

**IMPRESSIONS FROM THE ROCK OF GIBRALTAR:
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Good to Go: August 20, 2009

Within only nine days left before departure, things have fallen into place for Gibraltar. Janet Waterfield, a kind friend of English Bahá'í, Ann Dymond, informed me by telephone that she has a flat available to rent at 503 Neptune House, Marina Bay. The good news is that the flat is available for the whole three months duration of my stay. Janet recently made the acquaintance of senior believer, Ann, who was the first Bahá'í who came to Gibraltar in Holy Year 1992, the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension. I have never been to that small, densely populated (7 square kilometres) overseas territory of Great Britain, but I understand that Marina Bay is a fine, central location. Sam Benoit, a recent university graduate and son of old friends, Wendy James and Bernard Benoit, is going to sublet my furnished apartment. This will be a great help since I won't have to carry two rents at the same time

Any pioneer or travel-teacher should not forget that serving the Faith, although it brings confirmations and rewards, can also bring tests and difficulties. They are a built-in component of service. I suppose that if Bahá'u'lláh did not find that His believers had the capacity for spiritual growth and service, He would not put us to the test at all. But as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written, these tests prove to be either stumbling-blocks or stepping-stones, just as we make them.

Arrival: August 30, 2009

I arrived early yesterday evening at 6:15 pm local time. Today, the 31st, is my first day in Gibraltar. I like very much what I see, with the convergence of the several strong natural elements: the ever-present massive and dominating

limestone Rock of Gibraltar, the confluence of the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, the Bay and further out, the Straits of Gibraltar, the sea-salt air, the many ocean going vessels in the harbour and on the Mediterranean, the quay, ferry, marina and port facilities, and the ever-present ocean breeze and open sky.

Number 503 Neptune House is a solid, balconied, white stucco flat complex, built in the Spanish style on Marina Bay which I have rented for three months from Janet Waterfield mentioned above. (Janet prefers cheaper living just across the border in La Linea, but rents out this flat to supplement her income). As the name Marina Bay suggests, luxury pleasure craft, including yachts and sailboats are anchored close by in the Marina, just metres from Neptune House, and are anchored at the boardwalk that is lined with modern shops, cafés and restaurants. A fitness center, boat tours for dolphin-watching, sailing and scuba-diving facilities are all available. For gamblers, the imposing, sleek, modern Gala Casino here in Ocean Village is ready to receive those who seek the thrill of winning at the gaming tables. Bingo is a hot item, I'm told.

Although I am usually a light sleeper, I slept soundly last night being exhausted from about eighteen hours of travel. To save a few hundred dollars, I took the long way around, bussing to Pierre Elliot Trudeau airport (Montreal) from Ottawa, flying to Paris (Air France), backtracking from Paris to London-Heathrow, then bussing to Gatwick airport, and taking off from there to Gib, as the locals call it, where I arrived at 6:15 p.m. after a two and a half hour flight, touching down at Gibraltar's small but busy airport.

At first, I thought the longer trip was not worth the time and energy, with the extended travel-time, and all the security checkpoints to negotiate, until a chance meeting at Gatwick airport caused me to reflect on a certain divine wisdom in my circuitous route. (See the section below, "I Meet the Niece of Bahá'í Alfredo Danino at the Gatwick airport"). I was met at the Gibraltar airport by four friends: Suresh Malkani, who is originally from India, the married couple Pouneh Varghai and Dr. Harald Veen, an M.D. from Holland, and Janet Waterfield. Pouneh and Janet had never met but managed to recognize one another somehow at the airport. Suresh dropped Janet and me off at the flat. Once she handed over the keys and had given me a quick tour of the premises, Janet, a very energetic woman who is always on the move, was off.

The View From the Balcony: The Victoria Stadium Sports Centre and Airport

Picture yourself looking down from a fifth floor spacious Spanish style two bedroom apartment, with eggshell coloured walls, high ceilings, white cornices and tiled white floors swirled with grey, onto an adjacent gigantic indoor and outdoor sports complex. The Victoria Stadium Sports Centre is outfitted with not only a stadium but also —count them—a total of twelve outdoor fields and courts of various sizes for football (soccer), field hockey, called grass hockey here, basketball, volleyball, badminton, athletics, aerobics and net ball. Net ball is the game of choice, preferred to tennis by Gibraltarians and Spaniards alike, who play and shout on these courts and fields all day, despite the heat. The sports continue well into the night under bright lights. As I write, it's almost ten pm and I hear the players shouting and cheering on their team-mates on one of the illuminated soccer fields. The surface area of the sports complex easily takes up the dimensions of several large city blocks.

Now picture an airport runway located directly on the other side of the high security fence that divides the tarmac from the sports complex, with jets landing and taking off several times a day and night from London, England and Spain. Now strangely enough—because I am normally sensitive to noise because of my tinnitus—the noise of the jets doesn't bother me because the take-off and landing are not continuous. It's even rather exciting to watch them lift off only 500 metres away! When the planes take off in a westward direction, rising over the Atlantic, they lift off at a point that is roughly vis-à-vis the position of this apartment building. I particularly enjoy the loud thrust at the moment of lift-off. But I can't say I enjoy the after-odour of the jet fuel, depending on which way the wind is blowing.

Gibraltar's small airport may be the only one in the world where the jet planes taxi right across the main highway, Sir Winston Churchill Avenue, that leads to La Linea, Spain, which is literally a stone's throw away from the airport. You can walk to 503 Neptune House on Marina Bay in about 15 minutes from there. As the planes approach, signal lights are activated, barriers lowered, and bilingual announcements in English and Spanish echo off the pavement as the cars, motor scooters, bicycles and pedestrians stand and wait patiently until the plane

has not only landed and taxied up to the gate. A steady stream of humanity crosses that border all day long, and into the night. Now look over in the opposite direction, to the East, about a half-mile away. There, as steadfast as a high mountain, stands the flank of the mighty Rock of Gibraltar, 1400 feet straight up. This is, of course, the great icon for which this tiny but densely populated isthmus is known.

The Native Gibraltar Identity: English and Spanish

It seems like a cultural oddity this Mediterranean living in English, with the steady stream of a good number of British tourists seeking warmer climes, the Gibraltarians themselves, proudly British, and the Spanish presence of some estimated 5000 legal (and 2000 illegal) workers who cross the border daily at La Linea to work in Gibraltar. When I arrived, I was told by a young Gibraltarian woman at the airport that “everyone in Gibraltar speaks English,” but my first impression is that Main Street sounds decidedly like a Spanish-speaking town, with English being spoken only occasionally, mainly by British tourists, despite the entrenched status that English enjoys as the official language. Service in the shops is usually bilingual but one can occasionally find a salesperson who does not speak English. These people are usually hired at minimum wage from Spain or Morocco.

A stranger has to rely on local reports. I have been told that although English is the official language of the government, the schools, the local newspapers, and the financial institutions, Spanish is the preferred language of social and family intercourse. It naturally carries over into commerce when Gibraltarians do business with one another. The use of Spanish is only natural considering Gibraltar’s close proximity to Spain and consequently to the Mediterranean culture. The towns of La Linea and Gibraltar are really mutual extensions of one another. Despite the celebrations on National Day (Sept. 10th) that Gibraltar is proudly British, and despite the acrimonious history between Spain and Gibraltar, extending back over hundreds of years to 1704 when the British first conquered Gibraltar, Gibraltarians and Spaniards often intermarry and many Gibraltarians own a second home across the border in Spain. Even as I write these words, I hear Spanish, not English, being called out from one player to another on the net ball courts below Neptune House. History may dictate that Gibraltar and Spain are enemies, but cultural affinities have it that they are friends

and neighbours. Some sports fans in Gibraltar cheer for Real Madrid or Barcelona football teams instead of English clubs. This tells us something about the ambiguous identity of being Gibraltarian.

Janito, the Andalusian local version of Spanish, contains a sizeable admixture of foreign words and phrases from English, Arabic, Maltese, Italian and Spanish etc. but it is usually punctuated with shorter English phrases, as the speaker passes easily from one language to the other, with Spanish being dominant. Spaniards find Janito quaint or provincial and tend to belittle it as a second-rate Spanish, but the Gibraltarians make no apologies for their linguistic identity. Gibraltarians are, of course, Spanish speakers because of the close proximity to Spain, but I am told that their accent gives them away.

To my Canadian ears, Gibraltarian English sounds very much like British English, except that it lacks the ease and familiarity of familiar English expressions and/or slang. Thus, Gibraltarian English tends to be a vehicular language of government, business and the schools rather than a spontaneous language that conveys a distinct local culture. There are, of course, exceptions to this general observation, depending on the number of years a Gibraltarian has been educated in the U.K. or whether or not he or she has English friends or family in Gibraltar. However, the British who reside here tell me that Gibraltarian English does not sound like “true” British English to their ears. It would be interesting for a linguist to investigate the roots of the Gibraltarian English accent, which has been influenced by the various Latin languages as well as the Irish and English accents. (Gibraltarians were evacuated to England and Ireland and other places during World War II). Gibraltarians have the curious habit of raising their intonation even when using declarative sentences, as if they are asking a question. This gives a certain charm to their speech which sounds vaguely Irish, at least to my ears. Vowels and constants are distinctly articulated, although in some speakers one clearly hears the influence of Spanish. Again the level of formal education is telling.

Meeting the Niece of Bahá’í Alfredo Danino at the Gatwick Airport

Since the declaration of Bahá’u’lláh’s mission, the old saying “It’s a small world” has taken on greater meaning. The world has by now shrunk considerably. I

discovered a direct connection between the Faith and Gibraltar while I was still in the U.K. At the Gatwick airport, my transit point to Gibraltar via Heathrow, I chatted with a senior couple and their daughter who looked to be in her late thirties or early forties. The black-haired, brown-eyed elegantly dressed and graceful mother was a genuine Gibraltarian, while her husband was English, with many years spent in “Gib” as the locals call it. As it turned out, much to my surprise, the lady’s uncle, Alfredo Danino, now deceased, was a Bahá’í! He lived mostly in Spain, but the friends told me on my first night in Gibraltar that he became a believer on the isthmus and lived here at some point. I don’t know whether this was before or after the arrival of Ann Dymond, the first to pioneer to Gibraltar.

This lady freely admitted to loving uncle Alfredo: “He was all goodness,” she said. (I was so glad that Alfredo had made a positive impression, rather than none at all, or worse still, a negative one). “I had access to his books, and I remember reading about humanity being like the different colours of the flowers in the garden,” she said. She was obviously pleased with the poetic simile and remembered it clearly. After we continued on our respective journeys, I felt that this meeting could not have been coincidental. What were the statistical chances, I wondered, of a meeting occurring in Gatwick airport between a travelling teacher from Canada, and a lady from Gibraltar whose uncle was a rare Bahá’í? I felt that the way was being prepared even before I had left England.

I found a hidden wisdom by virtue of my having taken the long way round to Gibraltar; had I not gone via Gatwick, I would have never met the gracious niece of Alfredo Danino, nor perhaps even learned his name. In meeting Alfredo Danino’s niece, I received a divine confirmation of a watchful Providence at the very outset of my journey. I felt sure that Alfredo had inspired the meeting with his niece from a heavenly place. Later, I discovered Alfredo’s image in the photo of the first nine members of the Gibraltar L.S.A. (1995).

I have heard other “coincidental” stories from the pioneers here. The current L.S.A. chair, Trevor Richardson, happened to be the very first person that Bahá’í Ken Bishop spoke to when he arrived in Gibraltar from the U.K. in the early 1990’s, before the L.S.A. was formed. Ken was passing by the Carpenter’s Arms on Main Street—the carpenter being Jesus—a restaurant run by volunteers from the Wesleyan Church. Ken asked Trevor : “Is the food any good up there?” (The

alcohol free restaurant is found on the first floor). Trevor replied that the food was good and recommended the place to Ken. Unbeknownst to one another, Ken and Trevor were both Bahá'ís, and much to their mutual surprise, they met again at a Bahá'í meeting that very evening. So it seems that what the world calls “coincidence” is just God’s way of saying that He is present. These small stories are illustrative of a much larger pattern. Every pioneer, no matter where or when in the world she has served, has remarkable stories to tell. Our “Acts of the Apostles” would constitute a veritable encyclopaedia since the number of pioneers in Bahá'u'lláh's army is vast. His confirmations are limitless. They will reach each and every soul who arises, no matter how long the term of service, or regardless of the conditions. This is the emphatic promise contained in our writings and Bahá'u'lláh keeps His promises. It has been proven time and time again.

This morning I walked to Casemates Square, the large military square and very spot where the Moorish conqueror Tariq ibn Zayid landed in 711 C.E. The English word Gibraltar derives from his name Jabel Tariq, meaning Tariq's mountain. In those bygone days, the waters surrounding Gibraltar reached to the arches of the former Water Gate that marks the entrance to Casemates Square. But the land has since been reclaimed, as in other areas of Gib. Casemates is bordered now mainly by restaurants, cafés, pubs, restaurants and shops. Even here one cannot escape the ubiquitous American commercial market. A Burger King has just recently opened on Casemates Square, an opening I could have well done without since it reminds me of American neon fast food “eateries” and unhealthy food! I decided on “British” fish and chips for breakfast, one of my favourite foods, but I specified that the batter be light. Food purists would object to my mixing protein with carbohydrates, but fish ‘n chips is reasonably healthy, provided the cooking oil is fairly fresh. Fish ‘n chips brings back happy childhood memories when Dad brought them home wrapped in newspaper. However, even as a young person I was not too fond of the battered fish on black ink.

I like the large open area of Casemates Square where I can watch the people come and go and sit and think. I can think of no better spot to spend my mornings. Afterwards, I walked about a kilometre down Main Street, a fairly narrow thoroughfare which was the once trafficked main street of Gibraltar. It is now densely packed with shops, as before, but now Main Street is a pedestrian zone only, except for utility and emergency vehicles. I stopped to pick up today's *The*

Times and chatted with the proprietor, learning something about his family history—Italian and British, his Scottish side dating back to the early days of Gibraltar, after the British conquest in 1704. (The British were allied with the Dutch during the military offensive). Further along, I stopped in an electronics shop, open despite today’s bank holiday, and inquired from the Indian owner about reactivating my mobile phone while in Gibraltar. After shopping for “fruit and veg” at Morrison’s superstore, the exact replica of Morrison’s in Britain, I walked home in the heat and humidity, lugging my groceries with me, and having to ask for directions a few times along the way, but feeling grateful, nonetheless, for this wonderful change of scenery and the opportunity to do some service in a community that has extended me such a loving welcome.

Getting Connected at the Café Solo: September 1, 2009

Today in Casemates Square, I discovered the Café Solo, an Italian style restaurant, next door to the Gibraltar Crystal and Glass Factory. Café Solo is clean, cool, spacious, modern, displays art for purchase and offers free wireless Internet service (Wi-Fi). Just the type of place I like, even though it is too noisy when full because of the echoing stone walls and hardwood floors. So I will continue the same routine at Casemates as I do at home in Ottawa: head out each morning for the coffee shop, order a coffee—served here with milk in a glass instead of a cup—connect to the Internet, check emails and do some writing. I have met the owner, Alistair, originally from Scotland and some of the staff, the manager Frank and friendly waitress Rachael. I have let them know that I will be a regular for the next three months. Rachel is from Britain, and is married to a Gibraltarian. She is an acquaintance of Fiona Young, the young secretary of the LSA.

I didn’t have my laptop computer with me this morning since I had some grocery shopping to do, so I will have to do my connecting tomorrow morning. I hope that I don’t have any connectivity problems since I must rely on my email to send my responses to the Ottawa Citizen for Saturday’s “Ask the Religion Experts” page. But if for some reason my laptop does not connect at Café Solo, there are other options such as using one of the several internet cafés or using the PC of one of the friends. I naturally don’t yet feel completely familiar with Gibraltar; it’s too soon. But I am establishing my routine and slowly finding my way around the Rock. Much information is coming my way from helpful friends:

bits of cultural information about Gibraltarians and their history, and their ambiguous relations with the Spaniards, tips on tourist sites to visit, and the names of buildings of historical interest. A bit of a learning curve is involved in being “a stranger in a strange land.” Of course, Gibraltar is not entirely strange because the English language holds the key to the rest, and a travel-teacher has a ready-made Bahá’í community wherever he or she goes, but nonetheless so much information can be only gradually assimilated. By the end of the three months, I should know Gib well enough so that next time around—should there be a next time—I will be more familiar with my surroundings.

