

# The World Wide Web

## An Owner's Manual for Bahá'í Youth



### Introduction

The Internet has transformed many aspects of our lives. For Bahá'í youth, it opens new opportunities for communication, collaboration and research. As noted in *Century of Light* (p. 132):

"Internet communication, which has the ability to transmit in seconds the entire contents of libraries that took centuries of study to amass, vastly enriches the intellectual life of anyone able to use it, as well as providing sophisticated training in a broad range of professional fields. The system, so prophetically foreseen sixty years ago by Shoghi Effendi, builds a sense of shared community among its users that is impatient of either geographic or cultural distances."

The Internet actually includes many different services, from email to file transfers to the World Wide Web. In spite of its great promise, the Internet in general and the web in particular can also present challenges and even dangers for Bahá'ís, young and old alike. One of the biggest challenges is information overload. How can youth find the knowledge that they seek without drowning in a flood of facts or ideas? One of the greatest dangers lies in the ease with which web searches and links can take users to sites that they do not wish to see. This brief guide addresses both of these issues, then offers a list of some of the most interesting web sites for Bahá'í youth.

### Finding What You Want as a Bahá'í

The number of web sites is growing too fast to keep up with. Literally billions of documents await you in cyberspace, with millions more being added each day. For example, entering the word "web" on one major search engine returns links to more than a billion different web pages! How can you find the right needle in such a big haystack?

## *Web Portals*

The easiest and safest way to find what you're looking for is to let someone you trust do the work. So check out a Bahá'í web portal, especially one aimed at Bahá'í youth. What's a portal? Well, "portal" literally means "door" or "entrance." A web portal is a site that offers you a doorway (a gate!) to other places on the web, through links to relevant sites and services. When you want to find good Bahá'í web sites, this is where to start.

One of the best Bahá'í portals is the Bahá'í Faith Index, run by Casper Voogt. You can find it at <http://www.bahaindex.com>. (To visit any site mentioned here, when reading this on your computer you can click on the underlined link in this guide or copy and paste the address into your web browser.) Bahá'í Faith Index is regularly updated, adding new links and dropping those that have expired. It offers a host of great services, ranging from discussion forums to news stories to an event calendar - even Bahá'í clip art. Best of all, it has a whole section especially for Bahá'í youth. From the home page, click "Youth and Children" in the "Browse Bahá'í Links" box, or go directly to: [http://www.bahaindex.com/modules.php?name=Web\\_Links&op=viewlink&cid=21](http://www.bahaindex.com/modules.php?name=Web_Links&op=viewlink&cid=21).

Another good youth portal is Bahai-Youth.org, <http://www.bahai-youth.org>, which bills itself as "the most comprehensive list of Bahá'í Youth Communities and Workshops." It forms part of Furutan Çelebi's Bahá'í Internet Services (<http://www.bahai-internet-services.org/>), which concentrates on official Bahá'í web sites. It also offers lists of Bahá'í publishers, communities, media, schools and Associations for Bahá'í Studies, as well as links to Bahá'í devotional programmes and multi-lingual teaching materials. It even lets you sign up for a free Bahá'í email address (YourName@BahaiEmail.com.)

## *Search Engines and Reference Services*

Of course if you're looking for something other than a good Bahá'í site, these portals may not help you much. That's when more experienced web surfers turn to a search engine. If a portal works like a map, showing you how to get to destinations that someone else has already explored, a search engine is more like a compass, helping you explore previously uncharted territory. When you want to discover just what Shoghi Effendi meant by a particular historical reference, or investigate who says what about world peace, you need a search engine.

The most simplest, most popular search engine on the web is Google: <http://www.google.com/>. Type a word into its search box, press "enter," and watch it produce a list of thousands, even millions or billions, of "hits" (web pages that include your target word somewhere). Google ranks these in order of interest to other people, so with luck you'll find what you're looking for without visiting every one. Just click on the links to visit the pages that are most relevant to you. Spend some time learning how to use all of its search features (click on "Advanced Search" from the home page) and it becomes a great tool for researching topics related to the Faith.

For a different approach to web searching, try Vivisimo: <http://vivisimo.com>. It groups the sites it finds into categories. For example, let's say you wanted to know more about Krishna as a Manifestation of God. Try typing "Krishna" into Google and it will give you more than 2.5 million sites to visit - a bit too much to digest at once! To make matters worse, a quick glance at Google's first few results shows that most don't focus on the Person of Krishna. Type the same word into Vivisimo, though, and it will offer about 200 top picks grouped into categories such as Lord Krishna, Bhagavad-Gita, and the Hare Krishna movement. You could ignore the last one (unless you wanted to know more about that particular sect) to concentrate on sites about Krishna Himself. Of course the selection is much more limited, but the results are easier to digest. And if you want a broader offering, the right side of the page still lets you see 1.5 million results.

