

Lights of 'Irfán



Papers Presented
at the 'Irfán Colloquia
and Seminars

Book Six

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‘Irfán Colloquia and Seminars



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Lights of ‘Irfán
Papers Presented at the ‘Irfán Colloquia and Seminars
Book Six
General Editor Iraj Ayman
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O friend of mine! The Word of God is the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable. It hath ever dominated and will continue to dominate the realm of being. The Great Being saith: The Word is the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked. No sooner had but a glimmer of its effulgent splendour shone forth upon the mirror of love than the blessed word 'I am the Best-Beloved' was reflected therein. It is an ocean inexhaustible in riches, comprehending all things. Every thing which can be perceived is but an emanation therefrom. High, immeasurably high is this sublime station, in whose shadow moveth the essence of loftiness and splendour, wrapt in praise and adoration.

— Lawh-i-Maqşúd
Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 173

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Preface

Baha'u'llah refers to His revelation as a Choice Wine that is unsealed by the Fingers of Might and Power (KA ¶5). He says, "*The Sealed Wine is disclosed in this day before the faces of men.*" (ESW 83). He further praises those who will be blessed by drinking from that choice wine:

Well is it with him whom the changes and chances of this world have failed to deter from recognizing the Day Spring of the Unity of God, who hath quaffed, with unswerving resolve, and in the name of the Self-Subsisting, the sealed wine of His Revelation. Such a man shall be numbered with the inmates of Paradise, in the Book of God, the Lord of all worlds. (GWB, 340-1)

Verily, such a man is blessed by the Concourse on high, and by them who dwell within the Tabernacle of Grandeur, who have quaffed My sealed Wine in My Name, the Omnipotent, the All-Powerful. (ESW 83)

That is why He calls on the believers to "*Seize it in the name of thy Lord, and quaff thy fill in remembrance of Him Who is the Mighty, the Incomparable*" (ESW 88) and urges them to "*Meditate upon this, O men of insight!*" (KA ¶5).

The main goal and purpose of the 'Irfán Colloquium and its publications is to encourage, strengthen and promote systematic studies and deepening in the Bahá'í scriptures and holy texts as well as providing study guides for facilitating the quaffing of that spiritual drink.

The Sacred Texts are revealed in the language of, and with the expressions that are, prevalent among the people receiving them. Consequently, understanding the concepts and messages that such Writings convey requires familiarity with the literary, historical, and cultural background of that language. In other words, one has to learn the linguistic and philological background of that "language." Therefore the other aim and objective of the 'Irfán Colloquium and its publications is to assist in learning such backgrounds. The *Lights of 'Irfán* is a collection of research papers and other items that facilitate achievement of the above goals.

The *Lights of 'Irfán*, starting with Book Six, will be published in standard book size in order to make it easier to keep the volumes on ordinary bookshelves. Another new feature is that in addition to the

articles on the Writings of Baha'u'llah, articles on the Writings of the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá will also be added to the contents. From the Writings of the Báb the article on His autobiobiography appears in this volume. The article on the famous Tablet of the Two Calls, and the Tablet on the Signs of Prophethood are devoted to the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Articles on the Interpretation of the Guardianship, A Bahá'í Understanding of Reincarnation, and the Bahá'í-inspired Model of Education are expositions on some of the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í belief system. Research papers related to studies in the Bahá'í Faith from the philosophic perspective include the papers On Bahá'í Ontology, The Truth of Thyself, and Models and Idols. A different approach to the study of the Writings is investigating the life history of the recipients of Tablets. An example of such an attempt is the article on the Life and Times of August Forel.

The section on Elucidations contains the response of the Research Department of the Bahá'í World Center concerning the infallibility of the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith and a commentary on True Mysticism.

'Irfán Colloquia, in 2004, were conducted in seven sessions in English, Persian and German at the Louhelen and Bosch Bahá'í Schools in North America, at London University in England, UK, at the center for Bahá'í Studies in Acuto, Italy and at the Tambach Conference Center in Germany. In these sessions 62 scholars from 14 different countries made a total of 89 presentations. Thirty-two presentations were delivered in English. The text of some of the papers presented in English is published in this volume. The abstracts of all the presentations are available in the 'Irfán Colloquia website: www.irfancolloquia.org.

All papers in this volume present the views and understandings of their authors. The texts of the papers are published as provided by the authors, without further editing. The writing styles and scholarly approaches are therefore different. Articles are published in this volume according to the alphabetical order of the author's surnames. Abstracts of all the presentations made at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars are published in a series of separate booklets.

Iraj Ayman

Wilmette, June 2005

The Life and Times of August Forel

Sheila Banani

In 1848, the famous “year of revolution,” on September 1, August Henri Forel was born, the eldest of four children to Victor Forel (b. Switzerland) and Pauline Morin (b. France), in the country house called “La Gracieuse” belonging to his paternal grandparents near Morges, on the shore of Lake Geneva [see photo, next page].¹

As a young child he was sheltered by his overly protective mother who isolated him from outdoor play and friendships, leaving him bashful and timid, bored and lonely. He found fulfillment in his physical environment, in nature, initially in the lives of snails and later in wasps and ants. The “social” life of insects fascinated him in their encounters, both fighting and assisting one another, and intrigued him to learn what was inside their nests. But his parents and grandmother forbade him to keep living insects and he was allowed only to collect dead ones. This was the beginning of what would become Forel’s life-long passion and result, ultimately, in his famous book *The Ants of Switzerland* [1874] and later the donation of part of his extensive ant collection, one of the largest in the world, to the Geneva Museum in 1922.

Forel’s Protestant mother gave him a religious education which taught the Bible, both Old and New Testament, was the revealed Word of God, “even the most incomprehensible passages,” he wrote in his autobiography. As a result of his loving respect for his mother, by the age of fourteen his religious doubts and conflicts led him to regard himself as “a hardened, outcast sinner, who need not hope for God’s mercy,” though he still hoped that his “conversion” would come upon him like a Biblical “miracle” (Forel 25). His schooldays were passed in Morges and later at the College Cantonal in Lausanne. By the age of 16 [1864] he faced the dreaded “confirmation” discussions with the local Pastor. He stammered to the Pastor, “I can’t believe.” In his autobiography he later wrote: “In the quiet meadows round my home I had often cried in despair to the so-called personal God: ‘If you really exist, destroy me here and now; then I shall know that you exist, but otherwise I cannot believe in your existence!’ But all was silent; I was not destroyed” (Forel 47).

By 1866, while not particularly attracted to the prospect of entering education for the field of medicine, he did recognize the connection between medicine and his love of natural science. So, with his growing unbelief in God, despite his increasing sense of independence and self-confidence, he felt himself a pessimist. “On

every side I saw only lies and disappointments in human intercourse. It seemed to me that life was hardly worth living. My only consolation was, and remained, natural science” (Forel 51).



A Forel

This fateful year [1866] Forel met Edouard Bugnion, a fellow entomologist, who became his future brother-in-law when he married Forel's eldest sister in 1873. It is through Bugnion that Forel first learned about Charles Darwin [1809-1882] and his work. Forel wrote in his autobiography: “When I read [Charles Darwin's] *The Origin of Species* [written 1859] it was as though scales fell from my eyes.... I saw that the study of medicine was worthy of my highest endeavour. It must have been about this time that the notion of monism first dawned upon me, for I placed the following reflections on record: ‘If Darwin is right, if man is a descendant of animal species, and if therefore his brain also is

descended from the brain of the animal, and if, moreover, we think and feel with the brain, then what we call the soul in man is a descendant (an evolutionary product) of the animal soul, of the same fundamental structure as the latter, and, like it, entirely conditioned, in its simpler or higher development, by the simpler or higher development of the brain.... Consequently ... psychology cannot in the last resort be other than a sort of physiology of the brain” (Forel 53).

In the University of Cambridge Darwin correspondence files [internet], I found evidence that eight years later Forel sent to Darwin [written in French on 23 September 1874, from Munich] a copy of

his newly published book on Swiss ants [*Les Fourmis de la Suisse*, Geneva] and notes points and passages that Forel thinks will interest him. Darwin responded [28 September 1874] with thanks to Forel and recommends he read Thomas Belt's *The Naturalist in Nicaragua* [1874] by Darwin's fellow-countryman. In his autobiography Forel states: "He [Darwin] asked me the question: 'Do you read English easily?' I [Forel] had no knowledge of English, and felt greatly ashamed of the fact on receiving this book" (Forel 99-100). Forel then finds someone to help translate Thomas Belt's book and writes, "by the time we finished it I could read English pretty fluently, and in time I even learned to speak it after a fashion. For this Darwin was responsible, and I have been grateful to him all my life. Darwin also sent me his own interesting observations of ants, which led to a brief exchange of letters" (Forel 100).

In Forel's last year of medical school in Zurich [1870-1871] he became enormously interested in psychiatry. "I felt that here, where I perceived the contact of brain and soul, must lie the key to the monistic-psychological problem which was engrossing me" (Forel 63). This interest led him to Vienna [1871-1872] where he prepared his thesis under the guidance of Professor Theodore Hermann Meynert [1833-1892], finally passed his medical examinations in Lausanne and was graduated as a doctor (Forel 79-85). He then received his first medical appointment in Munich as assistant physician under Professor Bernard Aloys von Gudden, an asylum director and head of a laboratory, where he was able to work on the anatomy of the brain and make the "first thin microscopic section of the human brain," which had never been done before (Forel 93). Upon completing and publishing his book on Swiss ants he was awarded in 1875 the Thore prize by the Paris Academy of Sciences. This greatly surprised him until he learned that the politics of granting their academic distinctions favored not giving it to a Frenchman (Forel 96).

Treatment of the patients in the asylum, some of whom were very violent, challenged Forel who tried various experiments of separating out the physically infirm for better care and, for the first time [in 1876], he began to understand the insidious role of alcohol as a problem for the patients. However, it was not until a few years later that he became convinced that only total abstinence from alcohol was healthy.

In 1877 Forel became qualified as a lecturer in the University of Munich and, as a member of an entomological society, met and became close friends with Edouard Steinheil, the father of the child Emma [then twelve years old] who, years later [1883], becomes Forel's wife (Forel 105). Edouard Steinheil had previously made a trip to South America [Colombia] and now, with Forel, planned a six-

month ant hunting expedition there, so Forel took a leave of absence from his work in 1878 and they set out together. On their voyage when they reached the Caribbean, at the first stop at the island of St. Thomas, Steinheil took ill while still on board ship and suddenly died of tropical heat-stroke. His body was taken ashore for burial on the island where Forel served as his only mourner (Forel 109-111). Forel returned immediately then to Munich to break the news to Steinheil's family and returned to his own family home in Morges, to his old room, since he was still on his six-month leave of absence from his work at the Munich asylum and as a lecturer at the University. During this period Forel received and accepted an appointment to become assistant physician at the Burgholzli Institute, an asylum in Zurich. He served at Burgholzli for the next nineteen years [1879-1898]. Upon his arrival at the asylum, he found himself having to act also as its temporary director as well as physician and to look after the women's division in an insane asylum with more than 300 patients. Within a few months he was formally appointed the Burgholzli Institute Director and given a full professorship in the University of Zurich (Forel 138).

Now that his career path seemed quite settled, Forel arranged for the widow of his fellow entomologist friend Edouard Steinheil and her children [including young Emma, now a teenager] to come from Munich to visit his parents while he too was on a vacation at home. In subsequent visits to the Steinheil home, Forel's affection for Emma began to grow slowly though his naturally pessimistic outlook led him to fear that she would reject him as too old [he was 35 at this time]. But on the contrary, he relates in his autobiography, "I was positively dizzy with joy when at last a young girl, and, indeed, the daughter of the family I loved so dearly, confessed that she loved me. A totally new world was opening before me, and I can truly say that at one stroke the pessimism that had hitherto oppressed me vanished and was replaced by a firm, optimistic confidence. I could not only love, deeply and tenderly, but — and this seemed a sort of miracle to me — I could also be loved" (Forel 145). The wedding took place in the nineteen-year-old bride's family home in Munich the end of August 1883 with both families present in a simple ceremony. When Forel took his bride Emma back to Zurich she quickly made friends with various inmates of the Burgholzli asylum, organizing a choir and various festivities for those patients able to participate. Their first child, Edouard, was born November 15, 1884 followed by five more children, altogether four girls and two boys, the last child born in 1896 when Forel was 48 years old (Forel 231).

In these early years at Burgholzli he met a boot-maker, Jakob Bosshardt, who tried to convince him that alcoholism was not curable except by total abstinence which Bosshardt exemplified by rescuing and curing by abstinence many alcoholic former patients of the Burgholzli Institute. Forel, although a believer in the temperance movement, did not accept total abstinence until he slowly began to realize the positive success rate and cures accomplished by abstinence. Forel relates that he asked Bosshardt, "I want you to explain something: I am a psychiatrist, employed, as director of the asylum, to heal the sick, and you are a shoemaker; how is it, then, that I have never yet been able to cure a drunkard permanently, while you are so successful?" To this Bosshardt replied, with an understanding smile: 'It's very simple, Herr Direktor: I'm an abstainer, and you are not!'.... On that very day both my wife and I signed a pledge to abstain from alcohol.... This incident was for me the beginning of a new period of my life" (Forel 152-160).



1883 marriage to Emma Steinheil. 'Everything about her was tender and thoughtful.'

Source: Vader, between pages 4 and 5

Forel's brain research led to his formulation of what later became known as the neuron theory. He wrote a paper on the subject, "Some Considerations and Results relating to the Anatomy of the Brain," and sent it to the *Archiv fur Psychiatrie* in Berlin but it did not appear in publication until January 1887. However, without Forel's knowledge, Professor Wilhelm His [1831-1904] of Leipzig had arrived at similar results and published them in a periodical which appeared two months earlier [October 1886] than Forel's. Both papers were generally ignored until 1889 when in Barcelona Professor Ramon y Cajal [1852-1934] completely confirmed their results "mentioning His and [Forel], though only briefly" (Forel 163) and, in 1906, Santiago Ramon y Cajal was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for his

work on the structure of the nervous system which was shared with the Italian anatomist Professor Camillo Golgi.²

Hypnotism also intrigued Forel because of what he saw as “the relation between brain and psyche, or between the physiology of the brain and psychology, and the true monism or unity between cerebral and psychic phenomena.” He read of research by a Professor Bernheim of Nancy so he traveled there where he received from Bernheim instruction in “hypnotism or suggestion, which are one and the same thing” (Forel 166-167). Forel later wrote a very popular book on this subject, *Hypnotismus und Psychotherapie* [1889] which reached its twelfth edition by 1923.

Forel traveled to North Africa [Tunis and Algeria] for a month in the Spring of 1889 because of his great interest in ants of that region. While there he observed the results of famine in some areas and “comparatively savage people — the Arabs, very difficult to civilize, because of the influence of Islam — governed by a cultured nation, the French” (Forel 186). Soon after his return to Burgholzli, he noticed the people of Zurich were taking a greater interest in the “drink problem” and, in 1890, an Abstinence Society was founded which was to become “The International Society for Combating Indulgence in Alcohol.” He also founded the Ellikon sanatorium for the medical treatment of alcoholism.

He began to see in his activities and interests the inseparable connection among alcoholism, social problems, psychiatry, penal law, and science as well as education. “What is the solution? The renunciation of alcohol in childhood; freedom of belief, and the teaching to children of the scientific truth, and their social duties.” Further problems occupied him: the “sexual problem” [prostitution], the “feminist problem” [he became a supporter of women’s right to vote, and women’s rights in general], the problem of an international auxiliary world-language to promote mutual understanding [he studied Esperanto], and, the problem of what he called “the human races” [“Which races can be of service in the further evolution of mankind, and which are useless? And if the lowest races are useless, how can they be gradually extinguished?”] (Forel 193). Please recall the full title of Charles Darwin’s book, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, which dealt with evolution and selection, had persuasive influence on Forel. He worked out the draft of a Swiss Insanity Law which, in 1894, was accepted by the Psychiatrists’ Union. He also was commissioned to draft a bill to abolish brothels (Forel 201-206).

Following a three-month expedition to Colombia, this time in the company of his brother-in-law Bugnion, he returned to Burgholzli feeling exhausted in mid-1896, just in time for the birth of his sixth and last child. By 1897 he was nearing a general breakdown. "I had already given up the anatomy of the brain, I had handed over the direction of the Ellikon asylum ..., and I had reduced my studies of the ants to a minimum" (Forel 237). He was not yet fifty. "After my retirement I can concentrate wholly, if I wish, on those social and scientific tasks which I regard as most essential" (Forel 238).

By Spring 1898, Forel left the asylum in the hands of his successor and friend, Dr. Eugene Bleuler. Soon after [1902] Carl Jung worked as a psychiatrist under Dr. Bleuler at Burgholzli. Jung was to meet Sigmund Freud in Vienna in 1907.



Family Group, 1898

Above: left to right, Inez, Edouard, Martha

Centre: Mme Forel and A. Forel

Beneath: Oscar, Cécile, Daisy

Source: Miall, page 225

Forel and his family left Burgholzli to begin his retirement near his childhood home in the little country village of Chigny in the canton of Vaud, Switzerland. He took up bicycling and archery. His brother-in-law Professor Bugnion persuaded him to give a few lectures on psychology at the University of Lausanne, but he soon discontinued them because too little interest was shown in the subject (Forel 251). Forel traveled to the United States, where he delivered a lecture at Clark University on the occasion of their jubilee festival [1899], and to Russia [1902] as a member of the International Criminological Union invited by the Russian Minister of Justice Muravieff (Forel 253-261). Forel observed "Moscow was at that time a curious mixture of barbarism and culture, with striking contrasts between wealth and

poverty, education and ignorance, integrity and corruption, feasting and starvation. And everywhere society was fermenting under the surface” (Forel 263).

In Forel’s autobiography, he gives his “retrospect” of the 19th century at its close: “The beginning of the century stood under the sign of the French Revolution, whose consequences influenced the whole century; after which the technical and scientific discoveries that followed one another with headlong speed, and the names of Napoleon I, Lamarck, Darwin, and Bismarck, gave the century its peculiar stamp. If I had to make a choice I should call it the century of Lamarck and Darwin, in which the doctrine of evolution gave birth to the germ of the discovery of the identity of the human soul with the brain, and therewith dealt the deathstroke to the dualism of body and soul. Compared with this, what is the significance of conquerors, diplomatists, and technical discoveries?” (Forel 256).

In 1903, Forel and his family moved to the village of Yvorne in the midst of vineyards near the little town of Aigle at the foot of the mountains and overlooking the Rhone valley which opens westward on Lake Geneva. Their home, which his wife called “La Fourmiliere” [The Ants’ Nest], is where he lived productively his final twenty-eight years. In 1908, on the occasion of their 25th wedding anniversary, the Forels celebrated by journeying to Algeria, Tunis, Cairo, Carthage, and Italy (Forel 264-270). Upon their return to Yvorne, Forel set out again on lecture tours throughout Europe, the Balkans, Greece and



“The Ants’ Nest,” Forel’s last home, in Yvorne/Aigle, Switzerland 1903-1931
Source: Sheila Banani photo.

Turkey, visiting organizations for the support of abstinence and helping form Leagues of Youth. Upon his return to Switzerland, he celebrated the marriage [1910] of his daughter Martha to Dr. Arthur Brauns. It is from this couple, ten years later, that Forel learns of the Bahá'í Faith.

The end of July 1910 Forel endured the sudden and tragic death by embolism of the pulmonary artery of his first son, Edouard, who had just passed his examination in medicine and was engaged to be married (Forel 280-281). Disheartened at his loss, he nevertheless continued on lecture tours throughout Europe speaking on behalf of the International Order for Ethics and Culture on such subjects as eugenics, heredity, instinct and intelligence, morality in men and animals, heredity and progress in married and sexual life, social and hygienic requirements of the twentieth century. He expressed the hope to "gradually build up and firmly establish the new agnostic ethic, the religion of social welfare" (Forel 283).

Forel had also been studying the new ideas of psychoanalysis advanced by Sigmund Freud [1856-1939] who had written a review of Forel's *Der Hypnotismus* book when it was first published [1889], but he absolutely rejected Freud's "exaggerations in respect of infantile sexuality, dream-interpretation, and the like." (Forel 284)

Longing to see the tropics in another part of the world [Africa, Madagascar, the Indian Ocean] and possibly travel back by way of Japan and Singapore, studying ants wherever he would go, Forel made preparations to be gone about one year [from August 1912-1913]. He had even written his Will [which is included in his autobiography by the publisher in the German and English editions, but not the French which was the language in which he wrote his Will]. But on May 17, 1912, as he began to dictate something to his secretary, he was conscious of a tingling and numbness in his right arm and he could not find the right words to express himself. He thought he might have had a slight stroke but a doctor friend examined him and said it was just due to excessive fatigue. However the symptoms continued, his speech became indistinct and he fumbled for phrases. Within days he was paralyzed on his right side. Now he was certain that it had been a stroke and that he would have to give up his journey to the tropics. He gradually trained his left hand to do many things. In the autumn of 1912 he began to write his memoirs, using his wife's journal since she had kept an almost daily diary, and continued working on these memoirs until 1916 when he put them aside for awhile. With his son-in-law Arthur Brauns he went to Zurich in September for the session of the International Union for Medical Psychology and Psychotherapy where he was obliged to accept the Presidency in spite of his compromised health (Forel 290-295).

He eventually regained sufficient dexterity to be able to prune his peach trees and do other gardening at home as rumors of war became more threatening in Europe. In May 1914 he had written an article at the request of the Hamburg *Allgemeiner Beobachter* concerning the idea of a "United States of Europe" saying he was not in favor of confining the League of Nations to Europe since he believed it should include the whole world (Forel 299). As war approached, his eldest daughter Inez married and moved to Canada, his remaining son Oskar went with his Alpine regiment to the Swiss-Italian frontier, and his son-in-law Arthur Brauns left in August for Germany where he was appointed as an army surgeon in an auxiliary hospital. In Yverne the men had to join the frontier garrison. Forel and his remaining family organized a crèche for infants and young children so the mothers could replace their husbands in work on the land. He also began writing pacifist articles which appeared in various periodicals, in both French and German, and some were issued in pamphlet form in 1915 on the subject *Les Etats-Unis de la Terre* [*"The United States of the World"*] (Forel 303). He expressed this view in his memoirs: "The truth is that in the interest of the German people, whom I love and esteem, I cannot too strongly condemn German feudalism and the militarism and megalomania of the Pan-Germans. On the other hand, in France, and even in my own country [Switzerland], I was often regarded as a friend of Germany, and, indeed, suspected of secret Pan-Germanism.... In 1914, and again until 1918, I kept my pacifist correspondence in special drawers in my library.... Far more significant for me were the considered writings of really eminent minds, conceived in the neutral sense of an international reconciliation and a lasting inter-State peace. These I arranged in a drawer of their own in my library. My own ideas in respect of the whole problem were recorded in [Forel's pamphlet] 'The United States of the World'" (Forel 305).

The biologist Professor Ernst Haeckel [1834-1919], in his 70's by 1906, had formed the German Monist League along with a board which included Forel. The Monist League argued for "biosocial reform" and was an expression of Haeckel's "social Darwinism" views. Its philosophy claimed that, on scientific grounds, man was merely a part of nature with no special transcendent qualities. At the same time, German social Darwinists claimed Germans were members of a "biologically superior community," advancing some of the ideas that were to become part of the core assumptions of national socialism.³ It is interesting to note that in 1933, when Hitler became chancellor of Germany, the Monist League was disbanded.

Views on "racial purity" spread worldwide. The eugenics movement affected even California when, in 1909, it became the third state to legalize the sterilization of the feeble-minded and insane. Eugenics sterilization was in the mainstream of science and politics and upheld

by the U.S. Supreme Court. Eventually, more than 30 states with such laws sterilized about 60,000 — a third of them in California, which finally repealed its law in 1979.⁴

But Forel disagreed with some of Haeckel's views. He wrote an "open letter" in 1914 to Haeckel in Jena, the French version of which was published in the *Journal de Geneve*, criticizing Haeckel's essay on "World War and Natural History" which he had sent to Forel in which Haeckel had accused foreign countries of misrepresenting the German Army as a "horde of barbarians and incendiaries." Forel reminded Haeckel that he had written in the *Monistische Jahrhundert* for November 13, 1914 that it would be "highly desirable for the future of Germany, and a federated Continental Europe, to besiege London, to divide Belgium between Germany and Holland, and to give Germany the Congo Free State, a great part of the British Colonies, the north-eastern departments of France, and the Baltic provinces of Russia. To this you [Haeckel] add that Poland should be amalgamated with Austro-Hungary.... and your colleagues demand that the Emperor of Germany shall be the President of the future United States of Europe, and that the military security of this federation of States shall be entrusted to Germany.... If these assertions have any reality, then all foreign countries, and even our little Switzerland, will be compelled to defend themselves against your schemes of hegemony to the last drop of their blood" (Forel 303-304). Haeckel did not reply to Forel.

Shortly after Forel became a Bahá'í [1920], the U.S. Bahá'í educator Stanwood Cobb and his wife, Nayam, visited the Forel home in Yvorne which he records in an article on Forel published in The Bahá'í Magazine of September 1924: "After a most interesting tour of his library, ... we noted the pictures of Goethe, Haeckel, and Darwin, favorites of Forel (though he told me he found Haeckel much too



Arthur and Martha Brauns-Forel, Forel's daughter and son-in-law, from whom he first learned of the Bahá'í Faith in 1920. Arthur died in 1925 in a canoe accident. Martha became one of the pillars of the German Bahá'í community under the Nazi regime, when the Bahá'í Faith was outlawed.

Source: Vader, between pages 22-23

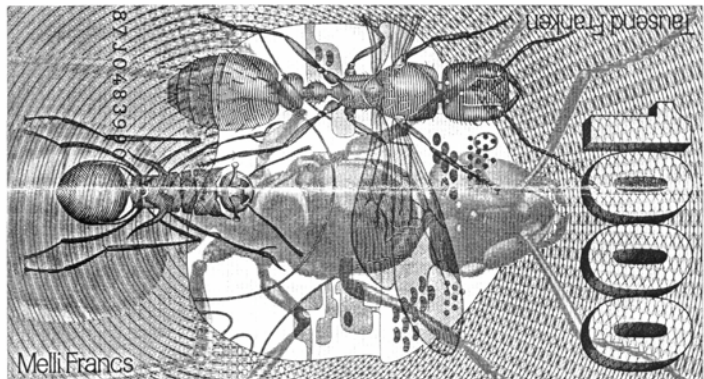
dogmatic, contrasting unfavorably with the modesty of Darwin)...”⁵

When I visited Switzerland and Forel’s home in Yverne in 1990 and again in 1991, Auguste Forel’s picture was imprinted on the one-thousand Franc banknote of Switzerland and it had been in circulation for a few years. His portrait had also been on a Swiss postage stamp issued in 1971. However, in 1997 a Swiss Citizens Commission on Human Rights (CCHR Switzerland) claimed credit that it had “exposed how the face of the 1,000 Swiss Franc bill was adorned by one of the founders of the ideology that spawned Nazism — Swiss psychiatrist August Forel” and that eight months later Forel’s face was removed from the currency.⁶



Swiss National Bank
1000-franc note,
obverse and reverse

Source: Iraj Ayman
photocopy of
original bank note



During World War I Forel continually supported anti-war efforts and movements, even attending international peace organizations formed in The Hague. On May 1, 1916 he wrote an appeal stating, “I believe only an international Socialist revolution can help us.... The human race must kill the three dragons that are strangling it: Capitalism, Militarism, and Alcoholism, or it will perish, the victim of all three.... But by overcoming these, by the eugenic mating of the best, the sterilization of the worst, and the help of social education

and the training of a well-disciplined, industrious Peace Army of all men and women ... we may gradually begin a steady ascent to social welfare on the basis of a supra-national peace.... Yet in vain I seek to light the lantern of Diogenes, and with it enlighten the rulers of Europe and America; so far I can find no man among them. Perhaps one will come even yet.” And in July 1916 he resolved to become an active Socialist (Forel 313-315).

Switzerland suffered during the war years and the Forel family, with rationing, was unable to adequately feed and warm themselves. Forel’s memoir recites that his wife even boiled earthworms for a meal and that the price of coal forced them to give up central heating and to content themselves with their fireplace during the winter of 1918-1919 (Forel 317). At this time the Russian Legation in Bern informed him that he had been appointed a member of the new Academy of the Russian Soviet, but he had already heard of the “misdeeds of the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat” so he sent a letter to the Russian Legation declining the appointment “unless the deeds of violence of which I spoke ceased immediately.” He never received a reply and later heard the Russian Legation was expelled by the Swiss government (Forel 322-323).

Forel’s memoir, *Out of My Life and Work*, closes in 1920, eleven years before his death July 27, 1931 and cremation in Lausanne on July 29, 1931. His son, Oskar, wrote in August 1934 in an Epilogue to his father’s autobiography, “August Forel left the publication of his memoirs to Herr Ernst Reinhardt, publisher, of Munich, since he wished to make sure that his own family would not be involved in their publication.... [T]he editor, with the permission of August Forel’s widow, has greatly abridged it....” Forel himself wrote, “I have made so many friends and enemies that I have felt afraid that my obituary would be tendentious in one sense or another. For this reason I preferred to write my own memoirs.... Many readers will take offence at my opinions, and this I sincerely regret. But to tell the truth when it must be told, and yet hurt no one’s feelings, is an art which is beyond my capacities, and I cannot get out of my own skin, nor do I wish to ...” (Forel Preface).

He wrote his personal “Testament” in the year 1912 which he states in his memoir will be read by his son [Oskar] “as my own funeral oration, during the cremation of my body” (Forel 332). [note: Bahá’í law stipulates burial, not cremation, although Forel may have been unaware of this law]. When Forel became a Bahá’í he added a Codicil in August 1921 to his Will which was also read at his funeral before hundreds of colleagues and admirers and it was included by the editor in his memoir. It is this important document which states his Bahá’í belief, “Our children should not be discouraged; they should, on the

contrary, take advantage of the present world-chaos, by helping in the difficult building of an ennobled and supranational human fabric on the basis of a universal League of Peoples. In the year 1920, at Karlsruhe, I first made acquaintance with the supraconfessional world-religion of the Bahá'í, founded in the East seventy [sic] years ago by the Persian Bahá'u'lláh. It is the true religion of the welfare of human society, it has neither priests nor dogmas, and it binds together all the human beings who inhabit this little globe. I have become a Bahá'í. May this religion continue and be crowned with success; this is my most ardent wish.... I am dying – I have died – in peace, desiring for my ashes nothing better than the eternal rest, the 'Nirvana,' which awaits them.... My ashes are sleeping the sleep of death. Remember this, and think of me only with a quiet and cheerful mind, as you think of my ants, my books, or the old walnut-trees in the garden.... We dead can do no more to alter the past; you living can give the future a different form. Courage, then, and to work!" (Forel 341-343)

Dr. John Paul Vader wrote a valuable monograph (drawn from his dissertation) published as *For the Good of Mankind: August Forel and the Bahá'í Faith* [1984] which covers specifically those years following the writing of Forel's memoir [1920-1931] after he became a Bahá'í. A summary of Vader's work would make this essay too long but, for a more complete view of Forel's life, Vader's book is recommended. As Vader states, "It is theoretically possible for Forel to have heard about the Bahá'í Faith before the winter of 1920-21.... Forel himself, however, clearly dates his first meeting with these teachings to the winter months of 1920-21 which he spent at the home of his daughter and son-in-law, Martha and Arthur Brauns-Forel." Dr. Arthur Brauns had opened his psychiatric clinic in Karlsruhe and, in 1920, both he and his wife joined the Bahá'í Faith.⁷ Before continuing with August Forel's last years of life, when he was a Bahá'í, let me conclude the story of the Brauns family since it is through them the Faith is carried on today by the Forel family.

On September 1, 1925, Forel's 77th birthday, tragically Arthur Brauns was drowned in a canoe accident on the Rhone river, leaving Martha a young widow with five children. Martha Brauns-Forel became the center of the Bahá'í group in Karlsruhe and later served as an elected member of the Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly of Germany. During World War II she suffered greatly, both personally [her youngest son died on the Eastern Front and her eldest son was seriously injured] and as part of the German Bahá'í community during the eight-year suspension of Bahá'í activity in Germany [1937-1945]. She died at the age of 60 in August 1948.⁸ In May 2000, the Karlsruhe Bahá'í community celebrated their 80th anniversary which included an internet website review of their Bahá'í history from its beginnings with the activities of Dr. Arthur and Martha Brauns-

Forel.⁹ The review states: “Marta Brauns experienced significant difficulties during the Nazi regime. Shortly after the Nazis came to power, it became apparent that Bahá’ís would be targets of hostilities due to their global world views as well as their contacts with people from all over the world. In 1937 Germany, Himmler outlawed the Bahá’í religion. Marta Brauns-Forel was accused of participating in the Bahá’í cause and being in contact with Jews and foreigners. She was treated badly and insulted by the Gestapo. She wrote the following to one of her sons: ‘My dear, dear child! It has happened more than once in my life that I thought this must have been the most difficult thing that could ever happen to me: August 1, 1914 [the beginning of World War I], September 1, 1925 [Arthur Brauns’ death] ... but once again, fate has brought me days filled with horror and dismay, causing me to fear for my own sanity.... I have been to the Secret State-Police four days in a row now, and I thank God that you have no idea what that really means.... The Gestapo has taken everything. All letters and addresses ... no books, not a single page, no prayer book, not a single one of those framed Golden Words.”¹⁰

Soon after Arthur and Martha Brauns had become Bahá’ís in Karlsruhe, Forel sent ‘Abdu’l-Bahá a letter dated 28 December 1920, in which he explained, “For my part, I am a monist, in the following sense: I am convinced that the functionings of the brain and of the human mind (or soul) are simply an inseparable whole. It follows that I cannot believe that the individual soul survives after the brain has died.... In metaphysical matters, on the other hand, I declare myself a complete agnostic, like the philosopher Socrates or the great naturalist Darwin, which means that ‘God’ for me is nothing but the Essence of the Universe, presumably absolute, but *for man absolutely unknowable*.... Despite all my admiration for your human principles, I must confess that I do not understand your ‘Divine’ principles. This, then, is my question: May I, *yes* or *no*, belong to the Bahá’í Faith, with the agnosticism I have mentioned above, without deceiving myself and others?” (Vader 14-15)

Forel’s fascinating letter, quite fully describing his beliefs, activities, and Bahá’í literature he had read apparently was received in Haifa but not responded to by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá until 21 September 1921 [among the last Tablets composed before ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s death 28 November 1921]. His Tablet to August Forel,¹¹ known now to Bahá’ís as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s proof of God’s existence, was not received by Forel in Switzerland until March 1922, more than one year after Forel had written to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and one year after Forel had already decided to consider himself a Bahá’í.¹²

Some explanation is helpful to understand why there were delays in the response to correspondence between Forel and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Forel's letter¹³ needed to be translated in Haifa to receive 'Abdu'l-Bahá's considered answer and this was during the last few months of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's busy life. Then, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet was written, it was decided in Haifa to have it translated into English and French for wider distribution to Bahá'ís worldwide which is explained in the cover letter written by Shoghi Effendi, dated 27 February 1922 Haifa, Palestine and sent with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet to Forel. In Shoghi Effendi's letter he tells Forel that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sudden passing, "has plunged us all in profound grief and added heavily to our preoccupations and responsibilities. Happily, however, the full answer to your [Forel's] epistle had been written, and signed by him ['Abdu'l-Bahá] many days before his passing ..." (Vader 18-19)

This essay will not include an analysis of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's famous Tablet to Forel but, for the purpose of this work, it is important to say what Forel responded to Shoghi Effendi when he wrote back on Sunday, 19 March 1922: "... Of course I empower you to publish the long and interesting answer which 'Abdu'l-Bahá took the trouble to give me. Out of love for truth I must tell you, however, that I stray from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's opinion on one point although at heart I am a follower of the twelve Bahá'í principles ... the soul dies with the brain, and I cannot believe that it lives on after the individual has died.... The *short* and *simple* question which I ask you please to answer concisely, in place of your late lamented Grandfather, is this: 'May I, *yes* or *no*, consider myself a Bahá'í, *without being a hypocrite* after the confession of faith I have just made? ... I would like to be a Bahá'í without misunderstanding and without hypocrisy, a 'leftist' Bahá'í if you like, but with the same rights as are enjoyed by the rightists. I wanted to ask 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself [Forel seems to have forgotten that he did ask 'Abdu'l-Bahá this very same question in his 28 December 1920 letter], but it is too late. This is why I ask you to answer in his place ..." (Vader 19-21) Vader reports in his book that there is no evidence in Forel's papers of a direct response by Shoghi Effendi to this letter, though Forel said he corresponded often with Shoghi Effendi, since tragically much of Forel's correspondence and possessions were disposed of after his death. Nevertheless, Forel undoubtedly considered himself a Bahá'í and continued to identify himself as one in his letters and publications from 1921 until his death in 1931.

After his declaration of Faith he had contact with several prominent Bahá'ís including visits from Hippolyte Dreyfus, Stanwood Cobb and his wife, Consul and Mrs. Schwarz, Mr. and Mrs. Mountfort Mills and Miss Martha Root (Vader 28-29). Forel founded the "Bahá'í group" in Lausanne in May 1922.

He immediately set himself to teaching and defending the Faith, particularly on behalf of the persecuted Iranian Bahá'ís in the mid-1920's, to influence European public opinion. He audaciously wrote of these persecutions to the French Foreign Minister Edouard Herriot [10 April 1925]; to the *Neue Freie Presse* of Vienna [26 April 1925] and other newspapers; and to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations Sir Eric Drummond [12 May 1926] from whom he received a disappointing, but expected, response stating the League of Nations was powerless to help since Persia had not accepted an international agreement for the protection of minorities. When all members of the Local Bahá'í Assembly of Constantinople were on trial on charges of subversion, Forel wrote to Mustapha Kamal Pasha [Ataturk] in Ankara on 18 November 1927. In this letter he advised Ataturk, "... if you were to declare the Bahá'í Faith as an official religion of Turkey, *in addition to* Islam, you would make a great step towards progress and would give an example to all of Europe and even to all the nations of the world!" The trial of the Bahá'ís did have a favorable outcome (Vader 53-59).

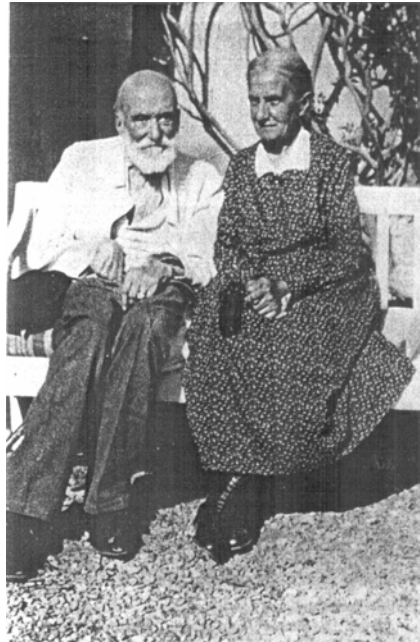
Among the most well known of his articles written for and published in Bahá'í sources is "World Vision of a Savant," first published in *Star of the West* in February 1928 and included in *The Bahá'í World*, Volume III, 1928-1930. In this article, Forel shares his "scientific" views on human behavior which reflect the racist understandings and attitudes of that time: "... one makes a pretext that there are differences in races; but if one excepts those races, altogether inferior, with a lighter cerebrum (according to Wedda about eight hundred or eight hundred and fifty grams instead of one thousand) it is a fundamental error.... There are several conditions of utmost importance which Bahá'ís ought to meet if they wish to remain scientific.... They should refrain from metaphysics, from seeking to know the Unknowable; and should occupy themselves wholly with the social good of humanity here on earth.... Our duty as Bahá'ís is not only to speak and think of God, but to be active for the social good."¹⁴

Vader cogently reviews those areas of Forel's beliefs which diverge from Bahá'í belief as understood today. These include Forel's concept of God, in which he considered himself agnostic, monist, pantheist and unable to believe in a "personal" God, and his rejection of the immortality of the soul after death. Forel also was outspoken in his political views, defining himself as a "leftist" and with anti-capitalistic views, which he incorporated in a listing of 12 principles entitled "Principles of the Bahá'ís" and published in *Sonne der Wahrheit*, the German contemporary official Bahá'í magazine. The final area of divergence from Bahá'í beliefs was in his racist attitudes, no doubt influenced by anthropological views of his day (Vader 33-38). Forel also was among many well known individuals who signed the Anti-

Conscription Manifesto of 1926 which included Albert Einstein, M.K. Gandhi, Martin Buber, Bertrand Russell, Rabindranath Tagore, and H.G. Wells. The 1930 petition Against Conscription and the Military Training of Youth was signed by Forel, along with some of the others mentioned before, and also Jane Addams, Paul Birukoff and Valentin Bulgakoff (secretaries of Leo Tolstoy), John Dewey, Sigmund Freud, Thomas Mann, and Upton Sinclair among others.¹⁵

When Forel passed away, his Bahá'í daughter Martha Brauns-Forel informed Shoghi Effendi¹⁶ to which Shoghi Effendi's secretary, H. Rabbani, replied on Shoghi Effendi's behalf dated 10 September 1931: "... However great the contradictions in Dr. Forel's testament in regard to his attitude towards the Cause we cannot fail to recognize him as a Bahá'í who had but a *partial* glimpse of the Bahá'í Revelation. No one can claim that his knowledge of this Revelation is adequate, especially in the embryonic stage of its development. Dr. Forel was sincere in his convictions but like every human being his comprehension was limited and this was not in his power to change..." (Vader 40)

The year of Forel's death, four months later, Shoghi Effendi penned his magnificent letter to the Bahá'ís of the world ["The Goal of a New World Order," November 28, 1931] in which he ponders the decade since 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing [1921-1931], the same last decade of Forel's life as a Bahá'í. Shoghi Effendi laid before us a description of a war-weary world, the signs of impending chaos, the impotence of statemanship, the guiding principles of world order, and the principle of oneness, the "pivot" round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve. The call for a federation of mankind, a deep wish of August Forel, would, Shoghi Effendi wrote, require "the fire of ordeal." Both a call, and a warning, which the world ignores at its peril.



'My beloved Emma, my faithful, kind and devoted comrade, the unfailing of sunshine in my life ... bestowed upon me ... the most precious things in life: love and optimism.'

Source: Vader, between pages 60-1

Appendix: Significant dates of events and correspondence of August Forel and 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Birth & Death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: May 23, 1844 – November 28, 1921

Birth & Death of August Forel: September 1, 1848 – July 27, 1931

December 28, 1920: Forel wrote an inquiry letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá asking if he could be considered a Bahá'í after explaining his "agnostic views."

September 21, 1921: Two months before His passing, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote His famous Tablet to Forel on the existence of God. The original Persian text was then published in Cairo in 1922. Forel did not receive 'Abdu'l-Bahá's answer (Tablet) sent from Haifa until the end of February 1922.

February 27, 1922: Date of the cover letter to Forel from the Guardian Shoghi Effendi written from Haifa, as the "grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá," explaining the delay in sending 'Abdu'l-Bahá's answer (Tablet) to Forel (various translations were being made). Following 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing, Shoghi Effendi had arrived in Haifa on December 29, 1921 from England. The Guardian then left Haifa on April 5, 1922 for rest and recuperation in Europe and was gone for 8 months, returning December 15, 1922. He had left his Great Aunt Bahiyyih Khanum, the Greatest Holy Leaf, and an "assembly" of 9 persons in charge during his absence.

March 19, 1922: Forel acknowledges receipt of Shoghi Effendi's letter and the various translations (into English and French) of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet to Forel, 15 months after Forel's original inquiry to 'Abdu'l-Bahá asking whether he [Forel], could consider himself a Bahá'í "without being a hypocrite." No specific answer to Forel's acknowledgment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet was sent from Shoghi Effendi, but he had left Haifa (see above) on April 5, 1922 to be gone 8 months. Very little of the correspondence remains in Forel's papers between Shoghi Effendi and Forel because of disposal by Forel's heirs.

Forel states, in a Codicil added in August 1921 to his original Will and Testament, which he had written between 1912, following a stroke, until 1924, that he learned of the Bahá'í Faith in Karlsruhe in 1920. The Codicil was read, at Forel's instruction, by his son Oscar at the ceremony on July 29, 1931 following Forel's cremation. This is the one reference of his Bahá'í beliefs left in his writings which survives today:

At Karlsruhe, in 1920, I first came to know of the supraconfessional world religion of the Bahá'ís, founded in the East more than 75 years ago [this was written in 1921] by the Persian Bahá'u'lláh. This is the true religion of human social good, without dogmas or priests, uniting all men on this small terrestrial globe of ours. I have become a Bahá'í.

May this religion live and prosper for the good of mankind;
this is my most ardent wish.

NOTES

¹ August Forel, *Out of My Life and Work*, translated by Bernard Miall (New York: W.W. Norton, 1937) 20. Hereafter referred to in text as (Forel with page number reference).

² Santiago Ramon y Cajal Biography, Official website of The Nobel Foundation, last modified June 27, 2003.

³ George J. Stein, "Biological Science and the Roots of Nazism: The Promotion of racist doctrines in the name of science," *American Scientist*, January-February 1988, 76, 50-58.

⁴ Mike Anton, "Forced Sterilization Once Seen as Path to a Better World," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 2003, A-1, A-18.

⁵ Stanwood Cobb, "Man and the Ant," *The Bahá'í Magazine*, 15:6 (September 1924): 166-170.

⁶ <http://www.cchr.org>.

⁷ John Paul Vader. *For The Good of Mankind: August Forel and the Bahá'í Faith*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1984, 13. Hereafter referred to in text as (Vader with page number reference).

⁸ "In Memoriam: Marta Brauns-Forel 1888-1948," BW Vol. XI, 1946-1950, 481-483.

⁹ <http://www.bahai.de/karlsruhe/80jahre.html>: translated from the German by Houshang Banani, August 2003.

¹⁰ *ibid*.

¹¹ First English translation by Dr. Zia Baghdadi published in SW 13:8 (November 1922): 195-202; another English translation was published in BW XV (1968-1973): 37-43.

¹² Forel had added the Codicil to his Will in August 1921 declaring himself a Bahá'í.

¹³ Forel's letter was dated 28 December 1920 although mistakenly referred to in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet as dated 28 July 1920.

¹⁴ August Forel, "The World Vision of a Savant," BW III (1928-1930): 286-287.

¹⁵ <http://www.peace.ca>

¹⁶ Her letter was dated 22 August 1931.

A Bahá'í Understanding of Reincarnation in Relation to the World's Faiths

Sateh Bayat and Vafa Bayat

Abstract

Belief in reincarnation, that is, the return of man's spirit or some aspect of his reality to the material world after death, has risen from 21 to 25% in the U.S. over the past decade. (Gallup 2001) Believers in this concept are now found amongst the adherents of most religions and even among non-religionists.

Given the overwhelming impact that this ideology can have on the lives and beliefs of people and society, we will briefly explore this concept in various Sacred Texts and then offer the perspective of the Bahá'í Writings.

We will show in this essay that the Bahá'í Faith does not uphold reincarnationist belief as literally understood. It accepts the return of attributes and qualities, yet maintains that the essence or the reality of things cannot be made to return. This essay seeks to see meaning and purpose coming from all those who have adopted reincarnationism and will demonstrate a far-reaching belief system that acknowledges God's love for man and his companionship as the purpose behind his creation. Man's physical birth along with the creation of his spirit are the first steps in his spiritual progress towards the acquisition of virtues and noble qualities. Thus, the Bahá'í Faith also changes man's age-long motivation for doing good from anticipation of heaven vs. hell to continuous, uplifting spiritual progress. It describes man's soul and its relationship to the physical body. It further describes man's spirit as being God's supreme talisman, traversing the innumerable spiritual worlds, each full of unconditional love and boundless grace, towards the court of His Presence. He leaves behind the world of dust, limitations, weaknesses, and darkness for the world of light, freedom and perfection, just as he left the embryonic womb of limitations for the material world of colors, sounds and fragrances.

Thus, there remains no reason for man's spirit to return to this netherworld and become attached to something else, be it plant, animal or even another human body. After its severance from the human body, the human spirit, with its acquired virtues and God's

unique gift of free will, will soar and journey through the expanse of never-ending spiritual worlds, gaining an ever-greater measure of bounties and grace, and becoming ever worthier of His companionship.

Introduction

There is one God, and He has been guiding mankind since his inception through Divine Messengers including Zoroaster, Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Christ, Muḥammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Today is the day of a new Revelation, which brings for the first time in history all of the world's people together, a Message brought by His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh. He taught that the Earth is but one country and mankind its citizens, and that we should consort with the world's peoples in the utmost amity and understanding, and seek to remove the barriers between them, so that the Earth will become like Heaven.

As members of this human family, we should not force our views on anyone; in fact, unless we have an audience, we shouldn't even express our views. In our dealings with others, we must not deride, criticize, or oppose anyone's view, but must, if they are interested, explain our understanding in a loving manner. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, we read:

O friends, consort with all the people of the world with joy and fragrance. If there be to you a word or essence whereof others than you are devoid, communicate it and show it forth in the language of affection and kindness: if it be received and be effective the object is attained, and if not leave it to him, and with regard to him deal not harshly but pray. The language of kindness is the lodestone of hearts and the food of the soul; it stands in the relation of ideas to words, and is as a horizon for the shining of the Sun of Wisdom and Knowledge. (TN 43)

Nevertheless, our world-encompassing beliefs that solve the long-held dilemmas, cure the world's ailments, and re-awaken mankind's spirituality and hope are immensely valuable and pertinent and as they come to the attention of the masses, have already begun to shake the world. One of those world-shaking truths that Bahá'u'lláh has revealed is His unveiling and clarification of the nature of life and the soul itself and the progress of our souls through the worlds of God after our physical death, ever advancing and ever progressing. In relation to this subject, in recent years, we have witnessed a great deal of interest, especially in the West, in the principle of reincarnation. Belief in reincarnation, that is, the return of man's spirit or some aspects of his reality to the material world

after death, is estimated to be as high as 25% or higher in the United States, with another 20% unsure. (Gallup 2001) Believers in this concept are now found amongst the adherents of most religions and even among non-religionists. We will attempt to describe this belief system and how it originated, as well as discuss it in relation to what the Bahá'í Writings say about it.

According to the American Heritage Dictionary, “reincarnation” or “samsara”, as it is also known, is defined as “the eternal cycle of birth, suffering, death, and rebirth”, in which every time someone dies, their soul returns clothed with a new body. Another related idea is that of “transmigration” or “metempsychosis”, in which the soul passes into another body, be it human or animal, at the time of death. The vast majority of believers in these ideas come from the Hindu and Buddhist Faiths. Hindus believe that the soul progresses through a cycle of successive lives, in which each reincarnation is determined by how the previous life was lived, i.e., if one's previous life was a dishonest and dishonorable one, one's present incarnation will be far more unpleasant — you reap what you sow. Fate, then, is a direct result of one's previous actions, and this doctrine is known as karma. Once these karmas have been resolved, one reaches the stage of Nirvana or Moksha, in which a state of freedom from samsara is attained, and one is then absorbed into the divine. Later we will discuss why these ideas have so much appeal to people, and also discover that the actual statements and Teachings of Krishna and all of the other Great Teachers are in perfect accord with the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, as they should be since Bahá'u'lláh is the return of their Divine Essences, and discuss the soul in what can only be a symbolic way — to describe the existence of life after this physical life. It is only much later that Hindu beliefs began to diverge from this spiritual understanding of the afterlife to one in which people are reincarnated on Earth into different bodies.

In order to proceed, we should first summarize the two major “reincarnation” belief systems. The first has only a belief in the existence of this Earth — it has no conception of future worlds of God, so to speak. Through reincarnation, we continue returning to this world and paying for our former misdeeds or being rewarded for good behavior. Hell and heaven therefore exist on and solely on this earthly plane. The second includes an affirmation in the existence of other worlds, and reincarnation in this one is simply a means to refine and perfect our soul until it has acquired enough perfections to continue to the next world. Man is thus composed of both matter and spirit, or “atman”. To most Hindus, Atman is considered as an entity without any attributes including memory, however somehow it manages to keep an account of Karma for an individual. This makes

atman an impersonal spirit of an individual that some Hindus believe to be involved in the process of re-incarnation.

I. Reincarnation and Hinduism

Belief in “Hinduism”, literally meaning the “Hind” or “Indian” Faith and introduced into the world’s vocabulary by the British in about 1829, is held by almost a sixth of the world’s population. It is estimated to have originated 3000 or more years ago, and indications are that part of it may have been introduced to India over many centuries by the Aryan people, tribes of whom settled in places as far apart as India, Iran, and Europe. Hinduism is a vast collection of beliefs and ideas, stories, traditions, and practices that have developed and evolved over several millennia by innumerable and sometimes well-separated people, and thus cannot easily be understood in its entirety, but certain of its texts and teachings are fairly universally accepted, and we will now examine them in relation to the subject of “reincarnation”. Hindus believe in a Universal Soul they call “Brahman”, Who is the Creator, Preserver and Transformer of everything. They also recognize different aspects of Brahman in the form of numerous deities including, for instance, Rama Vishnu, Shiva and Krishna.

Although transmigration, or the migration of the soul from one body to another at death, is a fundamental teaching of Hinduism and has a firm hold on the mind of others in India including Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs, the origin of the doctrine of transmigration is one of the most difficult problems of Indian philosophy, for the theory of reincarnation (rebirth) does not appear in the Vedas. The Rig Veda, the first book of the Vedas (1200 BC), speaks of death and immortality, rather than rebirth. Speaking of the Creator, the poet says,

Whose shadow is immortality and death. (10.121.2)

and prays:

As from its stem the cucumber, so may I be released from death, not reft of immortality. (7.59.12)

The Rig Veda offers various images of a vague but pleasant life after death. A funeral hymn addresses the dead man:

Go forth, go forth upon the ancient pathways whereon our sires of old have gone before us. 'Mere shalt thou look on both the Kings enjoying their sacred food, God Varuna and Yama. Meet Yama, meet the Fathers, meet the merit of free or ordered acts, in highest heaven. Leave sin and evil, seek

anew thy dwelling, and bright with glory wear another body. (10.14.7-8)

Life in the reign of Yama, together with the fathers with a glorious body, is the desire and hope of the Vedic man. Another hymn is addressed to the funeral fire, Agni:

Burn him not up, nor quite consume him, Agni: let not his body or his skin be scattered. O Jatavedas, when thou hast matured him, then send him on his way unto the Fathers. (10.16.1)

This hymn expresses the desire and hope that, after the purification through fire, Agni, the dead person receives his body back, made perfect, so as to enjoy the life of the fathers. Other hymns speak to the dead man, of the final dispersal of his old body:

The Sun receive thine eye, the Wind thy spirit; go, as thy merit is, to earth or heaven. Go, if it be thy lot, unto the waters; go, make thine home in plants with all thy members. (10.18.10-11)

And in a hymn addressed to the Earth, we read:

Betake thee to the lap of Earth the Mother, of Earth far-spreading, very kind and gracious. Young Dame, wool-soft unto the guerdon giver, may she preserve thee from Destruction's bosom. Heave thyself, Earth, nor press thee downward heavily: afford him easy access, gently tending him. Cover him, as a mother wraps her skirt about her child, O Earth. (10.18.10-11)

From these and other texts of the Rig Veda, it can be concluded that the original texts discuss death and immortality, and do not mention the idea of one's soul entering another body after death. We find various and diverse ways of considering death and the fate of man after his death, which seem to represent some sort of rebirth, consisting of the "putting on of a glorious body", receiving a purified body made perfect by Agni and living happily with the ancestors in the reign of the death, in the dispersion of the old body in cosmic elements, or in returning to the loving womb of Mother Earth. However, none of these texts speak explicitly that the dead man has to be reborn on the Earth in any form.

The texts of the Brahmanas (900 BC) also do not contain the doctrine of transmigration. In these texts too, the soul longs for the world of the fathers — for immortality, as in the Rig Veda. The problem here too is not that of reincarnation or rebirth, but that of death, which is far more explicitly feared: Death is evil, and the essence of evil is death. The central preoccupation of the Brahmanas,

is therefore, the fear of death and the obsessive search for rituals that can overcome it. Not only can the gods become immortal, but also the sacrificer, in fact, becomes immortal. As we are beginning to see, the addition of the idea of transmigration was a much later idea, not found anywhere in the original texts, and was created to remove people's great fear of death, for similar to those in the Middle East, it was yet too early in mankind's spiritual history to comprehend the existence of a spiritual world completely removed from this physical world, and so analogies similar to those used there of rivers of milk and honey, etc., were used to describe it.

Perhaps the earliest foreshadowing of the doctrine of transmigration is to be found in the Sathapatha Brahmana. This text, however, does not explicitly refer to transmigration. What the authors of the Brahmanas were searching for was not rebirth, but liberation from the inevitable problem of death, which is the greatest of all evils. What they feared was not life but death, "old age and death" (*janamrtyu*), and more precisely "recurring death" or "re-death" (*punarmrtyu*). They feared that in place of the desired immortality in the next world (of the Fathers), there would be renewed death, and, as a consequence, turned to many rites and ceremonies, including the Agnihotra, the Visuvant, the Naciketas fire, the piling of the fire, etc., in order to save them from suffering repeated deaths. What people could have perhaps realized was that the repeated death mentioned in their Holy Books referred to death in the next world, not in this — it applied to the Fathers. The idea that death is a birth (a passage to the next world) is not at all rare and the conception that death might there be repeated is a very natural one, i.e., a continuing progression from one spiritual world to another, as Bahá'u'lláh tells us occurs. This was misunderstood, unfortunately, and the idea of rebirth (transmigration) on the Earth was thus subsequently created in the Upanishads.

