

A New Evolution: Religious Bonding for World Unity¹

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Current studies by leading scientists have suggested an imminent “Grand Transition” or “Megaleap” in human evolution, as foreshadowed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His prediction of a Lesser Peace before the oncoming end of the century. In seeking to provide a view of North America’s and the Bahá’í Faith’s role at this time of probable crisis, a number of scenarios of possible radical change are suggested, along with the unique characteristics of the Bahá’í teachings which make the Bahá’í Faith the logical candidate for salvation of individuals and society, the bonding power for that world unity already far toward realization by humankind.

In the face of the pervading cynicism, emptiness, and negativity that subtly color our thoughts, let us hail North America and its promised destiny, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said during his momentous 1912 visit:

The American continent gives signs and evidences of very great advancement; its future is even more promising, for its influence and illumination are far-reaching, and it will lead all nations spiritually.
(*Promulgation* 104)

Yet few if any North Americans mired in consumer materialism would credit our lands and culture with even the remotest hope of so high a spiritual status, for we have been reared in a dominantly Judea-Christian-Islamic religious tradition that tends to link spirituality with isolation, deprivation, and poverty. Not yet have we learned that spirituality today is linked to honorable affluence achieved in service to others; for only through an ethic of service can the “me-first” egocentrism of modern man and woman be sublimated to present-day demands for preservation of our physical world and for world peace with world unity. A strong ethic of service, having its roots in the enfeebled but widespread religious feeling and essential good will of North Americans, provides the promise of our spiritual eminence.

Permit me to list my theses in this lecture:

1. America’s evolution as a multicultural democracy and federal union of equal states has prepared this country, with Canada, and us their citizens, for spiritual leadership of the world;
2. The world forces of discord are already largely countered or surpassed by forces for unity;
3. Post-Darwinian concepts of human evolution anticipate a mega-leap in the sociocultural organization of humankind despite grim possible scenarios of chaos and complexity;
4. The way of religion offers the only pervading, motivating, sufficiently simple yet powerful bonding force for this emergent new day. Moreover, religion has the force of common and familiar tradition in that it is religion which provides ethical and moral guidance for the average person; and
5. Bahá’ís are the authentic saviors-to-be of the new world society, the inheritors of a great evolutionary destiny.

Naturally, these theses will be presented skeletally, lacking much of the argument which you properly desire. They are presented, however, in the belief that the next six and a half years or

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perhaps 2100 days are singularly historic and possibly heroic ones, to be feared, to be confronted, and in retrospect to be applauded.

America's Spiritual Destiny

Our two nations (Canada and the United States) are steadily evolving, however rocky their courses, better to reflect the dream of true and inclusive equality with justice in all spheres of human life. Surprisingly, North America owns singular roots dating from long before Europeans “discovered” what was to them a “new world.” The Indians, misnamed and scorned as “savages” by our ethnocentric ancestors, had long before originated the concept and reality of a federal union of democratic equal states: it was the Iroquois federation of what is now upper New York State. To the warring tribes 700-800 years ago there came an astonishing Prophet of Peace Deganwidah, with his associates Hiawatha and Jikonsaseh, the Peace Queen and Mother of Nations.² Deganwidah united five, later six, mutually hostile tribal groups in a federal union based upon democracy, the first in the Western Hemisphere. He cemented this union with a “Great Law of Peace,” a constitution which propounded one expansive human family who claimed the sky for their ceiling and all the earth as their floor. These so-called primitive Iroquois practiced popular participation in community affairs, espoused natural human rights, the equality of women,³ the freedom of conscience and expression, the separation of civil and religious affairs, and regulated a relatively equal distribution of wealth. This federal system was based upon a democracy of persons who valued honesty, justice, and freedom far beyond the values of the Colonial settlers who denigrated and dealt dishonestly with them. Further, this innovation of forest Indians gave no primacy to battles won against Hurons or Algonquins, but rather memorialized places of peace.⁴ And thus, in God's Plan, with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson as perceptive mediators, the Bill of Rights and the Constitution were vital steps (after the War of Independence [1775-83]) toward realizing in America the Iroquois concept of the primacy of individual rights as superior to property and power. And of course the Iroquois foreshadowed, in their Longhouse of sky and earth, the planetary message of the Baha'i Faith for today.

