

A New Development in the Bahá'í Community

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Through the guidance of the August Body, the Bahá'í World Community at present is active and dynamic with such eagerness that it astonishes every observer. In tens of thousands of large and small communities all over the world, the believers are enthusiastically working in a harmonized and coordinated manner; and in villages and cities throughout the globe, whether in the frozen lands of Alaska or in the hot jungles in Africa, be it in the advanced countries of the West as well as the developing areas of the East, one sees innumerable groups that have formed in which men and women, young and old, educated and untaught alike, gather to study the Rúhí books, or get together in prayer meetings.

Such gatherings are on the one hand reminiscent of the early years of the history of the Faith when the believers used to assemble - often after midnight and undetected by eavesdroppers and trouble makers - to share and study a newly received Tablet. At other times, seeing the friends on their way to the study circles revives the memories of the Friday morning Bahá'í children Classes in Tíhrán when students - with books tucked under their arms - used to go to their classes. How often it is seen that inactive believers who were most unlikely to be involved in the activities of the community, now eagerly join the gatherings of the friends and regret the lost bygone times and opportunities. So numerous are the enthusiastic seekers who even offer their own homes for holding prayer meetings and Rúhí study circles.

This world-wide movement and uniform activity might be interpreted by some as a revolution, but for those who are familiar with the course of the history of the Faith, this is but another stage within the developing stages of the Bahá'í World Community; albeit due to its pace and speed, such a development might be interpreted as a revolution.

The Promise of Entry by Troops

The period associated with the accession of Him Who is the Promised One of all Ages - the Blessed Beauty - to the throne of celestial sovereignty consists of four stages:

- 1- The darkest and most foul prison in Tíhrán.
- 2- The tribulation-filled period in Baghdád.
- 3- The years in Adrianople.
- 4- The `Akká period, also referred to as the Most Great Prison due to the extent of its trials and afflictions.

Every one of these four stages has been brimming with ordeals and sufferings, the likes of which were seldom witnessed in the history of past religions. The period in Adrianople, however, contains characteristics that make it more strife-ridden than any of the other three phases. In those other three periods, the afflictions suffered by the Ancient Beauty were mainly launched by the enemies from without; those who in all religions have always arisen to oppose the Faith of God, but who in fact have forever been the cause of its victory and triumph. *Say: go through the land: then see what hath been the end of those who treated them as liars.*¹ During the Baghdád period, although the Faith seemed languishing, sorely-stricken, sinking into obscurity, and threatened with oblivion, but the hostility and rebellion of Mírzá Yahyá had not yet been flagrantly made manifest. It was during the period in Adrianople – and in addition to the ordeals from without, and the united attacked launched by the two powerful monarchs rising to uproot the foundations of the Faith of God – that *the most great separation* took place, and the threat of an internal schism became fully apparent; a threat to which all past religions, alas, had yielded.

When the hour struck for the Faith to be proclaimed and announced to the kings and the religious leaders of the world, as well as to the Bábís, the embodiment of faithlessness² rose up against the Tabernacle of God and introduced himself as the bearer of a station that was singled out for the Promised Manifestation of God. As it had been prophesied by Paul the Apostle in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians: *“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.”*³

It is easy for us today to look back and to read about this event in the history of the Faith, and to smile with the knowledge of the end result and the triumph of the Word of God; or we might even feel sorry for the disgrace and abasement that befell Yahya Azal and for his sad end, seeing that how even at his time of death not a single one of his followers were to be found by his side to bury his body, and how finally the governor of the city placed the body in a coffin and buried it. But formerly, and during those earlier days, he [Azal] was outwardly known as the leader of the Bábís. Some even regarded him as the successor of the Báb and believed him to be the author of the Book of Certitude.

¹ Qur’án Surih of Cattle 6:10-11 (Rodwell): Moreover, apostles before thee have been laughed to scorn: but that which they laughed to scorn encompassed the mockers among them! *Say: go through the land: then see what hath been the end of those who treated them as liars.*

² Mírzá Yahhá

³ King James Bible, 2 Thessalonians

It was during that dark period - one which Bahá'u'lláh refers to as the *darkest night*⁴ - that the Tablet addressed to the Shah of Persia was revealed; a Tablet in which the future of the Faith was ordained in the following words:

*Erelong shall the snow-white hand of God rend an opening through the darkness of this night and unlock a mighty portal unto His City. On that Day shall the people enter therein by troops, uttering what the blamers aforesaid exclaimed, that there shall be made manifest in the end that which appeared in the beginning.*⁵