Ask Jeeves (<http://www.ask.com/>) takes still another approach to simpler searching. It lets you ask questions in natural language. For example, "who was Krishna?" yields more than a million sites from which you can choose, some of which are obviously relevant and others that are not. It also offers related topics such as "Story of Krishna" and "Lord Krishna." It's "Smart Search" technology replies to questions such as "who is George Washington?" with separate answers (such as encyclopedia citations and photographs) in addition to web links. Right now Ask Jeeves only checks its own database, but it's planning to add full web searches that respond to the same kinds of natural questions.

Another very useful site is Refdesk, <http://www.refdesk.com>, which claims to be "the single best source for facts on the Net." It is a research portal, offering links to tools such as search engines (including Google), dictionaries, encyclopaedias, almanacs, news stories and tech tools - all available online for free. For a list of country-specific search engines and directories (including several for Africa), check out <http://www.searchenginecolossus.com/>.

Learning how to ask the right question is the real key to getting the most value out of any search engine. Take a look at the advanced search and tips links from any search engine home page for more help. You can find more web searching tips and search engine directories at <http://searchenginewatch.com/facts/>. Just don't assume that what you find through any of these services is accurate. Much of the information on the web is only personal opinion that can be misleading or even erroneous.

If you want to be able to find things in the Writings and other Bahá'í books, you'll need a different kind of search engine - one that searches Bahá'í texts rather than the web. These days the best-known example is Ocean (available online at <http://www.bahai-education.org/ocean/>), but there are many other options. Some of them let you work online; others install on your personal computer. You can learn more about the different possibilities at <http://www.homestead.com/watsongregory/files/searchABRIDGED.html>

## Avoiding What You Don't Want as a Bahá'í

Once explorers move beyond their maps, they may face unexpected perils. Bahá'í youth face similar dangers when exploring the web. It is surprisingly easy to start looking for something about which you want to know more but end up on a site that you definitely don't want to see. This is why good Bahá'í portals are so helpful; you can trust their results.

One of the most obvious examples of such danger is the kind of site that violates Bahá'í teachings, such as hate sites and, especially, pornography. The number of pornographic web pages has increased by a factor of 20 in the past five years, to an estimated 260 million pages. One study suggests that 70 percent of teenagers have accidentally come across pornography on the web, so it's likely to happen to you. The good news is that you can easily spot inappropriate sites, and escape is only a click (on your browser's "back" button) away.

You may also find yourself on sites run by people who do not like, or do not understand, the Bahá'í Faith. Some sites run by enemies of the Cause oppose the Faith directly, often misrepresenting our teachings. You may even find attacks by those who identify themselves as Bahá'ís. Fortunately, the *Guardian* reassures us:

"We should welcome, therefore, not only the open attacks which its avowed enemies persistently launch against [the Cause], but should also view as a blessing in disguise every storm of mischief with which they who apostatise their faith or claim to be its faithful exponents assail it from time to time. Instead of undermining the Faith, such assaults, both from within and from without, reinforce its foundations, and excite the intensity of its flame. Designed to becloud its radiance, they proclaim to all the world the exalted character of its precepts, the completeness of its unity, the uniqueness of its position, and the pervasiveness of its influence."

(From a letter dated 21 March 1930 to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters", pp. 15-16)

Web sites run by Covenant breakers pose the greatest dangers to faithful Bahá'ís of all ages, for two reasons. First, as the *Guardian's* Secretary wrote, "Covenant Breaking is truly a Spiritual disease, and the whole view-point and attitude of a Covenant Breaker is so poisonous that the Master likened it to leprosy, and warned the friends to breathe the same air was dangerous" (*Lights of Guidance*, p. 183). Second, Covenant breakers are often extremely devious, luring unsuspecting believers into their distortions. While unchaste or antagonistic web sites make their messages clear from the beginning, Covenant-breaking sites may seem perfectly normal. For example, you might never question a site featuring a picture of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on its home page. But some Covenant-breaking sites use the beloved Master's image for just this perverse reason.

So what should you do if you find yourself on a site that you think may be run by Covenant breakers? Just leave. If you are concerned that you may be affected by something that you inadvertently read, you can contact your Auxiliary Board Member for guidance. Alternatively, if you live in Africa you may email the Continental Board of Counsellors for Africa directly at [cbcafrica@mweb.co.za](mailto:cbcafrica@mweb.co.za). (In other parts of the world, of course, contact your own Auxiliary Board Member or Counsellor.)

## Recommended Bahá'í Portals

The nature of the web means that sites come and go frequently. Sometimes addresses change. This is another reason that your best starting point is always a trusted Bahá'í portal site, such as one of the following:

Bahá'í Faith Index: <http://www.bahaindex.com>.