Since the beginning of this journey, and just as I do at home, whenever the opportunity arises, I mention the Faith. I have heard or read either a pilgrim’s note or in a letter from Shoghi Effendi to a believer that we should mention the Faith to someone every day if we can. It will potentially benefit any seeker to hear the name “Bahá’í,” for with that most potent of all words, the seed is planted and a potential spiritual journey is set in motion. Today I walked to Morrison’s Superstore with an English woman and mentioned that I was here for three months of service to the Bahá’í community. I gave her a brief description of my duties. She listened politely, wished me well on my “project” once we arrived, but asked no questions. Nor did the Irish couple who are on their annual vacation with their two pre-teen children who are staying just a few doors over on the fifth floor of Neptune House. They were kind enough to volunteer tips for cheaper grocery shopping in La Linea and gave several suggestions for visiting in Gibraltar, i.e. where overseas phone calls can be made cheaply in Marina Bay at Albor’s newsstand on the boardwalk, and so on. To them too I mentioned the Faith. The husband seemed more receptive than the wife, affirming once in his conversation, with a certain ring of familiarity, something about “the Bahá’í community.” It seemed to me that by that remark a partial sympathetic identification was being made.

But if no questions are forthcoming, you can be sure that interest is not high, at least not at that moment. However, mentioning the Faith always plants a seed in the heart of the listener. Whether that seed will grow or die depends on a number of factors, including the spiritual predisposition of the listener, whether or not this seed has fallen on fertile ground, and whether conditions may be right in Bahá’í community for the eventual harvest. (I am thinking here of Christ’s marvellous

parable of the Divine Manifestation/Teacher as sower and seed as the Word of God, found in the three synoptic gospels).

I made an afternoon outing with the Irish couple and their children to Western Beach, on the other side of the runway, just beside the Ministry of Defence compound where Dr. Harald Veen (M.D.) and Pouneh Varghai and their two little children, Nura and Haifa live, and had a refreshing swim in the cool, salt waters of the bay. Waiting there for us was a mild and gentle Scottish lady from Glasgow named Lorraine with her two young boys, who were playing on the beach and hunting for small hermit crabs, the crustaceans that steal a sea shell from other tiny sea creatures because they cannot manufacture a shell of their own. These veritable little robbers look strange as they peer out of their stolen shells with little pincers, bulging eyes and antennas. Lorraine's husband works for Exxon Oil and commutes back and forth from Italy to Gibraltar every fifteen days. These days, being a member of the European Union and working for a transnational corporation means that one may end up working in any number of countries during one's career. Her boys are being schooled at the Loretto Catholic School in Gib. Generally, English-language schooling is excellent in Gibraltar.

Connected in Gibraltar: Welcomed by the Friends: September 3, 2009

I am now wi-fi connected in Gibraltar. I had no problems with my wireless connection at Café Solo; now I am able to send emails, including that important Bahá'í response for the weekly question in the Ottawa Citizen. That I didn't have problems connecting is fortunate indeed because although I am a computer literate, I barely make the grade, rather like a driver who just drives the car but needs a mechanic to fix it. At Café Solo, unlike Starbucks, no time limit is imposed on the Sapphire network, one of the service providers in Gib which competes with the "top dog" GibTelecom.

Last night, Rozita and Ramin Khalilian, at their apartment in Rosia, not far from Europa Point, where the Ibrahim al-Ibrahim mosque stands, hosted a welcoming dinner for me. It is a diverse Bahá'í community of four families consisting of about fifteen souls: one newborn girl, Shadi, daughter of Fiona and Peter Young; their other child Dylan; the two little children of Dr. Harald Veen and Pouneh Varghai, Nura and Haifa; Trevor Richardson and his two step-

children, teenager Aisha and young Robin; two junior youth, Kuresh and Kion Khalilian; one youth, their older sister Carmel, eighteen, who will be going off to university in Britain next year. At this time, Gibraltarians have one of the highest success rates in the English-speaking world in the number of high-scoring graduates from A-level examinations, their high-school leaving examinations. A-level graduates are given generous grants to attend university in Britain. In the past, Gibraltarians received generous treatment from the U.K. government. But I was told by a local whom I met at the bus stop on the way to Europa Point that, except for the Ministry of Defence in Gibraltar, which has been downsized, that Gibraltarians are financially independent from Britain. Once again, the ambiguous identity comes up; proud to be British but proud to be independent.

Among the friends I met last night were two seniors, Ken and Sarah Bishop. Sarah and Ken also spend time, they tell me, looking after their home on the Isle of Wight. After dinner, they invited me to speak when Trevor, the L.S.A. chair, asked me why I chose Gibraltar as my short-term pioneering post. With most of this diverse community being present, except for Suresh Malkani, who could not attend, it turned out to be a lively and enjoyable gathering. Trevor enjoys telling a good story and discussing spiritual matters. He drove me home, but we stopped by his flat in the Montague Estate so that he could lend me a bike, my usual mode of travel. (A bicycle would really help to familiarize me with the lay of the land in Gibraltar more quickly). He spent about an half-hour adjusting it, while I helped, but in the end I could not ride it home because of a bulging tire that kept jamming the wheel on the back brake. So I walked the mere five minutes back home to Marina Bay, enjoying the cool of the evening breeze, a welcome respite from the heat of the day.

Shopping in La Linea, Visiting Harald and Pounch Varghai Veen and Getting Wheels: September 4th 2009

Yesterday afternoon, I walked the approximately two miles in the hot sun to La Linea's Mercadona supermarket. I had been told it was cheaper than Morrison's which is quite expensive. I bought some groceries for about 25 Euros and lugged them back across the border, dividing them between my backpack and a recycled shopping bag. On the way, I dropped into see Harald Veen and Pounch Varghai who live in the Ministry of Defence compound. Harald was hired to practice

medicine in the clinic belonging to the M.O.D. near Eastern Beach. My flat in Marina Bay is about a fifteen minute walk from their place. The compound and Western Beach are clearly visible from my 5th floor balcony about one mile away, just across the runway of the Gibraltar Airport.

Harald and Pouneh are working well together in a cross-cultural Dutch-Iranian marriage. Harald is blond, blue-eyed and wears a short beard. He has exactly the same colouring and features as my long-time English friend in Gatineau, Quebec, Lynton Hutchison. Seen together, one would easily take Harald and Lynton for brothers. Harald and Pouneh's two children, little Nura, just a toddler, and the engaging, funny, independent-minded, blond-haired, blue-eyed Haifa, who began her first day of school yesterday, are keeping them both busy parents. Haifa is only four, but she is quite tall for a four year old. Little Haifa has a wonderful sense of humour. She is very open and affectionate. She is very playful and likes to be included in everything, except when we had the Sunday morning devotional at the Botanical Gardens; then she seemed content to run about on her own. Her parents have now given her permission to call me, not Jack, but Uncle Jack. Today Haifa told me, quite accurately, that I looked like a Grandpa.

Haifa was right because I have three small grandchildren. Her remark was perceptive for a four year old because Haifa had no way of knowing that I had three grandchildren, but then it is true that children have an uncanny way of speaking the plain truth. This morning I went to the Café Solo to check my emails and did some writing. While I was there Fiona Young, the capable secretary of the Gibraltar L.S.A., came in. She didn't see me at first so I greeted her and we had a brief chat. Her newborn baby girl, Shadi, was being cuddled by a friend outside on the square. Then I went across Casemates Square into the I.C.C. building (International Commercial Centre) where Suresh has a small sports shop. I went in and we chatted for about 15 minutes. Suresh was taught the Faith in Gibraltar by Ramin Khalilian about fifteen years ago. Suresh is very much integrated into the community. Suresh is a strong believer in Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for our day, the only reason, he says, that he became a Bahá'í. We have since had a number of lively, informative and enjoyable chats that are often punctuated with good humour.

In the morning I received a call from Ken Bishop on my mobile. Ken said that we could ride over to La Linea on his motorbike and pick up his bicycle which is currently being stored at a flat he sublets to Marjorie, an accountant friend who is originally from South Africa. Well, the tires were flat and the bike needed some adjustments and cleaning up, but the overall appearance of the aluminum-framed bicycle was quite solid. Ken suggested that I walk the bike over to Harald and Pouneh's, which was on my way home anyway, and ask Harald to make a few adjustments and pump up the tires. Harald is among the small but slowly growing number of cyclists in Gib. Well in no time, Harald had the bike in good running order and I biked back to Marina Bay. Having a bicycle will enable me to get around Gib and familiarize myself more quickly with the territory.

Evening in Casemates Square: Horizontal and Vertical Dimensions of Gibraltar: September 5, 2009

I am back at Casemates Square, checking my emails again. The square is very quiet for a Saturday night, with only a few people walking about, but the tempo may pick up later. It's still early—7:45 p.m. Some lovely jazz flute is floating in from just outside the door of the Café Solo where I am writing. A senior black musician, who calls himself Brother Wali, which he pronounces Wally, which is rendered as “friend” in one of the Arabic translations, is wearing a black cap and black T-shirt, and sporting three thin braids. Wali is playing a relaxed and lilting version of Cole Porter's “I've Got You Under My Skin.” His trio consists of flute, bass and drums.... Now the song is over. After a brief respite, he sings “Girl from Ipanema” in Portuguese. I love jazz, so the sound of this sudden soft music adds a welcome, unexpected charm to the evening calm.

Tomorrow morning I am attending a devotional in the Botanical (Alameda) Gardens further down the Rock, a stone's throw away from the Cable Car installation. They say here that “There are no distances in Gibraltar” and what distances there are, are becoming even shorter for me since Ken Bishop has loaned me his mountain bike. Ken's bike has the welcome addition of front fork suspension that softens the bumps considerably. Here if you say you are riding a “bike,” you may have to clarify what sort of bike it is because in the U.K. a “bike” can mean a motor bike. Ken, despite his senior years, moves about in one of the thousands of two-stroke motor scooters that dart here, there and everywhere across

Gibraltar. Now I can travel about Gib more quickly, and familiarize myself with the territory and its many features sooner. The ride to the Botanical Gardens is about fifteen minutes away, I'm told.

Seven square kilometres is, of course, not a large territory if one takes the land only horizontally, but Gib has many vertical dimensions, which are found in its long history, and several blended cultures: Maltese, Italian, Spanish, Moroccan, Arab, British, Jewish, etc. The vertical dimension is literal in the building boom of luxury apartments and subsidized housing that is going full swing here. Many ancient buildings and spots of historical interest are found all over this walled city. One sees reminders everywhere that Gibraltar was originally a land and sea garrison, long before it became an air force base, but the military installations are being devolved since both Britain and Spain are members of NATO. In years past, I was told by one of the locals this morning, the military presence was much greater. Uniformed soldiers filled the city, not only Brits but other soldiers, sailors and airmen from places around the Mediterranean Sea coast. However, Spain has never renounced its claim to Gibraltar and considers it an integral part of its territory, even though it signed off on all claims "in perpetuity" at the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. Some say that Spain has put its claim to Gibraltar "on the back burner" but others say that they will continue to press a claim to sovereignty over the isthmus.

Interfaith activities are pursued at a leisurely pace here. With four synagogues, two mosques, two cathedrals (Anglican and Roman Catholic), several churches professing Protestant confessions, a Hindu temple, Al Mandir, and of course, the People of Bahá, Gib presents a multi-faith community packed into a small space. All these religions get along very well as does the larger Gibraltar community of 28,000 inhabitants. One theory has it that strict British military justice contributed to interfaith harmony here since the garrison could not afford that military discipline be troubled by internal religious dissensions. I'm told that early soldier-missionaries of the Wesleyan church were severely punished for evangelizing their faith. This Gibraltar harmony is a must because a high density population cannot afford to be troubled by sectarian, ethnic or other divisions. If it were, Gibraltar would literally explode.

Jews have prospered in Gibraltar. Article X of the Treaty of Utrecht (1714) actually prohibited both Jews and Moors from settling in Gibraltar. But since Jews were traders and supplied much needed goods to the garrison, the British gradually ignored the provision. The first synagogue dates back almost to the beginning of Gibraltar in 1724. The incidents of crime are low; murder rarely happens here. The family is valued and children are doted on. I have seen only one missing child poster while I have been here, but this morning I did see notice of the disappearance of a woman. The illicit import of hard drugs from Morocco was stamped out in a clamp-down in the 1990's. If a drug trade continues, it is not highly visible. But in our day and age, recreational drugs are everywhere. No "turf wars" or killings for dominance in the drug trade darken the pages of the local newspaper, *The Chronicle*. Fortunately, there is a strong police presence here on the ground, which continues the ancient military tradition established by the British. Corporate tax rates are a relatively low ten percent at present and no V.A.T. (value added tax) is levied on consumer goods. Gibraltar won the right to levy its own taxes at the European Court of Justice. Britain has no say in the tax structure of Gibraltar, but continues to subsidize government spending in Gibraltar, although I have no idea what the financial scale of any subsidies may be.

The vertical dimensions of Gibraltar's rich history stretch back to the ancient Phoenicians. A Neanderthal skull was found here some months before the big splash was made in the archaeological world with the discovery of a Neanderthal man in Germany. Some archaeologists conjecture that Gib was the last space Neanderthals occupied before their sudden disappearance. If one wants to take the time to explore off the beaten track of this walled city, a network of narrow lanes, attached dwellings, and the odd shop that is just a hole-in-the wall await to be discovered. The apartment buildings are stacked up along the base of the Rock, like so many file folders with square eyes peering out.

Monkey Business

The most famous tourist attraction is the visit to the den of the famous "Barbary apes," about half-way up the Rock. These animals are not really apes at all, but Macaque monkeys, the only ones living wild in Europe. There is an old legend that if the monkeys die, Gibraltar will revert to Spain. During World War II, beginning in 1940 to 1950, all Gibraltarians were evacuated from this strategic post

to Jamaica, the Madeira Islands (Portugal), Tangier, London and Northern Ireland. The monkeys began to die off. Winston Churchill became aware of the legend, and ordered the army to provide for the monkeys. At one time they were fed either by the Sergeant-at-Arms or a seaman—I've heard both versions—but now a civilian looks after them.

Once in a while, a few monkeys just wander into town for a stroll! They are looking for food and they attack the rubbish bins. If they get into your house, they can create a terrible mess, so the locals keep their windows locked if they think they might be vulnerable. A maximum fine of £ 500 can be levied for feeding them, but I imagine the penalty is more of a deterrent than anything. Carrying food is not recommended while visiting the Barbary apes, but lots of tourists feed them. While the monkeys can be playful, they will sometimes jump on you if you are carrying food, particularly sweets, and they may follow you around for more. They have been known to suddenly kill little dogs. Their strong, nimble, little hands can easily damage windshield wipers if they see food inside the car. If I ever succeed in riding my bike up that steep grade—and attempt that would probably prove too much for me—Dr. Harald Veen told me not to leave it unattended because they could destroy the seat. Gibraltarians do not view the monkeys as cute little creatures; they are tolerated as a necessity for the tourist trade. The best thing is to take no food, keep at a safe distance, mind your business and everything will be all right. Harald told me yesterday that monkey-bites are frequently treated at his clinic. They can and do bite with their powerful, long fangs. Ouch!

Formation of the Gibraltar LSA (1995)

The LSA was formed relatively recently in 1995, fourteen years ago at this writing, thanks to the pioneering efforts of an English woman Ann Dymond, who came to Gibraltar for the first time in 1992, although she was not on the first L.S.A. which was formed in 1995. Ann has since returned to the U.K. but she stills comes to Gibraltar occasionally. Hopefully, Ann will be able to visit during the three months that I am here. Today Ken and Sarah Bishop told me the story of the L.S.A.'s formation. They showed me the 1995 formation photo of the first LSA. There I saw a bespectacled and elderly Alfredo Danino, the very Bahá'í whose niece I met in the Gatwick airport on my way to Gib! Sarah thinks she may have met her if the woman I met in Gatwick airport is the same lady who managed (or

manages) an art gallery here. The Gibraltarian woman I met in the Gatwick airport was quite the stylish and gracious person, with an artistic flair.