The word *blamers*⁶ mentioned in the above passage is a reference to the Qur'anic story of Joseph and Zelicha⁷ according to which Zelicha fell in love with Joseph and she was disgraced in town; so some of the notable women of that town blamed and condemned her saying that Zelicha has fallen for a slave. Thus, hearing of that, Zelicha prepared a feast, invited them to it and handed them each an orange and a knife to cut the fruit with. She then ordered Joseph to go out in front of them. As soon as the women saw him, distracted by his beauty and gracefulness, they repeatedly cut their hands, and then proclaimed that Zelicha had rightfully given her heart to the beauty of Joseph. The Blessed Beauty says that in the day when people shall enter the City of God in troops, those who used to condemn the Bahá'ís will proclaim that these lovers were right to be utterly enraptured by the love of the Beloved, and to surrender their all in the path of that love.

The Subtle Reality of Faith

The greatest bounty bestowed upon man through the Lord's Mercy is the ability to know God through His Manifestation. This is a bounty that throughout the whole of creation, whether from the tiniest atom to the greatest of galaxies, is only conferred upon man. This ability exists in all human beings and it is what was meant by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in one of His Prayers when He stated that although the people of the world are oblivious of God, yet they seek Him with all their beings⁸.

Every time that the Divine Springtime arrives, the rays of the Day Star of His Revelation penetrate in all the atoms of the existence of men, and all peoples across the globe will hear the call of God in the depth of their beings. This is that *true morn* and the *new garden* as stated in the Hidden Words. It is the same call of *Am I not your Lord?* as mentioned in the Qur'án, by which all veils are torn asunder and

⁴ Laylayi Dalmá': The gloomiest night, the night with no moon [TN: The last night of the lunar month which is very dark]

⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p.134

⁶ In the original passage in Arabic the word blamers is feminine plural.

⁷ Also known as Zoleikha or Zulaikha; the wife of al-Aziz (in Biblical passages known as Potiphar): Joseph's master.

⁸ Not the exact Words of the Master.

all those who stand bare before the Divine Light with a *sanctified, pure, and kindly heart* will receive its first rays. I have heard that there once lived an erudite scholar who carried the load of volumes on his well-read mind. When he was confronted with an unlearned believer, he told the latter: *I am a man learned in the Divine Law, and I possess all the knowledge that can be known. Do you not think that if this Faith were true, I would have recognized and fathomed it before the likes of you who can hardly name the letters of the alphabet?* The believer humbly replied: *Your excellency, you are absolutely right. You are among the gems of existence, and you are esteemed as diamonds and jewels. It is only right that priceless gems be kept in velvet and stored in a well-guarded safe. But the likes of me; we are like the pebbles and the sand of the shore; tons of which are worthless. Yet, when the dawn breaks and the first ray of the sun reaches the earth, we are the ones that are immersed in its heat and light. It will take a long time for that ray to reach the likes of you; and that is if it ever does reach you, so hidden and concealed you are behind the doors, velvets, safes, and boxes.*

All those who have passed through the gates of this divine City, who having kissed its threshold, and who have found themselves in the promised paradise, know well what a marvel and what a wonder it is. Some years ago, a German young man had come to our country and city to complete part of his higher education. He had learned about the Faith through one of his Bahá'í friends, and had decided to investigate it further. He spent several hours a week studying the Faith during a period of six months, after which time he returned to his homeland. Two years passed and he finished his studies and secured a job in the United Nations Office in Europe, and then used to travel widely. One day, his friend through whom he had originally heard about the Faith called me and said that this young man has come and wishes to declare himself as a Bahá'í and that he has asked me to also be present on the occasion. It so happened that we were invited on that day to the house of this mutual friend where our young friend was also present. He was dressed in his travelling clothes as he was on his way to the airport. After lunch, when he was going to sign his declaration card, he asked the host permission to use one of the rooms. A little while later he emerged and had changed his travelling clothes and was wearing a splendid outfit that he wore in his meetings with dignitaries. Seeing our surprise, he humbly said: *In this moment of my life, when I am presenting myself before Bahá'u'lláh to declare my faith in Him, I can not do so in my travelling clothes.* He then recited a prayer in an indescribable humbleness and signed his card.