A century later, the American Civil War of 1861-1865 was inevitable in the development of American democracy and the autonomy of its states. Fought for national unity against secession and for the equality of the common citizen against a nascent southern aristocracy, the abolition of slavery was an essential corollary of both wars' goals. From Winston Churchill in his *History of the English-Speaking Peoples* came a surprising analysis: “the American Civil War . . . must upon the whole be considered the noblest and least avoidable of all the great mass conflicts of which till then there was record.” Thus, whatever can be said of our failures, America probably has won the fundamental psychological and political instruments needed to achieve the promised spiritual eminence.

² The grave of Jikonsaseh, near Victor, New York, is a State monument.

³ The women in this matriarchy chose the chiefs and deposed those who were deemed to be unsatisfactory. However, the chiefs, when named, lost their status and personalities and became servants of the people.

⁴ Lesser federal alliances existed among the Cherokee and other Indian tribes. The high organizations of Mayas, Aztecs, Incas, and other Central and South American peoples boasted significant developments in governance, but they were all hierarchical, authoritarian, often colonialist, and non-democratic.

World Forces Conducive to the Unity of Humankind

Well before America's coming of age, there began the Age of Science from which America would mightily profit and to which she would significantly contribute. From the 16th to the mid-19th centuries the scientist-discoverers were laying the foundations of our technological culture. The many great minds of that early morning of the sciences developed new systems of thought and observation, of controlled experimentation and critical analysis. In short, the scientific method evolved. Yet, well beyond the earlier outflow of discoveries, the second half of the 19th century witnessed a massive transition in scientific thought and works. Its enormous significance is scarcely appreciated, for we live in that later century when the world mind has churned out a prodigious crop of achievements made possible by the conceptual changes of that earlier period.

A broad generality can be given of the latter half of the 19th century: it was the time of world-scale ideas and developments, the time of the beginning of a tidal wave of scientific discovery. In those fifty years, the world mind condensed in a new dimension of thought that carried humankind "from the classical world to the infinitely open world." The great generalists of that period were many, and their joint role was to dissect the universe, its structures and functions, its directions, and its purposes. Simultaneously and invisibly to most, another tidal wave was forming out of the long centuries of youth and adolescence of the human race. This wave was one of religious thought aimed precisely at the spiritual unity of humankind.

The wave of science was formed by numerous inquiring minds. A few examples will suffice to identify the process. Edward Burnet Tyler's treatise entitled *A Science of Culture* laid the foundation for cultural anthropology. Adam Smith gave world dimensions to the new science of economics with his book *The Wealth of Nations*. Darwin demolished the biblical Eden with his *Origin of Species* to create a science of biological and human evolution. Herbert Spencer then provided, in his *First Principles*, "a comprehensive, science-based account of evolution" which Marx and Engels expanded, via *Das Kapital*, into their theory of social evolution known as dialectic materialism. These visionary workers all variously perceived the unity of the Creation, its planetary and ultimately its cosmic scope.

Perhaps not surprisingly, a burst of religious activity paralleled the new science. A renewal of religion began at approximately mid-19th century and presented similar world-scale views and hopes. In America, Joseph Smith brought into being his Latter-Day Saints, the Mormons. William Miller predicted the Return of Christ and a Judgment Day for March 1844; his Christian literalist expectations survived disappointment in the Seventh Day Adventists. Perceptive Mary Baker Eddy sought to fuse the two waves of change in her Christian Science Church, but the idea was premature. Non-Christian cultures also had millenarian predictions, notably in Shi'ite Islam in Persia where from May 1844, onward the newborn Bahá'í Faith propounded the idea of religious evolution, of Progressive Revelation as it was termed by Bahá'u'lláh. This original religion, erupting in and severing itself from Islam, as did Christianity from Judaism, projected a world-encompassing set of principles and doctrines exquisitely attuned to the emergent needs of humankind, that humankind now aware of God's world as revealed by a burgeoning science. That humankind which had become the recipient of God's Will for at least a millennium to come. Another Darwin had emerged, of a far greater stature, and given a far larger and more difficult task. For his role was to uplift the spirit and reshape human behavior and aspirations for a new age that would demolish entrenched traditions. And, ultimately, this Prophet's mission was to congeal, with the annealing force only possible through a new religion, the collective human soul for a Great Peace soon to come.

