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Papers

The Spiritual Foundations of Science,
Anjam Khursheed

The Emergence of the Bahá'í Faith in Singapore (1950-1972),
Phyllis Ghim-Lian Chew

Jesus the Son of God and the Incarnation Doctrine,
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Bahá'í Guidelines to Healing and the Role of Homoeopathy,
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On the Nature of Bahá'í Communities,
Check Woo Foo

Special Supplement

A Compilation of Bahá'í Writings on Scholarship

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Note from editor

Association for Bahá'í Studies groups have been rapidly multiplying all over the world ever since the first one was created in Canada in 1974. Here in Singapore, a modest yet important start was made in the year 1996 when the first Singapore Bahá'í Studies conference was held on April 5th, at the Bahá'í Centre located at 110/D Wishart Road. Selected papers from that conference supplied the impetus to produce this initial Bahá'í Studies volume. To encourage full participation, the conference was deliberately not given a specific theme, and as a result, the papers included here cover a wide range of diverse subjects.

With kind permission of the Universal House of Justice, their Research Department's compilation on scholarship brought out in February 1995 is published here as a special supplement. It is hoped that this compilation may always serve as an inspiration and guide towards Bahá'í scholarship in Singapore,

Dr. Anjam Khursheed, editor
December 1996

The Spiritual Foundations of Science

Anjam Khursheed

Abstract

This paper examines some characteristic features of a Bahá'í approach to science. In contrast to popular modern western accounts of science which often attempt to reduce it to methods of logic and experiment, the Bahá'í reference point for the nature of science is the spiritual nature of man. The experience of some outstanding scientists of the past is cited to support the Bahá'í view.

1. Introduction

Many critics of modern western thought have commented on its fragmentation into two separate realms. The philosopher and mathematician Alfred Whitehead has described this division in terms of a 'bifurcation of nature'¹, where he states modern western thinking to be split into a quantitative world of science, and a qualitative world of human emotions and values.

The writer C. P. Snow has described this division in terms of a 'clash between two cultures'², a conflict between the scientific and humanistic (the artistic, religious and so on) in our society. He states that science is another 'culture' which has its own language, metaphors and view of the world. The clash between science and art is portrayed in terms of the misunderstandings and rivalries that exist between different nations.

¹ A. N. Whitehead, "The concept of Nature", p26-48, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1964

² see the book by C.P. Snow, "The Two Cultures: a second look", Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969

The psychologist Floyd Matson has described the fragmentation of modern thinking in terms of a 'broken image'³, where the traditional picture of man being made in God's image is shattered. He links these divisions in modern thought to the rise of a mechanistic world view of the universe, and refers to it as the 'modern dogma of scientism'⁴.

All these critics of modern thought link its divisions to a popular misconception of science. One of the most common ways of picturing science in the modern mind is to see it in terms of a collection of "facts and numbers". Science is conceived of as an objective method of observation, hypothesis and experiment. This view of science is generally classed as a "positivist" conception of science. The positivist representation of science portrays it as a method which is dominated by empirical measurements, either in observation or experiment, and hypotheses which are constructed according to rigorous methods of logic, whether they be deductive or inductive. Such a description of science, as is well known, was explicitly formulated by the logical positivists in the early part of this century⁵. It is one however, which still tends to dominate our view of science today, even amongst scientists themselves. The positivist conception of science is based upon understanding science in terms of explicit verification procedures which are thought to be objective: that is independent of spiritual values and purposes.

Positivist science tacitly assumes that other spheres of human activity such as religion, or art, do not have a 'scientific' method. Science is thought to contain verification tests of truth which other human activities do not have. The famous verification principle of logical positivism was an example of such a test being used to distinguish science from other spheres of human activity⁶. Others have preferred to use the truth-criterion of "falsifiability" to capture the nature of scientific investigation⁷. All these representations of science assume that it can be adequately described by formal methods of procedure, whether

³ F. W. Matson, "The Broken Image", pv-vi, NY, Anchor Books, 1966

⁴ *ibid.*, p6

⁵ see for instance the book by Ayer A.J., "Language, Truth and Logic", Penguin Books, 1971

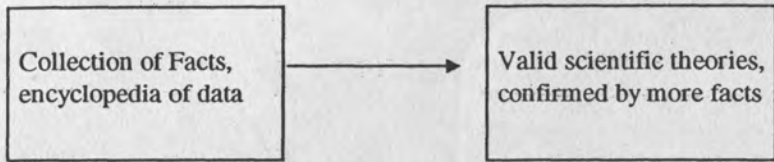
⁶ *ibid.*, p16

⁷ Popper K.R., "The Logic of Scientific Discovery", p40-41, Uwin Hyman, London, 1990

in observation, hypothesis or experiment. It is this view of science that still dominates the modern mind.

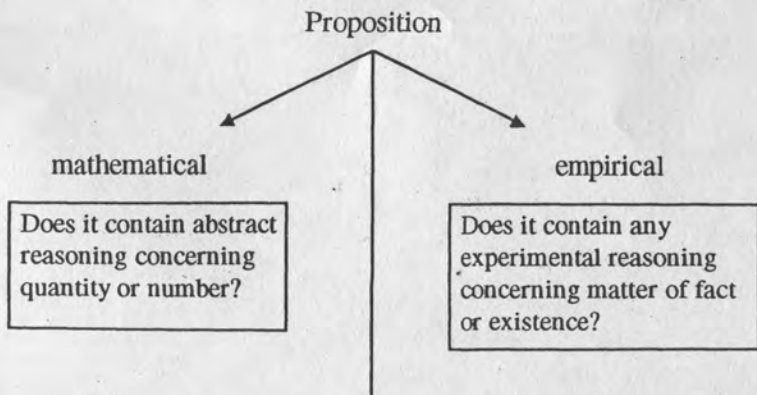
2. Examples of methods identified with science by empiricist philosophers

Francis Bacon: Science as a collection of facts



Francis Bacon (16th century) thought that science was largely about gathering facts. He thought that theories automatically emerge from trends or patterns from the facts, and that they are turned into a scientific law by the process of induction. Theories are tested by gathering more facts. Valid theories are the ones which are supported by the facts.

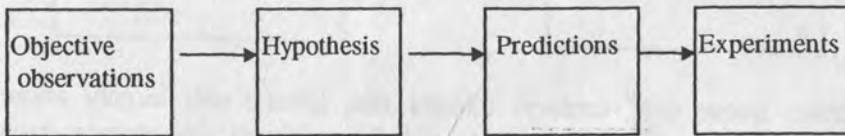
Hume's Fork: Scientific test for a meaningful proposition



“Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry illusion!”

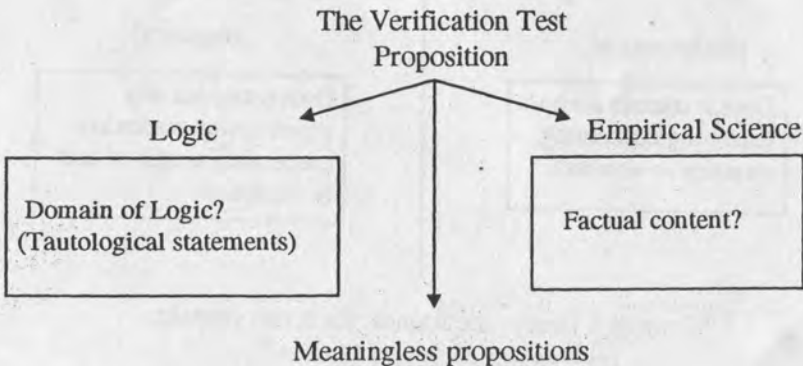
David Hume (18th century) was influenced by what he understood to be Newton's experimental method. Hume thought that Newton's scientific success was mainly due to his experimental work. Hume attempted to extend this approach into a scientific method which could describe human nature and philosophy. His method was based upon giving priority to propositions that could be directly related to information gathered by the senses. Hume's fork is a typical example of him attempting to arrive at a method for distinguishing science from non-science. His philosophy was typically directed against the metaphysics of the scholastic tradition in Western philosophy.

Bertrand Russell



Bertrand Russell (early 20th century) believed that progress in science is based upon the facts, both in observation and experiment. He thought that mathematics was a subset of logic - a tautology containing such statements as "all bachelors are men", and that it could be reduced to identifiable axioms and explicit rules of logic.

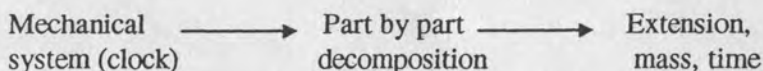
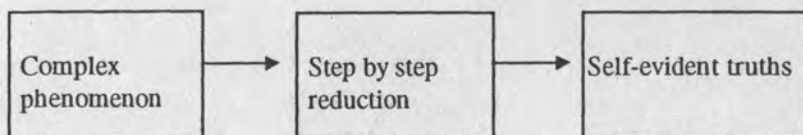
Logical Positivists: Empirical science/logic as a method to determine meaning



The touchstone of truth for the logical positivists (early 20th century) like Hume, was empirical science. They were concerned with “decontaminating” science from metaphysics, theology and ethics. Through the verification principle, they attempted to arrive at a “scientific” definition of meaning. The verification principle has many similarities with Hume’s Fork.

Scientific methods discussed by 17th century scientists

René Descartes



René Descartes articulated a scientific method based upon proceeding in a logical step by step analysis of complicated phenomena, simplifying them into simple irreducible parts. His method is similar to that of a geometric proof, which by relying on only a few simple axioms is able to proceed in clear steps of deductive logic to arrive at powerful conclusions.

Isaac Newton

Isaac Newton did not present a scientific method, but he did present general maxims that guided his scientific work. They are as follows: look for the simplest explanation, the one with the lowest number of postulated causes; assume that the same effects arise from the same causes; properties of bodies found through experiment and observation are generalised to become universal properties; proceed by general induction

from phenomena to propositions (theories). Here it is clear that Newton combines a method of induction articulated by Francis Bacon with the deductive method advocated by René Descartes.

Using inductive and deductive logic in scientific research does not necessarily constitute a "scientific method", and it is quite likely that Newton and Descartes did not conceive of them as a list of rules which could be mechanically applied to create science.

3. A Bahá'í approach

There is much written about the nature of science in the Bahá'í writings. In fact the Bahá'í faith is one of the few world religions to mention science explicitly within the orbit of its sacred scripture. But one of the most striking features about the Bahá'í writings on the subject of science is that procedures of observation, the role of experiment, or the processes of logic are scarcely mentioned.