A host of great services described above under "Web Portals." For the youth section, click "Youth and Children" in the "Browse Bahá'í Links" box, or go directly to:

[http://www.bahaindex.com/modules.php?name=Web\\_Links&l\\_op=viewlink&cid=21](http://www.bahaindex.com/modules.php?name=Web_Links&l_op=viewlink&cid=21)

Bahai-Youth.org: <http://www.bahai-youth.org/>

Also described above, this forms part of Bahá'í Internet Services (<http://www.bahai-internet-services.org/>) and concentrates on official Bahá'í web sites.

A Bahá'í Faith Page: [www.bahaivision.com/](http://www.bahaivision.com/)

Glen Little's personal collection of links to many Bahá'í web pages on the Internet creates a useful Bahá'í portal. In-depth information can be found here, as well as more photos and personal pages by other believers. His link to youth resources can be found at <http://www.bcca.org/bahaivision/p0400.html>.

## Some Interesting Sites for Bahá'í Youth

The following list focuses on English-language sites of possible interest to Bahá'í youth, including those in Africa. It is not meant to be comprehensive or definitive. But each site listed has been recommended and visited recently. Remember that some of these suggestions may be out-of-date. For the latest version of this guide and these links, go to <http://www.bahaindex.com/documents/youthguide.pdf>. (This requires Adobe Reader, available for free at <http://www.adobe.com/>.) And check your favourite Bahá'í portal site for the most recent recommendations.

Please feel free to make comments or suggest additions by sending an email to [phil@thechristensens.org](mailto:phil@thechristensens.org). Many thanks to all those friends who have offered their recommendations for this list!

### *Bahá'í Sites and Services for Youth*

B-Youth.com: <http://www.b-youth.com/>

A site aimed at hosting free Bahá'í community and institution web pages, including some youth organisations. Not very many sites or links right now, but its webmaster is looking for more "funky Bahá'í sites."

BahaIndiaYouth.com: <http://www.bahaindiayouth.com>

Official Bahá'í youth web site of India.

BAHAIYOUTH.COM: <http://www.bahaiyouth.com/>

BAHAIYOUTH.COM is produced by the Youth Desk under the National Teaching Committee and the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. A rich site with an active forum section. "Feel connected with your Faith. Get connected to other Bahá'í youth. Blazon the Name of Bahá'u'lláh. Learn, deepen, laugh, share, listen, serve, and interact with your peers from all over the place. Make lasting friendships, learn something new, help someone out, get ideas for service, and find out what's going on. This is your space, your place to get what you need and give back what you can in service to the Faith."

Bahá'í Youth Web Forums: <http://hillington.no-ip.com/yabbse/>

A good place to hang out and post messages for other youth. Hosted by the Hillingdon (Texas) Bahá'í Youth Committee. They say, "Our web site is just one of our projects, and we want it to be a place where everybody can come and chat about the Faith. You don't have to be from Hillingdon (hardly anybody is) and you don't even have to be a youth. If you need something or want to give your view/idea, we don't mind how old you are, even if you are not Bahá'í you are still more than welcome here."

Bahá'í Youth Web Ring: <http://c.webring.com/webring?ring=bahaiyouth;list>

A ring of Bahá'í youth web sites from around the world. You can choose specific ones to visit or even try them in random order. Only five sites listed right now, though.

Bahaiworld.com's Youth Page: <http://www.bahaiworld.com/youth/>

Features discussion, news, links and downloads suggested by visitors.

Fertile Field: <http://www.fertilefield.org>

Fertile Field is the online inspirational, motivational magazine for students on campus, inspired by the Bahá'í Faith. Sponsored by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States.



Generation of Hope: <http://www.genofhope.org>

A multi-faceted project with two primary objectives. On the one hand, it serves Bahá'í communities in each area through proclamation events, firesides, and deepening programs. On the other hand, it serves the greater community by raising awareness in youth of the negative forces threatening our society, illustrating the power of youth as the generation of hope for their countries, and challenging them to become active agents of change. Who will add Africa to their list of regions served?

International Bahá'í Young Leaders Forum: <http://www.egroups.com/subscribe/ibylf>

Bringing together a wide variety of young professionals, students and leaders from diverse fields, this association helps young Bahá'í professionals to discover and draw upon each other's talents. You will need to register online with Yahoo Groups in order to participate.

Living Waters: <http://www.geocities.com/lunaesia>

A nice example of what an individual Bahá'í youth can do on the web. A site for inspiration, learning, and the sharing of dreams. Poetry, essays, and personal stories on Bahá'í topics.