Despite our great powers and advantages, scientists of the 20th-century's end find it difficult to penetrate the profound currents of social change that are upon us, which alter our landmarks and change our rules. We are deeply concerned, morbidly fascinated, and seeking understanding of events of the recent past, of today, and futuristically of tomorrow. In this century two incalculably destructive world wars, with their ominous preludes and grim sequelae have produced, not peace, but today's Iraq, Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda-Burundi, and North Korea with smoldering disorder in the Middle East and the former Soviet Union, in tribal Africa, and in transitional China, to name but a few visibly burning fuses. At home, we are unhappy about racial tensions, child and spouse abuse, sexual and commercial immorality, casual murder, homelessness amidst plenty, etc. Throughout the world, the engine of civilization is running rough, emitting smoke, spitting rivets, despoiling the only world available to us. Even the least observant among us must agree with the words of Baha'u'llah that "the world is in travail, and its agitation waxeth day by day" (*Gleanings* 118). He predicts that "oppression will envelop the world. And following a universal convulsion, the sun of justice will rise from the horizon of the unseen realm" (qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day is Come* 116–17). He asks that we "bestir [ourselves] . . . in anticipation of the clays of Divine justice, for the promised hour is now come" (*Gleanings* 17).

How do we measure this century so close to its ending? Has the convulsion already begun? Is the world-enveloping oppression yet to come, after the travail and agitation? Have we the discipline and the power to contribute significantly to the anticipated Lesser Peace? At least we can see that this thick, messy social scum which so busies the media and the law is only a thin surface of symptoms above a seething magma of sociocultural evolution.

Post-Darwinian Evolution: A Projection

If we look beyond the blood, feel through the suffering, and seek to discern the trends of our immediate times, we can become optimists, positivists, and unifiers. The Bahá'í promise is well quoted in the 1991 *Inner Limits of Mankind* by Dr. Ervin Laszlo of the Club of Rome:

Over one hundred years ago, Bahá'u'lláh, founder of the Bahá'í Faith, proclaimed that the oneness of mankind will be achieved in evolutionary stages replete with strife, chaos and confusion The next stage in this social evolution . . . is the organization of human society as a planetary civilization which will be characterized by the emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship and the founding of a world civilization and culture which would allow for an infinite diversity in the characteristics of its components. (121)

Thus, below the present strife, chaos, and confusion, we can plainly see the next stage in human evolution. The incredible web of communication in this electrical and electronic age of interlocking computers, of microwave and radio, of telephone, telegraph and television, amazes and stultifies us, yet it promises that all humankind of this Information Age will be connected by non-living neurons whose glass, metal, and microwave axons will dissolve time and distance in message exchanges. The equally incredible network of world transportation by train, automobile, airplane, and soon rocket is a homely and pervading reality. Meanwhile automation with robotics and miniaturization is changing concepts of labor and capital, of production and distribution of

goods as we fully inaugurate the Third Industrial Revolution. Even a de facto world language is in use: it is English, fortunately for us English speakers.

New human realities have evolved as a consequence of these unifying instruments. Mind-sharing worlds have emerged: of scientists, of economists, of merchants, indeed of all specialized groups, including religionists such as the Bahá'ís, who seek to share a group-mind message of virtues and values. The creation of a value system and its dissemination are prime concerns of all of us seeking to channel and fuse the deep currents of unity already perceptible and already functioning.