On several occasions in his western tour between the years 1911-13, 'Abdu'l-Bahá based his public talks on the nature of science⁸. On all these occasions he never spoke about the 'methods' of science. To some of his western audience it must have seemed that instead of speaking about science, 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke about man. This is also true of the Bahá'í writings as a whole. Instead of finding a description of the nature of science in terms of special methods that are unique to science, that set it apart from all other forms of human activity, it is the special characteristics of the mind of man that are described, which set him apart from all other forms of life.

From the Bahá'í point of view, one cannot understand the nature of science without first understanding human nature. They are inextricably linked. Human nature from the Bahá'í perspective, is not reducible to the processes of nature. One special characteristic of man, which is not found within nature, is said to be his intellectual capacity. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that:

⁸ see for instance: 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Paris Talks", p141-146, The Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1911, 11th ed., London, 1969, or "The Promulgation of Universal Peace", p29-31 and p348-352, The Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette Illinois, 2nd edition, 1982

"Man is endowed with ideal virtues - for example, intellection, volition, faith, confession and acknowledgement of God - while nature is devoid of all these. The ideal faculties of man, including the capacity for scientific acquisition, are beyond nature's ken. These are powers whereby man is differentiated and distinguished from all other forms of life"⁹.

Science is possible, according to this view, only because human nature is fundamentally different to the world of nature. Human nature is seen to have characteristics not found elsewhere, such as consciousness, free-will and memory. Without the special qualities of human nature such as consciousness and free-will, no science would be possible.

Since from the Bahá'í view point, the character of science essentially derives from special non-natural powers of the mind, it is not artificially separated from other creative spheres of human activity such as the arts and crafts. Science is frequently mentioned in the Bahá'í writings in the same context as the arts and crafts. Bahá'u'lláh states that the "arts, crafts and sciences uplift the world of being", and uses the general term "knowledge" to refer to them all¹⁰. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in the context of discussing science, states that one must put effort in striving to acquire, "science and the arts"¹¹. From the Bahá'í perspective, since arts and crafts are also founded on unique creative powers of the mind, they share a natural unity with science. There is no definite boundary between the arts, crafts and sciences within the Bahá'í faith. All are regarded as important forms of knowledge which Bahá'ís have a spiritual obligation to learn.

The importance given to science within the Bahá'í writings cannot be over emphasised. Science is described as "the first emanation of God to man", "a means by which man finds a pathway to God", and as God's "love of reality in man"¹². Bahá'u'lláh states that: "Art, crafts and sciences uplift the world of

⁹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Promulgation of Universal Peace", p51

¹⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, "The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", p316, a compilation, The Bahá'í Publishing Trust, New Delhi, 1st ed., 1986

¹¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Promulgation of Universal Peace", p50

¹² 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Promulgation of Universal Peace", p49

being, and are conducive to its exaltation. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone.....Great indeed is the claim of scientists and craftsmen on the peoples of the world."¹³. 'Abdu'l-Bahá stressing the importance of science, states that: "Therefore, you should put forward your most earnest efforts toward the acquisition of science and arts. The greater your attainment, the higher your standard in the divine purpose"¹⁴. In another passage, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that: "The greatest attainment in the world of humanity has ever been scientific in nature.....the highest praise is due to men who devote their energies to science."¹⁵. Elsewhere in the Bahá'í writings, the Bahá'í faith is described as, "scientific in its method" ¹⁶.

Another important feature of the Bahá'í conception of science is that science is believed to reflect the existence of profound cosmological mysteries. Science is stated to be a revelation from God. The universe, from the Bahá'í perspective, is seen to be filled with the knowledge and signs of God. Each atom is said to contain within it, profound cosmological mysteries. The unity and order of the cosmos, a belief which underlies all scientific investigation, is given special emphasis within the Bahá'í conception of science, and is ultimately looked upon as a sign of divine purpose and design in the universe. It is stated in the Bahá'í writings that the universe is regulated by laws which operate from the atomic to astronomical level. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that:

"This Nature is subjected to an absolute organisation, to determined laws, to a complete order and a finished design, from which it will never depart; to such a degree, indeed, that if you look carefully and with keen insight, from the smallest invisible atom up to such large bodies of the world of existence as the globe of the sun or other great stars and luminous spheres, whether you regard their arrangement, their composition, their form or their movement, you will

¹³ "Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", p316

¹⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Promulgation of Universal Peace", p50

¹⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Promulgation of Universal Peace", p348

¹⁶ Shoghi Effendi, "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", pxi, Bahá'í Publishing Committee, New York, 1938

find that all are in the highest degree of organisation and are under one law from which they will never depart".¹⁷

The nature of science is ultimately impossible to capture or describe since this knowledge, embedded within the universe, is regarded as infinite. Human science, is understood to be empowered to capture a portion of this knowledge. Bahá'u'lláh states that:

"Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light. Methinks, but for the potency of that revelation, no being could ever exist. How resplendent the luminaries of knowledge that shine in an atom, and how vast the oceans of wisdom that surge within a drop! To a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, hath been invested with the robe of such gifts, and hath been singled out for the glory of such a distinction. For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no created being hath excelled or passed."¹⁸

The Bahá'í conception of science is thus inseparable from mystery, and that science is inherently limitless. It is founded on cosmological mysteries: the unity and order of the cosmos, which is understood to be a sign of God in the world of nature, and the creative power of the human mind, which is regarded as the greatest of all signs of God in the universe. The nature of science is seen to be unfathomable, because the mysteries that underlie it are believed to be unfathomable. Bahá'u'lláh states the human soul to be a "mystery among His mysteries". Bahá'u'lláh states that: "Every created thing in the whole universe

¹⁷ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Some Answered Questions", p3, The Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette Illinois, pocket size ed., 1990

¹⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, "Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", The Bahá'í Publishing Trust, London, 1978, XC, p176-7

is but a door leading into His knowledge.... Verily I say, the human soul is, in its essence, one of the signs of God, a mystery among His mysteries"¹⁹.

Speaking of the rational faculty of man, Bahá'u'lláh states that:

"Wert thou to ponder in thine heart, from now until the end that hath no end, and with all concentrated intelligence and understanding...this divinely ordained and subtle Reality, this sign of the revelation of the All-abiding, All-Glorious God, thou wilt fail to comprehend its mystery or appraise its virtue"²⁰.

The very recognition of such a mystery being unfathomable, is in itself regarded by Bahá'u'lláh as the "acme of human understanding":

"This confession of helplessness which mature contemplation must eventually impel every mind to make is in itself the acme of human understanding, and marketh the culmination of man's development"²¹.

The recognition of the essential mystery lying behind the power of the rational faculty of man, the foundation upon which scientific investigation is made, from the Bahá'í point of view, is essential to understanding the nature of science. According to this view, as science makes more and more progress, the cosmological truths that make this progress possible, appear in greater mystery. Contrary to modern popular conceptions of science, scientific progress is believed to enhance mystery, not to diminish it.

The notion of science being objective in an impersonal sense, without reference to human minds, convictions and values, is not found within the writings of the Bahá'í faith. The preconditions necessary to acquire truth, including scientific truth, are believed to lie in cultivating certain spiritual characteristics on the part of the enquirer. Scientific facts are not set in opposition to religious ideals. The ability to acquire knowledge, from the Bahá'í point of view, depends upon having certain moral prerequisites.

¹⁹ "Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", LXXXII, p.160

²⁰ "Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", LXXXIII, p164-165

²¹ "Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", LXXXIII, p165

One of the most important of all these preconditions is the obligation to think for oneself and rely on one's own reasoning. The spirit of Bahá'í enquiry entails taking the responsibility to carry out one's own investigations where possible, and to minimise the passive absorption of information from others. Blind imitation of other people's views is seen to be the main source of propagating prejudices. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

"Furthermore, know ye that God has created in man the power of reason whereby man is enabled to investigate reality. God has not intended man to imitate blindly his fathers and ancestors. He has endowed him with mind, or the faculty of reasoning, by the exercise of which he is to investigate and discover the truth, and that which he finds real and true he must accept. He must not be an imitator or blind follower of any soul. He must not rely implicitly upon the opinion of any man without investigation; nay, each soul must seek intelligently and independently, arriving at a real conclusion and bound only that reality. The greatest cause of bereavement and disheartening in the world of humanity is ignorance based upon blind imitation"²².

Other spiritual prerequisites include being open-minded, striving to minimise prejudice, and being humble in one's investigations²³.

The Bahá'í faith can only be considered to be "scientific in its method" in terms of its reliance on using one's own unique powers of mind, as opposed to the passive absorption of information from others. Only in this sense can the Bahá'í faith said to be "scientific in its method"²⁴. This phrase captures an important attitude of mind which characterises the Bahá'í approach. The unique powers of mind upon which science is founded: its ability for creative abstraction, its truth-seeking nature, its ability to reason, its ability to be independent of social prejudices, its ability to perform courageous leaps of faith, and many more, are all seen to be just as indispensable to the progress of religion, as they are to the progress of science. The individual Bahá'í has an

²² 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Promulgation of Universal Peace", p291

²³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Paris Talks", p135-7

²⁴ Shoghi Effendi, "World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", pxi

obligation to use the same creative qualities of mind which underlie scientific investigation, in his or her study of religion.

'Abdu'l-Bahá states that:

"Consider what it is that singles man out from among created beings, and makes of him a creature apart. Is it not his reasoning power, his intelligence? Shall he not make use of these in his study of religion? I say unto you: weigh carefully in the balance of reason and science everything that is presented to you as religion. If it passes this test, then accept it, for it is truth! If, however, it does not conform, then reject it, for it is ignorance!"²⁵.

Another important element within the Bahá'í view of science is that science must in some way serve society. Science is not separable from its effects in society. Bahá'u'lláh warns of avoiding sciences that "begin in mere words and end in mere words", and encourages the acquisition of "such arts and sciences, however, as are productive of good results, and bring forth their fruit.....acceptable before God"²⁶. 'Abdu'l-Bahá after having given a discourse on the nature of science, states that: "How shall we utilize these gifts and expend these bounties? By directing our efforts toward the unification of the human race. We must use these powers in establishing the oneness of the world of humanity..."²⁷. Science from this perspective, cannot be separated from its social consequences. Man has a special responsibility to use his creative powers of mind towards serving humanity. Without this end purpose in mind, developments in science are stated to endanger civilisation. Bahá'u'lláh warned that "The civilisation, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men....If carried to excess, civilisation will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation"²⁸. 'Abdu'l-Bahá echoes the same theme when he

²⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Paris Talks", p144

²⁶ "Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", p313

²⁷ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "The Promulgation of Universal Peace", p51

²⁸ "Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", CLXIII, p341-2

stated that: "material progress alone does not tend to uplift man. On the contrary, the more he becomes immersed in material progress, the more does his spirituality become obscured.....only if material progress goes hand in hand with spirituality can any real progress come about"²⁹.