Regarding the Bahá'í administration on Gibraltar: the Universal House of Justice has decided that Gibraltar's location, exceptionally, does not qualify it for sending delegates to the U.K. National Convention. I think it's probably because of the geographical distance. Two and a half hours by jet makes it virtually impossible for the friends here to know other Bahá'ís in the U.K. well enough to intelligently vote for them in Bahá'í elections. But the Gibraltar Bahá'ís have not been forgotten by the House. Three representatives from Gib (Suresh Malkani, Trevor Richardson and Rosita Khalilian) were invited for the inauguration of the Mount Carmel terraces in 2001. Trevor met Hand of the Cause, Dr. A.M. Vargha at Bahji at that time. Dr. Vargha mentioned to Trevor the strategic importance of Gibraltar. Gib stands at the crossroads to Africa, Europe and the Middle East via the Mediterranean and the community here is a blend of cultures and religions (Latin, British, Hindu, Arab and Jewish). The place serves as a respectable model for interethnic and interreligious harmony. The Auxiliary Board Member lives in Spain.

As mentioned above, the Gibraltar friends are a loving and harmonious community of about fifteen believers, consisting of babies, children, adults, seniors, coming from Iranian, English and East Indian backgrounds. The children born here are, of course, Gibraltarian. These friends have welcomed me warmly. Travel-teaching really proves time and time again that the Bahá'ís really are one family. Far from being an illusory ideal, the oneness of humanity is actually experienced by the Bahá'í travel-teacher.

Beginning Book Four: Giordano Durante of the Gibraltar Philosophical Society: September 8, 2009

Last night a small group of us assembled at Harald and Pouneh's. Ken's well-spoken wife, Sarah Bishop, who has already completed the sequence, came and delivered the new copies of Book Four, which narrates the lives of the Twin Manifestations and the greatness of the Day of God, but she left early since she has already completed the book. I was pleased that Trevor Richardson joined us. Rozita came too after a hard day's work at Sapphire Internet. The first session

seemed to go well; no suggestions were forthcoming about changing the approach or the pace. I suggested that if the friends had time, that they fill in the blanks completely later on.

This morning I called the minister's office (Family, Youth and Social Services I think) to speak with Jaime (James, pronounced Haimie) Netto of the Gibraltar Philosophical Society. When I was given his name, I wasn't aware that he was a minister of a government department, but the GPS and other societies in Gib fall under his administration. Minister Netto, along with Girodano Durante, founded the GPS only late last year (2008). The minister's secretary gave me the phone number and email address of Girodano Durante who returned my call within a matter of minutes. We agreed to meet on Monday of next week. He suggested the Café Solo in Casemates Square, my very own hangout. I told Giordano that I was a published author, working mainly in the field of Bahá'í studies, and that philosophical theology was a great interest of mine. He was quite enthusiastic about our prospective meeting and even invited me to give a talk to the GPS, a request to which I readily agreed, the topic to be determined later. My first opportunity for a public lecture came without my having to make the request. The prayers are already having their promised effect.

Beginning Book Six: "Teaching the Cause": September 9, 2009

This morning I went to the Café Solo as usual, had a coffee and checked emails from home which I am always happy to receive. The tables were quite crowded this morning and the hardwood floors and stone walls echo the sound. The Spanish voice and conversation are generally louder and more animated than the English voice and conversation, but I am quickly growing used to it. My tinnitus (permanent ringing in both ears), which I have had for the past 30 years or so, has made me sensitive to noise, especially loud noises, which I normally avoid since I have to endure the high-pitched shrill sound on a daily basis. Although I have never grown used to it, I accept it as best I can and try to ignore it, since I have been reassured by the specialists that it is not "harmful," although one's sense of "harm" is very subjective. Strangely enough, although I am living but 500 yards or so from the runway of the Gibraltar airport, here at Neptune House, the taking off and landing of planes does not bother me so much. As I said above, I find it rather exciting to watch these jets lift off so close to my flat.

In the late afternoon, I wanted to bike to Europa Point at the north end of Gibraltar, but I found the hill leading up the Rock just too steep for me on a hot afternoon, so I dismounted and walked the bike up the hill. Some of the streets in Gib are very narrow for cyclists. So far I have not been cut off and yelled at only once. Since I was running short of time, I turned around at the top of the hill and cycled back to Marina Bay to pick up my things to begin tutoring Book Six. I plan to take the easy way out and ride the bus later to Europa Point.

Ramin Khalilian was not able to join us, so we were just three adults: Rozita, Ramin's wife, Fiona Young and myself. If I count newborn, Shadi, Fiona's baby girl, we were four. Shadi had a bad evening, her mother thinks through overtiredness, so Fiona had to stand and walk her from time to time. It was challenging for Fiona to look after Shadi and do the written and oral exercises at the same time, but we managed, reading through and doing the sections on *Teaching the Cause*. Tomorrow is National Day (September 10th) and festive ceremonies and celebrations have been planned for Casemates Square, and in other parts of the city, so I'll go and see what that's all about and take a few pictures.

Poem Written After Visiting the Village at Catalan Bay: September 10, 2009

The other day I cycled along Devil's Tower Road over to Catalan Bay on the eastern side of the Rock. I was attracted by the symbol of the "Sikorski Monument" on my map, marked by the outline of a helicopter, a symbol that recalls the crash that took place in Gibraltar during World War II that cost the Polish patriot and British ally, General Sikorski, his life. I later discovered that General Sikorski, who was also the Polish Prime Minister, is buried in the cathedral of St. Mary the Crowned. Conspiracy theories have been advanced that it was no accident, but as with most conspiracy theories, we will probably never know. I learned about General Sikorski just prior to my departure from Ottawa, from Professor Bill Couch, a friend of Polish Bahá'í Eva Siekierska. Bill rents a flat from Eva. He is a close friend of the Faith and has been attending firesides. He teaches history at the University of Warsaw. We met for coffee at Starbucks on Elgin Street in Ottawa a couple of times before I left. Bill filled me in on the details of General Sikorski and gave me a lesson in European history while doing so.

I couldn't find the monument. Perhaps I just overlooked it, but the map shows it's just past the Eastern Beach Road, so I continued on the short journey to Catalan village. There I locked my bike and walked the sandy shore, where a few young mothers took photos of their small children, as they played just in front of them on the beach. I dipped my feet into the waters of the straits, which felt a little colder than Western Beach where I swam the other day. This little stretch of picturesque village features tightly ranged apartments facing the sea. A large white stucco hotel, the Caleta, dominates the scene. The mighty Rock of Gibraltar girdles the back of the village; once in a while a loose rock comes crashing down the mountain. While fences have been built, they cannot provide complete protection from falling rocks. I have heard that the new apartments that have been built just opposite the base of the Rock have not been selling well because of the falling rock hazard.

I noticed the name "Genoese Hotel" over the door of one of the establishments, so I knew that the village had a long ago connection to Genoa. Villagers are very protective of the beach and some will even dislocate tourists with the help of a local police officer if they don't vacate the spot they claim as their own, even though most beaches are public property. I've been told that Gibraltarians are also very proprietary about their café and restaurant tables. Even if the tables are being used, they expect clients to vacate them when they arrive because they feel that they have a prior right to use them because they frequent the establishment on a regular basis. Such are the mores in Gibraltar. "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." After I returned home, I discovered later that evening that the name of the hotel had worked its poetic magic on me. I composed the following poem which alludes to the evocative power of language and the transitory, impermanent nature of human existence: all history is in flux and although nothing ever really disappears in an absolute sense, things change state and cannot be recognized as they once were.

**Hotel Genoese
Catalan Bay, Gibraltar**

Grammarians profess the function of names,
but here on the eastern beach,
only the alchemy of a word.

Fisherman landed one summer two centuries ago.
Now, only this faded sign whispers their names
across the waters: “Genoa!” the mermaid calls;
“Italia!” echoes the siren call.

The Catalan have come and gone,
fleeing Napoleon’s armies.
Sensing present danger, panic, flight,
they settled at Mt. Calpe’s massive feet.

They too have fled into the night,
their spoken word, enigma,
story trailing silence.

Meeting the Orthodox Rabbi in Engineer’s Lane: Reflecting on Consultation: September 11, 2009

Today I went up Engineer’s Lane looking for Sharif Electric in search of a more solid converter that would hold my three-pronged North American computer plug. I have one without the ground but the two prongs unsupported keep losing contact which was very annoying, but this one works well. Suresh recommended the place when I dropped in during the late morning to his sports shop for a quick visit. Suresh is always smiling and helpful. I noticed on the way up Engineer’s Lane a small, but well-kept synagogue entrance in panelled wood. I found the shop and made the purchase. After I had just completed the transaction, a bearded orthodox rabbi with side-locks, dressed in black, about thirty years old, came in offering to give away some C.D.’s. He offered me one in Spanish, but I told him I didn’t speak the language, so he offered me another in English. It’s called “All in the Family.” I haven’t listened to it yet, but I gathered from the description stamped on the C.D. that it’s about promoting good marital relationships according to Torah principles, and thus producing a healthy atmosphere for raising children. The key point was that “No one thrives in an atmosphere of constant criticism,” which has an adverse effect on the children.

I greeted the rabbi warmly and told him that I was a Bahá’í and that our world centre is in Haifa. He responded that everyone is a brother to the Jew. But

obviously with C.D.'s like "All in the Family," they are reaching out to others with a service project. It was a brief but friendly conversation. I shook his hand to wish him good-bye. I listened to the first six tracks. The narration and translation were given by Rav Lazer Brody, a fluent and learned speaker with an American accent. It was naturally interspersed with Hebrew Torah phrases, which he translated, as well as wisdom from Rebbe Bretzlov, a nineteenth century Ukrainian *ztedik*. I was in full agreement with all the perennial wisdom that was given on the six tracks. It could have been accepted by members of any religion in the world. But when later I reflected on the talk, I realized that the good rabbi had made no mention of conjugal or family consultation, which is an effective panacea for marital conflict and creating a healthy atmosphere for raising children. Even the perennial wisdom of the world's great religions says very little about this wonderful new teaching of consultation which is found only in its elaborated form in the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

Meeting the LSA: An Iranian Declares His Faith: Attending Children's and Youth Classes: September 13, 2009

Last Friday, September 11th, I met the L.S.A. It was a very good meeting. They had a couple of requests that I could collaborate on rewriting the text for their website and compose a text for a proposed pamphlet that would be titled something like "The Bahá'í Community in Gibraltar." I brought a few items for their consideration. Regarding the status of Interfaith activities in Gibraltar, they requested that I speak on "Religion and Science: Two Sides of One Coin" at the next Interfaith meeting. Yesterday afternoon at Pouneh and Harald's a Unity Feast was held. A few non-Bahá'í friends of the community were present. We began with prayers. Then Dr. Harald played "The Queen of Carmel" on the piano which was accompanied by our singing. Little Dylan and Carmel sang a duet. This was followed by an introductory D.V.D. on the Faith produced in Germany, but which offered the viewer a choice of some of the major European languages and Persian. Following the video, I was supposed to speak on Shoghi Effendi, but I decided instead to ask if there were any questions about the contents of the D.V.D. which we had just seen. There weren't any questions forthcoming, so I clarified a few points about the material and spoke briefly on the reasons why we can believe with confidence that Bahá'u'lláh is a true Manifestation of God.

The Unity Feast was attended by a non-Bahá'í Iranian who is a friend of the community. He was experiencing the acute pain of the sudden passing of his mother in England on September 1st. He spoke to Dr. Harald about her hospitalization due to influenza and the immediate cause of death. He said that his mother was a devout Muslim, but she once attended a Bahá'í funeral and was so impressed by the serene and hopeful atmosphere at the service that she requested a Bahá'í funeral. For some reason, it didn't happen, but in any case we said a prayer for her at the Unity Feast and Sarah requested a healing prayer for him which was said by Aisha, one of the junior youth. I was pleasantly surprised to hear that he wanted to enrol as a Bahá'í the following day. I congratulated him and asked him what had prompted his declaration of faith. He said cryptically that Trevor knew, so naturally I asked Trevor at another moment. It had something to do with a mystical visitation, i.e. sensing his mother's presence in the morning after her passing, but before this he had been gradually drawing closer to the community in Gibraltar.

This morning I attended the children's and junior youth classes at Rozita's and Ramin's. What a wonderful little meeting it was! It was all so orderly, harmonious and loving that I told the youth it was like a little glimpse of the future peace and harmony that will come once the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh is established. I asked Kion if he liked Gibraltar. He responded that he did, but that sooner or later the young people grow tired of Gibraltar because it is so small and they long to go abroad. I was assisting Carmel Khalilian, who has just celebrated her 18th birthday, in teaching the junior youth, her fine brothers Kion and Kuresh, and Aisha, Trevor's step-daughter, and a friend of Aisha's. In another room, Pouneh was teaching little Dylan and her daughter Haifa, and in yet another room, Fiona Young, sat at small table teaching Robin, Aisha's brother, who is about ten years old and the brother of Aisha's friend. In our class, we used one of the Ruhi books for junior youth, *Drawing on the Power of the Word*, that focuses on the development of capacities, particularly the power of expression.

We did an exercise in we floated a balloon; everyone was supposed to catch it, using a different finger of the hand, but just one finger. The purpose of this effective little exercise is to demonstrate the power of unity in Bahá'u'lláh's admonition to be "the fingers of one hand," with each one helping the other in pursuit of a common task. The youth all laughed as they did it, but within seconds

they had captured the balloon. Voilà! Lesson grasped in a moment with enjoyment! Then Fiona's class of two did a little show with paper puppets the two boys made themselves for the enjoyment of the younger children, Dylan and Haifa, who sat on the bed in wrapt attention. Fiona had taught the boys the old story of the contest between the wind and the sun to see who was the stronger.

Watching Fiona do her exercise, I recalled, after all these years, my mother telling me this same story when I was a child. I had never forgotten it and it was a joy to hear it again. We often underestimate, I think, the ability of children to understand spiritual concepts through play or amusing stories. It's still the same lesson of the wind and the sun: the wind huffed and puffed and blew with all his might, but the man just wrapped his overcoat ever more tightly around him, whereas the mighty sun, calmly but purposefully, began to beam all the stronger until the poor man, feeling the intensity of the sun's heat, was obliged to remove his coat. Thus the sun won the contest. The moral of the story is that strength can be found in being calm and strong, and much energy can be wasted in a vain show of power and force. I had never attended children and youth classes where there was so much love and harmony, lack of ego, sense of purpose and organization on part of the teachers, without the need for strong discipline, and such well-behaved, mature junior youth who are wise and loving beyond their years. They gave new meaning to the phrase "children of the kingdom." It gives one the greatest sense of deep satisfaction and hope for the future of the world.

Giordano Durante Invites me to Speak to the Gibraltar Philosophical Society: Meeting Solomon (Momi) Levy: September 14, 2009

This morning I met twenty-eight year old Giordano Durante of the Gibraltar Philosophical Society, mentioned above, at Café Solo. We had a good chat about our mutual interests in philosophy and religion. Giordano has an M.A. from an English university, with a concentration in the philosophies of language and the mind. He gave me a brief history of the G.P.S. Giordano serves as the current chair and organizer of talks. At a recent meeting about eighty persons showed up at John Mackintosh Hall to join the society, a remarkably good number for Gibraltar, he said. I was delighted to hear that Giordano is not opposed to religion. He told me that he had actually delivered a paper, "Does Science Discredit Religion?" which I have since read and found excellent in that it attempts to show that the supposed

conflicts between religion and science are only apparent but not real. After about a forty minute conversation, he suggested that I speak on something to do with religious diversity and whether all religions are “equal.” I told him that the Bahá’í teachings had much to say on the topic. I suggested perhaps adding the word “commonality” or “oneness” in the title. The date has been set for Tuesday, November 3rd in the one of the two lecture rooms at John Mackintosh Hall.