Most striking of all the specialized group minds are those of scientists who study physical systems and their behavior, who seek their laws. A most informative book, also by Laszlo, is *Evolution: The Grand Synthesis*. These thinkers and workers on chaos, complexity, and non-linear systems have become the new evolutionists; they are far beyond Darwin but only now are becoming aware of religious evolution. These evolutionaries date their time scale from the Big Bang of perhaps 20 billion years ago and range far, deep, and everywhere in between; they seek lawfulness throughout the cosmos; they seek rational explanations of life, humanity, and evolution on a dust-mote planet orbiting a second-class sun of the Milky Way galaxy. They see all too well the emergence of *Homo sapiens*, the big-brained beast whose powers have accelerated to a danger point of easy self-destruction. For human beings, their evolutionary scale is now measured in decades, not millennia. Biped cerebrate humans can no longer wait for Darwinian mutation and natural selection occurring over eons. Humans now have the capacity and absolute necessity for a speedy, adaptive, sociocultural evolution if we are not to become extinct, another biological incident inscribed in God's diary. But, will Group Humans have the knowledge and the will to make the changes in self, in goals, in work to be done . . . and in time?

For us who are probably more or less the type species of modern men and women, Bahá'u'lláh admonished us, saying: "Set your faces towards unity, and let the radiance of its light shine upon you" in this "soul-stirring Springtime" of the spirit, for thus he called our moment in history (*Gleanings* 217, 94). Yet wary of the inhibitions created by national loyalties and by our unwillingness to broaden our fealties, Bahá'u'lláh challenged us all to a wider horizon, declaring: "It is not his to boast who loveth his country, but it is his who loveth the world" (*Gleanings* 95).

However, we are yet far from the level of unity needed for the crises that may come. Therefore, let us consider what the immediate future of humankind may be by suggesting possible scenarios of our rapidly approaching group fate. These scenarios postulate evolution as being inherently non-linear, i.e., that it will proceed unpredictably but by necessity . . . it will happen.

A mega-leap of a sociocultural type will probably soon occur, one component of which may be a sociological mutation comparable to what we witness in the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) or flu viruses. To Bahá'ís this leap is consistent with the prophecy of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who predicted in 1912 that a Lesser Peace "in this century, will be securely established" (qtd. in *Promised Day is Come* 121). For your consideration, then, nine possible scenarios for change toward world unity during the next six years:

Scenario I: There will be a new Magna Carta, a grand signing of a peace treaty by a majority of nations, or there will be a World Constitution and establishment of a world federal system, at least by those nations critical to such an agreement.

Scenario II: A lesser/limited Magna Carta will be signed by the advanced and powerful nations after the model of Clarence Streit's UNION NOW and UNION NOW WITH BRITAIN of the 1930s. This pre-World War II idea fossil is still sensible, for it calls for a limited alliance of nations, with all other nations free to join in a federal union of the world.

Scenario III: An accelerated step-by-urgent-step process of peacemaking involving the great powers will take off. Thus for the United States with Canada, the European Union (EU), plus Australia, New Zealand, and others as freely willing or constrained, a lesser conclave brings limited peace with limited federal union, with arms scrapping, an international police force, a legislative, an executive, and a judicial body.

Scenario IV: A crisis will be precipitated by a pandemic disease that produces massive cooperation in the midst of widespread deaths, crippling illness, and radical social disorganization. Will the disease be mutant influenza, droplet-transmitted HIV, or a “hot” virus newly emerged from our environmental crime-lands, the rain-forests? No matter, this pandemic will be called “The Stone-Age Disease,” for, after its carnage, residual humankind will be back in the caves to start all over again. The Most Great Peace will be postponed indefinitely.

Scenario V: The long-anticipated ecosystems crash will begin, accelerating as the peoples of the earth witness rapid warming of the planet with reversal of the engines of climate control. Soon another reversal occurs with a new Ice Age impending. In short decades, the human survivors cringe under climatic horrors, and survivor populations have intimately met the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (Disease, Starvation, War, Death).

Scenario VI: A brush-fire small war will break out, spread to adjacent lands, and become World War III, a conflict made more sanguinary through earlier arming of the small nations. Or . . . a rogue nation with a rogue dictator, or a simple bandit, first uses a stolen, purchased, or manufactured fission bomb. With retaliations, the world’s resources for survival disappear into the vortex of World War III, a civilizational black hole.