From the Bahá'í perspective, the unity between science and religion can be understood on many different levels. Religion provides the scientist with faith in the unity of Nature, a belief in the rationality of Nature's laws. Religion also directs scientific discoveries to the service of mankind. It provides a moral framework for the application of scientific discovery. Science on the other hand can protect religion from falling into superstitious beliefs by always distinguishing the primary irreducible truths of religion from its secondary aspects, ones that are relative to the time and place in which it comes. Science for instance demonstrated that the belief of the earth to be 6000 years old, justified by some Christians from a literal interpretation of biblical text, was in fact mistaken. By doing so, science performed an invaluable service to Christianity. It showed that such a belief was not central to Christian doctrine, and forced Christians to redirect their attention to the irreducible truths of their religion, such as their belief in the power of humility, love, justice etc.

The Bahá'í view is often presented in terms of an image given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, where he describes science and religion to be the two wings of a bird³⁰. With only the wing of science, he states that the bird of the 'human soul' will fall into the 'slough of materialism'. With only the wing of religion, he states that humanity will fall into the 'quagmire of superstition'.

Science here is presented as a multi-level activity which has spiritual foundations. One way of approaching science might be to liken it to an iceberg. The tip of an iceberg is the only part visible above water level. The mountain of ice upon which the tip sits is not apparent from observation of the tip alone. In fact, there is no indication above the surface that the iceberg consists of a vast mass of ice which is expanding in size as it penetrates deeper into the sea. Likewise, it is easy to underestimate the spiritual depth to science and reduce it to visible and tangible parts. At a deeper level, science consists of intellectual engagement, which involves problem solving and putting something to the test. Beyond the intellectual level, science involves moral

²⁹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Paris Talks", p107

³⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Paris Talks", p143

obligations and commitments, which include commitments to not falsifying one's results, an openness to criticism, and relying upon truth as the ultimate source of authority. Beyond this level and very much related to it, there is the level of metaphysical involvement, bringing in intuitions about our place in the cosmos, feelings of wonder and mystery, and faith in the power of our minds to understand Nature. The diagram below indicates some of the less visible but deeper aspects to science.



4. The Experience of Scientists

The positivist conception of science only partially captures the nature of scientific investigation. Formal methods of logical reasoning and empirical tests, as attested by the great scientists of the past and many philosophers this century, only capture surface layers of the true nature of science. Science is built upon spiritual foundations, and not empirical-mathematical ones. Some statements about the nature of science from scientists themselves can be used

to demonstrate this point. From the many examples which can be listed, only a few will suffice here.

The way in which Isaac Newton for instance looked upon his own lifetime's work in physics demonstrates that he considered science to be founded on an ocean of spiritual truths:

I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only a boy playing on a seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than the ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.³¹

Newton's view of his science is characteristic of pre-modern conceptions of science. Every scientific advance was seen to be washed up from out of an ocean of spiritual truths. Every scientific fact indicates the presence of deeper truths beyond it. The nature of science according to this image is seen to be unfathomable. Empirical tests and observations, rational hypotheses, are likened to be "pebbles" on the shoreline of scientific truth, whose reality is intuitively believed to extend infinitely far beyond them.

Another indication that the nature of science penetrates far beyond formal procedures of logic and empirical observation was given by Neils Bohr. The revolution of quantum theory in physics necessitated a much more profound view of science than the positivist one. Perhaps the greatest philosophical lesson of quantum theory is that absolute objectivity is unattainable in science. When one inherently affects what one sees, absolute objectivity is impossible to maintain. An observation will always contain an inherent amount of uncertainty associated with it, generated by the "subject" influencing the "object". The more the subject shares with the object, the greater the uncertainty produced. Under such circumstances, Neils Bohr states that we can only make progress in terms of "images and parables":

Quantum theory thus provides us with a striking illustration of the fact that we can fully understand a connection though we can only speak of it in images and parables. In this case,

³¹ Quoted on p207 of "Physics and Beyond", Werner Heisenberg, Harper and Row, 1971

the images and parables are by and large the classical concepts, ie, 'wave' and 'corpuscle'. They do not fully describe the real world and are, moreover, complementary in part, and hence contradictory. For all that, since we can only describe natural phenomena with our everyday language, we can only hope to grasp the real facts by means of these images. This is probably true of all general philosophical problems and particularly of metaphysics. We are forced to speak in images and parables which do not express precisely what we mean. Nor can we avoid occasional contradictions; nevertheless, the images help us draw nearer to the real facts. Their existence no one should deny. "Truth dwells in the deeps".³²

Neils Bohr captures important characteristics of scientific investigation in the above citation. He expresses the belief that scientific investigation contains much more than can be expressed in explicit formal terms: "truth dwells in the deeps". It is a vision of science which understands human knowledge to only capture imperfect glimpses of the reality of the universe, and has obvious parallels in religion. Neils Bohr referring to the ban with which positivist philosophy would place on scientific investigation, stated that: "this ban would prevent our understanding of quantum theory".³³

Science is founded on an intuition of unity in the universe. It is based on a conviction of the rationality of the universe, which cannot be demonstrated to be completely true. It requires faith. One can always be sceptical about such a faith, as Hume's philosophy clearly showed³⁴.

All great advances in the history of science have brought our vision of the universe into a greater unity. This was demonstrated in ancient Greece, where the Ionian philosophers looked for the "One behind the Many", or in the science of Pythagoras, by his discovery of an equivalence principle between musical intervals and the numerical ratios of the length of a musical instrument.

³² Ibid p210

³³ Ibid p208

³⁴ see the book by Hume D., "A Treatise of Human Nature", Penguin Classics, 1984

It is also evident in Newton's physics when he showed that the same laws of motion which applied to projectiles on the surface of the earth also regulated planetary motion: the motion of a falling apple and moon were united together. Similarly in the middle of the 19th century James Clerk Maxwell showed that the Electric force and Magnetic force were in fact one single force -the electromagnetic force.

The equivalence principles discovered by Einstein also brought a vision of the universe in greater unity: of the unity between energy and mass or the unity between inertial and gravitational acceleration. All these discoveries in the history of science serve to demonstrate the same point: that progress in science advances by integrating our vision of the universe into a wider scheme of unity. Scientific investigation is founded upon the conviction that the universe is intelligible to us. Einstein for instance stated that: "The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible"³⁵. The spirit of science is characterised by a search for universal truths. Science is based upon the value we place upon such a search. Scientific investigation entails the search for deeper and deeper meaning in the universe. Science is thus founded upon spiritual values: a search for meaning, a faith in the rationality and unity of the universe, and the search to acquire universal truths. Einstein expressed these spiritual characteristics in the following way:

But science can only be created by those who are thoroughly imbued with the aspiration towards truth and understanding. This source of feeling, however, springs from the sphere of religion. To this there also belongs the faith in the possibility that the regulations valid for the world of existence are rational, that is, comprehensible to reason. I cannot conceive of a genuine scientist without that profound faith. The situation may be expressed by an image: Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.³⁶

³⁵ Holton G. and Elkana Y., "Albert Einstein", p242, Princeton University Press. New Jersey, 1982

³⁶ Albert Einstein, "Out of My Later Years", p26. The Citadel Press, 1956

Science and religion find common ground in their search for universal truths. Universal truths cannot be compartmentalised. From this perspective, if a scientist genuinely searches for universal truths, he or she will be naturally led to religion, and correspondingly, a sincere member of a religious faith will be open to the results of scientific investigation.

Both science and religion also require a precondition of reverence. Science requires a respect within the subject for the object under study: an obligation to purge oneself of ego-centric prejudices. Likewise, religion also requires reverence. The scientist-philosopher Micheal Polanyi stated that: "we need reverence to perceive greatness, even as we need a telescope to observe spiritual nebulae"³⁷. Both science and religion require a feeling of child-like humility. Newton pictured himself as a boy play on the shore of truth, while only those "born again", are said to be able to enter the "Kingdom of Heaven". There are obviously many more examples which can be given to show that there are parallels between science and religion. The main point here is that science is founded on spiritual values, and not on an impersonal method of logic or observation. Science is not independent of spiritual values, but it is rather founded upon them.

The principle of complementarity between science and religion may be likened to the union of the magnetic and electric force in electromagnetism. James Clerk Maxwell discovered that the seemingly separate forces of electricity and magnetism were in fact one, and that light consisted of electromagnetic waves. The electromagnetic force, although embracing both the electric and magnetic force, is at the same time, something completely different. The unity of the electric and magnetic force is a creative form of unity, in the sense that their union produces a new dimension, an effect which could not have been predicted from either force alone: two static forms of energy by coming together give rise to a dynamic form of energy which is able to propagate information throughout space. Electromagnetic energy is now constantly encircling the earth in the form of radio signals, satellite signals, television signals etc and putting people from all nations into closer contact with one another.

³⁷ Micheal Polanyi, "The Study of Man", p96. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1958

Science and religion are at the moment considered by most modern western people to be two separate forces in human culture that have little to do with each other. But from the Bahá'í perspective, they are both different aspects of a single deeper force, a force which drives us to uncover universal truths, a force which impels man to search for God, the force which will build the 'Kingdom of Heaven on earth'. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that when the two forces of science and religion come together, there will be 'a great unifying, cleansing force in the world which will sweep before it all wars, disagreements, discords and struggles - and then will mankind be united in the power of the Love of God'³⁸. Like the union of the electric and magnetic force, the outcome of bringing science and religion together will have far reaching consequences. A new dimension to human culture is prophesied to emerge, one which will encircle the earth with a lasting peace, a kind of peace not yet witnessed before.

³⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Paris Talks", p146

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The Emergence of the Bahá'í Faith in Singapore (1950-1972)

Phyllis Ghim-Lian Chew

Abstract

The advent of a world religion is usually the beginning of a significant phase in the spiritual history of a country. This paper analyses the emergence of the Bahá'í Faith in Singapore in the first twenty years of its existence. This history will take us from the arrival of the first pioneers in Singapore in 1950 to the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Singapore in 1972. It reviews the work of Bahá'í pioneering families, the activities of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Singapore and the strategies employed to teach and proclaim the existence of the Bahá'í Faith. The significant features of the early Bahá'í community are then summarised.

