government official in lieu of payment of his salary. The relationship between this official and the minority community was thus critical to the welfare of that community.

Let us first of all consider the areas on which this book does not shed light. Any scholar of the Baha'i Faith turning to this book in the hope of gleaning information about the conversion of Jews to the Baha'i Faith in Qajar Iran will be disappointed, since this subject is only referred to in passing (although some have suggested that the persecutions of the Jews were themselves a major factor in bringing about these conversions). Nor does the book provide clues as to why these conversions occurred among some Jewish communities and not others. There is no more than a brief survey of subjects such as the social structure of the Jewish communities of Iran, the position of women and the religious life and thought of the community.

All this does not mean, however, the book is not valuable for the Baha'i historian. The study of another religious minority in Iran cannot but shed light on the experiences of the Baha'i community. The Shi'i worldview is affected by the constant commemorations of the sufferings and martyrdoms of the Shi'i Imams which tend to encourage negative feelings towards all non-Shi'is. Consequently, religious minorities have tended to be treated worse in Iran than in other Muslim countries. Thus in analysing the history of the persecutions of Baha'is, it is necessary to consider to what extent these were the result of a general phobia of the 'other', and to what extent these were specifically aimed at the Baha'i Faith. This book is an invaluable resource for such considerations.

The chronicle histories of the Baha'i Faith in Iran that we have are mostly a register of episode after episode of persecutions, sometimes interwoven with biographies of prominent Baha'is. While these histories are useful for providing details of these episodes, they often do not provide the

context in which the persecutions occurred. For this it is necessary to go beyond the Baha'i chronicles to local histories and to books such as the present one. Tsadik not only provides information about the persecution of Jews in precisely the same period as most of the Baha'i persecutions occurred but he also analyses the factors, both local and national, that led to these. In doing this, he distinguishes between those factors that were general for all of the religious minorities in Iran at this time and those that were specific to the Jews. We see for example that figures such as Aqa Najafi in Isfahan, Falasiri in Shiraz and Mulla 'Abdu'llah in Hamadan were not just persecutors of the Baha'i community but they raised campaigns against the Jews as well.

There were, of course, many ways in which the situation of the Baha'is differed from that of the Jews in Qajar Iran. The Jews were a well-defined minority living in their own special quarter of each town, often recognisable because of the clothes they wore, the occupations they pursued and even their accents. Thus when a persecution erupted, it tended to be against the whole community. Although the situation of the Baha'is in villages and smaller towns was similar, in the larger towns, the Baha'is tended not to be easily identifiable as Baha'is. They were indistinguishable from Muslims in the clothes they wore, their occupations and where they lived. Thus when a persecution against them erupted, it tended to be against one or a few individuals who had been identified as Baha'is.

Another notable difference was that from about 1860 onwards, the Jews of Iran were able to call on the protection of the Jews in Europe who in turn put pressure on their governments, especially the British and French governments, to relieve their persecutions – this aspect of the persecutions is a major theme in Tsadik's book. The British government also protected the Zoroastrians, while all the European powers protected the Christian minority. The Baha'is were unable to call on any such protection. Occasionally, as part of the high colonialism project of 'civilizing' Iran or as a way of asserting their power against their rivals, one or another European government might make a representation in favour of the Baha'is that were being persecuted in a locality; but this was infrequent and often dependent on the whims of individual European ambassadors. Despite the repeated assertions of many Iranian 'scholars' and of the present-day Iranian government and media, there is no evidence in the government records of any European government giving the Baha'is protection on a regular basis as a matter of policy in the way that is described in this book for the Jewish minority (and which certainly also occurred for the Christian and Zoroastrian minorities). Indeed one can find repeated instances where they declined to extend their protection to Baha'is under persecution.

Iranian cities had a number of different loci of power: the governor, local notables, and various clerics all vied for power. Often the persecutions of Jews were, as is well demonstrated in the present book, a result of these local rivalries (and the same is true of Baha'i persecutions). A cleric or local notable might initiate a persecution in order to demonstrate or build his power against a rival; alternatively, such a persecution might be used to embarrass the governor and make it appear that he is unable to maintain order. In any such case, the initiator of the persecutions had to weigh the potential gain against possible adverse consequences for him. The Jews

obtained European protection later than the Christians and Zoroastrians. The Baha'is, as discussed above, had no such protection. Thus a campaign against the Baha'is, and to a lesser extent against the Jews, was a move that offered tremendous possible gains for such ambitious local power brokers, with relatively little danger of negative consequences. It was unlikely that anyone would suffer negative consequences for raising a campaign against the Baha'is, and if they were held to account, they could always wrap themselves in an Islamic justification, claiming they were defending the religion against a dangerous heresy.

The book is well produced with a useful index. The author's first language is not English and there are a few infelicities of usage which the editor, it would have been hoped, could have caught (the author, for example, presumably meant 'compensate for' rather than 'complement' on p. 81). These are, however, very minor blemishes in an otherwise excellent book, the reading of which will reward those who are interested in gaining a fuller picture of Qajar Iran.