Scenario VII: An imposed peace will be forced upon our bickering nations by extraterrestrials having unopposable power. Note the UFO (Unidentified Flying Object) sightings, attempts at communication. Note the findings of distinguished astronomer Frank Drake of the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) who calculates that around the 200 billion suns of our Milky Way galaxy the number of possible planets which could have life forms is 5 billion, and those possibly having intelligent life is “a small but not negligible number” (quoted in Laszlo, *Evolution* 123).

Scenario VIII: A large asteroid or comet will strike the earth, as one apparently did to end the Age of Reptiles. Seismic effects, dust clouds cutting out the sunlight for years, climatic changes of magnitudes previously unknown, all produce cataclysm beyond any anticipated dimensions.

Scenario IX: The Third Millennium will begin without a real peace. But historians of the middle-21st century make a retro-diagnosis of the first step through which decisive steps toward peace become inevitable, this perhaps after a Lesser Peace of death, exhaustion, and new beginnings, or of step-by-slow-step peacemaking toward the long-needed federal union anticipated by the Iroquois.

Although most of these scenarios are doomsday ones and seem to predict long spans of tribulation, we must nevertheless expect a peace of some kind during the next 2100 days. We are encouraged that our great Teacher has told us authoritatively that “this is the Day in which God’s most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 6). Surely Bahá’u’lláh foresaw the great trends toward unity that have been our muted triumph. And He encouraged us with good news, saying that “every age requireth a fresh measure of the light of God” (*Gleanings* 81), a light which Bahá’u’lláh brought to us, a new grace from God at this moment of transition to a new measure. of power and organization.

However the future plays out in accordance with the systems postulates of sociocultural evolution, a new and higher energy flux will be developed in our society. Such are the signs as interpreted by systems theorists. So says Bahá'u'lláh, Prophet of enlightenment. We are close to a planet-wide fusion of many cultures. That unity is the price and the reward for survival of *Homo sapiens*, the dreamer, the futurist, the tool-maker, the responsive one to the Will of God through a succession of prophetic Voices.

The Bonding of Humankind for a Golden Age

Bahá'u'lláh makes clear the route of spiritual guidance for the oncoming time of the great transition, the mega-leap of evolution. He declares that “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. This can in no wise be achieved except through the power of a skilled, an all-powerful and inspired Physician” (*Gleanings* 255).

It should not be surprising that a spiritual Genius should have been born exactly for this evolutionary crisis period, even as a swarm of genius thinkers of science were created for the processes of the past 150 years. Nor should we be surprised that He foresaw the diseases of society oncoming and proclaimed himself to be a physician of those ailments, a healer given the power to cure the confused, the lost, the emotionally and mentally sick humanity of which we are a part. Bahá'u'lláh is today's Channel for the Creator who voices God's purposes for our time.

In a parallel thought, Albert Einstein once declared: “I want to know God's Mind. All else is detail.” Novelist Leon Bley said it differently: “History unfurls as God's Secret.” On the one hand, scientists want to unravel the hidden order, purposes, and mechanisms of matter and life; historians the trends of humankind's progress or regress. Religionists wish, on the other hand, to tap the intuition, the emotion, the enveloping love, the spirit that primarily our right brains evoke in real life experiences of love, of hale, of sharing and sacrificing . . . and the Supreme Prophet gives us the map and the direction-finding tools. The call to religion is sorely needed to provide the energy of belief contained in ideas of unity and cooperation at the world level, plus the willingness to adapt to change. Religion is critically essential to strengthen the inner forces of conviction and commitment to what the high Prophet shows to be good for all humankind, taken one by one, by families, clans, peoples, all.

Religion is the power of guidance brought by Bahá'u'lláh for this age. His message stiffens the moral backbone of an emergent world society as it is being welded together from impossibly diverse parts. Religion is the fuel speeding the engine of science into the new age. It is the glue of a world society that must live lawfully and at peace with all of God's biosphere, including precious humans in their entirety. How wonderful that the theories of 20th-century science are daily more congruent with the Bahá'í message of enlightenment!