According to the Upanishads, rebirth or reincarnation of the souls can take place in a series of physical bodies (normally in human bodies but also in animals and even plants) or in a series of astral and preternatural bodies (sun, moon, planets, stars, angels or demons), depending on one's karma. The Kaushitaki Upanishad expresses it more clearly: "he is born again here as a worm, or as an insect, or as a fish, or as a bird, or as a lion, or as a boar, or as a serpent, or as a tiger, or as a man, or as something else in different places". (Kaushitaki Upanishad 1.2)

It is important to reiterate that nowhere in the Vedic Hymns can be found any mention of reincarnation — it was four hundred years later that the doctrine was possibly alluded to in the Brahmana writings, and two hundred years after that, beginning in the 7th Century BC, that the concept was actually stated in the Upanishads.

It should be noted however, that to some of the followers of the Hindu Faith some of the books of Upanishads that are actually explanations of the Vedic Hymns and are usually placed at the end of each Hymn are as old and/or as authentic as the Rig Veda Hymns themselves.

The Bhagavad-Gita, or “Song of the Lord”, is part of the sixth book of the Mahabharata, the world’s longest poem. Composed between 500 BC and 100 AD, the Mahabharata is an account of the wars of the house of Bharata. It is one of the most popular Hindu texts and has an important place within the Hindu tradition.

The Bhagavad-Gita in part consists of a dialogue between Prince Arjuna and Krishna, his charioteer, an incarnation of the supreme God, Vishnu. Topics such as the meaning of true self, renunciation of work, the true nature of karma, the true nature of God, and the definition of a true devotee are discussed. He explains that:

Just as the embodied soul passes from childhood to youth to old age, it also passes from one body to another. The undaunted person therefore is not deluded. (Bhagavad-Gita 2:13)

How very unfortunate that beautiful statements like this one by Krishna have been misunderstood and misinterpreted to support the idea of returning to this world.

At the time the Vedic Hymns were written, it was a widespread belief that man continues to exist after death as a whole person. There was an absolute distinction between man and deities that could not be traversed. Much can be understood of their beliefs on this subject through their funeral rites, in which the deceased were buried with food and clothes necessary in the afterlife. Since they believed in the preservation of personal identity, they would also incinerate the dead body along with that of the (living) wife and ox so that they could accompany them in the next life, a ritual that continued in parts of India until the British outlawed it.

In the Vedas, we read about how the deity Yama, the sovereign of the souls of the dead and the recipient of the offerings made by their families, provided divine justice, casting the wicked into an eternal dark prison that they could not escape from. It is valuable here to note how we as Bahá’ís may look at this idea. Bahá’u’lláh gives us innumerable titles for God, exemplified by the Merciful, the Judge, the Sovereign Ruler, the Lawgiver, the All-Knowing, and gives us prayers to read on behalf of our departed loved ones. He also tells us that should we lead wicked lives, when we die, we will be far separated from our Beloved; it will be as if we were in darkness, far away from the Light.

What death is more wretched than to flee from the Source of everlasting life? What fire is fiercer on the Day of Reckoning than that of remoteness from the divine Beauty and the celestial Glory? (GDM 35)

So, though at first glance, the story of Yama might seem foreign to us, we quickly realize in light of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh that it is simply another name for God. Contrast this however with the concept of reincarnation — designed to give hope that one can escape hell. In this type of order, one realizes how far removed the Divine becomes — in fact, we become obsessed with each of our lives on Earth and seem to forget about God altogether. How beautifully and clearly does Bahá'u'lláh tell us that though in the future worlds of God we are rewarded and punished, progress is still possible if we are so inclined, and forgiveness is abundant. Thus, with one fell swoop, Bahá'u'lláh removes the fear of hell that people have had for so long that has caused them to accept the idea of reincarnation, with all of the shackles that that acceptance entails.

Again, in the Bhagavad-Gita, one finds words and statements on the nature of the soul, as exemplified by the following:

Just as the sun illuminates the whole wide world, the Soul illuminates the whole body, O Bharata. (Bhagavad-Gita 13:34)

We also read of Krishna telling Arjuna,

The soul is never born nor does it die at any time. It has neither past nor future. It is unborn, ever existing, permanent and ancient. When the body is slain neither it is killed nor it kills. (Bhagavad-Gita 2:20)

How beautifully does Bahá'u'lláh reiterate these when He says:

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. (GWB 161)

The soul, thus, transcends the physical body; it is merely associated with it for a short time, as it gains the faculties and qualities it needs for life in those future worlds of God.

The Upanishads added to the Teachings of Krishna the idea of reincarnation. They constitute the first writings to move the place of one's "second life" from the heavenly realm to the earthly realm, and say that resolution of this never-ending cycle will only take place after one knows one's self. Later, in the Puranas, a simpler and more down-to-Earth set of writings, one finds a vast elaboration of this

idea, where specific destinies are determined by the specific sin performed in the previous life.

2. Reincarnation and Buddhism

Like Lord Krishna, Lord Buddha taught that mankind has a soul and that in order to approach God's court, so to speak, one must purify oneself from such things as anger, greed, lust, jealousy, and ignorance. In Buddha's Dhammapada, one reads the following verses on the subject:

Rouse thyself! Do not be idle! Follow the law of virtue! The virtuous rests in bliss in this world and in the next.
(Dhammapada 13:168)

Impurity Thou art now like a sear leaf, the messengers of death (Yama) have come near to thee; thou standest at the door of thy departure, and thou hast no provision for thy journey.

Make thyself an island, work hard, be wise! When thy impurities are blown away, and thou art free from guilt, thou wilt enter into the heavenly world of the elect (Ariya).

Thy life has come to an end, thou art come near to death (Yama), there is no resting-place for thee on the road, and thou hast no provision for thy journey.

Make thyself an island, work hard, be wise! When thy impurities are blown away, and thou art free from guilt, thou wilt not enter again into birth and decay.¹

As one reads the last verse, one can begin to see how someone intent on their own belief in reincarnation might see this potentially as evidence for it, but simply switch the punctuation marks after "wise" and "stain" respectively, that could easily have been misinterpreted in the translation, and one gets a very different picture — one that involves purging oneself of taint and stain, for one will not have the chance to be born and die in this world again. No original Writings and statements made by any Messenger of God ever taught reincarnation, it is the creation of people only. The foundations of religious truth are one reality. All the holy Manifestations of God have proclaimed and promulgated the same reality. They have summoned mankind to reality itself and reality is one.

Now let us look at the concept itself and why it is so detrimental to society — so different from the intentions of the Prophets who people claim support it. According to the reincarnationist view, if

someone knows that the suffering they have experienced during the course of their lives is caused by previous lives' misdeeds, they will accept them as just and strive to improve themselves, as opposed to those who do not believe this, and therefore do not improve themselves, only increasingly feel resentment for life and society's injustices. As such, they will rebel against their fate, becoming ever more jealous of others and full of hate towards the more privileged, their situation only becoming more and more grave. This view is exemplified, for instance, by the following quote from a Swami:

If the virtuous man who has not done any evil act in this birth suffers, this is due to some wrong act that he may have committed in his previous birth. He will have his compensation in his next birth. If the wicked man who daily does many evil actions apparently enjoys in this birth, this is due to some good Karma he must have done in his previous birth. He will have compensation in his next birth. He will suffer in the next birth. The law of compensation is inexorable and relentless.²

Objections to this idea abound, and show how the holding of this idea can cause so much suffering in its adherents. For instance, as long as suffering (or the reward for good deeds) can be experienced only at a personal level, and man ceases to exist as a person at physical death, it implies that another person, generated in another physical body, will actually bear the consequences dictated by the karma of the deceased person. The new person, too, will have no recollection of previous transgressions, and will be forced to deal with his new lot in life. In other words, one person sows and another one reaps, since no personal characteristics can be preserved from one incarnation of the impersonal self to the next. Another objection one can raise relates to how, in practice, it would result in an ever-increasing karmic debt, for it is supposed that the person who is living out the consequences of his karma should do it in a spirit of resignation and submission, but this ideal is far from reality. Instead of adopting a passive attitude concerning the hardships that have to be endured, man almost always reacts with indignation. Indeed, experience shows us that evil always generates more evil, and without divine guidance, a balance will never be reached and a vicious cycle ensues. One can easily see this in the many troubled parts of the world, which will never become truly peaceful without that change of heart that adherence to Bahá'u'lláh's Message brings. Another sad, unjust, and clearly not divinely ordained outcome of adherence to the idea of reincarnation is that the suffering of others is simply "their own fault", and that they are being equitably punished. Indeed, anyone who interferes in the unrolling of someone else's karma is gathering bad karma for themselves. Thus, adherence

might even lead to complacency and a total loss of compassion for the welfare of others. Last but not least, according to this doctrine, people are the instruments for the punishment of those with bad karma. Unless one were to do this in the most “disinterested” and “detached” manner — highly rare for someone causing someone else intense suffering, the punisher in the process is gaining bad karma for themselves too, and will in a future life be punished in turn. A vicious cycle as such can be seen in regard to a butcher returning to this world as a pig to be slaughtered. The pig has to be slaughtered as punishment for being a butcher, and this will have to be done by the new butcher, who will then be punished in the same way. The cycle cannot be broken by anything, for it is the required punishment. It is therefore completely contrary to the teaching of “ahimsa”, or “non-violence”.

3. Reincarnation and Judaism

In Jewish Scriptures there is no mention of reincarnation, but this has not prevented some of its scholars and their books from supporting it. Throughout the Cabalists' texts, for instance, in the Zohar, one finds statements referring to reincarnation.

The souls must reenter the absolute substance whence they have emerged. But to accomplish this, they must develop all the perfections, the germ of which is planted in them; and if they have not fulfilled this condition during one life, they must commence another, a third, and so forth, until they have acquired the condition which fits them for reunion with God. (Zohar, Vol. II:99)

In the Cabala one finds the story of Moses killing an Egyptian as the reincarnation of Abel avenging his slaying by his brother Cain. From a Bahá'í perspective, actions such as these by Messengers of God that at first glance seem like breaking the law, another example being the breaking of the Sabbath by His Holiness Jesus Christ, have nothing to do with reincarnation — They doeth what They willeth, and no one has the right to question Them. (cf. GDM 62) They made the Law, so They can break it. The idea of reincarnation appears again in the Jewish interpretation of God's judgment, as found in the books Berachot and Rosh Hashannah.

Perhaps in answer to those Jews who believed in reincarnation, Job, in the clearest fashion possible, categorically rejects it in the following verses:

As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall

return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more. (Job 7:9-10)

Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death. (Job 10:21)

But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up: So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep. (Job 14:10-12)

When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return. (Job 16:22)

4. Reincarnation and Christianity

The early Christians were also strongly influenced by the prevailing Greek views on reincarnation. Indeed, some statements attributed to Christ even allude to such an idea, but it should be strongly considered by Bahá'ís that those words might require a different interpretation in the light of the totality of Christ's teaching on the subject. And that those passages should be understood symbolically, for "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life". (2 Corinthians 3:6) Examples include the following:

Matthew 26:52: *"all who draw the sword will die by the sword"*

John 3:3: *"No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again"*

John 9:2: *"Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"*

James 3:6: *"the wheel of nature"*

Galatians 6:7: *"A man reaps what he sows"*

Revelation 13:10: *"If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed."*

As one would expect of a group of people who had only recently become Christians from a Greek reincarnationist background, some of the early Church leaders might have continued to support the idea. One, for instance, is believed by some to have been Origen (185-254 AD), the first leader of the early Orthodox Church, who was the first person after Paul to develop a set of teachings around the Teachings of Christ. According to some, Origen was one of the ardent defenders of pre-existence, the idea that the soul existed

before birth in heaven or in a previous life, is found in the Teachings of Moses and Christ.³ How could this possibly be true? It is surprising to some how incredibly prevalent was the idea of reincarnation in the early Christian world. It was even taught until the Fifth Ecumenical Congress of Constantinople in 543 AD, at which time it was removed officially from church doctrine. It is remarkable how, until then, people had held a belief (and some still do) that was rejected in their own Sacred Texts. In the New Testament, we find, for instance:

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. (Hebrews 9:27-8)

Most Christians today do not accept the idea of reincarnation, correctly realizing that it completely undermines the Teachings of Christ. For instance, it renders God's sovereignty over creation futile, transforming Him into a helpless spectator of the human tragedy. Now one can see how this contrasts with our understanding of the omnipotence and sovereignty of God Who does as He wills when He wills. Additionally, as also stated earlier, an extreme application of reincarnationist convictions would lead to the adoption of a detached and complacent stand towards crime, theft, lying, and other similar plagues, very different from the intentions and Teachings of the Messengers of God, Whose spiritual Teachings about mankind's behavior in this world — honesty, humility, obedience, justice, forgiveness, and selflessness to name but a few, have always remained the same, only their social teachings have changed. Furthermore, if we were to pay for our own sins through being reincarnated in this world, the need for Christ's redemptive sacrifice for mankind's sins would become a useless, perhaps even absurd accident of history. If one reads the words of Christ carefully, one cannot become other than convinced in the nonexistence of reincarnation, exemplified by the following. In His story of Lazarus the beggar and the rich man, He indicates that the rich man was unable to do anything about his fate and would suffer eternal torment. Had reincarnation been possible, he would have had a second chance, wouldn't he?⁴ These words are exemplary of this:

Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. (Matthew 18:8,)

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. (Matthew 25:41)

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (Matthew 25:46)

Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation. (Matthew 12:45)

5. Reincarnation and Islam

Even in Islam, one finds people who have misinterpreted the Words of the Holy Qur'án as indicative of the existence of reincarnation. It should again be reiterated that the Prophet Muḥammad categorically declared that the inner meaning of that Book would not be unsealed until the Last Days, i.e., the coming of Bahá'u'lláh.⁵ One such sometimes misunderstood statement of the Holy Qur'án is:

*Thou causest the Night to gain on the Day, and Thou causest the Day to gain on the Night; Thou bringest the Living out of the Dead, and thou bringest the Dead out of the Living; and Thou givest sustenance to whom Thou pleasest without measure.*⁶

But as we now understand, when the Qur'án is talking about coming to life, it is referring to spiritual life, not physical life, and is referring to the spiritual eyesight and hearing we gain when we recognize the Messenger of God for this day.

Indeed, some of the words of Rumí, a famous Sufi poet, have also been misinterpreted in this regard, one of the reasons why many modern Sufis still believe in the idea of reincarnation,

*I died as a mineral and became a plant, I died as a plant and rose to animal, I died as animal and I was man. Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?*⁷

It may be that these words were meant to be understood symbolically and not to be taken literally. He is talking of being spiritually like a mineral, discovering new senses, new understandings progressively until he became a man with all of the full faculties and awareness of His creator. Man was created to know and worship God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá similarly discusses the meanings of the vegetable, mineral, animal and human kingdoms — each representing a different degree of perfection, recognition, and love for the Creator.⁸

6. Reincarnation and the Bahá’í Faith

Reincarnation is a popular belief among many peoples. It has such popularity because people would like to believe that they will be given a second chance if they “blow it” in their first life. Due to lack of spiritual capacity humanity had in the past often misunderstood the concept of the spiritual worlds of God. Manifestations have often spoken about the soul but could not reveal its nature or its mysteries.

Christ states:

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. (John 16:12-13)

Similarly, in the Qur’án, it has been mentioned:

And they will ask thee of the Spirit. Say: The Spirit proceedeth at my Lord’s command: but of knowledge, only a little to you is given.⁹

The Bahá’í view on reincarnation

Statements in the Sacred Writings of the world’s Faiths have often been used to support the idea of reincarnation, but we have now been given the key to understanding those statements. In this section, the Bahá’í position on reincarnation will be stated, we will describe the creation of the soul, what the purpose is behind its creation, how it progresses in this world and all the worlds of God.

Regarding the belief in reincarnation, the Beloved Guardian writes:

No revelation from God has ever taught reincarnation; this is a man-made conception. (LG 536)

and explains further:

The Bahá’í view of ‘reincarnation’ is essentially different from the Hindu conception. The Bahá’ís 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. (LG 536)

The Beloved Universal House of Justice states:

It is clear from the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh about the nature of the soul and of life after death as published in 'Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh', that the Bahá'í position on this subject is wholly incompatible with the theory of reincarnation. (LG 536)

Why reincarnation is an impossibility

'Abdu'l-Bahá was asked on several occasions about reincarnation. It is very instructive to read what He said:

As to what thou hast written concerning "Reincarnation": Believing in reincarnation is one of the old tenets held by most nations and creeds, as well as by the Greek and Roman philosophers and wise men, the old Egyptians and the chief Assyrians. But all these sayings and superstitions are vanity in the sight of God. (BWF 391)

No logical arguments and proofs of this question are brought forward; they are only suppositions and inferences from conjectures, and not conclusive arguments. (SAQ 283)

We must use writings of the Prophets as our measurement. If Bahá'u'lláh 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. (LG 538)

In *Some Answered Questions*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá brings forward explanations demonstrating the impossibility of reincarnation. The first explanation is that when a living body dies, it is decomposed, disintegrated, dissipated and dispersed. It is impossible for a body to have all its atoms and molecules and the spirit to return to this world.

Repetition of species is only possible through composition of new elements. In the material world nothing is identical, genetically or physically and appearances are not repeated. Since the material world corresponds to spiritual world, repeated appearance of the same spirit with its former essence and condition is impossible.

Now observe that in the sensible world appearances are not repeated, for no being in any respect is identical with, nor the same as, another being. The sign of singleness is visible and apparent in all things. If all the granaries of the world were full of grain, you would not find two grains absolutely

alike, the same and identical without any distinction. It is certain that there will be differences and distinctions between them. As the proof of uniqueness exists in all things, and the Oneness and Unity of God is apparent in the reality of all things, the repetition of the same appearance is absolutely impossible. (SAQ 283)

The second explanation that 'Abdu'l Bahá puts forward is what is considered to be the purpose of repeated reincarnations, i.e., acquiring perfections. He considers that to be impossible. Imperfection does not become perfection through return to the material world.

If we say that this reincarnation is for acquiring perfections so that matter may become refined and delicate, and that the light of the spirit may be manifest in it with the greatest perfection, this also is mere imagination. (SAQ 285)

Man's refinement is through his acquiring perfections and the bounty of God. No, in reality the cause of acquiring perfections is the bounty of God. (SAQ 285)

The third argument against reincarnation is the futility of returning to this world which 'Abdu'l-Bahá compares to a cage and a snare.

Moreover, this material world has not such value or such excellence that man, after having escaped from this cage, will desire a second time to fall into this snare. (SAQ 286)

He elucidates further that one develops and advances through all the worlds of God with the starting-point being this world of matter.

No, through the Eternal Bounty the worth and true ability of man becomes apparent and visible by traversing the degrees of existence, and not by returning. When the shell is once opened, it will be apparent and evident whether it contains a pearl or worthless matter. When once the plant has grown it will bring forth either thorns or flowers; there is no need for it to grow up again. Besides, advancing and moving in the worlds in a direct order according to the natural law is the cause of existence, and a movement contrary to the system and law of nature is the cause of nonexistence. The return of the soul after death is contrary to the natural movement, and opposed to the divine system. (SAQ 286)

There are infinite divine worlds. If we were reincarnated umpteen times in this physical world to acquire all the highest attributes and graces, creation would be futile.

Since the spirit is without material form or substance and does not enter and come forth, it would be better for man to try and extend his life span on this earth and acquire as much perfections and graces as possible rather die many times and have many lives.

If the divine worlds culminated in this material world, creation would be futile: nay, existence would be pure child's play. (SAQ 287)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that the idea of reincarnation has developed from the limited minds of philosophers, just the same way they thought

... that the world, life and existence were restricted to this terrestrial globe, and that this boundless space was confined within the nine spheres of heaven, and that all were empty and void. (SAQ 287)

The physical has its counterpart in the spiritual world. The physical constellations are innumerable, and then one can imagine the infinite number of spiritual worlds.

The true nature of the soul

Let us now look more closely at the vision the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith have laid out for us on the subject of the soul and the afterlife, and also see how beautifully similar are the words in the Sacred Writings of other Faiths, which have as often as not been misunderstood and misinterpreted.

The soul is a spiritual reality that is not ancient and comes into being at the time of conception.

The soul or spirit of the individual comes into being with the conception of his physical body. (LG 1988 504)

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 states of his development. He does not preexist in any form before coming into this world. (LG 1988 537)

Its essence and its reality is beyond the understanding and comprehension of man.

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. (GWB 158)

When an individual aspires to spiritual things, turns to the Manifestation of God, and does not direct all his affections towards this ephemeral world, then his soul becomes illumined and it will fulfill the purpose for which he has been created.

Man is, in reality, a spiritual being, and only when he lives in the spirit is he truly happy. (PT 72)

The soul is immortal and will progress in the spiritual worlds of God for all eternity. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

The spirit of man has a beginning, but it has no end; it continues eternally. (SAQ 151)

The nature of the association of the soul and the body is like that of light and a mirror. The light is not inside the mirror but reflected from another source. It cannot be placed in a body and is exalted above entry or exit, ascent or descent.

... 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. (GWB 161)

The relationship between the soul of man and that of God is between a lover and the Beloved. Man has been created out of God's love. We read in the Hidden Words:

O SON OF THE WONDROUS VISION! I have breathed within thee a breath of My own Spirit, that thou mayest be My lover. Why hast thou forsaken Me and sought a beloved other than Me? (HW Arabic #19)

O SON OF BEING! Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant. (HW Arabic #5)

The soul of a believer whose heart has been touched by the love of Bahá'u'lláh and has become assured of the truth of His Revelation, is very precious in the estimation of God:

We dare not, in this Day, lift the veil that concealeth the exalted station which every true believer can attain, for the joy which such a revelation must provoke might well cause a few to faint away and die. (GWB 9)

The purpose of the spirit's journey through the material world

This life is the beginning of a journey with the goal being of getting closer and closer to the Lord. When the soul is first created it is without experience but its qualities and powers are latent in it. It is capable of acquiring these latent spiritual qualities in the course of a lifetime.

... one must remember that the purpose of this life is to prepare the soul for the next. (LG 359)

The purpose of life is to acquire virtues and a praiseworthy character.

The fruits of the tree of man have ever been and are goodly deeds and a praiseworthy character. Withhold not these fruits from the heedless. If they be accepted, your end is attained, and the purpose of life achieved. (ESW 25)

The purpose of the creation of man is the attainment of the supreme virtues of humanity through descent of the heavenly bestowals. The purpose of man's creation is, therefore, unity and harmony, not discord and separateness. (PUP 4)

The true meaning of life and death

Some reincarnationists fear the concept of dying and its consequences and prefer to be reborn. As Bahá'ís we do not fear death but rejoice in it if we have spent our lives fruitfully and acquired the virtues.

How does one look forward to the goal of any journey? With hope and with expectation. It is even so with the end of this earthly journey. In the next world, man will find himself freed from many of the disabilities under which he now suffers. (ABL 96)

O SON OF THE SUPREME! I have made death a messenger of joy to thee. Wherefore dost thou grieve? I made the light to shed on thee its splendor. Why dost thou veil thyself therefrom? (HW Arabic #32)

The elemental body will come to an end at the time of physical death and goes back to nature.

Every soul shall taste of death.¹⁰

The soul does not die but lives eternally, ever advancing. The death that is mentioned in the sacred writings is not the physical death one thinks of, but that of spiritual death, meaning a lack of

awareness of our Creator, of His love for us, and disobedience towards Him.

But the spiritual life, which arises from the knowledge of God, does not die:

*Him will We surely quicken to a blessed life.*¹¹

In a passage concerning the martyrs, it states:

*Nay, they are alive and sustained by their Lord.*¹²

And in reference to true life, Bahá'u'lláh states:

And from the Traditions: "He who is a true believer liveth both in this world and in the world to come." (GDM 48)

Our second birth is not a physical birth, but a spiritual one – It is acceptance of the Manifestation of the Day and obedience to Him.

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation ... It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. (KA 19)

When one believes in the manifestation of God for the Day and obeys Him, that person has spiritual life, is 'born again' 'resurrected' and is in Paradise.

Whoso acknowledged Him, recognized the signs of God in His inmost Being, and saw in His beauty the changeless beauty of God, the decree of "resurrection", "ingathering", "life", and "paradise" was passed upon him. For he who had believed in God and in the Manifestation of His beauty was raised from the grave of heedlessness, gathered together in the sacred ground of the heart, quickened to the life of faith and certitude, and admitted into the paradise of the divine presence. What paradise can be loftier than this, what ingathering mightier, and what resurrection greater? Indeed, should a soul be acquainted with these mysteries, he would grasp that which none other hath fathomed. (GDM 42)

Thus, we come to understand that we can bring others to the recognition of the Manifestation by living a spiritual life.

The beloved of the Lord must, in this day, behave in such wise amidst His servants that they may by their very deeds and actions guide all men unto the paradise of the All Glorious. (SLH 110)

Heaven and Hell

In the past, Hell was feared and Paradise was misunderstood. The fear of Hell by people caused them to accept the idea of reincarnation. This has now been removed through our recognition that being in Hell is possession of an evil character and a state of unbelief, and being in Paradise is belief in God's Manifestation and possession of heavenly characteristics.

... consider love and union as delectable paradise, and count annoyance and hostility as the torment of hell-fire. (TAB 37)

In the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá we come to understand that the descriptions of Heaven and Hell given in some of the older religious writings are symbolic, like the Biblical Story of the Creation, and not literally true. According to the Bahá'í Writings, Heaven is the state of perfection, and Hell that of imperfection; Heaven is harmony with God's will and with our fellow man, and Hell is the lack of such harmony; for instance, Bahá'u'lláh states:

'Where is Paradise, and where is Hell?' Say: 'The one is reunion with Me; the other thine own self.' (ESW 132)

'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

But the paradise and hell of existence are found in all the worlds of God, whether in this world or in the spiritual heavenly worlds. Gaining these rewards is the gaining of eternal life. That is why Christ said, "Act in such a way that you may find eternal life, and that you may be born of water and the spirit, so that you may enter into the Kingdom." (SAQ 323)

Heaven is the condition of spiritual life, and Hell that of spiritual death. A man may be either in Heaven or in Hell while still on this earthly realm. The joys of Heaven are spiritual joys; and the pains of Hell are lack of such joys. In the Hidden Words, we read:

O SON OF BEING! Thy Paradise is My love; thy heavenly home, reunion with Me. Enter therein and tarry not. This is that which hath been destined for thee in Our kingdom above and Our exalted dominion. (HW Arabic #6)

Fate of man's spirit after death

The soul's destiny in this physical life is great, as we read in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh:

Were man to appreciate the greatness of his station and the loftiness of his destiny he would manifest naught save

goodly character, pure deeds, and a seemly and praiseworthy conduct. (TB 172)

The soul's destiny after death is also great.

And now concerning thy question regarding the soul of man and its survival after death. Know thou of a truth that the soul, after its separation from the body, will continue to progress until it attaineth the presence of God, in a state and condition which neither the revolution of ages and centuries, nor the changes and chances of this world, can alter. It will endure as long as the Kingdom of God, His sovereignty, His dominion and power will endure. It will manifest the signs of God and His attributes, and will reveal His loving kindness and bounty. The movement of My Pen is stilled when it attempteth to befittingly describe the loftiness and glory of so exalted a station. The honor with which the Hand of Mercy will invest the soul is such as no tongue can adequately reveal, nor any other earthly agency describe. Blessed is the soul, which, at the hour of its separation from the body, is sanctified from the vain imaginings of the peoples of the world. (GWB 155)

The soul carries with it divine attributes and spiritual qualities to the next world and does not carry negative qualities. The degree of the progress of a soul is also dependent upon the extent it has accrued praiseworthy virtues. The soul continues to progress in the spiritual worlds of God through the bounty of God, through prayers of intercession offered by those still in this life,

The progress of man's spirit in the divine world, after the severance of its connection with the body of dust, is through the bounty and grace of the Lord alone, or through the intercession and the sincere prayers of other human souls, or through the charities and important good works which are performed in its name. (SAQ 240)

And also through his own prayers of entreaty and supplication:

As we have power to pray for these souls here, so likewise we shall possess the same power in the other world, which is the Kingdom of God. Are not all the people in that world the creatures of God? Therefore, in that world also they can make progress. As here they can receive light by their supplications, there also they can plead for forgiveness and receive light through entreaties and supplications. Thus as souls in this world, through the help of the supplications, the entreaties and the prayers of the holy ones, can acquire development, so is it the same after death. Through their

own prayers and supplications they can also progress, more especially when they are the objects of the intercession of the Holy Manifestations. (SAQ 232)

Ultimately, one comes to recognize that until the Coming of the Promised One of All Ages, Bahá'u'lláh, mankind has only been given milk for its nourishment — it couldn't comprehend more, and even what it was told, it distorted it into something very different from the truth, basically in this case, because it couldn't deal with the idea that it would be punished for its wrongs by its Lord; it couldn't comprehend a spiritual world, and even when it tried to understand, could only do so with visions of rivers of milk and honey and beautiful maidens — a very Earthly vision. It is not hard to see, then, how people, when taught about the soul and life after life by their divine Teachers could misunderstand it as being an Earthly return and happily go about teaching the idea to everyone else until large numbers of people accepted it, few seriously going back to the actual Teachings of their Prophets and investigating the truth for themselves. If they had, statements such as the following from each of the world's major Faiths would have been clear enough.

Hinduism

*Those who remember me at the time of death will come to me. Do not doubt this. Whatever occupies the mind at the time of death determines the destiny of the dying; always they will tend toward that state of being. Therefore, remember me at all times ... Remembering me at the time of death, close down the doors of the senses and place the mind in the heart.*¹³

Judaism

*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*¹⁴

Buddhism

*The small and the great are there, and the slave is free from his master. Relatives and friends and well-wishers rejoice at the arrival of a man who had been long absent and has returned home safely from afar. Likewise, meritorious deeds will receive the good person upon his arrival in the next world, as relatives welcome a dear one on his return.*¹⁵

Christianity

*Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*¹⁶

Islam

*But ye prefer this present life, though the life to come is better and more enduring. This truly is in the Books of old, the Books of Abraham and Moses.*¹⁷

The Bahá’í Faith

The world beyond is as different from this world as this world is different from that of the child while still in the womb of its mother. When the soul attains the Presence of God, it will assume the form that best befits its immortality and is worthy of its celestial habitation. (GWB 157)

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. (GWB 161)

NOTES

¹ *Dhammapada* 18:235-238, tr. Max Müller.

² *Practice of Karma Yoga*, Swami Sivananda, Divine Life Society, 1985, p. 102.

³ “Origen.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2005. EB Premium Service. <http://britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=9057374> (Retrieved 2/20/05)

⁴ *Luke* 16:19-31, KJV.

⁵ *Qur’án*, 7:53, 86:9, Rodwell tr.

⁶ *Qur’án*, Surih 3:27, Yusuf-Ali tr.

⁷ Jalal al-Din Rumi, “I Died as a Mineral”, Arberry tr., v1-4.

⁸ SAQ 7.

⁹ *Qur’án* 17:87, Rodwell tr.

¹⁰ *Qur’án* 3:185, Rodwell tr.

¹¹ *Qur’án* 16:97, Rodwell tr.

¹² *Qur’án* 3:169, Rodwell tr.

¹³ *Bhagavad-Gita* 8:5, tr. Edwin Arnold.

¹⁴ *Ecclesiastes* 12:7, KJV.

¹⁵ *Dhammapada* 219-20.

¹⁶ *John* 11:25-26, KJV.

¹⁷ *Qur'án* 87: 16-19, Rodwell tr.

Autobiography in the Writings of the Báb

Vahid Brown

While much of the sustained research in the writings of the Báb in modern scholarship has focused on his earliest writings¹, the works written between 1844 and 1846 continue to present some of the most serious challenges to analysis and understanding. Aside from the general problems facing a reader of the Báb's famously obscure works, the Báb's earliest writings are rendered particularly difficult by an ever-shifting authorial voice. One must constantly ask in reading these early texts, *who* is the author, *who* is addressing us from the page? The obvious answer of course is, the Báb, Siyyid 'Ali Muḥammad. That this answer doesn't resolve our problem can be best indicated by an example. The following two passages are both drawn from the Báb's writings from this earliest period:

*Verily, We have bestowed revelation upon you [the Báb] just as We bestowed revelation upon Muḥammad and the Messengers before him, with clear signs, that perchance you might be a Proof unto God for the people after the [four] gates ... O people of the earth! Stray not from the bounds of the word of the Remembrance, and speak not concerning Him save by the truth, for the Remembrance has not revealed his verses but by the truth.*²

*I have not claimed a single word of revelation. They say, "He has laid claim to spiritual authority and its trappings." May God kill them for that in which they lie! I have neither made claims to nor spoken a word with regard to anything other than servitude ... The Remnant of God, the Lord of the Age, has, after the four gates, no designated gate and no specific deputy ... Verily, revelation from Thy presence, the like of which was sent down upon Muḥammad, was closed and ended with him.*³

These excerpts are both from the pen of the Báb, though ironically neither is in the authorial voice of "the Báb." The first is from the *Qayyúm al-Asma'*, written in 1844, and the authorial voice is that of God. The second is from the *Du'a-yi alif*, written in 1845, and is in the voice of a pious Shi'i siyyid of Shiraz. The problem that these two texts exemplify is an acute one – the problem of *taqiyya*.

In its most well-known sense, *taqiyya* means the dissimulation of belief for reasons of self-preservation, but it has in Shi'ism a much broader range of meaning. From the many injunctions to practice *taqiyya* found in the recorded sayings of the Imams, it becomes clear that *taqiyya* was not simply a negative obligation not to put oneself in harm's way, but was also a positive duty to conceal secrets. Regarding the nature of these secrets, one scholar of Shi'ism put it this way:

In the corpus of the Imams, certain subjects appear to constitute the main objects of *taqiyya*: information relating to the 'Qur'an of the imams,' the [pious hatred] toward the Companions of the Prophet and in particular toward the first three caliphs, or the identity of the Qa'im ...⁴

Two of the three primary objects of *taqiyya* given in this list have to do with Shi'i messianism – the Qur'an of the Imams and the identity of the Qa'im. *Taqiyya* then was a Shi'i religious obligation, was concerned with the concealment of secrets, and, more importantly, such secrets were often of an eschatological nature.

It is important to understand *taqiyya* in this wider sense and not just as dissimulation or self-preserving denial. When understood as a technique of arcanization, as concealment of secrets, we are able to discern *taqiyya* in the early writings of the Báb as operating at a variety of levels and layers. It is not simply that these earliest writings present two stark extremes of declaration and denial of messianism, as in the passages from the *Qayyúm al-Asma'* and the *Du'a-yi alif* cited above. Rather, there exists in these earliest works a range of revelation and concealment, a spectrum that extends from the open directness of the *Qayyúm al-Asma'*, to the opaque covering of the *Du'a-yi alif*, and includes in between a variety of shades of coding, allusiveness, and encryption of the messianic secret. And, what is perhaps most important for our present-day attempts to understand these texts, this spectrum of *taqiyya* isn't solely involved in claims or denials of a messianic station, but rather extends to the Báb's communication of personal belief and statements of doctrine. For example, the Báb in some texts expresses views of the Imams that He contradicts in other works, or states belief in certain orthodox usuli-Shi'i tenets that He elsewhere completely rejects. It is thus imperative that we make some attempt to crack the Báb's *taqiyya* code, to read between the lines of His esoteric writing, if we are to have any hope of success in understanding what the Báb thought – what, in other words, Bábí doctrine really was.

The three autobiographical works that I will discuss here – the *Khutba al-Jidda*, the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*, and the *Khutba dhikriyya* – are

indices of this spectrum, and they provide a window into the chronology of the Báb's practice of *taqiyya* during this period. I refer to the three texts in question as "autobibliographies" for the simple reason that they all share the characteristic of including lists by the Báb of works He had previously written. Autobibliography is a well-established genre in Islamic letters, and has traditionally been employed for a variety of reasons. In the Báb's milieu of 19th-century Shi'ism, autobibliographies were generally written by established scholars and are perhaps best understood as having the combined function of a curriculum vitae and a course syllabus; they indicated the areas of learning that a given scholar had covered or specialized in and, to use the language of the modern academy, provided students with a list of courses that they could seek a degree in.

While one might be tempted to understand the Báb's autobibliographical works against this scholastic background, there are a number of factors that would point to the inadequacy of such a view. For one thing, Shi'i scholars were not generally in the habit of describing their own works as divine revelations. As with the Báb's Qur'an commentaries, the Báb's autobibliographies are radically different from previous works in the genre in that they are bound up with His claims to be the Shi'i messiah. When there is light to be shed on these works from the Shi'i textual tradition, it is to be found not in the curriculum vitae of hadith scholars, but rather in the apocalyptic imaginary, the culturally-shared body of images and ideas associated with the coming of the Promised One. As we go through the three texts, I will highlight the Báb's utilization of this "imaginary of the end" in signaling – sometimes directly, sometimes obliquely – His messianic authorial voice.

The earliest of the three works is the *Khutba al-Jidda*, written during the Báb's return-journey from the pilgrimage during the late-winter or early-spring of 1845. The Báb was in Jidda for only a few days, from February 24th to March 4th, at which point He sailed from Jidda for Bushihr. We know these precise dates because they are given by the Báb Himself in the *Khutba al-Jidda*. Further, since the last date He gives there is March 4th (24th of Safar), this provides a *terminus post quem* for the *Khutba* itself. It seems most likely that it was written aboard ship soon after sailing from Jidda, though Abu'l-Qasim Afnan has noted that in one extant manuscript of the *Khutba* revealed in Jidda, the scribe headed it "*Khutba fi Bushihr* from His Holiness the Báb."⁵ It is indeed possible that the *Khutba al-Jidda* was written in Bushihr – i.e. in mid-May or late-June of 1845 – though the *terminus ante quem* for composition is June 21st, 1845, the date of composition for the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*, since the *Khutba al-Jidda* is listed in the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*. I am sceptical of a

later, Bushihr dating of the *Khutba al-Jidda* because of the absence of any mention of the length of the journey by ship, the length of stay at port in Bushihr, or of disembarking at Bushihr, whereas the Báb goes into minute detail throughout the *Khutba al-Jidda* into all of the earlier stages of His pilgrimage journey. If He had already arrived at Bushihr when composing it, why give so much chronological detail about His trip and yet leave off the details regarding these final legs of the journey? Fortunately, Dr. Stephen Lambden is currently working on this text, so I will leave the resolution of these thorny matters to his able hands.⁶

The *Khutba al-Jidda* is a short work, just thirteen pages long in the manuscript collection INBA 91.⁷ It begins with a page and a half of cosmogonic narrative – a style of exordium common to many of the works of the Báb during this period – describing the creation of the cosmos and its metaphysical structure in terms of a set of quaternities standard to Shaykhism and ubiquitous in the Báb's Writings throughout His ministry. The Báb then launches into a brief polemic against Ishraqi philosophical theology, mentioning by name one of the works of Mulla Sadra Shirazi, and stating that the Ishraqis have gone astray in their particular views on the quaternality of being and the status of the names and attributes of God. The Báb then extends His critique to include those 'ulama who have taken a favorable view of Ishraqi thought. There follows a brief transition to the next major section of the text – a detailed recounting of his pilgrimage journey – and here the Báb shifts to a more directly messianic register. Thus, for example, He writes:

*This is the light that hath borne the letter ha' through the land of the innermost heart, and hath gone forth from the bounds of the letter waw through the pen of God's Remembrance, to whom hath been revealed verses in the language of God, the Speaker, as divine proofs, that all people might realize the limitedness of their drink and recognize the true meaning ordained in this pearl-white water.*⁸

The Báb then describes His pilgrimage journey, and the messianic overtones continue strongly throughout this section of the *Khutba*. The action throughout this section is ascribed to God rather than the Báb. Thus, this portion of the *Khutba* begins, "Praise be to God ... who hath dispatched the Word of His servant from the land of his birth ...", and the text continues in this vein for another four and a half pages, naming the points on His journey to and from Mecca and providing the dates of each stage of this journey in extremely indirect language. Towards the end of this itinerary, the Báb writes:

*So praised be God, the One, the Self-Subsisting, the Single, the Worshipped, Who hath spoken in praise of His Remembrance and the days of his journey, and hath made mention of the path of his ascent in visitation of the manifestations of His power, Muḥammad and his family, that all might learn the meaning of destiny and the secret thereof through the knowledge of the days of his ascent, and from the knowledge of the days of his journey might proceed to the inner meaning of the Throne and the Footstool, and make that holiest of journeys into the concourse of Names and Attributes, until all people might enter the blessed House of God by the exalted verses sent down in this pearl-white tablet and prostrate themselves at the place of prostration as they did the first time ... So praised be He Who hath ordained in the path of these journeys what He had ordained for all of the Gates aforetime.*⁹

This passage clearly states, among other things, that the *Khutba al-Jidda* is a work of divine revelation (*tanzil*), that contemplation of the Báb's doings can provide the reader with various forms of cosmological gnosis, and that the Báb Himself is in some way equivalent to the Gates of the Hidden Imam.

The remainder of the *Khutba* is devoted to a listing of the works of the Báb that were stolen from Him during his journey from Mecca to Medina. More than a dozen individual works appear to be listed, but there is some ambiguity here, since some of what he writes may not be in regards to individual works but rather meant to characterize His writings in general. A number of specific works are named, however, and most of these were listed again in the Báb's *Kitáb al-Fihrist*, written less than four months later. The first item listed – if indeed it is an item *per se* – is rather representative of the list as a whole. The Báb writes:

Among that which was stolen are verses regarding the inner mysteries of the writing that hath been inscribed by the hand of the Remembrance in red ink upon eleven pearl-white leaves, gilded with liquid gold, and lined about in red, concerning the knowledge of two parts of the hidden secret manifest through the greatest secret, the true meaning of the inner mysteries of the Qur'an [batin al-qur'an]. These verses are such as no one aforetime has touched upon, nor shall any hereafter encompass them in knowledge.

One of the most interesting features of this list is that the Báb describes almost every item on the list as being concerned with the

batin al-qur'an, the esoteric meaning of the Qur'an, or even of the *batin at-ta'wil*, the inner meaning of the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an. His language of "secrets" and "concealed secrets" makes constant allusion to a saying ascribed to the Sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, which says, in a form quoted by the Báb in His first commentary on the letter *ha'*: "Our cause is a secret, a secret concealed by a secret, a secret veiled within a secret, a secret that cannot be known save by means of a secret."¹⁰

If we return to our original problem, the problem of *taqiyya*, we might ask how much does this *Khutba* reveal and how much does it conceal? This text is a far cry from the "verily, verily, I am God" of the Báb's latest works, but on the other hand there is nothing here in the way of outright dissimulation. The Báb here openly describes His works as revelation and compares Himself to the Gates of the Imam, but the real messianic punch of this *Khutba* is communicated only between the lines, in an esoteric manner, and is necessarily selective in the readership to whom it will reveal its secret. That ideal readership is the Shaykhi community, in whose language the Báb expresses Himself throughout this text, and in terms of whose apocalyptic imaginary the Báb encodes his messianic declaration.

As I said before, the Báb opens this work with a cosmogonic narrative that is markedly Shaykhi in its terminology and symbolism, discussing cosmic reality in terms of a symbolic system of quaternities that was first codified, as it were, in the writings of Shaykh Ahmad. It then proceeds to a polemic against Ishraqi philosophy, mentioning by name the *Kitáb al-Masha'ir* by Mulla Sadra, a book against which Shaykh Ahmad penned a gigantic, refutation-style "commentary." At the end of that polemic, after remarking that most of the 'ulama have sided with the Ishraqis, the Báb mentions that this state of affairs had continued up until His own time, when suddenly there had dawned the twin lights of the luminescent sun and moon — a reference, I believe, to Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim. The Báb then writes:

People of late carried out a campaign of lies against those two luminaries in contradiction to what is encompassed in the knowledge of the Creator, just as the people of old had calumniated against the Friends of God [the Imams], without certain knowledge and having no clear book. Thus it went until the letter Kaf returned (raja'a) to the place [of the appearance] of the Cause, in the region of God's command, and the cycles of time came full circle to the Day of God, in a new and wondrous mode, and the lights that had been an inaccessible mystery dawned forth with knowledge of the divine cloud of unknowing, and the Siniatic Tree was made to speak forth upon the ocean of

*praise, and the word of glorification was made manifest upon the crimson earth.*¹¹

One would have to have been an avid reader of Siyyid Kazim to be able to decode this messianic declaration, for in writing here of the return of the letter Kaf, the Báb is alluding to a prophecy made in Kazim's *Sharh al-Qasida* that the name of the Qa'im will be numerically equal to double the value of the letter kaf when pronounced. The abjad value of the pronounced kaf, or *kaf, alif, fa*, is 101, so the doubled value is 202. The abjad value of 'Ali Muḥammad is – 202. The Báb also refers to Himself elsewhere as this letter Kaf, and Tahiriḥ would later point out that this specific prophecy of Siyyid Kazim was fulfilled by the Báb.¹²

The list of the stolen works at the end of the *Khutba al-Jidda* provides a similar instance of this encoding of the Báb's messianic declaration in language that would likely only be decipherable to Shaykhi initiates. In terms very similar to earlier Isma'ilism, the Shaykhis had developed an elaborate theory of the cycles of spiritual history that centered on a notion of a dialectic between the *zahir* and the *batin*, the manifest and the hidden. According to this cyclical theory, Muḥammad and the Qur'an initiated a cycle of the *zahir*, the outward, and so during Muḥammad's prophetic cycle the *zahir* of the Qur'an was in force. According to all of the Shaykhi writers, including the anti-Bábí Karim Khan Kirmani, the cycle of the *batin* began in the year 1200, and would witness the coming of the Qa'im, who would initiate a spiritual cycle under the sign of the *batin al-qur'an*.¹³ As I noted above, the Báb refers to nearly all of the works in the list given at the end of the *Khutba al-Jidda* as being verses of the *batin al-qur'an*. Also, He begins the recounting of His pilgrimage itinerary by dating it as "the year *after* the year 1200," without further specifying the date. Taken together with the earlier reference to the cycles of time having come full circle, and in the hands of an attentive Shaykhi reader, these references to the revelation of the *batin al-qur'an* in the thirteenth century would signal the Báb's claims to be the messiah. The Báb, then, has hidden the secret in plain sight, visible only to those who know what they're looking at.

I move now to the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*, a work clearly dated to the 15th of Jumadi ath-thani, 1261, or June 21st, 1845. This work is extremely valuable in that it provides lengthy lists of works that the Báb had produced up to that time, including dozens of books, commentaries, letters, khutbas, and prayers. Like the *Khutba al-Jidda*, it also encodes the Báb's messianic claims, though the Báb in this text approaches the balancing act of revelation and concealment with altogether different methods. It is not markedly Shaykhi in its language or symbolism, but appears to assume a wider audience. It

evokes the Qur'an at the beginning by opening with a series of disconnected Arabic letters. The Báb had earlier affixed disconnected letters to the surahs of the *Qayyúm al-Asma'* and the *Kitáb ar-Ruh*, the two most explicitly messianic texts written by the Báb during the earliest period of his ministry.

In contrast to the *Khutba al-Jidda*, where the Báb describes His works as verses sent down by God, at the beginning of the *Kitáb al-Fihrist* the Báb states that it was sent down from the *Baqiyyat Allah*, the Remnant of God, a title given to the Hidden Imam. The Báb states that He is Himself a servant of the Remnant of God, and He then proceeds to testify to His belief in Muḥammad, the twelve Imams, Fatima, and the four Gates of the twelfth Imam. He then proceeds for several pages to describe His writings as verses sent down to Him from the Remnant of God, refers to Himself consistently as a servant of God and the Remnant of God, though all the while indicating that His own works technically constitute revelation, writing, for example, that "the reading of these verses in these, the days of God, is more excellent than all the deeds recorded in the Book of God." He states that His revealed works will endure until the day of Resurrection, which to a Shaykhi audience meant until the arising of the Qa'im. In any case, the whole of this introduction serves to simultaneously reveal and conceal the Báb's claims. He clearly is claiming to be capable of producing inspired verses, but by saying that these verses are sent down from the Hidden Imam He is distancing himself from any identification with that Messianic figure, even implying that He is waiting, just like all other orthodox Shi'a, the Messiah's *future* appearance.

At this point in the text, the Báb takes a most fascinating approach to concealing His revealed secret. He cites a handful of lengthy traditions, all of which, in one way or another, indicate the possibility for post-Qur'anic revelation. I provide below a translation of this lengthy section of the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*:

Verily, all that has been revealed by the hand of the Remembrance will remain in force until the Day of Resurrection, and the decree of God will suffer no alteration – unto Him do all return! Say: I, verily, have laid claim to no Cause other than that whose reality has been revealed in the tradition [al-hadith]. Would that you might read these traditions, that haply you would be of those who have attained certitude in the verses of God!

God said (exalted be He), in a sacred tradition: My servant ceases not from drawing nigh unto me through supererogatory acts of worship until I love him, and when I love Him I become the ear with which he hears, the vision

by which he sees, the tongue wherewith he speaks, and the hand by which he strikes. If he beseeches Me, I will answer his prayer, and if he asks of Me, I will grant him his request. Even if he holds his peace, I will then take the initiative [and answer his unspoken prayer].

He [an Imam] (upon him be peace) said: One who loves us and only grows in his love for us, who devotes himself to our knowledge and asks about certain matters from us and not others –the heart of such a one we inspire with the answers to those matters about which he asked.

In al-Kafi¹⁴ [it is related that] a Christian monk asked about certain things from Musa ibn Ja'far (upon him and his father be peace), saying: "Teach me about the eight letters that were revealed, four of which were made known on earth and four of which remained in heaven. To whom were these latter four revealed, and who will interpret their meaning?" Musa replied, "The one about whom you ask is none other than he who will arise from among us [qa'imunaa]. God will reveal these unto him and he will interpret their meaning. God will reveal to him what has not been revealed to any of the truthful ones, the messengers, nor the rightly-guided." Then the monk said, "Teach me about two of the four letters that were made known in this world. What are they?" Musa replied, "I will tell you about all four of them. The first of them is 'there is no god but God, His unity eternally without peer.' The second of them is 'Muḥammad is the Righteous Messenger of God (the blessings of God and His peace be upon him and his family).' The third is 'We are the People of the Household.' The fourth is 'Our partisans (shi'a) are from Us, and We are from the Messenger of God (the blessings of God be upon him and his family), and the Messenger of God (blessings) is from God (but by way of intermediate causes).'"

In al-Kafi [it is related] from Abi 'Abd Allah (upon whom be peace), who said: Verily, God, exalted and glorified is He, created a name with letters that are unutterable, with a pronunciation that cannot be voiced, with an individuality that is not corporeal, of a likeness that cannot be described, and with color that has no hue. It transcends measurement and delimitation, and is veiled from the senses of all possessors of sense. It is hidden without being concealed. He made it to be a word perfected by the joining of four parts, yet not one letter thereof comes before any of the others. He manifested from it three names, since creation

depended on these latter names. He veiled one of them, and that is the hidden, treasured name. The outer form of these names that have been manifested is "God," "Blessed" and "Exalted." And He, praised be He, gave to the service of each of these names four pillars, making twelve pillars in all. Then for each pillar He created thirty names, names which are related to them.

The Merciful, the Compassionate, the King, the Holy One, the Creator, the Fashioner, the Former, the Living, the Self-Subsisting, Whom neither weariness nor sleep overtake, the Knower, the All-Informed, the Hearing, the Perceiving, the Wise, the Almighty, the All-Compelling, the Most Great, the Exalted, the Mighty, the All-Powerful, the Omnipotent ... [lists 35 names in all, with one repeat] These names and the names that (make up) the Most Beautiful Names comprise three hundred and sixty names and are related to these three names. These three names are pillars and He concealed the single, hidden, treasured name by these three names, even as He, exalted is He, says: "Say: Call upon God or call upon the Merciful. By whatsoever name you call Him, His are the Most Beautiful Names." (Q 17:110)

Those who claim, however, to have met the Proof of God, such as they are none but liars! Say: this, My Path, is the like of what has been set forth in the above traditions, and my inner heart lied not about what it saw... (cf. Q 53:12).¹⁵

The Báb prefaces this brief compilation of traditions, as you can see, by saying that He has claimed no Cause other than in accordance with these traditions. The first two traditions describe modes of extra-Qur'anic revelation or inspiration, the third alludes to secrets that the Qa'im will reveal, and the last describes the hidden name of God, the revelation of which is frequently associated in Shi'i apocalyptic literature with the messiah. Nowhere in this text, then, does the Báb state that He is the Qa'im, but He leaves wide open for the reader the option of drawing that conclusion. Once again, He's hidden the messianic secret in plain sight.

The last text to be considered, written in January of 1846, is the Báb's *Khutba dhikriyya*, a text about which there has been considerable confusion among Western scholars with regard to its title, though there isn't space here to go into those perplexities.¹⁶ The Báb begins the work with a very brief cosmogonic exordium, and then proceeds to a lengthy creedal statement. He first affirms the unity and absolute unknowability of God, and then goes through a series of doxological statements, testifying to His belief in

Muḥammad, the Imams, Fatima, and so forth. The Báḅ refers to the coming of the Qa'im in the future tense, certainly giving no indication here of His identification with that figure. He states that He believes in the standard dogmas of the Shi'i faith in a perfectly orthodox manner – "just as the people have believed concerning it," as He says. We know from other works of the Báḅ that He did *not*, in fact, believe in these dogmas "just as the people did," and much of the first *wahid* of the Persian Bayán is devoted to spelling out the Báḅ's radical interpretations of things like resurrection and so forth.

In contrast with the *Khutba al-Jidda* and the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*, there is really nothing in the way of a direct indication of the Báḅ's claims in this text. The only hint to these claims is given in the list of works at the end, and here again the Báḅ draws from the symbolism of the apocalyptic imaginary to communicate this allusion. The Báḅ writes:

*I testify that everything set forth in this book is the truth, by the grace of God, the Exalted, though many of mankind are of the ungrateful. Indeed, there is delineated in this book all that went forth from my hands from the year 1260 unto the middle of the [first?] month of the year 1262. These consist of four perfect books and ten masterful epistles, each one of which is a sufficient proof for leading all who dwell in the heavens and on earth unto a station of servitude. Thus I now mention their names by the names of the members of the Family of God, who are their revealers, that these texts may be canonical within the realm of exposition and honored with divine titles in the domain of conclusive proof.*¹⁷

Following this, the Báḅ lists fourteen works – the number of the Shi'i Holy Family – and renames each work after a member of this family. That the purpose of this list is primarily symbolic is indicated towards the end. The eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth works do not correspond to any actual works of the Báḅ, and serve here to fill out the list and underscore the repetition of the sacred number.

In comparison with the other two texts that I have discussed, the *Khutba dhikriyya* is the most obvious in its practice of *taqiyya*. It conceals much more than it reveals, but it *does* reveal something. For one thing, like the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*, it serves as an index to *other* works of the Báḅ, works in which He is quite explicit about his claims. But more importantly there is the symbolic nature of the list itself, and the renaming of His works here as the 'Alid Book, the *suhuf* of the Imams and so forth. One of the central elements of Shi'i apocalypticism is the belief that the Hidden Imam is in possession of secret books and *suhuf*. According to these traditions,

Muḥammad was given *suhuf* containing the true revelations that had been sent down to all of the previous prophets, and He passed these on to the succession of the Imams. Among them was the *Sahifat Adam*, the *suhuf Ibrahim wa Musa*, etc. There is also the *Kitáb ‘Alī*, said to contain a detailed list of all possible rulings of Islamic law, which when revealed would obviate the need for all disputation and legal interpretation in determining the rules of the Shar’iah. Descriptions of these messianic *kutub* and *suhuf* are scattered across dozens of traditions, and in many of them number symbolism has a prominent role. That the Báb considered His own writings in relation to these hidden books is made plain by more or less direct references to them in the *Qayyúm al-Asma’*.¹⁸ Beliefs regarding these books were even drawn upon by Bahá’u’lláh in communicating His own claims, inasmuch as the Hidden Words were originally given out as the *mushaf fatima*, one of the hidden books in the possession of the Hidden Imam.

In looking at these three works of the Báb, we have seen that the practice of *taqiyya* in this early period meant more than simply directly denying messianic claims, and was more often a technique of esoteric communication. Given the right readership, with initiation or familiarity with the right body of apocalyptic lore, the Báb was able in these works to simultaneously reveal and conceal His messianic claims, to set forth, in the words of Ja’far al-Sadiq, “a secret concealed by a secret, a secret veiled within a secret, a secret that cannot be known save by means of a secret.”

Appendix

A Provision Translation of the Khutba Dhikriyya

Translated by J. Vahid Brown from a typescript of a single ms. with handwritten corrections by Nader Saiedi

Khutba Dhikriyya¹⁹

The sixth epistle²⁰ of sermons²¹, consisting of fourteen sermons: first sermon.

I have revealed this sermon regarding all that hath been inscribed in this book,²² that all might thereby be of those who bear witness.