The Advent of a World Religion

In the fifth chapter of the fifth unit of the Bayán the Báb declares that ...during the advent of each Revelation all that dwell on earth must come under that Revelation. For example during the Dispensation of the Apostle of God it was

befitting for all those on earth to believe in Him. Such an event not coming to pass was due to the weakness of the Muslims.⁹ He has further repeated this same point in the book *Panj Sha'n*. The substance of those passages is that all the Religions were potentially world religions. In the Qur'án too, the Apostle of God is referred to as the *mercy unto all creatures*¹⁰. In fact it is inconceivable that a Religion and a Messenger should appear, and for some to be barred from accepting His Teachings. Yet, there is a difference between saying that a religion could have potentially become universal, and it being explicitly promised to become one.

The promises recorded in the Sacred Scriptures indicate that the day must come and the means will become available for all the peoples of the world to stand before the Almighty God, and that the words *The day when mankind shall stand before the Lord of the worlds*¹¹ will be fulfilled. In the Tablet addressed to Queen Victoria, Bahá'u'lláh writes the following:

*Regard the world as the human body which, though at its creation whole and perfect, hath been afflicted, through various causes, with grave disorders and maladies...That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith*¹².

The renown scholar, Abu'l-Fadá'il - who was counted by the Centre of the Covenant amongst *them that are well-grounded in knowledge*, in other words among those individuals who are aware of the meanings and mysteries of the Holy Books - wrote in a letter that he sent from Isfahán to Ábádih: *O pride of the righteous! I swear by the Sovereign Beauty that the majority of the believers have not yet apprehended the greatness of this most glorious Revelation, and have not fathomed the inconceivable worth of this great Day. Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied the advent of this Great Revelation through the following emphatic words: 'Behold, The Holy Great One will come forth from His dwelling, and the eternal God will tread upon the earth and appear in the strength of His might from the heaven of heavens. The Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgement upon all and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed...'*¹³ *The call is a Divine Call and not a Prophetic one. The Advent is Universal and not confined to one Message. All who dwell on earth must needs come under its banner and no one will deny it.*

The believer: The Bearer of the Divine Trust

⁹ These are not the exact Words as stated in the Bayán, and only convey the contents of that Passage.

¹⁰ The Qur'án (Rodwell tr), Surih 21 – The Prophets, verse 107

¹¹ The Qur'án: (Rodwell tr.), Surih 83, verse 6

¹² Bahá'u'lláh, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p.90

¹³ Book of Enoch, and King James Bible, Jude 1:14

In the same manner that the Holy Spirit - by taking the human form - becomes the bearer of the Word of God; likewise, teaching the Faith belongs to those enlightened souls who assisted by the Abhá Kingdom will embark upon guiding the peoples and nations. As such, teaching the Faith and the guidance of souls is considered as the most noble of acts in numerous Tablets. After one's belief and steadfastness in the Cause, such teaching is regarded as the first duty prescribed unto the believer. The Most Exalted Pen writes: *Verily, in this day, to the soul who is the cause of guidance to another soul the recompense of a martyr in the way of God will be assuredly recorded by the pen of the Cause for his deed.*¹⁴

The Cause of God is a trust that the Lord assigns to the care of the believers in each Dispensation, so that they may deliver it to its intended destination or goal; namely the hearts of the servants of God. It is a lamp that must enlighten the abode of the hearts of others. In past religions, this duty was performed through three stages. **First:** Through the arising of pure hearted and detached souls. **Second:** Through force and by compelling people to accept. **Third:** The turning over of this duty or task to specific personalities or scholars in each religion.

In early Judaism, Moses initially proclaimed the Faith of God with the *rod of Commandments* and by *wielding the serpent of God's Testimony*. He endured and suffered oppression and hardships, and was even ready to give up his life when one of Pharaoh's men arose to defend Him. Yet, when the Israelites approached the promised land - the land flowing with milk and honey - they drew on the iron rod; and we see many verses such as: *When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee...and when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them.*¹⁵

Similarly, in Christianity, we read how after the martyrdom of Jesus Christ, His disciples so often met and dealt with people with the power of faith and with the armour of clear and conclusive evidences. It is recorded in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles that Peter spoke to a gathering with such love and devotion that some three thousand souls entered into the Faith of God. They then dispersed all over the world and each one gave up his life in another country and another locality.