I told Giordano that if possible I would like to do Torah study while I was visiting Gibraltar. He recommended that I talk to Mr. Solomon Levy, an estate agent whose offices are located at 3 Convent Place. Solomon Levy is the recently retired Mayor of Gibraltar and one of the pillars of the Jewish community. I found the office easily. Just as I had reached the reception desk, Mr. Levy walked in. I recognized him from the photo that I had seen that very morning, holding a letter of commendation from Queen Elizabeth. Mr. Levy is a tall, thin man, quite advanced in years, and presented himself in a business-like manner. But he told me that there is Kollél, a rabbinical centre where rabbis study Torah all day, and that perhaps he could interest one of the rabbis in teaching me. He told me to contact him in about a week.

When I returned home, Janet Waterfield was showing my flat to two ladies, one of whom, Anna, lived in San Rocque across the border in Spain. The conversation turned first to the history of Gibraltar. Then Anna told me that she knew most of the Bahá’ís in Gibraltar, that she has attended firesides, and was interested in comparative religion. She asked me to give the friends her love. She was married to a Spaniard who has since passed on. She has grown children living in Spain. Anna also knows Ann Dymond, the first pioneer in Gib.

It’s a Small World and It’s Getting Smaller: The Couple From Cornwall, Ontario: September 17, 2009

Almost every day I have a short visit with Suresh Malkani in his Sports Centre, in the I.C.C. building, just opposite the Café Solo in Casemates Square. Suresh has grown children who are just launching their own careers, and a smiling, pure-hearted wife, Lavina, who is a devout Hindu. Their apartment is a charming little corner of India. Lavina read a Bahá’í prayer at the last Feast which touched me so deeply. Sometimes here in Gibraltar, I find myself unexpectedly in a state of

heightened spirituality. After the Feast, Lavina served several dishes of the most delicious Indian food.

Today a tall man, Jim Dobson, a retired travel agent from Mississauga, Ontario, outside Toronto, came into the sports shop. By his accent, Suresh thought he was American—he guessed Texan—but Jim said he was from Canada. As the conversation soon revealed, Jim had lived at one point in Toronto at Islington and Dixon Roads, less than a mile from where we lived at 6 Emery Circle, near Royal York and Dixon Roads. Jim told us he was born in 1938 which made him seven years older than I am. (He is age 71). He told us that he was taking a cruise on the famous liner Queen Mary that had cast anchor in Gibraltar. Passengers are launched from the boat to *terra firma*, so they do not actually disembark directly from the ship.

Then a woman who looked somewhat younger than Jim came into the shop. Jim introduced his wife, Lorraine, née McDonald. Lorraine had short brownish-blond hair, a round, pleasant face and wore glasses. As it turned out, Lorraine grew up in Cornwall, Ontario. I told her that one of the Bahá'ís in my neighbourhood of Ottawa, Jennifer Phillips, was also from Cornwall. Lorraine said that she lived in the Riverdale section of Cornwall, on Princess Street. Coincidentally, Jennifer grew up on Riverdale Street. Lorraine went to C.C.V.S. (Cornwall Collegiate and Vocational School), as did Jennifer, but Lorraine graduated from St. Michael's Academy in 1969. She said she was sixty years old which made her about the same age as Jennifer. It's very likely that Lorraine and Jennifer were both in C.C.V.S. at the same time, but Lorraine had no recollection of meeting someone by the name of Jennifer Phillips. After a brief, pleasant conversation, during which I told them about my "service project" in Gibraltar, they moved on. But one more seed was sown. It was only a brief mention of the Faith to passing travellers, but who knows where the scattering Wind of God might carry this little seed?

Watching the R.A.F.'s Red Arrows: September 20, 2009

On a sunny September 19th day, a group of us watched the Royal Air Force's aerobatics team, the Red Arrows, perform their manoeuvres over Europa Point. Ramin offered to take me up the Rock in his Sports Utility Vehicle. It was the best day I've had so far in Gibraltar. Seeing the community from the heights became a

consciousness-raising experience. Rather than record the day's events as a journal entry, I would like to use them as poetic symbols of a spiritual journey.

Ascending the Rock of Gibraltar

Today you scaled the rocky heights the easy way.
There at the Pillars of Hercules, where the Greek strong man held up
Africa and Gibraltar on his mighty shoulders, you flexed your own muscles,
and gazed out on the vast expanse of waters and watched the dream
you dreamed those three years ago come true.

Now I see the very place where the two great seas meet,
at the crossroads to Europe, Africa and the Middle East.
Just there lies Spain; and yonder Africa's Atlas Mountains.
Soon it will be a tour around the old Kazbah in Tangier.
America lies far off to westward, across the ocean,
North America, the Land of Tomorrow, the new Promised Land.

Up here, the resurrected body is consciousness itself.
Seeing this corner of the world from the wind-swept peak,
looking down at the *bona vista* to Gibraltar, Spain and Africa,
this stranger in a strange land feels like he's almost home.
Somehow he has moved inside, is mysteriously pacified by distance,
when like Jacob, he wrestled nights with ancient ills,
calling on the Master.

A benign, loving presence came over him.
Suddenly all was still. He was tranquilized after many years.
The old grudge with himself was cast away,
laid in the hollow of the hands of Those who hold the destinies of men.

The Barbary apes are here, trusting men for food.
The little brown monkey jumps on the boy's back.
He is proud to carry him so, as if a little miracle's been done.

And we should all be little monkeys, or better still,
wise old apes, with mouths, ears and eyes stopped up,
to amble quietly among our fellow creatures, trusting them
with rarer victuals, just as they trust us to feed them
what they need.

At the giant caverns of St. Michael's Cave,
we descend into the bowels of the earth,
but I am not at home here, in this dark, damp place,
where the temperature is constant. No light reaches here,
and changes are made only over geologic-time.

Here the Neanderthals grovelled for food,
fought to survive, struggling with wild animals.
Here's a skull left behind.

I will leave here now,
ascend into the light, climb the sacred mountain,
emerge in the open, feel the salt-sea breeze on my brow,
that I may journey on at the crossroads,
knowing that I have arrived; that I may go on where I will,
knowing that the wind that fills my sails blows
from the three great seas.

Moving in the Rhythm of Life: Visiting Ken and Sarah Bishop: September 22, 2009

After three weeks of residence, I am getting a better sense of Gibraltar; not that I know every corner of it—far from it. But from time to time, I make little discoveries here and there along the byways of this walled city, either on foot or on my bicycle. Today behind Casemates Square, I took the Land Port tunnel that at one time was the only way to enter Gibraltar other than by sea, a point that was once of great strategic importance. When you emerge from the uphill walkway, at the end of the tunnel, you immediately see on your right the various terraced walls built to support the cannon batteries that fired down on the enemy who tried to enter and conquer the garrison by land. Many soldiers, both Spanish and Spain's allies, as well as British lost their lives here.

Some fifteen sieges were laid on Gibraltar by Spain and her allies, but the English managed to break every one and British Gibraltar held. Although all this ancient military history has by now lost its importance, except to students of history, since Spain and England are now both members of N.A.T.O. The British

of yesteryear realized that by controlling the heights, they controlled the Rock. The strategy worked. General Eliot had a stroke of military brilliance when he ordered the building of the siege tunnels so that the enemy could be fired on from above. But these tunnels were built at great cost to human life since the British soldiers built them while they were virtually starving. I have heard that the soldiers were allowed only one solid meal per week since the food supply was very scarce during the sieges. Men died too because of accidents with explosives, the same mishaps that occurred when Colonel John By was building the Ottawa Canal.

At this writing (2009), with the lapse of some 300 years, the Rock has belonged to England longer than it ever did to Spain. But longevity is not the only factor that will determine the future of this isthmus. The close proximity to Spain, and the sharing of a common language, mean that the two cultures and their economies, despite all the proud claims to being “British,” are quite integrated. At this moment, popular sentiment is virtually unanimous that Gibraltarians remain British, despite their cultural affinities with their large and very close Iberian neighbour. British though they claim to be, some Gibraltarians cheer for Real Madrid and Barcelona football teams, not those of England!

This afternoon I went to visit Ken and Sarah Bishop at 501B Ocean Heights, the name of their building, about seven minutes walk from Neptune House where I am. I came to return the picture of the first L.S.A. (1995) which I had copied this morning. The three of us had a family-like visit and a few good laughs. Since the Bishops are English, talking to them is reminiscent of the many visits I made in Toronto over the years to my English grandparents, Jessie and Will Halsted. My grandparents’ house was like a little corner of England, with its warm and friendly hospitality, picture of the Queen, photos of the homes of relatives in England, the occasional meal of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and tea brewing in the pot.

Ken and Sarah are both in their seventies. Sarah has just become a great-grandmother. At present, they are in good health. Sarah is very devoted to moving ahead with the Faith in Gib; teaching is always at the forefront of her mind. She is quite goal-oriented. She even proposed a little teaching project at John Mackintosh Hall while I was visiting. Ken is supportive of the teaching effort. I saw him again this morning at Café Solo, as I went in for my morning coffee, and we had a friendly little chat. Sarah, despite her quiet, but earnest resolve, has a comic,

childlike spontaneity, a lighter side to her personality. I saw a touch of it this afternoon when she suddenly held the desserts she was serving on a platter with tea high above her head and made us pick the dishes sight unseen. “Who wants the big one?” she asked merrily. Then, “Who wants the small one?” Of course, Ken and I had no way of knowing which was which from a sitting position, but it was good to see Sarah suddenly break into this lighter mood. Her little gesture brought some levity into the seriousness of the conversation. Sarah returns to the Isle of Wight every so often to look after their house there and to attend to one of the Bahá’ís, David Mumford, who is in his early nineties.

The Long Lonely Nights: September 27, 2009

One of my challenges here in Gib is loneliness, particularly at night when I am by myself in my flat. I have reading and writing, of course, but one must take a break. During the day, I have things to do and follow a more or less established routine which I enjoy: morning prayers and readings, saying the Greatest Name ninety-five times, reciting the Prayer for Canada, going to the Café Solo to check my emails and have a coffee, doing some writing, running errands, etc. I have Books Four and Six to tutor twice a week, so that keeps me occupied; naturally I attend the Nineteen Day Feasts and Holy Days that are held in the evening. But on those evenings when all is quiet and there are no activities, I find the time long. Evenings, most businesses close down, except for restaurants and the Gala Casino. The cinema is open but I haven’t been there yet. Journal writing is my main activity these days. I also listen to the radio which broadcasts current affairs programs from Britain, which are, for the most part, professionally presented, with in-depth analysis. Their usual themes feature the ongoing conflicted scenarios of international politics.

Sometimes I take an evening stroll down Main Street where I meet only a few passers-by at that time of night. It is a welcome change to walk up and down Main Street in the cool of the evening, when the sun has gone down, and look at the shop windows with fresh eyes, without there being crowds of people peering in through the glass, looking over the tobacco, spirits, jewellery, electronics are other products that are sold duty free. There is no television in this flat—Janet Waterfield warned me about this before coming—and no books except what I have borrowed from the friends here. These include Jelle de Vries’s scholarly and

thorough history of the Dutch Bahá'í community, which I have now read, actor O.Z. Whitehead's instructive *Portraits of Some Bahá'í Woman*, which I borrowed from Sarah via Pouneh, and Julian Johnson's *The Path of the Masters*, a thorough, distilled, comparative synthesis of Hindu thought, intended for non-Hindus, which makes correlations to the other world's religions, philosophies and esoteric movements, a book I borrowed from Suresh.

Because of airline weight restrictions, I could not bring any books from my own library, except for my prayer book and *The Hidden Words*, which I use for my morning and evening devotions, and a small booklet of inspirational writings about pioneering called *The Power of Divine Assistance*, a Canadian publication compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (1982). It once belonged to my mother Joyce and was inscribed and dedicated to her by an old friend of my generation, Dr. Sandra Hutchinson (Ph.D English), who as a young woman attended our firesides in the borough of Etobicoke (Toronto). At her thirty-fifth birthday party the other evening, Fiona Young offered to lend me hers and Peter's old television set since I complained of evening loneliness. I am going to accept that offer, but first I'll have to check with my landlady, Janet Waterfield, to see if she approves. (I imagine she will). Then I'll have to find a way to transport it by car.

Today we celebrated the Feast of Will at Trevor's flat in Ebony House, in Montague Gardens. I was the first to arrive at the community breakfast and Feast, after having had my usual black coffee with small jug of milk, sweetened with a bit of sugar, and some churros, the long, sausage-shaped, deep-fried pastries that are a favourite breakfast dish here in Gibraltar. During the consultation, I raised the subject of the "core activities" and how the work of spreading the Faith is different from the process of conversion that is the goal of most congregational religions. The Bahá'í friends are naturally delighted if someone who participates in the Institute process wants to join the Faith, but we are also happy to find collaborators who share our goals, even if the person does not intend to join the Faith officially.

Attending a Christian Fellowship Meeting: September 27, 2009

Last evening, I decided to visit a church. On a previous evening walk down Main Street, I passed by a doorway whose sign read: "Christian Fellowship. All

Welcome. Saturdays 7:00 p.m.” I made a mental note of the location and decided that I would return. I walked through the door into a hallway. At the end of it, in the half-light, I saw a small shop, set up in an opening between flights of stairs, perhaps an upholsterer’s judging by the sewing machine, bobins and fabrics I glimpsed as I passed by. A tall Arab gentleman stood there looking at me. I asked him where the Christian fellowship meeting was taking place. “Upstairs,” he said. So up the stairs I went to enter a simple meeting room constructed with plain wooden panels and bare, glossy white walls. It turned out to be a small, evangelical congregation, with only four other adults present beside myself, three men and a smiling, middle-aged woman, who wore glasses and a black dress. She wore a large, golden cross over her bosom. Two children were present: a small, black-haired happy boy, who was the son of the lay minister, who later gave the lesson, and a girl aged about twelve years, with pale skin and dark hair, who was only too glad to participate in the service by beating time to the hymns, by striking or shaking a tambourine. Their “calling,” as they put it to me, was to the Jews, i.e. convincing other Christians of the importance of the mission of Israel in the coming kingdom and the restoration of the temple with Christ’s imminent advent. I had gathered as much when I first entered. A decorated, small placard of Hebrew script was posted on the lectern, facing the audience, accompanied by a quotation from the book of Isaiah. All that I told them was that I was visiting Gibraltar for three months, that I was a Bahá’í, and that I attended interfaith meetings in Ottawa. No questions were asked and I did not attempt to force an opening in the conversation.

Their service consisted of the music of praise and fervent, impromptu prayer, led by one of the two gentlemen who had set up an electric guitar and microphone at the front. The prayers and music were followed by a cogent talk given by the lay minister on the meaning of such Jewish festivals as the Feasts of Tabernacles/Booths and Trumpets, two celebrations that respectively give thanks for God’s protection during the 40 years of wandering in the desert, and the final call for God’s word of redemption and the harvest of souls. Instead of the stirring sermon that one usually hears at these worship services, he gave an instructive sober, thoughtful, scholarly presentation on his chosen theme.

The pastor reminded us that it was the eve of Yom Kippur, the great Day of Atonement, “the great day of awe” as he called it. The gist of his lesson was to

interpret the Jewish festivals as a foreshadowing of the life of Christ. This approach reflects the ancient Christian hermeneutical method of “types” i.e. how events in Jewish history prefigured the coming of the Messiah. I stood and sang and bowed my head at prayer. I was respectfully received, and in her spontaneous prayer, the lady in black thanked God for the visit of “the gentleman who has joined us tonight.” I decided to leave at nine o’clock, after two hours had passed. They were not yet quite finished praising God, but when there was a lull in the service, I stood and announced that I had to be going. I thanked them for their warm hospitality and wished them all the best in their mission, quoting the words of the Gospel as I adjusted my backpack: “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” (John 1:11) (KJV). “Yes,” replied the minister immediately, “we have our work cut out.” I turned and said good-bye, found my way downstairs, walked back out into the cool dark of Main Street and headed home to Neptune House.