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

Praise be to God Who hath created the water by the mystery of construction²³, hath established the throne upon the water²⁴ by the modality of execution²⁵, hath sent down the verses from the world of the divine cloud by the flowing of decree²⁶, hath set forth what He determined on Mount Sinai by the power of praise, and accomplished in glory²⁷ whatsoever He determined by the deliquescence²⁸ of necessity.²⁹ So glorified and exalted be He Who hath sent forth the messengers – givers of glad tidings and warners – that none may worship aught but Him. He hath given into their hands a rank of His own power such as all else but He must fail to attain, that they might establish the truth through His words and frustrate falsehood by His verses, that haply these verses might be a proof leading unto a station of wisdom for any who take cognizance thereof, and thus may all be of those who submit unto Him.

So glorified and exalted be He, Who hath made between He and His messengers a rank of glory in utterance – the supreme grace in the world of creation – and hath honored thereby some of the messengers above others, as hath been sent down in the revelation³⁰ by the decree of God, the All-Glorious. Indeed, God hath not spoken to mankind except by prophetic inspiration³¹, or from beyond a veil, or by sending inspired messengers by His permission and according to His will. Verily, He is exalted, wise. He hath established in His utterance a mode of power the like of which He hath not granted unto the utterance of His servants. Verily, He is living, almighty, and sends down

unto whomsoever He wills whatsoever He wills of His verses. Glorified and exalted be He above what is attributed to Him.

I testify unto God in this book according to what God hath testified of Himself, by Himself, without any need of the testimony of the foremost in knowledge among His servants, that verily there is no God save Him, Who hath existed from everlasting without the mention of any thing, and is now the Existing One as He hath ever been, with nothing with him. Immeasurably exalted is His Essence above the depiction of the realm of construction and its inhabitants. Supremely magnified is His Self above the description of the realm of origination³² and whatever is like unto it, glorified be He!

The realm of origination is cut off from His existential reality, as is the realm of fashioning³³ from His inner identity. Whoever says, "He is He" hath truly lost Him, for none may find Him other than He Himself, and He hath no attribute other than His Essence, no name other than His glory.³⁴ And whoever declares His unity hath indeed denied Him, for nothing recognizes Him and no servant comprehends Him. The world of names is cut off from the world of the divine cloud by [the interposition of] His realm of omnipotence, and the world of attributes is inaccessibly removed from the imaginal world by [the interposition of] His sovereign Kingdom.³⁵ He hath from time immemorial been the Lord, with none as objects of His Lordship, the Knower without objects of knowledge, the Almighty without objects of His might, the Creator without any creatures, and He is now as He hath ever been.³⁶ There is for Him no name, no description, no depiction, and no designation. All things are entirely cut off from His Essence, as are all entirely severed from His existential reality. He cannot be mentioned in terms of separation, nor can He be spoken of in terms of union. Whoever says "He is the True One" depends in this matter [of so designating Him] upon the creation. And whoever says "He is the Just," nevertheless fails to give His justice any description, glorified and exalted be He. The act of origination³⁷ hath been brought into being by means of the act of construction itself, without a touch of the fire of God's Essence. The Will was fashioned by the act of origination, without any division of God's own Self. Verily, the originated is barred from recognizing the act of origination, while the fashioned realm is severed from His

love by its mere fashioned station. Glorified and exalted be He, for whom no praise can be mentioned – not by negation, nor assertion, nor praise, nor signs, nor glory, nor indications, nor by mention of [the letter] há', nor by flight from wáw, nor arising between the two affairs, nor by the letter lá'³⁸. Glorified and exalted be He above what is attributed to Him.

I testify unto Muḥammad (blessings ...) according to what God Himself hath testified concerning him, wherein none have knowledge save Him. He hath fashioned him for the magnification of His Essence, hath chosen him for the holiness of his honor, and hath made him, among his people, unique in beauty, that he be established upon the station of “no vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision. He is the Subtile, the All-Perceiving.” I testify that Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Alláh is His messenger, who hath transmitted that which he bore of God’s cause and held fast with his own hands to carrying out the Divine Decree, glorified and exalted be He. God hath warned you all lest anyone speak concerning him other than what God hath Himself determined for him. Glorified and exalted be He above what is associated with Him.

I testify that the vicegerents of Muḥammad – the blessings of God be upon him and his family – are twelve souls [inscribed] in the Book of God on that day when no letter save them had been created, just as God hath testified of them in the grandeur of His omnipotent realm, the holiness of the world of His divinity, the magnificence of the expanse His majesty, and the loftiness of the kingdom His everlasting bounty, of which none has knowledge save Him. I bear witness that they have transmitted what they bore from the bequest of the messenger of God – the blessings of God be upon him and his family – and that they are truly the triumphant, with whom it shall be well. I testify that he who will arise from among them³⁹ – the salutations of God be upon him – is alive, that by him God hath raised up all things, that to him God will extend all things, and that by him He will unite all things. I testify that his return is the truth, as is the return of all [of the vicegerents]. Verily, God will give new life to the earth by his manifestation, and he will utterly confound the works of those who join partners with God.

I testify that Fátima, the daughter of the messenger of God – the blessings of God be upon him and his family – is a blessed leaf from the snow-white tree of “No god is

there but God,” glorified and exalted be He above what is associated with Him.

I testify unto the truth of all things unto which God hath testified in His hidden knowledge, and in the same manner do I testify unto the falsity of falsehood. Verily, I am a servant of God, a believer in Him, His verses, and His book, the Discrimination⁴⁰ – the like of which there hath never been – and in the love of all that which is most beloved of Him and the rejection of all that which is most despised by Him. Sufficient as a witness is God, the Exalted. I testify unto [the reality of] death, and of the questioning [in the grave], and of the resurrection, and of the reckoning, and of the raising of the bodies of the dead, and unto whatever God hath established, beyond these, in His knowledge, just as the people have believed concerning it.

I testify that everything set forth in this book is the truth, by the grace of God, the Exalted, though many of mankind are of the ungrateful. Indeed, there is delineated in this book all that went forth from my hands from the year 1260 unto the middle of the [first?] month of the year 1262. These consist of four perfect books and ten masterful epistles, each one of which is a sufficient proof for leading all who dwell in the heavens and on earth unto a station of servitude. Thus I now mention their names by the names of the members of the Family of God, who are their revealers, that these texts may be canonical within the realm of exposition and honored with divine titles in the domain of conclusive proof.

First is the Aḥmadian Book, in elucidation of the first thirtieth of the Qur’án and in commentary on the Surah of Praise.⁴¹

Second is the ‘Alawian Book, divided into seven hundred perfect surahs, each of which is of seven verses.⁴²

Third is the Ḥasanian Book, divided into fifty books of irresistible verses.

Fourth is the Ḥusaynian Book, in elucidation of the Surah of Joseph – upon whom be peace – arranged in one hundred and eleven surahs of forty-two verses, each one of which is a sufficient proof unto whomsoever is on the earth and whatsoever is beneath the throne, should it not suffer any alteration. Sufficient is God as a witness.⁴³

*Fifth is the Fáṭimid Epistle, comprising fourteen chapters on the acts [of worship related to] the twelve months in the Book of God.*⁴⁴

Sixth is the ‘Alawian Epistle, comprising fourteen prayers in answer to ninety-two questions, composed during the month of fasting, after my return from the pilgrimage.

*Seventh is the Báqirian Epistle, comprising fourteen chapters in commentary on the letters of the “bismallah.”*⁴⁵

*Eighth is the Ja’farian Epistle, comprising fourteen chapters in elucidation of [Ja’far’s] prayer – upon him be peace – for the days of the Occultation.*⁴⁶

*Ninth is the Músawian Epistle, comprising fourteen chapters in answer to two souls from among the servants of God, provided [in answer to them] in the land of the Two Holy Sanctuaries.*⁴⁷

*Tenth is the Ridáwian Epistle, comprising fourteen chapters concerning the recitation of fourteen sermons – which are the very height of eloquence – from the tree of the laudation, “No god is there save Him, the All-Glorious, the Beneficent.”*⁴⁸

Eleventh is the Jawábian Epistle, comprising fourteen chapters in answer to fourteen questions concerning the realm of Divinity [lahut].

Twelfth is the Hábian Epistle, comprising fourteen chapters in answer to fourteen questions concerning the Dominion of Power [jabarut].

Thirteenth is the ‘Askarian Epistle, comprising fourteen chapters in answer to fourteen questions concerning the Kingdom [malakut].

*Fourteenth is the Hujjatian Epistle, comprised of fourteen holy prayers which were revealed at the beginning of this Cause and are related to the Imam of Justice.*⁴⁹

All fourteen of these holy texts are present in this book, along with – at the end of the text – that illustrious epistle regarding the fourteen books of the Imáms.⁵⁰ All of these are inscribed in this book. Regarding that which went forth from my hand and was stolen while [I was] on the path of pilgrimage, a detailed account thereof hath been made in the Ridáwian Epistle. It is incumbent upon whomsoever may find any of those [stolen texts] to carefully preserve them. Happy is he who preserves all that hath been sent

down from my presence in exquisite tablets with the finest of handwriting. And [I testify] by Him who hath honored me with His verses that a single letter thereof is more glorious in My sight than the kingdoms of this world and the next – may God forgive me for such a comparison.

And glorified be God, Lord of the Worlds, above what they attribute to Him. And peace be upon His messengers, and praise be to God, the Lord of all the Worlds.

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NOTES

¹ For instance, the three major dissertations on the Báb's writings – by MacEoin, Lawson, and Eschraghi – all focus on the Báb's early writings.

² Qayyúm al-Asma', sura 61, pp. 244f in ms. dated 1323. All translations are provisional and my own unless otherwise noted.

³ Du'a-yi alif, from Mazandarani, *Asrar al-Athar*, 1:179-82.

⁴ Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, p. 129.

⁵ A.-Q. Afnan, '*Ahd-i A'la*', p. 474n. 18.

⁶ For now, see Dr. Lambden's introduction and partial translation of the *khutba* online at: <http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/03-THE%20BAB/post%201844/kh-jidda.htm> (cited 20 December 2004).

⁷ INBA stands for Iranian National Bahá'í Archives, a series of just over a hundred book-length collections of manuscripts that were photoreproduced and distributed in an extremely limited fashion during the latter half of the twentieth century, partly to avoid the irrevocable loss of this material at the hands of Iranian authorities committed to the complete destruction of the Bahá'í community. Some authors (e.g. D. MacEoin, S. Lambden), refer to these volumes with the acronym INBMC, and reserve INBA as an acronym preceding individually-numbered mss. once housed in the Iranian Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly's archives, a discrete collection which no longer exists due to the destruction of Bahá'í institutions and the murder of the entire membership of the National Spiritual Assembly following the Iranian Revolution in 1979. See http://bahai-library.com/?file=rabbani_inba_index.

⁸ INBA 91, p. 65. The symbolism in this passage is bound up with the Báb's quaternities: *ha'*, innermost heart, verses, and the color white are the highest terms in their respective quaternities, and all are related to divinity.

⁹ INBA 91, pp. 68f.

¹⁰ *amrunaa huwa al-sirr wa mustasirr bi'l-sirr wa sirr muqanna' bi'l-sirr wa sirr la yufiidahu ila 'l-sirr*, cited by the Báb in INBA 67, p. 23. This tradition is often quoted by Shaykh Ahmad and frequently alluded to by the Bab. There are several variants of this tradition; see, for example, those given in Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, p. 231n. 687.

¹¹ INBA 91, pp. 64f.

¹² See Vahid Rafati, *Development*, pp. 181f., and Mazandarani, *Zuhur al-Haqq*, vol. 3 pp. 402 and 509.

¹³ See MacEoin, *From Shaykhism*, p. 213.

¹⁴ The famous early collection of Imami traditions, *Usul al-Kafi*, compiled by Kulayni

¹⁵ For the texts of the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*, a number of mss. were consulted, though my translation of these passages is based primarily

upon the Princeton MS. (Bábi Collection of William McElwee Miller, vol. 4, ff. 1a-6a.

¹⁶ For a summary of the issue up to the period of MacEoin's bibliographic labors, see Appendix Four in his *Sources*, p. 207. MacEoin's conclusions there are incorrect; the text in fact is the *khutba dhikriyya*, and has no relationship whatsoever with the *Risala-yi dhahabiyya*, other than the fact that Nicolas mistakenly referred to this text by that name.

¹⁷ Translated from a typewritten copy of a single ms., with handwritten corrections by Nader Saiedi, whom I thank here for kindly sharing the typescript and his corrections with me.

¹⁸ MacEoin writes (*From Shaykhism*, p. 159):

The Qayyúm al-Asma' may be said to combine something of the character of the tawqí'at written by the hidden Imam through his intermediaries, the four abwáb, of the various books reputed to be in possession of the Imams — the mushaf of Fatima, Al-sahifa, Al-jami'a, Al-jabr, the complete Qur'an, and the previous scriptures — and of the Qur'an itself.

¹⁹ See Browne, *Descriptive Catalogue*, p. 68, where he calls this the *Sahifa-i-Ridawiyya*. For a full discussion of the various confusions regarding this tablet and its title, see MacEoin, *Sources for Early Bábi Doctrine and History*, p. 207. I do not agree with MacEoin that this work should be titled "Risala-yi dhahabiyya," but this issue cannot be dealt with here. See also A.Q. Afnan, *Ahd-i 'Ala*, pp. 437f. and 473f. n. 2.

²⁰ Here and throughout this text, "epistle" translates *sahífiḥ*.

²¹ "Sermon" renders *khutbih*.

²² Here and throughout this text, the Báb refers to the *Sahífiḥ al-Ridáwiyyih* as *dhálik al-kitáb*, or literally "that book." Since this text is itself one of the sections of that *Sahífiḥ*, this phrase will be rendered here as "this book."

²³ *sirr al-inshá'*

²⁴ Cf. Qur'an 11:7: "And it is He Who hath created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His throne was upon the waters."

See also GWB 46:

Thus have We established for thee, through the waters [má'] of Our wisdom and utterance [hikmati l-bayán], the foundations of thy belief. This, verily, is the water whereon the Throne of thy Lord hath been raised. 'His Throne had stood upon the waters.' [Q 11:7] Ponder this in thine heart, that thou mayest comprehend its meaning.

In the Báb's *Ziyára jámi'a kabíra*, He says of the Imáms:

I swear by my father and mother, and by whatsoever is in the knowledge of my Lord, that the heavens were raised not by pillars but by your name[s]; that the Throne was set upon the waters by your command [istaqara al-'arsha 'ala l-má'i bi-amrikum]; and that

káf was joined to nún for the mention of your afflictions.
(INBA50, p. 55f.)

²⁵ *al-imḍá`*

²⁶ *al-qaḍá`*

²⁷ *bahá`*

²⁸ *dhawaban*. This term appears to belong to the nomenclature of alchemy. For example, Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i uses the term in this sense in *Jawahir al-Kalam*, vol. 2, p. 258.

²⁹ Compare this passage with the *Tafsír súrat al-hamd*, INBA69, p. 123.

No thing will ever know Him and no thing will ever be united with Him inasmuch as the mention of the thing (ḍhikr ash-shay`) is made to exist (kuwwina) by means of the Will (mashíya), and the mention of existence (ḍhikr al-kawn) is made to have an essence (ḍhuwwita) by means of Purpose (iráda), and the mention of the essence (ḍhikr adh-dhát) is delimited (huddida) by means of Determination (qadar), and the mode of Determination is realized (huqqiqa) by means of Decree (qaḍá`), and the alteration (badá`) of the Decree is fixed (yuthbat) after the [stage of] Execution (imḍá`). Therefore, the station of the secret of construction (sirr al-inshá`) and the exaltation of its status in itself is by means of the manifestation of Mt. Sinai in the crimson pillar.

Also relevant to this passage is the Báb's letter in answer to questions about alteration of the divine will (*badá`*) and the Preserved Tablet (*lawh al-mahfúz*) in INBA67, pp. 172-76.

³⁰ I.e., the Qur'an.

³¹ *wahí*

³² *ibdá`*

³³ *ikhtirá`*

³⁴ *bahá`*

³⁵ There appears to be a hierarchy implied in this sentence: the '*álam al-'amá* is above *jabarút*, while the '*álam al-amthál* is above *malakút*. I have inserted the clarifying phrases in brackets in line with this reading of the passage.

³⁶ Here the previous sentence is repeated, with *al-ka'in* replacing *rabb*: "He is the Existent with none as objects of His Lordship, the Knower without objects of knowledge, the Almighty without objects of His might, the Creator without any creatures." I am surmising that this repetition is due to a scribal error.

³⁷ Alternatively, the world of origination; only the word *al-ibda'* is used, but this is often used by the Báb as a designation for a level of a distinctive four-fold cosmological hierarchy. Likewise, the term is used by the Báb to designate four levels of creative *activity* that are proper to the generation of four different levels of cosmic reality.

³⁸ The allusions here are many and baroque, but on one level these references to letters can be understood to imply that God is exalted

above being truly qualified by affirmation (*huwa*, written in Arabic with the letters *ha`* and *waw*) nor by negation (*la`*, “no”).

³⁹ The *Qá'im*, the awaited Twelfth Imám.

⁴⁰ *al-Furqán*, a synonym for the Qur'án.

⁴¹ This is Báb's *Tafsir Surat al-Baqara*.

⁴² This refers to *Kitáb al-Ruh*.

⁴³ This refers to the *Qayyúm al-Asma`*.

⁴⁴ This refers to the *Sahifa a'mal al-sana*.

⁴⁵ This refers to the Báb's *Tafsir al-basmala*.

⁴⁶ This refers to the *Sharh Du'a al-Ghayba*.

⁴⁷ The *Sahifa bayn al-Haramayn* is most likely intended here.

⁴⁸ On the basis of the statement later in this *khutba* to the effect that the Ridawian Epistle (*Sahifa Ridawiyya*) contains details about the works which were stolen from the Báb during his pilgrimage, MacEoin was of the opinion that this is none other than the *Kitáb al-Fihrist*. If that were the sole criterion, however, it is equally likely that this refers to the *Khutba al-Jidda*. Neither of these works is divided into fourteen sections.

⁴⁹ The *Sahifa Makhzuna* is probably intended here.

⁵⁰ The text here has *awliya il-'ubád*, which could be translated “the Guardians of the worshipers.”

Models and Idols

Towards a philosophy of the community of mind

Sháhbaz Fatheazam

Preamble

My sincere thanks go to the organisers of the Irfán Colloquium for making it possible to cross the globe and join you on this auspicious 10th anniversary of this initiative. A chill ran up my spine when I first received the invitation. I hadn't even come across the word 'colloquium' before. I had to look it up. Its meaning was revealing. The term colloquium means as much an informal gathering for the exchange of views as it does an academic seminar on a broad field of study. Such latitude definitely made me feel at home.

But first a personal introduction. Who am I? A non-academic venturing outside his field? Doubly insulting to all of you distinguished listeners. A safe specialist talking to a non-specialist audience on matters he knows nothing about? Hardly. A demolition expert of simplistic either-ors with more respect for academic complexity than the authority of the heart? Too brash and immodest. The public intellectual seeking influence or the timid seeker attempting at quality? Neither if the world continues to remain disenchanted. The value of gatherings such as this lies not so much in how well we clear suspicion from the intellectual mind but how well we portray sincerity to the rational soul. How we find truth is as important as how we tell it. The politics of Bahá'í scholarship lies precisely in balancing accuracy with sincerity and this tends to reduce conflict as undue emphasis on precision alone will always take power away from one group or the other. In our zest to get to the facts we must avoid being seduced by the siren song of our own agenda and to be led into making the facts fit our pet theories rather than fostering a framework which fits reality. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) said if the fact that two and two makes four were to become a matter of political relevance, there would be a faction to deny it. It is precisely to avoid fractioning scholarship that wisdom, spiritual perception and sincere language should be more than a mere appendix to knowledge. These should be our permanent referees. For a while knowledge and wisdom remained bitter opponents until

the staff of Hermes turned them into celebrated complements as symbolized by the caduceus.

With less mythical flare, we propose the same here today. We wish to see how we as a special emerging world community could meet and overcome the two major modern obstacles to truth — suspicion and skepticism. The fear of deception is real and doubt universal. Should there be no objective truth or reality can any human experiment last? If the greatness of man is a function of the greatness of what he loves maybe it is to the heart first that we must turn before examining the rules? Is there any philosophy that simultaneously addresses the human being as a rational agent but also as a package of passions and impulses? All these questions and more were too compelling to be left unanswered.

The question ‘Who am I?’ has, however, been left unanswered and remarks so far have responded more to the question ‘What must we be?’ however coarsely addressed. In any case, to be respectful to those here present I offer this line stolen from a distinguished Bahá’í scholar of the recent past. “We are not so wise nor so good as we should like to be; nor even so wise and good as we hope soon to become. God Himself alone is a perfect teacher.”¹

Introduction

The paper today, short and unsystematic — the limits of what can be said in a sixty-minute lecture show through — is not a reintroduction to Bahá’í community. The title ‘*Towards a Philosophy of the Community of Mind*’ should not be regarded as offensive in implying to mean that we have strayed so far from the ideal that it is necessary to provide the means to return to it. Nor is the presentation intended to be homiletical: sermons are too moralistic to be of value. But rather it is to be viewed as an exercise in tensions — to comprehend the incomprehensible, to objectify what we cannot know objectively. If the word community has been defined as ‘*a most elusive and vague term ... and without specific meaning*’ and ‘*essentially a mental construct*’ (*Dictionary of Sociology*, Penguin 2000, page 64) then imagine the difficulty of applying sublime concepts to a collection of people in a permanent state of becoming. ‘Community’ is becoming and ‘mind’ thinking. But thinking and being are too remote from each other for us to see them as anything else but two human states in eternal, fraternal conflict.² Nevertheless it is the coexistence of action and learning that modifies community and its traditions and any systematic study centered on this exchange can only be valuable. One final reminder. The word ‘philosophy’ in the title is but a synonym, albeit a pompous one, for meditation and does not represent any groundbreaking structural theory of social

change nor doctrine.³ Nor is the title as a whole an attempt at self-aggrandizement.

There are too many creating too many catchy terms and trademarks for these to be treated as anything but poor badges of scholarship and slogans in themselves have always been too spurious to be grounds for investigative reasoning quite apart from the fact that labels have lost their simplistic charm.⁴ Given that no adequate definition of community exists other than uninspiring minimalist references to a collection of people with a sense of belonging or with similar interests or restrictive definitions heavily dependent on which group views what for what purposes (the urban planner will define community in terms of boundaries, the politician in terms of constituents, the anthropologist in terms of culture and so on), we shall use the following text of the Universal House of Justice: "A community is ... more than the sum of its membership; it is a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders; it is a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress." (Ridvan Message 1996). The concept of community here is dynamic (a purposive functional unit) and theory related – building unity and effective development in areas of permanent concern of mankind (welfare in the wider context of progress and prosperity).

The text goes on to show how recurring patterns of Bahá'í community life manifest "the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members.... in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth.... It implies a collective will and sense of purpose." (idem) The concept of will and purpose are vital to our understanding of the notion 'community of mind'. The noted German sociologist Ferdinand Toennies (1855-1936) identifies two forms of human will: (1) the essential will defined as 'the underlying, organic, or instinctive driving force' in which community membership is self-fulfilling, and (2) arbitrary will which is deliberative, purposive, and future (goal) oriented, often associated with the wider society and State. Both types of wills, according to Toennies, can be found in two basic types of social groups – the community (*Gemeinschaft*) and society (*Gesellschaft*).

Community of Mind

The community of mind, a concept which Toennies also originates, is the ideal community, a format kinship represented by

friendship (*Community Society*, 42).⁵ According to Tönnies, a community based on similar interests (*Gemeinschaft*) has as its basis a real community and the only real form of life.⁶ He famously noted, "In community people remain essentially united in spite of all separating factors, whereas in society they are essentially separated in spite of all uniting factors." *Gemeinschaft*, a "community of mind and feeling" results from likeness and from shared life-experience. In simple terms, it implies human relationships that are intimate and enduring, understanding each member to be a unique human being, a sacred soul, with dignity. Social bonds in such situations are characterised by sentiment, commitment and depth. Emphasis in *Gemeinschaft* was on kinship, locality and mind (sentiment). He argued that all three of these had been seriously disrupted in the transition to *Gesellschaft*. This social group is suggestive of the impersonal, instrumental and largely contractual relationships that are taken to characterise life in modern society. It is based on rationality rather than sentiment. These concepts serve as a useful device for giving expression to a dominant thought that a community-based social order is being destroyed by processes of industrialisation and urbanization and that, as a result, values were being undermined, the basis of solidarity within the society was being changed and an older closeness was being lost.

Bahá'í communities may be viewed today as similarly undergoing profound change as per the Toennies' dichotomy, shifting from a community sustained by spirit to a society sustained by instrument. A new 'culture of growth' is emerging which some view as alienating (but not as discouraging) as the process of urbanization is to family and neighborhood. Just as Toennies feared that the evolution from community to city would create an impersonal society destructive to common understanding and time-honoured customs so too many see the new culture of growth (to be defined shortly) as the evolution of one type of Bahá'í community to another, one less nourishing and impersonal, causing fears not dissimilar to the German sociologist, but infinitely less darksome: "The entire culture' he says, 'has been transformed into a civilization of state and *Gesellschaft*, and this transformation means the doom of culture itself if none of its scattered seeds remain alive and again bring forth the essence and idea of *Gemeinschaft*, thus secretly fostering a new culture amidst the decaying one." To this we can match a recent sentiment of despair from a British Bahá'í:

I have seen personally diverse manifestations of such discouragement. I see them in desperate exhortations to teach the Faith in which the sense of urgency is accompanied by an element of despondency and resentment. I see them in strong, faithful Bahá'ís who

choose to become inactive in the community on account of their perception of dysfunctionality.⁷

Metánoia – the New Insight

The problem of transition in Bahá'í community is heightened by the fact that whereas Toennies contrasts between a social order which rests on harmony (consensus of wills) and is developed and ennobled by religion, and another which rests on convention and agreement, safeguarded by political legislation, in the Bahá'í community there is a fusion of the two forms of social groups. Order and bonding are consecrated by a divine charter protected by divinely established social structure and laws. It is inevitable then that perplexity mounts when believers seek to acquaint themselves with 'the profound change in Bahá'í culture' when the change itself has been capitalized on through the formal agency of established order, in this case the Four Year Plan of the House of Justice launched in 1996 which may be viewed as a landmark enterprise in initiating a new community consciousness on a single focus – advancing the process of entry by troops. Where should allegiance lie? In the divided loyalty which emerges we are pressed to choose between the inner promptings of a free but dedicated spirit or the outer exigencies of a benevolent but formal order? A good example of the metaphysical debate over self and the polis outside of it is the culture shock of the new methods of Bahá'í activity against the old habits of the heart. "There are no shortcuts," writes the Universal House of Justice.

Systematization ensures consistency of lines of action based on well-conceived plans. In a general sense, it implies an orderliness of approach in all that pertains to Bahá'í service ... While allowing for individual initiative and spontaneity, it suggests the need to be clear-headed, methodical, efficient, constant, balanced and harmonious. Systematization is a necessary mode of functioning... (Ridvan Message, 1998)

Are not efficiency and systematization obvious tendencies of religion's secularization? Is there not a real danger of our religion falling into the age-old dilemma of intellectualization and disenchantment? Does there not exist a real possibility that our new culture of growth is ceding religion's mystery to the clarity and control of bureaucracy? The testing ground for adopting the necessary values and attitudes to establish true Bahá'í communities lies in this: that while individuals receive their share from a common center of belief and root their strength of faith from this common center, the center itself displays both the conditions of Gesellschaft-like civilization in which peace and order are maintained through

rules as much as conditions of Gemeinschaft family solidarity where its members share a morally significant history, collectively striving to realize ideals and aspirations governed by sentiments of trust, cooperation and altruism. Can the religious ethic of brotherliness sustain itself in the face of the increasing changes to its form?

The development of a 'systematic' image of community is not anathema to religion (nor new).⁸ As Weber points out in 'Science as Vocation' (1919), such organization of the modern self does not necessarily take power away from religion; it allows people to take a corrective stance in response to the senselessness in the world. He suggests that religions of redemption tend toward systematic, comprehensive rationalizations of problems and their solutions, in contrast to magical religions which are remedial in a non-systematic way. The new culture of growth is developing a distinctive form of collective enterprise without necessarily forfeiting our Faith's distinctive and vital function. But sustainable growth by building on the necessary capacity at the levels of the individual, the institution, and the community is a three-legged stool in need of balance. This can be achieved commanding a new insight best described by the Greek word *metánoia*, literally repentance (*Woodhouse English-Greek Dictionary*, 696) but more generally used to mean to change one's mind as in respect for the new. Change is only meaningful if we alter the mental model that shapes the way we think about individuals, institutions, and community that shall benefit from change.

Metanoia wrongly understood is a guilt ridden awareness of all that is going wrong in our lives and society. Metanoia properly understood is a push forward toward something better for us and for our world. It is not change for change's sake but positive change *with deep understanding* of the implications. We see it in the first syllable, "meta" in Greek meaning "with," and "noia" meaning understanding. Therefore if progress, process, and development are inevitable in Bahá'í community and are to be accompanied by this new insight, what value/attitude typology is there to adopt to promote and foster a community that best expresses the essential will while maintaining intact the unifying principles of the arbitrary will?

Culture of Growth

Before examining this issue it is important we look more closely to the concept 'culture of growth' first mentioned in the January 9th, 2001, Message of the UHJ to the Continental Board of Counsellors. The phrase "culture of growth" at face value seems redundant. The right culture is a significant determinant of a community's ability to

grow and prosper. Culture shapes our thoughts, feelings and action. Imagine, for a moment, the negative impact on young businessmen in Ghana forestalled in involving themselves in affairs of international business simply because of the traditional respect to elders who do not wish for the younger generation to be involved in events beyond their national boundaries?⁹ Or the obstacles to upward mobility and self-improvement which the resignation of the poor in certain societies represents? Or the low priority given to the education of girls because of gender inequality? The point here, reinforced with countless other studies, is that culture matters in any collective behaviour, be it social or economic, albeit representing a very complex story.¹⁰ The most pervasive and harmful tendencies in culture are to revert to the familiar and to revere the past, at the price of neglecting the present. One cabinet member of an African country, for example, when questioned on the issue of underfunding the AIDS programme in his country and how he could look at some of the accomplishments of Uganda in this area he replied that they, and “not Uganda had possessed the third highest standard of living in Africa” twenty-five years ago. Clearly blind pride and a lack of openness that stands in the way of learning and innovation may not be prevalent in Bahá’í communities but we are not immune from such error. Another obstacle is the error induced by conservatism. To continue with ritual and repetition rather than decipher the real meaning of tradition is unjustified. It is tantamount to forsaking the tribulations of the Prophet in providing precisely that new gestalt to break down ritualistic conservatism.

Growth depends on changing the way we think about growth. The same for progress, prosperity or any other idea behind man’s quest for community. Introspection is important. A modern community stresses a continuous process of self-analysis. The Universal House of Justice shows its foresight when it writes that “the periodic reevaluation of the effectiveness of the teaching work is an essential factor in promoting the growth of every community.” (Lample p. 132). As one distinguished scholar from Stanford put it “A modern nation is self-correcting”. (Inkeles *One World Emerging*, 24). So how people actually think or feel are important concepts.¹¹ Specialists acknowledge now after five decades of frustrated development, for example, that mental models may offer the best way to understand and attack the problem of poverty. Our mental states influence the way we behave and precede culture as the key variable. Peter Senge, in his groundbreaking book *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) defines mental models as “deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action”. (p 8). Nobel laureate Douglas North writes that human beings use ‘both ... mental models ... and institutions “ to “shape the performance of

economies.” Columnist and economist Paul Krugman admits that “Economists are notoriously uninterested in how people actually think or feel.” But again it is counterproductive to discuss a particular value/attitude typology without being clear of what we mean by growth. Have a conducive mentality for what? Progress in which area? Expansion where? Consolidation and improvement to what end? Progress is commonly defined as a movement towards economic development, social justice, and political freedom. As Bahá’ís we do not disagree with this interpretation but find it imperfect. Its shortcoming is its imbalance.¹²

Progress is not so much a ‘movement towards’ a desired material objective but a ‘turning to’ a dominant spiritual force – the efficient cause which gives finality to all human effort as well as true balance. Material progress is activity, spiritual progress is reflexivity.¹³ Take the latter away and the work of the Cause becomes the work of an international aid agency and not that of a ‘healing Agency, this leavening Power, this cementing Force, intensely alive and all-pervasive ...’ The words of Shakespeare are revealing: “Take but degree away, untune that string, and hark, what discord follows. Each thing meets in mere oppugnancy.” (*Troilus and Cressida* Act I, scene II): The fairest testimony of mankind to itself today – its state of disequilibrium and disharmony where vision is befogged and systems have lost their virtue despite all efforts to redeem it.

The central issue, therefore, in our discussion on culture, community and growth should not be so much me–you, us and them, but between the me here and now and the me there and then. How I grow daily turning to the heaven of holiness is as vital as how the community grows periodically moving towards prosperity. How I recognize my limitations in understanding truth will turn more effective my work in translating ‘that which hath been written into reality and action.’ (TB 166) The two processes are interdependent and are the defining attributes of simultaneously building an ideal society and perfecting the behaviour of individuals – the key to resolving Tonnies’ dilemma of society and community. Not dissimilar to Shoghi Effendi’s message captured in his ‘double crusade’: “first, to regenerate the inward life” of our own communities, “and next to assail the longstanding evils that have entrenched themselves in the life” of nations. (ADJ 34)

Idols

The mental model needed to carry out this double crusade (to be defined shortly) cannot be beset with certain natural tendencies or defects (idols) which prevent us from achieving a full and accurate

understanding of the ethics of community. (The word “idol” here is used not in the sense of false god but from the Greek *eidolon* meaning image or phantom). Many centuries ago a bright Englishman introduced a famous doctrine which serves us well to this day.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626), perhaps in his charge to establish the basis for the emerging scientific philosophy of empiricism, highlights in his book *Novum Organon* (1620), four different classes of idols (Book I Aphorisms 39-68) that we must recognize to counteract falsehood and avoid dogma and ignorance. One of the four, Bacon's ‘Idols of the Tribe’ refer to the natural weaknesses and tendencies common to human nature. Only the Idols of the Tribe are not the result of nurture. All the others are acquired through intercourse with other men and the particular environments in which thinking takes place. We chose *Idola tribus* because they are innate, they cannot be completely eliminated, but only recognized and compensated for. Some of Bacon's examples are: reverting to the familiar, wishful thinking (according to Bacon, we have a natural inclination to accept, believe, and even prove what we would prefer to be true), and our tendency to rush to conclusions. Spelling out the ways in which the Idols of the Tribe come to bear on the human understanding, persistently creating bias and twisting its workings in specific directions in specific directions, Bacon observed: ‘The human understanding resembles not a dry light, but admits a tincture of the will and passions, which generate their own system accordingly – for man always believes more readily that which he prefers.’

Preference here is given to Bacon rather than other modern theories of unlearning,¹⁴ principally because of its datedness and how, independent of the period, man always incubates misleading assumptions as self-created barriers to truth owed to fear, prejudice, and principally, in the case of religion, fixed antagonism. We carry ‘an enchanted glass, full of superstitions and imposture’, which robs the full potential of the inquiring mind and weakens the beneficial leverage of mental models designed to see the world anew. The mental model we are referring to are the concepts of trust and resignation set in the context of a trustless world and a technology dependent society with the emphasis being made not so much on the central importance of these values to personal spiritual development and social stability but that trust and resignation are indispensable states of mind in the compelling saga of the quest for true community. We shall see how both of these attitudes are consequential to the behavioural implications of steadfastness in the face of a disobedient self and the lure of irresponsible freedom bent on interpreting rules in peculiar ways.

Trust and Resignation

In the Book of My Covenant (*Kitáb-i-‘Ahdí*) two key words appear early on in the text — ‘trust’ and ‘resignation’:

Although the Realm of Glory hath none of the vanities of the world, yet within the treasury of trust and resignation We have bequeathed to Our heirs an excellent and priceless heritage. Earthly treasures We have not bequeathed, nor have We added such cares as they entail. (TB)

Trust and resignation, the needed value/attitude typology referred to earlier, are sister obligations, a sacred dyad, the duality principle on which depends our outcome as true agents in connexion with God, where social virtue (trust) and personal quality (resignation) seal a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical aspects of Bahá’í communities.

In our daily lives we accept and trust the judgement of highly trained professionals to cure us, to educate us, to protect us. Trust is a binding, stabilizing, critical factor of social order and progress. How much so to trust in the judgement of the Divine Physician. The Manifestations of God are

the very life of the world, and the skilled physician of each ailing soul ... relate thou the Teachings of the Abhá Beauty to the urgent needs of this present day, and thou wilt see that they provide an instant remedy for the ailing body of the world. Indeed, they are the elixir that bringeth eternal health. (SWAB 59)

To apply the teachings to the needs of the age we must forsake our ‘idle fancies and vain imaginings’ and trust the judgement, vision and understanding of the Prophet. ‘... *whatsoever are the effective means for safeguarding and promoting the happiness and welfare of the children of men have already been revealed by the Pen of Glory.*’ (TB) This is not just a pious and spontaneous religious outburst but a comprehensive statement to believe in and a most effective ethical value to be shared, especially by those who hold positions of responsibility in the Cause of God to maintain order and organization in a divine trust committed to our charge by God’s Messenger for today.¹⁵ No society is possible without order and Bahá’u’lláh’s concept of order is centralized in the Covenant which has its genesis in Revelation, authority necessarily superior to human reason. As such “carries with it Assurance beyond Doubt, Evidence beyond Exception.”¹⁶ The consequence of this axiom is the assent of reason to authority — the immediate faith (well captured by the Hebrew word *emunah* or “trusting in the Covenant”) — and virtues

like loyalty, honesty and dependability or trust must necessarily begin to flourish.

The Bahá'í model of society not only encourages and protects such ethics but depends on them for its prosperity. The evolution of technology, the fermenting of new social relationships and the consolidation of global networks depend on the prevalence of trust. But more importantly trust in the Covenant avoids the disaggregating forces of progress in the secular world as well as guard against heliocentric tendency of religion to coercive power. These may be avoided if both community and the institutional framework remain faithful to the Covenant and conduct their business on its axis *even though they may not know, or cannot fully understand, the connections or benefits.*

There is a broader implication of dependency, however, which is expressed in the peculiar spiritual vision of Bahá'u'lláh of human reality:

They should put their trust in God, and, holding fast unto Him, follow in His way ... inasmuch as man can never hope to attain unto the knowledge of the All-Glorious, can never quaff from the stream of divine knowledge and wisdom, can never enter the abode of immortality, nor partake of the cup of divine nearness and favour, unless and until he ceases to regard the words and deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets. (KI 3-4)

The Kitáb-i-'Ahdí has branded in the word Covenant an attitude to trust very different from current legal-rational codes of conduct and moral-ethical guides to collective behaviour, no matter how precise, creative, or even technologically fully proven these have been made out to be. In the Bahá'í way of life humility is the cornerstone of trust relationships. Given our overwhelming limitations as human beings and the need to respect the rules as active members of a diverse community we have a spiritual obligation to distance ourselves from any corrupt inclination of fame and popularity which false notions of rank and position breed. In the Book of His Covenant, we find the standard against which to measure our worth not as haughty creatures but as humble servants conscious of the gift that our virtues are not intrinsically our own but rather manifestations of the attributes of God.

'Say: all things are of God.' This exalted utterance is like unto water for quenching the fire of hate and enmity which smouldereth within the hearts and breasts of men. By this single utterance contending peoples and kindreds will attain the light of true unity.

The greater the humility of the holders of trust the greater the probability that trust shall succeed as a social virtue; the richer the quality of servitude the more abundant the results of service; the more absent ambition, the more present the “esteem and real affection” of subject to ruler. The effective discharge of duty and leadership in the Cause is not dependent on proficiency or power but humility and service and this breeds resignation.¹⁷ Patience and resignation are the hard-earned marks of a true believer because they represent the highest form of belief as evidenced by sacrifice. But for trust, however, resignation cannot exist. Acquiescence implies self-deliverance to a trusting power. Any other combination is compulsion not resignation and where there is compulsion there is no joy (*“Compulsion and felicity cannot be together”*) with all its implications for social rupture and alienation. Trust must be established first for resignation to follow; I must trust the law before I am able to resign and be patient to its outcome. And the patience I bear must be true and forbearing, anything else is resignation’s forgery, a cheap, chalked image of a master design. In Bahá’u’lláh’s mystical work, the Seven Valleys, we read of the fruit of patience:

... without patience the wayfarer on this journey will reach nowhere and attain no goal. Nor should he ever be downhearted; if he strive for a hundred thousand years and yet fail to behold the beauty of the Friend, he should not falter.... In their search, they have stoutly girded up the loins of service, and seek at every moment to journey from the plane of heedlessness into the realm of being. No bond shall hold them back, and no counsel shall deter them.
(SVFV 5)

By dominating the ego and its ‘evil passions and desires’ (referred to in the Book of His Covenant as *nafs* and *havas*) – precisely the two imposters in Bacon’s tribe of Idols – we are free to surrender. Trust in authority higher than our own and resignation to circumstances beyond our control has as its basis the strength of certitude and conscious faith and not the powerlessness of passive fatalism or self-denial. This is the poverty of resignation and creates obdurate mental models that impede progress and victimize its participants. ‘It is good to suffer in this life because in the next life you will find eternal reward’. Or ‘We must not challenge the will of God’. Such impoverished mind-sets need to be reoriented to promote prosperity. Nor does resignation mean to be imprudent. The words of a fisherman from Galilee resound to this day “Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” Mathew 10:16

Bahá’u’lláh has swept away the belief in the virtue of living a hard life as invented by Stoics or argued by Cynics.¹⁸ In the Bahá’í

Covenant resignation is not an end in itself but a means for patient obedience to be learnt. Submission to the Will of God in the last analysis helps us accept outcomes contrary to our expectations – a state of mind which our natural pride disallows with insolence. As the lesson of Abraham offering his son Isaac for sacrifice in the Old Testament teaches us no sacrifice is too hard when God demands it. Resignation is trust in the mystery of the standard, “*He doeth what He willeth, ordaineth what He pleaseth.*” (Qur'an 2:254)

This is valid in our daily lives as much as it is in our administrative duties as Bahá'ís or in our research as scholars. Well-intentioned effort and praiseworthy achievement vanish in the Cause when those responsible for such acts become proud and arrogant, ‘the most deadly of sins’ and dismiss contrariness with airy condescension. Blatant disrespect, even its lesser manifestation grudging compliance, are tantamount to forgetting our part of the bargain as loyal covenanters (no partnership withstands the cult of the petty personality for any length of time) aside from displaying a poor understanding of the ultimate aim in the life of every soul – to attain spiritual excellence.

Whoever has is eyes fixed on the goal of attaining the good pleasure of God will accept with joy and radiant acquiescence whatever work or station is assigned to him in the Cause of God, and will rejoice to serve Him under all conditions. (UHJ, Ranks and Functions in the Bahá'í Cause, letter dated 03/27/1978)

It is to this aspect of contentment and resignation that part of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet Madínatu'r-Ridá (City of Radiant Acquiescence), revealed in Baghdád, advances. To be pleased with the believers and to be humble before them is explained in the Tablet as an important attribute of “contentment and radiant acquiescence.”

To show pride towards them is to show pride to God; for man cannot attain the good-pleasure of his Creator unless he obtains the good-pleasure of His loved ones.

Bereft of God's love, service in the Covenant is barren. Without radiance and resignation efforts in promoting the interests of the Cause lose efficacy. Applying the mental model of trust and resignation all human calculation is suspended. It is the dialectic of faith at its most refined (we are conscious of our choice but on the strength of the seemingly absurd) of which we can only form a conception and not a comprehension. The incommensurable, however, is recognizable given its heroic quality, memorably defined by Kierkegaard: “The knights of infinite resignation are readily

recognizable, their gait is gliding, bold.” (*Fear and Trembling* 1843, 67).

Final Words

To correct the antithetical tendencies of society and community and to understand the new culture of growth that is sweeping before us (the world-wide reception to a sequence of courses offered by training institutes and the movement of geographic clusters from one stage of growth to the next has hardly been an easy learning experience not to mention trying) and avoid being the ‘magical religion’ in the Weberian sense we must question our accumulated beliefs, methods, knowledge, systems, habits, stories and traditional patterns of community behaviour. We become comfortable with our limited models, despite their obvious incompleteness. We are hesitant with the new because of our misconceived loyalties. The new culture is a credence good — it has to be taken on faith. Its quality cannot be determined by inspection, in advance of purchase. That is why monitoring input is so important. If the quality of the output cannot be determined readily, the next best way of ascertaining quality may be to monitor input quality. Not to screen the three active participants of social change but to approach individuals, institutions, and the community with compassion and understanding and raising each of them to a new level of spirituality.

With regard to the ideal society, all philosophers whether classical or revolutionary attest to the ascendancy of the spiritual bond over all others in maintaining the fabric of society. The community of mind is the closest to such an image. It is a community whose language is a spiritual language; it is not spoken, it is felt. It is a community that recognizes the fundamental needs of human existence and self-expression but no longer blames the order or society for its defects. It regards as shameful for its members to have to rely on others to obtain their inner sense of justice. This makes of us slaves and others our master. The root of the Latin word ‘societas’ is to share, to unite, man’s carbon copy of an ancient divine exhortation: “... let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.” (Philippians 3:16) and the Master’s oft-repeated desideratum: “... that we may unite even as the waves of one sea and become merged together as the rays of Thine effulgent Light; that our thoughts, our views, our feelings may become as one reality, manifesting the spirit of union throughout the world.” (BP 138) By combining social perception (Tonnies) with philosophical perspective (Bacon) and by acknowledging the Bahá’í categorical imperative of trust in the Divine Covenant and its institutions, we have not today constructed the community of mind so much as tried to portray the need to be masters of the art of composition when attempting to

bring communities as close as possible to the divine original. In bringing all lives, all ends, all values and all means into total articulation with one another we must, first and foremost, be artists and not technicians, poets and not statesmen, rational souls and not public intellectuals. Skepticism be replaced by estheticism, workers by seekers. In short, a community composed of men and women with 'fire in their minds'. "The passion ending, doth the purpose lose." (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*)

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NOTES

¹ George Townshend, in *George Townshend*, page 223.

² The mythological saga of the Titan brothers Prometheus and Epimetheus, meaning ‘forethought’ and ‘afterthought’ respectively, and delegated by Zeus to create mankind may well symbolize the tension of thinking before acting and acting before thinking that characterize community in history and its reshaping under everchanging conditions.

³ The title of the presentation must not be confused with the concept ‘philosophy of the mind’ which is concerned with the nature of mental phenomena in general and the role of consciousness, sensation, perception etc. Standard problems include those of free will, personal identity, mind-body problem and so on.

⁴ At a January 2002 session of the Astronomical Society meeting, a young astronomer named Brian Mason, of Caltech, presented the lead paper in one of the main cosmology sessions. His discussion paper bore the title, “Measurements of the CMB Power Spectrum to $L = 4000$ with the CBI”. Whatever happened to Einstein’s blunt ‘The Foundation of the General Theory of Relativity’ or “The Big Bang Cosmology”? ‘*God in the Equation: How Einstein Transformed Religion*’ Corey S. Powell, page 242.

⁵ Tönnies’ major work, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (first published in 1887), is available in English translation (edited and translated by Charles P. Loomis) as *Community and Society* (1957).

⁶ Not dissimilar to the Aristotelian ideal of the intimate, reciprocating local community bound by shared ends.

⁷ See letter from an individual believer to the UHJ, dated August 9th, 2002 posted on the Internet <http://bahai-library.org/uhj/enrollments.growth.html>

⁸ The idea of a systematic approach to Bahá’í activity first appears in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to the Bahá’ís of the Central States, revealed on March 29, 1916 where he counsels that the teaching effort should be conducted ‘systematically and enthusiastically’.

⁹ Such pressure of course can have the opposite effect as in the case of Chinese merchants who had no choice but to excel at making money because Confucianism formally placed the merchants near the bottom of the social scale. Plato had similar disregard for the commercial class relegating them to the lower abdomen together with craftsmen and husbandmen in his analogy of comparing the activities of the State with bodily functions (Republic).

¹⁰ The fact that the same values do produce different consequences in different circumstances is just one of the paradoxical relationship between culture and economic behaviour.

¹¹ Sociologists as early as the 1900s questioned the cultural origins of economic development beginning with Max Weber’s famous work *Die*

protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus (The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism) 1922; then followed by anthropologists such as Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict (her teacher) in the 1940s, to be completed in the 1980s with the most prominent contribution to the value of culture in understanding societies written by Lawrence Harrison, entitled "Underdevelopment Is a State of Mind – the Latin American Case" (1985) where he concludes that culture has been a primary obstacle to development.

¹² Social observers refer to development along exclusively material lines and focus on three drivers: technology (scientific advance), goods (economic output), and freedom (political, cultural and social emancipation). The materialist stance is highlighted by a World Bank publication, *The Quality of Growth* (2000), which equates quality of life with higher per capita income, equitable education and job opportunities, greater gender equality, better health and nutrition, cleaner and more sustainable natural environment, more impartial judicial and legal system, broader civil and political freedom and a richer cultural life.

¹³ Reflexivity does not simply imply reflection, but a "self-confrontation created by the dynamics of modernisation" (Giddens, Beck "*Reflexive Modernization*", 1995). The disposition for reflexivity is created by the constant flow of information characterizing modern communities and which forces these simultaneously to revise themselves. The spiritual dimension is the collective self-confrontation with eternal spiritual principles.

¹⁴ Systems thinking (and its sensibility for subtle interconnectedness), feedback concepts of cybernetics and servo-mechanism engineering theory are all famously discussed and applied in Peter M. Senge's *The Fifth Discipline: the Art & Practice of the Learning Organization*, 1990, Doubleday.

¹⁵ Reference here to elected Bahá'í representatives and scholars may not be uncalled given that so much responsibility is borne by these legitimately qualified defenders of social order and progress, especially scholars, whose high attainment "make it possible for them to contribute in important ways to the advancement of civilization [and] are deserving of society's recognition and gratitude." Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, March 14, 1996.

¹⁶ John Locke, quoted in Wendy M. Heller's exposition "Covenant and the Foundations of Civil Society", published in BW 1995-96. If faith constitutes the supreme degree of assent possible by human reason, this poses a serious challenge especially to Bahá'í scholars who must "try to avoid the snare of allowing a divorce between their faith and their reason." See the Memorandum on Scholarship in the Universal House of Justice letter dated January 3rd, 1979.

¹⁷ Much debate today is being centred on the concept of the servant-leader as the management paradigm of the future where the philosophy of service is present in the practice of leadership. Embedded in

teamwork and community, the servant-leader asks the questions, “Whom do we serve?” and “For what purpose?” testing the idea that those served grow as persons, “become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants.” See *The Power of Servant Leadership*, edited by Larry C. Spears. See also a seminal article by Jim Collins entitled “Level 5 Leadership, the Triumph of Humility and Fierce Resolve”, *Harvard Business Review*, January 2001 issue.

¹⁸ The common ground of Stoicism and Cynicism is the manner in which both respond to the inevitable cycle of senescence and decay. Their gesture that living in accordance with Nature reduces man’s wants is not a celebration of life but its depreciation, and therefore contrary to Bahá’í belief.

True of Thyself

The Mystical Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and Ken Wilber's system of integral philosophy

Wolfgang A. Klebel

Introduction

Who sees inside from outside?

*Who finds hundreds of mysteries even where minds are
deranged?*

See through his eyes what he sees.

Who then is looking out from his eyes?

Jalálu'd-Din Rúmi (1207-1273¹)

“To see inside from outside” is the topic of this essay. The Persian Sufi poet and mystic Rúmí, who was a contemporary of Thomas Aquinas, stated in this poem the question that today arouses the interest of the philosopher again. For several centuries the inside remained unseen, the progress of science was focused exclusively on the outside of this world and all what could be counted and measured. Today it appears that the inside of things is in the process of being rediscovered by psychology, by philosophy and, yes, even by science.

The same thought has been fundamental to Phenomenology as a philosophical system explaining Personal-dialogic Thinking:

The study of human awareness as it is authentically revealed without assumptions and bias from abstract objectivity and one's own agenda. It implies the use of intelligent subjectivity by authentic individuals in an encounter that is primarily dialogic. Its importance lies in the issue that one can then attempt to “look through the eyes of the **other**” and then (ideally) experience the **other** with compassion and situated acceptance. The **other** then reflects back to us and we “come upon ourselves as stranger”. As with children looking in their parent's eyes, we see ourselves to learn, and to be gifted.² (bold in the original)

In this description, the origin of spirit is based on the dialogical nature of the human person. This spirit is given to the child looking in their parent's eyes. From this origin in the individual to the origin of human spirituality as a whole, this thinking of dialogic Personalism leads to the biblical tradition. This is expressed in John 1,1 "In the beginning was the word," directing the attentive reader back to Genesis 1:1-3 where it is stated: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said ..."

The inside is seen through, and in the eyes of the other, through and in the word of the other connecting the "I" and the "Thou" (you singular)³. In establishing the unity of the vision and of the inside, i.e., the spirit, R  m   asks the question, who then is looking out from his eyes? In the mystic Sufi tradition, and in most other mystic traditions, what is seen in the inside is ultimately the Divine. Can we see the inside if we do not see that the individual is always part of a collective; that the position of the individual cannot be seen without seeing the collective in which this individual finds its place? So seen and unseen, or outside and inside is equally the topic of this paper as the individual and the collective as expressed in the inside and outside. The integration of the inside and outside, of the individual and collective, of being and awareness is at the core of the integral philosophy of Ken Wilber, whose writings will assist in this paper's quest to attain the "Truth of Thyself."

What is the Truth of the self, one could ask? How does the self relate to the internal and external, to the individual and to the collective? To rediscover this tradition of the self and to fortify it with modern science and the understanding of the development of the individual and of humanity brings about Wilber's integral philosophy that has become a new, a worldwide phenomenon as the translation of his books into 20 languages demonstrates. What is it that made him the most read thinker not only in USA, but popular also in countries such as Germany and Japan?

A note about popularity needs to be inserted here. Popularity is not a criterion of truth, in fact, it often is indicative of a lack of truth, or, as history has proven, it is an indication of what can be called "half-truth." Something becomes popular because it conveys some truth, but in an easy form, which often disguises the untruthful, but popular aspect of the statement. In the case of the Integral Philosophy of Ken Wilber this issue will be explored below.

This paper is concerned with a vision that will shape the future; it is trying to discover the way humanity sees itself and how it will try to solve the difficulties the future might bring. Can philosophy be

the answer, or does it take more than human understanding? This paper will bring together philosophical thinking of today and another source of knowledge and understanding, i.e., the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, (1817-1893), who is the founding prophet of the Bahá'í Faith, and regarded as the Manifestation of God for our age.

The comparison of Wilber's integral approach and Bahá'u'lláh's progressive Revelation will result in an attempt to formulate some principles of an integral and progressive theology, an attainment that can today only be envisioned in its outlines and that will have to be developed over time.⁴ This comparison could further suggest some ideas about the future Bahá'í commonwealth; and it will shed some light from the "Truth of Thyself" as expressed by Bahá'u'lláh towards the future of humankind.

Terry Culhane has made a connection between the philosophy of Ken Wilber and the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh in the "integration of the tradition of liberalism with a genuine spirituality".⁵ In the chapter "Redeeming Modernity: Bahá'u'lláh and the Integral Philosophy of Ken Wilber", he compares Wilber's integral philosophy with the "life and work of Bahá'u'lláh" and finds that both have a rather corresponding understanding of the development of modernity, of its strength and pitfalls, and both come to similar conclusions.

This correlation can be noted, when looking at the tradition of liberalism, but the work and life of Bahá'u'lláh and especially His early mystical Writings go much farther than the philosophy of Wilber and are based on an understanding of the human predicament that transcends Wilber's ideas. Culhane is aware of this when discussing the concept of Irfan and the integration of the social practices in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

The present essay intends to continue this dialogue between Wilber and Bahá'u'lláh; it will extend it to a broader scope, including the cosmological aspects of both system; and will, furthermore, indicate in what special areas the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is not only corresponding, but also transforming and transcending Wilber's system of integral philosophy and psychology. Wilber's subtle individualism, his mystic-panteistic world view will be placed in the light of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, which transcends the philosophical speculation and psychological research of Wilber, as we will see.⁶

There is another topic, which needs to be raised. What is the connection of these two systems, one a Revelation, the other a philosophy, and both a century apart? We have to ask in what way can the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh be understood as the seminal ground on which the philosophy of Wilber grew? This question has been raised about other modern thinkers as well, for example Martin

Heidegger⁷ and, most of all, Teilhard de Chardin⁸, whose writings were a precursor of Wilber's thinking about the relationship of matter and spirit.