Introduction

Singapore can be said to be representative of the geographic region of "Southeast Asia". Its three million population in a tiny land area of 626 square kilometres represents a cross-section of the people of South and East Asia. There are four major races on the island - Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian, each with their own distinctive history and culture. Linguistically, the island has four official languages and in addition to these, its populace speak a large variety of other Chinese, Indian and Malay dialects. In terms of religious affiliation, almost every

major Faith has found a home. The Chinese are predominately Confucianists, Taoists, and Buddhists (what has been called "the Chinese religion")¹ the Malays predominantly Muslim, the Indians predominately Hindu and the Eurasians predominantly Christian.

Situated in the heart of the myriad islands of Southeast Asia, on the crossroads between India and China, Singapore became the natural port of transit for many sea travellers. Today, its international airport performs the identical function that its seaport had traditionally performed. It is an important centre for the exchange of goods between the countries of Southeast Asia and more generally for the world. Its strategic location and its natural harbour were in fact the main reason for its colonisation by the British in 1819.

The 1950's marked the main boundary between colonial and postcolonial era since it saw the liberation of Singapore and the rest of Southeast Asia from European rule. Like the rest of Southeast Asia and together with Africa and South America, Singapore was part of the so-called "third world". It was a time when new ideas and technology began to challenge traditional patterns of living. The period also marked the introduction of a new world religion to Singapore - the Bahá'í Faith. This paper analyses the emergence of this unique phenomenon. The first twenty-two years of the Bahá'í Faith is examined and this takes us from the arrival of the first Bahá'í pioneers in Singapore in 1950 to the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly (NSA) of the Bahá'ís of Singapore in 1972. It reviews the work of Bahá'í pioneering families, the activities of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Singapore and the central strategies employed to teach and proclaim the existence of the Bahá'í Faith.

By Way of India

The continent of India has always played a significant part in the political, social and cultural fortunes of Southeast Asia. The region's traditional link to the Indian subcontinent can be seen in the fact that it was often referred to as "Further India" by Europeans before the Second

¹ See Chew, *The Chinese Religion*.

World War.² The British, for instance, used to rule the Straits Settlements of Penang, Singapore and Malacca from the office of the Governor-General in India. The spiritual history of the region is also connected to India. Religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam in countries such as Burma, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia were mainly transmitted by Indian traders visiting the region. Transmission was often effected through marriage and other social contact, often facilitated through the wealth of the Indian traders and their claim to magical powers.³ On the whole, it has been a region receptive to the advent of new religions. Before the advent of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and the Bahá'í faith (in that order), the spiritual characteristics of Southeast Asia were ancestor worship and beliefs which involved animism, a cosmological dualism between mountain and sea, and a numerology associated with magic. Thus, when more sophisticated religious systems were introduced, they were often recognised and appreciated as such and easily absorbed by the local people. New faiths were easily embraced without the necessity of prolonged conflicts or religious wars so apparent in other countries.⁴

The first Bahá'í teachers to this region, characteristically, also came from India. Like previous traders, teachers and sojourners, their intended destination was the comparatively more populated Javanese islands. A journey by sea would often take these travellers through the Straits of Malacca, forcing them to stop at the Portuguese (later Dutch and British) port of Malacca, Penang and Singapore for refuelling and recreation. In the 1880's, two Bahá'í teachers, Sulayman Khan Ilyas (popularly known as Jamal Effendi) and Siyyid Mustafa Roumie, stopped in Singapore for a few weeks on their way to the Javanese and Celebes islands.⁵ Jamal Effendi was the first Persian teacher of the Faith sent to India in 1878 on the instruction of Bahá'u'lláh, while his travel companion, Mustafa Roumie was a Muslim of Iraqi decent, whom he had converted to the Bahá'í Faith during his religious teaching tour in India. In the 1880's both of them decided to team up for the purpose of teaching the Faith to the

² Taylor, *Southeast Asia*, p. 3

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ See Smart, *Religions of Southeast Asia*.

⁵ See Abbasali Butt, *An Account of the Services of Siyyid Mustafa Rumi. A Compendium of Volumes of the Bahá'í World*, I - XII, 1925-1954.

inhabitants of the countries of Southeast Asia. An account of this particular journey was written by Roumie and subsequently published.⁶ Although Roumie does not give a specific date of arrival, one can infer from his account of the events leading up to the journey that they visited the Dutch East Indies in 1883.⁷

Their sea route to the Javanese islands meant that they had to pass through the Straits of Malacca. They docked at the ports of Penang, Malacca and Singapore for refuelling and rest. There are verbal accounts that they may have engaged in some trading of horses.⁸ In Singapore, they stayed at the Arab quarters of the town, as guests of the Turkish Vice Consul, a well-known Arab merchant. During this period, they mixed freely with the Arab community. It is very likely that they taught the Bahá'í Faith although it is unlikely that they managed to reach the Chinese race (the majority racial group in Singapore) due to language problems and the fact that 19th Century Singapore was generally segregated geographically along racial lines. From Singapore, they caught a boat for Batavia (Jakarta), then the chief seaport of Java, where they encountered a lot more success in their teaching endeavours.⁹

It was to be in the 20th Century, a few more decades later, before any other Bahá'í stepped foot on the island. It is likely that two well-known Bahá'í teachers, Mason Remey and Martha Root, in their travels to China and Japan may have stopped on the island of Singapore although it is unlikely that they would have stayed long enough to do any effective teaching work.¹⁰

Bahá'í Pioneers

⁶ The editorial synopsis of Siyyid Mustaffa's account was published in *Bahá'í Weekly*, 19.3.1932.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Butt, *op.cit.*

⁹ See Mobine-Kesheh, *op.cit.*

¹⁰ One notes that in 1930, a Chinese female student, on a hearing a talk by Martha Root at the Hong Kong University in 1930 was so impressed by the teachings that she asked Root: "What can I do to promote the Bahá'í movement in Singapore, my home city?" See Seow, *The Pure in Heart*, p. 59.

It was only in the 1950's that the first Bahá'í "pioneer" chose to settle in Singapore. A pioneer is different from a travel-teacher in the sense that unlike the latter who has chosen to teach the Faith for a temporary period in the countries of their travel, a pioneer is one who leaves his place of residence to promote his belief in a new location, whether within his country or outside it. They often stay longer than a travel teacher. They are not "missionaries" in the commonly understood sense of the term since no special theological training is involved. While "pioneering" may constitute an individual's sole purpose, Bahá'í pioneers often combine it with furthering their formal education, with business opportunity or career enhancement, or with a creative retirement. Few receive any funding although they may be assisted financially at critical moments, especially during the process of establishing themselves.¹¹

The first Bahá'í pioneers to settle in Singapore were Dr K. M. Fozdar and his wife, Mrs. Shirin Fozdar. In 1950, as part of the goals of the second seven-year plan (1946-1953), Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, instructed the National Spiritual Assembly of India to send pioneers to the whole of Southeast Asia. Requests were made to the believers in India to volunteer to relocate to the region. Heeding the call, the Fozdars volunteered to pioneer to Indonesia.

Accordingly, Dr Fozdar resigned from his medical appointment with the State Railways in India and made plans to leave for Indonesia. As it was easier to obtain a visa to Jakarta from Singapore rather than from India, he booked a one-way ticket on a P and O Liner to Singapore. The journey by ship took three weeks and he arrived in Singapore on the 26th May 1950. On alighting, he immediately sought entry to Indonesia. Despite several attempts at the Indonesian consulate in Singapore, he was unsuccessful in obtaining a visa for entry into the country. Failing in his mission and reluctant to return to India, he decided to stay on in Singapore in the hope of reapplying again for re-entry in the near future. There were other advantages for staying on in Singapore. For one, it was in close proximity to the Indonesian islands. Its affairs were also conducted in English, a language in which he was fluent. Being an Indian national, he was also not unfamiliar with British administrative rule. Thus, very quickly and with the help of friends which he had made on

¹¹ See Hassall, *Pacific Bahá'í Communities*.

board ship, he quickly found employment as a private medical practitioner in the colony.¹² However, he was never to realise his goal of pioneering to the Indonesian islands. He remained in Singapore until his sudden passing from a heart attack eight years later - in 1958.

Subsequent years also saw the arrival of other Bahá'í pioneering families in Singapore. They came to settle, and simultaneously, to pursue their own career and business opportunities. There was, for instance, Col. Eshraghian, a Persian who came as a pioneer with his family in 1958 and stayed for two years before leaving for Australia. Other pioneers who resided in Singapore in the late fifties and who stayed for at least a year included Mahesh Dayal and Mangubhai Patel from India, Mr and Mrs Wesley Huxtable from Canada and John McHenry III from the United States. In the sixties, these pioneers were joined by Mr. and Mrs. Rostrum Rahnema from Persia and Mary Robinson from Britain.¹³

The Proclamation of the Bahá'í Faith in Singapore

After securing accommodation and a stable means of income, Dr Fozdar cabled his wife, Shirin, to join him in Singapore. From the day Shirin Fozdar arrived on the island (19th September 1950), the Bahá'í Faith became very well known. This was because she was able to generate enormous publicity for herself and the Faith in whatever she was doing. When the liner which brought her from India was about to arrive, Dr Fozdar seized the opportunity to inform the local press that "an eminent feminist from India" had arrived and would be giving public talks on women's rights. This bold gesture on a rather conservative British colony in the 1950 led the *Straits Times*, the leading English daily,¹⁴ to announce her arrival on its front page with the caption "A women with a message".

¹² Dr Arthur Thevathasan offered him a job in his clinic within a month of his arrival in Singapore. Dr Fozdar accepted, and worked with him throughout his stay in Singapore.

¹³ However, Dr and Mrs. Fozdar stayed the longest, with Mrs Fozdar taking up Singapore citizenship in 1959. Both of them are buried in the Bahá'í Cemetery in Singapore.

¹⁴ *Straits Times*, 20 9. 1950.

This first article not only reported about her feminist activities in India but also the fact that she was the "Vice President of the National Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India and Burma" and that "Bahá'ís are dotted all over the world." The report also mentioned that "They believe in universal brotherhood, the unity of mankind, a spiritual civilisation, a universal language and universal peace and the establishment of world government."¹⁵ Thus, the Bahá'í Faith in Singapore was born, from the very beginning, in a blaze of publicity.