Yet, later on, as Christianity grew strong, it was once again the sword and not the breath of the pure hearted and faithful that opened the way for the Religion of God. For example Charlemagne converted the Saxons under duress by giving them the choice between baptism and death during his wars of 804-872 AD. Will Durant writes in *The History of Civilization* that as Charlemagne met resistance and the rebellion of the Saxons, he ordered the beheading of 4500 Saxons in one day; after

¹⁴ Compilations, Bahá'í Scriptures, p. 204

¹⁵ King James Bible, Deuteronomy, Ch.7

which he proceeded to Thionville to take part in the celebration of the nativity of Christ. The famous Latin proverb *Cuius regio eius religio* that also has its parallel in Arabic and means *whose region, his religion*, (or in other words, the religion of the people would be the religion of the king) reigned throughout the Middle Ages. So, when a king was converted to Christianity, his subjects were also all converted. When Olaf I of Norway ascended to the throne in 995 AD, as he had been converted to Christianity in Britain, he ordered that all the old pagan temples be torn down and churches be built throughout Norway. When he was confronted with the people's opposition, he consented to leave the temples but to use them to carry out the customary pagan sacrifice rites to slay those who resisted Christianity. Consequently, they all surrendered.

Further, it is recorded that Vladimir the first, king of Russia wished to marry the sister of the Byzantine Emperor who was a Christian. He accepted Christianity and proceeded to make it the official religion of his state. He ordered and eventually forced his subjects to accept baptism in 988 AD.

Regarding the conversion of the people of Denmark, it is recorded that the peace treaty drawn up between Otto II, the German Emperor, and the King of Denmark in 974, compelled Harald Bluetooth (Blatonn) to enforce Christianity upon the people of Denmark.

Christianity is now passing through the third of the above-mentioned stages. That is to say that the teaching and the spread of the Religion is undertaken by the clergy, the missionaries, and the theologians. The general public has no part in it.

The history of the spread of Islam has also gone through these same three stages. Initially the duty of the believers was ordained as follows in the Surih of Na? I: *Summon thou to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and with kindly warning: dispute with them in the kindest manner: thy Lord best knoweth those who stray from his way, and He best knoweth those who have yielded to his guidance*¹⁶.

After the passing of the Prophet, the Muslim conquests started. Nowadays, there are lengthy debates written by Iranian writers both residing within the country as well as those abroad, regarding whether or not the Persians would have willingly submitted to Islam had it not been for the wars that took place. The truth of the matter is that in addition to the outer power that Islam had at the time, the Sassanian dynasty was an exceedingly corrupt one, and an impenetrable class differentiation was harshly dominant. Furthermore, considering the prevailing corruption within the religious society of the time, and the cruelty inflicted upon the people by the Zoroastrian clerics; the Persians would only have needed to hear the message of brotherhood and equality of Islam, and they would have no doubt accepted it by will, and there would have not been the need for the massacre of hundreds and

¹⁶ The Qur'án (Rodwell tr.), Surih 16, verse 126 – The Bee

hundreds of thousands of people, as was done in Jilawla or in the subsequent riots and battles. As such, tens of thousands of women and children would not have been taken captive; and it would not have been necessary to place an Arab in each home to watch over the observance of the religious duties of prayer and fasting of the newly converted believers in order to consolidate Islam in their hearts. Later, that stage also passed away and the spread of the Faith fell in the hands of the clergy and the Hujjatu'l-Islams who, rather than using wisdom, counsels or kindly manners, proceeded to enforce the belief through imposing fear and domination.

The question now raised by the scholars and researchers is whether these three stages will also be repeated within the Bahá'í Faith. Those who are familiar with the Bahá'í Writings and Scriptures are well aware that not only the believers are advised through scores of Tablets to *speak not unless they obtain a hearing*¹⁷, or to *...Set forth that which ye possess. If it be favourably received, your end is attained; if not, to protest is vain...*¹⁸; but further, the Blessed Beauty made the following assertion at the eve of His earthly life as recorded in the Book of His Covenant: *Conflict and contention are categorically forbidden in His Book. This is a decree of God in this Most Great Revelation. It is divinely preserved from annulment and is invested by Him with the splendour of His confirmation. Verily He is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.*¹⁹

According to this blessed statement, God Himself will protect this commandment, and will prevent it from becoming annulled. In many thousands of Tablets revealed by the Pens of Bahá'u'lláh and of the Master, the teaching of the Faith has been made dependent upon a twofold process: **First:** The proclamation of the Word of God; that like unto the breezes of springtime confers life to every withered branch and every disheartened soul. **Second:** The observance of the Teachings of God that attract the hearts and transform the souls.