It is this writer's opinion that Bahá'u'lláh's ontological understanding of the universe corresponds, at least in some important points, with the ideas presented and explicated by Ken Wilber, who has most recently, i.e., more than a century after Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, described the structure and integration of being, in a potential "Theory of Everything." Such a theory must include all of reality in an abstract form and this is how Wilber describes this theory. He reverted to the Greek form of the word *cosmos* reintroducing the word "Kosmos," implying that by this spelling he means all reality or everything that is, not only the partial, external and materialistic aspects, which is researched by modern cosmology. He finds access to this Kosmos in an analysis of human consciousness and of its development, and explicates it in his theory of "all-quadrants" "all-levels", which will be explained below.⁹

Similarly, in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, it can be stated that the truth of this universe is revealed in "thyself", in you and me, in the human predicament. It consists of four states, of Firstness and Lastness, of Outwardness and Inwardness (the manifest and the hidden),¹⁰ or as expressed in the analogous terminology of Wilber in Individual and Collective, in Interior and Exterior states. For this investigation and this writer, these words of Bahá'u'lláh have become "mother words", in the sense as explicated by Him:

Every single letter proceeding out of the mouth of God is indeed a mother letter, and every word uttered by Him Who is the Well Spring of Divine Revelation is a mother word, and His Tablet a Mother Tablet. Well is it with them that apprehend this truth. (GWB 142)

In this paper these four "mother words" of Bahá'u'lláh, "First and Last", "Seen and Unseen", "that are true of thyself", will be analyzed and an attempt will be made to explicate some of the meaning contained in these terms. It is obvious that this attempt is rather limited by the ability and background of this writer; on the other hand, this limited perspective in combination with other interpretations in the sense of consultation can and should contribute to a better understanding of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh in the ongoing dialogue of Bahá'í scholarship.

This has been stated by Steve Birkland when he said: "The beauty of it is: the limitations are all characterized by the way our minds have been trained, so the view of a mathematician, the view of an artist, the view of a doctor, or the view of any particular person give shape and form to this interpretation." Furthermore "these words

would give rise through every individual's mind, according to their limitations and capacity, to things that we had no previous knowledge."¹¹

Since these four terms in this combination are used only in the early writings of Bahá'u'lláh, as far as they are published and available, the context of these terms needs to be elaborated and its correlation, as well as its distinguishing features, to Wilber's corresponding terms analyzed.

After a brief description of the concept of "individual and collective" of "interior and exterior" as used by Wilber, and clarifying these concepts in his philosophical system, the corresponding terms used by Bahá'u'lláh will be investigated and their place in the Seven Valleys will be evaluated.

Bahá'u'lláh describes them as being "conferred to thyself," as gift to every human individual and as descriptive of, not only, the human awareness but of the human ability to be conscious of everything, to reach out to the understanding of all that is. Traditionally, Aristotle has described this fact already, when stating that "the human mind (νοῦς) can somehow understand everything (τα πάντα)". This metaphysical line of thought leads us towards a better understanding of being, of what reality is and what humans actually can be and know. Ontology and epistemology, being and knowing, is both expressed in these structures of thinking.

Therefore, in the next part of this paper, these four categories of everything are being brought into the open and explained in their Biblical, Qur'anic and Bahá'í context. The explanation of these concepts will become further elucidated in Wilber's system of the Four Quadrants. Wilber's idea of "all levels" in this system can be found in the modern, and especially Teilhardian, concepts of progress and evolution, and in the Bahá'í principle of Progressive Revelation. It is an expression of the idea of the maturation of the individual and of mankind, both being basic concepts of the Bahá'í Revelation.

It needs to be pointed out here that this writer did not follow this line of thought in discovering this surprising correlation. In reading the Wilber terms and their explanation he felt that they were germane to the Bahá'í writings and Wilber's concept could be used to organize Bahá'í cosmology and provide a philosophical system for the writings. Therefore, he attempted to correlate Bahá'í principles with these Wilberian concepts and was in the process of writing a paper on that topic. Purely accidental, so it seems, this author was one evening reading the Seven Valleys and found to his total surprise

that Bahá'u'lláh uses terms, which Wilber has reproduced in his philosophical scheme.

More accurately, it must be stated, that Bahá'u'lláh's terms not only anticipate Wilber's understanding, but substantially improve on it, even though, they were written about a century prior. And what is even more surprising is the fact that they were written without the benefit of the philosophical and psychological development of the last century, on which Wilber's understanding is based. As will be pointed out below, one could wonder if the vision of Bahá'u'lláh was not the seminal ground, which gave rise to the development of the idea of a developmental psychology and integral philosophy, as is presented by Ken Wilber.

This discovery was unexpected and almost shocking. It is hoped that this paper will increase the understanding of these concepts and their correlation, as the work on this paper has already substantially improved the ideas on which this paper is based.

In fact, Bahá'u'lláh's terms can improve the understanding of Wilber's scheme and make it better fitting with other concepts of Wilber's Kosmology, especially the concept of Holon. As we will see later, while Wilber follows the Teilhardian concepts in describing the internal and external aspect of consciousness and being, Bahá'u'lláh's concepts of First and Last much better describe the other corresponding concepts of individual and collective used by Wilber.

Continuing this search we will attempt to delve into the range of these four concepts as presented in the Bahá'í writings. This excursion will assure that this investigation is in tune with the understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. It further will bring to light the breadth and depth of this Revelation and how it relates to the most up to date understanding of this world as partially presented by Wilber. This marriage of philosophy and theology in understanding of this connection again will be indicative of our time, which is a time of disintegration and integration as indicated by Shoghi Effendi¹².

In a final section the now elaborated concepts of the four quadrants and of all the levels will conclude in a description of the ontological aspect of the Bahá'í revelation and will bring new light into the Wilber concepts of reality and awareness. This bringing together of theology and some philosophical concepts, as well as, psychology will impart more light into the Wilber metaphysical system, not only indicating the severe limitations of this system, but also its partial truth. This will open up the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh to today's philosophical discourse encompassing the whole globe. The numerous translation and wide distribution of Wilber's books could assist in this development.

This paper, therefore, is an attempt to integrate two seemingly diverse systems of thought and to compare them to each other. What they have in common is the fact that both are in their particular way universal and integral, in what they differ is that one author is the prophet-founder of a world wide religion, spreading quickly all over the continents and the other is a philosophical and psychological thinker, who has found wide acceptance in the USA and has reached international recognition. Both are separated by more than a century, yet it does not appear that the later has been much aware of the former.

We will encounter the difficulty of trying to understand the unity that binds them together, the deeper meaning that is the basis of both of their ideas and we will have to make some effort to explain the relationship between them both. It would be too easy to just assume that the truth is always the same, no matter, who discovers it – that things hang together and that there is a causal relationship between different points of view and thoughts, which develop independently from each other, as long as they sound similar.

Or, one might think, all is just accidentally connected; just like in a heap of sand the different grains have nothing to do with each other, except their proximity and similarity. Another way to understand a coincidence of similar thoughts is to assume that either one has caused the other or that both have one or more common causes that connects their ideas together.

There are certainly two basic types of thinking about these kinds of relationships, as Teilhard de Chardin already noted:

However, it is just at this point, in fact, that we meet an initial split in the thinking mass of mankind.” And further: “Beneath an infinite number of secondary differentiation, caused by the diversity of social interests, of scientific investigation or religious faith, there are basically two types of minds, and only two: those who do not go beyond (and see no need to go beyond) perception of the multiple – however interlinked in itself the multiple may appear to be – and those for whom perception of this same multiple is necessarily completed in some unity. There are only, in fact, pluralists and monists: those who do not see, and those who do.¹³

Both the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh and the integral philosophy of Ken Wilber seem to be connected by similar understanding and are sharing of a similar view, at least in some areas.

Shoghi Effendi, the official interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's writings describes the God's Plan, whose Author is Bahá'u'lláh, and whose

theater of operation is the entire planet¹⁴ in terms of integration¹⁵ and disintegration, of continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other.

Such simultaneous processes of rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other, are but aspects of a greater Plan, one and indivisible, whose Source is God, whose author is Baha'u'llah, the theater of whose operations is the entire planet, and whose ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all mankind.

In the Bahá'í understanding of history it is clear that the rapid development of modern science and civilization is a response of the entire world to the message of Bahá'u'lláh, who stated that the world is pregnant of His Revelation.

The historicity of the Bahá'í worldview was portrayed by Saiedi as one of the specific new aspects of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. It is based on the principle of Progressive Revelation and the Maturity of mankind receiving this new message.¹⁶

This increasing integration of the world is described as well in Ken Wilber's Integral Philosophy, when he writes,

I sought a world philosophy. I sought an integral philosophy, one that would believably weave together the many pluralistic contexts of science, morals, aesthetics, Eastern as well as Western philosophy and the world's great wisdom traditions. Not on the level of details — that is finitely impossible; but on the level of orienting generalizations: a way to suggest that the world really is one, undivided, whole, and related to itself in every way: a holistic philosophy for a holistic Kosmos: a world philosophy, an integral philosophy.¹⁷

Wilber's Four Quadrants

Wilber organizes the structure of reality as well as of human consciousness in four quadrants, where the left two quadrants are depicting the inside of things and the right two sides the outside of things. The upper quadrants signify the individual aspect and the lower two quadrants the collective aspect of reality and consciousness.

	Inside	Outside
Individual	I Intentional	It Behavioral
Collective	We Cultural	Its Social

Figure 1: Wilbur's Four Quadrants

He further indicates that the philosophical tradition for several thousand years, in East and West, has seen the structure of being in similar ways, talking about the area of the "I" as the Beautiful, about the area of "We" as the Good and about the right sight (the "it and its") as the area of the True. Combining the tradition and the modern understanding of consciousness he added another aspect to this structure, that of the levels. With this concept he introduces into the structure of the perennial philosophy the modern idea of historicity, of evolution and progress.

In this Wilbur follows the view of Teilhard de Chardin and others, who had indicated that the evolutionary aspect of reality was a new understanding. Additionally, they had also described this evolution not only in a biological Darwinian sense, but also much more in an ontological sense, ascribing this concept of evolution to the world and the reality of being. Teilhard had developed his view from the scientific understanding of the human phenomenon, since then many studies of psychology and philosophy have built a rather substantial understanding of the progressive character of the universe.

In Figure 2 (next page), the development of the individual consciousness is shown as starting at the center and moving towards the corners in a continuous evolution of awareness, of behavior, social and cultural understanding. The same is true for the reality and development of the universe, starting in the center with the big bang and developing upwards and towards the corners in all four directions.

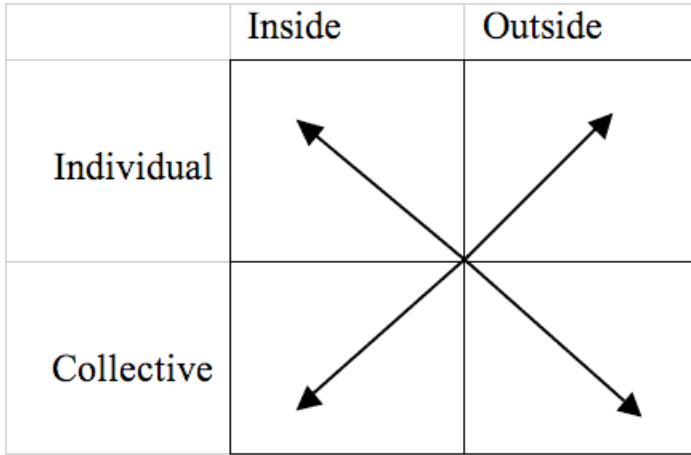


Figure 2: Development of Individual Consciousness

What should never be overlooked is the fact that this development is not happening in four different directions, but that these four quadrants are integrated and corresponding aspects of one and the same reality. Whatever develops or changes in one quadrant has effects in all the others, and happens at the same level in all four quadrants. This is cogently demonstrated in an overview of the modern understanding of developmental psychology and is demonstrated in the history of mankind as well.

Figure 3 (next page) is a graph of the four Quadrants from the books of Wilber (SES 198, SP 26). Obviously, this scheme presupposes the understanding that awareness is present at all levels of development of the universe. The reader is invited to seek the explanation for this understanding of awareness and the history of this ontological and epistemological idea in the writings of Wilber. Wilber describes the development of the universe in three spheres: The understanding, development and integration of physiosphere (matter), biosphere (living organisms) and noosphere (a Teilhardian concept, meaning the sphere of the mind), is presupposed in this scheme.

Wilber's Holons

There is another Wilberian concept (originally coined by Arthur Koestler) that is important for the understanding of this metaphysical concept of integration, which again places Wilber in the center of modern thinking and demonstrates that all of his concepts are thoroughly integrated with the most modern understanding of science. This is his concept of the Holon. This Greek term stands in for the word whole but in a very specific sense.

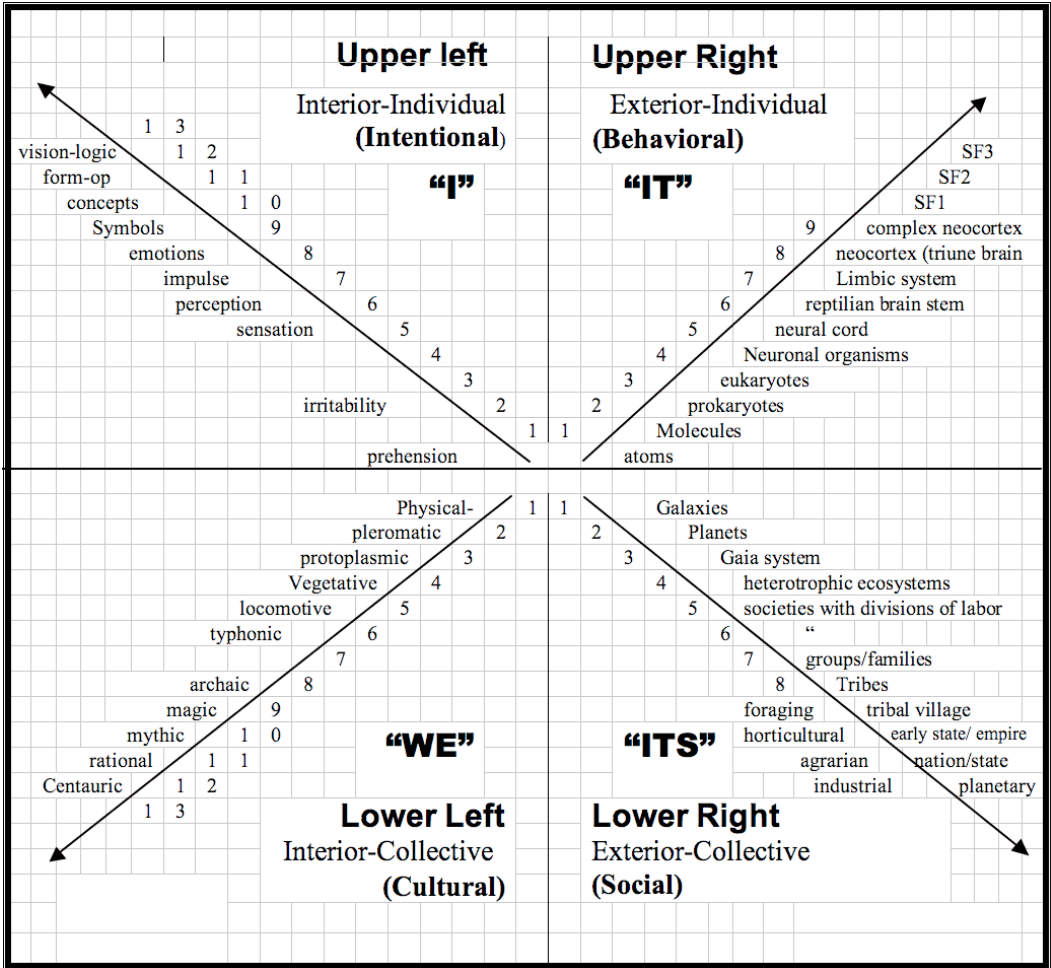


Figure 3: The Four Quadrants: Constructive and Evolutionary Integration of Awareness

Wilber explains that the world is not made of matter or spirit, who in his and Teilhard's system are never to be separated, but out of Holons. A Holon is a whole consisting of parts in its own right, and which is always at the same time a part of a higher whole.

Consequently, and that is important to the understanding of Wilber's system, everything is such a Holon, and dependent on what place such a Holon is found it will be including always parts and be a part of other wholes. So for example, the atom is a whole compared to subatomic particles such as electrons or even lower quarks etc. As soon as the atom is included in a higher whole such as a molecule it becomes a part of this. And again, the molecule will be part of the cell, and the cell of the organism and so fort, even into the spiritual

area of consciousness, this principle is continued. There is no end in either direction. The reality consists of these Holons, which gradually developed into ever-higher wholes.

We will encounter this concept again when attempting to understand the statement of Bahá'u'lláh in the Seven Valleys. And we will see, it is hoped, that this understanding from the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh gives the concept of Holon a new and increased theological and cosmological meaning. This new meaning transcends the Wilberian concept, in a similar way as Bahá'u'lláh's mystical writings transcend the Sufi mystical tradition, by incorporating what is good into His revelation and elevating it to a new level of integration.

Towards a Bahá'í Theology

Wilber describes evolution, which proceeds by separation and following integration. When the separation becomes dissociation, the evolution becomes pathological and integration cannot follow. We will recognize these and other structures of the Wilberian system later in the writing of Bahá'u'lláh. It should not surprise us that the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh did not only anticipate the Wilberian concepts, but that it further integrates them and transcends them towards a more complete understanding of the Divine. Additionally, it will become clear in this paper that this development can today be more easily understood, after Wilber has developed his system of integral philosophy and in this specific way, the theological development depends on the level of philosophical understanding. Here again we encounter the principle of progressive revelation.

To say it concisely following in the Bahá'í understanding of this relationship, the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and its influence into the world has made the philosophical progress possible, as seen in Wilber's system. And that system in turn prepares us to a deeper understanding of the meaning of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. In this sense, and in this sense only is a progressive Bahá'í theology possible. This influence of the Revelation to philosophy was expressed in the statement of Bahá'u'lláh:

The essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets. That the people differ concerning the inner meanings and mysteries thereof is to be attributed to the divergence of their views and minds.
(TB 145)

This progressive and historical principle does distinguish Bahá'í theology from all previous unhistorical and static forms of theology, which ended up in dogmatic constructs, philosophical speculations

and/or in a simple adaptation to the thinking of the times. With the understanding that the world is “pregnant with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh,” Bahá'í theology tries to trace the emerging thinking of this New Order in all contemporaneously developments of the noosphere, and then apply these findings to the Writings for better understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Therefore, it is postulated in this paper that Bahá'í theology will remain dynamic, up to date or “au courant” as the Guardian had recommended and at the same time bound by the Covenant to the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. It can remain at the zenith of modern thought, without deviating from its origin in the Scriptures and without losing its dynamic and progressive force, as long as it remains integrated into the progressive revelation of God.

After this short excursion into the philosophic system of Wilber, we will now turn our attention towards the early mystical writings of Bahá'u'lláh, especially the Seven and Four Valleys.

Structure and Purpose of the Seven Valleys

The Seven Valleys of Bahá'u'lláh “was written in response to questions of Shaykh Muhyi'd-Din, the judge of Kháníqín, a town near the Persian border northeast of Baghdad. The judge was evidently a student of Súfí philosophy, a variety of mysticism that developed as a movement within Islam.”¹⁸ As it will become clear in the following sections, we can, therefore, understand these writings as an introduction to Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation for all adherents of mysticism in general and especially Sufi mysticism. In this paper, we will attempt to use these mystical writings of Bahá'u'lláh in the same sense of integration and transcendence towards the integral philosophy of Ken Wilber, who includes Eastern and Western mysticism into his view of the Kosmos.

The formal structure of this mystical composition is patterned after the writings of the twelfth century Persian Súfí, Farídu'd-Din 'Attár, called Mantiqut-Tayr (*Language of the Birds*). Bahá'u'lláh changed the structure of this composition slightly, and the reason for this change is one of the points of analysis presented in this paper.

Quite clearly Bahá'u'lláh places the Valley of Unity in the center of this text, and organizes the three Valleys before and after around this Valley. The first three Valleys are the spatial approach towards the beloved, which is reached in the Valley of Unity. The next three Valleys are more an explanation of the Valley of Unity than new progressive steps beyond unity. This corresponds to the importance of Unity in His Revelation. The other changes are following this

change, placing the idea of detachment into the last Valley as True Poverty and adding Contentment in Place of Unification.

Attar's Language of the Birds		Bahá'u'lláh's Seven Valleys		Bahá'u'lláh's Four Valleys	
Journey of the Soul		Journey of the Soul		Journey of the Soul	
1.	Search	1.	Search	1.	Intended One
2.	Love	2.	Love	2.	Praiseworthy One
3.	Knowledge	3.	Knowledge	3.	Attracting One
4.	Detachment	4.	UNITY	4.	Beloved One
5.	Unification	5.	Contentment		
6.	Bewilderment	6.	Wonderment		
7.	Annihilation	7.	True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness		

Figure 4: Valleys of Attar and Bahá'u'lláh

It is remarkable that the Four Valleys of Bahá'u'lláh have the same structure as the Seven Valleys, but conclude with the Valley of Unity, in which all of the three further Valleys are mentioned.¹⁹

The length of the different description of the Valleys gives us another clue to the importance of the Valley of Unity. The Valley of Unity is about triple the length of the other valleys. According to Nader Saiedi, "Not a single word used by Bahá'u'lláh is arbitrary, cosmetic, or unnecessary. His dynamic poetics unveils the beauty of His mystical text."²⁰ Saiedi further comments that there are "at least four fundamental principles that distinguish Bahá'u'lláh's writings from previous expressions of mysticism in general and Sufism in particular." First the principle of "absolute divine transcendence;" secondly the "the idea of the spiritual journey is historicized;" thirdly Bahá'u'lláh insists on, "harmony, not contradiction, between mysticism and religious law, social teaching and institutions;" and finally "mysticism is inseparably linked to the principle of the unity of humankind as the ultimate goal of Bahá'u'lláh's mission."²¹

In this change we can already recognize the method Bahá'u'lláh uses in order to friendly and positively accept all what is valuable in the Sufi philosophy, yet carefully and gently moving the focus and the conclusion towards His quite different philosophy as expressed in His mystical writings. In the same manner He will explain in the last Valley the total difference between Sufi philosophy and Bahá'í mystic, stating that the Seven Valleys can be passed in one breath and only after that the city of the heart opens up the seeker to the

beloved. It is necessary to thoroughly analyze the writings in order not to overlook this tendency, which is common in all the early writings of Bahá'u'lláh and which was clearly stated by Him:

Were all the things that lie enshrined within the heart of Baha, and which the Lord, His God, the Lord of all names, hath taught Him, to be unveiled to mankind, every man on earth would be dumbfounded.

How great the multitude of truths, which the garment of words can never contain! How vast the number of such verities as no expression can adequately describe, whose significance can never be unfolded, and to which not even the remotest allusions can be made! How manifold are the truths, which must remain unuttered until the appointed time is come! Even as it hath been said: "Not everything that a man knoweth, can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it."

Of these truths some can be disclosed only to the extent of the capacity of the repositories of the light of Our knowledge, and the recipients of Our hidden grace. (GWB 176)

It has been demonstrated that this process is pervading the whole structure of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation,²² especially in His early Writings and we will, throughout the Seven Valleys, observe this principle of disclosure of truth according to the capacity of the recipients. This is actually nothing else than a direct application of the Bahá'í principle of Progressive Revelation; any Revelation of God is adjusted to the capacity of the people at that time and therefore, there will be a next revelation, as soon as humanity is ready for it. In other words, God, through His Manifestations, gives successive Revelations to humanity according to their ability and progress. As explained above this principle does permeate the development of the study and understanding of the Bahá'í Revelation as well, even beyond the time of the actual revelation until the time of the next revelation.

"That the Full Meaning may be Manifest"

A note will here be inserted as to the process of developing this paper. After studying Wilber and recognizing his internal correlation with the Bahá'í Scriptures this writer attempted to demonstrate this correspondence by explaining the Wilber scheme of Four Quadrants with Bahá'í texts and placed the principles of prayer, work, order and unity into them.

	Inside	Outside
Individual	I Intentional PRAYER	It Behavioral WORK
Collective	We Cultural UNITY	Its Social ORDER

Figure 5

These four Bahá'í principles (Figure 5) seem to fit perfectly into this scheme and explain how the Bahá'í life is organized and regulated in the individual and collective sense. While this process of understanding was in progress, this writer, seemingly accidentally, read one evening the Seven Valleys and encountered the following paragraph in the Valley of Unity:

Although a brief example hath been given concerning the beginning and ending of the relative world, the world of attributes, yet a second illustration is now added, that the full meaning may be manifest. For instance, let thine Eminence consider his own self; thou art first in relation to thy son, last in relation to thy father. In thine outward appearance, thou tellest of the appearance of power in the realms of divine creation; in thine inward being thou revealest the hidden mysteries, which are the divine trust deposited within thee. And thus firstness and lastness, outwardness and inwardness are, in the sense referred to, true of thyself, that in these four states conferred upon thee thou shouldst comprehend the four divine states, and that the nightingale of thine heart on all the branches of the rose-tree of existence, whether visible or concealed, should cry out: "He is the first and the last, the Seen and the Hidden...." [Q 57:3] (SVFV 26-7)

The first thought that struck this writer, were the concepts of outwardness and inwardness, of which was stated that they are "true to thyself" and "conferred upon thee", clearly indicating that the self is seen by Bahá'u'lláh in the same way as by Wilber, i.e., having an outward side and an inward side. Without doubt there was more to

this statement. It took some days and nights with increasing excitement to understand the rest of the statement.

The first and the last created the next hurdle, until the explanation of Bahá'u'lláh was carefully studied. This statement became clear when the text was considered, which said: "let thine Eminence consider his own self; thou art first in relation to thy son, last in relation to thy father."

That can only mean that everyone is first and last, depending on the context and that everyone is always both, first and last. Towards a higher unit, like the family of origin, one is last, one is a member; in respect to the lower unit, like the family one starts, one is first, the father is representing the whole. Consequently, when this is understood metaphysically, the term first can be replaced by the term whole and the term last can be replaced by the term part.

Another and even more meaningful explanation of first and last is the social one. A person is an individual in respect to subordinated units; he is at the same time a member, or a part of any higher collective unit, such as family, state and humanity. As a matter of fact, when the Wilber terms of individual and collective are replaced by first and last, the dynamics of this relationship is better expressed and the concept of Holon immediately comes to mind.

A Holon is, as shown before, always a whole towards its subordinated parts, and at the same time always a part towards the higher wholes, in which it is included. And everything that is, and especially man, is a Holon, every structure is hierarchically organized in this tension between being the whole and the part, at the same time and in a constant process of integration, the first and the last. This is "true of thyself" as Bahá'u'lláh clearly states, this is, as one could say, the essence of being human. This way of existing is "conferred upon thee" for a specific purpose, i.e., "to comprehend the four divine states." This purpose elevates this structure into the religious, it is the necessary condition of being able to comprehend the divine and in that sense it is the structure of man created in the image of God, as stated in the first book of the Bible.

What is given to us in creation, what is our true self, what is conferred to us, is the potential ability to recognize the Divine states. The Valley of Unity will further explain, how this is possible and in other early writings, Bahá'u'lláh will explain that these Divine states are the Manifestations of God in His Messengers. God the unknowable manifests himself as the First and the Last, the Seen (manifest) and Unseen (hidden) in His prophets, the theological meaning of this will be explicated further in another Chapter.

	Inwardness	Outwardness
First	I Intentional PRAYER	It Behavioral WORK
Last	We Cultural UNITY	Its Social ORDER

Figure 6

The “Human Gestalt:” First and Last – Outward and Inward

Internal and external²³ as seen by Wilber is only one aspect of the human consciousness and reality; the other is individual and collective. The internal and external aspects are expressed as well in the opposition between spirit and matter. These are not separate or exclusive categories of being, neither is one dependent of the other, nor can they stand alone and make the other dependent on the first. They are mutually interdependent of each other. Teilhard de Chardin has expressed that in many places, like in this quote:

It (the spirit) in no way represents some entity, which is independent of matter or antagonistic to it, some force locked up in, or floating in, the physical world. By spirit I mean ‘the spirit of synthesis and sublimation’, in which is painfully concentrated, through endless attempts and setbacks, the potency of unity scattered throughout the universal multiple: *spirit which is born within, and as a function of matter.*²⁴

The consequence of this understanding of the relationship between spirit and matter is clearly demonstrated in Wilber’s opus, where both are expressions of the Four Quadrants, the left handed side is the spiritual or inner side of beings, the right handed side exemplifies matter or the outside of things. The influence of this thinking disavows the modern materialistic understanding of the world, which was created by scientism defining being as matter and reality as only that which can be measured and operationally defined.

First and Last is the other dynamic that describes humanity, humankind is stretched out between these two poles of existence. Individual humans are always being the last in relation to humankind and in this lastness they become the first, in relation to themselves and to what belong to them. This can be reversed, only being able to be the first, being an individual; one can equally accept the lastness of one's existence. This understanding is expressed in the concept of service to humanity.

This truth was expressed in the Gospels, where the first will be the last and the last be the first, where the individual grain has to die, before it can bring fruit in the many. This Qur'anic term, of first and last, as used and expanded by Bahá'u'lláh provides new and improved understanding of the Wilberian terms individual and collective.

So we have to ask, what happens when the Wilberian term of individual and collective is replaced by Bahá'u'lláh's terms of first and last? Placing these terms from the Valley of Unity and introducing it into the Wilber scheme makes this structure more dynamic and the concepts used more appropriate, as will be shown below.

While it is clear to Wilber that internal and external must be understood in their mutual relationship, the relationship of individual and collective becomes clearer when the mutually related concepts of first and last are used to describe these quadrants. Wilber²⁵ points out that ignoring the internal aspect of the human condition was the mark of modern scientism, or materialistic scientific understanding of the world. This view of the Kosmos declares that only matter exists, and all ideas related to the internal aspect of man are nothing but fairytales, like Santa Claus.

A similar point can be made in regard to individual and collective and it is the prevalent meaning of these two concepts. In this understanding the individual is absolute, as it can be located in space and time, counted and materially measured. The individual's relationship to the collective of humankind becomes negligible and, in the Western world at least, could be ignored for all practical purposes. The individual person has material reality, the collective of people is usually seen only as an aggregate, a heap or a summation of individuals and has no attached meaning or importance in this materialistic and scientific (i.e., based on scientism not on science) understanding of the world, as is prevalent in modern times. This is basically the ideology of Western Individualism and Capitalism, where everyone is for himself, is number one and has to take care of others only to protect the self. This ideology assumed that the natural selfishness of the individual would, if used rationally, provide

the perfect state for humanity, where everyone, out of selfishness, will work for improving the fate of all.

Following this understanding, one can, and one often has understood the term “individual” as a self-standing concept, as the whole and independent essence of man. In common use the word individual can stand for human being, for men or women. Saying that someone is an “individual” gives that person special standing and value in society. Modern Individualism has actually placed this idea of the individual as an original descriptive term for the human person, relegating any higher unit as a secondary element in the human condition.

Liberal Individualism, which ignored or downgraded the collective and social aspect of man, and its social consequence Capitalism historically found its opposition in collective and materialistic Communism and Socialism, which following the same logic in a reversed way, ignored the individual and its value. Karl Marx called this change from idealism to materialism a fundamental reversal and transferred it from individualism to collectivism.

All of these ideologies are only partial conceptions of what human beings are, and this partial and deficient vision of man has caused the eminently destructive and devastating forces during the last century. In fact, Bahá'u'lláh predicted this, when He warned the leaders and all of humanity that ignoring His message will have devastating consequences for humanity. Only in the tension and relationship between first and last, inwardness and outwardness, and in recognizing the divine states, can humanity exist and prosper.

Not recognizing the true states of man, not accepting in pride that humans are the first as well as the last, created a devastating force in this world that almost destroyed humanity and even today could be causing ecological catastrophes.

First and Last in Bible and Qur'án

This section will be an overview over the passages that present the concept of first and last in the Scriptures of the Jewish, Christian and Muslims faith from Genesis to Qur'án.²⁶ What it mainly shows is the dynamic force of these words that were originally attributed to God and than to God's prophets. This process of attribution is completed in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, especially in the Kitáb-i-Íqán, the Book of Certitude, written by Bahá'u'lláh during the same period the Seven Valleys were revealed. In this book the circle is completed, from God to His Prophets, and to the believer, so the meaning of this descending and ascending circle is recognized by the

faithful, as described in the Valley of Unity, because these four states are “conferred upon thee”, to “comprehend the four divine states.”

Nader Saiedi has described this ontological circle, this *arc of descent and ascent* in *Logos and Civilization*²⁷, with special attention to the Neoplatonic, Sufi and Islamic origins of these concepts and their new interpretation in the Bahá'í writings.

Above all, one important feature strongly distinguishes the Bahá'í concept of the ontological circle from typical Sufi or Neoplatonic ideas. In the Bahá'í writings, the stations of creation in the arc of descent do not start from the divine Essence itself but from the realm of the divine Will. Likewise, the arc of ascent – or the spiritual journey – terminates not in union with the Essence of God, but in union with the Will of God.... The Primal Will is also referred to as the Command (*amr*) or Word of God and, as such, refers to the common reality or essence of the Manifestations of God. (page 55)

As the below quoted passages from the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures demonstrate, this understanding was prepared in these scriptures using the concept of first and last and of beginning and end.

From the Scriptures of the Old Testament:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1)

Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he. (Isaiah 41:4)

Here the concepts of first and last²⁸ are attributed to God, the Lord of Israel. And the beginning is the creation of heaven and earth by God. This direct relationship between God and his Creation as described in Genesis is only possible in an early and primitive understanding of this world. Evolutionary this is the message as presented to a culture that is in the archaic or magical state of development of human consciousness.²⁹

Nevertheless, that does not mean that this description is wrong or does not reveal truth, it just indicates the form in which the truth is revealed. It further does not mean that people with higher developed consciousness could not understand this message correctly, since any higher level of consciousness includes, and elevate the lower levels in a true dialectical process, as Wilber has described in most of his books.

Another point needs to be made here, the fact that Isaiah mentions the beginning and then speaks the words of God, who is

the first and with the last, who is He. Being the creator makes God the first and the last and much could be said about this understanding of the Bible, but a more complete exegesis of these texts cannot be presented here.

From the Scriptures of the New Testament

The letters of Paul were historically the first written documents of the Christian Canon. Therefore, we present them first in the description of the concepts of first and last.

1 Corinthians: 15:45:

And so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

Colossians. 1:15-20 Hymn about Christ, the head of all creation:

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature?

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: All things were created by him, and for him:

And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell;

And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.³⁰

About the seen and the unseen Paul has the following to say:

For the things, which are seen, are temporal; but the thing, which are not seen, are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:18)

The letters of the Apostle Paul were the first written documents about Jesus. Jesus is called the Last Adam and put together with the first Adam. Further, what can be seen with the natural eyes is the temporal world, the outside existence of Jesus, what cannot be seen this way is the eternal meaning of Jesus, who is described by Paul as being before all things and through his cross he will reconcile all things unto himself, in that sense he is the last. In Jesus the circle is completed that originated in the first Adam in creation and ends in the last Adam, who will reconcile all things unto himself, whether they be in earth or in heaven. This allusion to the Lord's Prayer and

to the Return of Christ expresses the completion of the ascending arc in Jesus, the Christ.

The same idea is expressed in the Gospel that was written as the last of the Gospels. Christ is the Word, in the beginning.

The Gospel of John 1:1-8:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

And in the last book of the Christian Canon, in the Book of Revelation 22:13

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

In this last book of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures the circle is completed. Christ is the first and the last, the beginning and the end. In Christ's final return God's Kingdom has come "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10)

From the Qur'án

All that is in heaven and earth gives glory to God, He is the Mighty, the Wise One. It is He that has sovereignty over the heavens and the earth. He ordains life and death, and has power over all things. He is the First and the Last, the Seen and the Unseen. He has knowledge of all things. It was He who created the heavens and the earth... (Q 57:1-3)

In the Bahá'í Writings

In the passage from the Valley of Unity Bahá'u'lláh quotes this verse from the Qur'án. The Manifestation as the First and the Last and the Seen and the Unseen is one of the topics of the Kitáb-i-Íqán as in the following passage:

Were any of the all-embracing Manifestations of God to declare: "I am God!" He verily speaketh the truth, and no doubt attacheth thereto. For it hath been repeatedly demonstrated that through their Revelation, their attributes and names, the Revelation of God, His name and His attributes, are made manifest in the world. Thus, He hath revealed: "Those shafts were God's, not Thine!" (Qur'án, 8:17) And also He saith: "In truth, they who plighted fealty unto thee, really plighted that fealty unto God." (Qur'án 48:10) And were any of them to voice the utterance: "I am the Messenger of God," He also speaketh the truth, the indubitable truth. Even as He saith: "Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but He is the Messenger of God." (Qur'án 33:40) Viewed in this light, they are all but Messengers of that ideal King, that unchangeable Essence. And were they all to proclaim: "I am the Seal of the Prophets," they verily utter but the truth, beyond the faintest shadow of doubt. For they are all but one person, one soul, one spirit, one being, one revelation. They are all the manifestation of the "Beginning" and the "End," the "First" and the "Last," the "Seen" and "Hidden"³¹ — all of which pertain to Him Who is the innermost Spirit of Spirits and eternal Essence of Essences. (KI 178-9)

What He had indicated in the Seven Valleys, Bahá'u'lláh has spelled out more directly in the Kitáb-i-Íqán, about the different Manifestations and their unity and what it means to follow them:

Therefore, whosoever, and in whatever Dispensation, hath recognized and attained unto the presence of these glorious, these resplendent and most excellent Luminaries, hath verily attained unto the "Presence of God" Himself, and entered the city of eternal and immortal life. Attainment unto such presence is possible only in the Day of Resurrection, which is the Day of the rise of God Himself through His all-embracing Revelation. (KI 142-3)

The concept of Manifestation rounds up the circle of Creation and Return, the arc of descent and ascent becomes closed in the recognition of the Manifestation, who was in the beginning and is the end of history. The progressive revelation and the return of the Manifestations in every historical Prophet makes this circle the circle of history, and it has a beginning without beginning and an end without end, in other words this process of revelation transcends the concept of time.

Wilber's Kosmos versus Bahá'í Commonwealth

It is important that we do not only point out the similarity between Wilber's philosophy and the statement of Bahá'u'lláh in the Seven Valleys but also the fundamental difference. The main difference is in the Worldview as presented by Wilber and in the understanding of Reality as presented in the Bahá'í Writings. How they overlap and how they diverge can be shown in the two figures below, which were taken from a PowerPoint presentation of the same topic. The first figure is taken from advertising to Wilber's Integral Institute and only augmented with statements indicating Wilber's understanding of God,³² which is strictly pantheistic and monistic, strongly influence by Tibetan Buddhism.



Figure 7

He follows the main tradition of the mystics of the East and the West and the critique Bahá'u'lláh applies to the Sufi mystic does apply directly here also. Saiedi stated:

Some of the Bahá'í writings employ mystical symbols and discourse, including, as in the Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys, quotations from classics of Sufi literature. At the same time, Bahá'u'lláh strongly criticizes particular premises, doctrines and practices.

Bahá'u'lláh's explicit rule on the assessment of others' statements is to be sympathetic and open minded in approaching them. Therefore, He tends to emphasize the positive aspects and the acceptable meanings that can be found in those statements.³³

A similar approach is attempted in this paper, where both the positive aspects and the critique of Wilber's philosophy must be presented.

Wilber, talking about religions, states:³⁴

The "great World Religions" (Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, etc.) that still exist today (...) all arose in the general area of *mythic-imperialism* and all of them remain clothed to some degree in surface structures (and ethics) that are the two major technological epochs behind the times. None of those religions (nor the previous tribal religions) arose from within a global culture, and thus, none of them can (or will) speak to the rising world culture, however important their specific spiritual practices are (and will remain).

And he continues talking about a new global religion, without considering the possibility that this new religion might be already present!

No, the new global religion(s) will come from within the new global culture and will not be anything simply grafted on from the past.

Wilber, in this statement, follows the modern understanding that religion is a superstructure of a culture and caused by the culture, he cannot perceive of the possibility that it is not the global culture that will bring forth a global religion, but that it could be the opposite, a global religion that is now bringing forth a global culture. He expects the global religion to come from within the new global culture, while it is this writer's conviction that the new global religion has laid the spiritual fundament of today's global consciousness.

The fact that the previous religions were presented in a different cultural milieu, fits well in the Bahá'í concept of progressive revelation, i.e., the religion is presented to the people in their understanding, in their cultural awareness.

When the Bahá'í Universe is schematically depicted in the figure below, the crucial difference is the position of the Manifestation, a central aspect of the Bahá'í Worldview and understanding of Reality. There is no monistic World Soul but the unknowable Essence of God. All human striving and understanding directed toward God is towards the Manifestation who manifests God to the world. This follows the Biblical and Qur'anic tradition, as pointed

out above. The global aspect of the new religion, the unity of the world is in fact the fundament of the Bahá'í religion, and that 150 years before global consciousness has become a cultural idea today.

In the figure below (next page), several aspects need to be pointed out: The direction toward the top is ending in the "Word of God" in the biblical sense or the "Will of God" as the origin of the Manifestation according to Bahá'í theology. God remains the unknowable Essence and therefore Bahá'u'lláh talks about absolute nothingness as the endpoint of the journey in the Seven Valleys. The terms individual and collective are replaced by Bahá'u'lláh terms of first and last, inward and outward. These four terms are conferred as states to every human being, are described by Bahá'u'lláh to comprehend the divine states:

And thus Firstness and Lastness, Outwardness and Inwardness are, in the sense referred to, true of thyself, that in these four states conferred upon thee thou shouldst comprehend the four divine states.

Furthermore Bahá'u'lláh identified the same concepts with the Manifestations of God, the founders of all world religions, whose unity in their historical appearance is the basis of all human unity and global understanding, and He describes that this is the Manifestation of the same concepts as they have been applied to God in the scriptures:

They are all the manifestation of the "Beginning" and the "End," the "First" and the "Last," the "Seen" and "Hidden" - all of which pertain to Him Who is the innermost Spirit of Spirits and eternal Essence of Essences.

The scheme of the Bahá'í Universe that is presented here (see Figure 8) includes Wilber's Four Quadrant, but elevates and transcends them in the light of the Bahá'í Revelation and indicates in the sideline that Biblical referents to that understanding. In this picture, these four terms of Bahá'u'lláh, the First and the Last, the Outwardness and Inwardness are the means for humanity to "comprehend the four divine states." The same terms are again used by Bahá'u'lláh to indicate how the Manifestations in their unity "pertain to Him Who is the innermost Spirit of Spirits and eternal Essence of Essences".

Bahá'u'lláh explains further:

Therefore, whosoever, and in whatever Dispensation, hath recognized and attained unto the presence of these glorious, these resplendent and most excellent Luminaries, hath verily attained unto the "Presence of God" Himself, and entered the city of eternal and immortal life.

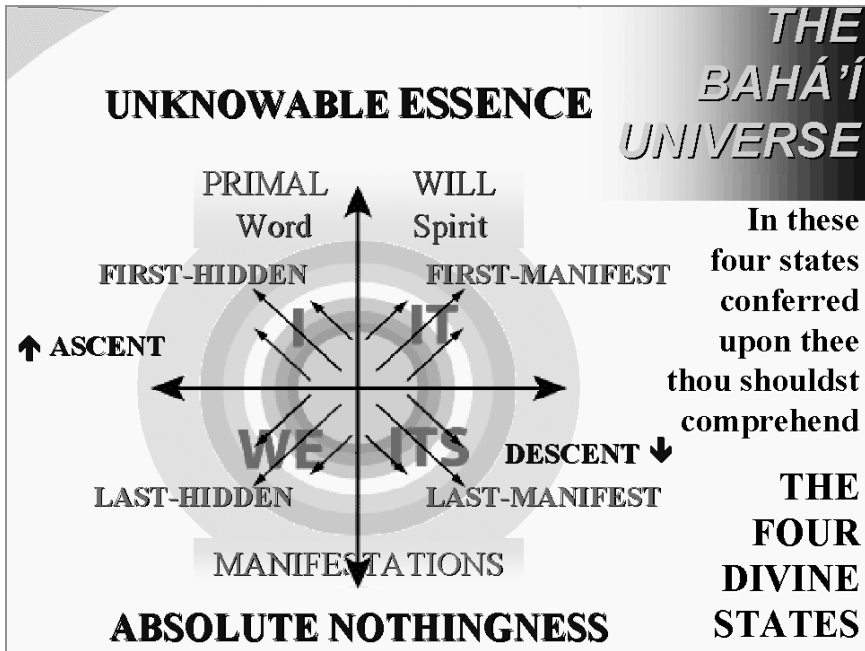


Figure 8

To this writer it appears rather convincing that the four states described by Bahá'u'lláh are nothing else than a modern explication of the words of Genesis that God created man in His image.

Concluding it could be stated that the integral philosophical understanding of Wilber and his reasoning has helped to clarify the words of Bahá'u'lláh in the Seven Valleys which He introduces with the important statement "that the full meaning may be manifest." In the Valley of the Search Bahá'u'lláh encourages the reader to identify with the traveler when He states:

On this journey, the traveler abideth in every land and dwelleth in every region. In every face, he seeketh the beauty of the Friend; in every country he looketh for the Beloved. He joineth every company, and seeketh fellowship with every soul, that haply in some mind he may uncover the secret of the Friend, or in some face he may behold the beauty of the Loved One. (SVFV 7)

Could it be that in fellowship with a philosophical seeker of our age and in the mind of influential thinkers in our days, we can uncover the secrets of the Friend? This writer had the experience of this meeting of the mind and has written these lines in the hope to assist others on the way to the Friend, the loved One, on a journey that is just a beginning.

Postscript

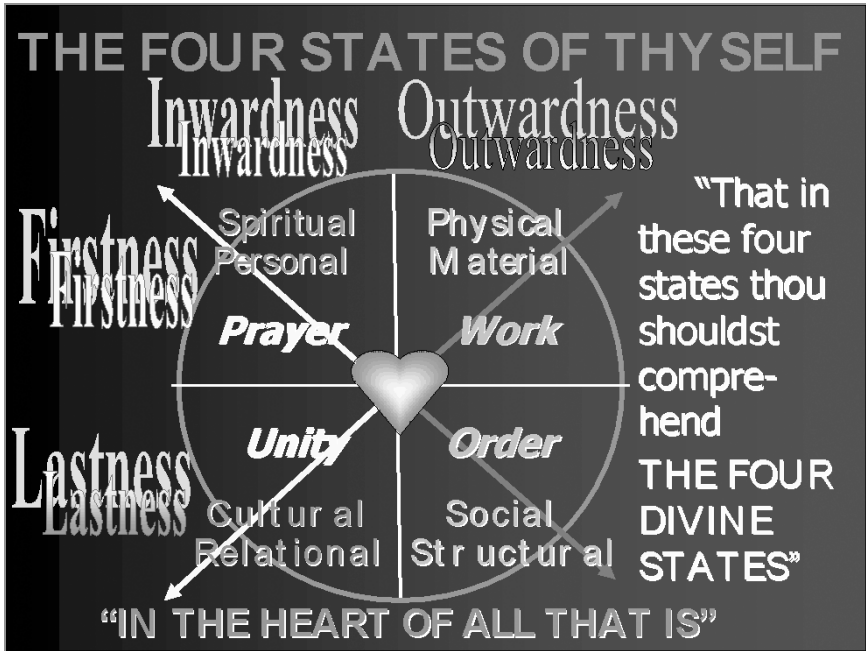


Figure 9: The Four States

The presented structure can further be developed and the four quadrants can be used to organize an integral Bahá'í worldview. Additionally, the Bahá'í writings seem to organically fit into these structures, which idea has been presented by this writer in several deepenings and firesides. This exemplification will not be presented here and can be attempted by any student of the Writings. Under the four ideas of "prayer and mystical journey," of "work and advancing civilization," of "administrative order and consultation" and finally under the "unity of the world" all Bahá'í principles can be organized and related to each other so "that the full meaning may be manifest." (SVFV 27)

The four states, as presented in Figure 9 above, are organized to describe thyself and the whole cosmos, they are not only present in man, they are the structure of all that is, or as 'Abdu'l-Baha stated in a Prayer for the first School of Bahá'í Studies, they are embedded in the heart of all that is:

Lord, help thou thy loved ones to acquire knowledge and the sciences and arts, And to unravel the secrets that are treasured up in the inmost reality of all created things. Make them to hear the hidden truths that are written and embedded in the heart of all that is.

NOTES

¹ *The Essential Rumi*, translated by Coleman Barks, Castelbooks, Edison, New Jersey 1995, page 94. Rumi was born in Afghanistan, but his family fled from the Mongols to contemporary Turkey, where he became a brilliant scholar and teacher. Rumi lived in precarious times when the Mongols from the East and the Christians Crusaders from the West attacked Islam. Bahá'u'lláh quotes him frequently throughout the Seven Valleys as presenting Sufi mysticism.

² This quote is from a description of phenomenology on the internet, which can be found on the following address: <http://www.human-inquiry.com/SpInasDiBe.htm>

³ This relationship of the I and the Thou expressed in the word or the logos of the Gospel of John is the topic of the book of Augustinus Karl Wucherer-Huldenfeld, *Personales Sein und Wort, Einführung in den Grundgedanken Ferdinand Ebners*, (Personal Being and Word, Introduction in the fundamental Principle of Ferdiand Ebener 1882-1931) Herman Bölau, Vienna Austria 1985

⁴ At the completion of this paper, this writer is researching the wider context of Bahá'u'lláh's statement in the Seven Valleys (see below) in modern philosophy, especially in the light of the dialogical thinking of Martin Buber and Ferdinand Ebner as presented in the above quoted book by Augustinus Karl Wucherer Huldenfeld and others of his writings as well as in the book by Bernhard Casper *Das Dialogische Denken, Franz Rosenzweig, Ferdinand Ebner und Martin Buber (The dialogical thinking)* Verlag Karl Albert, Freiburg, München, 2002. It is hoped that this revised and extended edition of this paper can be presented at an Irfan Colloquium in Germany. This will hopefully shed some additional light on the value and the limitation of Wilber's thinking.

⁵ Terry Culhane, *I Beheld a Maiden: The Bahá'í Faith and the Life of the Spirit*, Kalimat Press, Los Angeles, 2000, Chapter 4, page 111.

⁶ Wilber's psychological and philosophical system is based on the Psychology of Transpersonalism. In an extensive and internal critique of this philosophy, which places Wilber in a modern and Western Buddhist tradition, Toegel has called Wilber's position "Spiritual Materialism." Johannes Toegel, *Eine Theologie des Zeitgeistes, Darstellung und Kritik am Beispiel der Transpersonalen Psychology* (A theology of the spirit of the time, a presentation and critique using the example of transpersonal psychology); Dissertation (28,684); University of Vienna, 1991. Toegel reports that for three years he had tried the same approach, while living in a cave in Tibet, where he eventually met a true master and realized that true mystical experiences consist in trust and acceptance and not in striving to higher transpersonal techniques.

In a forthcoming paper this writer intends to explicate this concept of Spiritual Materialism in relation to the Tablet of Wisdom of Bahá'u'lláh.

⁷ How Heidegger's philosophy can be used to formulate a "Bahá'í Existentialism" was demonstrated by Ian Kluge in *The Call Into Being: An Introduction to a Baha'i Existentialism*; email iankluge@netbistro.com.

⁸ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, Harper & Row, New York, 1965. *Towards the Future*, Harcourt Brace & Company, San Diego, New York, London 1975 and *Christianity and Evolution*, Harcourt Brace & Company, San Diego, New York, London, 1974.

This correspondence was presented at the Irfan Colloquium in Bosch, May 3, 2003 by this author with the title *Unity and Progressive Revelation, Comparing Bahá'í Principles with the Basic Concepts of Teilhard de Chardin* and will be published in the next number of *Lights of Irfan*

⁹ Ken Wilber's books are quoted in this paper by their abbreviation, **MS, IP, SES, ES, TE**; i.e. **MS** for *The Marriage of Sense and Soul, Integrating Science and Religion*, Broadway Books, New York, originally published by Random House, New York, 1998. **IP** for *Integral Psychology, Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy*, Shambhala, Boston & London 2001; **SES** for *Sex Ecology, Spirituality, The spirit of Evolution*, Shambhala Boston & London, 2000; and **ES** for *The Eye of Spirit, An integral Vision for a World Slightly Mad*, Shambhala Boston & London, 2001; **TE**, *A Theory of Everything, An integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science, and Spirituality*, Shambhala, Boston, 2001.

So I would like to introduce the term "Kosmos. The Kosmos contains the cosmos (or physiosphere), the bios (or biosphere), nous (the noosphere), and theos (the theosphere or divine domain)." SES, page 45 and "The endeavor to honor and embrace every legitimate aspect of human consciousness is the goal of an *integral psychology*." IP, page 2 (italics in the original) and "A truly integral psychology, I have suggested, would involve the very best of premodernity (the Great Nest), modernity (the differentiation of the value spheres), and postmodernity (their integration across all levels of the Great Nest) — "all-level, all-quadrant. IP 87

¹⁰ SVFV 27. The respective terms in Arabic are *batini* (inwardness, hidden or unseen) and *zahari* (outwardness, manifests or seen). As in this translation the terms seen and unseen are used in accordance of the Qur'án quotation, manifest and hidden is used in other Bahai translation by Shoghi Effendi, Inwardness and Outwardness is used in this translation. In this paper the translation of Shoghi Effendi will be placed in parenthesis, when needed to clarify the original terms.

¹¹ This investigation into these "mother words" of Bahá'u'lláh need to be understood in the sense as it was described at the meeting of the American Bahá'í Studies (2003) in a talk by Steve Birkland: presented by

Susan Maneck at <http://list.jccc.edu/read/?forum=bridges> July 16, 2004:

But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said that God’s grace is like the rain: when it falls to the earth, as it’s falling it has no shape or form or limitations – it’s unrestricted. But the minute the rain hits the earth, it takes on the shape of whatever container or place it falls into: in a square pool it becomes a square; and in a round pool a circle, and so on. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that it’s the same with humans, that the Word of God is unlimited and unrestricted, but when it goes through our perceptual screen it takes on limitations. Whatever we offer in terms of our view, our perspective of the Word of God is limited. Previously unconfined, previously unlimited, now it takes on limitations. The beauty of it is: the limitations are all characterized by the way our minds have been trained, so the view of a mathematician, the view of an artist, the view of a doctor, or the view of any particular person give shape and form to this interpretation.

I want to ask you to consider this as a challenge – that maybe all of us, as a contribution to the development of scholarship in Bahá’í Studies, even in the next few months, could think of one word from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh that we could meditate on. Because then, He said, these words would give rise through every individual’s mind, according to their limitations and capacity, to things that we had no previous knowledge of. I want to finish by asking you to consider the value that those of you engaged in scholarly pursuits have right now, in my estimation.

¹² See below, endnote 15.

¹³ Teilhard, “How I believe,” page 101 in *Christianity and Evolution*, Harcourt Brace & Company, San Diego, New York, London 1969,

¹⁴ *Likewise, reflect upon the perfection of man’s creation, and that all these planes and states are folded up and hidden away within him. Dost thou reckon thyself only a puny form, When within thee the universe is folded? (‘Alí) (SVFV 34)*

How can I claim to have known Thee, when the entire creation is bewildered by Thy mystery, and how can I confess not to have known Thee, when, lo, the whole universe proclaimeth Thy Presence and testifieth to Thy truth? (GWB 63)

¹⁵ ADJ 72-73

¹⁶ What is in Christian and Muslim interpretation the end of the world, (i.e., the Return of Christ,) becomes “transformed into the doctrine of historicity and historical consciousness,” (Nadir Saiedi, *Logos and Civilization*, University Press of Maryland, 2000, page 68) This idea of the evolution of mankind, as a theological concept, was previously presented in a Christian context by Teilhard de Chardin who spoke of a God of Evolution and of Christ the Evolver, (*Christianity and Evolution*, Harcourt Brace & Company, San Diego, New York, London,

1971, especially in the papers on “Christ the Evolve, page 138, r, Christology and Evolution, page 76 and The God of Evolution page 237). In his work Teilhard describes the necessity to understand religion in the context of historicity or evolution. This topic will be resumed in a later part of this paper.

¹⁷ Wilber TE, page 38

¹⁸ From the Preface (by Robert L. Gulick, Jr. 1975) to SVFV (Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, USA, 1991)

¹⁹ The relationship of these two texts needs further study, but to this writer it seems obvious that the selection of Four and Seven Valleys cannot be two different types of mystical discourse, rather they are two different descriptions and the Seven Valleys follow closer to the historical tradition, while the Four Valleys focus on the essential of the message presented.

²⁰ Nader Saiedi, *Logos and Civilization, Spirit, History, and Order in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, University Press of Maryland, 2000, page 83

²¹ Saiedi, *ibid.* page 62

²² This issue was elaborated by Nader Saiedi in his book: *Logos and Civilization, Spirit, History, and Order in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, University Press of Maryland, 2000, page 351, *passim*, where he discusses the issues of authority and democratic principles expressed in the letter to the Kings.

²³ Internal and external is used here in the same sense as all the other corresponding antonyms such as: inward and outward, hidden and manifest, seen and unseen, evident and immanent. In this paper we will use these concepts as exchangeable, except where the context indicates a special difference in meaning.

²⁴ Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution* page 107-108

²⁵ See among others Wilber in MS, page 15:

The wonderful differentiations of modernity went too far into actual dissociation, fragmentation, alienation. Dignity became disaster. The growth became a cancer. As the value spheres began to dissociate, this allowed a powerful and aggressive science to begin to invade and dominate the other spheres, crowding art and morals out of any serious consideration in approaching 'reality'. Science became scientism — scientific materialism and scientific imperialism — which soon became the dominant 'official' worldview of modernity.

²⁶ There are certainly many correlates of these terms in the Eastern Tradition of Buddhism and Hinduism, as well as in Confucian traditions, unfortunately this author is not able to describe them in this paper.

²⁷ *Logos and Civilization* page 53-78

²⁸ It needs to be mentioned here that in the book of Chronicle the term first and last are used in another not totally unrelated sense, meaning

the whole of a life, for example in: 1Chron: 29:29: "Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer."