Phoenix Magazine Online: <http://phoenix.warble.com/ppages/home.html>

Latest news, events and resources relating to the UK Bahá'í youth community. Live chat rooms, message board, photos and resources, and events calendar. (Site closed as of March, 2005, but may be reopening soon under new management)

radioNUR: <http://www.radionur.com>

The world's first full-time Bahá'í internet music-based radio station. In addition to the regular music programming, which is a mix of classical to classic rock, rap to rock, world-beat to gospel, folk to jazz and everything in between - all with Bahá'í themes, radioNUR also plays a variety of educational and informational programs for adults and children in English and Spanish.

### *General Bahá'í Sites and Services of Potential Interest to Youth*

BahaiEmail.com: <http://www.bahaiemail.com/>

Part of Bahá'í Internet Services, this site offers free web-based email accounts. Your email address would look like this: "YourName@BahaiEmail.com."

Bahá'í International Community: <http://www.bic-un.bahai.org/>

Lots of informative papers in the Statement Library.

### Bahá'í Internet Update

The Bahá'í Internet Update is a monthly digest of the newest in the Bahá'í internet world. Whether you want to keep yourself up to date on the latest happenings in the Bahá'í Internet world, or you wish to share this information with your community, this mailing list is for you. Subscribe by registering at the Bahá'í Faith Index page: <http://www.bahaindex.com/>.

### Bahá'í Library Online: <http://bahai-library.com/>

A private site, managed by Jonah Winters, with primary and secondary texts, as well as resource materials, in English, French and Spanish. Great resource for deepening - and for those school papers! (See also the Bahá'í Reference Library below.)

### Bahá'í Prayers: <http://www.bahaiprayers.org/>

Created as a celebration of the beauty of the Bahá'í scriptures. Visit the Languages page for links to many non-English versions of the Bahá'í Prayers, including two African languages: Afrikaans and Setswana.

### Bahá'í Reference Library: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/>

This is the official online home of the Bahá'í Writings. The Bahá'í International Community describes it as "...an authoritative, voluminous Web site housing Sacred Writings of the Faith. In addition to Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá in their original Arabic or Persian, the Web site includes the English language translations of Sacred Texts; writings, messages and letters from the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice; and works by other authors."

### Bahá'í Study Site: <http://www.bahaistudy.org/>

This site offers a variety of ways to learn about the Bahá'í Faith. You may take introductory online classes, read answers to common questions, watch videos and listen to recorded talks. Not only can you read the Bahá'í Writings, you can even download them as audio files and listen to them on your computer or MP3 player.

### The Bahá'í World: <http://www.bahai.org/>

This site, maintained by the Bahá'í International Community office, represents "the official presence of the Bahá'í Faith on the Web." Its orientation is towards introducing non-Bahá'ís to the Faith, but you'll also find useful information for Bahá'ís here, including Sacred Writings, statements and essays.

### Bahá'í World News Service: <http://www.bahaiworldnews.org/>

Reports on the activities, projects and events of the worldwide Bahá'í community. Email subscriptions available.



Core Curriculum Training Materials for Youth and Adults:

[http://www.education.usbnc.org/trn\\_mtrls\\_yth\\_adlts.htm](http://www.education.usbnc.org/trn_mtrls_yth_adlts.htm).

The Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education series offers not only a comprehensive learning experience for youth and adults, but also the opportunity for people to deeply explore the principles of Bahá'í education and participate in a systematic process of providing direct service.

Gregory Kagira-Watson's Home Page: <http://gw.homestead.com>.

Another useful personal page. This one focuses on culture, religion, science and education from a Bahá'í perspective. A related link will take you to transcriptions of talks by members of the Universal House of Justice:

<http://gw.homestead.com/membersTalks.htm>.

Ocean Student Research Library: <http://www.bahai-education.org/ocean/>

Here's a youth site that the whole Bahá'í world uses! Download a wonderful research tool for free and keep your library updated via the Internet. Now includes writings from eight world religions in addition to a very comprehensive Bahá'í collection.

One Country: <http://www.onecountry.org/>

The online newsletter of the Bahá'í International Community. Published quarterly, each 16-page issue contains two or three in-depth feature stories on the United Nations, noteworthy social and economic development projects, environmental efforts or educational programs, along with an editorial that addresses world problems from a Bahá'í point of view.

Planet Bahá'í: <http://www.planetbahai.org/>

Another rich Bahá'í portal with interesting articles and links as well as a chat room. (The chat room requires registration.)

Uplifting Words: <http://www.upliftingwords.org/>

A good general portal site, with useful links to Bahá'í information and resources. Also offers brief, inspiring quotes from the Bahá'í Writings by email.

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Latest version available at <http://www.bahaindex.com/documents/youthguide.pdf>

(courtesy of Bahá'í Faith Index). Requires Adobe Reader (free download from <http://www.adobe.com/> by clicking on the "Get Adobe Reader link).