The stages of teaching the Faith during the time of the Báb – that was the era of moving from one world to another, and was as a bridge by which to pass from the old world to the new – and later, the stages and phases of teaching during the eras of the Blessed Beauty, of the Master and of the period of the Guardianship, all need to be studied and researched. But we can briefly say that each one of the believers during the Heroic Age, acted in the way that he or she found possible in face of the severe pressure from the enemies. The history of the Faith is filled with hundreds of stories and anecdotes of their sacrificial efforts. Yet, this activity was not a collective one. The possibility did not exist and even the time was not ripe for the believers to act as an organized troop and conquer the citadels of the hearts of men. Those were individuals who - during the time of the Blessed Beauty and the Master, and then later on, and after reading the contents of the *Will and Testament* of `Abdu'l-Bahá in which He states that : *...They must disperse themselves in every land, pass by every clime, and travel*

¹⁷ Bahá'u'lláh: Hidden Words Persian: The wise are they that speak not unless they obtain a hearing,...

¹⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, page 91

¹⁹ Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, page 220

*throughout all regions...*²⁰ - they left their homes and shelters behind; they forwent their material possessions, their lives, and their whole being in the path of love, and considered that to be their real abode. Finally, each one passed away in a different land and region. In the western world also, there were some who arose and exerted the utmost endeavour in the wilderness of the love of God. They were individuals such as the exemplary and indefatigable teacher Martha Root who wrote the pages of history of the Faith through her magnificent services. Yet, all of these activities were scattered ones. There was a need for entering into a new phase and stage: the establishment of the Institutions of the Administrative Order, and the formation of Assemblies to coordinate the activities of the Faith according to specific Plans, and to allow the flow of the life of the Faith of God within structured and ordered channels.

This phase too, just like the previous stages, was difficult to achieve. When the Guardian of the Faith of God proceeded to establish these Administrative Institutions, some arose in opposition both in the East and the West, and considered the Administration to be contrary to the spirit of the Faith. They compared it to the organization of the Church that had become corrupted. Some others contented themselves with remaining silent and inactive. The spread of the Faith seemed to slow down, and as Dr. Moojan Momen has referred to in his valuable article, the number of believers in the United States reduced to half the number. This fact gave the enemies of the Faith an opportunity to openly announce that the flame of the Faith of God was about to be extinguished. In the midst of all this, it was only the pulsating heart and the fluent pen of the Guardian of the Faith of God, together with the efforts of a group of the lovers of the matchless Beauty that removed all obstacles, and led to the foundation of the Bahá'í Institutions all over the world.

The passage of time, as well as the firm establishment of the Institutions of the Administrative Order (that is the model and the seed of the World Order), demonstrated what a great portal to the unknown city was unlocked in those days through the establishment of the Administrative Order. It was thus revealed how the mighty hand of the Guardian of the Faith of God had turned a new page in the book of the Formative Age. Great Plans were gradually formulated; Plans that could only be possibly implemented providing the Institutions and National Assemblies existed. These were completed with the Ten Year Crusade, the fruit and result of which was the establishment of the Faith in all the countries of the world. The Faith of God had taken a sudden and unbelievable leap forward.

A New Culture: The Challenge of our Time

Earlier on we saw that despite the sacrifices of the believers during the Bábí Dispensation, as well as during the ministries of Bahá'u'lláh and of `Abdu'l-Bahá - periods that are collectively referred to as the Apostolic Age (or Heroic Age) – and notwithstanding those sacrifices that constitute the contents of scores of volumes of

²⁰ `Abdu'l-Bahá, Will and Testament, page 10

history; the number of countries opened to the Faith and the number of believers were relatively small. After the establishment of the Administrative Order, unprecedented victories resulted within a short span of time during the Formative Age. Nevertheless, we are still far from the time when the peoples of the world shall turn their attention to the Faith of God. Today, the population of the world is estimated to be between six and seven billion people, and the Bahá'ís form some six to seven million; that is to say one thousandth of the population of the world. That is to say that every Bahá'í carries the duty of proclaiming the Faith to one thousand other people; and that is providing every one of the Bahá'ís arises to do so.