²⁹ See Wilber SES 608, note 44

³⁰ *The Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday & Company; Inc, New York 1966, a modern critical translation of the bible by the Dominican Biblical School in Jerusalem. It has the following footnote to this passage (page 345), which is very close to the understanding of Christ in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, who would fully agree with the description of Christ as the visible manifestation of God:

The subject of this poem is the pre-existent Christ, but considered only insofar as he was manifest in the unique historical person that is the Son of God made man (cf. Phil, 2:5-11) It is as the incarnate God that Jesus is the 'image of God' i.e., his human nature the was the visible manifestation of God who is invisible (cf. Romans 8:29-39) and it is as such, in this concrete human nature, and as part of creation, that Jesus is called the 'first-born of creation'-not in the temporal sense of having been born first, but in the sense of having been given the first place of honor.

This and similar Pauline statements about Christ have been the foundation of Teilhard's theology of evolution as expressed in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, Harcourt Brace & Company, New York, 1969, see index under Christ, Pauline Attributes, page 248, which books seemed to have been available to Ken Wilbur.

³¹ page 143-144

³² SES, in the Chapter "The Unpacking of God", Pages 520-551

³³ *Logos and Civilization*, *ibid.*, page 73, with reference to GWB 329

³⁴ SES, page 608, note 44

Bahá'í Ontology: An Initial Reconnaissance

by Ian Kluge

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the Bahá'í Writings to discover the nature of the ontology they embody. However, in a single paper, this project can only be an “initial reconnaissance,” a scouting of the territory to discover some of its most prominent features. A full and more complete examination awaits a book-length study.

The main value of this project is that an ontology, like a constitution, provides a philosophical frame of reference within which various ideas take on meaning. Any exposition of the Writings or any Bahá'í-based philosophizing must harmonize with this ontological ‘constitution’, or at least, be neutral and not offend against its general principles. Thus, like any other constitution, a Bahá'í ontology provides a particular philosophical identity that distinguishes the Writings from other sacred books or the foundational books of various philosophies and ideologies. Clear knowledge of this identity lays the foundations for detailed and in-depth dialogue with other religious and secular belief systems.

1. What is Ontology?

Ontology is the study of being and what it means to say that something ‘is’ or ‘exists’. As a branch of metaphysics¹, the study of the most general principles of reality, ontology specifically concerns itself with the most fundamental questions about the nature of existence. It focuses on questions related to being, such as what precisely does it mean ‘to be’?; “why is there anything at all rather than nothing?”²; what exists?; what kind of things are there?; do all things have ontological parity? and what is the relationship between being and becoming?³ While far from complete, this list of questions provides at least a sense of the ontological enterprise.

2. Do the Bahá'í Writings Have an Ontology?

As the following example illustrates, the Bahá'í Writings definitely embody an ontology. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that “the rational soul is the substance, and the body depends upon it. If the accident — that is to say, the body — be destroyed, the substance, the spirit,

remains.” (SAQ 239) This statement commits the Writings to the existence – in some form – of spiritual substances such as the soul⁴, and to material substances such as the body. Moreover, it defines the body, and perhaps matter in general, as an “accident”⁵, as a particular kind of attribute or quality of a spiritual substance. Because the soul is the substance and the body the attribute or accident, they obviously have different ways or modes of existing: the ‘accidental’ body is in a relationship of existential dependence upon the soul, which it needs to exist. This suggests that the soul does not depend on the body for its existence – though it may depend on the body for its appearance in the world of matter – which allows the soul or substance to survive the dissolution of the body. Already at this point we have dealt with such questions as ‘what kind of things exist?’, ‘do all things have ontological parity?’ and ‘what does it mean to be as a substance?’

Although philosophical study of the Bahá'í Writings is in its early phases, it seems certain they embody a systematic ontology. As this paper shall demonstrate, it is already possible to discern the parameters of the system. The outward presentation of the Writings – tablets, talks, letters – should not be interpreted as a lack of coherent, systematic thought, since these various presentational forms are united by a network of identifiable themes and principles.

3. The Language of Bahá'í Ontology

Careful analysis shows that to an almost overwhelming extent, the Writings use a philosophical language and concomitant concepts that overlap with the philosophical tradition begun with the work of Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus.⁶ A list of these includes essence; substance; essential attribute; attribute; accident; potential; the prime mover argument; emanation; planes of existence; material, efficient, formal and final causes; the mineral, plant, animal, human kingdoms; contingent and necessary being; this world being an image of a higher world; the concept of the rational soul; an unknowable God and change as the actualization of potentials. These terms and concepts are used in a manner fully consistent with what we find in the original works of Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus. Moreover, the terms and concepts are used in a consistent manner throughout the Writings.

How are we to interpret the consistent use of this philosophical language? In our view, the Bahá'í Writings plainly endorse many of the ontological principles and ideas found in this tradition as the basis for further philosophizing. Of course, this is not to imprison future philosophical developments in ancient ideas, for as the work

of Whitehead, de Chardin, the neo-Thomists and Ken Wilber shows, this tradition is capable of highly diverse developments.

There are two main reasons for taking this position. The first is the sheer pervasiveness of the use of Platonic, Aristotelian and Plotinian terminology and concepts in the Bahá'í Writings. It is extremely unlikely that such a far-reaching overlap of terminology and concepts is merely a matter of accident. The literary and philosophical sophistication of the Writings show that the authors were obviously in full and complete control of their diction and chose it because they always had a specific purpose in mind. We must also remember that the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi cover a century: in other words, this consistency of diction spans four generations of writers expounding their teachings in very different circumstances, to very different audiences at very different times. This is unlikely to be mere happenstance.

The second reason for concluding that the language of this tradition was chosen intentionally lies in the inherent weakness of the counter-arguments, of which there are basically two. The first is that the philosophical concepts and terms were chosen as a means of communicating with a specific audience in its own terms. While this argument might possibly have some merit so far as Middle Eastern audiences of the time were concerned, it does not apply to western or other non-western audiences. In the West, since the time of Galileo and Descartes in the 17th Century, the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition was scientifically and philosophically discredited most particularly in the areas of prime interest, physics, metaphysics, epistemology and ontology. Since that time, despite the efforts of neo-Thomists⁷ and neo-Aristotelians⁸, the philosophy of this tradition has never been a part of mainstream philosophy. Therefore, we must conclude that *if* Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and, through his use of quotation, Shoghi Effendi intended to use the language of Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus to reach western audiences of the 19th and 20th centuries, they miscalculated grievously. For a Bahá'í scholar, the notion that a Manifestation of God and His chosen interpreters err so completely is not tenable for theological reasons but even a non-Bahá'í scholar would have enormous difficulties in supporting such a conclusion on non-theological grounds. Consequently, it seems almost certain that the choice of philosophical tradition is intended as guidance for future Bahá'í-based philosophizing.

A similar argument applies to reaching non-western audiences outside of the Muslim world. Here too, the argument that this language was chosen to facilitate communication fails because these peoples were wholly unfamiliar with the Platonic-Aristotelian-

Plotinic tradition. Initially, at least, such language is bound to be a barrier, a barrier that could be overcome only by a careful study of this tradition as presented in the Writings. Furthermore, it makes no sense to put these non-western peoples to so much trouble if there were no special value in doing so.

3.1. Making the Tradition and Language New

The second argument against the view that the Writings' use of the Platonic-Aristotelian-Plotinic tradition is intentional is that in Bahá'u'lláh's dispensation, God has "instilled into every word a fresh potency." (GWB 92-3) For these reasons, the Writings cannot belong to an 'outmoded' tradition. This argument has two decisive weaknesses. First, it cannot be rationally denied that this argument notwithstanding, textual analysis shows that the Bahá'í Writings do in fact, use the terminology and concepts of this tradition in the way that is consistent with their original usages. A secular scholar would describe this as a conceptual continuity, whereas a Bahá'í scholar would say this is *confirmation* of some of the tradition's philosophical insights. Second, Bahá'u'lláh's confirmation of this tradition does not necessarily imprison our understanding in the work of the ancients. Whitehead, de Chardin, Wilber, and the neo-Thomists irrefutably demonstrated that this tradition is enormously flexible, capable of considerable growth and has, indeed, received a "fresh potency." (GWB 92-3)

4. The Bedrock Principle of Bahá'í Ontology: Ontological Dualism of Creator and Created

This paper contends that the bedrock of Bahá'í ontology is the principle of ontological dualism between the Creator and the created. It rejects any form of ontological monism — a substantial identity and/or one-ness of being⁹ — between God and creation. God and creation are so fundamentally different in their substance and modes of being that between them there exists an unbridgeable gulf denying any possibility of a direct connection, let alone substantial unification. As Bahá'u'lláh says, "there can be no tie of *direct* intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between the transient and the Eternal, the contingent and the Absolute." (GWB 66, emphasis added¹⁰) 'Abdu'l-Bahá also states categorically that the "Preexistent is different from the phenomenal, and the phenomenal is opposed to the Preexistent." (SAQ 293)

Because of the vast ontological gulf between the two¹¹ — a difference of kind, not of degree — it is impossible for God to become man as held by some mystics and by Christian incarnationism. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes this view, which He

identifies with the Sufis as “evident error.” (SAQ 195) There is no way that “the Preexistent should confine itself to phenomenal forms.” (SAQ 195) He also rejects the view that man may become God, asking rhetorically, “[H]ow can the phenomenal reality embrace the Preexistent Reality?” (SAQ 221) Bahá'u'lláh makes the same point when He says, “*no soul hath ever found the pathway to His Being ... every saint hath lost his way in seeking to comprehend [contain, encircle] His Essence.*” (SVFV 23, emphasis added) He re-enforces this point by asking rhetorically, “How can utter nothingness gallop its steed in the field of preexistence?” (SVFV 23) The ontological difference between Creator and created cannot be overcome by mere human effort.

Ontological monism undermines Bahá'í theology because it makes Manifestations superfluous as mediators between God and humankind. If human beings can actually or substantially become one with God, then there is no need for Manifestations to guide us to the divine. For this reason, ontological monism undermines the rationale of all revelational religion.

Moreover, ontological monism also ignores logic. First, if man truly becomes ontologically one with the Creator, then the claimant in effect becomes his own creator, which is to say, he exists before he exists – since God logically precedes all other beings. This is not logically possible. Second, the relationship of dependence on God can never be revoked or negated in any way. God is the perpetually indispensable ‘necessary and sufficient condition’ for the existence of anything other than Himself. Consequently, there is no possible point of view, position or stand-point within creation where the distinction between Creator and created is overcome and dependence on God is negated.

To claim otherwise – as ontological monism does – is, in effect, to claim ontological parity with God and to ignore Bahá'u'lláh's assertion that “He hath assigned *no associate* unto Himself *in His Kingdom* ... (GWB 192, emphasis added) It also violates Bahá'u'lláh's injunction not to “transgress the limits of one's own rank and station.” (GWB 188) The principle of adhering to one's appropriate station is so strict in the Bahá'í view that even after death, the soul “never leaves its own condition.” (SAQ 233)

Another major problem with ontological monism is that it violates the principle of the unknowability of God, since actually (i.e. substantially) becoming one with something entails inner or subjective knowledge of it and its condition. However, in the “Commentary on the Islamic Tradition, ‘I was a Hidden Treasure...’”, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá categorically states His own position that “the path to knowing the innermost Essence of the Absolute is *closed to all*

beings ... How can the reality of non-existence ever understand the ipseity of being?"¹² Since the knowledge of God is utterly impossible for "*all beings*" then no one – regardless of spiritual condition – can attain the necessary and sufficient conditions for obtaining such knowledge, which in effect denies the possibility of unity with God. Moreover, such knowledge is also impossible because "encompassment"¹³ is one criteria of knowledge: "until one thing *encompasses* another, it cannot understand its inner nature."¹⁴ The problem for ontological monism is that according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "the limited can never *comprehend, surround* nor *take in* the unlimited." (PUP 422, emphasis added) This categorical statement is itself enough to completely negate any conclusion about the equal validity of ontological monism and dualism in Bahá'í ontology.

We must, however, remember that the denial of ontological union or oneness with God does not preclude an ethical oneness in which man submits to or harmonizes his personal will with the will of God. This ethical monism is not only allowed but even encouraged by the Writings as an essential human goal. Nevertheless, we must not misinterpret this ethical harmonization as an ontological union.

4.1. Apparently Monist Passages

It may be argued that the Bahá'í Writings contain passages suggesting ontological monism, as, for example, Bahá'u'lláh's injunction, "Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee." (HW Arabic 7) However, this passage is not really monist. Because we can find God's omnipresent presence reflected in the mirrors of our hearts¹⁵ does not mean that we have become ontologically one with God's Being. Moreover, this passage maintains the distinction between the perceiver and the perceived (God) – a fact which effectively precludes a monist interpretation since monism vitiates the distinction between perceiver and perceived.

*The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*¹⁶ contains another seemingly monist passage: some wayfarers behold various colors, but "some have drunk of the wine of oneness and these see nothing but the sun itself." (SVFV 20-1) A careful reading of this passage shows that its concern is epistemological – visionary – and not ontological, it is about perceiving, not about the *being* of that which is perceived. To be ontologically monist, this passage would have to assert that "the place of appearance" (SVFV 20) and the sun itself are actually one and that the perceiver, the person who gazes, is substantially one with the perceived. However, it is obvious that the preservation of the perceiver/perceived distinction precludes a monist interpretation of this passage.

The following passage is also quoted to support ontological monism:¹⁷ “Yea, all he [the seeker] hath, from heart to skin, will be set aflame, so that nothing will remain save the Friend.” (SVFV 36-7) Nothing in these or immediately subsequent statements suggests that the seeker becomes ontologically one with God since neither the passing away of the world or self nor the loss of awareness of self and world as separate entities necessarily implies actual, substantial one-ness.

Finally, it is claimed that the Bahá'í belief that only God has absolute existence is “in essence a monist position.”¹⁸ Such is far from being the case. First, God's absolute existence implies the (relative) nothingness of contingent creation, not the ontological identity of creation with God. Indeed, to insist on such identity is, in effect, to insist that God – like creation – is nothing and that creation – like God – is absolute. Both positions are untenable for Bahá'ís. Second, the assertion of ontological one-ness between Creator and created implies that God is somehow present, albeit in different forms, in His creation. This position would be “appearance through manifestation” (SAQ 203) which ‘Abdu'l-Bahá categorically rejects as “quite impossible.” (SAQ 203)

4.2. The Failure to Reconcile Monism and Dualism

Given this rejection of ontological monism in favor of ontological dualism, how are we to understand Dr. Moojan Momen's claim that the two positions are reconciled in ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's “*Commentary on the Islamic Tradition: 'I Was a Hidden treasure'*”? According to Dr. Momen, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá adopts a relativist approach to achieve “a reconciliation of the dichotomy”¹⁹ between an ontological dualism asserting that “there is a fundamental difference between the human soul and the Absolute”²⁰ and an ontological monism stating that “there is no fundamental difference between the human soul and the Absolute.”²¹ But is this really the case? After His exposition of both apparently monist and dualist views, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá says,

*But to this servant all these expositions and questions, stations and states are complete in their own station without defect or flaw. For although the object being viewed is the same, nevertheless the viewpoints and stations of these mystic knowers is different. Each viewpoint, with respect to the person who is in that station is perfect and complete.*²²

Analysis shows that ‘Abdu'l-Bahá strictly confines His remarks to the *subjective* criteria for truth: given their own presuppositions and criteria, the advocates of each viewpoint reason correctly and attain a conclusion that is consistent with their spiritual conditions as

“knowers.” In other words, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s argument is *subjectively* epistemological – concerned with the “knowers” and not with what is objectively known, with the perceiver and not with the perceived. He is not talking about what actually is the case but rather about what the viewer thinks is the case because of his presuppositions, nature and spiritual condition. Once this distinction is noted, it becomes clear that His judgment about the two viewpoints has no ontological implications at all.²³ Consequently, seeing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words as a relativist reconciliation of ontological monism and dualism is to mistake a rather studiously neutral statement about two kinds of viewers as an endorsement of both their opinions.²⁴ Such is patently not the case.

If Dr. Momen’s reading is correct, it would follow that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá assumes that the spiritual condition, nature and understanding of the believer are by themselves sufficient to determine the objective *correctness* or *truthfulness* of a belief. However, the Writings do not espouse such a subjectivist theory of truth.²⁵ Indeed, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá clearly dismisses this notion when He points out that subjective conditions and observations notwithstanding, it is simply an objective error of fact to assert a geocentric solar system.²⁶ Moreover, if spiritual condition and nature were sufficient to establish objective truthfulness, the Writings could not logically dismiss certain beliefs as “vain imaginings,” (TB 41) “error,” (TB 10) and “the lowest depths of ignorance and foolishness.” (SAQ 137²⁷) Spiritual condition is simply not sufficient to establish objective truth.

5. Problems with Relativism

Can, as Dr. Momen asserts, relativism be “a basis for Bahá’í metaphysics” or ontology? According to him, there can be no ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’ interpretation of certain experiences and statements as monist or dualist because all knowledge “is relative [to the speaker’s standpoint] This may be termed a cognitive or epistemic relativism.”²⁸

This far-reaching assertion is beset by at least six problems. First, is the claim that humans are “unable to make any absolute statements about Reality.”²⁹ If this is meant categorically, how can Bahá’ís claim “God exists”? For Bahá’ís, this declaration cannot be anything less than absolute since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the infallible interpreter of Bahá’u’lláh’s word, provided “proofs and evidences of the existence of God.” (SAQ 5³⁰) He affirms this unconditionally, which is to say, it absolutely as true from all possible viewpoints and no addition can make it more true than it already is. Furthermore, from God’s absolute existence, we can – contrary to Dr. Momen’s claim – make indisputable ontological deductions. For example,

God's existence makes Him the non-contingent head of a hierarchy of being whose other members are contingent and dependent on God. This dependence is true from all possible viewpoints within creation. Denying or relativising this irreparably undermines the foundations of the Bahá'í theology.

Second, in his claim that there can be no "absolute statements about Reality,"³¹ Dr. Momen falls into a logical trap that devils all assertions of absolute relativism. If the claim is true, then it contradicts itself, since it is an "absolute statement about reality." If it is self-contradictory, there is no reason to give it the epistemic privilege of being the "basis of Bahá'í metaphysics."

A third problem is that the denial of "absolute statements about reality"³² logically suggests that all viewpoints are equally true insofar as they are relatively true, which in turn undermines the central doctrine of "progressive revelation." (KA 220) Guided by successive Manifestations, humans attain ever more adequate, ever more true – though never perfect – knowledge of reality. Similarly, Bahá'u'lláh's statement that we were "created to carry forward an *ever-advancing* civilization" (GWB 215, emphasis added) implicitly suggests an "*evolutionary relativism*" in which knowledge – while never perfect – is nonetheless genuinely improving and progressive. If knowledge is progressive, all viewpoints cannot be equally true.

A fourth difficulty is that Dr. Momen's "cognitive or epistemic relativism"³³ rejects epistemic privilege, a position that maintains that inasmuch as all views are conditioned by personality, spiritual, historical and cultural factors, they are equal. There is no absolute standard. However, in the Bahá'í Faith the Manifestations, "the perfectly polished mirror[s]," (PT 26) and Their chosen interpreters are, indeed, epistemically privileged: Bahá'u'lláh's "Book itself is the "Unerring Balance" established amongst men." (KA 13) Bahá'í teaching on this issue cannot be logically reconciled with epistemic relativism.

A fifth difficulty: if we argue that the statements of the Manifestations are privileged, but human interpretations of these statements are not, we face the problem of vacuousness. When all readings are equally true, then – because some readings contradict others – none are. Consequently, it becomes impossible to teach the Writings or even to discuss them since – all interpretations being equally accurate – no one knows what the Writings actually say. What is the point of becoming a Bahá'í or offering the Faith's teachings as a solution to a wide variety of world problems if no one knows what the Writings 'really' mean? Obviously, the very *raison d'être* of the Bahá'í Faith is removed by an unqualified cognitive relativism.

How can we distinguish various degrees of truthfulness without infringing on every Bahá'í's right to interpret the Writings for him or herself? This paper contends that the Bahá'í community has adopted negative gate-keeping as a means of reconciling doctrinal cohesion with individual freedom. Any understanding of the Writings is acceptable if it is not 'forbidden,' that is, inconsistent with the letter and spirit of the Sacred Text and/or the guidance from Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice. By adopting negative gate-keeping, Bahá'ís have, in fact, adopted a *qualified relativism* inasmuch as negative gate-keeping stipulates that within the framework provided by the Central Figures and the Institutions, all understandings that are not forbidden are equally valid or true.

The sixth problem with Dr. Momen's views on relativism is his interpretation of Shoghi Effendi's statement that Bahá'í Faith's "teachings revolve around the fundamental principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is progressive, not final." (WOB 58³⁴) He appears to understand this as a blanket relativism applicable to all subjects, but such is not the case. The context of Shoghi Effendi's is progressive revelation which distinguishes between eternal "essential ordinances" (PUP 106) and "material ordinances [which] are abrogated according to the exigencies of time." (PUP 106) It is the "material ordinances" *not* the "essential ordinances" or "golden core"³⁵ which are relative. Because these "essential ordinances" (PUP 106) of religion are not relative, it follows that only a qualified doctrinal relativism can apply to the Bahá'í Writings.

6. The First Great Ontological Question: Introduction

Because the Bahá'í Writings embody an explicit and implicit ontology, they are able to answer one of the most fundamental ontological questions: "Why is there anything at all rather than nothing?"³⁶ In answering this basic question, the Writings also answer a host of supplementary questions and thereby lay out an entire ontological schema for future exploration and development. The question arises because, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "absolute nothingness cannot find existence." (SAQ 281) Everything comes from something else not itself.

6.1. 'To Be' Means 'to be Caused' (with one Exception)

Unlike God, the created universe lacks "essential preexistence ... which is not preceded by a cause," (SAQ 280) and, therefore lacks ontological self-sufficiency and independence. For this reason, the created universe, like every one of its contents, requires a creator or

pre-existing cause since according to Bahá'u'lláh, "*All that is created ... is preceded by a cause.*" (GWB 162, emphasis added³⁷) From this we can conclude that in Bahá'í ontology 'to be' means to be caused and to be contingent³⁸, that is, to require a pre-existent and external cause. Consequently, 'to be' also means to be part of a causal chain or network, to be essentially connected to other entities or acts in a community of predecessors that extends through time.³⁹ This, in turn, suggests that the Bahá'í Writings are committed to a causal ontology.⁴⁰

'Abdu'l-Bahá declares that every affect must have a cause⁴¹ and rejects as "manifestly absurd" (BWF 343) the notion of an infinite causal chain that does not eventually lead back to a First Mover. He uses this to prove the existence of God. (BWF 343) The fact that all beings except God need a prior cause highlights again the ontological dualism what we have called the 'bedrock principle' of Bahá'í ontology – the absolute distinction between God Who has "essential preexistence" (SAQ 280) and creation which does not.

7. Why is There Something Rather than Nothing? The First Answer

The Bahá'í Writings provide two answers to this question. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "*a creator without a creature is impossible ... all the divine names and attributes demand the existence of beings.*" (BWF 297, emphasis added) This and similar statements⁴² affirm the idea that there is something rather than nothing because God's perfection includes the title or name of 'Creator' which, in turn, logically "demand[s]" (BWF 297) a creation without which God would suffer a deficiency inconceivable in "the Exalted, the Supreme". (TAB 197) This is the argument from divine perfection. It is possible to generalise this answer to say that creation follows logically from God's transitive attributes such as "All-Merciful," (TB 12) "the Help in Peril" (PM 14) and "the Ever-Forgiving." (PM 17) This in turn can be generalised even further, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá does when He writes "all the divine names and attributes [transitive and intransitive] *demand* the existence of beings." (SAQ 180)

7.1. God's Free Will and Necessary Creation

Do not such demands limit the freedom of God Who "is powerful to do as He willeth?" (GWB 314) On one hand, God's freedom is a paradox or mystery beyond human reason. There is nothing inherently irrational about this stance – known as moderate rationalism⁴³ – since recognising the limits of logic is not in itself illogical. On the other, we could say that God has not only established the laws of reason but also committed Himself to follow them. Thus, He is constrained only by Himself which, in effect,

leaves God doing as He wills. Given this commitment, He accepts creation as a logical consequence of willing His own perfection.

8. Why is There Something Rather Than Nothing? The Second Answer

Creation also exists because God wishes to be known. Bahá'u'lláh makes approving use of the Islamic tradition "I was a Hidden Treasure. I *wished to be made known*, and thus I called creation into being in order *that I might be known*." (KA 175, emphasis added) This and similar passages⁴⁴ highlight that this freely chosen wish on God's part underlies creation.

However, if God is the "the Self-Sufficing," (GWB 12) why does He wish to be known? One possible reply, the 'devotional answer', is that God's will in all its mystery ought to be sufficient reason for us since He is "inscrutable unto all men." (SWB 113) Another possible response argues that without beings to know Him, God exists purely as a subject and thus lacks being as an object. Since God cannot have any deficiency⁴⁵, He must — according to the logical rules He has willed and to which He has freely committed Himself — also exist as an object of knowledge in creations that are fundamentally different than He.

9. The Ontological Principle of Perfection and Plenitude

It might be argued that only the Manifestation and, perhaps, humankind are needed for God to be known and to "reveal [Himself]" (KA 175) but such a notion violates the principle that God's creation is "perfect and comprehensive." (GWB 62⁴⁶) This seemingly simple phrase conveys a very powerful idea, namely, that in Bahá'í ontology, the principles of perfection and plenitude are at work: creation is not only perfect (PUP 79⁴⁷) but the "numberless forms" of creation guarantee that God is known as completely and perfectly as possible throughout all degrees of being.

10. The Qualified Idealist Tendency in Bahá'í Ontology

The Writings state that all beings are "expressive of the knowledge of God." (PUP 178, emphasis added) Indeed, without revealing God's attributes and names, there would be no beings: "but for the potency of that revelation, no being could ever exist." (PUP 177) Given that conscious or unconscious knowledge of God is *the sine qua non* of existence, Bahá'í ontology has a strong idealist tendency. Like Bishop Berkeley's principle of "esse est percipi"⁴⁸,

Bahá'í ontology correlates being and perception or knowledge, but with a unique qualification: in the Writings, 'to be' is not just to be known by God but also to actively know or perceive God in a manner appropriate to one's station. In general terms, knowledge and being are correlates. They can be distinguished intellectually but not separated in actuality.

Abdul'-Bahá's statement that "the Kingdom is the real world, and this nether place is only its shadow stretching out," (SWAB 178) not only reinforces the idealist tendency in Bahá'í ontology but also gives it a decided Platonic turn.⁴⁹ Just as in the "Myth of the Cave"⁵⁰ Plato compares what most people take as reality to shadows, 'Abdu'l-Bahá likens the real world to a "shadow" (SWAB 178) or "images reflected in water." (SWAB 178) The Platonic structure of this idea is plainly evident in that the material world is a shadow of the ontologically superior, truly real world of the ideal Kingdom.

Although the material world is an image or shadow of the Kingdom, the Writings do not write of this "nether" world" as ontologically unreal or illusory in an absolute sense. Bahá'í ontology, unlike Platonic ontology, only devalues the world therapeutically – but not ontologically – to remind us that our ultimate destiny is not on the material plane though passage through this plane is necessary for our development as individuals and as a species. For this reason, we say that Bahá'í ontology exemplifies a *qualified* idealism.

10.1. The (Platonic) Arc of Descent and the (Aristotelian) Arc of Ascent

In Bahá'í ontology, things cannot just receive knowledge of God's attributes but must also express or reflect the divine attributes. Thus, every entity not only illustrates the "return to God" (PUP 73⁵¹), but actually *is*, in its very being, the act of returning to God. If it did not 'testify' to God's bounty, it would not actually exist. Therefore, at every moment an entity's act of being is both the "arc of descent" (SAQ 284) – the reception of God's attributes – and the "arc of ascent" (SAQ 284) – the reflection of God's attributes – in a manner appropriate to the kind of being it is. Descent and ascent are really aspects of a single ontological process constituting at every instant an entity's complete act of being and were this process to stop, the entity would cease to exist. This shows that in Bahá'í ontology, 'to be' is 'to be in the act of becoming.'

Furthermore, the arc of descent corresponds to the Platonic fall in which things are projected onto the lower, material plane as shadows, images or "outer pictures." (PUP 10) The corresponding arc of ascent is Aristotelian insofar as entities proceed towards, or 'return' to God, the universal "object of desire,"⁵² by actualising their intrinsic potentials through real experience and thus becoming

'all they can be.' They give up an ideal, untested perfection – the inexperienced purity of childhood⁵³ – for practical experience by which the human spirit will “acquire perfection.” (SAQ 200) The descent is not entirely a loss since an entity's act of being is augmented by the process of return.⁵⁴

11. The Two-Fold Structure of Being

The fact that things must both receive and actively express or reflect their knowledge of God in order to be, indicates a correlative two-fold structure of being: receptive ('passive') and active.⁵⁵ 'To be' is to be receptive *and* expressive of the divine attributes; being is structured receptivity and expression.⁵⁶ Though in the case of non-human entities, reception and mere reflection, that is, unconscious “testimony,” (GWB 177) is sufficient for the act of being, such is not the case for human kind. As the Noonday Prayer demonstrates, conscious and free humans were created to “know Thee and to *worship* Thee.” (KA 100, emphasis added) Thus, humankind also has a two-fold ontological structure, but it is distinguished by a qualitative difference: we must not only be aware of the signs of God but reflect them *consciously* and *freely* in worship.

12. A Hierarchical Ontology: Degrees of Existence

Bahá'í ontology includes the concept of “degrees of existence” (SAQ 225) as shown in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that “the differences in the degrees of existence of creatures is one of the necessities of existence, which unfolds itself in infinite forms.” (SAQ 301⁵⁷) He also recognizes “degrees of being,” (SWAB 190) stating that “although the degrees of being are various, yet all are good,” (SAQ 225) meaning that each being and each kind of being has its appropriate place (station) and properly performs its tasks as it “participateth in a coherent whole.” (SWAB 190⁵⁸)

Implicit in the concept of “degrees of being” is the concept of a hierarchy, albeit one in which each entity is good and perfect in its own degree and relative to itself. Relative to others, however, “*some beings are higher in the scale than others.*” (SAQ 130) Specifically, humankind is at the top and the mineral at the bottom, an idea emphasised by saying that “the existence of the mineral in comparison with that of man is nonexistence.” (SAQ 278) In other words, humankind has a greater degree of being than matter, though in relationship to the “Supreme Being” (KI 97) any degree of being possessed by any created entity “is an illusion.” (SAQ 278) The hierarchical principle is so much a part of Bahá'í ontology that even the Abhá Kingdom reflects degrees or a hierarchy of being. As

'Abdu'l-Bahá says, in the next life those who "fall[] into the lowest degrees of existence" will be "considered as dead by the people of truth." (SAQ 225)

How, we may ask, can one thing can be 'more real' or have 'more being' than another? One possible answer is that the degree of being is determined by the capacity to receive and express the divine attributes and names. "Each [entity] according to its capacity, indicateth, and is expressive of, the knowledge of God," (GWB 178) and humankind possesses this receptive and reflective capacity "[t]o a supreme degree" (GWB 177) because "in [humankind] are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed." (GWB 177) Thus, humankind possesses a pre-eminent degree of being among created things.

We must also recall that our degree of being or existence has two aspects. First, there is our *natural degree* or station as beings consciously able "to know and worship" the Divine, and as beings "at the last degree of darkness, and at the beginning of light." (SAQ 235) Second, there is our *existential degree* of being, the degree we attain by the free choices we make and our consequent "nearness to God" (PUP 147) which seems to determine how much of the divine bounties or attributes we can receive and reflect. Above all, we must consciously choose to love God, for if we do not, we cannot receive and reflect God's bounties. (HW Arabic 4) Spiritually, we can be as real as we choose to be.

13. A Qualified Relativist Ontology

'Abdu'l-Bahá's foregoing statement about some beings as "higher in the scale than others" (SAQ 130) shows that Bahá'í ontology is a relativist ontology with the degree of existence possessed by any entity being *relative to its position in the hierarchy of being*. At the top of the "scale" of being is God, Who alone is existentially independent or "Self-Subsistent," (TB 34) and in comparison with Whom "the existence of beings ... is but illusion and *nothingness*." (SAQ 278) A similar relationship holds between humankind and matter: "the existence of the mineral in comparison with that of man is nonexistence." (SAQ 278) It is nevertheless important to remember that *relative to itself*, or, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá puts it, "in its own condition," (SAQ 281) the mineral possesses complete and adequate existence. Similarly, in the Abhá Kingdom, those who are "deprived of [God's] divine favours" are "dead" in relationship to the "people of truth." (SAQ 225) Generalizing on this issue, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that "existence and nonexistence are both relative." (SAQ 281)

The relativity of existence and nonexistence is ontologically important because it denies any form of *creatio ex nihilo*, or creation out of absolute nothing, a key doctrinal point for almost all Christians and Muslims.⁵⁹ Indeed, on this issue, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that “absolute ... has not the capacity of existence.” (SAQ 281⁶⁰) Consequently, we cannot take literally Bahá’u’lláh’s statement that we were “called into being ... out of utter nothingness.” (GWB 61⁶¹) Given ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s qualification, the latter phrase obviously intends the phrase “utter nothingness” relative or in comparison to God and does not introduce the concept of *creatio ex nihilo*. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá dismisses the concept of absolute nothingness as “inconceivable.” (PUP 88)

Because in Bahá’í ontological relativism, an entity’s degree of being is both absolute and relative — absolute vis-à-vis itself and relative vis-à-vis its place in the hierarchy of being — we have a ‘qualified’ not a radical or “totalistic relativism in which all things without exception depend on their relationships to everything else for their existence and degree of being.”⁶² Bahá’í ontology is also qualified because it has an absolute reference point — God — Whose absolute being is beyond degrees, and by Whom all other degrees of existence are determined.⁶³ God gives the hierarchy or “chain”⁶⁴ of beings an absolute foundation, just as in physics the absolute speed of light gives relativity an absolute foundation.

14. Substantialist Ontology

‘Abdu’l-Bahá categorically rejects as “erroneous” the belief that “each being is an absolute illusion which has no existence [and that] the existence of beings is like a mirage or like the reflection of an image in water or in a mirror which is only an appearance having in itself no principle, foundation or reality.” (SAQ 278) What the mirage or mirror image purports to be is entirely unreal because the image “has no material existence, *no substance*.” (PUP 21, emphasis added⁶⁵) This suggests that in Bahá’í ontology to be real means to have a substance of some kind.

‘Substance’ of course does not necessarily refer to material substance. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for example refers to the “living substance” (SAQ 90) from which humankind is created, and says that the rational soul and spirit are the substance whereas the body is the accident.⁶⁶ Even God seems to have a substance of some kind, for according to Bahá’u’lláh, the spiritual nature of the Manifestation is “born of the substance of God Himself.” (GWB 66⁶⁷) Thus we may conclude that in Bahá’í ontology, to be real, to exist, means to have or be a substance of some kind. What illusions and mirages represent lacks substance and is, therefore, not real.

The substantialist ontology is also confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that while things are known to us by their attributes, their "identity or reality ... remains hidden." (PUP 421⁶⁸) Elsewhere, using a flower as an example, He notes that the "*underlying reality or intrinsic identity*, is still beyond the ken" (PUP 421, emphasis added) of human observers. In other words, in addition to the attributes by which a thing becomes known to us, it also has an "underlying" substrate or substance that remains unknown. In its identification of "underlying reality" with "intrinsic identity" this last quotation also indicates that substance ("underlying reality") and essence ("intrinsic identity") are the same, a position that aligns Bahá'í ontology with Aristotle.⁶⁹

The fact that things are more than their perceived attributes also makes it clear that Bahá'í ontology rejects phenomenalism, "the doctrine that physical objects are reducible to sensory experiences"⁷⁰ or that empirical statements correspond only to "mental appearances."⁷¹ Real things are not only their superficial sensible or mental appearances but also possess an underlying reality, a substrate or substance as an emanation of the divine Will.⁷²

In regards to substantialism, there are three additional points to keep in mind. First, the fact that even this "nether place" (SAQ 178) has some degree of substantial reality qualifies or mitigates the Platonic aspect of Bahá'í ontology: the unreality of the "nether place" is relative in the hierarchy of being and not absolute. Second, we must keep in mind that a substantialist ontology is not necessarily static. What the Writings call 'substance' may – except in the case of God – also be thought of as various modes of a process of self-actualization.⁷³ Third, evil is simply a by-product of the greater good of the quest for self-actualization; it is a failing, a shadow or "absence of good" (FWU 78) without real existence, that is, substance of its own.

15. A Qualified Realist Ontology

Reflecting on the examples of substance given in the Writings, makes it clear that a substance is that which exists independently of a perceiver. Consider the mirage mentioned by Abdu'l-Bahá. What it represents, or purports to be (a caravan) is completely unreal – not only because it lacks substance but because it is observer-dependent for its existence; another observer might see the caravan as something else and there is no way to prove either person right. However, the fact that mirages exist as atmospheric phenomena is indisputable and independent of any observer. Therefore, Bahá'í ontology is realist; what is real does not depend on observers for its existence.⁷⁴ This realism is supported by the fact that all things are

created by God and therefore depend for their existence on Him and not on any human observer.

The claim that Bahá'í ontology is fundamentally realist does not mean that human beings simply perceive reality without interpreting it. The fact that we do interpret reality encourages us to re-introduce a traditional distinction between first nature, or reality as made by God, and second nature, the personal, social and cultural superstructure which humans have developed from their various interpretations of and work with first nature. For example, a sculptor such as Michelangelo takes a piece of marble – first nature – and interprets it as the unrealised form of “David” which – the second nature – he then reveals through his labour. Second nature is indeed man-made reality, and is, therefore, immediately dependent on humankind for its existence and proximately dependent on first nature. Thus, when we say that in Bahá'í ontology reality exists independently of human perception, we refer to first nature as created by God, and not to second nature. For these reasons the realism of the Writings is “qualified.”

Although the terms ‘first and second nature’ do not occur in the Writings, the concept is implicitly there. It is directly analogous to the distinction the Writings make between natural or innate and “acquired capacity” (SAQ 214) as well as between innate and “acquired character ... which is gained by education.” (SAQ 212) Innate capacity and character correspond to first nature; they are divine creations and, therefore, “purely good” (SAQ 212) because “in creation there is no evil; all is good.” (SAQ 215) Acquired capacity, character and education correspond to second nature. Our use of this distinction does nothing accept apply at the larger, collective level a distinction clearly made by the Writings at the individual level.

The importance of the distinction between first and second nature should not be underestimated. It means, among other things, that the Writings distinguish between ontology *per se*, that is, the study of being vis-à-vis the first divinely created nature, and *cultural ontology*, that is, the study of being vis-à-vis human interpretations of and constructs based on this first nature. This distinction completely undermines the radical constructionist or relativist view that there can be no knowledge of nature as it is because whatever we call ‘nature’ is already a human cultural construct. From the perspective of the Bahá'í Writings, such *may* be the case – as proven by the existence of errors – but it is *not necessarily* so. Thus, we conclude that Bahá'í ontology does not support the view that our understanding of first nature is entirely a human construct. This, in turn, supports the outright essentialism of Bahá'í ontology.

Additional proof of the realist nature of Bahá'í ontology is found in the existence of the various kingdoms of God, the mineral, vegetable, animal and human. These are real regardless of human perception, that is, they reflect inherent essential differences, the divinely decreed "degrees of existence" (PUP 208⁷⁵) that are independent of human observers and not mere constructs or conventions. (SAQ 301) However, the realism is qualified inasmuch as the reality of things is relative in regards to God and higher beings.

However, this does not mean Bahá'í ontology espouses a completely 'naïve' realism in which the world is necessarily always as it appears to superficial inspection. On the contrary, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is perfectly aware that the senses and the rational mind can be deceived as, for example, with images in a mirror or in a mirage.⁷⁶ He does, however, agree that it is possible to penetrate these illusions, to cut through the appearances and illusions we have constructed to get to the underlying reality. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "we say that the spirit of man can *penetrate* and *discover the realities of all things*, can solve the secrets and mysteries of all created objects." (PUP 264, emphasis added) The notion of *discovering* realities suggests they exist independently of the knower.

16. An Essentialist Ontology: To Be Means To Have an Essence

Since the various kingdoms possess inherent or essential differences and if each entity has a hidden "reality," (PUP 421) then it is difficult to avoid the judgement that the Bahá'í Writings uphold an essentialist view, or conversely, reject the basic nominalist principle that entities possess no real essences other than humanly constructed 'nominal essences' of second nature. The essentialist nature of the Writings can be deduced from Abdul'-Bahá's statement that we know the "hidden" (SAQ 220) essence of a thing only through its qualities or attributes.⁷⁷ It follows that if the essence is hidden from us, it cannot be a human construction or convention and must, therefore, be independent of human perception and action. This would apply primarily to things in the divinely created first nature. Moreover, if we define essence as a thing's unique capacity to reflect the divine attributes⁷⁸ and that "*all things* in their inmost reality" (GWB 177, emphasis added) do so, it follows that all things, be they first or second nature, have an essence.⁷⁹ Nothing is exempt from having an essence, as shown by the following list drawn from the Writings: God; the human soul; humankind; belief in Divine Unity; justice; "all created things" beauty; species of living things; truth; religion; "this new age"; "existence" and the spirit. These references to the essence are even more wide-spread once we realise that such phrases as "inmost

reality,” “the realities of” the “inner reality,” and “inner realities” also refer to the essence of things.

This highly diverse list, along with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s references to the real but hidden “intrinsic identity,” (PUP 421) as well as to “the essential reality *underlying any given phenomenon*” (ibid, emphasis added), makes it clear that in Bahá’í ontology, all things have an essence whose attributes appear or manifest in the world. Because there is no such thing as being without an essence, being and essence are absolutely correlated. To be is to have an essence since the act of being can never be separated from the act of being something in particular.

Essentialism is reinforced by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s insistence that “the essence of things does not change,” (SAQ 100) an idea also reflected in His belief that the essence of humankind undergoes no change despite changes of outward appearance⁸⁰ and that species do not change.⁸¹ The immutability of essences is, of course, one of the pillars of any form of essentialism since the ‘purpose’ of essences is to provide order, that is, continuity of identity through various transformations.

Essentialism does not mean that Bahá’í ontology is static. Instead, we must bear in mind that the essence of an entity is only an aspect of its whole being. The other, equally necessary aspect is the ‘becoming’, that is to say, the manifestation of that particular essence in the external, contingent and “visible world” (SWAB 8) whereby it can display in ever-more adequate measure the bounties of God. Without this ‘becoming’ or actualization, the essence remains wholly on the “plane of the invisible” (PUP 30) and, thereby, without effect and unknown. That is why ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “Praise be to Him Who hath made the world of being ... and hath made the invisible world to appear on the plane of the visible.” (SWAB 13)

16.1. Being and Essence

On the far-reaching issue of whether being or existence is identical to essence, Bahá’í ontology sides with Ibn Sina and St. Thomas Aquinas in distinguishing the two except in the case of God. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes this clear when He writes that “all things are subject to transformation and change, save only *the essence of existence itself*.” (SWAB 157, emphasis added) The phrase “the essence of existence itself” is a philosophical description of God, Who, as the only non-contingent being, exists necessarily. His essence is to exist which is why He needs no creator. From this it follows that in God, existence and essence are one. This is emphasized by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when He speaks of “the Essence of Unity (that is, the existence of God)” (SAQ 180) indicating thereby that God’s essence and existence are identical.

In God, we cannot even conceive of a difference between essence and existence but such is not the case with contingent beings in whom we can distinguish between the essence, 'what' a thing is, and whether or not it actually exists, as for, example, with unicorns and moose. Thus, in Bahá'í ontology, whatever exists in creation has two correlated aspects: a divinely bestowed act of existence by which it negates nothingness and an essence which makes it the particular kind of thing or negation it is. It should be noted that the distinction between being or existence and essence allows us to understand with greater precision the difference between Creator and created since in God this distinction does not exist.

16.2. Knowledge and Essence

A key feature of Bahá'í ontology is the principle that human beings cannot know essences or substances directly but can only know *about* them by means of their attributes. Thus, Bahá'í essentialism is an epistemically qualified essentialism. On this issue 'Abdu'l-Bahá informs us, that "phenomenal, or created, things are known to us only by their attributes," (PUP 421) that "the inner essence of anything is not comprehended, but only its qualities." (SAQ 220) Even more precisely, He says, "the *essence* of a thing is *known through* its qualities, otherwise it is unknown and hidden." (SAQ 220, emphasis added)

What exactly does this prohibition of knowing essences mean? It is our contention that this is one of the 'continental divides' in the interpretation of the Writings: how we understand 'Abdu'l-Bahá's remarks will lead Bahá'í ontology into wholly two different directions with profoundly different implications for a number of important issues. If we go in a Kantian direction, the Bahá'í world-view is divided not only between Creator and created but also between absolutely unknown essence or noumenon and perceived attribute.

On the basis of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that "the *essence* of a thing is *known through* its qualities," (ibid) the present author takes a non-Kantian view. The Master's statement shows not that there can be no knowledge of essences but rather that this knowledge must be gotten in a specific way – through the qualities. The knowledge about essences may not be obtained by direct, immediate intuitive or 'mystical' knowledge of the essence or substance itself. Knowledge about essences is indirect and 'second-hand,' and it is inherently incomplete, for which reason essences are bound to remain mysterious. Nonetheless, we can rest assured that whatever knowledge we do possess from the qualities, that knowledge is not just about the appearance of something but is 'connected to', corresponds to the inner nature of that particular thing.

17. Disconnected, Phenomenal 'Knowledge'

If there were a *complete* 'disconnect' between the qualities and the essence, Bahá'í ontology would postulate a *strongly* 'Kantian' universe in which we remain absolutely isolated from the noumenal or essential realm and enclosed in a world of superficial phenomena or appearances.⁸² There are three problems with this position. First, such a limitation denies any knowledge of 'depth.' Not only does this conflict with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's claim that essences can, in fact, be known, albeit through attributes, but it also is out of harmony with such statements as "The power of the rational soul can *discover the realities of things, comprehend the peculiarities of beings, and penetrate the mysteries of existence*" (SAQ 217), and "For this reason we say that the spirit of man *can penetrate and discover the realities of all things, can solve the secrets and mysteries of all created objects.*" (PUP 264, emphases added) These statements, with their references to knowing the "realities of things" and solving "secrets and mysteries" clearly indicate that human knowledge goes deeper than phenomena or appearances.

The second problem follows from the first. If there is a complete disconnect between our knowledge and "the realities of things", then in fact, there is no knowledge of things at all. This opens the way for a profound philosophical skepticism that undermines the Revelation itself. A complete disconnect between phenomenal knowledge of Bahá'u'lláh and His reality prevents Bahá'ís from using their phenomenal knowledge of the history of Bahá'u'lláh to attain certainty about Him and His mission. Any efforts to know His phenomenal history would be pointless since such knowledge would not necessarily connect in any way to His reality. In that case, why bother?

Third: if there were no intrinsic connections between the entities and its qualities, how could we know to associate a particular set of qualities with a particular entity? Qualities with no intrinsic connection with entities are simply free-floating qualities not much different from the mirages mentioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. They have no intrinsic or necessary connection with any underlying reality or substance and this — in Bahá'í ontology — deprives them of reality. Moreover, if there is no certain connection between perceived attribute and essence, we will eventually arrive at an all-corroding skepticism about knowing things in any way. This conflicts with the Bahá'í notion of making progress by increasing knowledge of various kinds.

Though it rejects a strong Kantianism, Bahá'í ontology does, in fact, embrace a weak Kantianism insofar as it posits a distinction between attributes and essence, between the knowable and not

completely knowable, between inherently mysterious essences and the emanated attributes perceived by us. However, we must not press this distinction too far, lest we end with a strong Kantianism and its attendant difficulties. Finally, it should be noted that God, of course, differs from created beings inasmuch as “all these *attributes*, names, praises and eulogies apply to the Places of Manifestation” (SAQ 149, emphasis added) rather than to God-in-Himself. However, as will be seen in Section 19, this doctrine is more nuanced than at first appears.

18. The Problem of Nominalism

Positing a complete disconnection between attributes and essence leads to some form of nominalism. If essences are completely unknown, they can be discounted and, therefore, objects can be reduced to the qualities we select and bundle together in whatever way suits us. This easily leads to the conclusion that what we call particular things — ‘chairs’, for example — are only a conventional (and basically arbitrary) selection of attributes bundled together under one name or heading, ‘chair.’⁸³ Such a conventional theory of knowledge easily leads to skepticism since any convention can be arbitrarily replaced by any other.⁸⁴

The Writings show at least three additional problems with nominalism. First, they assert that the “the reality of things, the mysteries of beings and the properties of existence [are] *discovered*.” (SAQ 9, emphasis added) Nowhere do they even remotely suggest that reality is merely a construct or convention. Second, the degrees of existence — mineral, plant, animal and human — are the results of divine creation and not arbitrary human conventions. Second, the differences between the degrees are inherent, that is, essential. The same may be said of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s three-fold division of reality in God, the Manifestation and the rest of creation. These distinctions are not constructs or conventions. Third, nominalism is implicitly rejected in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s acceptance of the concept of species and His emphatic denial of the modification of one species into another.⁸⁵ Since the differences among species are inherent and real, the existence of species is not simply a matter of constructing and conventionalizing.

19. God and the Problem of ‘Disconnected Knowledge’

Vis-à-vis God, the issue of disconnected knowledge takes a different turn. It seems that on this issue the Bahá’í Writings try to steer a middle course between absolutely denying any and all knowledge of God on one hand and the direct acquisition of

immediate, comprehensive and adequate knowledge of God's essence on the other. This is at times a difficult pathway.

According to the Writings, it is "absolutely impossible" (SAQ 147) for the human mind to know the divine reality, essence of substance. God's essence is "above all comprehension" (SAQ 148) and for this reason we categorically reject any direct, intuitive, mystical human knowledge of God. But does this mean that our knowledge of God's attributes — known only indirectly via the Manifestation⁸⁶ — is completely disconnected from God? This paper contends that even though this knowledge is scaled down, and, in absolute terms, wholly inadequate to comprehending completely the divine nature, it is, nonetheless, knowledge of God that we can rely on as being true, though limited and obtained indirectly. We learn to expect mercy from God, for example, because He is "the All-Merciful." (TB 12) Deficient as it may be, this knowledge tells us something about God. At one point, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that such knowledge is given negatively: we assert God's perfection to deny imperfection.⁸⁷ This, however is still knowledge connected to God. Finally, we must keep in mind Bahá'u'lláh's statement that "no tie of *direct* intercourse" (GWB 66) joins God to His creation for which reason a Manifestation is needed. This statement must not be misread to mean that no tie or connection of any kind can exist between humankind and God.

19.1. The Problem of Ethical Nihilism and the Deus Absconditus

The issue of 'connected knowledge' is important because denying such a connection leads to two problems. First, if the knowledge given us by the Manifestation is not connected to God in some way, what is the soteriological relevance of the Manifestation? What authority does He have? Second, if such names as the "Most Merciful" (PM 63) have no real connection to God, what is the ethical relevance of God? Without real grounding in God, our ethical values are all mere matters of opinion. Such a position leaves us open to an ethical nihilism since without God's authority, ethical injunctions lose their absolutely imperative character and become 'suggestions.'

Finally, disconnected knowledge can also engender the problem of the 'disappearing God', the *deus absconditus*. An absolutely unknowable God will simply become irrelevant and, for practical purposes, be 'replaced' as an 'object' of worship by the Manifestation. This, of course, violates the very *raison d'être* and message of the Manifestation, but the danger is nonetheless real because it is hard, if not impossible, for humans to maintain a sense of connection with something we cannot know in any way.

19.2. An Alternative View

It must be noted that the concept of faith provides us with an alternative view of the issue of connection between the God and the attributes given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Bahá'u'lláh. We might say that these descriptors provide no knowledge of God because knowledge implies a degree of rational and intellectual certainty – which in turn suggests surrounding the object of knowledge⁸⁸ – whereas faith has no such implications. Faith is simply a positive existential response that is not dependent on rational or external evidence. In other words, we take it on pure faith that the attributes of the Manifestation apply to God, but we make no actual knowledge claims on this issue.

Although further research is needed to make a final determination whether the Writings favor the 'faith' and 'knowledge' approaches to God's nature, there are strong suggestions that 'knowledge' is favored as the first among equals. Knowledge and faith are the "two wings of the soul" (BWF 382) and both are necessary for the ascent of the human soul to the lofty station of divine perfections.⁸⁹ However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes it clear that "it is *first* 'to know' and then 'to do'" and that "By faith is meant, *first, conscious knowledge*, and second, the practice of good deeds." (BWF 383, emphasis added) These words seem to give knowledge a certain primacy since 'Abdu'l-Bahá even puts it ahead of good deeds. This idea seems in keeping with the affirmation that "for God, knowledge is the most glorious gift of man and the most noble of human perfections." (SAQ 137)

20. What Else Does It Mean 'To Be'?

In exploring various questions, this paper has provided parts of the answer to the question, 'What does it mean 'to be'?' We shall now continue this exploration. Rather than start with an abstract discussion, we shall begin with an inventory of the kinds of things that exist according to the Writings. This allows Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá to determine the inventory which is, in effect, a 'world-map' of reality.

According to the Writings, human beings inhabit a *Lebenswelt*⁹⁰ or 'life-world' that is made up of the following kinds of 'things': "sensible realities" or physical phenomena; "intellectual realities" or ideational phenomena; spiritual realities such as the "Holy Spirit," "human spirit" and the "rational soul"; God, the Creator; Manifestations, the mediators between God and creation; the mineral, plant and animal kingdoms and their members; the human kingdom and its members; the Abhá Kingdom and its inhabitants; "spiritual beings" or entities who are the "angels of holiness ... Thine

invisible hosts” also called “the angels of Abhá.” In addition there are essences, and attributes or qualities, as well as potentials – also referred to as “capacities” or “potency” “powers” and substances, “material forces,” “spiritual forces”, four kinds of time (SVFV 25), the reality of “limitless space,” and the reality of cause and effect. (GWB 162) Furthermore, they recognize “the absolute order and perfection of existence,” “natural order,” natural laws⁹¹ and processes of growth, evolution, decline⁹² and constant regeneration.⁹³

In the *Lebenswelt* of Bahá'í ontology, all of these things exist in various modes of being. Examination of this list suggests that we can classify all the items as existing in one of five ways: either as (1) substance (which includes processes), as (2) an essential attribute, as (3) an accidental attribute, or as (4) the form of a substance.⁹⁴ Finally, there is (5) location, be it physical, temporal or ontological as in the hierarchy of being. Essential attributes are those that a substance needs to be the kind of substance it is; in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s example, it is an “essential requirement” (SAQ 233), or the “inherent nature” (ABL 27) of fire to burn. Accidental attributes are those which a substance may have but are not necessary to be the kind of substance it is. For example, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that the body is an accident of the soul which, He says, is the substance.⁹⁵ The form of a substance is the structure, or organization of the parts. Each of these things has a different way or mode of existing. Substances, be they material or spiritual, exist independently; accidental attributes exist contingently and dependently but not necessarily in a substance; essential attributes exist dependently but necessarily with a substance, and form also exists dependently and necessarily with a substance. Location tells us time and place as well as ontological location in the hierarchy of being.

Examining this inventory shows that each of the items fits into one of the five categories that seem to define the minimal requirements of Bahá'í ontology. In the category of substance, we find first of all God, Who is, strictly speaking, the only true substance because only God is completely independent of anything else. That God is a substance is confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh's statement that the Manifestation is “born of the *substance* of God Himself,” (GWB 66, emphasis added) meaning not that God is material but that He is a totally independent being. Lest this statement be misinterpreted in an ‘incarnationist’ manner, we hasten to add that the Manifestation is emanated or “born of” God, and resembles God formally (though not substantially) in the way a mirror image resembles the original formally. The relationship also resembles the relationship between the original of a manuscript and a copy: the two share formal but not substantial identity and one is logically

prior and is the final cause, *raison d'être*, of the other. All created entities are, therefore, substances only in a relative sense. As we have already seen, the rational soul is also a substance as are minerals, plants, animals, “spiritual beings,” “material forces,” “spiritual forces,” “sensible realities,” some “intellectual realities,” the Holy Spirit, the human spirit, various physical and non-physical processes and the members of the Abhá Kingdom.

In the category of essential attributes, we find the visible essential attributes and “powers” that any substances has along with “capacities” or potentials. All non-essential attributes are, by definition, accidental. Within the category of form — that is, the category of how things are organized — we find the “natural order” and “natural laws,” whereas within the category of location we find time, “limitless space,” and the “degrees of being.”

From the foregoing discussion we may conclude that in Bahá'í ontology, to be is to fit into one of these categories: everything that is a negation of absolute non-existence, everything that is in some way a ‘reality’ finds a place somewhere in this schema. Refinements or even changes may eventually be required, but it is difficult to imagine how any list of categories based on the Writings could fail to include these in some way or another. In other words, with these categories, Bahá'í ontology provides us with a basic map of reality that allows us to understand (within certain limits) the kinds of things we encounter. This list of five categories also shows that there exists some kind of underlying order in the Writings’ vision of reality.