The Interfaith Meeting on “Religion and Science. Two Sides of One Coin?": October 1, 2009

Last night, I attended an Interfaith meeting in Gibraltar. Trevor Richardson, the chair of the L.S.A. asked me in advance if I could attend in his place and I agreed. Earlier, while I was walking down sunny Main Street, Trevor phoned me on my mobile to say that he could not attend because he had an urgent work-related job to do that evening. He asked me to give his regrets to the group. Trevor was nonetheless able to attend later because his job did not take him as long as he had anticipated. The Interfaith meeting was held at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, just across the way from the Eliot Hotel. The church was offered by its minister, the Reverend Ewan McLean, a Scots cleric. Reverend McLean did not chair the event; that task was admirably performed by another man named Bill. The admired predecessor of Reverend McLean, Rev. Lamond, had initiated some excellent work in Interfaith dialogue, I was told, but Rev. McLean was not moved to participate in the Interfaith movement.

I had naturally never met Rev. McLean before, but he turned out to be a colourful individual. The tall, lanky cleric pulled up to the church on his motor scooter, and walked in carrying his helmet, wearing jeans, *sans* clerical collar, looking very relaxed, and sat down in the chair beside me. The minister and I “hit

it off” immediately. Although his theology was not that of the “broad church,” I admired his frankness. He also showed us a keen sense of humour which set the tone for the cordial, engaged atmosphere that prevailed throughout the meeting. I had the distinct impression that by the end of the meeting, the Rev. McLean had been moved by the spirit of love, fellowship, learning and dialogue that took place that night.

In attendance were Ingrid (Dutch) and Monica (English), two representatives from the Brahma Kamaris of the World Spiritual University. It was in Gibraltar that I first made their acquaintance. The ladies dressed in long white robes. Two Hindus attended who came separately: a passionate avowed pantheist named Andrew Planet, a name he told me he had adopted, and a woman, Deepa, who was very knowledgeable in the Hindu faith. Later in my stay, Andrew was kind enough to take me on a complete tour of the botanical gardens. Attending also were Evelyn, the Buddhist, who sat beside me, a woman who had attended Bahá’í meetings here in Gibraltar, and two Muslims, a mother who was wearing a headscarf and her daughter who was bare-headed. Also in attendance was a brilliant, sensitive young woman named Samantha Golt, a barrister and acting solicitor in Gibraltar, who described herself as a Christian Buddhist who was also studying with the Brahma Kamaris of the World Spiritual University. Samantha was contemplating abandoning the practice of law for the devotional life. Next in attendance was a bright and congenial Irish M.D., a man impressively knowledgeable in religion and philosophy, and his teenaged daughter. The Irish doctor is a colleague of Dr. Harald Veen, Pouneh’s husband. They are both employed in medical services at the Ministry of Defence. Finally there were the two Bahá’ís: Trevor Richardson and me.

We sat in a large circle. Bill, the church clerk, called on us to begin the discussion. At first it appeared as if it were going to be a free-for-all, until someone intervened and requested that we proceed around the circle in a more formal manner; the others readily agreed. The Hindu lady both spoke and read her comments, which were virtually identical to the Bahá’í Faith’s position on religion and science. She relied on the cogent statement of a Hindu astrophysicist who had abandoned science in favour of God-realization. Trevor made the point that science was by nature amoral and needed an ethical force to guide it; otherwise science’s

malignant fruits could destroy mankind. I brought some quotes from the Bahá'í writings and integrated them with my remarks when my turn came.

There seemed to be two positions which reflect current attitudes to the question: (1) religion and science are conflicted and cannot be reconciled. (2) they should work together. No unanimity on the question was first reached, but by the end of the evening, after each representative had made his or her points, it had become clear that a consensus had emerged that religion and science should work more cooperatively. Among others I made the point that the Bahá'í Faith is the only world religion that explicitly states *in its scriptures* that religion and science are “intertwined,” to use ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s word, and that their relationship must be cooperative; that each sphere should recognize the validity of the other and work together for the common good and fuller development and integration of both the individual and humanity. The meaning of the word “religion” naturally needs careful definition in this discussion, as does the word “science.”

I had almost forgotten, when it suddenly occurred to me during the social mingle, that Suresh and his wife Lavina had invited me for a late supper. Lavina is an excellent cook. Their daughter Wendy, a recently graduated lawyer, is now fully engaged in her first job-search. Wendy joined her father and me for conversation before the meal while Lavina was busy in the kitchen. Suresh is brilliant in the law and finance, but these are not the domains that he chooses to work in any longer. During one conversation, Suresh mentioned that it would be wise to invest in precious metals because he thinks that the day will come when money will be useless—and he may just be right!

Listening to the BBC and Short Wave Radio: A Wonderful Swim at Western Beach: Meeting the LSA: October 3, 2009

Here in Gibraltar, I am slightly news deprived. This is partly by choice. I buy a newspaper only occasionally and I don't have a T.V. although Fiona and Peter Young are going to lend me their old television tomorrow. In return, I will help Peter to transport their new high-definition television to their other home in Spain. What news I do receive comes from listening to B.B.C. radio and short-wave at night, where I can catch programs in French and German in addition to English. I hear several other languages on short wave, including Arabic—

understandably enough because we are so close to North Africa—Spanish, of course, and some of the Slavic languages, and one program about China in English, some Chinese lessons for English-speakers, and Deutsche Welle in English, which is usually well done and which I listen to in the small hours of the morning in Ottawa, usually around 3:00 a.m. Since I speak French and some German, this adds variety to my listening.

Yesterday afternoon it reached a very hot 35 degrees C., so I felt like a swim. I biked over to nearby Western Beach which I can reach from Neptune House within five minutes. It was one the most relaxing swims I've had in a long time. It was one of those moments when everything just seemed to flow. Even though I swim fairly well, the first time out was an effort; I felt out of shape. But each time I returned to the water, I experienced an increased surge of energy. The salt water was a refreshing respite from the hot air, being just a comfortable temperature—cool enough to refresh but no discomfort to enter. I felt quite relaxed as I swam, paddled and floated in the water, and lay on the beach in the sun, with my head propped up on a make-shift pillow, consisting of my backpack, sandals, long-sleeved beige cotton top, all of which I rolled inside my white angler's sunhat. I scanned the horizon from time to time with my 8 x 24 waterproof binoculars which often accompany me on trips. (I have been fascinated by binoculars since childhood). The natural elements of sun, water, air and sand acted as a stimulating tonic and relaxing balm.

Probably because I was at the beach, I found myself singing the popular song from my early teens, "Ebb Tide," with its haunting and beautiful melody: "First the tide rushes in, plants a kiss on the shore, then rolls out to sea, and the sea is very still once more. Then I rush to your side, like the oncoming tide...etc." The melody just seemed to flow, as I sang on the sandy beach and waded into the water, the song being so *à propos* for an afternoon swim, a song whose lyrics tell of the sea and the tide. I greatly enjoyed the afternoon, swimming, drying off, sun-bathing, returning to the water, then scanning the beach searching for multi-coloured pebbles and small shells on the shore and in the water, and marvelling at the fine water-lines that formed ridges on the brown sand as the waves receded. It was a boyhood experience relived.

Discovering the Meaning of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Teaching on the Search for Truth in the Spanish Hills Above Tarifa: October 19, 2009

“If only men would search out truth, they would find themselves united.” *Paris Talks*, p. 129

“Therefore, if the religions investigate reality and seek the essential truth of their own foundations, they will agree and no difference will be found.” *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 126

Tarifa is a little town on the very tip of southern Spain, facing the Strait of Gibraltar, about an hour’s drive from the Rock, famous for its world windsurfing competitions, where paragliders may be seen floating gently beneath their sails, like so many butterflies colouring the skies. Close by the magnificent wind-swept beach of Tarifa lie the rising Spanish hills, a landscape which is reminiscent in its broad outlines of southern California. It was in the hills beyond Tarifa, beyond the paragliders and windsurfers I glimpsed as we sped by, on a visit to a “hippie couple,” as Samantha described them, that I discovered something of the meaning of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s teaching on the search for truth. Manuel and Rosa are practicing their own form of spirituality and a back-to-nature lifestyle.

Now if we read carefully all the conditions that the Perfect Exemplar lays down for the search for truth, we will soon conclude that very few qualify as true seekers of Reality. For one thing, He says that the true seeker must abandon every form of prejudice, must seek with passionate longing, be willing to relearn, if necessary, all that s/he has learned, and endure hardships. That lets out the greater part of the human race. But for the sake of this little narrative, I will take ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s teaching in a less rigorous fashion. A better understanding of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s teaching on the search for truth began on the sunny Sunday morning of October 11th. Ms. Samantha Golt, whom I first met at the interfaith meeting in St. Andrew’s church, had invited the alert, rationalist philosopher of science, and forty-eight year old tattoo artist, Keith Tonna, another Gibraltarian, and myself, to visit Manuel and Rosa who live on an isolated farm in the hills above Tarifa.

Keith and Samantha are both members of the Tuesday morning discussion group called “The Theory of One” which I was invited to join. How could any self-respecting Bahá’í ever pass up on an offer to join a discussion group with a name

like “The Theory of One”? Our discussions take place at the back of the Royal Calpe café, just opposite the cathedral, St. Mary the Crowned, on Main Street. The group was founded by Samantha, who is by nature a networker and community builder, who is not shy of telling those who are sympathetic to her views that she wants to change the world. Within the larger group, the three of us have had many stimulating conversations, debates and good times over coffee. A magnetic chemistry binds the three of us in the search for truth. Our discussions are enlivened with good humour and sparkle. Keith is a rationalist, a process philosopher of science who is open to the spiritual dimension, but who is nonetheless wary of theology and religious institutions; Samantha the sometimes ecstatic Christian-Buddhist, values religious experience above theory. As a Bahá’í scholar and poet, I contribute what insights I am able to find to our discussions. I have warm memories of the Theory of One group. Love was always inherent, if unspoken, to our conversations, love for one another, as we quested for a deeper understanding of spiritual and philosophical truth.

Samantha, a tall, thin, energetic, articulate, sensitive woman with a fertile, searching mind is attempting to synthesize and “fine-tune,” as she says, everything that she has learned about the spirituality of Buddhism and Christianity, and her own life experiences. One of her favourite phrases is “But it’s all one!” or “We are all one!” She usually pronounces this mystical phrase when we are experiencing difficulty in integrating some highly abstract or contradictory concepts. At that moment, a certain tension is released. Then we look at Samantha and smile, who is already smiling. I certainly agree with Samantha when she emphasizes the importance of experience over rational analysis. Her comment helps to bring us down to earth again.

Samantha has an artistic flair and holds herself erect like a dancer. She has a generous heart and winning smile. Her brown eyes and hair are accented by modish glasses. Her face shows that lightly tanned pale skin that one sometimes sees on Gibraltarians. On several occasions when I have been walking with Samantha down Main Street, she momentarily darts away, like a little butterfly, to greet, hug and kiss a friend. Like most Gibraltarians, Samantha is well-connected on the Rock since the community is small and virtually everyone is interconnected. Keith clearly favours the rational as his main tool of analysis, but he is not entirely closed off to the realms of faith and religion. Despite his rational approach, which

usually takes a hard line and makes a strong argument, Keith often refers to the “phenomenon” in creation. He means by that something that cannot be circumscribed by rational analysis. This makes Keith open to transcendence. His usual example comes from quantum mechanics, i.e. that mass (matter) is not really solid, as it appears, but consists of vibrating fluctuations of energy which cannot be really defined. Keith’s left arm is fully tattooed in a swirl of red and black. One of the motifs is identical to the eagle’s face that one finds on the totems of the first nations of the Pacific North West in Canada. His Facebook photo has him resting and smiling at the edge of a swimming pool. Despite his intellectual approach, Keith’s heart is open.

Samantha picked me up in her Land Rover at the gate to Neptune House; Keith soon joined us in his vehicle, a VW Jetta. After stopping for petrol and a loaf of bread, we were off. Keith went separately because he had to return to Gibraltar earlier than Samantha. After passing the beach at Tarifa, and having climbed the road into the Spanish hills, we reached the turn-off point that led down to Manuel and Rosa’s rancho. Keith joined us there. Samantha turned her S.U.V. onto a narrow, sandy road. Within minutes, we reached another “road,” which consisted of roughly hewn boulders planted into the ground. The road was in such a rough state that I warned Samantha about possible damage to her vehicle, but she assured me that the Land Rover was built to handle it. After a short stretch the road ended. We stopped, got out, and within a few hundred metres, we reached a rusty swinging gate. We went through, and from there, we crossed a patchy, dry field that led down to a low wall which marked the entrance to Manuel’s and Rosa’s white-washed hacienda.

A woman of medium height with a smiling, roundish face greeted us warmly at the door. Rosa appeared to be in her late fifties. Rosa wore thick rimmed glasses; her brown hair was tied back. Unlike many Spaniards who enjoy their sunny clime, Rosa’s skin was not tanned. She would not have looked out of place in England. But where was Manuel? He came in the front door a few minutes later wearing a white towel, having just taken his morning bath in the outdoor bathroom. Once Manuel had dressed, he joined us. Wine was served where we sat in the narrow front room that contained a fireplace made of rough stone covering an entire wall. As they drank their wine, and I my *agua mineral*, the conversation was engaged in Spanish. Spanish it was because Rosa spoke no English; Manuel spoke about as

much English as I spoke Spanish—very little. As I spoke, my remarks were translated into Spanish by Keith or Samantha and they, in turn, translated for Manuel and Rosa into English.

Finding Ourselves United

Before the afternoon visit with Manuel and Rosa, I did not fully understand ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement that “If only men would search out truth, they would find themselves united.” But that afternoon in the hills above Tarifa I learned the truth of the Master’s statement by direct experience. Over a simple, tasty lunch of fried rice, tomatoes, green and red peppers, grown on the land, and following an outside tour of their vegetable patch, we spoke more earnestly of the future of the mankind, in light of the destructive chaos that is now devastating the entire planet. I made the point that in chaos theory what first appears to be chaos proves in time to be a new pattern of emerging order. The pattern that is now emerging, I maintained, was a new world order. Manuel must have had similar ideas because he nodded his head, saying a gentle but firm “Si”. My observation was not, of course, my own; it was based on Shoghi Effendi’s cogent little phrase that order and chaos have reciprocal effects on each other.

We spoke also of one of Keith’s favourite topics—the mysterious nature of reality according to quantum physics to which I attempted to add a spiritual dimension in keeping with the complimentary nature of religion and science. We observed with unanimous satisfaction that our topics of conversation were unusual in that they went beyond the usual surface pleasantries of our mundane lives, the political machinations of the day, the World Cup of Football, or what-have-you, At one clear point during our conversation, the truth of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement struck me forcibly. It brought a conclusion to the conversation. We had reached unanimity. That five people, a small mix of friends and strangers could have reached agreement so quickly demonstrated to me the unifying power of the search for truth and the veracity of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words.

“Come with me to the Kazbah”: Visiting Tangier: October 25, 2009

Yesterday I landed for the first time in Africa. In the months leading up to my departure from Ottawa, I used to sign some of my friendly emails “Jocko heading for Morocco.” I did so because I had planned to visit Morocco while I was

in Gibraltar. Well, assisted by the magic hand of time, I can now say that I've been there. Now I can start signing "Jocko who's been to Morocco!" I was accompanied on the day trip by "sister" Monica Porter, as they call themselves, one of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University devotees from the U.K. who is here for a sabbatical visit of several weeks duration. The Brahma Kumaris have a small shop called Butterfly just off Main Street. Monica will be returning at the beginning of November. We took a fixed rate taxi south-west to the port of Algeciras, about a forty-five minute drive, and from there a large Spanish ferry to Tangier. The crossing took a few hours; the weather was gloriously sunny. On the decks, the fresh air breathed in *à pleins poumons*, combined with serene moments of basking in the sun, made the crossing at once invigorating and pacifying. Since the time of my youth, I have been intrigued and amused by the little phrase "Come with me to the kazbah." which comes from previews/trailers of the 1938 American movie "Algiers." Well, I finally did go to the kazbah, which refers to the old fortified Arab quarter. Tangier was one of the most interesting places I have ever visited, but then I cannot claim to be an experienced world traveller of exotic locales. Beyond the shoreline, with its modern ferry terminal, docks and fishing boats, its line of hotels on the main boulevard that thrive on the tourist industry, an authentic Moroccan atmosphere colours the bazaars and the narrow winding lanes and streets.