In order to attain such an end, the Universal House of Justice speaks in its Messages of a new culture – one which will need to be established in the lives of individuals and communities from different aspects. It is a culture that will enable all the Bahá'ís of the world to arise. It might not be easy for all the friends to fathom and comprehend this culture, inasmuch as the two words of *new* and *culture* seem to be incompatible or at odds. The culture of every nation, people, and society consists of the way of life, the customs and practices, and the language and traditions that are formed throughout centuries, and it is not something that is created at once. This is of course true; but it is also true that one of the characteristics of the religions of God is that they create a new culture through their advent: a culture that is not the result of the experiences of past centuries, but rather, one that is the guide of centuries to come, one that will gradually take form. A clear example of this in the past was the advent of Christ. The culture of the time prevailing both in the Judaic Faith as well as the society in that period was one of revenge, and it was considered as a fundamental principle throughout the Roman Empire. At such a time, Jesus Christ proposed and brought forth a culture of pardon and forgiveness. This gradually took form and with the passage of centuries, it became recognized as the most exalted quality and distinguishing characteristic of any human being. For the past two thousand years, the talks and sermons of priests and ministers have been based upon this quality, and every true Christian thinks of it every day. Even during the Middle Ages, when the heretics were burned at the stake, a priest would kneel before the victim and would pray for him.

Also, as we have seen, when the Guardian of the Faith of God began to lay the foundations of the Administrative Order, it was not easy for everyone to comprehend it. Some imagined the administrative institutions of the Faith to be a newly-fashioned phenomenon. As such, in order to help those who were slower in grasping it, to understand, he repeatedly emphasised in his Letters written during the 1920s and the 1930s that he was not adding anything new to the Faith, but rather had turned a new page in the Book of the Faith. He emphatically stated that the Administrative Order is based upon the Universal House of Justice as well as the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies; that these Institutions have been explicitly introduced in the Writings of the Faith; and that the time had then come to establish them.

Similarly, in this day the elements of this new culture are not a novelty being imposed upon the community, but rather a new page in the Book of the Faith of God

has been turned; that is the page for bringing forth those gems that lie hidden within the mine of the inner selves of men.

The Mine of Man – Education and Consultation

Bahá'u'lláh, describes the purpose of His Advent; a Revelation that was a six-thousand-year promise made by the Messengers, as follows: *The Purpose of the one true God, exalted be His glory, in revealing Himself unto men is to lay bare those gems that lie hidden within the mine of their true and inmost selves.*²¹ Further, He states:

*Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess.... The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.*²² And again:

*O people of Baha! The source of crafts, sciences and arts is the power of reflection. Make ye every effort that out of this ideal mine there may gleam forth such pearls of wisdom and utterance as will promote the well-being and harmony of all the kindreds of the earth.*²³

The meaning of these statements is evident. The experts in psychology and education are totally aware that every child and every human being has magnificent hidden talents; and that throughout the past several thousand years up to the present day, only a small number of people have had the means to reveal these capacities. Contrary to the world of nature where the mines of precious stones that are left untouched simply remain for the use of future generations; these human mines of gems, however, disappear after a number years with the death of their owner. As such, universal education is one of the Teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, but this is not the issue that is presently being discussed.

Our attention, however, in this article is focused on the period beyond one's academic education; The period during which each person comes forth in society to draw on that which has been learnt through education and to apply it to his or her social and spiritual life. Once again, in our present society, there are unfortunately few who have the opportunity to do so. In ancient Greece, in a system that was called democracy, it was agreed that all people express their opinion on important issues. It was therefore deemed necessary that cities be small ones, so to facilitate universal participation in consultations. Although that system had the limitation and weakness that only the city dwellers enjoyed such a privilege, and that the foreigners and slaves were excluded; yet, the system later developed into the parliaments of the nations. But rather than civil progress, their purpose and arena became the centre for the clash of

²¹ Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXXII, p.287

²² Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXII, p.259

²³ Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p.72

parties, for disputes and debates, and even at times for conflict and fight; and the rest of the population remained deprived of expressing that which they contained within.

For the purpose of laying bare the gems of the inner self of man, Bahá'u'lláh has ordained the principle of consultation throughout one's lifetime. He said:

*The Great Being saith: The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.*²⁴

God's purpose by consultation is the true meaning of the concept. Nowadays, in consultations on a private level – that is to say when a person consults with a friend – the aim is primarily to either confirm one's own point of view, or else to benefit of the correct judgement of the friend. In collective or group consultations the aim is often to take sides or to impose an idea upon others. The Writings of the Bahá'í Faith explain that the purpose of consultation is to search for the truth, as well as the exchange and meeting of ideas. It is under such circumstances that consultation may lead to an idea that had not occurred to the minds of any of those present. In common words, a stew is not a simple combination of meat, potatoes, onions and some vegetables, but rather, it is the process of cooking it which will enhance the flavour and provide a special taste to the meal.