22. A Non-Kantian, Realist Ontology Vis-à-vis the Categories

Our inventory of the Bahá'í *Lebenswelt* reinforces, from yet another side, the conclusion that our knowledge of first and even second nature is not entirely a human construct. It shows that Bahá'í ontology is not a Kantian ontology inasmuch as the Writings recognize the independent reality of time, space, “natural order” (SAQ 201) as well as cause and effect.⁹⁶ According to Kant, time, space, causality and other categorical attributes are imposed upon the unformed external data — noumena — by the human mind and shaped into the phenomena we experience. The cosmic order as we know it is an invention, a construction or convention of the human mind and, to this extent, truth is something that we have made rather than found. The Writings reject this view. Time, space, causality, the categorial attributes — in short, the cosmic order — are inherent in the phenomena themselves and are not human constructs. They were created by God, not man, and therefore exist independently of human perception.

23. The Rejection of Classical Empiricism and Positivism

Another conclusion we can draw from our inventory or *Lebenswelt* is that Bahá'í ontology rejects positivism and "classical empiricism,"⁹⁷ that is, "any view which bases our knowledge, or the materials from which it is constructed, on experience through the traditional five senses."⁹⁸ This is not to say that the Writings altogether reject sense knowledge — for they do not — but rather that they present reality as made of intellectual⁹⁹ and spiritual¹⁰⁰ as well as "sensible realities." (SAQ 83) Consequently, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Bahá'í ontology is fundamentally incompatible with any philosophical system or epistemic methodology that confines valid knowledge to knowledge gathered and verified by the five senses.

24. The Equivocal Application of 'Being'

Our ontological inventory also shows that the term 'being' is applied equivocally in the case of God. In other words, the term 'being' does not apply to God in the same way as it does to created things. How could it? God is — among other things — uncreated, Self-subsistent, beyond time, has no spatial location yet is omnipresent and is omniscient. Indeed, the difference is so great we might wonder if the term applies to Him at all. Its self-evident virtues notwithstanding, this argument is rejected by the Writings which on a regular basis refer to God in terms such as "the Divine Being," (GWB 46¹⁰¹) "the unchangeable Being," (GWB 47) "the Ancient Being," (GWB 49¹⁰²) and "the sacred Being." (GWB 192) (It must immediately be noted that these descriptors for God should not be confused with the references to the Manifestation as the "Great Being." (GWB 250)) Given these descriptions of God, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Writings intend us to associate God with being in some way. However, in light of the overwhelming differences between God and creation, it is clear that 'being' can only be attributed to God in an equivocal or analogous way. Like all other things, God has being insofar as He is not absolute nonexistence and because it is His essence to exist¹⁰³ as the only self-subsisting or necessary being.

This analogous knowledge of God's being is entirely negative — He is 'not absolute non-existence' — and thus lacks any genuine positive content. Knowing what a thing is not tells us nothing about what it actually is. Thus, we are not ascribing any predicate to God beyond what the Writings Themselves do by referring to Him as the "Divine Being." (GWB 46) This is simply a positive way of saying that God is not absolute non-existence. Of course we must recall that

although this predication indicates a truth about God — His being or existence — this does not mean that humankind understands this truth to its fullest measure. Our knowledge is correct but incomplete.

25. The Tension of Being and Nothingness

The fact that “the existence of creation in relation to the existence of God is nonexistence” leaves all created things in a highly paradoxical or contradictory situation: they both are and are not at the same time. Their very existence is constituted by a tension between being and non-being, a tension that cannot be escaped or resolved in favor of one side or the other. Were it resolved in favor of being, the created thing, would, in effect, become an absolute being like God; were it resolved in favor of non-being, it would become absolute non-existence, and that, as we know from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is impossible. Thus, all created, finite things are situated, so to speak, in the middle, between being and nothingness, a situation manifesting itself most obviously in the inescapable anxiety that accompanies all life and especially the lives of human beings. For humans it is necessary to learn how to live consciously and creatively with the tension, with the thesis and antithesis, of being and non-being which structurally constitutes our existence. We are not here to escape the tension by various means but to use it for our individual and collective growth.

26. Non-Being and Being-not-Yet

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements that “nonexistence is only relative and absolute nonexistence inconceivable” (PUP 88) and that “no sign can come from a nonexisting thing” (SAQ 225) lead to the conclusion that in Bahá’í ontology there is another kind of non-being — ‘being-not-yet.’ The classical name for such incipient being-not-yet is ‘potentials’, which we have noted earlier are a part of the *Lebenswelt* in Bahá’í ontology. Of course, from the point of view of actually existing things, such potentials do not exist and are, therefore, a kind of non-being, but they are a relative non-being with a capacity for actualization. As such, like all other finite entities, potentials have a paradoxical existence: depending on viewpoint they both are and are not, though they are as real “in [their] own condition” (SAQ 281) as any other degree of being.

The Writings admit the existence of potentials when They note the virtues of the “potential in the seed,” (PUP 91) of the sun awakening “all that is potential in the earth,” (PUP 74) of the “virtues potential in mankind,” (PUP 70) of the inventions “potential in the world of nature” (PUP 309) and of the embryo progressing until “that which was potential in it — namely, the human image — appears.”

(PUP 359) Of similar import are the passages referring to the “mysteries *latent* in nature” (PUP 51) which are actualized by humankind, the “*latent* talents” (PUP 52) hidden in human beings, the “divine perfections *latent* in the heart of man,” (PUP 53) the “latent realities within the bosom of the earth,” (FWU 70) and the “the greater world, the macrocosm ... *latent* and miniature in the lesser world, or microcosm, of man.” (PUP 69-70, emphasis added) The same idea is implicit in Bahá'u'lláh's statement that we are to “[r]egard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value,” (GWB 260) which is to say that humankind possesses invaluable potentials that must be actualized through education. Perhaps most fascinating passage in this regard is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá's rhetorical question, “*Before we were born* into this world did we not pray ... Did we not *pray potentially* for these needed blessings *before we were created?*” (PUP 246, emphasis added) Combined with the previous quotes, this passage strongly suggests that we had some degree of existence as potentials before we actualized on the physical plain. This matter needs further exploration.

27. Platonic and Aristotelian Elements in Bahá'í Ontology

The passages quoted above suggest that Bahá'í ontology recognizes that the material plane has two distinct, though not actually separable levels, the invisible plane of potentials and the visible plane of actualized things.¹⁰⁴ Quotes such as the following suggest the same idea: “through an ideal inner power man brings these realities [in the universe] forth from the invisible plane to the visible.” (FWU 70¹⁰⁵) Such quotations strengthen the view that Bahá'í ontology has a Platonic slant, a view also reinforced by statements such as, “The spiritual world is like unto the phenomenal world. They are the exact counterpart of each other. Whatever objects appear in this world of existence are the outer pictures of the world of heaven.” (PUP 10¹⁰⁶) Elsewhere we read “For physical things are signs and imprints of spiritual things; every *lower* thing is an *image* and *counterpart* of a higher thing.”¹⁰⁷ These, combined with statements that “the Kingdom is the real world, and this nether place is only its shadow stretching out” (SWAB 178) and that the Kingdom is a more perfect world¹⁰⁸ — much like Plato's world of Ideas — shows that Bahá'í ontology has strong Platonic features.

The fact that the material world has a ‘level of potentials’ and a ‘level of actualization’, which are distinct though not actually separable, reveals the Aristotelian features of Bahá'í ontology. According to Aristotle, each thing — except God — is in the condition of being actual and being-not-yet or being-in-potential, of being and being-in-development, of being whole and being-not-yet-

whole. If we ask where these potentials are, the answer seems to be that they are enfolded¹⁰⁹ within the particular things. For example, the Writings speak of the “latent realities *within* the bosom of the earth,” (FWU 70) “the potential *in* the seed,”¹¹⁰ the “virtues potential *in* mankind” (PUP 70) and the “virtues latent *within* the realities of the phenomenal world.” (PUP 91, emphases added¹¹¹) This suggests that the invisible plane is not a physical place but rather the unactualized and, therefore, to us, invisible, condition inherent in all things. ‘To be’, therefore, includes being and being-not-yet.

28. Implications for Existential Ontology

Everything of which we are aware has a visible and hidden aspect – a fact which has tremendous implications for existential ontology. Due to limitations of space, we shall refer briefly only to two of them. The first, and perhaps most obvious, is that humankind lives in a world that is essentially and irremediably mysterious. Not only is the world an endless mystery for us – “how vast the oceans of wisdom that surge within a drop” (GWB 177) – but we are mysterious to ourselves as well: in each of us is “are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree no other created being hath excelled or surpassed... Man is My *mystery*, and I am his *mystery*.” (GWB 177, emphasis added) The essential mysteriousness within and around us leads in some existential ontologies to the establishment of a sense of estrangement, ‘uncanniness’ or ‘unheimlichkeit,’ and anxiety or Angst¹¹² as constitutive features of human existence, and in others, such as Marcel’s, to a more positive appreciation of the role of mystery in our lives. Like the Bahá’í Writings, Marcel sees the inescapable mysteriousness of life as a structurally constituted sign of the presence of the divine and, therefore, as something that brings value into human existence.

The second implication of the double visible and invisible aspect of things relates to humankind’s role in the universe. According to the Writings, humankind has a clearly defined role in cosmic evolution, namely, to transfer phenomena from the plane of the invisible to the visible. Humankind “discovereth those hidden secrets of nature ... transfereth them from the invisible plane to the visible.”¹¹³ Thus, humankind plays a role in the unfolding of creation’s otherwise hidden potentials and, thereby, makes its contribution to the evolution of the cosmos at large which is to say, human and cosmic evolution are inter-related as aspects of a unified whole. Without this intervention of humankind, the being of the cosmos would remain in an ontologically diminished state and for this reason humankind is a necessity – not, as modern evolutionary theory teaches, an accidental development – for the ontological completeness of cosmos. Without man, the cosmos would also lack

value,¹¹⁴ being incomplete and imperfect.¹¹⁵ Quantitatively insignificant at the cosmic scale, humankind is qualitatively of supreme value.

29. An Ontological Fall?

Because of the Platonic elements in Bahá'í ontology, we cannot avoid asking whether or not the transition from the Kingdom to the visible world and from the potential to the actual constitutes a 'fall'? The question arises because the potential or essential has a certain perfection insofar as it is not determined or limited by the conditions of actual existence. It also arises because of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's characterisation of the world of creation as being as "shadow[s]", "fantas[ies]", "images" and "pictures" in contrast to "the real world" (SWAB 178) of the Kingdom. From a Platonic point of view, this transition constitutes a fall.

However, from the Aristotelian viewpoint also evident in the Writings, the 'fall' into actual being in the world of creation, to the plane of the visible, is an opportunity for real growth and the actualization of latent potentials. Thus, what is a 'fall' in one sense is the beginning of progress in another. One recalls in this connection Bahá'u'lláh's prayer, "O Thou Whose tests are a healing medicine." (PM 220) Without the tests of existence, there can be no progress, no actualization and making visible. The situation is analogous to what 'Abdu'l-Bahá says about the innocence of children: their "purity is on account of weakness and innocence, not on account of any strength and testing." (PUP 53) From this vantage point, the fall is a 'felix culpa', a 'fortunate fall.'

30. To Be and Becoming

Since all things are a combination of being and non-being in the form of being-not-yet, all things are, therefore, in a constant condition of change as various potentials strive to actualise themselves. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "nothing which exists remains in a state of repose ... Everything is either *growing or declining*; all things are either *coming from nonexistence into being*, or going from existence into non-existence." (SAQ, emphasis added) He adds that "motion [is] an *inseparable concomitant* of existence, whether inherently or accidentally, spiritually or materially."¹¹⁶ Indeed, He says motion "cannot be separated from beings because it is their *essential requirement*," (SAQ 233) to which He adds, "this movement is *necessary to existence*, which is either growing or declining." (SAQ 233, emphases added) Since motion and change are essential attributes of all entities, then it follows that in Bahá'í ontology to be is to be in the condition of becoming. It is not a static ontology.

31. The Correlation of Being and Becoming

This leads to a subtle but important question: Is there a difference between saying that 'For an entity 'to be' means 'to be *in the condition of becoming*' and saying 'An entity's being *is the process* of its becoming'? One possible difference is that the first implies that there is a continuing substance that is in the condition of changing, that is, actualising its potentials, whereas the second suggests that the changing process itself *is* the entity. Put into its larger context, this question deals with whether Bahá'í ontology is an ontology of being as represented by Plato and or an ontology of becoming as represented by Heraclitus or perhaps a hybrid as represented by Aristotle and Whitehead. At this stage in our research, the last alternative seems the most capable of doing justice to what we find in the Writings.

According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "This state of motion is said to be essential — that is, natural; it cannot be separated from beings." (SAQ 233) In this statement, 'being' and 'becoming' are absolutely correlated with one another: they are mutually interdependent, complementary and reciprocal relationship. In His words, they are "inseparable concomitants of existence."¹¹⁷ Like two sides of a coin, they are distinguishable by intellectual abstraction but are not separable in actual fact, which 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirms when He says, "an essential requirement cannot be separated from the thing itself." (SAQ 171) For this reason, it is our contention that Bahá'í ontology upholds the correlation — as opposed to the identification — of being and becoming in all things except God and the Manifestations in their station of "pure abstraction and essential unity." (KI 152)

31.1. What is "Becoming"?

At this point, however, we still face the question of how Bahá'í ontology defines becoming or change. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, there are "different degrees of motion"¹¹⁸: "motion in transit", "motion of inherent growth", "motion of condition", motion "of spirit", "motion of intellect" and "motion of eternal essence."¹¹⁹ Reflecting on this passage, we see the nature of change as being from one thing to its contrary or contradictory, that is, from one place or condition to its opposite. Next, we see that 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explicitly adopted Aristotle's definition of change as the motion from potentiality to actuality¹²⁰, which is to say that in motion or change, qualities and attributes that were potential but not overtly present or active become actualized, that is, explicitly present and active.

Given the emphasis on change or the actualization of potentials — and further — evolution, progressive revelation and human progress after death, it seems clear that Bahá'í ontology has a strong

affinity for process ontologies. Furthermore, because Bahá'í ontology also has Platonic elements – the “nether place” as the shadow of the Kingdom – it appears that Bahá'í ontology resembles the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead which also combines Platonic and Aristotelian elements with a process ontology. Of course, this is not to suggest that Bahá'í ontology is completely assimilable to Whiteheadian philosophy, but the fact remains that, despite some important differences, they share a number of essential features.¹²¹

From the foregoing discussion, it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that Bahá'í ontology is neither a pure ontology of being as best illustrated by Parmenides and Plato, nor a pure ontology of becoming as illustrated by Heraclitus, but rather a hybrid of the two as represented by Aristotle and Whitehead. It does not claim that only static being is real and valuable, nor does it claim that only becoming has reality. Instead, both are real and essential features of the universe. It is a qualified process philosophy.

32. Conclusion

From the foregoing survey it is possible to draw at least five major conclusions about Bahá'í ontology.

1. The Bahá'í Writings do, in fact, contain a systematic ontology.
2. Bahá'í ontology confirms many of the insights provided by the philosophic tradition that begins with Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus, goes through Ibn Sina and Aquinas and is active today in Whitehead, Adler, Wilber and neo-Thomism.
3. Bahá'í ontology is rigorously dualistic vis-à-vis the relation of the Creator and the created. This is the bed-rock of Bahá'í ontology.
4. Bahá'í ontology represents a qualified form of realism, relativism, idealism and process philosophy.
5. Bahá'í ontology is rigorously essentialist, moderate rationalist, hierarchical and substantialist.

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NOTES

¹ The *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*; *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*.

² Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* 1.

³ This question immediately brings to mind Plato's view that true being is only found in the realm of unchanging Ideas of which the changing entities around us are mere copies without 'full reality.'

⁴ SAQ 239.

⁵ SAQ 239.

⁶ See for example, Nima Hazini, "Neoplatonism: Framework for a Bahá'í Metaphysics"; Mark Foster, "Neo-Platonism: Framework for a Bahá'í Ontology"; John Hatcher, *The Purpose of Physical Reality*; Ian Kluge, "The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings"; Julio Savi, *The Eternal Quest for God*; Juan Cole, "The Concept of the Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings"; Keven Brown, editor, *Evolution and Bahá'í Belief*.

⁷ Of whom the most widely known are Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain.

⁸ This movement is best represented by the renowned Mortimer J Adler.

⁹ See Section 14 of this paper, "A Substantialist Ontology" for a precise meaning of 'substance.'

¹⁰ See also SAQ 293.

¹¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, of course, reveals a three-fold division of existence – the stations of Creator, Manifestation and the rest of creation. (SAQ 295) However, unaided natural reason, can, by itself, only identify two stations, Creator and created. The station of Manifestation requires revelation by the Manifestations of God. Moreover, the first fundamental division is between Creator and created.

¹² 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Commentary on the Islamic Tradition: 'I Was a Hidden Treasure'", emphasis added.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*, emphasis added. See also SAQ 241; SAQ 157.

¹⁵ SWAB 108

¹⁶ Momen, "Relativism: A Basis for Bahá'í Metaphysics," http://bahai-library.com/?file=momen_relativism.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

²² "Commentary on the Islamic Tradition: 'I Was a Hidden Treasure'", emphasis added.

²³ A similar conclusion was reached by Keven Brown in "'Abdu'l-Bahá's Response to the Doctrine of the Unity of Existence" in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, Vol. 11, Number 34, September-December 2001.

²⁴ This, of course, raises the question as to why 'Abdu'l-Bahá would take such a neutral position and on this score we enter the realm of historical speculation. It is possible, for example, that He did not want to get the new faith or its adherents embroiled in a long-standing Islamic theological dispute, especially while they were in Baghdad.

²⁵ In fact, the Writings hold to a correspondence theory of truth. See Ian Kluge, "The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings" for detailed documentation about the correspondence theory of truth in the Writings, <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Den/4944/aristotle.html>

²⁶ PUP 356.

²⁷ This rejection of a subjective theory of truth is illustrated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's denial of the geocentric theory of the solar system. He says, "The eye sees the sun and planets revolving around the earth, whereas *in reality* the sun is stationary, central, and the earth revolves upon its own axis." ("Relativism: A Basis for Bahá'í Metaphysics")

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ Of course, it is important to distinguish the absolute assertion that God exists from particular descriptions of God; the latter may well be limited by our personal perspectives, but the former is an absolute truth.

³¹ "Relativism: A Basis for Bahá'í Metaphysics"

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ See also the Preface to *The Promised Day is Come*; BA 185.

³⁵ Alexander Skutch, *The Golden Core of Religion*.

³⁶ Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* 1.

³⁷ See also GWB 157 and SAQ 280.

³⁸ GWB 157: "Such an existence is a contingent and not an absolute existence, inasmuch as the former is preceded by a cause ..."

³⁹ SAQ 178.

⁴⁰ This moves Bahá'í ontology in the direction of causal or hidden variable interpretations of quantum phenomena in agreement with Einstein and Bohm that the Copenhagen interpretation is incomplete.

⁴¹ PUP 307. See also PUP 424; TAF 16.

⁴² PUP 219.

⁴³ One way of schematising philosophies is by their answer to the question, 'How much can reason/logic tell us for certain?' Rationalists answer, 'Everything – and what is not rational is not real knowledge.' Irrationalists answer, 'Nothing. It's all just viewpoints and opinions.' Moderate rationalists answer, 'Some things – but not everything.'

⁴⁴ As in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's "Commentary on 'I was a Hidden Treasure' " provisionally translated by Moojan Momen.

⁴⁵ BWF 315.

⁴⁶ See also PUP 80; SAQ 199.

⁴⁷ See also SAQ 301.

⁴⁸ Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*. "Esse est percipi" – "To be is to be perceived."

⁴⁹ For more on this, see Section 27.

⁵⁰ Plato, *The Republic*, Book 7, 5141-517a.

⁵¹ See also PUP 291.

⁵² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII, 7, 1072a, b.

⁵³ PUP 53.

⁵⁴ Some readers may recognise ideas analogous to those found in the poetry of William Blake for whom being has a similar "innocence" and "experience" dialectical structure. We may also see a Hegelian element here.

⁵⁵ This differs significantly from Berkeley for whom being perceived is sufficient for existence.

⁵⁶ If we correlate receptivity and activity with traditional beliefs, we have, of course arrived at a concept analogous to beliefs about yin and yang. For similar ideas, see TAB 140.

⁵⁷ See also SAQ 206, 213; PUP 302; TAB 146.

⁵⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses the human body to illustrate His point, thereby showing yet again that an organic image of creation as an internally connected whole underlies the Writings.

⁵⁹ Thanks to Richard Gravelly and Susan Maneck for providing information and exact Qur'anic references on Muslim beliefs regarding creatio ex nihilo.

⁶⁰ See also PUP 88.

⁶¹ See also SWB 196.

⁶² G.R. Lewis, "Relativism," <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txn/relativi.htm>.

⁶³ God as the absolute reference point is analogous to light, which is the absolute reference point in physical relativity theory.

⁶⁴ SAQ 178.

⁶⁵ This does not refer to the mirage as atmospheric phenomenon, which is quite real, but to what the mirage purports to represent.

⁶⁶ SAQ 239; see also 240.

⁶⁷ See also SAQ 146.

⁶⁸ See also SAQ 220.

⁶⁹ Leon Edel, *Aristotle and His Philosophy* 123.

⁷⁰ *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 658; *The Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 669.

⁷¹ Dictionary of Philosophy of Mind <http://www.artsci.wustl.edu/philos/MindDict/phenomenalism.html>; see also The Catholic Encyclopedia, "Phenomenalism".

⁷² GWB 177.

⁷³ A detailed discussion of this can be found in Kluge's "Process Philosophy and the Writings," <http://www.geocities.com/iankluge/Whitehead-deChardin.html>

⁷⁴ *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* 746.

⁷⁵ See also SAQ 129; 286;

⁷⁶ PUP 21.

⁷⁷ SAQ 220.

⁷⁸ GWB 177.

⁷⁹ Even second natures have essences: Michelangelo's "David" is required to have certain essential attributes to be a statue, to be made of marble, to be that particular statue by Michelangelo. We could call Rodin's "Balzac" "David", but it lacks the attributes to be Michelangelo's "David."

⁸⁰ SAQ 184.

⁸¹ SAQ 193.

⁸² Schopenhauer, in *The World as Will and Representation*, tried to solve this problem by using the universal will of which all things are made as the means to obtaining more than phenomenal knowledge.

⁸³ Nominalism: "The view that things denominated by the same term share nothing except that fact: what all chairs have in common is that they are called 'chairs'... Our common classifications are merely flatus vocis or breath of the voice." *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* 264.

⁸⁴ If the replacement of one convention by another cannot be arbitrary, it must be constrained and such constraints lead us back to the notion of essence/substance.

⁸⁵ SAQ 178-84.

⁸⁶ SAQ 222.

⁸⁷ SAQ 148.

⁸⁸ FWU 46.

⁸⁹ BWF 382.

⁹⁰ The term originated with Edmund Husserl in his *Phenomenology of the Life-World*.

⁹¹ SAQ 3.

⁹² SAQ 233.

⁹³ TAB 141. For a detailed study of process thought in the Writings see Ian Kluge, "Process Philosophy and the Bahá'í Writings." (see <http://www.geocities.com/iankluge/Whitehead-deChardin.html>)

⁹⁴ 'Substance' of course is not material substance but rather Aristotle's substance of anything that does not exist as an attribute (essential or accidental) of anything else or as a form.

⁹⁵ SAQ 239.

⁹⁶ GWB, 162.

⁹⁷ *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* 226.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹ SAQ 83.

¹⁰⁰ PUP 138.

¹⁰¹ See also GWB 53; 70; 151; 166-167; 191; FWU 68.

¹⁰² See also GWB 151.

¹⁰³ The essence and existence of God are equated in SAQ 180: "... the Essence of Unity (that is, the existence of God ...)"

¹⁰⁴ The Writings also refer to the "human plane" (PUP 114), the "animal plane" (*ibid.*, 182), the "vegetable plane" (*ibid.*, 69), the "physical and intellectual plane" (FWU 59). However, inasmuch as these are specific planes of things already actualized, they are part of the visible plane in general.

¹⁰⁵ See also PUP 50, 81, 178, 241; PT 175.

¹⁰⁶ See also ABL 46.

¹⁰⁷ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet of the Universe; emphasis added. Original Tablet in *Makátib-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 1, pp 13-32. Anonymous translation. http://bahai-library.com/?file=abdulbaha_lawh_aflakiyyih

¹⁰⁸ PUP 4; 90.

¹⁰⁹ The allusion to quantum physicist David Bohm's concept of 'enfolding', 'unfolding' and the 'implicate' and 'explicate' order is quite intentional. See Bohm's Wholeness and the Implicate Order.

¹¹⁰ PUP 91; emphasis added.

¹¹¹ See also “latent mystery” in PUP 360; “latent force” (ibid., 417) as well as the numerous references to “latent” throughout the Writings.

¹¹² Heidegger and Kierkegaard for example.

¹¹³ BWF 339; see also PUP 30; 81;

¹¹⁴ This is not to be interpreted as a contradiction with the statement that creation is perfect (PUP 80. The apparent contradiction is removed by recalling that creation as a whole, includes both the actualized and unactualized potentials. However, strictly from the point of view of actualized nature is incomplete and, in that sense, imperfect, because other potentials remain to be actualized or made manifest.

¹¹⁵ PUP 310; see also 309, 330, 400. See also SAQ 201.

¹¹⁶ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablet of the Universe*. Original Tablet in *Makátib-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, vol. 1, pp 13-32. Anonymous Translation. http://bahai-library.com/?file=abdulbaha_lawh_aflakiyyih

¹¹⁷ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablet of the Universe*.

¹¹⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá *On Divine Philosophy*, quoted from Julio Savi, *The Eternal Quest for God* 57.

¹¹⁹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá *On Divine Philosophy*, quoted ibid. 57.

¹²⁰ *Physics*, III, 1, 201a.

¹²¹ See Ian Kluge, “Process Philosophy and the Bahá'í Writings” in *Lights of Irfan V* (2004) or at <http://geocities.com/iankluge/Whitehead-deChardin.html>

‘Abdu’l Bahá’s Tablet of the Two Calls: Civilizing Barbarity

Manooher Mofidi

1. Introduction

The earth seemed unearthly. We were accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there – there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were – No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you – you so remote from the night of first ages – could comprehend. And why not? The mind of man is capable of anything – because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future.¹

The immortal words of Marlow, the narrator in Joseph Conrad’s enduring classic, *Heart of Darkness*, as he journeys deep into the unknown, the darkness, to retrieve Kurtz, at one time civilization personified, now the embodiment of crassness, avarice, barbarity.

Conrad’s novel, *Heart of Darkness*, is a rumination on the thin line between civilization and barbarity. This relationship is also the central theme of Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet of the Two Calls. “Civilization is conjoined with barbarism,” (SWAB 297) Abdu’l-Bahá states in the Tablet.

Arguably no subject is more apt to ponder in today’s political (indeed politicized) and ideological climate than how thinly civilization, a “terrible beauty,” to borrow from W.B. Yeats, cloaks the darkness that envelops humanity. Here, we use Abdu’l-Bahá’s civilization and barbarity construct to understand the capabilities of humanity absent the “call of God,” “the Most Great Guidance.” We employ the construct to also situate the geo-political and historical events alluded to by Abdu’l-Bahá in His Tablet, events that

demonstrate how the boundaries between civilization and barbarity at times overlap uncomfortably and at other times simply coexist indistinguishably.

2. The Tablet's Structure and Themes

The Tablet, known as the "Tablet of the Two Calls," is found in *Selections From the Writings of Abdu'l Bahá*, No. 225. The Tablet is not dated. Certain references in the Tablet, though, suggest that it was revealed *circa* 1907-1908.²

A brief word about the structure and themes of the Tablet. It is divided into 32 paragraphs of varying length. A number of themes are explored. Among these are: The two calls, namely call of civilization and call of God; the intimate relationship between the two, namely, that civilization (progress) is conjoined with barbarism unless material civilization is confirmed by Divine Guidance; happiness of mankind (happiness of the world of humanity) "lieth in the unity of the human race, and that spiritual and material developments are conditioned upon love and unity among all men;" the dual nature of man; material progress being the result of association and cooperation, while ruin the outcome of animosity and hatred; unity in diversity; obedience, submission, and loyalty towards one's government.³

Here, we probe the theme of civilization and barbarity.⁴

3. Civilizing Barbarity

The Tablet begins with Abdu'l-Bahá describing, in His words, "two calls to success and prosperity being raised from the heights of happiness of mankind." (SWAB 296)

One is the Call of civilization, which pertains to the world of phenomena. It promotes the principles of material achievement; trains the physical accomplishments of mankind; comprises the laws, regulations, arts and sciences through which the world of humanity has developed. The propagator and executive power of this call is just government.⁵

The second call is the Call of God, whose spiritual teachings are safeguards of the Everlasting glory, eternal happiness and illumination of the world of humanity. It causes attributes of mercy to be revealed in the human world and the life beyond. This Call is founded upon the instructions and exhortations of the Lord and the admonitions and altruistic emotions belonging to the realm of morality which, like unto a brilliant light, brighten and illumine the

lamp of the realities of mankind. The penetrative power of the Call of God is the Word of God.⁶

Abdu'l-Bahá then describes the relationship between these two calls. He says that until material achievements, physical accomplishments and human virtues are reinforced by spiritual perfections, luminous qualities and characteristics of mercy, no fruit or result shall issue therefrom, nor will the happiness of the world of humanity, which is the ultimate aim, be attained.⁷ He cautions that while, on the one hand, material achievements and the development of the physical world produce prosperity, on the other hand dangers, severe calamities and violent afflictions are imminent.⁸

Abdu'l-Bahá invites the reader to look at the orderly pattern of kingdoms, cities and villages, with the attractiveness of their adornments, the freshness of their natural resources, the refinement of their appliances, the ease of their means of travel, the extent of knowledge available about the world of nature, the great inventions, the colossal enterprises, the noble discoveries and scientific researches. He says that this vantage point compels but one conclusion – namely, that civilization brings happiness and progress to the human world.⁹

But a different vantage point warrants a different conclusion. That vantage point is the discovery of destructive and infernal machines, to the development of forces of demolition and the invention of fiery implements, which uproot the tree of life. From this perspective, it is evident that civilization is conjoined with barbarism. Progress and barbarism go hand in hand, He says, unless material civilization be confirmed by Divine Guidance.¹⁰

Let's pause and reflect on this civilization-barbarity construct. They are "conjoined," Abdu'l-Bahá says. This means that civilization and barbarity are separated by a very thin line. Civilization is conceptualized in very precarious terms – a state of tension and unyielding struggle between constructive aspirations and destructive tendencies.

This is precisely the theme of *Heart of Darkness*. In this book, Conrad attempts to come to terms with the brutal and exploitative nature of the European colonization of Africa, using as a backdrop the bloody history of the Congo Free State. Conrad's narrator, Marlow, is the commander of a riverboat looking for ivory to trade in the Belgian Congo. Marlow travels into the heart of the Congo to retrieve the enigmatic Mr. Kurtz, a promising young agent who has disappeared into the bush. Along the way he learns that Kurtz has gained supreme power over the natives of the land through the use of extreme violence. Throughout Marlow's harrowing journey, Conrad maintains an unflinching focus on the crassness and avarice

of which human society is capable, ultimately revealing that the “the horror” Kurtz fears lies within us all. Marlow’s encounter with the mysterious and corrupted (and corrupting) Kurtz, who dies proclaiming the “horror” of what he found in the Congo, is the novel’s defining moment, when Marlow recognizes his kinship with Kurtz’s corruption.

Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is a rumination on the relationship between civilization and barbarity. The novel reminds us that civility is not innate; that the values and beliefs we possess as human beings, although passed down through countless generations born into civilization, are not intrinsic. Furthermore, the novel implies that, if submerged into a place of barbarity for a length of time, a civil man might succumb, as evidently Kurtz did, to the powers of darkness found in the human heart. Upon finding Kurtz, Marlow fully realizes the impact of utter, enduring barbarity on the heart of the urbane man. The values and beliefs civility had instilled are powerless against Kurtz’s own heart of darkness as he descends into his intrinsic, animalistic nature. Marlow recollects,

I tried to break the spell—the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness—that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions. This alone, I was convinced, had driven him out to the edge of the forest, to the bush, towards the gleam of fires, the throb of drums, the drone of weird incantations; this alone had beguiled his unlawful soul beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations ... His was an impenetrable darkness.¹¹

Kurtz has capitulated to murder, theft, and the temptation to be god.

Heart of Darkness vividly offers insight into the capabilities of man without restraint. We have here a terrifying and thought-provoking look at how thinly civilization cloaks the darkness that lives within us all.

Kurtz personifies civilization, but, after succumbing to barbarity, is transmogrified into “a Flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly.” The original Kurtz had been educated partly in England.¹² His mother was half-English, his father half-French.¹³ All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz.¹⁴ We have an indictment of Europe here. Kurtz did poetry; spoke on love; justice.¹⁵ And yet, despite (or perhaps in spite of) these civilizational trappings, there was a hollowness about him. When he lived his entire life in every detail during that supreme moment of complete knowledge, Kurtz could only utter: “The horror!” “The horror!”¹⁶

Such was his pronouncement: a judgment upon the adventures of his soul on earth. That's his entire summation!

Conrad portrays the tense and uneasy relationship between civilization and barbarity — the same relationship Abdu'l-Bahá describes in the Tablet. Recall that Abdu'l-Bahá describes progress and barbarism as going hand in hand. The barbaric tendencies can be tempered, mitigated, if you like, only when “material civilization [is] confirmed by Divine Guidance, by the revelations of the All-Merciful and by godly virtues, and [is] reinforced by spiritual conduct, by the ideals of the Kingdom and by the outpourings of the Realm of Might.” (SWAB 297) Thus, absent spiritual rejuvenation, growth, civilization decays and deteriorates into barbarity. The divide between barbarity/civilization comes close to collapsing into an area of mutual cohabitation.

Abdu'l-Bahá then illustrates just how uncomfortably civilization and barbarity overlap:

Consider that the most advanced and civilized countries of the world have been turned into arsenals of explosives, that the continents of the globe have been transformed into huge camps and battlefields, that the peoples of the world have formed themselves into armed nations, and that the governments of the world are vying with each other as to who will first step into the field of carnage and bloodshed, thus subjecting mankind to the utmost degree of affliction. (SWAB 297-8)

To develop a deeper appreciation of Abdu'l-Bahá's comments, we must take the political temperature of late 19th century-early 20th century.¹⁷ Recall that the Tablet was revealed sometime around 1907-1908.

By the late 1880s, all the desirable territories of Africa (and many of the richest countries of the Middle East and Asia) had been brought under European flags or had become “spheres of influence” of the European powers. Western imperialism was continuing apace in the first decade of 1900.

In 1907 Britain, Russia, and France formed the Triple Entente, which now faced the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy, which had been formed in 1882. As can be expected, all the governments claimed their intentions in forming these alliances were purely defensive, but the sober truth was that the loose concert of power which had existed from 1815 to 1870 had gradually been replaced by two powerful, hostile alliances.

From 1890 to 1914, all diplomats and military officers (if not all politicians generally) knew that the major nations of Europe were

engaged in an arms race and in the formation of ever tighter military alliances. The network of painstakingly crafted and often overlapping alliances seemed to give assurance that a general conflagration would be avoided and regional disputes settled, as they had been during most of the previous century.

As it turned out, appearances were deceiving. The formation of these mighty alliances and the concomitant increases in armaments rendered inevitable the war that began in August 1914. The tightening bonds of the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente substantially increased the danger of general war in the decade before 1914. The alliances, which were intended to maintain a balance of power and to protect each member in case of aggression, also meant that any serious local conflict could become general, internationalized.

The opening years of the 20th century were marked by turbulence and instability. In the years 1904-1905, the violent war between Japan and Russia led to the humiliating destruction of almost the entire Russian naval forces and its surrender of territories it regarded as vital to its interests. This humiliation was to have long-term domestic and international repercussions. On two occasions during these opening years of the 20th century, war between France and Germany over imperialist designs in North Africa was narrowly averted. In 1911 Italian ambitions similarly provoked a dangerous threat to international peace by the seizure from the Ottoman empire of what is now Libya. International instability had been further deepened when Germany, feeling constrained by a growing web of hostile alliances, embarked on a massive naval building program designed to eliminate the British lead.

Percolating below these conflicts were tensions among the subject peoples of the Romanov, Hapsburg and Ottoman empires. Balts, Poles, Czechs, Serbs, Greeks, Albanians, Bulgars, Romanians, Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, and a host of other nationalities all were thirsting for their day of liberation.

Advances in science and technology were exploited for military advantage. Military hardware triggered a massive arms race: Machine guns, long-range cannon, "dreadnoughts", submarines, landmines, poison gas, and the possibility of equipping airplanes for bombing attacks. All this weaponry would be deployed and refined during the course of the coming war — thus cementing, as Abdu'l-Bahá had warned, civilization and barbarity.

Abdu'l-Bahá, of course, prescribes a different combination, fusion. "[T]his civilization and material progress," He says, "should

be combined with the Most Great Guidance so that this nether world may become the scene of the appearance of the bestowals of the Kingdom, and physical achievements may be conjoined with the effulgences of the Merciful.” (SWAB 298)

Now, Abdu'l-Bahá's prescription may, at first blush, appear commonsensical. A closer inspection, though, shows otherwise. Indeed, Abdu'l-Bahá's civilization and barbarity construct may be employed to illuminate the latest, and widely acclaimed, political study of the relationship between civilization and barbarity in the context of 20th century Europe.¹⁸

As the title suggests, the author, an eminent historian, deals with the political and cultural history of Europe during the past hundred years. The author observes, as Abdu'l-Bahá did nearly a century ago, the apparent contradiction between forces of civilization and those of barbarity and proceeds to catalogue Europe's achievements. She observes that

The 'civilization' of 20th century Europe has included many of the most revolutionary scientific advances in human history, the information explosion, some of the most original movements in art and music, and the creation of a "welfare state" offering greater and more varied opportunities to the ordinary citizen than any previous civilization. It has democratized both traditional intellectual and artistic culture, and the popular culture of mass media entertainment, travel, and athletics. It has witnessed the gradual extension of the concept of human rights and religious and racial toleration.¹⁹

The author then juxtaposes these achievements with Europe's gross and glaring failures. She says that

But the same century has also seen the two most destructive wars in human history; a large number of authoritarian, arbitrary, and incompetent dictatorships; and, in the form of Nazism and Stalinism, the most vile and sadistic regimes of which we have any documented record. How can we understand the combination of such prodigious accomplishments and such devastating violence?²⁰

The author strives to answer two basic questions: What are the factors that produced European economic and scientific leadership? And what are the factors that produced such horrific wars and cultural conflict within the context of a single civilization?

She notes that understanding of any society requires a basic comprehension of its economic foundations, its political systems,

and its shifting power relationships. She then explains 20th century European barbarism in terms of deceit, military prowess, military alliances, threats, promises, military and naval feints, financial policies, personal traits of reigning rulers, poor decisions by players, misperceived ambitions of the enemy, virulent nationalism.²¹

Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet suggests that these material explanations are necessary, but not sufficient. Material explanations capture only part of the narrative; the analysis must go deeper – and consider civilization's disconnect with, in Abdu'l-Bahá's words, "the Most Great Guidance."

Abdu'l-Bahá explains the various dimensions of this Guidance. He tells us that happiness of mankind lies in the unity and the harmony of the human race, and that spiritual and material developments are conditioned upon love and amity among all men. He describes man as being endowed with two natures: one bent towards moral sublimity and intellectual perfection, the other towards imperfections: "If ye travel the countries of the globe ye shall observe on one side the remains of ruin and destruction, while on the other ye shall see the signs of civilization and development. Such desolation and ruin are the result of war, strife and quarrelling, while all development and progress are fruits of the lights of virtue, co-operation and concord."²²

Abdu'l-Bahá offers an implicit, but no less trenchant, critique of the perennial "survival of the fittest" mentality. He tells us that "which is conducive to association and attraction and unity among the sons of men is the means of the life of the world of humanity, and whatever causeth division, repulsion and remoteness leadeth to the death of humankind."²³ Here, Abdu'l-Bahá is making a simple, though often overlooked, distinction between human survival and animal survival.

As S.I. Hayakawa observed long ago, it is often taken for granted that human nature is "selfish" and that life is a struggle in which only the fittest may survive.²⁴ According to this thesis, the basic law by which man must live, in spite of his surface veneer of civilization, is the law of the jungle. The "fittest" are those who can bring to the struggle superior force, superior cunning, and superior ruthlessness. Hayakawa explained the implications of this philosophy: The wide currency of this philosophy of the "survival of the fittest" enables those who act ruthlessly and selfishly to ease their consciences by deluding themselves that they are merely following a "law of nature." Hayakawa then, inviting a hypothetically disinterested, and arguably more honest, observer, asked whether the ruthlessness of the tiger, the cunning of the ape, and obedience to the "law of the

jungle” are actually evidences of **human** fitness to survive.²⁵ He insightfully asked whether, if human beings are to pick up pointers on behavior from the lower animals, there were not animals other than beasts of prey from which one might learn lessons in survival.²⁶

Pointing to the rabbit or the deer, Hayakawa asked whether fitness may be defined as superior rapidity in running away from one's enemies. Similarly, pointing to the earthworm or the mole, might we not define fitness as the ability to keep out of sight and out of the way? Or, pointing to the oyster or the housefly, could fitness not be defined as the ability to propagate one's kind faster than one's enemies can eat them up? Thus, according to Hayakawa, if we are looking to animals for models of behavior, if we simply look to animals in order to define what we mean by “fitness to survive,” there is no limit to the subhuman systems of behavior that can be devised: we may emulate lobsters, dogs, sparrows, parakeets, giraffes, skunks, or the parasitical worms, because they all obviously survived in one way or another. We are still entitled to ask, however, if **human** survival does not revolve around a different kind of fitness from that exhibited by the lower animals.

Hayakawa then explained this fitness as the ability to cooperate, to unify. Hayakawa found that cooperation within a species (and sometimes with other species) is essential to the survival of most living creatures, including man.

Juxtaposing Hayakawa's insights with Abdu'l-Bahá's utterances, we learn that the unity called for by Hayakawa is attainable only in the context of diversity. Abdu'l-Bahá explains that differences are of two kinds:

One is the cause of annihilation and is like the antipathy existing among warring nations and conflicting tribes who seek each other's destruction, uprooting one another's families, depriving one another of rest and comfort and unleashing carnage. The other kind which is a token of diversity is the essence of perfection and the cause of the appearance of the bestowals of the Most Glorious Lord.
(SWAB 304)

Abdu'l-Bahá illustrates this point using the example of the flowers of a garden. He says:

Consider the flowers of a garden: though differing in kind, colour, form and shape, yet, inasmuch as they are refreshed by the waters of one spring, revived by the breath of one wind, invigorated by the rays of one sun, this diversity increaseth their charm, and addeth unto their beauty. Thus when that unifying force, the penetrating influence of the

Word of God, taketh effect, the difference of customs, manners, habits, ideas, opinions and dispositions embellisheth the world of humanity. This diversity, this difference is like the naturally created dissimilarity and variety of the limbs and organs of the human body, for each one contributeth to the beauty, efficiency and perfection of the whole. When these different limbs and organs come under the influence of man's sovereign soul, and the soul's power pervadeth the limbs and members, veins and arteries of the body, then difference reinforceth harmony, diversity strengtheneth love, and multiplicity is the greatest factor for co-ordination.

How unpleasing to the eye if all the flowers and plants, the leaves and blossoms, the fruits, the branches and the trees of that garden were all of the same shape and colour! Diversity of hues, form and shape, enricheth and adorneth the garden, and heighteneth the effect thereof. In like manner, when divers shades of thought, temperament and character, are brought together under the power and influence of one central agency, the beauty and glory of human perfection will be revealed and made manifest. Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men. Verily, it is the penetrating power in all things, the mover of souls and the binder and regulator in the world of humanity. (SWAB 304-5)

4. Conclusion

Abdu'l-Bahá's "Tablet of the Two Calls" is at once a plea and a promise. The plea is for unity, which, according to Abdu'l-Bahá, trumps discord and isolation. The promise is two-pronged: unity will result in welfare and happiness of humankind, while dissension and discord are sure to cause hardship — human, political, economic, intellectual.

This plea and promise, as Abdu'l-Bahá demonstrates, are amply borne out by history. Man continues to insist on harming man. The political and social climate that Abdu'l-Bahá alludes to in the Tablet prevail today. Difference, disunity, and destruction continue to marginalize unity and construction. Abdu'l-Bahá's unity in diversity paradigm enables us to mine the diversity inherent in humanity without alienating the other: unity without uniformity, diversity without fragmentation.

NOTES

¹ Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness and The Secret Agent*. New York: Doubleday, 1997, 47-48.

² This determination is confirmed by the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre.

³ SWAB 296-309.

⁴ "Depth or breadth?" A question that invariably leaps to mind in exploring this or any other Tablet under page and space limitations such as those imposed here. In other words, should the writer probe two or three salient themes? Or, abandoning depth, should the writer try to capture and convey the general thrust? I hope to steer a middle ground; that is to say, I will give a flavor of the overall thrust of the Tablet and then explore one or two themes in more depth. Along the way, I will embark on various excursions into politics, history, poetry, and literature. These detours, especially that involving Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, are meant to illuminate and dramatize the topic at hand.

⁵ SWAB 296.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 297.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 86, 90

¹² Ibid., 65.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 90.

¹⁷ This discussion borrows heavily from *Century of Light*, a 2001 publication of the Universal House of Justice.

¹⁸ Gabriel Jackson, *Civilization and Barbarity in 20th-Century Europe*, Amherst: Humanity Books, 1999.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 301.

²³ Ibid., 303.

²⁴ S.I. Hayakawa, *Language in Thought and Action*, New York: Harcourt, 1949.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

SunWALK

A Bahá'í-inspired model of education¹

Roger Prentice²

Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him – a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation.... Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. (GWB 65)

The SunWALK Bahá'í-inspired model of education sees the key challenge for education as establishing *the spiritual-moral* and *the creative-subjective* as co-equal modes with the mode that currently dominates; *the reasoning-objective*. SunWALK presents a view of education that centres on the human spirit. The human spirit is seen as the three intrapersonal dimensions of Caring, Creativity and Criticality. The fourth 'C', Community' includes the interpersonal-social and the cultural. Inspired by principles evident in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá teaching and learning are presented as the development of consciousness and abilities in these four 'Cs'. Development is seen as being brought about via processes of dialogue, service and the creation and deconstruction of 'texts'- texts chosen as higher-order expressions from within the arts, humanities and sciences. In SunWALK we study texts, including the text of self, in a 'nest' of contexts – of family, classroom, community and the ultimate ground of being, that Whole that we call the presence of God.

Diagram 1

The diagram on the following page presents a summary of the meanings of the main elements of the SunWALK model of education logo.³ The diagram and the summary have been placed here so that the reader may refer back as s/he reads each section.



Summary of the meanings of the elements in the SunWALK 'logo-diagram-mandala'

The SunWALK model brings aspects of 'Western' and 'Eastern' world-views into harmony. The 'Sun' = our source of spiritual inspiration & values. WALK = Willing & wise Action through Loving & Knowing – the most general goal for education. The logo combines the following sub-models:

- a) An 'interior' model of the human spirit - in relation to 'the world'.
- b) A model for re-positioning education within being & becoming human – in the world with others.
- c) A general model of the curriculum - for primary, secondary and higher education.
- d) A framework for the analysis and evaluation of teaching episodes or projects.
- e) A model of education that makes spiritual education and moral education intrinsic.

THE MODEL IN ONE SENTENCE: - *the SunWALK model of spiritualizing pedagogy sees human education as the storied development of meaning, which is constructed, and de-constructed, physically mentally and spiritually, through Wise & Willing Action, via Loving and Knowing – developed in Community, through the 'Dialectical Spiritualization'¹ of Caring, Creativity & Criticality processes, all undertaken in the light of the 'Sun' of chosen higher- order values and beliefs, using best available, appropriate content.*

The outer ring of the SunWALK logo combines two dimensions: 1 '**Community**' i.e. the social, interpersonal dimension of interaction with other individuals or groups. 2 '**Cultural sources**' including such dimensions as traditions, the political & the legal.

Summary of the meanings, cont.

The three major divisions of the arts, sciences and humanities are here thought of as the stored, yet dynamic, accumulation of knowledge and beliefs and procedures – everything from galleries to written laws of physics that the individual can draw upon or be influenced by. This is the ‘stuff out there’ rather than the interiority of consciousness.

In SunWALK everything within the inner circle = a representation of ‘interiority’, i.e. human consciousness - the human spirit. The human spirit is presented intrapersonally as 3 ‘voices’ - 3 modes of being & of engaging with reality & of knowing – that emanate from the singleness of ‘heart-mind’ as (metaphorically) the ‘primary colours’ of Creativity (the yellow of inspiration), Criticality (the blue of reason) & Caring (the red warmth of love)

Creativity is the ‘I’ voice of *subjective engagement* via an artistic medium - it is particularly related to the core virtue ‘*beauty*’ and to ‘the Arts’. **Criticality** is the ‘IT’ voice of *objective engagement* which enables progress in the Sciences (& Math., Philosophy and ‘critical’ studies). It is concerned with *objective knowing* - related particularly to the core virtue ‘*truth*’. **Caring** is the ‘WE’ voice which enables *moral engagement* – for progress in the moral domain and in service of others. It is concerned with *social knowing* – related particularly to the core virtue ‘*goodness*’ and to ‘the Humanities’.

The physical dimension is seen as the instrument for the flow of spirit in all of its forms – e.g. via dance drama & PE.

Each individual develops her/his I, WE and IT voices, the 3Cs, via socialization, starting in the family, the local community and then later in formal education. A sense of justice is seen as paramount intrapersonally as well as interpersonally i.e. it enables us to engage with that which is beautiful, good or true with *balance, clarity & due weight*.

The essential process in all 4Cs is multi-level dialogue. In the case of the individual dialogue is seen as meditation, reflection and inner-talk. In the case of groups it is dialectical process via consultation.

The ‘Celtic’ knot that surrounds the central shield indicates that the 3Cs are simply aspects of the one human spirit – the flow of ‘heart-mind’.

The white shield at the centre represents the meditative state in which there is no ‘focused’ engagement via one of the 3Cs – and in which there is relatively little of the ‘white noise’ interference that we experience in the unquiet mind. This can enable us to ‘go beyond ourselves’, i.e. transcend our normal knowing – any of the 3Cs (I, WE or IT modes) can be a pathway to the transcendent and to subsequent improved insight into reality.

The black dot at the centre is the ‘well-spring’ of consciousness. For artists (and great scientists) it is the Muse. For religionists it is the voice of God within (albeit distorted by the dust of self). For non-religionists it is the inner source of spirit as energy & inspiration – the little bits of realization and insight that come to us for which we don’t make an effort.

Educating the human spirit is seen as nurturing the life-force which culminates in the developed human who, through higher-order consciousness, realizes abilities from within Caring, Creative or Critical engagements. Teaching is seen as nurturing and cultivating what is normally present, almost from birth, & certainly by the time we go to school – namely the flow of spirit expressed in nascent forms of Caring, Creativity, and Criticality – in Community with others. Holistic Learning takes place when the learner uses Creativity, Criticality and Caring – in Community – inspired by higher-order values – in dynamic combinations such as Creativity providing texts for criticality - which then via dialogue produce the spirit for more creativity.

In SunWALK spirituality is not a dimension; it is the model as a whole. In SunWALK moral education is not a dimension – they are one and the same. The SunWALK logo can also be seen as a mandala, or even as a plan drawing for a fountain or a ‘temple of light’! SunWALK is a major shift to a process view of the world, of being human and of educating our young people. It rejects a worldview that is limited to the mechanistic, the ‘human-as-computer, the fragmentary and the materialistic; seeking instead modelling that is based on flow/process, holism and the spiritual.

Introduction

This paper gives a brief account of some of the main features of 'the SunWALK model' and its rootedness in the Bahá'í Faith's writings. SunWALK is a new model of education designed to reflect the paradigm shift inherent in the coming of the Bahá'í Revelation.

The model is radical in that it paradigmatically shifts the main focus of education toward a range of 'new' dimensions. For example:

from the material to the spiritual,

from a concern with fragments to a concern with the Whole and its parts

from knowledge as trading in 'stuff out there' to knowledge as being and becoming via multi-level dialogue

from the competitive acquisition of 'having' to self-realization – through being and acting in service

from teaching as 'instructing' and 'training' to education as nurturing and growth inducement

from repetition and reproduction to the raising of consciousness and the solving of problems

from merely technical learning to technical learning within the context of being and becoming human – in the world with others

However such shifts are secondary to the most simple but challenging shift, which is the shift to education as *the nurturing of the flow of the human spirit* – as a river flows, as life-energy or 'chi' flows (the reader might like to look immediately at the '*nub*' of the *model section* below; see Part 1, p. 180). This of course echoes the idea that we are spiritual beings having an embodied experience.

SunWALK was developed in my doctoral thesis. It was chiefly forged out of the daily teaching of English with, mainly, 12 to 13 year olds in a Roman Catholic middle school plus a variety of Bahá'í youth groups and their friends. The thesis was entitled *Spiritualizing Pedagogy: education as the art of working with the human spirit*. Until a publisher is found the thesis can be found at <http://www.holisticeducation.org.uk>

Our mainstream education is notoriously conservative and is, so I will argue, unnecessarily complicated. SunWALK is a radical way to simplify educational modelling without losing the best of contemporary thinking, and, indeed, the best of the wisdom of the past. This broad concept of wisdom also means that we can respect,

and draw upon, the total treasure-house of our planet's many and varied cultures. Celebrating diversity, *and* the oneness that is at the centre of reality, can provide the guiding principles – for education as well as for the unification of the family of humankind. The alternative seems to be that we more agonizingly get forged into greater unity through such catastrophic events as the recent Tsunami disaster. Such events and the worldwide compassionate response to them belie the postmodernist claim that there is no grand narrative. In the SunWALK model of education the eternal grand narrative is the 'story of stories' – of being and becoming human in the world with others. Story is one of the major means for making of the parts a whole. It is the chief means by which we make sense of our life experiences.

With regard to 'story' the thesis developed what has been called a new form of methodology, named 'applied autoethnography'. Autoethnography is an established, but still emergent, form of qualitative research. Described by Ellis and Bochner (2000) it is:

an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographer's gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focussing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations – see Deck, (1990); Neuman, (1996); Reed-Danahay, (1997). As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition. Usually written in first-person voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms – short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing and social science prose. In these texts, concrete action, dialogue, emotion embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought and language. (emphasis added)

To the underlined elements, and the italicised passage, in the above quotation I would like to make connection with principles evident in Bahá'í writings.

Firstly the Universal House of Justice, when guidance was sought in 1992, suggested a dialectical process of going back and forth – in

this case between Bahá'í writings and positive aspects of contemporary educational theory and practice. They said;

[We] might make a contribution to the evolutionary process of devising an educational system which “would be in full harmony with the spirit of the Bahá'í Teachings”.

Knowledge of educational theory, for example, could assist (us) in identifying some of the relevant “basic principles” and “teaching ideals” that are set out in the Bahá'í Writings. Such principles could in turn, serve as a basis for highlighting positive aspects of contemporary educational theory and practice which could contribute to the implementation of Bahá'í “teaching ideals”. (Research Dept. Memorandum 21st May 1992)

Some degree of innateness or embeddedness in human reality means that knowledge or virtues are not just ‘stuff out’ there to be crammed into the learner; rather we should:

Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom. (GWB 260)

We, as well as the Manifestation of God, are made in the image of God (though in our case it is potentially and imperfectly). We on our life-journey are in the business of supporting each other in the process of manifesting whatever admixture of gifts constitutes each individual's uniqueness.

We can see emphasis on *interiority*, *autonomy* and *subjectivity* as well as on the voice of ‘*God within*’, along with the importance of *self-understanding* and *the conditions for true knowing* in the following four Bahá'í quotations (emphases added):

1. O SON OF SPIRIT!

The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes. (HW Arabic #2)

2. *Turn thy sight unto thyself*, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, *mighty, powerful and self-subsisting*. (HW Arabic # 13)

3. One must ... read the book of his own self, rather than some treatise on rhetoric. *Wherefore He hath said, "Read thy Book: There needeth none but thyself to make out an account against thee this day."* (SVFV 51-52)

4. *Turn your faces to the Sun of Reality. That Sun has always risen in the East.* Find the answer to your questions in your heart. *Be as little children.* (PUP 213)

The notion then of autoethnography applied to specific objectives, such as developing a new model, aims specifically at utilizing the creativity that lies within individual life experience. It is a method particularly relevant to the creative and moral spheres just as scientific methodology is appropriate for the investigation of objective reality via science. The present writer takes the view that included in the purpose of the Bahá'í revelation is *the subjective manifestation of potential*. Conversely there is a dis-empowering of the individual when there is the belief that knowledge is simply 'stuff out there' and that it is to be handed down from on high by those few that know. This work's against development⁴. We are protected because not only is it forbidden for individuals to impose their own 'reading' of the Writings on others but also because Abdu'l-Bahá also set out clearly (PUP 197) the conditions for growth and development. The three conditions of *freedom of conscience*, *liberty of thought* and *right of speech* I suggest are not presented by Abdu'l-Bahá as luxurious and self-indulgent 'rights' in an extreme liberal society. They are nothing less than key dynamics for the whole system to work, if we are to have development and growth. The same principle is, I suggest, applied by Abdu'l-Bahá to establish the dialogic basis for education. He says;

Most ideas must be taught them through speech, not by book learning. One child must question the other concerning these things, and the other child must give the answer. In this way, they will make great progress. For example, mathematical problems must also be taught in the form of questions and answers. One of the children asks a question and the other must give the answer. Later on, the children will of their own accord speak with each other concerning these same subjects.... Oral questions must be asked and the answers must be given orally. They must discuss⁵ with each other in this manner. (BE 301; emphasis added)

These dialogical and dialectical principles go even deeper. Taherzadeh opens the first volume of his Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh with the statement that

All created things, whether tangible or intangible, come into being as a result of the intercourse between two elements which assume the functions of male and female. This pattern is followed throughout the whole of creation...