After we reached *terra firma*, I was finally forced to be slightly adamant to one of the tourist guides who stuck to us like glue. In retrospect, the best tactic to handle these persistent folk, who are after all just trying to eke out an honest living, is not to make eye contact, keep walking straight ahead and be resolved to say nothing. "But mister," one of these tenacious ones said, "You won't be able to find your way around in there. You'll get lost. You need a guide." It was the psychology of fear. "Is it dangerous?" I responded. "No," he said. "Well then," I continued, "We'll go it alone." He finally got the message after walking with us for almost five minutes and after trying bargaining, hounding and guilt psychology. We had decided in advance that we did not want to be treated to the organized tours that are arranged for the benefit of local merchants.

After we had walked up the hill into one of the main kazbahs, we happened to meet a sixty something, diminutive, Tangierian named Ahmad Ali. (He later told us that the spot where we met him was in the kazbah for tourists). This tense

but open and friendly man was sitting casually on the steps of a small shop, smoking a cigarette, just across from the restaurant where he told us he worked. Ahmad had attended the American school in Tangier and spoke English fluently. This improvised guide took us around the town for a modest price, but he seemed genuinely interested in showing us the real Tangier. Old Tangier is a world that has been only superficially brushed by modernity. In the shop windows, except for watches, I noticed very few cell phones, televisions, computers, cameras and other electronic goods that are ubiquitous in western Europe and North America. Since Morocco is an Islamic country, alcohol was conspicuously absent. Instead the shops were heavily laden with excellent, hand-made leather goods (slippers, purses, wallets, etc.), textiles (long jelabachs, scarves, etc.), decorative and functional cookery, such as copper and brass tea kettles, vases, and bowls.

With Ahmad as our guide, we appeared to be the only non-natives wandering through those narrow lanes, but I felt nonetheless quite at home. The tourists usually do not frequent some of the places we visited. I felt stimulated, relaxed and charmed by the passing scenes; I smiled and greeted the men, women and children who were walking by or standing in the doorways or playing in the streets. Ahmad told us that writers Allan Ginsberg, William Burroughs and actress Barbara Hutton lived at one time in Tangier. We passed by the outside of Barbara Hutton's walled, whitewashed, former home, still a tourist attraction, I imagine. It was one of the few homes in Tangier that we saw that was graced with flowers that ran along the top of the outer wall. Later, in one of the smaller lobbies of the Continental Hotel, I looked at a yesteryear photo of a relaxed, sitting guest--Humphrey Bogart. Ahmad took us to the entrance of the courtyard of rocker Mick Jagger's house. I glimpsed a European man inside the house at the end of the walkway. Ahmad Ali explained that Europeans are buying old properties fairly cheaply, at least compared to European prices, and are renovating them for second homes. These refurbished homes have new windows and doors and clean, smooth, whitewashed façades that shine brilliantly in the sun. Their updated appearance contrasts markedly with the ancient, earth-coloured, stone dwellings that stand beside them.

Ahmad took us on a quick tour of nearby "restaurant." Being a little weary from the tour by that time, I wanted to stay for tea but Ahmad seemed reluctant. He drew my attention to the photos on the wall that depicted certain celebrities

smoking marijuana and hashish there. On second glance, the occupants that were standing around sullenly did not impress me. The “restaurant” was a locale for drug-dealing. We turned and walked out. As we continued to roam around the kazbah, our guide took us into a large Berber manufacture where rugs are woven by hand on old wooden looms. This was truly a trip back in time. These partitioned, small work stations were dimly lit “holes in the wall,” around and above the courtyard, where workers sat at their looms all day. If there were owners or managers, they sat on their chairs, or at their desks, or stood in the door to see if prospective buyers might be coming down the passage. I looked in as we walked by and was surprised to notice one very industrious, smiling worker. This artisan was just beaming inside his dim enclosure, his radiant face shining over his loom. He achieved such a rhythmic motion with the repetitive movement of his hands and arms that he seemed to be in a trance. Perhaps he was a devoted Muslim meditating on Allah. In any case, some spirit of wrapt inner joy was just beaming from his face. By contrast, other workers looked anything but joyful; they worked robotically at their looms.

Wild cats wandered up and down the passageway and on top of the thick-gauge, weather-beaten, plastic roofs that were scattered with debris and covered some stalls on the ground floor below. Coming from Canada, I expected the cats to be domesticated, but soon discovered that they were half-wild scavengers. Having no food, I did not succeed in luring one close enough to be patted. In one of the covered markets, I saw some women from the Atlas mountains wearing ankle-length, bright, full skirts and broad hats that at first glance seemed to resemble the Bolivian mountain people. Their faces were marked with simple tattoos, consisting of a few horizontal blue lines on the chin. These women had no stalls and sat where they could find room, on cushions or low stools, with their spices laid out on colourful scarves before them.

We passed by another open market whose canvas roof was all in tatters. There we saw merchants selling huge chunks of charcoal the size of tree trunks. Close by the charcoal, earthen pots and pitchers in brightly coloured, bold, simple designs were standing in the sun. As we passed by in the street, both Monica and I witnessed a sales practice that neither one of us would see either in Britain or Canada: the fish mongers held out the raw fish in their bare hands for you to inspect. Later, we walked through the Jewish quarter. In the afternoon, we stopped

for tea at the Continental Hotel that overlooks the water. Somehow—and how exactly this happened I was not sure—Monica and I were invited into the upper floors of the outer court of the hotel where we viewed the splendid floor-to-ceiling blue and white mosaics and two spectacular bejewelled chairs--virtual thrones. It was a vivid scene from authentic old Morocco. These geometric, multi-coloured mosaics were one of the artistic fruits that the faith of Islam had produced in a former age.

***Déjà Vu* at a Town Square**

I had one remarkable *déjà vu* experience in Tangier. When we approached an open square with its palm trees, low plants, grassy knolls beyond and nearby mosque, busy with the afternoon traffic of the passing cars, I realized, with a sense of growing wonder, that I had dreamt of this very spot several years ago. My dream had come true before my eyes. Being in a different dimension, the vision I saw in my dream was a subtly different representation from the scene that lay before my eyes, but I recognized the two as one and the same.

Hit on the Head by a Deranged Man

While I did find Tangier exotic and fascinating by North American or European standards, I should not overlook the harsh reality of daily life in the Moroccan coastal city. People are really struggling “by hook or by crook” to make a living. As I walked through Tangier, I recalled reading Truman Capote’s vivid descriptive essay on Tangier not long before I left Ottawa. It was good advance preparation for the trip. In his essay, Capote alluded to the petty criminal and strangely deviant elements that thrived in the Tangier of the 1920’s and 1930’s. To my searching eyes, it looked as if some of these shady characters were perhaps still at large. I did not always feel at ease in Tangier, despite my intense curiosity and passing tourist satisfaction. The tense, brittle atmosphere leaves you lacking a sense of security. You never know what’s coming next.

I suddenly received one graphic reminder of this unpredictable world when I got whacked on the head from out of nowhere by a one-eyed, deranged man. He didn’t hurt me, but I was momentarily stunned, more from surprise than anything else. When I looked into his round, one-eyed face and bald head, he appeared like a figure who had just dropped out of Victor Hugo’s novel *The Hunchback of Notre*

Dame. A couple of stall owners had witnessed the incident and quickly intervened. Our afternoon was quickly spent. As evening descended, it was time to return to the ferry terminal for the trip back to Algeciras. It was Tangier and the kazbah in a day: ancient, weirdly fascinating and unpredictable. But for the populace that lives inside these gates, this is their existence.

Hosting the Jazz Trio of Brother Wali, Norman and Lewis at Sacarello's Restaurant: November 1, 2009

Last night I was asked by Brother Wali to host his jazz trio of flute, bass and drums at Sacarello's restaurant in Irish Town. Irish Town is the name of the street, not an actual Irish section of Gibraltar, although it must have been at one time as its name suggests. Brother Wali is a smiling, sixty something black American flutist from Philadelphia, with three braids in his hair, a broad smile, regular white teeth, a positive spirit and easy laugh who plays in the streets of Gibraltar and the clubs both here in Spain. He reminds me of a jazzy, magical, modern pied piper. I had a good fireside with him the other day at Café Solo. He seemed impressed when I told him Dizzy Gillespie was a Bahá'í and that John Birks, as his close friends called Dizzy, gave a fireside at the McLean home at 6 Emery Circle in Etobicoke (Toronto) circa 1969. I even relayed to Wali some of the things Dizzy said about racial prejudice that night and how harmful it is.

Jazz fans would have enjoyed the evening. There was a very close, warm atmosphere between audience and players at Sacarello's. The *Trio of Brother Wali, Norman and Lewis* were in exceptional form. Norman Tonna, the drummer, a Gibraltarian, sang a sad bolero in Spanish. It was very moving—*un cri du coeur*. The bolero works only in Spanish. Fiona Young got her jazz vocalist debut when she sang "Summertime," while her two little children, newborn Shadi and three-year-old Dylan slept with his feet on Monica's lap and his head on his grandmother's lap. Fiona enjoyed herself as she sang, smiling throughout the rendition, while her parents, Mina and Keven Beint, visitors from the U.K. looked on. Fiona's debut was much better than karaoke because she had live backup. I also wanted to make a vocal debut, but in the end, I didn't dare ask. Brother Wali had dubbed the evening an "Inner Journey" and the atmosphere proved true to its theme. The trio played mostly the beloved jazz vocal standards like "Autumn Leaves," "I've got you under my skin," and "The Girl from Ipanema" that Norman

sang in Portuguese while he drummed away. The evening was one the highlights of my stay in Gibraltar.

Yesterday we finished our week-long Bahá'í exhibit at John Mackintosh Hall. We had only about fifteen visitors but we made some good contacts including the young man Mark Clancy who works evening at the front desk. Mark came to visit and chat with us almost every evening we were there, freely sharing his insights about religion and the world. At lunch time, we would go down the street to eat at the Carpenter's Arms, an economically priced, small, warm and friendly cafeteria run by the Methodist church, founded by the exceptionally effective and charismatic religious reformer, John Wesley. During the week, we took every opportunity to teach the Faith everywhere we went.

Sarah Bishop and Ann Dymond worked very hard at conceiving and executing the project which consisted of colourful printed displays of the teachings mounted on the walls, a moveable white cardboard display of the principles and the temples placed on a table, several laminated quotations from the writings in Spanish, two vases of pink carnations, one being green which I hastily purchased from Saverland, and a multi-lingual D.V.D. presentation on the Bahá'í gardens in Haifa by the German Bahá'í Verlag (2005). I provided support and company and loaned my borrowed television for the DVD. Talks were advertised twice a day that I was supposed to give but no seekers turned up.

Ann Dymond is a travel-teacher from Britain, a vigorous eighty-one year old and former yoga teacher with a sprightly step, who looks at least ten years younger than her chronological age. She has been a great help during her stay of a few weeks, but she will be returning home to the U.K. on Thursday. Ken Bishop, Trevor Richardson and Suresh Malkani all lent a hand. We had no success during the exhibit in encouraging seekers to join a Book One study circle, but at least the names of Bahá'u'lláh and the Bahá'í Faith are being spread in Gibraltar.

At the moment I am reading Monica Furlong's excellent 1980 biography of Father Thomas Merton, one of my favourite twentieth century spiritual giants, whose soul, spirit and outlook were all very close to the spirit of the Bahá'í Faith. I find myself resonating with Merton's thinking, with his mystical-spiritual-theological outlook. Yesterday I wrote a poem which I reproduce here which

begins with a quotation from Merton. The phrase, “the waters of Siloe” is also taken from the title of one of Merton’s books. The poem relates one of the *déjà vu* experiences about Gibraltar that I had in Ottawa one afternoon some eight years ago when I was fully awake. I say *déjà vu*, but the following poem captures, rather, a clair-audient experience. The poem derives from an experience of *hearing* rather than seeing, although upon reflection it seems to me that I could also see the ships whose horn I heard sounding.

Ship’s Low Horn Singing

“We feel His eyes upon us as we sit under the fig tree and our souls momentarily spring to life at the touch of His hidden finger.” (Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas*)

I heard the ships low horn
out in the Straits of Gibraltar.
I heard it then in Ottawa,
one afternoon, these eight years ago,
as surely, clearly as I hear it now.

Truly, spirit is not in the fabric of space-time;
no, not really in the body, but associated,
while it’s here, yet distinct, apart.

Yes, I heard the ship’s horn singing low then.
I sit and listen to it now.
It was the same moment, this singing,
this low singing, calling me here....

Not the siren’s shrill but subtle call,
the voice of the crimson ark,
the mother ship, to launch us on new waters,
the waters of Siloe, where we will find ourselves
sailing the high seas, without desire,
uncommonly filled,
at peace, empty at last.

I am also reading *Faith in the Age of Reason* (the Enlightenment) by Jonathan Hill. I risk oversimplification in saying that the Enlightenment was largely a reaction to religious extremism, repressive church authority and dogmatism. It is estimated that some thirteen million people lost their lives in the Thirty Years War which was largely a Protestant-Catholic conflict with political overtones. Following this catastrophe, large numbers of thinking people turned to reason and away from religion and religious conflict. The result was the first post-Renaissance European wave of scepticism, agnosticism and atheism, but it gave great impetus to science and scientific method and resulted in the first serious or systematic investigations of natural as well as supernatural phenomena. Those Christian thinkers who remained faithful to Christian doctrine tried to reinterpret it along lines that would be consistent with the dispassionate dictates of reason, which decidedly reduced the place of faith and revelation. If faith and revelation were still considered to be valid, they had to be subjected to the test of reason. The defined form of this rationalistic religion, which flourished in the early eighteenth century, was deism—a scandal to the older generation of faith-based believers.

Speaking to the Gibraltar Philosophical Society: November 5, 2009

On Tuesday evening, November 3rd at 7:30 p.m., I spoke to a full house of forty people in the upstairs Lecture Room at John Mackintosh Hall. That evening was one of the highlights of my stay in Gibraltar. The lecture was entitled “Truth Claims, Exclusivism and Religious Diversity: Is any Unity Possible?” The afternoon of the lecture, I was interviewed on G.B.C. radio (Gibraltar Broadcasting Company) by a young and perceptive reporter name Jonathan Scott. It was an engaging meeting with an alert and informed audience consisting of Christians, Jews, agnostics, atheists but no Muslims. A lively half hour discussion followed. The same Andrew Planet whom I first met at the interfaith meeting at St. Andrew’s church on October 1st digitally recorded the talk. The secretary of the G.P.A. Giordano Durante, was pleased with the turnout and the talk.

The Bahá’ís in attendance were Ann Dymond, Kevin and Mina Beint, Fiona Young’s parents, all visiting from the U.K.; all three returned to England today. During the discussion period, I noticed that several people expressed their approval of the belief in the harmony of religion and science. One young woman made a comment on progressive revelation, in the light of the historical constraints of

education and culture and the growing consciousness of humanity, that was remarkably perceptive and close to the spirit of the Faith. My subjective impression was that she had clearly understood some of the implications of progressive revelation as a partial solution to the seemingly mutually exclusive truth claims made the world's religions.

I approached the topic by saying that my presentation just might end up by raising as many questions as it proposes to answer, but that these questions were all part of the ongoing process involved in the search for truth. I proposed five theories to the audience that were capable of leading the various world religionists to certain forms of unity: 1. The recognition that revelation has occurred progressively in history. 2. The oneness of religion 3. The relativity of religious truth 4. Dispensational religion 5. The search for truth. I also outlined several possible forms that the unity of religions might take which included the simple recognition of the truths contained in religions other than our own, and the more challenging acceptance of the divine mission of the founders of the world's religions other than our own, to the more challenging "inclusivistic" unity that would result were of one of the world's religions able to convince the others that it held the key to a harmonization of the teachings of the world's religions. I was, of course, thinking of the Bahá'í Faith by suggesting this last possibility, but I had to admit, in a gesture of realism, that this theory was an admittedly idealistic goal, at least in the short term. Still, I hoped by the comment to instill the idea into the minds of the perceptive ones in that bright and engaged audience that the Bahá'í Faith, being suited to meet the great imperatives of our time, might be able to achieve such a great goal, which has been the promise of all past Prophets and ages.