The following Statement of `Abdu'l-Bahá throws light on the subject: *The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions.*²⁵ When two flint stones are struck against one another, a spark is produced that outwardly was not visible in the two pieces of stone.

Consultation: The Foundation of the New Culture

At the present day, the Bahá'í World Community and its Administrative Order can be likened to a orchard filled with saplings in which healthy and fruitful young trees are developing under the care of the true Gardner – that is to say the August Body; until the time when the owners of the gardens of the world, or in other words the human societies will seek and purchase them. One of these saplings revealed in the Sacred Writings of the Faith, is the principle of consultation. The time has now come for it to receive special attention. This sapling must grow and develop in the heavenly orchard in such wise that every member of society will be able to taste its luscious fruit for himself. In other words, everyone, whether young or old, learned or unlettered must attempt to extract from this gem-filled mine that exists within their selves, and to use it as a tool for teaching the Faith.

²⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p.168

²⁵ `Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, p.87

The need for consultation has always been clearly specified in the Writings, and steps have been taken in the community in that direction. Yet, those actions were like unto preliminary practices. A significant measure taken in this respect was powerfully carried out by the beloved Guardian; and that was at the time when he instructed that consultation be made part of the Nineteen Day Feast, and explained that from among the three parts of the Feast (ie.: spiritual, consultation, and social), consultation is the most important. Based on this priceless fact, in all the communities throughout the world, in every city and village, hundreds of thousands of Bahá'ís got together in numerous gatherings and consulted on the affairs of their community on equal footing. In Tihrán alone some three hundred Feasts used to be held, in which a scholar sat together with an untutored person, or a colonel with a simple soldier and they all consulted and expressed their views. This, of course was the first step. Today, after several decades of practice, unfortunately some friends are simply content with the spiritual part of the Feast, or that in some other parts of the world full use is not made of the viewpoints of the youth or the women in the community. In order to prepare the necessary preliminary steps for the correct implementation of this principle, and with the aim of utilising the incessant strength of the community, the Universal House of Justice initially formulated two Plans of four-year and twelve-month duration: Following those two Plans, a further four Plans of five years each have been devised that will terminate with the centenary of the Formative Age and the entry of troops.

Two Important Instruments

Following the instructions of the August Body, today, the believers throughout all the communities in the world are using two important and significant instruments for the correct implementation of these Plans:

- 1- The first tool or mechanism is the *Cluster* and its *Reflection Meetings*. All the believers of a cluster gather together in these meetings, and contrary to the past method when the Plans and instructions were received from Institutions above, and were carried out by the friends; now the friends themselves, through a loving consultative process, devise and carry out their own teaching Plans and the methods of implementing them. Furthermore, while in the past many sacrificial souls single-handedly dedicated their time to proclaiming the Word of God, now, the friends work together to fulfil this duty, thus strengthening the sense of collaboration and teamwork amongst themselves, and each one becoming a source of encouragement to the other. In this way the principle of cooperation and harmony, that is the aim and purpose of every Bahá'í, is used in the teaching work. Among the characteristics of this culture that is referred to by the August Body as *the culture of learning*, is that in the arena of consultation, we should not fear our mistakes and errors; but rather, to act again, aim to rectify the mistake and to move forward.
- 2- The second instrument is the *Ruhi course*. This course presently consists of seven books, and has been tried in a national community for several years, and has thus gradually been developed; and it is now being used throughout the

International Community. The purpose is twofold: To deepen in and meditate upon the Sacred Writings, and to acquire a preliminary knowledge of the history and the Teachings of the Cause, as well as the education of children, and the methods of teaching the Faith. It might be that a small minority of the friends who have a good knowledge of the Faith regard themselves above such classes; but it should be borne in mind that even in the west, there exists only a small number of Bahá'ís in this day who are well informed of the history of the Faith, its life-giving Teachings, and the methods of proclaiming it; and who are aware of the techniques and methods of teaching it. This in itself is one of the obstacles for the proclamation of the Faith by the believers. In a letter dated 21 October 1943 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi by his secretary, he states the following: *The Cause has the remedy for all the world's ills. The reason why more people don't accept it is because the Bahá'ís are not always capable of presenting it to them in a way that meets the immediate needs of their minds.*²⁶