Dialogue engages and nourishes subjective potential in the way that rain, soil and sun nurture the potential of the seed. Because we have a whole complex of psycho-spiritual cross-checks given by Abdu'l-Bahá and Bahá'u'lláh we need not fear the subjective. Abdu'l-Bahá gives us the model of *the senses, reason, intuition, tradition* (see SAQ 297; PUP 21-22 and 253-255; PUP 356). Bahá'u'lláh gives us proofs (His own Self, His Revelation, His words – see GWB 105) and a process (consultation). Combined, this set of dynamics is more than enough to check any distortions or excesses of subjectivity.⁶

Such methodology as autoethnography clearly owes something to the postmodern viewpoint⁷. What may be novel is its *applied* use – applied in this case to developing a paradigmatic model of education out of deep reflection on experience – in ‘dialogue’ with a wide range of public theory.

In the thesis some twenty-five major problems were identified, to which the model seeks to provide answers. Here I present a few of the main challenges, and my suggested solutions, indicating examples of Bahá'í writings that ‘speak’ to the particular issues. The paper is in two parts. Part I presents some general, foundational, concerns and Part II asks, and briefly answers, five core questions in relation to Bahá'í-inspired holistic education.

Part I – SunWALK as a model for holistic education – some general, foundational, concerns

Will and vital energy are similar. Where the will goes, the vital energy follows. (Hong Yuan in Cleary 1991, 29)

When true knowledge flows, then knowledge and action advance side by side. (Hong Yuan in Cleary 1991, 31)

One cannot obtain the full force of the sunlight when it is cast on a flat mirror, but once the sun shineth upon a concave mirror, or on a lens that is convex, all its heat will be concentrated on a single point, and that one point will burn the hottest. Thus is it necessary to focus one's thinking on a single point so that it will become an effective force. (SWAB 10-11)

What's in a name – the nub of the model?

SunWALK as a name, and mnemonic, has two elements. Sun stands for whatever source of values the individual, or group, draws upon with which to illumine her/his 'walking' of the path of life. This light and inspiration is also seen as the source of the will to act – morally (or creatively or critically). WALK stands for the generalized goal of development in *Willing Wise Action through Loving and Knowing*. Will, Action, Love and Knowledge also correspond to the 'Four Valleys' as described by Julio Savi in his essay⁸ entitled "Will, Knowledge and love as explained in Bahá'u'lláh's Four Valleys". This is the 'what' of the model.

The 'how' of the model is seen as the *balanced, challenging and nurturing* of the dimensions of the human spirit. The human spirit is seen as dynamic – always being expression in one of three voices: the 'I' voice of Creativity, the 'WE' voice of Caring and the 'IT' voice of Criticality (see Wilber 1998: 74). These three are interpersonally the arts, humanities and sciences but *the focus in SunWALK is as corresponding voices, from within the individual's spirit* – through which we engage with reality.

Evil, or at least harm, comes from the absence of positives or from imbalance between the 3Cs – and their illumination by higher-order values or 'virtues'.

To the three *intrapersonal* Cs in the model we must add the fourth C which is termed 'Community'. Community consists of a) the *interpersonal* and social dimension of all of our relationships – our being in the world with others – and b) the cultural from which we take all of the various stimuli, via socialization, through which to develop the three voices. *Naturally* we develop the 'I' voice from what broadly we call the arts, the 'WE' voice from the Humanities and the 'IT' voice from science and philosophy. This starts in the (reasonably healthy) family, local community and earliest schooling. Our individualized version of the three voices, and our command, more or less, of reading the cultural milieu are shaped by the beliefs and values of the culture in which we find ourselves – as well as our personal beliefs and values.

Education, and civilization as a whole, needs the best possible balance between the personal and the group. Failure to enable the release of individual potential is harmful as is excess licence or group domination.

The need to stay connected to the perennial values of truth, beauty, goodness, justice and, transcending all, love

My educational studies in addition to their Bahá'í inspiration have had 'perennial philosophy', as the wider community co-equivalent

source of inspiration for 'holistic education'. Holistic education as a form of education is to be distinguished from other 'labels' such as 'integrated education' or the broader 'alternative education' because it puts the 'Whole' as greater than us, greater than any bits that we can fit together, greater than the sum of the parts. That is to say there is a mystical dimension intrinsic to the term 'holistic education' even though holistic education is not 'faith-specific'. It is, most often centred on the eternal truths of 'perennial philosophy'. Such eternal truths are of course referred to by Bahá'u'lláh as transcending specific religions – *the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future* (PB 118-9). The mystical connection is necessary to holistic education and refers, as do the Guardian's words, *the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling which unites man with God*, (LG 544) to how we relate to Mystery or the Whole. Such being and relatedness is also described as the Whole, or, in Paul Tillich's terms, *the ground of all being, or Being-Itself*.⁹

The mystical connection to the Whole might enable us to maintain an open and prayerful stance toward our theory-making and our practice development and might consequently help us maintain a touch of humility in how we view educational challenges and our tentative solutions. Such a position is far from the 'lust for certainty' which is how the writer Karen Armstrong describes fundamentalism. Fundamentalism of course closes down the possibilities of true growth. Love on the other hand nurtures diversity as well as unity. Concerning love Abdu'l-Bahá says:

Love is the cause of God's revelation unto man, the vital bond inherent, in accordance with the divine creation, in the realities of things ...

Love revealeth with unfailing and limitless power the mysteries latent in the universe. (SWAB 27-28)

The challenges of developing a new model of education are many. The range of concerns from which questions might be posed, is nothing less than vast. Here as in many challenges we have to set aside the important in favour of the most important but what *is the most important concern when setting out to develop a new model of education?* Over a number of years the most important question was sought – on which to construct a model of education. The question which was settled on was, *'what is it to be human, positively and fully?'* This I suggest is the question to which all other educational questions need to relate. To this was added the question, *'what are the characteristics of education as indicated in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá?'*

This paper then focuses on a view of what it is to be human – in order to provide a clear and simple way to reflect on educational practice and theory.

Toward a definition of holistic education – as used in SunWALK

What is Holistic Education? This is my working definition:

- Holistic Education is learning and teaching based on balancing all positive aspects of being, & becoming fully human – via the realization of interconnectedness & wholeness.
- Holistic Education seeks to provide for balanced engagement, expression and relatedness of the whole person: the physical, mental, affective, & spiritual – intrapersonally & interpersonally.
- Holistic Education seeks to balance content & process. It seeks to maintain balance between the intrapersonal dimensions of the human spirit – here termed the Caring, the Creative and the Critical. It also seeks to maintain a dynamic balance between personal and interpersonal-group concerns. The interpersonal, along with the cultural, political and legal dimensions of society are collectively referred to as 'Community'.

Holistic Education using the SunWALK approach is seen as an answer to some of the key problems/challenges in education – its fragmentariness, obviously, but also the need for moral education to be integral throughout a model as opposed to being a bolt-on' extra.

What kind of a mess is education in?

Children find themselves alienated by parents and other adults whether they live in conditions of wealth or poverty. This alienation has its roots in a selfishness that is born of materialism that is at the core of the godlessness seizing the hearts of people everywhere. (Ridvan 2000 letter, Universal House of Justice)

Inadequate parenting, or exploitation of children, are not the only forces that negatively impact on children and their teachers. Political interference & manipulation, de-professionalization, prevalence of materialistic philosophies, a mechanistic world view, sheer poverty, poor teacher education etc. are just some of the issues that shape, or distort, education. So are all the world's general ills, terrorism being the most recently publicized. We could list many such problems.

For me the chief negative characteristic of mainstream education is its fragmentariness, its lack of wholeness. Children *are* usually whole (to start with) but the system progressively atrophies connections and connectedness. Should Bahá'ís see education as (necessarily) holistic?

A range of statements concerning connectedness are to be found in Bahá'í writings. Examples are:

... all parts of the creational world are of one whole. (BWF 364)

God contains all.... The whole is greater than its parts ... (PT 23-7)

All that exists is God.... (ABL 22)

Every created thing in the whole universe is but a door leading into His knowledge. (GWB 190)

We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment & is itself also deeply affected by it The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi 1933)

Together these suggest both a view of reality and a way of proceeding. If all is God then all is sacred, all is connected, all potentially leads from and to Him. We need to proceed ever-conscious of two things; a) our connectedness and the need for the learner's realization of, and in, connectedness and b) the infinitely Unknowable that lies behind the little we know and can know. In our humanness lies potentially all of the names and attributes of God. In humanity

are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed. All these names and attributes are applicable to him. Even as He hath said: 'Man is My mystery, and I am his mystery.' (GWB 177)

Yet beyond even the fullest expression of those names and attributes lies mystery – both immanent and transcendent. Mystery is the ever-present reality (and conditioner) as we look within ourselves and also as we look at all that is 'other' and 'beyond'. A sense of Mystery and of the Whole should be ever present as we nurture thought, feeling and action in education. The writings of A. J. Heschel (1965), in addition to the Bahá'í writings, are a great inspiration in exploring awe, wonder and the ineffable as well as what it is to be fully human.

The chief negative consequence of fragmentariness is here seen as alienation. Alienation breeds anti-social behaviour and possibly ill-

health, and dis-ease. At the heart of alienation is meaninglessness. The solution to the negative effects of fragmentariness is meaning-full-ness. The creation of meaning-full-ness is both a personal and a community responsibility. In SunWALK rich meaning-making comes from the choice of *higher-order texts experienced within higher-order contexts*.

The chief positive consequence of wholeness, through connectedness, is seen as *a sense of belonging* and *a sense of place* and *a sense of identity* and, consequently, *a sense of purpose*. Thereby our name is named, as in

*O son of man! I loved thy creation, hence I created thee.
Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and
fill thy soul with the spirit of life.* (HW Arabic # 4)

which is seen as a process, not as a single completed act. The four 'senses' above are wholly relevant to the crisis that children and youth are experiencing in the Western world – and perhaps the world generally. The *Hardwired to Connect*¹⁰ report enables us to see both a graphic portrait of the ills of our children and youth and also a way to help bring healing. The notion of the panel of thirty odd scientists who contributed to the report is to create 'authoritative communities'. These in effect embody the 'four senses' I have mentioned above as a curative way. They also of course embody support in answering the age-old existential questions of philosophy.

The teacher's viewpoint and simplifying the teacher's job

The SunWALK model, and its application to holistic education, is presented from a teacher's-eye-view of the teaching process. Its perspective focuses on her/his consciousness, decision-making, discourse-management, balancing of inner and outer concerns, environment management etc. as s/he conducts the actual process of nurturing others learning.

To illustrate the need for simplification I point to the UK National Curriculum which originally required primary school teachers to teach more than 200 'Attainment Targets' for each and every child. One of the consequences of the curse of 'managerialization' in education is the replacement of horticultural metaphors with war metaphors. Abdu'l-Bahá seems pre-eminently to use natural, horticultural, metaphors in relation to education.

In SunWALK, on the other hand, I suggest that (in the West, at least) teachers need only ever teach the development of abilities within the dimensions of the 4Cs, three being intrapersonal, the other the interpersonal:

The Intrapersonal:

- Caring – abilities in other-focusedness – moral acts in service of others
- Creativity – abilities in construing reality via subjective expression
- Criticality – abilities in ‘reading’ reality via objective description

The Interpersonal:

- in Community – abilities in being and functioning with other individuals and groups – i.e. includes teamwork and citizenship
- all the rest is forms of information and processing

The emphasis is on more than information or skills. Contexts are as vital as texts. The supreme text is being and becoming human – in the world with others – in the light of higher order values drawn from our ‘Sun.’¹¹ Information on its own is inert. It becomes knowledge, or even wisdom, when it is placed in a context, particularly in a values context (assuming raised consciousness in the person). Lower-order contexts tend to debase human activity. Here I am arguing for placing information, and all that we do in education in higher-order contexts. Lower-order contexts tend to provide for the greed of the individual, or group. Higher-order contexts tend to be concerned with the good of the whole. We need to stay consciousness of the contexts, whilst teaching ‘texts’¹². In SunWALK the teaching of the technical is always seen as within the context of being and becoming more fully human. The ultimate context is of course Mystery – or the presence of God. A sense of those contexts, Wilber calls them a *nest of holons* (1998b: 61), can provide richness and depth of significance and meaning.

The focuses of unbridled materialism robs children of the chance to grow into their wholeness. Materialism narrows the meaning that is made and the sense we have of what it is to be human. The antidote to materialism is the spiritual, particularly in the sense of richness and depth of meaning made.

Perhaps this is what the UK Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sachs had in mind when he said (BBC 1 12.9.04) that the future is built on memories. He spoke about how today’s children will become the guardians of memory, so that what we invest in them today will determine the legacy for tomorrow. Memory is what maintains our knowing of who we are – but we need the collective memories of humankind as well our personal memories. Together as contexts and texts, dynamically interactive, they can provoke our development.

Rabbi Sachs said that children are the big time losers in our consumer-society because *what we give them is material affluence and spiritual poverty*. “Children grow to fill the space we give them,”

the Chief Rabbi said. The space I suggest is determined by nests of contexts or holons with which we create the worldview within which we do our teaching. We need to keep hold of eternal values to resist the onslaught of exploitative materialism, and the dark side of the postmodernist world-view. So massively de-stabilizing is that onslaught that it would not be excessive to describe it as a spiritual tsunami. The only antidote or cure to de-humanization is re-humanization – which is why humanization is placed at the centre of the SunWALK model.

It is a bitter-sweet irony that we can only study holistic education fragmentedly. But we can live with a sense of the Whole – providing that we recognize that we have no ability to comprehend the Whole. Bahá'u'lláh says: *I know not how to sing Thy praise, how to describe Thy glory, how to call upon Thy Name.* (PM 122) Abdu'l-Bahá says: *truth in its essence cannot be put into words.* (ABL 22) Above all that we know we have to acknowledge the infinity of what we don't know.

In applying my thesis and model here I needed to summarize (some aspects of) 12 years' work. What did I get when I reduced more than 2000 books and papers, and many years of classroom 'experience and reflection and study' to a one sentence version of the model – consisting of approx 50 words?

The 50 word 'one-sentence' version of SunWALK?

Concepts are delicious snacks with which we try to alleviate our amazement. (A. J. Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone* 7)

The one sentence version of *The SunWALK model of spiritualizing pedagogy* (learning & teaching) sees **human education** as the

storied development of meaning, constructed, and de-constructed, physically, mentally & spiritually, through Wise & Willing Action, via Loving and Knowing – developed in Community through Dialectical Spiritualization processes (in all 4Cs) – all undertaken in the light of the 'Sun' of (chosen) higher-order values and beliefs, using the best available, appropriate, content.

These are the key elements, sifted from a total list of more than four hundred concepts, and placed in a single, albeit, complex, sentence.

Presented as a *list of elements* the same one sentence version of The SunWALK model of spiritualizing pedagogy looks like this:

1. the storied development of
2. meaning
3. constructed, and
4. de-constructed

5. physically,
6. mentally and
7. spiritually,
8. through Wise &
9. Willing
10. Action via
11. Loving and
12. Knowing developed in
13. Community through
14. Dialectical Spiritualization processes all undertaken in the light of
15. the 'Sun' of (chosen) higher-order values and beliefs

Each of these is a study in its own right, and will constitute chapters or sections in a forthcoming book version, of the model, but there is no space here to do that, however in Part II I present a little more about five of the SunWALK model's major themes.

Part II – Five Core questions and issues from SunWALK in relation to Bahá'í-inspired education

The five themes, as questions, are:

1. What is *the central idea* around which to build education?
2. Given that being and becoming human is the central idea *how should we structure education?*
3. How is knowing and knowledge viewed?
4. What is the key *process*?
5. How should we develop *the curriculum and its contexts*?

1. Unity, the central idea around which to build education?

I suggest that the best answer to the question, '*What is the central idea around which to build education?*' is the idea of '*Being and becoming human, in the world with others, in the light of higher order values/virtues*'. The question, '*In what can we unite?*' also springs to mind'. I suggest that the answer to both is that we can unite in deeper and deeper understanding of what it is to be human – positively and fully – as guided by the best contemporary thought, as well as ancient wisdom¹³. Focus on being and becoming human is not the same as a Humanist viewpoint. The viewpoint here comes from the idea that we are made (potentially) in the image of God and also that we (ideally) grow in the presence of God, a presence that is maintained through prayer, meditation and engagement in service.

As a representative image of this human-centred modelling perhaps we can take the beauty of the human face. Beyond the beauty of the human face, in what then can we unite and in what can we co-operate? My answer is – in the *universality* of being human. We are human, here in the world, and our needs centre on the same realities. A student on a course on which I was teaching said, in answer to the question, ‘Where do human rights come from?’, ‘*Human rights arise from human needs*’. As is well known the psychologist Abraham Maslow described these needs and realities as being at eight levels.

Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs:

1. Physiological: hunger, thirst, bodily comforts, etc.;
2. Safety/security: out of danger;
3. Belonginess and Love: affiliate with others, be accepted; and
4. Esteem: to achieve, be competent, gain approval and recognition.
5. Cognitive: to know, to understand, and explore;
6. Aesthetic: symmetry, order, and beauty;
7. Self-actualization: to find self-fulfillment and realize one’s potential; &
8. Self-transcendence: to connect to something beyond the ego or to help others find self-fulfillment and realize their potential.

Human needs, and the rights and responsibilities attached to them, indicate the shared experience we have, and are as such grounded in such essential fellow-feelings as empathy and compassion. But this taxonomy of needs doesn’t tell us what *medium* it is with which the teacher works, in the way that the sculptor works with stone, or the painter with paint and canvas, or the dancer with body and space.

With what medium does the teacher-as-artist work, as the sculptor works with stone or the dancer with her body?

My answer is the human spirit – her own and her pupils. How might we construe that spirit? My answer is as the flow of ‘spirit-as-the-life-force’ (chi?)

One analogy for the ‘flow of spirit-as-the-life-force’ is water flowing. Another analogy lies in the flow of energy as dancer dances. Another metaphor for ‘the flow of spirit-as-the-life-force’ is that of white light. These metaphors are the opposite of the mechanistic ‘human-as-computers’ or the older ‘humans-as-machines’ metaphors.

Since, following Abdu’l-Bahá, I see teachers as ‘developers of consciousness’¹⁴ I here am focusing on the idea of the life-force, in a normal person, culminating in (raised) consciousness. I also use the

term *interiority* to refer to consciousness. By interiority I mean 'affective awareness' and 'moral awareness' as well as 'cognitive awareness' – hence my preference for 'heart-mind' as a term for interiority. Thoughts lead to feelings and vice versa. In the West, post-Enlightenment, the heart and feelings have been presented as an opposite to the 'real thing' i.e. to reason. As with the elimination of the secondary status of women, peace for the human family needs a re-balancing of heart and head and a re-legitimization of other ways of knowing!

Metaphorically undifferentiated consciousness I suggest can be viewed as white light. When the light is differentiated I suggest we be concerned not with a full spectrum but with just the 'primary colours'. The primary colours of the human, the life-force in its spiritual form (i.e. all that is not-biological) can be seen as the red of the warmth of caring, the blue of cold reason, and the yellow of expressing creativity. (See logo diagram on p. 174 above, or for colour version please go to www.holisticeducation.org.uk)

Seen as the three 'primary colours', Caring, Creativity and Criticality are not primarily ways of cognition, certainly not simply ways of *thinking about*. They are socially derived ways, and possibly even 'hard-wired' ways of being and of engaging with and acting in the world. Of course the brain is involved in all three modes – but not in the sense of reasoning. The 3Cs as presented here (see diagram 2, page 195) are *modes of being and doing*. It is true that caring draws upon both the creative, for example via imagination in empathy, and criticality, for example via estimating the seriousness of an act, but *being moved by some-thing and then moving* is a different mode to *thinking about* issues¹⁵.

In the West it seems to me that 'other ways of being' are mistaken for simply different kinds of cognition or 'thinking about'. Perhaps this is relevant to, for example, the feminist objection to the Kohlbergian developmental model of moral development (see Gilligan 1998). The evolution of moral maturity is not experienced by women as a step of improvement in reasoning. In general men, who hold the majority of the positions of power, are challenged by the idea that their way of being may not be the only valid way (much like some powerful nations whose ethnocentricity makes it difficult to understand that there are other worldviews.) Acknowledging other ways of knowing is vital for the paradigm shift, especially for a redress toward justice and peace – both require the establishment of the equality of women on the world's stage. The 3Cs are spiritual in the sense of the ongoing manifestation of the human spirit, but they are not of themselves the Spiritual¹⁶. The Spiritual in the divine sense is seen as the voice of God that speaks via the Revelations of the

Manifestations (but also to all, relatively, developed human consciousness) via God immanent: *Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting* (HW Arabic #13).

In the SunWALK model a quiet contemplative state of consciousness is metaphorically, the 'white light' state – the state when our spirit is dis-engaged from any one of the 3Cs. But from the contemplative we can 'fire up' into engagement that is Caring or Creative or Critical – we move from quietitude to focused engagement.

In the quietness of the contemplative the ever-present God can speak to us. Sometimes what we hear is impurified through egotistical 'interference', sometimes not. But from an educational point of view since this is part of how we function as humans, being made in the image of God, and this needs to be factored into any educational model that considers itself Spiritual or Bahá'í.

Our psycho-spiritual life consists of events, most of which are interactions that come through Caring, Creative, Critical and Communal engagement. To ground these let me say this – Criticality is the mode we (writer and reader) are in now. Caring would be the mode of engagement if out of compassion we jumped up to care for someone who had fallen down. Creativity would be your mode of engagement if you took an idea and danced it as a dance, or developed a series of filmic images, or represented it in paint, or as a sculpture. My sense is that we are only ever in one mode, but the other two are in the 'background' – each is 'supported' by the others. We can 'hover' between two modes – but I suspect this means switching back and forth rapidly between two modes. Whatever brain science eventually reveals will be interesting but not vital – the balance behind the three modes and the 4Cs is what education needs. They enable the eliciting, developing and refining of 'raw' spirit into appropriate and relevant abilities. They are what are needed to ensure that education is whole, and education that is whole can be instrumental toward the healing of our ailing world.

In SunWALK the teacher's job is to develop *abilities* from within the framework and dynamics of *Caring, Creativity, Criticality in Community – in the light of the 'Sun' of virtues/higher-order values*. The rest is information, and 'information processing' *utilized* for the development of abilities in the 4Cs. Examples of such abilities are the ability to analyse, differentiate, classify etc in the case of Criticality. In the case of Creativity the abilities relate to the use of the various arts media to express viewpoints subjectively. In the case of Caring abilities include the capacity to empathise and act with compassion so as to help others. The model also relates to several of the Ancient

Greeks' cardinal virtues; truth (Criticality), beauty (Creativity) and goodness (Caring). Justice is the over-riding virtue in the social realm but is equally the virtue in interiority that enables us to see reality via each of the 3Cs. It enables us to develop both autonomy and authenticity. Justice is seen as the chief 'conditioning' influence in all of the four Cs.

Each mode or voice needs an exemplary way or process to enable its development in learners. For Criticality my exemplary process is Professor Matthew Lipman's philosophical inquiry programme called *Philosophy for Children*. For Caring it is Bahá'í teachings and, from a wider community perspective, perennial philosophy. For Creativity it is – 'artistic' expression in any of its forms.

The 3Cs relate to three domains; the moral, the artistic and the scientific. Epistemologically the 3Cs provide three forms of knowing – internalized via socialization – from their various forms of social and cultural embodiment – such embodiment being every-thing from family members, to the media and galleries and museums.

As teachers it is our use of task setting and questioning that provides the opportunities for challenging and nurturing abilities in all of the 4Cs. The questions & tasks we give to children help socialize development within the distinct modes of Caring, Creativity & Criticality and in working in Community. With very young children the task setting and questioning might be as simple as:

- "Please offer the grapes to everyone." (Caring – Goodness)
- "Draw me a picture,' or 'Dance me a dance." (Creativity – Beauty)
- "Is the green doll larger or smaller?" (Criticality – Truth)

Enlightened, responsible, parents of course get these processes started from the child's earliest years and create a good foundation for the teacher to build on.

2. Given that being and becoming human is the central idea how should we structure education?

In SunWALK the 4Cs, become the overall structure for developing theory and practice. What does this mean? Theoretical developments are looked at in terms of their value for supporting further work via the 4Cs framework. We all have frameworks, we all construe¹⁷, but they are not always explicit or shared, not always articulated so that we know them.

In practice series of lessons need to be looked at in terms of enabling balanced development between the four Cs. The need to

intensify one area might become apparent following reflection on the work pupils have achieved over the preceding weeks. Most important is the 'juxtaposing of work' especially the use of work from the criticality mode being used as a creative challenge, followed by the opposite i.e. creative work being used as the text for the next piece of philosophical inquiry. In my experience this 'dialectic' can become the most powerful form of pedagogy, and take the teacher and class into high-order 'crossover' experiences between the critical and the creative-meditative.

3. How is knowing and knowledge viewed?

Epistemologically two major shifts are seen as needed in education. The first is a shift from the mechanistic, atomistic view of *knowledge as 'stuff out there'* to *knowing as a state of being and a process of engaging with the world*. Education is still largely in a 'transmissive', 'Newtonian', mechanistic mode. The shift is more than a greater emphasis on experientiality or 'learning through the mastery of doing' – but it includes these re-emphases. It is even more an emphasis on being, and being in relationship with others, as opposed to individualistic, regurgitation of information that is largely meaningless to the learner, except for its instrumental value. The learner has to find meaning in forms of collective experience as well as in the personal. As Parker Palmer (1998) says in his book *Courage to Teach*;

It is not enough to get the big story inside the student but we also have to get the student inside the big story.

To escape from the dominance of 'transmission' a number of things have to be changed, most notably reliance on teaching that which can be tested in narrow, regurgitative ways. The answer here lies in a combination of self, teacher and peer evaluation that is cross-moderated right up to national level. Standards currently result in homogenization, which is the opposite of what is needed. We need standards but standards that are achieved via the principle of 'harmony in diversity', as opposed to standards that create homogenization.

The second shift is away from the 'god' of rationality into recognition of a range of ways of knowing. These can be seen as including women's ways of knowing, indigenous people's ways of knowing etc., but here I am proposing that education needs to legitimize four ways of knowing that correspond to the 4Cs in the model and these are not gender specific or culture specific;

Creativity: The subjective knowing that comes via the imagistic and other arts media

Caring: The knowing that comes from focusing on others needs

Criticality: The objective knowing that comes from observing, measuring, repeatability etc

Community: The interpersonal knowing that comes from being and working with others

The first three forms of knowing correspond with the voices of 'I', 'WE' and 'IT' as described by Ken Wilber in several of his books (1998a, 1998b, 2000).

In suggesting, as I do, greater emphasis on the other Cs I am not making an argument to diminish the rational. Far from it, since reasoning is taught abysmally in many schools. The exemplary process for criticality in SunWALK, philosophical inquiry, (Lipman's *Philosophy for Children*¹⁸), shows us how to raise standards in reasoning, and reasonableness.

4. Q. What is the key process?

The key process for SunWALK is dialogue. It is dialogue that causes development that is worth having. Dialogue presupposes at least an element of innate knowing in human reality. Professor of Mathematics education Gene Maier emphasizes the vital difference between education and training;

“Educate” stems from *educere*, to lead out, a Latin word that lives in Modern English as “*educe*”. “Train” is from the French *traîner*, to drag behind one, as in “bridal train.” Thus, we have two disparate metaphors for teaching: leading out or dragging behind.¹⁹

The chief purpose of dialogue, and philosophical inquiry, as in Lipman's *Philosophy for Children*, is to *educe*, to lead out – as in Bahá'u'lláh's “*Man is a mine...*” (GWB 260) I extend the notion of dialogue into four forms to correspond with the four Cs and the four ways of knowing.

Intrapersonal dialogue

1. Caring = d. with and in the heart & with & in relationships – d. in other-centredness
2. Creativity = d. with and in and through the materials of the chosen medium; focused on expression of the subjective world-view (in the meditative) voice; to generate insight subjectively
3. Criticality = d. with and in texts (math., philosophical, critical) focused on expression of the objective voice – to generate insight objectively

Interpersonal dialogue

4. Community = d. in and with people (or artefacts) that are part of the cultural, legal, social & political milieu – this form of d. includes the purpose of maintaining & developing the social/cultural milieu

The Western separation of affect and cognition can be a curse. Heart and mind, (heart-mind) are involved, more or less, in all three modes of engagement. Moral development, for example, as understood in SunWALK draws upon all forms of engagement and both affect and cognition. Cognition is sometimes defined as *the psychological result of perception and learning and reasoning*. But knowing and being in relationship do not require constant 'perception-and-learning-and reasoning'. A mother and baby for example can 'talk' to each other via touch whilst cognitive involvement can be elsewhere. Diagram 2 indicates a straightforward way to model the three Cs in relation to affect and cognition – criticality being more cognitively charged, and less affectively charged etc. However I still hold to the idea that ultimately interiority is best seen at 'bedrock level' as heart-mind, the flow of the life-force experienced as interiority or consciousness.

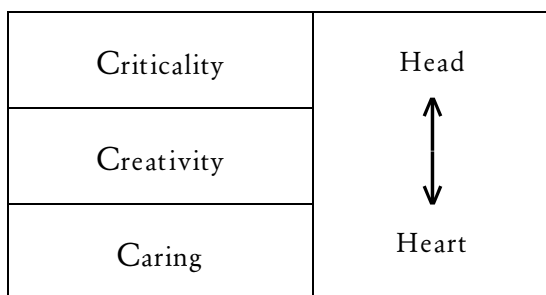


Diagram 2 - The Three Cs

The nature of the process and methodology is vital to all aspects, and users, of the SunWALK model. The researcher and the teacher, and the teacher-as-researcher, need, as the Americans say, to 'walk the talk'. This relates to two general points. Firstly civilized living is seen as a function of *how well a society brings together the private, subjective sphere, with the public sphere, i.e. the concerns of the group as a whole*. (What passes for democracy in the West may or may not do better than other forms of government, at least on such issues as care of children, or of the vulnerable – but its associated freedoms are vital to the manifestation of potential). The second general point concerns the conditions for maximizing the development of potential. Chief amongst the necessary conditions is the freedom of expression and the use of dialogue. However dialogue

here is seen as more than the exchange of speech. I include creative expression and meditation and consultation in my broadly-based definition of 'multi-level dialogue', as described earlier, since all of these provide the *stimulus* for a person, and the groups to which s/he belongs to manifest potential.

The revelation of abilities through the stimulus of dialogic challenge

Highly relevant to the concern of subjectivity and of maximizing the development of peoples' potential are the writings of Charles Taylor, especially his book *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1991, p. 61) where he says;

The notion that each one of us has an original way of being human entails that each of us has to discover what it is to be ourselves. But the discovery can't be made by consulting pre-existing models, by hypothesis. So it can be made only by articulating it afresh. We discover what we 'have it in us to be' by becoming that mode of life, by giving expression in our speech and action to what is original in us. The notion that *revelation comes through expression* is what I want to capture ... (emphasis added)

The chief means for eliciting potentials is seen then as dialogue, dialogue in the broadest sense, as described in the multi-level sub-model of dialogue. Taylor's *revelation through expression* is to my mind more than a definition of 'acceptable authentic individuality' compared to 'unacceptable individualism'. It is the identification of an essential principle for learning and development. That principle lies, as I described above, in having the creative and the rational yoked in dynamic relationship. It also provides an inter-faith (or pan-religious) way to understand the intuitive voice, the spiritual and the transcendent form of experience. One pathway to try to build common ground between the religious and the non-religious views of the spiritual is via art especially if we are willing to entertain the closeness of the subjectivity of art and the subjectivity of religious experience.

5. How should we develop the curriculum and its contexts?

One of the key notions in SunWALK is that we enable the moral and spiritual to be present throughout the whole process of education. One essential way of doing this is to place all technical learning, from basic reading through to advanced engineering, in the context of being and becoming positively and fully human in the world with others. Maslow's²⁰ hierarchy of human needs if 'inverted' gives us the transcendent as the outermost context with which to embrace all 'lesser' focuses.

- 8) Self-transcendence: to connect to something beyond the ego or to help others find self-fulfillment and realize their potential.
- 7) Self-actualization: to find self-fulfillment and realize one's potential; &
- 6) Aesthetic: symmetry, order, and beauty;
- 5) Cognitive: to know, to understand, and explore;
- 4) Esteem: to achieve, be competent, gain approval and recognition.
- 3) Belonginess and Love: affiliate with others, be accepted; and
- 2) Safety/security: out of danger;
- 1) Physiological: hunger, thirst, bodily comforts, etc. (William Huitt, <http://chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt/col/regsys/maslow.html>)

When inverted Maslow's hierarchy can be seen as a hierarchy of contexts, rather like Ken Wilber's nests of holons. In SunWALK the spiritual is seen as the source of the will to act morally. The spiritual for me includes two simple ideas a) all that is not biological is spiritual and b) spirituality is living for others²¹. Personally I don't care what a person's belief system is so long as s/he is committed to truth, beauty, goodness and justice. Consider the absurdity, and horror, of humans being the only 'animals' that will kill each other because they hold to different ideas. "I know that Christ is king, and I'm prepared to kill you as a consequence." "I know that Muḥammad is the Seal of the Prophets, and I'm prepared to kill you as a consequence." "I know that all religion is the opium of the people and I'm prepared to kill you as a consequence." No lower 'animal' behaves like this. Whatever our worldview that which can be cherished, that which can unite us is acknowledging virtues – and in SunWALK I have chosen as cardinal the virtues of truth, beauty, goodness and justice.

Consequently development in education is seen as the ability to frame the curriculum within higher and higher developmental stages. In using Maslow's hierarchy 'inverted' the suggestion is that we try framing the more material or biological within the higher order context of transcendence. The transcendent (potentially) is here taken at its simplest to mean being able to live primarily in the light of higher order values, or 'virtues', and to be able to stay focused on the needs of others. 'Others' here is seen as ranging from ones own partner or family through to the human family as a whole. However the transcendent can mean more, most importantly it is experiences in which there is loss of ego boundaries, i.e. the subject and object become one. It is possible that in this 'the deeply spiritual experience' and the 'creative experience', or the 'aesthetic experience', are all the same – the unifying factor being the movement from subject-object

to an experience of oneness, expressed subsequently as a gain in 'deep feeling' or 'deep insight'. To include these, the deepest levels of human experience, requires sensitive, inspired teaching of considerable ability. SunWALK provides the framework for this kind of development and international cooperation of the holistic kind can help us create not just a vision, but working models and proven practice.

Curricula models – is there a fourth level?

John P Miller (1996:5-8) suggests three forms/levels of educational orientation, the Transmissive, the Transactional and the Trans-formational – but is there a fourth? It seems to me that there is a case to be made for a fourth namely; the Transcendental. The transcendent I tentatively suggest might lie in *such a deep engagement, via any one of the four Cs, that there follows an experience of oneness between subject and object, (preferably) followed by new insight and new understanding*. Unitive experience is what Wilber calls boundarylessness, or a (temporary) loss of the ego boundaries²². Unitive experience of itself is not, of course, a guarantee of virtue. It is the contexts chosen that enable, or deny, virtues.

We can't teach transcendence but we can teach to maximize the possibilities of transcendent experience (but that will have to be the subject for another paper).

The approach used in SunWALK makes the model a vital new way to develop initial teacher education, as well as in-service teacher development. I will write about SunWALK's application to initial and in-service teacher education elsewhere but suffice it say that the model applied to teacher education will involve the same dimensions that are introduced here. This is to say that I believe that the way to organize teacher education, as well as the teaching of children, is via the 4Cs, multi-level dialogue etc.

Conclusion

This paper has provided a brief description of aspects of the Bahá'í-inspired SunWALK model of holistic education'. It is concerned particularly with holism in respect of *interiority* and in respect of *balances* between the four modes of engagement with reality, which in the light of higher-order values, make us human, and which form a basis for true civilization.

Professionally as teachers we could structure our work on the three voices found in (Western) civilization the 'WE' voice (Caring), the 'I' voice (Creativity) and the 'IT' voice (Criticality) – in Community – with the rest of the process being refinement via use of various kinds

of information and processing of that information. SunWALK by placing all technical learning in a context of being and becoming human – in the light of higher-order values²³ is a way of proceeding that has the capacity to contribute to the establishment of justice and peace.

East and West have an abundance of riches to bring to the task of developing Bahá'í-inspired holistic education. With the 3 modes corresponding to 3 'voices' and corresponding to more diverse ways of knowing we have a way to take education into the future – providing they are linked to the cardinal values of goodness, beauty and truth, along with justice as the measure and conditioner of all. That way is a holistic maintaining of glorious diversity – harmonized by our recognition that we are all in the process of being and becoming more fully human, as with others, we spend our brief span in this world.

Future developments and partnership cooperation with other centres and further uses of the SunWALK model

We are currently working at developing courses at various levels including an MA. We are interested to find 'partner' centres who would like to work with us at developing the model further – or at applying the model in schools or in teacher education. If you are interested please contact us at: rogerprentice@bigfoot.com

About the SunWALK model Professor Martin Cortazzi wrote:

A further function of the SunWALK model might be to use the model to integrate theorizing of education and principles application to learning and teaching- in Bahá'í institutes and schools. Another function could be to facilitate ways for Bahá'í professionals to develop their working practices in all levels of education in more holistically oriented ways – in state or private school or colleges. Since the 'Sun' part of the model is so designed that the values from any religion, philosophy or community tradition can be placed in the centre and worked through, integrating practices around the 4Cs, the model has the further function that it might be used to establish common ground between different faiths or worldviews applied to education. This is an exciting challenge towards a holistic vision of spiritual traditions in education.

If you would like to discuss these ideas or receive a book list of key texts please contact me at rogerprentice@bigfoot.com Much information about Holistic Education is available at www.holisticeducation.org.uk

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NOTES

¹ This paper is a development of presentations prepared for the Irfan Colloquium October 2004 at the Louhelen Bahá'í school and the forum held at the Bosch Bahá'í school by the CGIE – the Centre for Global Integrated Education, October 2004. In this version however I have tried to include some elements of a Bahá'í theological basis for educational philosophy.

² Director, Holistic Education Institute, rogerprentice@bigfoot.com.

³ The SunWALK logo and model of education © Roger Prentice 1995.

⁴ Of course I don't mean the Bahá'í Revelation or its proper institutions. Here I have in mind corrupt organizations in which people mis-represent knowledge in order to maintain power or achieve improper ends.

⁵ The reader of course must decide whether 'discuss' means the openness of dialogue or the closedness of cloze procedures.

⁶ 'Mistakes' are vital to learning – as someone said the fastest way to progress is 'ready, fire, aim'. (My apology for the nature of the metaphor)

⁷ We mustn't because of contemporary chaos think that the postmodern is all bad. An excellent sorting out of the benefits as well as the demerits of postmodernism is to be found in Wilber (1998 ch. 9)

⁸ Savi says:

To summarize the first three Valleys: in the first Valley, the self, with its aspiration to realize its hidden potentialities and to become similar to the Self of God, requires the capacity of willing, intended as willingness to turn towards the True Beloved, willing-ness to choose a course of action, to determine which thoughts, feelings, words, deeds to manifest in this earthly life so that the self may be transformed into a divine, angelic identity. In the second Valley, reason, in its yearning to acquire knowledge of outer and inner reality, requires the guidance of a divine universal mind that will "teach it the science of the love of God" (SVFV 52). The acceptance of this guidance is the secret to acquiring a real and sound knowledge. (http://bahai-library.com/?file=savi_will_knowledge)

⁹ The whole of the Harper and Row 1965 book *Ultimate Concern – Tillich in Dialogue* by D. Mackenzie Brown is online at <http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=538> (accessed 29 Jan 2005)

¹⁰ Much information including a summary is to be found at <http://americanvalues.org/html/hardwired.html> (accessed 29 Jan 2005)

¹¹ The 'Sun' for Bahá'is obviously is the Bahá'í Revelation. However the model is designed to enable us to work spiritually with others without distorting relationships through feeling the need to convert; that is it is designed to respect other forms of worldview within the 'Sun'.

¹² 'Texts' includes experience of dance, video, theatre etc. – and especially the text of self.

¹³ The current interest in 'restorative justice' for victims, and between them and perpetrators of crime, is essentially a process of re-humanization of the perpetrators. Of course it is also for some of the victims a releasing from the negatives that can destroy.

¹⁴ I have in mind the passage:

There are certain pillars which have been established as the unshakable supports of the Faith of God. The mightiest of these is learning and the use of the mind, the expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God. To promote knowledge is thus an inescapable duty imposed on every one of the friends of God. (SWAB 126-7)

¹⁵ I continually repeat this point because many people seem to find it difficult to understand the difference between cognition and being in the creative mode (essentially the same as the mystical) or the caring mode. My impression is that something of the order of 90% of male academics, for example, just don't 'get it' – they literally cannot get out of their heads. Some women academics and politicians seem to have essentially adopted a male-like persona in order to succeed. (Possibly their only option.)

¹⁶ I have chosen to capitalize Spiritual to indicate divine influence. I have in mind those passages where 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of the 'breaths and promptings' of the Holy Spirit – e.g. PUP 7, 23, 41, 142; PT 179. In Paris Talks the notion of higher self is not capitalized – however in a sense the higher self it is that receives the 'breaths' and 'promptings'.

¹⁷ The psychologist Kelly developed a whole psychology on the idea of our construing – see <http://www.brint.com/PCT.htm> for a summary of his work (accessed 29 Jan 2005)

¹⁸ There are many books by Lipman and about Philosophy for Children. A good classroom based introduction is Bob Fisher's 1998 book *Teaching Thinking – Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom*. Lipman's opus magnum is *Thinking in Education*.

¹⁹ Mair's website on maths learning contains much more than mathematics, see <http://www.mlc.pdx.edu/ARC060998.html> (29 Jan 2005)

²⁰ For an introduction to Maslow's ideas in an educational context see Dr William Huitt's website at <http://chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt/col/regsys/maslow.html> (accessed 29 Jan 2005)

²¹ These come from the much loved professor of Religious Education John Hull; many papers are online at <http://johnmhull.biz> (29 Jan 2005)

²² This is a major theme in one of Wilber's early books *No Boundary* (1985)

²³ The teacher, the school, the community needs to decide on those virtues that are to form the 'human context' for a school's teaching – I have argued for truth, beauty, goodness and justice to be cardinal but compassion and empathy as well imagination and other key qualities must be developed. The authority of the school needs to be derived from periodic consultations between representatives of all stakeholders.

Interpretation and the Guardianship

A talk given by Ian Semple at a seminar in Haifa on
18 February 1984¹

The subject “Interpretation and the Guardianship” may seem to be very straight-forward, but the more I have thought about it, the more I have become aware that the Bahá’í concept of interpretation is very different from that prevalent in earlier Dispensations and that, even within the Faith, there are many misconceptions, and that these can give rise to tests for the believer.

Here I would like to digress from the subject for a moment, to make a personal comment about the coexistence of divine authority and individual freedom of expression, which is such a characteristic feature of the Faith. Someone — I think it was a pilgrim — once commented to me that he thought that if the Guardian had been sitting in the meeting of the Universal House of Justice it would have been impossible for the members to say frankly what they thought. I have had the privilege of only a few hours in the presence of the Guardian, but I do not agree with that point of view. I believe that in his presence one would not have *dared* to do anything *but* say exactly what one thought. I am also confirmed in this view by the actions of the Hands of the Cause of God since the coming into being of the Universal House of Justice — the Hands who worked so closely with the beloved Guardian. They have always demonstrated absolute loyalty and also absolute frankness in all their consultations with the Universal House of Justice, and this combination has been a tremendous source of strength and inspiration to the Universal House of Justice.

So I believe that the presence of a source of divine guidance in the Faith, while being a guarantee of its unity and preserving the purity of its teachings, is no contradiction to the principle of freedom of thought. I doubt if it is possible to obtain a totally clear understanding of the subject of interpretation, but perhaps we can clarify it to some extent.

I propose to divide the subject into three main topics:

1. The distinction between the interpretation that we all do when discussing any subject, and Authoritative Interpretation as exercised by the Guardian
2. The distinction between authoritative interpretation, and divinely guided legislation

3. Aspects of the function of Interpreter as exercised by Shoghi Effendi This part of the subject is our main concern in this talk, and therefore I shall divide it also into a number of aspects, although I must emphasize that this is a purely arbitrary division, and each type of interpretation shades into the others. They are:
 - 3.1. Defining the meaning of specific Texts.
 - 3.2. Explaining what is the thought conveyed by the Texts, i.e. expounding their meaning.
 - 3.3. Development of seminal statements in the Sacred Text.
 - 3.4. Examples of refusal to comment further on a Text or make statements on matters not covered in the Text.
 - 3.5. Definition of the sphere of authoritative interpretation.
 - 3.6. Illumination of the overall significance of the Revelation.
 - 3.7. The power to take a long and uninterrupted view over a series of generations.

Let us go back to the first of the three main topics.

1. Aspects of Interpretation, Individual and Authoritative

It is, of course, impossible to understand or speak about any statement, whether written or oral, without interpretation. The Manifestation of God has the superhuman task of conveying to mankind truths that it does not yet understand and training it in modes of behaviour that it has not yet risen to. To do this He has to use the limited languages that are spoken around Him, with all their accumulated meanings and connotations. He not only uses words and metaphors and similes with consummate skill, but in using old forms and old concepts, He transforms them and breathes into them new meaning. So, in trying to educate ourselves in the Revelation, we need to study three meanings in each text we read: the meaning of the words themselves; the meaning they will have had for the particular person or persons that the Manifestation was addressing; and also the new meaning or meanings that He will be trying to convey. In other words, we must avoid three pitfalls: one is that of ignoring the obvious meaning of the words (in the past people were sometimes so keen on extracting the esoteric significance of a text that they were blind to the clear meaning of the words); the second pitfall is that of taking the words out of their historical and social contexts; the third is that of thinking that the social and historical contexts will, in themselves, give us an understanding of the obvious meaning and of what the Manifestation is saying.

A good example to show this is Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to a Physician. Some passages are quite straightforward. To understand others we need to remember the caution of the Guardian that this Tablet was addressed to a physician of the old school of medicine, and that without an understanding of the terminology of that school, we could not understand what Bahá'u'lláh was saying. However, it is clear that Bahá'u'lláh was not merely recounting to the physician what the physician already knew; He was explaining to him, in terminology that he could understand, certain truths that He wanted to convey about health and healing.

The historical and social context is not the only context of a passage. There is also the context of the other teachings. In *Gleanings* we find the following words of Bahá'u'lláh:

If it be your wish, O people, to know God and to discover the greatness of His might, look, then, upon Me with Mine own eyes, and not with the eyes of anyone besides Me. Ye will, otherwise, be never capable of recognizing Me, though you ponder My Cause as long as My Kingdom endureth, and meditate upon all created things throughout the eternity of God, the Sovereign Lord of all, the Omnipotent, the Ever-Abiding, the All-Wise. (GWB 272)

This, I think, implies among other things that the most important keys to understanding the Writings are the Writings themselves; that we must read them not merely from our point of view, trying to see what we can understand, but consider them from Bahá'u'lláh's point of view: what is *He* trying to convey? And for what purpose? It is no good taking one text and trying to understand it in isolation from all the other teachings which might bear upon it. Therefore we must relate every statement to all the rest of the Revelation and try to understand what Bahá'u'lláh is striving to *convey*. The consequence of this realization is to accept that, since we can *never* encompass the whole Revelation we must always be tentative in our understanding even when it may seem to us to be absolutely clear. A striking example of the importance of this occurs in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, where we find the verses: "*God hath enjoined upon you marriage*" and "*Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me: this is My commandment unto you, obey it as a succour to yourselves.*" One would think that these are very clear statements not susceptible of any interpretation. It seems, on the face of it to be an unambiguous and binding command. Yet one of the believers asked Bahá'u'lláh Himself about this passage, and whether it meant that marriage was compulsory. Bahá'u'lláh replied: "This is not compulsory." I instance this because it is quite a temptation sometimes for Bahá'ís, during discussion of a

subject, to assert dogmatically (and sometimes heatedly!): “You can’t say that! Here are the words of the Text and they are quite clear!”

Individual interpretation of this kind, that is, striving to understand the full meaning of a text, is not only inescapable, it is essential if we are to increase the depth of our understanding and also recognize its permanent limitations. I believe the combination of encouragement of individual thought with the existence of an infallible centre of authoritative interpretation is one of the unique strengths of this Dispensation, the effects of which endure even in the absence of the Guardian. The very fact that there is in principle in the Cause a centre of such guidance, and that all other interpretation is deprived of authority, teaches us a humility in our thinking that is one of the strongest cements of unity.

Although individual interpretation has no authority, we should not be led to the extreme of concluding that the explanations given by individuals can never be inspired. In a Tablet which is published in *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* the Master wrote:

The Blessed Beauty hath promised this servant that souls would be raised up who would be the very embodiments of guidance, and banners of the Concourse on high, torches of God’s oneness, and stars of His pure truth, shining in the heavens where God reigneth alone. They would give sight to the blind, and would make the deaf to hear; they would raise the dead to life. They would confront all the peoples of the earth, pleading their Cause with proofs of the Lord of the seven spheres. (SWAB 250)

It would be a mistake, therefore, to assume that the Bahá’í Revelation will be deprived of believers who can give us profounder insights into the meaning of the Teachings of the Faith. But none of these kinds of interpretation, no matter how learned the believer who expresses them, are authoritative. Although, they *may* enlighten us there is *always* the inevitability of some degree of error. Let us never forget the example of the Christian Dispensation. The Gospels are filled with prophecies and warnings given by Jesus about His Second Coming. Christians have laboured to understand these for some 2,000 years. Their scholars have worked out many interpretations and understandings of what would happen, but I do not know of *any* who came to the correct conclusion, namely, that it signified the appearance of another Manifestation of God.

Authoritative, divinely-guided interpretation is of a wholly different order to what we have just been considering and is exclusively the function of the Master and the Guardian.

2. Authoritative Interpretation and Divinely Guided Legislation

The prerogative of authoritative interpretation conferred by Bahá'u'lláh, first upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá and, after Him, upon the Guardian, lies at the heart of the Covenant.

In previous Dispensations no clear distinction was drawn between interpretation and legislation. The two functions were subsumed under one process of deducing conclusions and guidance for new situations from the study of the Holy Word. Because these deductions were believed to be the process of making explicit what was implicit in the Text, they were virtually unalterable and turned into a massive accumulation of dogma, ritual and laws. In Judaism it became primarily a multiplicity of minute regulations governing every moment and aspect of a person's life, obedience to which was conceived as identical with obedience to the Law of God. Christianity, to a large extent, broke free of this, but replaced it with the erection of a formidable structure of dogma, belief in which was understood to be essential for the eternal salvation of the soul, and which led to such abuses as the sale of indulgences, which precipitated the rebellion of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation.

In this Dispensation we have two separate divinely-guided authorities, one to provide authoritative interpretation, and one to provide supplementary legislation. The essential distinction between these two functions is explained by the Universal House of Justice in its letter dated 9 March 1965:

The Guardian reveals what the Scripture means; his interpretation is a statement of truth which cannot be varied. Upon the Universal House of Justice, in the words of the Guardian, 'has been conferred the exclusive right of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the Bahá'í Writings.' Its pronouncements, which are susceptible of amendment or abrogation by the House of Justice itself, serve to supplement and apply the Law of God. Although not invested with the function of interpretation, the House of Justice is in a position to do everything necessary to establish the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh on this earth. (MUHJ63 ¶23.20)

One important consequence of this distinction is that when we have a question about what we should *believe*, or what the Text *means*, and this is not answered for us in the Text itself, there is no one, in the absence of the Guardian, who can answer it authoritatively and bindingly. If, however, we wish to know what we

should *do* in any instance, the Universal House of Justice is fully empowered to convey the divine guidance on the subject.

Two other important consequences are the prohibition of the formulation of dogmas or creeds in the Faith (these are, after all, but man's attempt to tie the truths of God up in a parcel and are forever doomed to inadequacy), and the recognition of the profound difference between the Laws actually given by the Manifestation of God, which can be changed only by another Prophet, and those which the Universal House of Justice is inspired to make, which are repealable by the House of Justice itself. This gives an unprecedented degree of elasticity to the Bahá'í system of law.

There is, of course, a hierarchical relationship between the Guardian's interpretation and the legislation of the Universal House of Justice. The supreme authority in the Faith is the Word of God and all legislation is bound by that authority. The Authoritative Interpreter is the living mouthpiece of that Word, the Expounder of its true meaning. He therefore naturally has the authority to define the sphere of the legislative action of the Universal House of Justice. Shoghi Effendi has stated categorically that neither the Guardian nor the Universal House of Justice would ever usurp the function of the other. Both, after all, are under the protection and unerring guidance of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Therefore we can be confident that, even in the absence of the Guardian the Universal House of Justice is not going to legislate outside its sphere of authority. I suspect, however, that in its care not to step beyond its boundaries, the House of Justice may well refrain from legislating in areas which, if we had the Guardian with us, he could have told us were within its sphere. There are two very interesting examples of what I mean.

As you know, in both Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith, murder is prohibited. The question then arises as to whether abortion and euthanasia are permissible or not. The Catholic Church has concluded that the law is clear, "Thou shalt not kill", and therefore both are prohibited. In the Bahá'í Faith, however, we have statements by the Guardian on both issues. In both cases he states that there is nothing explicit about them in the Writings – which implies that they are not quite the same thing as murder. The following are three statements made on his behalf relating to these subjects:

On 25 August 1939: *The practice of abortion – which is absolutely criminal as it involves deliberate destruction of human life – is forbidden in the Cause. Regarding 'mercy*

killings' ... this is also a matter which the Universal House of Justice will have to legislate upon.

On 13 November 1940: *Regarding the practice of abortion; as no specific reference has been made to the subject in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, it devolves upon the International House of Justice to definitely pronounce upon it. There can be no doubt, however, that this practice, involving as it does the destruction of human life, is to be strongly deprecated.*

On 20 October 1953: *As there is nothing specific in the Bahá'í Writings on the subject of abortion, it will consequently have to be dealt with by the International House of Justice, when that Body is formed.*

On the basis of these statements the Universal House of Justice has ruled that to have an abortion just for the sake of getting rid of an unwanted birth is absolutely forbidden, but that there may be cases in which abortion would be permissible, and this is for the Universal House of Justice to legislate on. Pending such legislation the decision is left to the consciences of the individuals concerned in the light of the above principles and of expert medical advice.

Another area concerns the obligatory prayers. In the thirteenth Glad-Tidings Bahá'u'lláh states: *"All matters of State should be referred to the House of Justice, but acts of worship must be observed according to that which God hath revealed in His Book."* On one occasion when one of the believers asked the Universal House of Justice to designate a prayer which could be said for the House of Justice it referred to this Text and refused to make any such designation. One could have assumed, likewise, that this Text would have made it impossible for the House of Justice to answer any questions about the Obligatory Prayers, but the Guardian has written that matters of detail that are obscure in relation to the Obligatory Prayers are to be decided by the Universal House of Justice, specifying, therefore, just what aspect of these matters do lie within its sphere of legislation.

3. The Function of Interpretation

The way in which Shoghi Effendi exercised his function of Interpreter is highly illuminating, both in regard to our understanding of what Authoritative Interpretation implies and in regard to our understanding of the infallibility of the Sacred Text, a subject which has been badly misunderstood in earlier Dispensations. All these quotations immediately following are from letters written by the Guardian's secretaries on his behalf.