The day after her arrival, Mrs. Fozdar gave a public lecture at the Singapore Rotary Club, then the most prestigious club in the colony. As this was the first public lecture given by a woman at the Rotary Club (then an all-male preserve), the press found this newsworthy and reported parts of her speech the following day under the caption "No more nonsense from men, says Mrs. Fozdar." Once again, the article had a concluding paragraph which mentioned that "Mrs. Fozdar spoke on the new world order which she said was originated by Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith."¹⁶

Mrs. Shirin Fozdar was now in constant demand as a public speaker. From the day of her arrival up to the year of her departure (1961)¹⁷, she spoke on topics such as "the Brotherhood of Man" "The Solution to World Peace" and "Religion should be the Cause of Unity" in associations, clubs, societies, schools, libraries and over the radio.¹⁸ One such society in which members were interested in what the Bahá'í Faith had to say regarding "the unity of religion" and "the oneness of mankind" was the Theosophical Society. A significant portion of the early believers on the island were in fact, former members of the society. A prominent member of the Singapore Bahá'í community, Teo Geok Leng, a

¹⁵ *Straits Times*, 15.9.1950, p. 10. This was to be the first of many press reports on Mrs. Fozdar in the newspapers of Singapore in the 1950's. It is not inaccurate to say that Mrs. Fozdar became one of the most widely written-about women during this period.

¹⁶ See *Straits Times*, 21.9.1951. See also 17.11.1951; 20.1.1952; 18.2.1952; 22.2.1952; 29.2.1952.

¹⁷ Mrs. Fozdar left Singapore to fulfil a pioneering post in Thailand.

¹⁸ *Straits Times*, 22.2.1952; 16.2.1953; 3.4.1956; *Singapore Free Press* 10.3.1952; 5.4.1952; *The Weekender*, 4.11.1955; 7.3.1958; *Borneo Bulletin*, 19.3.1954; *Malay Mail* 23.5.1955. She also became the first woman to speak to prison inmates in the prisons of Singapore (See Chew, *The Singapore Council*).

professional accountant, was for example, a former President of the Theosophical Society.¹⁹

The Women's Platform

The Bahá'í Faith is closely connected with the rise of the early women's movement in Singapore. Indeed, the Faith was effectively proclaimed in Singapore (and to a lesser extent, Southeast Asia and the world), on the wings of the movement. In the 1950's in Singapore, women had begun to participate more actively in public life and to speak up on issues which affected them adversely.²⁰ Shirin Fozdar's contribution to and ideas about the women's cause were very much motivated by her Bahá'í beliefs. The Faith urges its adherents to "walk the spiritual path with practical feet" and emphasised that a good Bahá'í was one who would dedicate his or her life to the advancement of human civilisation.²¹ The direct promotion of the equality of the status of men and women, one of the tenets of the Faith, was one such measure which the Bahá'ís believe would bring about a "new world order."

The platform which Mrs. Fozdar used to promote the principle of the equality of the sexes was that of the Singapore Council of Women (SCW). In November 1951, she called a meeting of prominent women in the colony to discuss the formation of an organisation which would act as an "umbrella" body for the various women's organisations then existing in Singapore. This would give the SCW the license to act as the collective

¹⁹ Teo was a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA) of Singapore for over twenty years.

²⁰ For example, in 1949, Mrs. Robert Eu, a close friend of Mrs Shirin Fozdar and a member of the protem committee of the *Singapore Council of Women*, became the first woman to be elected into the Legislative Assembly of Singapore. In the next few years, other women would be nominated or elected into the same Assembly as well as the Municipal Council.

²¹ The motif that was on display was that of social reformism. This was basically a program advocating specific social reforms and universal social principles, such as the abolition of extremes of wealth and poverty, the emancipation of women, universal compulsory education, the adoption of an international auxiliary language, and the fostering of means to promote the unity, harmony and spiritual development of the human race.

voice of women in Singapore and enable it to "ensure through legislation if necessary, justice to all women and to further their welfare as embodied in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights."²² The idea was appealing and the SCW was formally registered in April 1952 amidst intense public interest and press coverage.²³

As the elected secretary-general of the SCW throughout the 1950's,²⁴ Mrs. Fozdar spoke fearlessly on the controversial issues of polygamy and divorce which affected women's welfare adversely, e.g. "Shame and misery are forced on Muslim women in Malaya in the name of God and religion," "Malay beats Hollywood: 60 out of 100 marriages end on rocks" and "Polygamy feeds the wolf in man". Such statements would often make the headlines.²⁵ This prompted a local paper, the *Malay Mail* to write an editorial on "Women Leaders", pointing out that Mrs. Fozdar had a rapidly increasing following throughout Malaya and Singapore and not from the womenfolk only.²⁶

The formation of the SCW was an important milestone for the proclamation of the Bahá'í Faith in Singapore because on many occasions when Mrs. Fozdar was speaking on "women's rights", there would be the accompanying paragraph that this notion was part of the "new world order", which was originated by Bahá'u'lláh, "the prophet founder of the Bahá'í Faith." In this indirect fashion, the general public became familiar with terms such as "Bahá'í" and associated it with notions such as "human rights", "women's rights", "world language" and "world tribunal".²⁷

In addition, because of Mrs. Fozdar's fame as a crusader of women's rights, the papers were willing to report on other talks she delivered which were not on "women rights" but on the Bahá'í Faith. Thus, Singapore readers were exposed to brief summaries of her views

²² Chew, *The Singapore Council of Women*.

²³ *Straits Times* 4.4.1952, *Singapore Free Press* 4.4.1952.

²⁴ Another Bahá'í, Mrs. George Lee, was the President of the SCW throughout the 1950's.

²⁵ *The Weekender*, 7.3.1958; *Straits Times* 20.6.1958.

²⁶ See *Malay Mail* 25.4.1958. See also *Malay Mail* editorials 30.5.1955; 9.7.1955

²⁷ See e.g. *Hong Kong Standard* 11.8.1958, *Straits Times* 15.9.1950; 4.9.1959.

such as the "Concept of a World Commonwealth", "A Universal Language", "A World Legislature", and how "national rivalries could be replaced by racial harmony, understanding and Cupertino."²⁸

The SCW also provided an avenue for women from all walks of life to meet. To encourage mass participation, membership fees were kept low and open to all women regardless of race, religion and nationality. Mrs. Fozdar's "progressive" ideas captured the imagination of the populace and before long, SWC's ideas were adopted by other women groups hoping to seize political power. The Women's League of the People's Action Party, organised in 1956, for example, encouraged women to organise themselves in order to press for legal reforms.²⁹ In 1958, a Singapore branch of the Pan Pacific Southeast Asian Women's Association (PPSEAWA) came into existence and began to host seminars to promote the social and legal status of women. One Singaporean woman leader, Mrs. George Lee, became so impressed with the SCW's agenda that she later became a Bahá'í.³⁰

Another way in which the Faith was proclaimed was through the establishment of a "girls" club in Singapore by the SCW. This idea was first mooted by the Social Welfare Department who noted that there were at present eight "boys club" but no "girls club" in Singapore. The Department asked the SCW to consider the sponsoring of one. The SCW took up the idea and formed the first girls' club in Singapore. This club began functioning in February 1953 at the Joo Chiat Welfare Center³¹ with volunteers recruited from both the SCW and the Bahá'í community to help in the organisation of lessons such as English, the vernacular languages, cooking, sewing and the art of self defence.³²

²⁸ See e.g. Singapore Tiger Standard, 28.11.1958. The SCW had 100 paid-up member two months after its formation (*Straits Times* 29.5.1952) and 1,000 members a year later (*Straits Times*, 2.4.1953).

²⁹ *Petir* 1, no. 8, May 1957, p.2.

³⁰ Mrs. George Lee was a prominent member of the Methodist Women's Group and was President of the SCW from 1953-1961.

³¹ See Chew, *The Singapore Council*, p. 119.

³² This well-used platform was no longer available with the passing of the Women's Charter of 1961 which made into law most of the demands made by the SCW and with the departure of Mrs. Fozdar from Singapore soon after.

The Early Bahá'í Community of Singapore

The Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA) of Singapore

The Bahá'í administrative system is characterised by the absence of clergy. It is the responsibility of each individual Bahá'í to assist in propagating the religion, according to a code which favours dissemination of information and which prohibits proselytism. While the Fozdars were unable to find any believers in the first two years of their stay in Singapore, things began to change from the beginning of the third year.³³ The first Bahá'í was enrolled into the Faith in early 1952. He was Naraindas Jethanand, an Indian national working as a textile salesman whom Mrs. Fozdar had invited to a "fireside" at her home.³⁴ He was soon followed by Mr. and Mrs. Cheng Wei Min, neighbours of the Fozdars and Mr. Teo Geok Leng and Goh Beng Wan, both of whom were friends of Dr Fozdar from the Theosophical Society. This small group began to introduce the Faith to other friends and from then on, there was a slow but steady trickle of declarants.

There being now more than nine members in March 1952, the Fozdars began to look into the formation of an assembly which could administer the religious and administrative affairs of the infant community.³⁵ This could not be done earlier since there were not enough new Bahá'ís to participate in an election which would elect nine members to sit on the Assembly. By April 1952, there was a total of 12 declared

³³ In late 1951, a little discouraged, the Fozdars wrote to the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith expressing doubts on staying. The Guardian encouraged their continued efforts, and compared the region to initial "difficult places" such as Italy and Switzerland but which had later become strongholds of the Faith. He told them not to be disheartened, assuring them that he would pray for "the harvest to come in." (Letter from the Guardian to Dr and Mrs Fozdar, n.d.)

³⁴ Narain Das was an Indian national working in Singapore as a textile salesman. Mrs. Fozdar had made his acquaintance while buying some materials for a sari. The same day she invited him for a fireside and he declared his belief. Little else is known of him but he is reputedly the first believer on the island (Interview with Mrs. Fozdar, August 1986)

³⁵ Following the guidelines set down by the Bahá'í administrative order, this had to be done by secret ballot, without nominations or the campaigning of votes.

believers. The Fozdars began to make plans for electing the nine members who would constitute the first Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA) of the Bahá'ís of Singapore.³⁶ The first election was held in April 1952 and the first elected members were (in alphabetical order): Mr. Gianchand Datswani, Mr. Goh Beng Wan, Dr John Fozdar,³⁷ Dr K. M. Fozdar, Mrs. Shirin Fozdar, Mr. Kishenchand, Mr. Motiram, Mr. Ramsay, and Mr. Teo Geok Leng.³⁸

In the early years, the Faith was attractive to the Indian community. There were seven of Indian origin on the Assembly - three of them members of the Fozdar family and four others of Indian nationality who had met the Fozdars in the course of their work in Singapore. Only two members were Chinese and they were English-speaking, close friends of Dr K. M. Fozdar from the Singapore Theosophical Society. The Fozdars were not successful in drawing in the Malays (who were predominantly Muslims) or the Eurasian (who were predominantly Christian). Indian believers distinguished themselves as stalwart adherents of the Faith. Some other Indian nationals who were key members of the early Singapore community were Kishen Khemani and Shatur Chotrani.³⁹ Another was Gian Datwani, who later pioneered to Japan and Hong Kong. There were also other active Singapore believers of the fifties such as Pishu and Vashi, who eventually pioneered to West Africa.