A further aim of these books is that the friends sit together, immerse themselves in the ocean of the Words of God, and help one other to enkindle the flame of faith and devotion in each other's hearts. That is why the first Ruhi book is named *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*. It has been seen that after going through the Ruhi courses, believers who seldom studied Bahá'í books become enthused and motivated to study more Writings. There are youth who, through these courses, have decided to enter research and scholarly studies. In the past, the friends in many local communities did not have much interest in forming deepening classes. Now, after studying the Ruhi courses, many deepenings for the study of the Aqdas, the Book of Certitude, or the Bahá'í Dispensation are formed; and even some friends whose free time does not coincide with these classes, eagerly request special extra classes to be organized for them.

The Three Stages of Teaching – Two Great Glad Tidings

The following statement of the beloved Guardian – published in the book *Citadel of Faith* - was written in one of his Letters dated June 1953 addressed to the Bahá'ís of America in explanation of the Ten Year Crusade:

...This flow, moreover, will presage and hasten the advent of the day which, as prophesied by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, will witness the entry by troops of peoples of divers nations and races into the Bahá'í world -- a day which, viewed in its proper perspective, will be the prelude to that long-awaited hour when a mass conversion on the part of these same nations and races, and as a direct result of a chain of events, momentous and possibly catastrophic in nature and which cannot as yet be even dimly visualized, will suddenly revolutionize the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of the world, and

²⁶ The Compilation of Compilations volume II p.431

*reinforce a thousandfold the numerical strength as well as the material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh*²⁷.

Considering the above statement, we can envisage three stages in the process of proclamation and the recognition of the Faith by the peoples of the world:

Stage One: A seemingly lengthy stage than consists of the acceptance of the Faith by individuals during the Apostolic Age as well as part of the Formative Age.

Stage Two: The stage of entry by troops that the Bahá'í community is presently preparing its preliminary and first steps, to which the Guardian referred to as the day that will witness ...*the entry by troops of peoples of divers nations and races into the Bahá'í world...*This stage is the fulfilment of the tidings announced in the Lawh-i-Sultán²⁸ to which reference was made at the beginning of this article:

*Erelong shall the snow-white hand of God rend an opening through the darkness of this night and unlock a mighty portal unto His City. On that Day shall the people enter therein by troops....*²⁹

Contrary to the earlier stage in which the duty of teaching was carried out by a small number of believers, in this stage this task is accomplished as a universal enterprise, in which all individuals are trained, guided and prepared to serve as hosts of salvation under the guidance of the Lord of Hosts, and will prepare the way for the third stage. The duration of this stage will continue until the centenary of the Formative Age.

Stage Three: Is confirmed in the statement of Shoghi Effendi as follows:

...will suddenly revolutionize the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of the world, and reinforce a thousandfold the numerical strength as well as the material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

This stage has also been foreseen in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh as follows:

*The world is in travail, and its agitation waxeth day by day. Its face is turned towards waywardness and unbelief. Such shall be its plight, that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly. Its perversity will long continue. And when the appointed hour is come, there shall suddenly appear that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake. Then, and only then, will the Divine Standard be unfurled, and the Nightingale of Paradise warble its melody.*³⁰

²⁷ Citadle of Faith; Messages to América 1947-1957, p.117 (25 June 1953)

²⁸ The Tablet to the Shah of Persia (Násiri'd-Dín Sháh)

²⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p.134

³⁰ Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p.118

A glance from afar at the third stage - in which according to the Writings, thousands upon thousands will enter the Faith, a stage which will be the fulfilment of the statement of Bahá'u'lláh recorded in His Tablet addressed to Queen Victoria as mentioned earlier on in this article - will make the importance of the second stage clear and evident. That is to say that if during the third stage, certain catastrophic events will cause mankind to turn to the shelter of the Cause, one can then compare the Faith in that stage to a large vessel or ark that has anchored in the vast ocean of existence at a time of imminent storm; and it is awaiting the numerous souls who are happily and obliviously swimming in that water. Those troops who attain the recognition of the Faith in the second stage throughout the world and who will strengthen and consolidate the foundations of the Institutions of the Faith, may be likened to the rescue boats that will guide the masses during the storm to this Ark of Salvation; to this Crimson Ark.