3.1 In some cases Shoghi Effendi simply gave clear statements about what a particular passage meant, for example:

In regards to your questions: What the Master meant in the words you quoted is simply that joy gives one more freedom to create; if the Prophets, the Master Himself, and the Guardian, had less problems and worries, They could give forth a great deal more creatively to the Cause. When He said that “grow to be as a fruitful tree” he meant that, by lifting burdens from the Guardian and trying as much as possible to do our share of the work of the Faith, we would help Shoghi Effendi to develop his full powers as Guardian and, thru the Covenant, the Cause would spread its shadow over all men. This we have seen happen in the last 30 years, but that does not mean we must not try to our utmost to help him by our lives and our services (1952.10.5 - Sec)

The “rheum” mentioned in the Tablet of the Master is symbolic. He means that the people have a spiritual cold and cannot smell the Divine Fragrance and that the believers must be the physicians to heal men of these conditions. He is not referring to physical ailments. (1950.3.26 - Sec)

The Master uses this term “the Divine Reality is sanctified from singleness” in order to forcibly impress us with the fact that the Godhead is unknowable and that to define It is impossible; we cannot contain It in such concepts as singleness and plurality which we apply to things we know and can experience. He uses the method of exaggerated emphasis in order to drive home his thought that we know the sun indirectly thru its rays, the Godhead indirectly thru the Manifestations of God. (1950.2.20 - Sec)

The human soul is a “harbinger” [GWB 160] in the sense that it gives us a faint idea of the existence of the other worlds, an inkling of the spiritual worlds beyond. (1938.05.25 - Sec)

The “flame of fire” in the Tablet of Aḥmad should be taken figuratively. In other words, we must not tolerate the evil of Covenant-breakers or enemies of the Faith, but be uncompromising in our loyalty, in our exposure of them and in our defense of the Faith. (1955.07.21 - Sec)

What Bahá'u'lláh means by the faculty of sight and hearing is the physical faculty, not a spiritual abstraction. He means that we have been given eyes and ears to

appreciate what goes on in this world, by Almighty God; in other words, we can read the Teachings and listen to the Message of the Prophet. This is to be taken literally. (1954.04.22 - Sec)

“Him Who is at the distance of two bows” [GWB 70] should not be taken literally, but it has an allegorical meaning, indicating nearness or close proximity. (1938.04.12 - Sec)

The expression “tend my raven locks, and not wound My Throat” [HW] is an allegorical warning by Bahá'u'lláh against the misuse of anything bestowed by Him on the world. (1937.09.06 - Sec)

In the Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih Bahá'u'lláh states:

We have formerly ordained that people should converse in two languages, yet efforts must be made to reduce them to one, likewise the scripts of the world, that men's lives may not be dissipated and wasted in learning divers languages. Thus the whole earth would come to be regarded as one city and one land. (TB)

A believer asked the Guardian how this related to Bahá'u'lláh's command that an auxiliary international language should be chosen and taught in all the schools in addition to one's mother tongue. The reply was:

What Bahá'u'lláh is referring to in the Eighth Leaf of the Exalted Paradise is a far distant time, when the world is really one country, and one language would be a sensible possibility. It does not contradict His instructions as to the need immediately for an auxiliary language. (1946.03.16 – Sec)

From these specific interpretations we learn not only what the particular passages mean, but we receive an object lesson in studying the Writings. We see that some passages are to be taken literally, others allegorically. Some are even stylistic exaggerations to produce an intended effect, and some relate to a different stage in the development of the Dispensation than do others.

3.2 Sometimes the Guardian would go considerably beyond a brief interpretation of the passage in question, such as in this beautiful description of the Short Obligatory Prayer:

The meaning of the short prayer mentioned by Mr. Lacey in his letter is simply that Bahá'u'lláh has put into one brief sentence the very essence of life, which is that we come from one Father, and pass, on the road of life, through

tests and trials and experiences, so that our souls may grow; and that the reason for our existence is to learn to know and understand our Creator. As we do this, we will increase our love for Him and will worship Him.

This is really the deepest joy that comes to any soul. All others are merely reflections of this happiness, the happiness that comes when we worship the God Who made us, our Heavenly Father. (1953.10.05 - Sec)

3.3 Sometimes, he would develop an entire concept from just a seminal reference in the Writings. There is, for example, his definition of the *Námús-i-Akbar* (the Greater Law) as the constitution of National Spiritual Assemblies, and the *Námús-i-A'zam* (The Most Great Law) as the constitution of the Universal House of Justice. The development of the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, with their Auxiliary Boards is undoubtedly another example of the same process.

3.4 On the other hand, there are many examples of matters on which he refused to give an interpretation because there was nothing specific in the texts. For example:

We have no way of knowing what science Bahá'u'lláh meant when he said it would largely eliminate fear; as no further mention of it was ever made in the teachings, the Guardian cannot identify anything with this statement. To do so would depart from his function as interpreter of the teachings; he cannot reveal anything apart from the given teachings. (1952.08.30 - Sec)

Concerning the points you mention in "The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf", page 32: These were never, so far as we know, further elaborated by Bahá'u'lláh; they remained hidden within the realms of His infinite knowledge, just as did the universal language which, in that same book, He mentions. (1942.08.15 - Sec)

As to your question regarding the possibility of an artificial production of life by means of an incubator; this is essentially a matter that concerns science, and as such should be investigated and studied by scientists. (1937.12.31 - Sec)

3.5 This leads us to the Guardian's own definition of the limitations of the sphere of his infallibility as Interpreter.

Shoghi Effendi is infallible only when interpreting the words. He considers it heretic to attribute to him a station equal to Bahá'u'lláh or even to the Master. His station is

Guardian of the Cause of God and the President of the House of Justice, and the interpreter of the words and nothing more. He absolutely disclaims any other station that the friends may, through their great love, wrongly attribute to him. (1938.09.18 - Sec)

The Guardian's personal powers are not unlimited and are different from those possessed by the Master. But the degree of guidance which God may choose to vouchsafe him is unlimited, as it comes from Bahá'u'lláh and not himself. Any extraordinary manifestation of knowledge or intuition he might on some occasions demonstrate must not be attributed to his possession of powers akin to the Master's, but rather to a manifestation of the will of Bahá'u'lláh guiding him for His own reasons on that occasion. The Guardian is infallible interpreter of the Word of God. His words are not the Word of God itself. But his interpretation is as binding as the Word. (1941.11.20 - Sec)

He likes to be provided with facts by the friends, when they ask his advice, for although his decisions are guided by God, he is not, like the Prophet, omniscient at will, in spite of the fact that he often senses a situation or condition without having any detailed knowledge of it. (1948.03.04 - Sec)

Anything that is not in the Teachings, the Guardian does not pass upon. These are matters for scientists and specialists. (1953.09.29 - Sec)

An implication of the Will and Testament that must not be lost sight of is the injunction on the friends to obey the Guardian and the House of Justice. This may be related to their functions of divinely-guided interpretation and legislation, but it is not necessarily the same thing and can apply in other contexts, as is shown from the following explanations from letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi.

As to the Master's injunction concerning obedience to the Guardian it should be made clear that the question of deciding what matters require the obedience of the Guardian is one which the latter alone has the full right to conscientiously decide. In other words, it is for the Guardian to say whether a certain action is injurious to the Cause or not, and whether it calls for his personal intervention. It is not for individual believers to limit the sphere of the Guardian's authority, or to judge when they have to obey the Guardian and when they are free to reject

his judgement. Such an attitude would evidently lead to confusion and to schism. The Guardian being the appointed interpreter of the Teachings, it is his responsibility to state what matters which, affecting the interests of the Faith, demand on the part of the believers complete and unqualified obedience to his instructions. (1933.11.27 - Sec)

The infallibility of the Guardian is confined to matters which are related strictly to the Cause and interpretation of the teachings; he is not an infallible authority on other subjects, such as economics, science, etc. When he feels that a certain thing is essential for the protection of the Cause, even if it is something that affects a person personally, he must be obeyed, but when he gives advice, such as that he gave you in a previous letter about your future, it is not binding; you are free to follow it or not as you please. (1944.10.17 - Sec)

Future Guardians ... cannot 'abrogate' the interpretations of former Guardians, as this would imply not only lack of guidance but mistakes in making them; however, they can elaborate and elucidate former interpretations, and can certainly abrogate some former ruling laid down as a temporary necessity by a former Guardian. (1947.02.19 - Sec)

3.6 Now I find it very interesting that all the quotations that I have given so far, which are, for the most part what previous dispensations have regarded as comprising "interpretation" are all in the words of the Guardian's secretaries. He himself devoted his main attention in this field, not to the elucidation of obscure passages or the definition of terms used in the Scriptures, but to the illumination of the overall significance of the Revelation. He would take certain themes, such as the nature and significance of the Bahá'í way of life, the theory and functioning of Bahá'í institutions, the relationship of the Cause to current events and its place in the history of mankind, the station of the Manifestations of God and Their interrelationships, the station of the Master, the destiny of certain Bahá'í communities, the proper way of teaching the Faith, and, with his own hand, write long letters which, like the string of a necklace, would thread together quotations from the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and the Master, showing the sources from which the ideas were welling up, the implications and importance of those passages and the actions that they called for from the believers.

This, to my mind, is the greatest aspect of the Guardian's function as Interpreter. This Revelation is so enormous, so profound, that the believers would be struggling like

minnows in the shallows of a vast ocean. He it was, following in the footsteps of the Master, who drew together those aspects of the Cause that require our immediate attention, showed their relationship to the vast implications of the entire Revelation, the riches of which we are only beginning to taste, and gave us a vision of our work far into the future, even to the end and beyond the end of this Dispensation.

3.7 In “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” Shoghi Effendi wrote that “Without such an institution” as the Guardianship “the means required to enable” the Faith “to take a long, an uninterrupted view over a series of generations would be completely lacking.” I have heard friends relate this statement to the fact that the Guardianship is a hereditary institution, and that it was this hereditary factor that would provide the means to the Faith to take this long view. I have not seen this point made in any of the Guardian’s writings, however, and it seems to me that although, of course, there is an element of truth in the assumption, the mere fact that each Guardian would have succeeded his father in office does not seem an adequate basis for the exercise of such an exclusive function. The function of inspired interpreter, however, does imply it. As interpreter the Guardian is able to understand not only the outward meaning of the Writings but their inner implications. Although others, by studying the Writings and the progress of human affairs, can gain some idea of the way society will develop, the Guardian alone could clearly see the whole panorama of Bahá’u’lláh’s intention and could delineate for us the course that the Manifestation of God sees as lying before us. This, indeed, Shoghi Effendi has done in his World Order letters and also in *God Passes By*. The latter is not only a history book, magnificent though it may be in that respect, it is also an inspired commentary on the events it recounts, illuminates the past, challenges us in the present and gives us a vision of the future.

NOTE

¹ Paper first published online 05/1997 at the Bahá’í Library Online; now at http://bahai-library.com/?file=semple_interpretation_guardianship

The Signs of Prophet-Hood

An Exposition on a Tablet by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

James B. Thomas

The veil hath fallen away, the curtain is lifted, the clouds have parted, the Lord of Lords is in plain sight - yet all hath passed the sinners by.

It is He Who hath made for you the new creation, (Qur’an 29:19) and brought on the woe that surpasseth all others, (Qur’an 79:34) and gathered the holy together in the realm on high. Verily in this are signs for those who have eyes to see. (SWAB 14)

To “have eyes to see” is the great challenge of the twenty first century! It is an old challenge; 2000 years ago Christ asked His audience “Having eyes see ye not?” (Mark 8:18) He was referring to spiritual eyes of course. Now in the mélange of cacophonous distractions and material temptations there lies confusion in the minds of many folks who seek purpose in their lives beyond immediate gratification. It is especially disadvantageous to people of faith who have sincerely clung to belief systems that have been surreptitiously corrupted by unscrupulous religious leaders past and present. On the other hand, when things go consistently bad people will begin to question what’s going on around them and hopefully become open to new truths that may have been staring them in the face all the while. New seekers are thus born and the potential for the opening of spiritual eyes becomes apparent. What are the signs of truth, of a new Prophet?

In three steps this paper elaborates upon the ramifications of the extraordinary evidence of the signs of a Manifestation of God as articulated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and is corroborated with excerpts from the Dalá’il-i-Sab’ih (The Seven Proofs) by the Báb. It is also reinforced by Bahá’u’lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* and additional comments by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in *Some Answered Questions*. And references from the distinguished Bahá’í scholar Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl are presented as he builds on criteria from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s writing with references to past dispensations. The interesting feature of these passages by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is that they are in the past tense with respect to things accomplished whereas signs of Prophet-hood are normally mentioned in future tense within prophetic utterances.

First, reliable criteria for proofs are defined. Second, in the sequence of signs there are shown those that are obviously self-evident whereas others are more subtle and require probing to deeper levels of meaning. Third, emphasis is placed on historical confirmation.

Proof Criteria

Proofs are of four kinds: first, through sense perception; second, through the reasoning faculty; third, from traditional or scriptural authority; fourth, through the medium of inspiration. That is to say, there are four criteria or standards of judgment by which the human mind reaches its conclusions. (PUP 253-6)

In His argument regarding the first kind of proof, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá holds that the senses are held to be unreliable. For example He refers to sight as being subject to aberrations and inaccuracies. We see a mirage as a body of water and reflections in a mirror as reality. We see the earth as a fixed object with the stars moving across the night sky whereas it is really the earth that is rotating on its axis. Many examples may be drawn about the uncertainty of the senses.

The second kind of proof based on the intellect or ‘reasoning faculty’ is also faulty and insufficient by virtue of the differences among men of learning when analyzing identical subjects of investigation. Even the great philosophers and scientists are often contradictory in their conclusions revealing that human judgment tends to be subjective or opinionated and therefore unreliable.

The third kind of proof is dependent on scripture whereof every conclusion is supported by traditions, which are recorded in holy books. But understanding these books requires the authority of human reason for explanation. However, as previously shown, human reason is unreliable so it follows that interpretation based on it is inaccurate.

The fourth type of proof according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá depends upon inspiration. He refers to the “philosophers of the illuminati” of past centuries who claimed that truth came to them through revelation. But He points out that inspiration is prompted by the human heart, which is sometimes satanic in its expression. Therefore this type of proof is also insufficient.

What kind of proof can we rely on? ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answers:

Consequently, it has become evident that the four criteria or standards of judgment by which the human mind reaches its conclusions are faulty and inaccurate. All of them are liable to mistake and error in conclusions. But a

statement presented to the mind accompanied by proofs which the senses can perceive to be correct, which the faculty of reason can accept, which is in accord with traditional authority and sanctioned by the promptings of the heart, can be adjudged and relied upon as perfectly correct, for it has been proved and tested by all the standards of judgment and found to be complete. When we apply but one test, there are possibilities of mistake. This is self-evident and manifest. (PUP 254-5)

In summary, the criterion of proof must simultaneously satisfy sensory perception, analysis by reasoning, traditional knowledge and intuitive inspiration.

Signs

In the dawning days of the Bahá'í Dispensation a principle emerged that profoundly changed the perspective on religion forever. Although Muḥammad discoursed on some of the Prophets that preceded Him it was the Báb, twin Prophet of this latest dispensation, Who first explicitly presented proofs and characteristics of Divine Messengers that form the basis of the principle of progressive revelation. This principle is fundamental to the Bahá'í Faith.¹ In The Seven Proofs the Báb begins by defining the source of divine knowledge. *"And know thou that in this world of being the knowledge of God can never be attained save through the knowledge of Him Who is the Dayspring of divine Reality."* (SWB 117) Is He referring to only one Manifestation of God? If not who are they? At the conclusion of the tablet He states:

In the time of the First Manifestation the Primal Will appeared in Adam; in the day of Noah It became known in Noah; in the day of Abraham in Him; and so in the day of Moses; the day of Jesus; the day of Muḥammad, the Apostle of God; the day of the 'Point of the Bayán'; the day of Him Whom God shall make manifest; and the day of the One Who will appear after Him Whom God shall make manifest. Hence the inner meaning of the words uttered by the Apostle of God, 'I am all the Prophets', inasmuch as what shineth resplendent in each one of Them hath been and will ever remain the one and the same sun. (SWB 126)

This is in complete accord with Christ's statements "For if you had believed Moses you would have believed me" (John 8:58) and "Before Abraham was I am." (John 5:46) In addition, Bahá'u'lláh mentioned two more Divine Messengers Who preceded Abraham but are not readily known in the West. The first was Húd, a cousin of 'Ád, whose name was associated with the people that occupied a

large area in southern Arabia. According to tradition they were fourth generation descendents of Noah.²

And after Noah the light of the countenance of Húd shone forth above the horizon of creation. For well-nigh seven hundred years, according to the sayings of men, He exhorted the people to turn their faces and draw nearer unto the Ridván of the divine presence. What showers of afflictions rained upon Him, until at last His adjurations bore the fruit of increased rebelliousness, and His assiduous endeavours resulted in the wilful blindness of His people. (KI 9)

Their demise was recited by Muḥammad: "And as for 'Ád, they were destroyed by a roaring and violent wind." (Q 69:6)

The second Prophet was Ṣálih of the people of Thámud who were the successors to the culture of 'Ád. He like Húd tried to convince the people to stop worshipping idols and to turn their reverence to God. But the people said they could not find in Him the signs of prophethood.³

For over a hundred years He admonished them to hold fast unto the commandments of God and eschew that which is forbidden. His admonitions, however, yielded no fruit, and His pleading proved of no avail. (KI 9-10)

When Ṣálih asked them to attend to a she-camel with a warning that if they did not comply with God's wish they would be struck with a calamity and seized for a grievous punishment,⁴ they responded:

Those who were haughty said: Surely we are disbelievers in that which you believe.

Then they strung the she camel and revolted against their Lord's commandment, and said: O Ṣálih, bring us that with which thou threatenest us, if thou art of the messengers.

So the earthquake seized them, and they were motionless bodies in their abodes. (Q 7:76-78)

The question is, how can we recognize Divine Messengers and know for sure that They are Who They say They are? What about signs and proofs of the foregoing Divine Messengers? The inference by the Báb is that They are all equal in Their essence. This concept is unequivocally confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh:

These sanctified Mirrors, these Day-springs of ancient glory are one and all the Exponents on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose. From Him proceed their knowledge and power;

from Him is derived their sovereignty. The beauty of their countenance is but a reflection of His image, and their revelation a sign of His deathless glory. They are the Treasuries of divine knowledge, and the Repositories of celestial wisdom. Through them is transmitted a grace that is infinite, and by them is revealed the attributes of God. (KI 99-100)

Bahá'u'lláh further explains that all Divine Messengers equally embody "*light that can never fade.*"

They only differ in the intensity of their revelation, and the comparative potency of their light... That a certain attribute of God hath not been outwardly manifested by these Essences of Detachment doth in no wise imply that they Who are the Daysprings of God's attributes and the Treasuries of His holy names did not actually possess it. (KI 103-4)

The eminent Bahá'í scholar Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl states

But of these Manifestations, those who appear later or nearer to the Great 'Resurrection' and the Glorious 'Hour,' are of a greater brilliancy and splendor, and their proofs and arguments are clearer and stronger, on account of the law of progression.⁵

And regarding their proof, he states that the adherents of religions actually follow four types of proof: (1) Revelation, (2) Logic or Argument, (3) Signs and Miracles and (4) Prophecies and Records.⁶ These actually fall into the categories of proof that 'Abdu'l-Bahá listed, namely sense perception (signs and miracles), reasoning faculty (logic or argument), traditional or scriptural authority (prophecies and records) and inspiration (revelation).

With these criteria one can easily confirm, even with the limited information available, that the Prophet Founders of the great religions of the past are true Manifestations of God for Their day. Noah, even back to Adam through Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muḥammad and others are so verified.

What about 'The Great Resurrection' and 'the Glorious Hour' mentioned above? This began with the advent of the Báb in 1844 when He announced that He was the Qá'im that the people of Shí'ih Islam had been waiting for one thousand years. As a Manifestation of God in His own right He also can be readily verified based on extensive knowledge of His life and His Writings.

We come then to Bahá'u'lláh, The World Redeemer, The Prophet of this age. 'Abdu'l-Bahá begins His treatise on the signs that define a Divine Messenger as they pertain to Bahá'u'lláh:

And among His signs is the appearance of omens and joyous prophecies, of hints and clues, the spreading of many and various tidings, and the anticipations of the righteous, they who have now attained their goal. (SWAB 15)

A profound ‘omen’ emerged when Bahá’u’lláh wrote the Tablet of The Holy Mariner. A deep sense of foreboding gripped a multitude of Bábís and friends at all levels of society just prior to His departure from Baghdád in 1863 after hearing the reading of that tablet. The worst fears expressed in that mysterious tablet came true as Bahá’u’lláh’s exile took Him from Baghdád to Constantinople, Adrianople and finally the prison city of ‘Akká. He and His small band of followers were subjected to a series of extreme tests and difficulties that ultimately ended in remarkable victories for His Cause.⁷

The ‘joyous prophecies’ of Bahá’u’lláh are numerous and they are expressed in tablets of great variety. For example, in the famous Tablet of Carmel He referred to the holy mountain of Carmel as the seat for the Universal House of Justice when He wrote *“Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names.”* (GWB 16) Seventy two years after this utterance the Universal House of Justice was elected in 1963 and now resides in an elegant edifice at the center of an arc of buildings on the face of Mount Carmel. This “Ark”, the highest administrative institution in the Bahá’í world has been endowed by Bahá’u’lláh with “inferred infallibility” which will last until the next Manifestation of God appears. Only as a body in session does this special endowment exist, whereas the nine individual members of the Universal House of Justice do not have personal ‘infallibility’.

The Book of Names (the Kitáb-i-Asmá’) mentioned above was written by the Báb wherein He admonishes His followers to embrace “Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest” and that even His own Bayan should not “keep them from recognizing the Promised One when He should Appear.”⁸

Another example of prophecy by Bahá’u’lláh in a different form was expressed to the first western scholar to make contact with the Bahá’í Faith, distinguished Orientalist Professor E. G. Brown of Cambridge: *“Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the “Most Great Peace” shall come ...”*⁹ By the close of the 20th century this process was in its last stage. In the year 2004 the last hotbeds of war were being resolved and the prospects for a “great war” remain most unlikely. In regard to this there were some astonishing prophetic utterances by Bahá’u’lláh to the rulers of the world that will be noted later.

Clues of Prophet-hood are abundant in Bahá'í literature. They are sprinkled throughout with references to events of Bahá'u'lláh's childhood, and to His ancestry. More clues are related to His character as a young man and to certain miracles attributed to Him though He admonished His followers not to dwell on them.

His ancestry included Abraham through His wife Katurah, through Zoroaster the Divine Messenger of Persian antiquity, through Jesse the forerunner of David and through the last king of the Sasanian dynasty, Yazdigird.¹⁰ His character as a youth was exemplary.

From earliest childhood He was distinguished among His relatives and friends. They said, "This child has extraordinary power. In wisdom, intelligence and as a source of new knowledge, He was advanced beyond His age and superior to His surroundings. All who knew Him were astonished at His precocity..." During the period of youth the Blessed Perfection did not enter school. He was not willing to be taught. This fact is well established among the Persians of Tíhrán. Nevertheless, He was capable of solving the difficult problems of all who came to Him. In whatever meeting, scientific assembly or theological discussion He was found, He became the authority of explanation upon intricate and abstruse questions presented. (PUP 25)

"The anticipations of the righteous" referred to the first teachers who alerted their students to the coming of the Promised One. In Persia they were Shaykh Aḥmad-i-Aḥsá'í and his chosen successor Siyyid Kázim who had accurately anticipated the coming of the Báb prior to His declaration in 1844...¹¹ For ten years a parallel effort actually occurred in the West but from a Christian perspective with the talks given by Reverend Miller and others in the United States who fully expected the return of Christ in 1843. In Germany the Templars¹² who were also disappointed after awaiting "The Great Expectation" sent a group to settle in the Holy Land at the foot of Mount Carmel in 1868, the same year that the Glory of God entered 'Akká in the Holy Land. He was the very one they had been waiting for, though they remained forever blind to His presence.

As to tidings there were many given in various forms by Bahá'u'lláh in His writings but in the Tablet of Bishárát (Glad-Tidings), Bahá'u'lláh specifically lists fifteen elements pertaining to world rebirth. In the first He states that "*the law of holy war hath been blotted out from the Book.*" (TAB 21) Here He is referring to "*the Mother Book*" (Book of Laws) of His "*Most Great Revelation...*" Historically, the Middle East has been plagued with holy wars for fourteen hundred years that were motivated by a lust

for power of corrupt leaders. For similar reasons in medieval times, the West became forever blighted spiritually by the Christian Crusades the only benefit being contact with Islam and its high learning, which reputedly sparked the Renaissance. Priests and monks of the world's great religions have increasingly taken on a militant stance in various regions of the world during the last half century. Even Buddhists have immolated themselves for political reasons on a number of occasions in the far east. It is no wonder then that Bahá'u'lláh "*blotted out*" holy war from "the Book."

His second Glad-Tidings brings the prospect of peace full circle with His admonition "*O people! Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship.*" (TAB 22) Imagine what long reaching consequences this would have for society to exist for the first time in a condition of harmony with complete absence of acrimony. If the great religions claim that their followers are worshiping the one true God then we must all be worshiping the same God yet we seem to hate each other for doing so.

The third Glad-Tidings is concerned with divisiveness resulting from the profusion of various tongues in the world. Bahá'u'lláh resolves this with a formal decree:

It behoveth the sovereigns of the world - may God assist them - or the ministers of the earth to take counsel together and to adopt one of the existing languages or a new one to be taught to children in schools throughout the world, and likewise one script. Thus the whole earth will come to be regarded as one country. (TAB 22)

In another tablet He further insists that we cannot have universal peace until a secondary language finds common usage among all the earths populace.

The fourth Glad-Tidings pertains to the oppressed people of the world:

Should any of the kings - may God aid them - arise to protect and help this oppressed people, all must vie with one another in loving and in serving him. This matter is incumbent upon everyone... (TAB 22)

In this instance kingship is exalted by Bahá'u'lláh for a good king is a rare gift to the world. He has more to say on this later.

The fifth Glad-Tidings puts one's relationship with government into perspective. That is, citizens of every country "*must behave towards the government of that country with loyalty, honesty and truthfulness...*" He then appeals to the people of the world with:

We cherish the hope that through the earnest endeavours of such as are the exponents of the power of God - exalted be His glory - the weapons of war throughout the world may be converted into instruments of reconstruction and that strife and conflict may be removed from the midst of men. (TAB 23)

The sixth Glad-Tidings is “*the establishment of the Lesser Peace.*” The Lesser Peace is a political peace that shall be established in order to eliminate war and to prepare for the Most Great Peace, which will be established upon a spiritual foundation.¹³ When the rulers of the world rejected Bahá'u'lláh's summons He responded: “*Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents.*” (GWB 254) Humanity is currently trying to achieve that goal.

The seventh Glad-Tidings is particularly appropriate for today but with a warning.

The choice of clothing and the cut of the beard and its dressing are left to the discretion of men. But beware, O people, lest ye make yourselves the playthings of the ignorant. (TAB 23)

In other words, vanity is to be avoided.

The eighth Glad-Tidings announces a profound but massive change in the Christian world of religion. Priests and monks are admonished to give up the life of the cloister and to rejoin the world to become productive members of society. Moreover, celibacy is no longer required:

We have granted them leave to enter into wedlock that they may bring forth one who will make mention of God, the Lord of the seen and the unseen, the Lord of the Exalted Throne.” (TAB 24)

The ninth Glad-Tidings declares that confession belongs to God alone and that the humiliation and abasement resulting from confessing to another individual is not to be suffered by His servants for

Confession of sins and transgressions before human beings is not permissible, as it hath never been nor will ever be conducive to divine forgiveness... When the sinner findeth himself wholly detached and freed from all save God, he should beg forgiveness and pardon from Him. (TAB 24)

Bahá'u'lláh then revealed a prayer about forgiveness for the sinner to recite. Following is the first paragraph of that prayer:

O God, my God! I implore Thee by the blood of Thy true lovers who were so enraptured by Thy sweet utterance that they hastened unto the Pinnacle of Glory, the site of the most glorious martyrdom, and I beseech Thee by the mysteries which lie enshrined in Thy knowledge and by the pearls that are treasured in the ocean of Thy bounty to grant forgiveness unto me and unto my father and my mother. Of those who show forth mercy, Thou art in truth the Most Merciful. No God is there but Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the All-Bountiful... (TAB 24-5)

The remaining paragraphs express humility and remorse on the part of the sinner. And an intense appeal is made for permission to approach the “Court of Thy holiness” with the appeal for mercy and grace. No suggestion is made for one to stand before another and ask forgiveness.

The tenth Glad-Tidings pertains to book burning, a phenomenon that is very old. Indeed the first library to develop a ‘book’ concept became the first victim of this disparaging practice. The Library of Alexandria, “the most famous library of classical antiquity” was established by Ptolemy after the conquest of Egypt in 332 B.C by his leader Alexander The Great, and was managed by a president-priest. A “daughter library” was later established in the Temple of Sarapis by Ptolemy III. The great library actually survived a fire set in Alexandria in 47 BC by Julius Caesar but was destroyed in a civil war in the late 3rd century CE. Later, Christians destroyed the “daughter library” in 391 CE. In modern times the Nazis of the Third Reich had massive public burning of books that expressed any religious or political thoughts that would even slightly infer disagreement with Nazi philosophy during Hitler’s rise to power. To all this Bahá’u’lláh states:

As a token of grace from God, the Revealer of this Most Great Announcement, We have removed from the Holy Scriptures and Tablets the law prescribing the destruction of books. (TAB 25)

The eleventh Glad-Tidings resolves the long lasting conflicts between science and religion: “It is permissible to study sciences and arts, but such sciences as are useful and would redound to the progress and advancement of the people...” In another place He carries it one step farther by emphasizing that we must have harmony between science and religion. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

The highest Praise is due to men who devote their energies to science, and the noblest center is a center wherein the sciences and arts are taught and studied... (PUP 348)

The twelfth Glad-Tidings gives new meaning to human enterprise:

It is enjoined upon every one of you to engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like. We have graciously exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship unto God, the True One... Waste not your time in idleness and sloth. Occupy yourselves with that which profiteth yourselves and others... The most despised of men in the sight of God are those who sit idly and beg. Hold ye fast unto the cord of material means, placing your whole trust in God, the Provider of all means... (TAB 26)

The thirteenth Glad-Tidings cannot be overemphasized.

The men of God's House of Justice have been charged with the affairs of the people. They, in truth, are the Trustees of God among His servants and the daysprings of authority in His countries.

O people of God! That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the sources of life to the world. Inasmuch as for each day there is a new problem and for every problem an expedient solution, such affairs should be referred to the Ministers of the House of Justice that they may act according to the needs and requirements of the time... (TAB 26-7)

He further states that all should be obedient to them but that worship should be observed according to His Book.

Integral to this Glad-Tiding is a strong admonition against backbiting with this corollary:

O people of Bahá! Ye are the dawning-places of the love of God and the daysprings of His loving-kindness. Defile not your tongues with the cursing and reviling of any soul, and guard your eyes against that which is not seemly. Set forth that which ye possess. If it be favourably received, your end is attained; if not, to protest is vain. Leave that soul to himself and turn unto the Lord, the Protector, the Self-Subsisting. Be not the cause of grief, much less of discord and strife. The hope is cherished that ye may obtain true education in the shelter of the tree of His tender mercies and act in accordance with that which God desireth. Ye are all the leaves of one tree and the drops of one ocean. (TAB 27)

The fourteenth Glad-Tidings relieves one of a costly duty.

It is not necessary to undertake special journeys to visit the resting-places of the dead. If people of substance and affluence offer the cost of such journeys to the House of Justice, it will be pleasing and acceptable in the presence of God. Happy are they that observe His precepts. (TAB 27-8)

The fifteenth Glad-Tidings offers clues to the future world order.

Although a republican form of government profiteth all the peoples of the world, yet the majesty of kingship is one of the signs of God. We do not wish that the countries of the world should remain deprived thereof. If the sagacious combine the two forms into one, great will be their reward in the presence of God ... (TAB 28)

Bahá'u'lláh made further mention of kingship in a different light with respect to the maturity of man.

One of the signs of the maturity of the world is that no one will accept to bear the weight of kingship. Kingship will remain with none willing to bear alone its weight. That day will be the day whereon wisdom will be manifested among mankind. (KA notes 250-2)

But until that time, under the right circumstances, kingship can be a bounty according to Bahá'u'lláh's earlier reference.

Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave credence to His splendors:

And among His signs are His splendours, rising above the horizon of oneness, His lights streaming out from the dayspring of might, and the announcement of the Most Great Glad-Tidings by His Herald, the One, the Incomparable. Verily in this is a brilliant proof for the company of those who know. (SWAB 15)

The horizon of oneness signifies the realm of the one true God from whence all creation emanates. It also characterizes the stations of Divine Manifestations of God as being the same. Bahá'u'lláh, the Daystar of this age, is often compared to the Sun of our solar system with its life sustaining radiance. His splendors stream out as spiritual soul sustaining radiance with omnipotent power. The Herald of course is the Báb, the 'Primal Point' who announced the coming of One greater than Himself.

Among His signs is His being manifest, being seen by all, standing as His own proof, and His presence among witnesses in every region, among peoples who fell upon Him even as wolves, and compassed Him about from every side. (SWAB 15)

Long before the Báb's declaration, Bahá'u'lláh became known as the "The Father of the Poor" and His young wife Ásiyih Khánum was called "The Mother of Consolation" due to their constant assistance given by them to the downtrodden of Tíhrán.¹⁵ Later He became the great pillar of strength to the Bábís when the Báb was incarcerated. From that time forward He was the center of concern to the Persian and Ottoman leadership. In spite of their continuous persecution of Him and His company, at no time did He compromise one iota of His message to the people for the remainder of His earthly life.

There were no hidden agendas in the life of Bahá'u'lláh and the holy ones that accompanied Him. Those in His presence were often overwhelmed by His spiritual majesty and those with evil intent that rose to challenge Him sank into quiet submission without uttering a word. The highest authorities could not squelch His spirit, they actually increased the fire of His rhetoric and ultimately lost their purpose.

Among His signs is His withstanding powerful nations and all-conquering states, and a host of enemies thirsting for His blood, intent at every moment upon His ruin, wheresoever He might be. Verily this is a matter deserving the scrutiny of those who ponder the signs and tokens of God. (SWAB 15)

In 1853 Bahá'u'lláh emerged from the Black Pit of Tíhrán in such a state of physical degeneration that He was almost unrecognizable. Nine year old 'Abdu'l-Bahá fainted upon seeing His Father in such a condition.¹⁶ That was the beginning of a forty-year exile initiated by The Sháh of Iran. He and His small band of family and followers were ordered to Baghdád, a journey of extreme hardship, as they had to walk without proper clothing through the icy passes of the Zagros Mountains in the dead of winter. The authorities thought that He would expire and be gone forever. Instead His majestic influence not only reunited the bedraggled Bábí community, it also brought great respect from the authorities in Baghdád. Far worse for Him was the insidious disruption caused by the covenant breakers led by Mírzá Yahyá and Siyyid Muḥammad.

In 1863, out of fear for His growing influence, the Sultán of Turkey sent Bahá'u'lláh across the desert and mountains of northern Iraq, thence by ship to Constantinople. Less than a year later He was sent to Adrianople and in 1868 by sea to "The Most Great Prison" of 'Akká. With respect to these journeys Bahá'u'lláh fulfilled one of the numerous prophecies of past holy books that are distinctly related to Him.

In that day also he shall come even to thee from Assyria, and from the fortified cities, and from the fortress even to the river, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain. (Micah 7:15)

The duration of His earthly ministry, forty years, is also given.

According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvelous things. (Micah 7:15)

Another of His signs is the marvel of His discourse, the eloquence of His utterance, the rapidity with which His Writings were revealed, His words of wisdom, His verses, His epistles, His communes, His unfolding of the Qur'an, both the abstruse verses thereof and the clear. By thy very life! This thing is plain as day to whoever will regard it with the eye of justice. (SWAB 15)

The marvel of His discourse and the eloquence of His Utterance is self evident. One has only to read a few lines of His writings to readily see the truth of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement.

The rapidity of His writings were witnessed by His own amanuenses, the ones doing the actual writing from Bahá'u'lláh's dictation. At times He would have as many as six secretaries writing simultaneously.

His words of wisdom are contained in the hundred tablets or books that He wrote and dictated, the Most Holy Book being the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Book of Laws). One of the most informative books on religion, the Kitáb-i-Íqán (Book of Certitude) was written by Bahá'u'lláh in the incredible span of forty-eight hours.

Again among His signs is the dawning sun of His knowledge, and the rising moon of His arts and skills, and His demonstrating perfection in all His ways, as testified by the learned and accomplished of many nations. (SWAB 15)

His knowledge was innate and extensive beyond human understanding. With no formal education He confounded His elders as a youth.

O King! I was but a man like others, asleep upon My couch, when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been. This thing is not from Me, but from One Who is Almighty and All-Knowing. And He bade Me lift up My voice between earth and heaven, and for this there befell Me what hath caused the tears of every man of understanding to flow. The learning current amongst men I studied not; their schools I entered not. Ask of the city

wherein I dwelt, that thou mayest be well assured that I am not of them who speak falsely. This is but a leaf which the winds of the will of thy Lord, the Almighty, the All-Praised, have stirred. Can it be still when the tempestuous winds are blowing? Nay, by Him Who is the Lord of all Names and Attributes! They move it as they list. The evanescent is as nothing before Him Who is the Ever-Abiding. His all-compelling summons hath reached Me, and caused Me to speak His praise amidst all people. I was indeed as one dead when His behest was uttered. The hand of the will of thy Lord, the Compassionate, the Merciful, transformed Me. (ESW 11-12)

And from 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Briefly, all His adversaries in the Orient acknowledged His greatness, grandeur, knowledge and virtue; and though they were His enemies, they always spoke of Him as 'the renowned Bahá'u'lláh.' (SAQ 35)

And again among His signs is the fact that His beauty stayed inviolate, and His human temple was protected as He revealed His splendours, despite the massed attacks of all His foes, who came against Him in their thousands with their darting arrows, spears and swords. Herein is verily a wonder and a warning to any fair judge. (SWAB 15-16)

The fact that Bahá'u'lláh survived the Síyáh-Chál had to be a miracle of Divine intervention. The same can be said about His trek to Baghdád and to the other journeys in exile. He was not only fraught with the persecutions to His Faith and His being; He also faced constant threats from the seditious acts of the covenant breakers. He was actually poisoned by Mírzá Yaḥyá yet survived to fulfill the mission that God had given Him. Even near the end of His life His Doctor was awed by the steady rhythm of His heart.

His 'human temple' was mysteriously protected at every juncture beginning with the early uprisings against the Bábís. The defenders at Fort Tabarsi were in imminent danger and needed all the help they could get.

Bahá'u'lláh's intention to throw in His lot with the defenders of the fort of Shaykh Ṭabarsí was destined to remain unfulfilled. Though Himself extremely desirous to lend every possible assistance in His power to the besieged, He was spared, through the mysterious dispensation of Providence, the tragic fate that was soon to befall the chief participators in that memorable struggle. Had He been able to reach the fort, had He been allowed to join the members of that heroic band, how could He have played His part in the great drama which He was destined to unfold? How could He have consummated

the work that had been so gloriously conceived and so marvelously inaugurated? He was in the heyday of His life when the call from Shíráz reached Him. At the age of twenty-seven, He arose to consecrate His life to its service, fearlessly identified Himself with its teachings, and distinguished Himself by the exemplary part He played in its diffusion. No effort was too great for the energy with which He was endowed, and no sacrifice too woeful for the devotion with which His faith had inspired Him. He flung aside every consideration of fame, of wealth, and position, for the prosecution of the task He had set His heart to achieve. Neither the taunts of His friends nor the threats of His enemies could induce Him to cease championing a Cause which they alike regarded as that of an obscure and proscribed sect.¹⁷

His real beauty on the other hand is manifest through the constant, steadfast outpouring of His Revelation to a hostile world in spite of the difficulties that were heaped upon Him. It is through His writings that His splendors streams forth.

And among His signs is His long-suffering, His tribulations and His woes, His agony in His chains and fetters, and His calling out at every moment: 'Come unto Me, come unto Me, ye righteous! Come unto Me, come unto Me, ye lovers of the good! Come unto Me, come unto Me, ye dawning points of light!' Verily the gates of mystery are opened wide - but still do the wicked disport themselves with their vain cavillings! (Q 6:91, 52:12) (SWAB 16)

From the moment that Bahá'u'lláh was thrown into the Black Pit of Tíhrán until His last days on earth, a period of forty years, He was tormented by enemies from without and from within the Faith that He founded. Even before His incarceration in the Síyáh-Chál He was subjected to cruel indignities at the hands of His captors. The events of the nineteen years that followed were so difficult, so dramatic that He wrote the famous Fire Tablet in which He poured out the heartache that wrenched His soul. Yet it was not for Himself that He lamented. It was always for the friends, the lost souls of the world and even His worst enemies that He offered the healing balm of the love of God if only they would open their spiritual eyes to see its radiance and the hope for the next world.

Yet another of His signs is the promulgation of His Book, His decisive Holy Text wherein He reproved the kings, and His dire warning to that one (Napoleon III) whose mighty rule was felt around the world - and whose great throne then toppled down in a matter of brief days - this being a fact clearly established and widely known. (SWAB 16)

Historical Confirmation

His Book of Laws, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, sometimes called 'The Crimson Book,' is the most essential of all His writings. It contains the blueprint for the unification of man and the future world order. Its potential impact extends for a thousand years in the life of the planet and with it will come The Most Great Peace.

Brief mention has already been made about prophecies of Bahá'u'lláh that have been fulfilled or are in the process of being fulfilled. From this juncture verification can be made by witnesses or by historical records on the remaining content of this paper.

The most audacious of Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic warnings were the letters to the leaders and divines of the world in the late 1860's. The colonial powers of Europe ruled the world in the middle of the 19th century such that their bickering, machinations, political intrigue and warlike tendencies impacted everyone else in the world. In the Middle East the Ottoman Empire and its vassal Persia had reached the lowest level in their long histories as a result of endless corruption. This was compounded by the corruption of the religious leaders in Christendom and in Islam. Bahá'u'lláh addressed the most powerful leaders of these domains and brought them to task for the grave error of their ways with warnings that they would be met with utter failure if they did not obey the commands of God given through His Messenger. One by one they received their summons, Napoleon III, Pope Pius IX, Czar Alexander II, Queen Victoria, the Sultán of Turkey and other Ministers then one by one, with the exception of the Queen, each rejected the claim and admonitions of Bahá'u'lláh with disastrous results. Each of them lost their power and died in ignominy. By virtue of Queen Victoria's response, the Monarchy of Britain is the only one remaining to this day.¹⁸

Perhaps the most pathetic was Pope Pius IX. A few abbreviated statements from Bahá'u'lláh's declaration are as follows:

O Pope! Rend the veils asunder. He Who is the Lord of Lords is come overshadowed with clouds, and the decree hath been fulfilled by God, the Almighty, the Unrestrained... Beware that thou dispute not with Him even as the Pharisees disputed with Him (Jesus) without a clear token or proof... Leave now the world behind thee, and turn towards thy lord, through Whom the whole earth hath been illumined. (SLH 54-5)

The Pope rejected the call of Bahá'u'lláh and instead, declared Papal Infallibility in 1869. A few months later the consequences that Bahá'u'lláh warned him about followed quickly.

On September 20, 1870, Italian troops occupied Rome, and in October a plebiscite was held in which an overwhelming majority of the votes cast were for the incorporation of Rome in the kingdom of Italy. Pius remained for the rest of his days a prisoner, as he regarded himself, in the Vatican... In the rest of Italy, church and state were to be separated...¹⁹

And among His signs is the sublimity of His grandeur, His exalted state, His towering glory, and the shining out of His beauty above the horizon of the Prison: so that heads were bowed before Him and voices lowered, and humble were the faces that turned His way. This is a proof never witnessed in the ages gone before. (SWAB 16)

Wherever Bahá'u'lláh was forced to go He would sway not only the people but the highest authorities in that region. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains:

Only through the honor of entering His presence, many souls became confirmed believers; they had no need of other proofs. Even those people, who rejected and hated Him bitterly, when they had met Him, would testify to the grandeur of Baha'u'llah, saying, "This is a magnificent man, but what a pity that he makes such a claim! Otherwise, all that he says is acceptable..." (SAQ 36)

The Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh are many. The precepts and teachings they contain are universal, covering every subject. He has revealed scientific explanations ranging throughout all the realms of human inquiry and investigation - astronomy, biology, medical science, etc. In the Kitáb-i-Íqán He has given expositions of the meanings of the Gospel and other heavenly Books. He wrote lengthy Tablets upon civilization, sociology and government. Every subject is considered. His Tablets are matchless in beauty and profundity. Even His enemies acknowledge the greatness of Bahá'u'lláh, saying He was the miracle of humanity. This was their confession although they did not believe in Him. He was eulogized by Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians and Muslims who denied His claim. They frequently said, "He is matchless, unique." A Christian poet in the Orient wrote, "I do not believe him a manifestation of God, yet his miracles are as great as the sun. (PUP 155)

Again among His signs are the extraordinary things He continually did, the miracles He performed, the wonders appearing from Him without interruption like the streaming down of His clouds - and the acknowledgement,

even by unbelievers, of His powerful light. By His own life! This was clearly verified, it was demonstrated to those of every persuasion who came into the presence of the living, the self-subsisting Lord. (SWAB 16)

The many miracles attributed to Bahá'u'lláh that were witnessed by those in His presence were minimized by Him as being important only to those events of the time. Once Bahá'u'lláh was challenged to perform a miracle for a group of religious leaders in spite of their acceptance that He had no peer in learning. Bahá'u'lláh replied that they had no right to ask this for only God can test His creatures not the opposite. He consented with the understanding that it would not be considered a theatrical display.

The 'ulamás must, therefore, assemble, and, with one accord, choose one miracle, and write that, after the performance of this miracle they will no longer entertain doubts about Me, and that all will acknowledge and confess the truth of My Cause. Let them seal this paper, and bring it to Me. This must be the accepted criterion: if the miracle is performed, no doubt will remain for them; and if not, We shall be convicted of imposture. (SWAB 35)

Thirty 'ulamás consulted and decided that Bahá'u'lláh would probably defeat them with an enchantment so they did not dare to push the matter further. Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

At the time when this great Light suddenly arose upon the horizon of Persia, all the people, the ministers, the 'ulamá and men of other classes rose against Him, pursuing Him with the greatest animosity, and proclaiming "that this man wishes to suppress and destroy the religion, the law, the nation and the empire." The same was said of Christ. But Bahá'u'lláh alone and without support resisted them all, without ever showing the least weakness. At last they said, "As long as this man is in Persia, there will be no peace and tranquility; we must banish him, so that Persia may return to a state of quietude. (SWAB 27)

And yet another of His signs is the wide-spreading rays of the sun of His era, the rising moon of His times in the heaven of all the ages: His day, which standeth at the summit of all days, for its rank and power, its sciences and its arts, reaching far and wide, that have dazzled the world and astonished the minds of men.

Verily is this a matter settled and established for all time. (SWAB 17)

Conclusion

The emergence of the Bahá'í era with the declaration of the Báb in 1844 coincided with "The Great Expectation" but quickly changed to "The Great Disappointment" when religionists were unable to recognize the Promised One. But remarkable things occurred in the world beginning with that date. Knowledge exploded and the second industrial revolution began to accelerate and continues to father generations of higher technological revolutions (Air Age, Electronics, Telecommunications, Computer age, Space Age, Medical Breakthroughs etc.) Today many of the principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh have been adopted such as equality of men and women, universal standards, universal education, elimination of racism and an emerging secondary universal language, perhaps English. There are many more but the most important is the unity of humankind under a world assemblage.

A new cycle was born with the Báb and when Bahá'u'lláh revealed Who He was, the very dust of the earth took on new life. A radiance of spiritual and physical bounty was showered upon the world of man and remains in its plenitude in our own time. For this is the day not followed by night, the Day of God and, though the general public is not yet aware of it, we now have the great privilege of participating in its early stages.

NOTES

¹ GPB 100.

² Taherzadeh: *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* Volume IV, 425.

³ Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh IV, 426

⁴ Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh IV, 426.

⁵ Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl: *The Bahá'í Proofs*, 158.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ GPB 147.

⁸ *Bahá'í Dictionary*, 133.

⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne*, Browne's interview with Bahá'u'lláh (pre-introduction).

¹⁰ GPB 94.

¹¹ DB, 1.

¹² *Bahá'í Dictionary*, 223.1

¹³ *Bahá'í Dictionary*, 174.

¹⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 2001, Alexandria, Library of.

¹⁵ Bahá'u'lláh: *Call to Remembrance*, 9.

¹⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in SW Sep. 1914-Mar. 1917, Vol. VII, No. 4, page 32.

¹⁷ DB, 376.

¹⁸ GPB, 211.

¹⁹ Encyclopedia Britannica 2001, CD-ROM, *The Roman Question*.

Elucidations

Infallibility of the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith

Universal House of Justice letter to one of the believers

25 July, 1974

Dear Bahá'í friend,

We have received your letter stating you were disturbed by statements made in your deepening class regarding the infallibility of the beloved Guardian, and we appreciate your concern.

According to your letter, this question arose in connection with Shoghi Effendi's references in "God Passes By" to historical events, and his descriptions of the characters of opponents of the faith, particularly that of Hájí Mírzá Áqásí. Letters written on behalf of the guardian by his secretary to individuals who asked similar questions clearly define the sphere of the Guardian's infallibility. We quote from two of these, one written in 1944, the second in 1956.

The infallibility of the Guardian is confined to matters which are related strictly to the Cause and interpretations of the Teachings; he is not an infallible authority on other subjects, such as economics, science, etc.

The Guardian's infallibility covers interpretation of the revealed word, and its application. Likewise, any instructions he may issue having to do with the protection of the Faith, or its well-being must be closely obeyed, as he is infallible in the protection of the Faith. He is assured the guidance of both Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb, as the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly reveals.

Now, in the matter of accuracy of historical fact, Shoghi Effendi had to rely on available information. For example, on page 5 of "God passes By", he refers to Hájí Mírzá Áqásí as "... the idolized tutor of Muḥammad Sháh, a vulgar, false-hearted and fickle-minded schemer..." An appropriate and pertinent quotation supporting that characterization can be found in P. M. Sykes's "A History of Persia", Volume 2, pages 439-440, which appears as a footnote on page 233 of "Nabíl's Narrative":

The state of Persia, however, was not satisfactory; for Hájí Mírzá Áqásí, who had been its virtual ruler for thirteen years, 'was utterly ignorant of statesmanship or of military science, yet too vain to receive instruction and too jealous to admit of a

coadjutor; brutal in his language; insolent in his demeanour; indolent in his habits; he brought the exchequer to the verge of bankruptcy and the country to the brink of revolution ...’ Such – to adopt the weighty words of Rawlinson – was the condition of Persia in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The Guardian was very meticulous about the authenticity of historical fact. One of the friends in Yazd wrote to him stating that the account given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in one of His tablets about events related to the martyrdom of some of the believers in that place was in conflict with known facts about these events. Shoghi Effendi replied saying that the friends should investigate the facts carefully and unhesitatingly register them in their historical records, since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself had prefaced His recording of the events in His Tablet with a statement that it was based on news received from Yazd.

It is a great pity if some of the friends fail to recognize the matchless prose to be found in the Guardian’s writings. Shoghi Effendi’s masterly use of the English language makes the meaning abundantly clear, and that is an essential quality of great works.

We are delighted that you and your dear wife are conducting classes for the benefit of the friends, and we will remember you both in our prayers at the Holy Threshold.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
The Universal House of Justice

The quotation from Abu’l-Fazl Gulpáygání, taken from *Miracles and Metaphors*, pp. 9-10 reads as follows:

It is clear that the prophets and Manifestations of the Cause of God were sent to guide the nations, to improve their characters, and bring people nearer their Source and ultimate Goal. They were not sent as historians, astronomers, philosophers or natural scientists. Their position in the world of creation is like that of the heart in the body: it has a universal position with a general effect. The position of the learned in the world of earthly dominion is like that of a specific organ. That is, they have a particular position and a special effect. Therefore, the prophets have indulged the people in regard to their historical notions, folk stories, and scientific principles, and have spoken to them according to these.... But from the point of view of science, it is impermissible for the historian to depend on the literal meaning of these verses. This is because he cannot discount the very real possibility that they possess a higher significance and are subject to sublime, figurative interpretations which differ from the understanding that might be gained from their external sense.

A Commentary on the Conclusion on True Mysticism

Enoch Tanyi

In the conclusion of my paper ‘Mysticism in African Traditional Religion and in the Bahá’í Faith’, presented at the Irfán colloquium in London in July 2001*, I wrote that true mysticism or class one mysticism in the Bahá’í Faith had no parallel in African Traditional Religion. In the light of new information and some more reflection, I modify this conclusion.

To refresh the memory, I defined true mysticism as ‘The ecstatic joy that results from communion with the Souls of the Manifestations leading to physical martyrdom or the living of a life of self-sacrifice and saintliness’. This definition is derived from a statement the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith made in *Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá’í Community*, pp. 406-7, and Abdu’l-Bahá’s explanation of the meaning of sacrifice (see notes 1 and 2 below).

First of all, deducing from the Bahá’í teachings: African Traditional Religion (ATR), like the Bahá’í Faith is divine in origin. This means that a Manifestation or Manifestations of God appeared in Africa, and brought divine teachings. True mysticism, as defined in the Bahá’í teachings, is an eternal truth. Since the Bahá’í Faith teaches that the Manifestations teach essentially the same truth, it can be concluded that the Manifestations who taught the original form of ATR also taught true mysticism. In this light, therefore, true mysticism is found in both ATR and in the Bahá’í Faith.

Deducing from ATR:

According to one scholar, the book entitled “The Sayings of the Ancient One”, purported to have been found in Zimbabwe, shows interesting correspondence to the Four Valleys of Bahá’u’lláh’.

The theme of the Four Valleys is true mysticism, therefore, this book from ATR teaches true mysticism. My previous conclusion can only hold in considering recorded examples in the lives of the adherents, in which case the abundance of recorded exploits of martyrs in Bahá’í literature would have no parallel in recorded ATR literature. However, the absence of records does not prove that no martyrs or true mystics arose in ATR. Besides, the main thrust of the paper was to classify concepts and not to examine the extent to which the adherents have applied these concepts to their lives.

NOTES

* Ref: *Lights of Irfan*, Book Three, 2002, Pp 155-172

1. The Guardian's statement on true mysticism:

We liken God to the Sun which gives us all our life. So the spirit of God reaches us through the Souls of the Manifestations. We must learn to commune with Their Souls, and this is what the Martyrs seemed to have done, and what brought them such ecstasy of joy that life became nothing. This is the true mysticism, and the secret, inner meaning of life which humanity has at present, drifted so far from. (UD 406-407)

2. *"Sacrifice of life is of two kinds. To be killed for the Cause is not so difficult as to live for it in absolute obedience to the commands of God."* (Abdu'l-Bahá, in SW 5:VIII:6:65)

3. In this brief commentary, I propose another definition of True Mysticism. This definition neither supersedes nor is inferior to the previous one: 'The act of communing with the Souls of the Manifestations of God to such a degree that the communer attains the state of ecstatic joy leading to his physical martyrdom or to his living a life of self-sacrifice and saintliness'.

Appendices

Appendix I

Bibliography of the Bahá'í Writings and their abbreviations used in this book*

- ABL** 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, Commemorative ed. London, UK: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987
- ADJ** Shoghi Effendi. *Advent of Divine Justice*, 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990
- BA** Shoghi Effendi. *Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
- BP** compilation. *Bahá'í Prayers*.
- BW** World Centre Publications. *Bahá'í World, The*, volumes I (1925) through XX (1986-92); new series 1993-2004. Haifa, Israel: World Centre Publications, 1925-2004
- BWF** compilation. *Bahá'í World Faith*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976
- ESW** Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi. *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988
- FWU** 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Foundations of World Unity*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979
- GDM** Bahá'u'lláh, trans. World Centre Publications. *Gems of Divine Mysteries*. Haifa, Israel: World Center Publications
- GPB** Shoghi Effendi. *God Passes By*, 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
- GWB** Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983
- HW** Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Marzieh Gail. *Hidden Words*. Numerous editions.
- INBA** compilation. *Iranian National Bahá'í Archives* (also called INBMC, Iranian National Bahá'í Manuscript Collection). Tehran, Iran: 1976
- KA** Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi and the Bahá'í World Centre. *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
- KI** Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi. *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983
- KJV** King James Version, The Bible. Numerous editions.
- LG** compilation. *Lights of Guidance*. India: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
- MUHJ63** Universal House of Justice, comp. Geoffry W. Marks. *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-86: The Third Epoch of the Formative Age*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996

PB	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh: To The Kings and Leaders of the World</i> . Haifa, Israel: World Centre Publications
PBA	Shoghi Effendi. <i>Principles of Bahá'í Administration</i> . London, UK: Bahá'í Publishing Trust,
PM	Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi. <i>Prayers and Meditations</i> , 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987
PT	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Paris Talks</i> . Ontario: Nine Pines Publishing.
PUP	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Promulgation of Universal Peace</i> , 2nd ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982
Q	Qur'án. Numerous editions.
SAQ	'Abdu'l-Bahá, comp. and trans. Laura Clifford Barney. <i>Some Answered Questions</i> , 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
SDC	'Abdu'l-Bahá, trans. Marzieh Gail. <i>Secret of Divine Civilization</i> , 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990
SLH	Bahá'u'lláh, trans. World Centre Publications. <i>Summons of the Lord of Hosts</i> . Australia: Bahá'í Publications Australia,
SVFV	Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Marzieh Gail. <i>Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys</i> , 4th ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991
SW	World Centre Publications. <i>Star of the West</i> , CD-ROM ed. Heltonville, IN: Special Ideas, 2001
SWAB	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá</i> . Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
SWB	Báb, The. <i>Selections from the Writings of the Báb</i> . Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
TAB	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas</i> , volumes 1-3
TAF	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Tablet to Auguste Forel</i> .
TB	Bahá'u'lláh, comp. Research Department of the UHJ, trans. Habib Taherzadeh. <i>Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i> , 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988
TN	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Traveller's Narrative</i> , A. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
UD	Shoghi Effendi. <i>Unfolding Destiny</i> . London, UK: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
WOB	Shoghi Effendi. <i>World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters</i> , 1st pocket ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991

* No formal list of abbreviations exists, but semi-formal lists can be derived from abbreviations used by the Baha'i World Centre. First, a partial list is in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-86* xxx. Second, the BWC downloads site has a list of their filename abbreviations at <http://library.bahai.org/README/README-TREE.htm>. Those two have been combined. See more at <http://bahai-library.com/?file=abbreviations>

Appendix II

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