My comments were interspersed with some observations gleaned from my academic studies of religion and my own readings. One of my comments was that philosophy, with its emphasis on logic, healthy scepticism, reasoning and its requirement for logical "proof" was valuable to religion in that it deterred dogmatism and opened up religious studies to critical or analytical thinking, and provided a sharp tool of analysis to explore and expound the teachings revealed in scripture. It was St. Anselm's old but gold idea of *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith leading understanding), which is but another way of saying the faith and reason (understanding) must work together. Ultimately, of course, the complementary

nature of science and religion has to do with the harmonisation of faith and reason, of the truths received by revelation, explained in the divine light of reason, one of the several preeminent gifts bestowed by God on the human reality, as Bahá'u'lláh has revealed. The “proof texts” I cited came directly from the Bahá'í sacred writings. The presentation was decidedly “low tech.” I didn't have a handout of the lecture outline. But the old-fashioned lecture method seemed to work well.

Multiple Activities Condensed in Space-Time: “Home is Where the Heart is”

The inhabitants of the Rock of Gibraltar live in a very condensed space. The whole community lives around the base of the massive limestone Rock which dominates physical life here along with the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, the sea-salt air or the “Levanta,” the east wind that blows in and hangs its misty cloud like a hat over the Rock. When the road beyond Catalan Beach is opened up again, I imagine that a pedestrian could walk around all of Gibraltar from Casemates Square and back within several hours—at a rough estimate. These past two months have just flown by, but I am pleased at how much activity has been condensed into this brief period. I only hope that other opportunities to teach the Faith or contribute to Gibraltar's cultural or intellectual life await me in the brief time that is left. Some of these opportunities I will need to create myself. The interview that Samantha's mother, Sonia Golt, did for one of the local newspapers “Seven Days” will be coming out on Friday, November 13th. I am reminded that that I have to contact Alice Mascarenhas again, the features' editor of *The Chronicle* to see whether or not she is still interested in an interview or an article.

Being a pioneer, whether short or long-term confirms the believer in the knowledge that the weighty promises contained in our sacred writings are indeed true; as such, to experience them is part of the experimental or “scientific” method which is advocated by the Faith. But these emphatic promises are most vividly experienced in the arena of active service where they become fully abundant and available. Indeed, the believer who arises experiences the truth of Bahá'u'lláh's words in the *Gleanings* that the divine assistance of the ministering angels, each bearing aloft “a chalice of light” will be vouchsafed to the believer who arises.

The phrase “strange lands” is really an oxymoron. Gibraltar has seemed like a second home, almost from the moment I arrived here. We know from experience that some pioneers come to love their adopted country more than they do their native land. I think of Dr. Susan Moody preferring Persian and Iran over her native land and the English language. They do so because the pioneering field is where their heart is. They find their heart’s desire in that temporal space where sincere service is rendered. The old saying applies just as much to the Bahá’í pioneer as it does to anyone else: “Home is where the heart is.” The pioneer feels the presence of Bahá’u’lláh more keenly in the heart in the pioneering field than at home perhaps because s/he knows that serving as a pioneer is especially pleasing to Him. Shoghi Effendi stressed the importance of providing isolated local communities with as steady a flow of travel-teachers and pioneers as possible. By assisting the local community to keep moving forward, the travel-teacher or pioneer renders a service that increases the tempo of the teaching activity; and this renewed activity gives renewed vigour to the life of the community.

More on Science and Religion: A Scholar’s Talk on Chance and Contingency in the Evolution of Life Forms: John Mackintosh Hall: November 17, 2009

“Philosophy will clip an angel’s wings, Conquer all mysteries by rule and line, Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine - Unweave a rainbow.” John Keats

Keats’s ironic lines have put me to thinking. A Gibraltarian friend and spiritual seeker, Tanya Sacramento, quoted the first phrase of the above lines as we walked out into the cool, night air after attending a lecture at the Gibraltar Philosophical Society by Oxford scholar Dr. Clive Finlayson. His topic was “Chance and Contingency in the Evolution of Human Life Forms.” After we left John Mackintosh Hall, and continued walking down Main Street, my mind reached back to correlate my mood to the following poem by Walt Whitman, which is in itself a farsighted comment on the religion-science interface.

When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer

When I heard the learn’d astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts, the diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the learned astronomer where he lectured with much applause

in the lecture room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

The poet's contemplation in "perfect silence" of the starlit night sky, which stilled his troubled mind, might well contain the ancient roots of astronomy. Why should "perfect silence" perforce be anti-scientific? Einstein was closer to the truth in his "mystical" reflections on the symmetry of the universe with his mentions of "radiant beauty" and "harmony." Since Gibraltar is a relatively small place, a lot of people know Clive and call him by his first name. A number of scientists and social scientists sat in the audience. Although Dr. Finlayson is an admitted agnostic, his wife is a practicing Catholic. I met her too and commented in jest that only love could keep an agnostic and a believer in the same marriage. She laughed heartily and agreed.

Dr. Finlayson has recently published a book at Oxford University Press which details his arguments as to why the Neanderthals went extinct. He directs the Gibraltar museum here which is fascinating. The other day I paid a visit to this facility, with its reconstructed downstairs Moorish baths which date from the 13th or 14th century. The informal talk was a broad brush sweep of human, plant and animal evolution going back to the beginnings of the fossil record and before. I asked him to clarify Darwin's written comment that it would be "absurd" to conclude that the human eye could have evolved by natural selection. Dr. Finlayson deferred to another scientist who is a Darwin specialist, who basically said that Darwin clarified the answer in later papers, but it was not at all clear to me by his answer what Darwin's clarification was. Clive said that he was satisfied that Dr. Richard Dawkins had explained the evolution of the eye. Creationists often cite this quote of Darwin, so it has, of course, been answered by atheistic scientists like Professor Dawkins.

Nonetheless, religion has a persistent way of resurrecting even after Nietzsche's lunatic declared in a fit of madness, as he ran through the market place, that "God is dead. We have killed him!" The rumoured death of God, despite the perverse uses human beings have put to religion over the centuries,

would appear to be false. For many modern scientists, science has become their religion. But this is not new. The Dutch Enlightenment astronomer, Christian Huygens, who discovered the rings of Saturn and Titan, Saturn's largest moon, said: "The world is my country, and science is my religion." In our time, science has become that totalizing reality, whose authority is never questioned, precisely the same error perpetrated by priesthood when they laid down binding dogmas in the Middle Ages. For these men and women, science risks becoming the whole purpose of their lives; everything must perforce be filtered through what they imagine are the absolute and irrefutable proofs of science. The problem with this absolute approach is that humanity must stand on two legs, not just one. We can stand on one leg for a short time, but we are always off-balance, and it proves to be exceedingly difficult. We were meant to be bipedal. Like Pierre-Simon Laplace, sometimes called the French Newton, who in answering the question of Napoleon as to where God fit into his planetary scheme, Laplace responded that he had no need of the God hypothesis: "Sire, je n'avais pas besoin de cette hypothèse."

The whole notion of teleology has now been practically banned from science. There is no directionality; everything is emerging in the now. It could have been factor A, B or C, that led to the final result, but it just so happened that it was factor C. But to return to the lecture: a biologist in the audience during the question period spoke of the cogency and logical interrelationships of systems. To him not everything appeared to be based on chance and contingency, an argument that made more sense to me. There has been such an overreaction by some scientists to the creationists and to religion generally that the phrase "argument by design" has become a forbidden phrase. It has become politically incorrect to speak of "design" in these discussions, even though every biologist, and even casual observers, know that nature is replete with patterns, which is just another word for design. The mathematical fractals found in natural forms indicate that there is design. If it is all chance and contingency, why have some physicists argued that the possibility of the universe forming by chance are so remote as to number in the trillions!

But to return to the saying of Keats: My lecture companion, Tanya Sacramento, offered the following observation. Unweaving the rainbow could simply mean: do the analysis but retain the magic. Science does not have to kill the sense of wonder. Keats is suggesting that reason ("philosophy") and science may

indeed demystify, but they do not necessarily give us angelic wings. Flogging reason alone can make us weary. It is the spirit of joy, the spirit of inspiration that gives us wings. The perceptive and alert secretary of the Philosophical Society here in Gibraltar, Giordano Durante, who has been a great help during my stay, suggests that Keats may have been referring to the nitpicking done by the scholastic philosopher-theologians, mind-numbing over-analysis that was criticized by Descartes and Hume. But for all of that, I can't imagine that Keats was in favour of killing scientific curiosity. He was arguing, instead, in favour of retaining the powers of imagination in an age when science was beginning to displace religion.

**How a Seed About Gibraltar was Planted in England and Blossomed Later:
Lee Toomey in Epsom and Evangelical John Culatto in Gibraltar: November
25, 2009**

The other day, I was treated again to the existential unexpected, just one of several epiphanic moments I have experienced here. The two players were John Culatto, Gibraltar's outstanding evangelical Christian, who proclaims Christ to all who will hear him, and one Canadian Bahá'í travel teacher. John greets and blesses all freely. Strangely enough, although John would, of course, like to see me convert to Christianity, amazingly, he has almost completely refrained from witnessing to me. What little preaching he has done, has taken place in a few short exchanges on email. He has, instead, become a friend who has invited me for coffee and conversation. I am not exactly sure of the reason for John's reluctance to proclaim Christ to me as he does to others. Perhaps it is because I relate to him on his own level, fully acknowledging that Bahá'ís believe in the sonship and divinity of Christ, and because I acknowledge that Jesus is the great, loving Saviour in his life who "heals, saves and delivers". (This message John wears on his cap). He has met the Bahá'ís in Gibraltar and has looked up the Bahá'í Faith on the Internet. He told me we would have a difference of opinion about Bahá'u'lláh, a statement to which I readily agreed, but I reminded him that we would have fewer disagreements about Jesus, and that we should stick to that and remain united in the love of Christ.

Now here I will have to backtrack to 2004, five years ago at this writing. During that summer, I took a month-long travel-teaching trip to England and France, having spent two weeks in each country. Part of the time in England was

spent in Epsom, the market town in Surrey, famous for its magnesium sulphate salts. Living just across the street from the Bahá'í family who were kind enough to offer me hospitality was a Christian woman named Lee Toomey. I befriended Lee during my stay in Epsom and helped her sort out her house and her papers because she was having difficulty dealing with household tasks because of medical issues. Lee was kind enough to take me on a tour of the lovely Royal Botanical Gardens at Wisley. Lee and I spoke on the telephone a few times after I returned to Ottawa and then lost contact. In the meantime, I had forgotten her name.

It was during one of those telephone conversations that Lee prayed for me—and, of all things, in tongues! Based on Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (*passim* chapters 12-14) and the Book of Acts (2:4), speaking in tongues is one of the several gifts of the Spirit. Although I have seen and heard Pentecostals speaking in tongues on television, listening to Lee Toomey pray spontaneously for me in tongues was a strange but captivating experience. It was my distinct impression of a visitation from another time and place. Lee was not speaking in gibberish. To my ears, it sounded like a genuine, ancient language of the Middle East. What occurred to me intuitively was that this language might be similar to Aramaic, the very language that Jesus spoke. When she had finished praying, Lee then interpreted the gist of the prayer in English. Lee could not only pray in tongues, but also interpret them, which is a separate gift mentioned in the Gospel among the gifts of the Spirit. (1 Cor. 14: 27-28).

In the intervening five years I had not been in touch with Lee Toomey. I had, in fact, forgotten her name and lost her telephone number. But although I knew Lee Toomey for less than two weeks, she was one of those whom Providence put on my path, for Lee was the first person who alerted me to Gibraltar's existence as a country, other than my being aware, like everyone else, of the iconic Rock. Lee had grown up in Gibraltar, and I remember her telling me that her father had been a doctor and had passed away there. She also told me that she could speak Spanish because most Gibraltarians know Spanish. Lee was also a poet; she lent me a chapbook containing some of her poems. The conversation about Gibraltar was a seed that Lee had planted unknowingly in my mind; that seed was to germinate some five years later.

I mentioned my acquaintance with Lee to John Culatto as we drank coffee at the Royal Calpe Café on Main Street, just across from the cathedral St. Mary the Crowned. I continued. "I have forgotten the woman's name, but her father was a doctor." John looked up and replied immediately: "I know who she is. Her name is Lee Toomey. Her father was a very good doctor and her sister Angela still lives in Gibraltar and so does her mother, if she is still alive. They are living in the same house near the Convent School on the road to Europa Point." I was just amazed. "Yes," I said. "That's her name, Lee Toomey! And you know her sister?" I was under the full shock of a surprise that John had been able to connect the dots that had been first pointed in Epsom, and were now being joined in Gibraltar, the very place that Lee had told me about and where her family, John was now telling me, were still living. "John," I said. "Can we go there right now?" "Well, yes," he said. "Why not? It's a bit of a walk but it shouldn't take us too long, maybe twenty minutes."

So after we finished our coffee, off we walked up Main Street and through the Southport Gate, constructed during the reign of Emperor Charles V, and uphill through the Alameda Gardens, talking about various things along the way: our health in our senior years, the plants in the gardens, how I met Lee Toomey, our friends in Gibraltar and our respective families. (John had six children and has been married about 35 years). In about twenty minutes, we reached a brown door that stood only a few feet away from the sidewalk and road. John rang the buzzer. After a brief pause, a woman's voice came through the intercom. John announced himself and the woman invited us in. As we walked down the steep stairs into the courtyard that led to the house, a tall, trim, black-haired woman with pale skin, and a mild, gentle voice came out to greet us. This was Angela, Lee Toomey's sister. John introduced me and I could not help, there and then, while still standing in the courtyard, to express my delight to Angela that I had met her sister Lee in Epsom in 2004, and that through John Culatto, I was now meeting her in Gibraltar.

Angela invited us in for tea, and introduced us to her frail, sweet, ninety-two year old, silver-haired mother with the faded blue eyes. The mother seemed genuinely happy to meet us when she learned the circumstances of my meeting with her daughter Lee. There on the mantle-piece, I saw pictures of Dr. Toomey, the very man Lee had told me about in Epsom, and whose vigorous looking face, I could now see. Alongside the picture of her father, there stood a smiling Lee

Toomey herself, in cap-and-gown, freshly graduated from a British university. When the hour was up, John and I thanked our gracious hostess and we headed back to town. I parted the ways with John somewhere along Main Street, turning left down one of the lanes, making my way toward Fiona's apartment in the Atlantic Suites, near Morrison's supermarket, just across from Rozita's office at Sapphire Net in the Euro Towers, to attend the Nineteen Day Feast.

Although I was about an half-hour late, since the walk from the Toomeys had taken me longer than I expected, all the friends had kindly waited for me. A few days later, I phoned Lee Toomey in Epsom, having obtained her phone number from her sister Angela. She was still living in the same house across the street from her Bahá'í neighbour. I had not spoken to Lee in almost five years, but we took up our conversation as if it had been only yesterday. Somehow she did not seem surprised that I had ended up in Gibraltar, the country where she had been raised, and that I had actually gone there and met her sister and her frail, old mother. I was expecting Lee to be as astonished as I was, but as it turned out, I was more surprised at this development than she was.

The Emerging World Consciousness: Speaking to Peter MacKay's Youth Group in Alcadeisa: November 30, 2009

It's almost midnight. I have been to Alcadeisa and back this evening. There were about fifteen of us all in a circle in a hotel restaurant. (Nobody else was there). Before we went up to the hotel, to find a comfortable quiet spot that was congenial for the meeting, we met outside a little snack-bar counter and had coffee. I first met Peter MacKay in Gibraltar at Samantha Gold's Theory of One group. I felt immediately at ease with Peter. He was the sort of person that inspired trust immediately, a kindly, good-natured and loveable man that you would feel happy to welcome into your circle of friends.

At the snack-bar, Peter introduced me to an Englishman named Frank, a hypnotherapist, who at first had seemed a little reticent. But I knew that if Peter had invited him there, he would have had something meaningful to say. Some years ago, after he had abandoned a soul-destroying lifestyle, Frank had a spontaneous and remarkable out-of-body experience during hypnosis that changed his life, and made him more open to the religious/spiritual perspective. Prior to his

life-changing moment, he confessed that he had had absolutely no use for either religion or spirituality. Also present there was an Englishwoman named Marjorie, a lovely senior who is a psychic who says she is never wrong and who also does healings. Peter also introduced me to his namesake, another Peter who was in his late 30's or early 40's, who is on a spiritual path that I would characterize more or less as belonging to New Age spirituality. The two Peters, Frank, Marjorie and I were the anchor group for the meeting, with Peter MacKay being the leader. Then we went up to the hotel.