Moreover, at this very moment the Bahá'í Faith has come of age, bringing a new scripture evolutionarily consistent with but greatly expanding its Judeo-Christian-Islamic heritage, that energy stream which, however inconsistently, has sustained concepts of morality for more than twenty centuries in the West and East. Bluntly, too, it assures the believer that religion and science are in harmony, two facets of one grand Truth of matter, of life, of spirit. The new Word of God is simple, direct in its principles, many of which are common to its religious antecedents. It is also complex in its detail, facile in change, ready for our Information Age and for the Third Industrial Revolution of automation, robotics, and miniaturization. It makes no attempt to justify historical,

ethnic, scientific, or traditional thoughts or customs, for the Message partakes of all, honors all, harmonizes all. There is here fresh food for both old and new hungers of humankind.

The Bahá'ís as Authentic Saviors of the World

Nine unique factors should be noted in the Bahá'í Faith as qualifying it to be the answer to the bonding needs of the new world soon upon us:

1. People are inherently good, not evil. Bahá'ís have abandoned the concept of Original Sin, for Bahá'u'lláh says: “Noble have I created thee” and then permitting free will: “yet thou hast abased thyself” (Arabic Hidden Words no.22). He is expecting sin but not excusing it, for in free will there is also conscience.

2. Salvation is won through good works, not by grace alone, nor by vicarious sacrifice of a Savior, worthy as is that deed. “Let deeds, not words, be your adorning” says Baha'u'llah to his followers (Persian Hidden Words no. 5). Deeds of service form a crucial element of character development and are a counter to self-centeredness. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says: “Service to mankind is My perpetual religion.” And further He states that “Service is the magnet which draws the divine confirmations” (qtd. in *Lights of Guidance* 118).

3. Many versions of the Golden Rule can be found in Bahá'í Scriptures. But in addition Bahá'u'lláh has propounded the Greater Golden Rule as a corollary of the Most Great Peace. It is this: “Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself. Verily, such a man is reckoned, . . . with the people of Bahá” the people of Glory (*Tablets* 71).

4. Three great keys to universalism are found in the Bahá'í Faith:

- A universal Messiah, Bahá'u'lláh, the Glory of God, another Anointed One, is the Expected One of all religions;
- A universal Bible based on belief in God and God's Manifestations is created by addition of the Bahá'í Scriptures to those of the other revealed religions, with freedom to use all as relevant;
- The Bible (Book) of science is accepted as complementary to the Bible of all religions.

5. The call to group spirituality is uttered by Bahá'í who tells us that we must become “one soul in many bodies” (Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny* 306). To this end, Bahá'ís, the people of enlightenment, must become the complete men and women of peace who “primarily speak with words as mild as milk” and who have attained the “station of true understanding and nobility” (*Tablets* 173), people who know that “the day is approaching, . . . when the faithful will behold the daystar of justice shining in its full splendor” (Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *Advent* 28).

6. Wealth is praiseworthy, if honorably won and disbursed in service to humankind. The Bahá'í Faith is the first religion to call for general affluence in our future society.

7. That “work, performed in the spirit of service” (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 281) is worship ennobles all labor, all crafts, all professions.

8. The Founder calls for a portion of our material profit as a voluntary contribution to the international work of the Bahá'í Faith. It is that which the individual owes to God, the Huqúqu'lláh. It is also another step toward reducing the extremes of wealth and poverty.

9. In this day of the equality of women and men, it is highly significant that the symbol of Bahá'í Revelation is the Maid of Heaven who appeared to Bahá'u'lláh in the Black Pit, perhaps the first such female figure in revealed religion. As a religion, the Bahá'í Scriptures appeal to the

emotions without apology, respecting intuition and feeling for confirmation of the rightness and goodness of thoughts, actions, relationships. The Supreme Prophet is the parent figure for this age aborning. Through prayer to God, the Prophet summons the power of the spirit to the aid of individuals and groups who are struggling to attain the Day of God in the New Day of Science. The Prophet attunes us to the new level of evolutionary need. The Prophet's intuitive knowledge, divine authority, and love for humankind are felt in the Prophet's tablets, essays, and books. The Prophet bonds all people in love for Mother Earth, the living Gaia now imperiled, bringing to her the loyalty of six billion kinfolk. And the Prophet asks for homage to God the Creator, God the Preserver, God the Evolutionist, so that the people of the planet may, ere long, truly be "regarded as one soul" (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 162).