The early community was active in holding weekly "firesides" which were publicised by word-of-mouth to their friends and which were conducted at the members' respective homes. Regular firesides are a means for Bahá'ís to talk about their Faith. It involves sharing the Bahá'í principles with those willing to give it a hearing and seeking a positive

³⁶ The minutes of the LSA of Singapore for the period under study are not available for research purposes. The reconstruction of some of the activities of the LSA have been pieced together from interviews and correspondences with some early members of the community e.g. Mrs. Shirin Fozdar, Mr. Koh Lian Chin, and Mr. Teo Geok Leng.

³⁷ Dr John Fozdar was the second son of Dr and Mrs K. M. Fozdar. He arrived in Singapore in June 1951 after completing his medical studies in India.

³⁸ See *Bahá'í World* Vol. XII, p. 573, for a photograph of the first LSA of the Bahá'ís of Singapore.

³⁹ Both Kishen Khemani and Shatur Chotrani later became Auxiliary Board Members in India.

response from the audience. Bahá'ís would invite friends and acquaintances to their homes and would teach them about the Faith. If the listener was interested, another invitation was issued and this would go on. The home of the Fozdars, for example, became known as the "Bahá'í Center" and was the first such Center registered with the Singapore authorities. It was from such occasions that the first believers of the Bahá'í Faith were found. The early believers also observed the 19 Day Feast which was an occasion where Bahá'ís would gather to read the scriptures, to discuss the administrative duties of the Faith and to socialise among themselves. This was often held in the believers' homes on a rotational basis. However, by the early sixties, the Singapore community had saved enough to purchase a small flat at Jalan Kechil, for their regular meetings. This became the Bahá'í Center for the next few years. This eventually proved inadequate for the community's growing needs and was later sold in order to purchase a small bungalow, with a little garden, at Hartley Grove, Frankel Estate, in the late sixties.⁴⁰

Visitors

The small group of early believers (approximately 20-40 in number)⁴¹ were sustained by periodic talks given by visiting Bahá'ís. Bahá'í dignitaries such as "Hands of the Cause of God" Dr. R Muhajir,⁴² A. Faizi, and Collis Featherstone would often stop in Singapore either before or after visiting the larger Bahá'í community in Malaya. They were such inspiring speakers that after their talks, members of the audience

⁴⁰ The subsequent center was not large, but it had a fairly spacious compound unlike the Jurong Kechil flat (*Malaysian Bahá'í News*, Dec 1969-January 1970).

⁴¹ It is unlikely that there would be more than 100 believers in the enrolment list in the period under study. Out of this, only 20% could be considered active, that is. they would attend the 19 Day Feast and were either members of the LSA or its subcommittees. (Interview with Mrs George Lee and Shirin Fozdar, 1986).

⁴² Dr Muhajir may be singled out for special attention. He was the Hand assigned by the Guardian in 1957 to guide the growth of the Faith in Southeast Asia. He visited Singapore and Malaya frequently and was often the speaker at summer schools and youth conferences (held in Malaya) to which many Singaporeans would drive up to attend. Members of the *Hands of the Cause*, a Bahá'í institution, are responsible for the propagation and preservation of the unity of the Bahá'í Faith.

would spontaneously volunteer to pioneer to other countries.⁴³ Other frequent visitors included well-known Bahá'ís such as K. Samimi and K. Payman from Java.⁴⁴ As mentioned, the strategic location of Singapore encouraged prominent Bahá'í speakers to break their journey and stop there. Another Hand of the Cause, Shua'u'llah Ala'i, stopped to teach for a week in January 1960, on his way back to Iran after attending the historic conference of the Cause in the Holy Land in November 1959.⁴⁵

The visit of yet another dignitary, Hand of the Cause Amatu'l Bahá Ruhíyyih Khanum, in Malaysia in 1961 and 1964 gave an added boost to the young community. She toured both Malaya and Singapore and in doing so touched the hearts of the believers leaving them with a feeling of awe and inspiration the aura of which was not forgotten for a long time. She was in Singapore at the beginning and end of her tour to Malaya. The Local Spiritual Assembly of Singapore organised a well-publicised talk entitled "All the Races are needed" at the Singapore National Library.⁴⁶

The last "Hand" to inspire the infant community of Singapore was Tarazu'lláh Samandari.⁴⁷ In 1966, at the age of 93, he visited Singapore and Malaysia and gave talks at all the places he visited. Thousands of believers gathered at places along the route to hear him speak. Being then the only living link to Bahá'u'lláh, he was looked upon with awe and admiration. He was the guest of honour at the Bahá'í Seminar held in Singapore in December 1966 at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. In that week when he was in attendance, the Singapore community played host to the many Malaysians, Vietnamese and Thais who journeyed down especially for the conference.⁴⁸

⁴³ *Annual Report of the NSA Malaysia, 1968*

⁴⁴ K Payman was a *Counsellor* of the Bahá'í Faith. In 1968, several Counsellors making up the Continental Board of Counsellors, were appointed by the Universal House of Justice for the protection and propagation of the Bahá'í Faith.

⁴⁵ *Bahá'í News*, February, 1960.

⁴⁶ *Bahá'í News* September 1961.

⁴⁷ Mr. Samandari enjoyed the rare honour of meeting Bahá'u'lláh, the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith when he was eighteen years old.

⁴⁸ *Malaysian Bahá'í News* Dec 1966, p. 13

Singapore and Malaya

The LSA of Singapore came under the jurisdiction of the National Spiritual Assembly (NSA) of the Bahá'ís of India in the first five years of its existence (1952-1957) and thereafter under the aegis of the Regional Spiritual Assembly (RSA) of the Bahá'ís of Southeast Asia (1957-1963).⁴⁹ As part of the Indian Assembly, it was treated very much like an appendage, India being too far removed physically to respond quickly to local needs and conditions. As a result, many of the administrative decisions had to be decided on the spot by members of the LSA of Singapore. The formation of the RSA in 1957 ensured a more coherent and responsive framework for the administering of the Faith as its nine annually elected members were drawn from people who actually lived in the region, some of whom were born there. Some of the "local-born" RSA members included Yankee Leong, R. Sauragan and Leong Tat Chee of the Malayan Peninsula.⁵⁰

While under the aegis of both the NSA of India and the RSA of Southeast Asia, the Singapore Bahá'í community was not regarded as a distinct national community of Southeast Asia. In fact, Singapore was administered as part of the Malayan Bahá'í community.⁵¹ This was in line with the political situation at that time. Being under the same colonial power as the peninsula of Malaya and separated only by a causeway of less than a mile, it was administratively convenient to treat the tiny island of Singapore as such. In 1963, Singapore also became, politically, a part of Malaysia.⁵²

⁴⁹ In April 1955, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith announced to the world that the NSA of India had been given the responsibility of seeing to the formation of the RSA of SEA by Ridvan 1957, with its seat in Jakarta.

⁵⁰ However, it had only a six-year mandate in which to strengthen the local assemblies of the various countries of Southeast Asia so that they would eventually be independent enough to elect and run National Assemblies of their own. It was dissolved when the NSAs of Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines came into being in 1964.

⁵¹ It was only in the late sixties, following the political separation of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965, that there was a clear rationale for Singapore to have its own National Spiritual Assembly

⁵² Then, the political map of "Malaysia" included Singapore, Sabah, Sarawak and Malaya.

Members of the Singapore community had no problems identifying themselves closely with events taking place on the Peninsula.⁵³ From the very beginning, the LSA of Singapore participated in Bahá'í events across the Causeway, as would the Malaysian Bahá'ís in events organised by the Singapore community. Believers from both countries helped in each other's teaching or administrative goals. In 1957, the first summer school organised by the RSA was held "to give believers the opportunity to fully acquaint themselves more thoroughly with aspects of Bahá'í scripture."⁵⁴ This was held in Malacca and attracted believers from as far away as Penang, Singapore and Sarawak. In addition, believers from Singapore were members of the National Teaching Committee (NTC) which came into existence in 1961 when the RSA decided it was necessary to have a specialised body to co-ordinate all the teaching activities in Malaya.⁵⁵

Travel from Singapore to Malaya and vice versa was easily facilitated via train or road. The very first such journey was attempted by Mrs. Shirin Fozdar in December 1953. As Secretary of the LSA of Singapore, Mrs. Fozdar wrote to Yankee Leong, an acquaintance she had met at the 1949 Pacifist Conference which took place in Shantiniketan, in India,⁵⁶ to try to organise a one-week lecture tour for her to teach the Bahá'í Faith. Yankee organised a lecture tour which took Mrs. Fozdar to Seremban, Kuala Lumpur and Malacca for three weeks in December 1953. The talk in Malacca was particularly successful with over three hundred presents. It was presided over by the well-known Chinese scholar and politician, Dato Tan Cheng Lock. Yankee himself became so impressed with the principles of the Faith that he declared himself a believer on the day the tour ended. As the first believer of Peninsula Malaya, he was mainly responsible for spreading the Faith in Seremban, Malacca and Kuala Lumpur soon after and for helping the infant believers

⁵³ Information obtained from interview with Mr Mahesh Dayal.

⁵⁴ Summer schools were basically stay-in affairs held within the space of a few days. Speakers would be invited and social and religious activities planned. Ideally, everyone would return from the school refreshed, deepened and stimulated.

⁵⁵ In the early years, the National Teaching Committee (NTC) activities were centralised in Malacca where most of the active believers resided.