Peter introduced me briefly. There were two Spanish ladies there for about an half-hour, so Peter MacKay had to translate my talk until they left. I spoke about the developing world consciousness and how people—and all things really—are so interconnected in the world, that unity in all its forms was the key to our age because interconnectedness is about unity, even with the lower forms of life, like plants and animals. I spoke about the world of tomorrow and how the leaders of tomorrow would eventually have to develop the spiritual tools to carry humanity forward, and that the ones who had these spiritual tools and who were able to propose workable, creative solutions to old-age problems were really the best qualified leaders of the world of tomorrow. I spoke about the wonderful phenomenon of perfect strangers becoming friends, after only a matter of hours in one another's company, and suggested that this was happening so quickly because there was precious little time to put the world's grave problems aright. (I spoke of other things that I am passing over). I felt that the audience was listening very closely, so closely that they were resonating. We were tuned to the same vibration. It was of course a Bahá'í inspired talk, but I used the indirect approach, without quoting the writings—at least until the end of the talk.

I closed the talk by reading from the first few pages of the Hidden Words, the ones about love and justice. The audience seemed to be just drinking up Bahá'u'lláh's life-giving words. Peter MacKay said that the readings had confirmed something very important for him, forgotten since his childhood. He realized again that God loved him, and that he needed to hear this fundamental message again, a message that is at the very heart of all religion. They all agreed that LOVE was the most powerful force in the universe.

After the break, we went into part two. Peter did his intuitive, clairvoyant readings of the young people there. He is a spiritualist, but he uses his gift more as a loving teacher and wise mentor. I did not feel any awkward, downward pull of strange, psychic vibrations. It all seemed very natural, I think because Peter's motive is pure. The anchors, including me, assisted in the "reading" of these young people. (I say young people, meaning that most were 20 and 30 somethings). After he diagnosed them, they opened up and talked about their lives and the struggles they have gone through in their families and in their relationships, and how spirituality is fitting into their lives now. Nobody was nervous except in an expectant way. It was all very real, very comfortable, very loving and very natural. People were very much in tune. We also did some story-telling and sharing spiritual experiences. Strangers became friends in a short time.

When the meeting was breaking up, Marjorie stood up and spontaneously laid her hands on my head. It was very relaxing. I use much intellectual energy, i.e. nervous energy in my work; so to feel her healing touch was a comforting balm and a welcome relief. She said I had a past injury in one of my neck muscles, but I had already told her that I broke my neck when I was twelve. She said the tinnitus (ringing in the ears) that I have suffered from for the past forty years, would go away. Well, it will go away eventually, of course—when I leave my body behind for good. Now it's past midnight, but speaking to that youth group was nothing short of a remarkable experience.

When you travel, you do realize that mankind is one. This evening confirmed my faith in human nature, gave me hope for the future, and made me realize how much we are all alike, wherever we are in the world. Many of us share a common human condition. Most of our spiritual struggles, at least in the western world, are the same: to break out of our anonymity, to understand our own nature at a profounder level—it remains a daunting task to "know thyself," one of the commands once inscribed near the entrance to Apollo's shrine at Delphi—to find meaning and purpose in life, to solve our personal problems and to build and live out a system of authentic values. However, such a spiritual search is one sense a luxury, although a necessary one. I do recognize that those who live in dire straits or who lack the bare necessities of life, are more preoccupied by the struggle for survival, and have less time to engage in these important existential preoccupations.

Surprise Going-Away Party: Monday, November 30, 2009

As far as I recall, I have had only one other surprise party in my life. It was a surprise birthday party given by the Bahá'ís of Gatineau when my daughters, Mukina and Leah, were teenagers. That surprise party must have taken place when I was in my forties. However, I have never had a surprise going-away party before the one organized by the friends in Gibraltar took place. They succeeded well: It was a total and complete, and altogether wonderful surprise. I was so focused on completing Book 4 during the last class before I left Gibraltar that I didn't even notice the balloons hanging on the walls when I entered the combined living and dining room area of Pouneh and Harald's house in the Ministry of Defence compound, just a stone's throw away from the Spanish border.

Pouneh had phoned about 15 minutes before the class started to offer to pick me up at Neptune House because it had been raining, but I had determined to walk on my own because I had not been getting enough exercise in Gibraltar. I took the call on my mobile phone, just as I was just stepping outside, and noticed that the rain had stopped—only momentarily as it turned out. I crossed the parking lot, walked along in front of the Victoria Sports Complex, and then went straight along to the roundabout where I turned left at Winston Churchill Avenue. Then I crossed the runway heading toward the M.O.D. By this time, the rain had begun to fall hard again, and the wind had picked up, but it wasn't long before I reached Pouneh and Harald's home, the very first house on the right after you have passed the guard's post and main gate.

I suspected nothing and headed straight for the dining room table where Pouneh, Harald and Rozita were sitting calmly waiting to continue our last lesson on Book Four on the lives of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Suddenly, the kitchen door burst open and a small crowd of the men, women, children in the Bahá'í community, and some of their friends, came rushing out, smiling and shouting "Surprise!" Well, I was so moved that didn't know whether to laugh or cry, but under the circumstances I didn't want to cry-- so I laughed—and I laughed repeatedly, so much was I under the impact of my emotions!

After the excitement had died down, I was presented with the gift of another backpack, courtesy of Suresh. Suresh had seen me every other day in his shop with

my laptop packed tight in my Mountain Co-op biker's backpack. Other gifts were a farewell jumbo-sized card signed by the friends with their comments, and a coffee-table book about Gibraltar. Then little Robin, Trevor's young step-son, played a tune on the coronet, and little Haifa and Dylan sang "We are drops of one ocean." Another lovely surprise was Trevor's and Haysell's announcement that they were getting married on May 2nd, 2010. These festivities were followed by a delicious potluck supper. All in all, it was a lovely way to celebrate my three months in Gibraltar and to send me merrily back home.

Departure: December 3, 2009

Two of the friends came to see me off, Ramin and Pounch. Ramin picked me up bag and baggage just outside Neptune House and we made the short drive to the airport. I always find that the last moments spent with loved ones or friends before an international departure are special. There were just the two of us at that point. Ramin was so kind and so humble, the essence of simplicity. We just stood in line and chatted quietly enjoying those final moments. He thanked me again for the three months spent in Gibraltar. We talked for a moment about a personal problem and a small, but very telling word of wisdom fell from his lips: "I think it's best to face your fears." Yes. It was the right word at the right time. How often has just the simplest of words or phrases from one of the friends found its mark in the heart and enabled the listener to do the right thing. In public or media discourse, we are subjected to lengthy speeches and torrents of words to influence the listener; even between close friends the conversations can be long but often with little effect. Although I cannot say that I am wise, Ramin's word was sufficient. Following my return home, it has proven true.

The New Agers with their "pop" psycho-spirituality say that there are only two things in life: love and fear. The New Age dictum is actually based on this verse from the first Epistle of St. John: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love"(4:18). That divine verse contains much wisdom. For fear and love are our greatest motivators and make life possible, although the greater the love is, the less we are dominated by the agony of fear. The new world come-of-age is beginning to learn that love is a greater motivator than fear, with all its negative

consequences. And as Jesus taught, love is a better motivator than fear when he said simply: “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15).

After I had checked in my bags and Ramin and I had said our good-byes, I still had some time left over before the departure of my flight. We had prearranged that I would pop over to Harald and Pouneh’s just across the street to spend some last moments with them. Dr. Harald was soon to be off to his M.O.D. clinic at Eastern Beach, so we said a warm good-bye. Harald is one of those souls of such great integrity, warmth and discipline that his example brought new meaning, to my consciousness at least, that the line between those call themselves Bahá’ís and those who are not official followers of Bahá’u’lláh, can be a fine one indeed. In fact, these distinctions are sometimes so subtle that understanding them should be best left to Bahá’u’lláh Himself.

Once Harald left, Pouneh offered me tea and fruit and sandwiches to take on my journey. She also offered me the gift of a book, *The Prince*, by Hushang Golshiri and translated from the Persian by James Buchanan. It is the story of the dark reminiscences of a dying consumptive prince of the doomed Qajar dynasty. As I read Buchanan’s introduction, the book seemed already familiar with the Iranian ambiance depicted there that once surrounded the historical “woeful struggles,” as Shoghi Effendi called them, of the Bábí martyrs of the Heroic Age (1844-1921). Buchanan mentions in passing the Bábí martyrs, those living torches, who had burning candles placed into their gouged out flesh by a savage populace misled by an equally fanatical clergy. And yet, they sang and danced beyond their pain and praised their Beloved until they expired. The translator tells us that the prince’s grandfather was Nasiri’d-din-Shah, the great enemy and avowed destroyer of the Bábí-Bahá’í Faith.

Pouneh inscribed the book: “With all our love, Harald, Pouneh, Haifa and Nura, xxx, See you soon.” Under the title she quoted the great Rumi: “When something unique becomes many, it loses its value. Yet many are the sorrows of the heart but they become precious gems on the path to the Beloved.” Then Pouneh, Haifa, Nura and I walked across the road to the Gibraltar Airport where I stood in line. Pouneh and I chatted for a while, reminiscing about the last three months. Then I said good-bye to the little children and their mother and walked on to board the plane.

As the Easy Jet Air Bus took off from the landing strip, I looked out of the window to take a last look at the white stucco Neptune House where I had stayed, clearly visible below, and glimpsed the great Rock of Gibraltar, that living symbol of steadfastness, and the surrounding waters of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, at the convergence of the two seas that I had dreamt about in another realm, and which I was destined to find later in person in the concrete world of space-time. *Au revoir*, dear Gibraltar. I leave fragments of my heart with you. God only knows whether or not I shall see you again.

Final Reflections: What I Have Learned in These Past Three Months

1. All the Promises in the Sacred Writings are True

Our sacred writings contain some remarkable promises of divine assistance for all those who arise to serve—especially for those who travel to foreign fields. It would be mistaken to think that these promises were mere hyperbole, just an emphatic way of basically saying that God will help you. But as for so many other things in life, one may know these things either theoretically or practically. One may well believe them theoretically. One should start there. But a believer becomes confirmed when he or she experiences them practically, by actually serving abroad in the field.

2. The Emerging World Consciousness and the Kindness of Strangers

One thing that constantly astonished me was the way that strangers seemed to just appear—and did appear. Every day there was a new surprise and delight. These friends, although they were not all believers in God in the traditional sense, nonetheless they felt as if they were members of my spiritual family. To me these souls represented the crest of the wave of rising world consciousness that is taking place simultaneously throughout the planet. We realize now more than ever that the catastrophic problems we share are global and interconnected, or in the language of the new physics, “entangled.” They require new and radically different solutions which must follow spiritual lines. For love and finding common points of similarity will always bring souls together, while focusing on differences is a misguided tactic that will always separate us one from the other and produce division and strife, unless these differences are accented to enhance the beauty of humanity in the perspective of “unity in diversity.”

Although I did some “leg-work” in trying to open doors for the Faith in Gibraltar, without my seeking them, opportunities were brought to me by others to teach the Cause, either directly or indirectly, whether it was Giordano’s invitation to address the Philosophical Society or Peter MacKay’s invitation to address his youth group or Samantha’s invitation to join the Theory of One discussion group which explored the oneness of all things, and that was intended to elaborate a new theory to sort out the world’s problems. The rapidity which defines the emergence of this intimacy reflects the pressing lack of time that remains for humans living in the dysfunctional old world order to correct the urgent problems that confound and confront mankind and that now threaten its very existence. In *The Hidden Words* (Persian #7) Bahá’u’lláh reveals: “Take one pace and with the next advance into the immortal realm and the enter the pavilion of eternity.” In past ages, lovers of God earnestly sought their heart’s desire, but in this revelation, the Beloved, astonishingly, seeks us! This affirmation should cause no trace of pride, smugness or self-congratulation. It is a testimony to the power of the Grand Theophany, the Great Manifestation of God, that suffuses and sustains all creation and that earnestly seeks to make the knowledge of God’s Revelation known to every single soul in this Great Day.

3. Synchronicity and the Power of Thought: Material and Spiritual Goods

‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that the reality of man is his thought, a truth that parallels the old biblical proverb “As a man thinketh so is he.” (Actually, that saying, I have since discovered is only a partial quote. The full sentence in Proverbs 23:7 reads: “As a man thinketh **in his heart** so he is.”). According to this belief, it is especially the thoughts that are entertained deeply in the heart, with profound conviction and hope, that become realized in the outer world. This law of the power of thought I was to discover over and over again in Gibraltar. This process of guidance and confirmation, or guidance and realization, which begins with a sincere desire to serve the Faith, involves both oneself and those who watch over us from the Abhá Kingdom

One small example of things just manifesting out of the ether—just as new friends and opportunities suddenly appeared—came in the form of an old song. Of course, sceptics argue that such things are merely coincidental. But when such coincidence becomes life-changing, or even confirming in a less significant way, it

is safe to assume that the synchronicity was created by the power of mind, and more especially, by the magic, hidden Hand of God. The song, which has no special significance for me among the scores upon scores of songs that I know and enjoy singing, I first heard when I was a student in Paris, beginning in the fall of 1965. It was an Italian popular hit song, “Lo Che Non Vivo Senza Te,” rendered in English by Dusty Springfield as “You Don’t Have to Say You Love Me.” It played in Italian on French radio. The lyrics included this line: “How am I going to live without you for a lifetime when I can’t (even) live an hour without you?” At this writing, it has been fully 45 years since I first heard that song. It has by no means been floating around in my musical memory since then, so I cannot say that the song has been frequently revisited. But when I travelled to Gibraltar, one afternoon as I walked down Main Street, this old song started to run through my mind again and I found myself singing it. That same day, tattoo artist and quantum physics connoisseur, Keith Tonna, invited me to dinner in a restaurant off Irish Town Road, one of the main streets of Gibraltar which parallels Main Street. As we walked into the restaurant, the strains of that very Italian song floated on the air from a radio being played back in the kitchen. When I heard the music, I related to Keith the coincidence connected with the song, but I am sure that I was subjectively more impressed by the experience than he was.

4. Personal Problem-Solving

Although my main motive in travel-teaching was not to solve personal problems, my last reflection on lessons learned in Gibraltar would be the following: whatever your problems and challenges are, arising to serve the Faith will help to solve them. When you arise to serve the Faith, you tap into the Covenant; you align yourself with that divine energy that sustains the universe and all that lies within it. You are affected, consequently, at a much deeper level than the mind and the emotions. Your heart is moved and changed. Your consciousness is refreshed and purified; yes, even your strained nerves. You find a greater degree of detachment—a never-ending process in this life. You experience increased peace of mind.

Closing the Book

Gibraltar was my first in the three month short-term pioneering project, the current approach which helps to define the more systematic effort to teach the Bahá'í Faith which has now replaced random travel-teaching with its stays of unspecified duration. At this writing, it is now the end of March, 2010, and we have just celebrated Naw-Ruz 167 B.E. I have now reached the end of this spiritual travelog. When I look back now on my short stay, I am left with two predominant emotions: the first is gratitude for the opportunity of being able to help the friends in Gibraltar in a small way to advance the institute process. My visit lasted only a short time. But they, not I, are the steadfast pioneers who are engaged in the day-to-day, long-term community building process. The second emotion is a warm satisfaction, the joy that comes with knowing that you have served the Faith abroad. The physical move that is pioneering, whether it be long or short, always corresponds to movement in one's inner life. We are inevitably changed by the experience. The greatest of all teachers, next to the Founders of our Faith, the immortal Martha Root, said that she never liked to say good-bye. Instead it was Alláh'u'Abhá and only Alláh'u'Abhá. So in closing I say to you Alláh'u'Abhá!

John Allan McLean, Ottawa, 8 Bahá, 167/28 March

2010