⁵⁶ The Shantiniketan Conference was initiated by a group of pacifists who wanted to bring together Mahatma Gandhi and his followers in India, and the pacifist of Western countries, into a world-wide movement on non-violence (See Ong, *Uncle Yankee*)

form their respective Local Spiritual Assemblies in 1955. Like the early Chinese believers of Singapore, many of the early believers of Malaya were English-speaking and came from the Theosophical Society. In 1954 and 1955, the LSA of Singapore took the responsibility to help Yankee set up the infant communities of Malaya by periodically sending some of its members on teaching trips on a temporary basis to Seremban, Kuala Lumpur and Malacca.⁵⁷

Singapore on its own

The LSA of Singapore came into prominence for the first time in the wider Bahá'í world when it played host to the Intercontinental Conference of 1958. This was part of five such conferences organised by the World Center of the Bahá'í Faith held throughout the world in that year: Kampala, Uganda in January; Sydney, Australia in March; Wilmette, Illinois in May; Frankfurt, Germany in July and Singapore in September. They were held to commemorate the midpoint of the 10-Year Crusade (1953-1963), a Crusade which the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith had initiated as a means to engage the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in a global missionary enterprise.⁵⁸

The Conference was actually supposed to be held in Jakarta, which was the seat of the RSA but the permit for that conference was cancelled at the last minute by the Indonesian authorities.⁵⁹ To save the situation, the LSA of Singapore successfully applied for a permit from the British authorities and the conference was held in Singapore at the Victoria Memorial Hall in September, 1958. Many Bahá'ís from Singapore and Malaysia were therefore exposed to what an "international" Bahá'í conference was like. They had the rare opportunity to meet in one place, the more well known teachers and believers of the Faith, who had journeyed from many regions to come to the conference.⁶⁰ The community became so enthused after the conference that a number of

⁵⁷ Information obtained from an interview with Yankee Leong and Shirin Fozdar.

⁵⁸ See Hassall, *Bahá'í History in the Formative Age*.

⁵⁹ See Mobine-Kesheh, "Guided Religion"

⁶⁰ See *Bahá'í World*, 1954-1963

them left to pioneer to other countries. A few years later, in 1963, a handful of them saved a quite substantial sum of money to help charter a plane to take them to the Bahá'í World Congress in London in May 1963.⁶¹

From its inception, the Singapore Bahá'í community enjoyed good relations with the Singapore government. The Chief Minister of Singapore had attended the first World Religion Day in Singapore on the third Sunday of 1956⁶² at the Victoria Memorial Hall and had given a piece of burial land *gratis* to the community. This relationship with government leaders stood them in good stead in 1964 when the Selangor State Assembly attempted to pass legislation which refused to recognise the independent status of the Quadyani, Taslim, as well as the Bahá'í Faith.⁶³ This prompted the NSA of Malaysia (of which Singapore was a part) to appoint a committee to look into the matter and to employ a lawyer to represent the Bahá'í case to the Selangor state government. Members of this committee included members from Singapore such as Mrs. George Lee and Mrs. Shirin Fozdar,⁶⁴ who met privately with the Prime Minister, Tengku Abdul Rahman and the Mentri Besar of Selangor, Datuk Harun, to seek their personal assistance on the matter. This meeting was effective for by the second parliamentary reading of the Bill, the word "Bahá'í" was dropped from the proposed legislation.⁶⁵

Mrs. George Lee of Singapore, for some time the Chairperson of the LSA of Singapore, was elected to the NSA of Malaysia in the first

⁶¹ No mean feat in those days, plane journeys being highly expensive affairs. Information obtained from an interview with Mrs Shantha Sundram.

⁶² From an unpublished report by Mrs Shirin Fozdar (n.d.). This event has yet to be substantiated by other eyewitness or published accounts.

⁶³ In March of that year, an amendment to the section on Muslim administration the Selangor State Assembly was tabled and read "whosoever under any circumstances teaches or expounds the doctrines of Quadyani, Taslim or Bahá'í or any doctrine or performs any ceremony relating to Muslim religion contrary to Muslim law is liable to six months jail a fine of \$500 or both."

⁶⁴ Mrs Shirin Fozdar was then residing in Thailand.

⁶⁵ Interview with Mrs. George Lee and Mrs. Shirin Fozdar

two years of its existence (1964 and 1965).⁶⁶ Monthly meetings were held in Kuala Lumpur and members from all over Malaysia, including Singapore and Sarawak, would meet there to consult on the administrative matters of the Faith. As part of the political union of Malaysia, Singapore believers helped implement the Malaysian NSA's Nine Year Plan, whose twin objectives were "the widespread expansion the Cause" and "Universal Participation".⁶⁷ This meant helping in the establishment of a further 179 assemblies and the opening up of another 351 localities where Bahá'ís resided.⁶⁸ Funds were also collected from Singapore members to build the Bahá'í Center of Kuala Lumpur.⁶⁹ In return, the Singapore community received periodic visits from Malaysian Counsellor Yankee Leong and from Auxiliary Board Members Leong Tat Chee and Betty Monteiro, who would inspire the members by their talks and presence.⁷⁰

This went on even after 1965 when Singapore separated itself from the political union of Malaysia and became an independent republic. It began to take on a separate political, social and economic identity of its own. Singaporeans were nevertheless still considered a part of the Bahá'ís of Malaysia and indeed Bahá'í activities in Singapore were regularly reported in the Malaysian Nineteen-Day Newsletter. It was however only a matter of time before the administrative situation was rectified so as to enable it to synchronise more closely with the political

⁶⁶ No records of the LSA of Singapore exist to confirm the exact dates of her Chairmanship. The information was obtained from Interviews with Mr. Mahesh Dayal, Mrs George Lee and Mrs. Shirin Fozdar. Suffice to say, no other Singaporean held a seat on the NSA Malaysia after she left.

⁶⁷ *Malaysian Bahá'í News*, Sept. 1966. Information obtained from an interview with Mr Kumara Das and Mr Anthony Louis.

⁶⁸ *Malaysian Bahá'í News*, Sept 1966

⁶⁹ Mrs. George Lee had given a piece of land to the LSA of Singapore in the early 1960's. This land was later sold and the money used to buy properties in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong.

⁷⁰ Yankee Leong was appointed Counsellor in 1968. *Auxiliary Board Members* are assistants to the Counsellors. Their work involves periodic visits to Bahá'í centres, groups and assemblies - stimulating, encouraging and increasing their awareness of the spiritual challenge and responsibility resting on them. Leong Tat Chee became an Auxiliary Board Member in 1965 and his duties saw him travelling to various parts of Malaysia.

reality. By the late sixties, the supreme body of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice, deemed it pertinent that Singapore should have its own NSA by 1972.

To prepare for this eventuality, the NSA of Malaysia began to take steps to strengthen the Singapore Bahá'í community. This it did by organising some of its more important annual programs in Singapore. The first Southeast Asian Youth Conference was held in Singapore in December 1969 and the Malaysian Winter School, a highly popular activity with Malaysians, was held in Singapore in 1971.⁷¹ The Oceanic Conference of the South China Seas, which attracted a few hundred believers from various countries and nationalists was also held in Singapore in 1971. Navanita Sundram, from the island of Penang, then an undergraduate at the University of Singapore, also helped inaugurate a Bahá'í Society at the University of Singapore.⁷² The NSA of Malaysia also encouraged Malaysians to pioneer to Singapore so as to strengthen the Singapore community both qualitatively and numerically. There was also a formal request to each Malaysian Bahá'í to make at least one teaching trip to Singapore.⁷³ A relationship with the Singapore press was cultivated resulting in the latter's publicising of some of its activities.⁷⁴ These attempts reaped some fruits: in 1968, there was only one LSA in Singapore but by 1970, there were five LSA's in Singapore.⁷⁵ By 1972, there was a total of 586 names on the believers list, an increase of 500 names since 1968.⁷⁶

The stage was thus set for the inauguration of the NSA of Singapore on 22nd April, 1972. Accordingly, a National Convention was held which elected nine members for the first NSA of the Bahá'ís of Singapore. They were (in alphabetical order): Mrs. George Lee, Mr. G. Machambo, Mr. Kenneth Mak, Mrs. Rose Ong, Mr. Henry Ong, Miss

⁷¹ *Bahá'í World*, 1968-1973, p. 158

⁷² Its inauguration was reported in the *Eusoff College* magazine, the *Straits Times*, the *Eastern Sun* and the *Singapore Herald* (See *Malaysian Bahá'í News*, Sept-Oct, 1970)

⁷³ See Chew, *The First Forty Years*, p. 94.

⁷⁴ See *Straits Times*, 26.11.1971; 21.10.1971; 19.3.1973 and *New Nation*, 24.3.1972.

⁷⁵ They were centred in the districts of City, Katong, Serangoon, Jurong and Pasir Panjang.

⁷⁶ Minutes of the NSA of Singapore, 15.7.1972.

Navanita Sundram, Mrs. Lena Tan, Mr. Edward Teo and Mr. Teo Geok Leng. The Representative from the World Centre of the Bahá'í Faith, Hand of the Cause Jalal Khazeh, at the inaugural ceremony, proclaimed Singapore's potential as "one of the few seats of predominantly Chinese culture", and called on the new Assembly to "become a beacon of guidance to the great Chinese race."⁷⁷

Conclusion

In the first twenty years of its existence (1952-1972), the LSA of the Bahá'ís of Singapore was successful in establishing a small but viable community. It met little resistance from the governments of Singapore, that is, the British colonial authorities, and later, the Peoples' Action Party. The LSA's aims were peaceful and its outlook progressive and universal. It articulated religious values and advocated social and political mechanisms conducive to the rehabilitation of the fortunes of what Bahá'ís called the "lamentably defective" world order. In fact, it enjoyed a good relationship with the government and sought successfully the Cupertino of the governing authorities in most of its activities. It also had prominent Bahá'í teachers, including members of the Fozdar family. While many Bahá'í pioneers in other countries made no attempt to gain publicity or newspaper coverage, to contact public officials or political leaders; this was not the case in Singapore.⁷⁸ Mrs. Shirin Fozdar together with Mrs. George Lee deliberately courted publicity by being the foremost advocates of the women's movement in Singapore. In this sense, the early Singapore Bahá'í community was closely associated with the women's movement and rose from obscurity on its wings. Due to such efforts, the Bahá'í Faith became a household word in Singapore in the 1950's.

However, while many Singaporeans were acquainted, in a superficial sense, with the social principles of the Faith, few were interested in becoming members. In the period under scrutiny, the Singapore community could not have had more than a hundred members

⁷⁷ *Malaysian Bahá'í News*, April 1972.

⁷⁸ International Teaching Center 7.12.53. (Quoted in Hassall, *Pacific Bahá'í Communities*, p. 80).

at any one time. It was also a community which was largely transient in nature, with a significant portion of its members resettling in different localities in the republic or in some other country. Although the community remained small, it was nevertheless, a steadfast one, with a significant proportion of its early believers having pioneered to other lands,⁷⁹ and contributing their expertise in the organisation of the many international Bahá'í conferences held in Singapore.

The history of the Singapore community is also closely linked to that of Malaysia. In 1953, Mrs. Fozdar taught the Faith in Malacca, and together with Yankee Leong, was the chief instrument for the formation of the first few LSAs in the Malay Peninsula. Together with a few other members of the Singapore LSA, she was to make many more teaching trips across the causeway, sometimes residing there semi-permanently. Malaysians came down in sizeable numbers for the 1958 Intercontinental Conference held in Singapore while Singaporeans attended the summer schools of Malaysia, were members of various subcommittees of the NSA of Malaysia and were featured periodically in their newsletter. In the few years before the formation of its own NSA, Singapore received help in the form of pioneering families and travelling teachers from Malaysia. The early history of the Bahá'ís of Singapore is thus a history of two cities, its fate intertwined in so many ways, different yet similar, together yet apart.

⁷⁹ For example, Pishu and Vashi pioneered to West Africa.

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The above are some of the early Bahá'ís of Singapore and Malaysia. The interviews were conducted between October 1985 and August 1986.

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Jesus the Son of God and the Incarnation Doctrine

Antonella Khursheed and Anjam Khursheed

Abstract

This paper shows that the Bahá'í approach to the sonship and divinity of Christ is consistent with Old and New Testament usage. It also examines the Incarnation Doctrine and shows that its roots are to be traced to pagan influences creeping into Christian belief in the early centuries of its growth.

Introduction

Among Christians throughout centuries, the concept of Jesus as Son of God or even as God Incarnate has become a common notion. Only a few theologians and historians have paused to examine what it means or meant.

The Incarnation Doctrine was formally declared to be a fundamental pillar to the Christian faith at a council that met in 325 A.D. in the town of Nicea, now called Iznik, in Eastern Turkey. There, representatives of the early Christian churches signed a document which stated the following: "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made."¹ Most Christian churches share this declaration, now known as the Nicene Creed, all over the world in surprising unity.

¹ Ian Wilson, "Jesus: The Evidence", Pan Books Ltd, Basingstoke, Hants (England), 1985, p 11

Historically, the belief in Jesus as God incarnate has not only divided Christians from Jews and Muslims, but also sadly used to justify persecutions, crusades and pogroms. Nowadays, as people of different religions are coming into closer contact with one another, the Incarnation Doctrine is under greater scrutiny. A growing number of people, not only those belonging to religions other than Christianity, are questioning its validity. In the modern inter-faith dialogue, the Incarnation Doctrine is often associated with an exclusive stance of Christian superiority with respect to other religions, and is one of the major obstacles towards achieving a higher level of inter-religious harmony.

This paper sets out to demonstrate a close correlation between the sonship and divinity of Christ as it appears in the Bible and the Bahá'í writings. It argues that the Incarnation Doctrine is not something which can be supported from the Bible, but rather, arose from historical circumstances that surrounded the growth of the Christian faith in its early centuries.

1. "Son of God"

1.1 The Old Testament

What did the "Son of God" title mean to the Jews who met Christ? There are no certain answers to this question, but from a study of the Jewish scriptures, we can conclude that there were at least three possible ways in which the Jews would have understood this title. The first usage is in terms of angels or heavenly beings. The second meaning signifies the Israelites or people of Israel. The third usage of the Son of God term is associated with the anointed kings of Israel.

Since in the Gospels stress is specifically placed upon Jesus being descended from David, and all other descriptions of him refer to a living human being, the first category is not consistent with the New Testament usage.

The second meaning encompasses a wide variety of different usages that all relate to the Israelites collectively and individually. The Israelites are referred to as "children of the Lord", in the sense that they are chosen by

God, a holy people, and bear likeness to God. "Ye are the children of the Lord your God... For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth" (Deut. 14:1).

It is stated that Israel is God's son whose purpose is to serve God. When instructing Moses on what to say to the Pharaoh, God states: "And thou shalt say unto the Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my first born. And I say unto thee, let my son go, that he may serve thee." (Exodus 4:22-23)

When the Israelites wanted to make mention of "the loving kindnesses of the Lord, the praises of the Lord" (Isaiah 63:7), they recalled how the Lord was Israel's saviour, how He had trust in them as His honest "children", "Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour" (Isaiah 63: 8). When the Israelites prayed for God's guidance, they stated that in contrast to their physical descendants, God was their true Father, the one who had always guided and "redeemed" them: "Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our father, our redeemer, thy name is from everlasting" (Isaiah 63:16).

In Psalm 82.6, the Israelites are referred to as "gods" and the "children of the most High". This statement appears in a passage which starts by describing God's justice, "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty, he judgeth among gods. How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked?... Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked..." (Ps. 82:1-4). Obviously here, the Israelites are taken to be those who judge alongside God, and those who carry out God's judgement. Part of their task is to protect the "poor and needy" from the "wicked", and in this respect, they are stated to be fallible "gods" who have fallen short of their high purpose. The Jews as "gods" and "sons of the most High" are the "congregation of the mighty" whose purpose is to execute God's judgements.

These passages show that the Israelites were considered to be "sons of God" because they were His holy servants who declared God's glory and justice, and were specially chosen to carry out His purpose.

The Son of God title is also given to King David, and at other times, refers to a special Israelite ruler who is destined to carry out God's punishment.

King David is called 'my son', 'I will be his father, and he will be my son' (2 Sam. 7:14). Elsewhere David is referred to as the 'first born' of God, 'He will say to me, 'Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him my first-born, higher than the kings of the earth' (Ps. 89:26-7). Six verses before this passage, David is referred to as 'my servant', and the specific reference of the King being anointed is made, "I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: with whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him" (Ps 89: 20-1). In the context of a special Israelite ruler, God speaks of a king as his Son who will punish other nations, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. 'I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee' "(Ps 2:7).

1.2 The New Testament

In the New Testament, references to "Son of God" are consistent with Old Testament usage. In John 10:34, Jesus specifically defines what is meant by the "Son of God" title. Some Jews accused him of blasphemy and were ready to stone him for it (John 10:33). Jesus in response states that "Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken, Say ye of him, whom the father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, thou blasphemest because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe me not, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him" (John 10: 34-38). In this passage, Jesus clearly explains that the Son of God term refers to those "to whom the word of God came", that is, to whom God had entrusted to carry His message. Jesus also makes it clear that this term especially applies to him, whom the Father had "sanctified, and sent into the world". These words demonstrate that the

unity of God and Christ was one of purpose, not of substance and is quite consistent with the Old Testament usage.

In the first chapter of John's gospel the term "sons of God" is used for those who came to believe in Christ. Faith in the message of Christ is equated with being born "of God": "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. Which were born, not of blood, nor of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). A few verses later, "the only begotten Son" is related to Jesus being a sign of God, who "declared him": "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). These passages show that Christ was a Son amongst sons of God. His life and message was the channel through which God could be known. They do not imply that God was unknown to the Jews before Christ appeared, but through his coming a much fuller knowledge of God was made possible.

As in the Old Testament, there are references in the New Testament to the Jews becoming the children of God through acquiring spiritual qualities. In the Sermon on the Mount, it is stated that, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matth. 5:9). This is also true for those who love their enemies, "love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." (Matth. 5:44-45). Here, a spiritual kinship with God is made through acquiring spiritual perfection, bearing likeness to God's attributes. Chapter 5 of Matthew ends with, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect". The "only begotten Son of God" (John 1:18) in this context conveys the spiritual perfection of Christ.

There are also many passages in the New Testament, which relate to the Old Testament usage of royal sonship. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is addressed to by an angel in these words: "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:31-32). The connection to the Old Testament where David is addressed

by God as "You are my son, today I have begotten you" (Ps. 2:7) is evident.

The royal sonship usage is also apparent in the Aramaic title *Masih* (Messiah, the anointed one), by which his followers frequently addressed him. The word 'Christ' derives from a Greek translation of this title (*Christos*) and is interchangeable with 'Messiah'. Peter, the first disciple of Jesus, states that, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Math. 16:16), which can equally be translated as "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God". The same link is made by a high priest who questioned Jesus by asking, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God" (Matth. 26: 63, Luke 14:61). Here it is clear that many who came into contact with Jesus expected him to be a King like David, who had been anointed with "holy oil" (Ps 89: 20).

Jesus made it clear that he was only partially the 'Messiah' of Jewish tradition. In response to Pilate's question, "Art thou the King of the Jews", he stated "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18: 35-36). The other Gospels for the same passage report Jesus replying, "Thou sayest it" (Luke 23: 3, Mark 15: 2, Matth. 27: 11). In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus affirms he is the Messiah to Peter (Matth. 16: 17), but for the corresponding passage in the Gospels of Mark and Luke, Jesus instructs his disciples to "tell no man" (Mark 8: 30, Luke 9: 18).

2. The Son of Man

The Son of Man title occurs a total of 77 times in the New Testament, compared to the Son of God title that appears about 40 times, and is the most frequent way by which Jesus refers to himself.

The "Son of Man" was an Aramaic expression, "Bar nasha", which "was a synonym for 'man', and a substitute for the indefinite pronoun"². It has several usages in the Old Testament. In Ezekiel, it is used to denote a simple 'human being'; in Psalm 8, it means a man weak and insignificant,

² Geza Vermes, "Jesus the Jew", SCM Press Ltd. London, 1983, p 176

but destined for authority second only to that of God; in the visions of Daniel (Dan. 7: 13-22), after four beasts which symbolise successive despotic empires, comes "one like a Son of Man" (Dan. 7: 13), signifying the "saints of the Most High" (Dan. 7:18) to whom God is about to entrust his judgement and his kingdom.

While the Son of God is a generic term which was not only used for Christ but for King David, and sons of God were used for the Jewish people, collectively and individually, the Son of Man title is much more specific. In its highest sense, it denoted the figure whom the Jewish people believed would usher in the Kingdom of God on earth.

The references in the New Testament are all consistent with the Old Testament usage. In the sense of "Bar Nasha" or simple "human being", an example can be found in the reply Jesus makes to a scribe who offers to follow him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matth. 8:20, cf. Luke 9:58). It is interesting to note that to the question posed by the high priest Caiaphas asking whether Jesus was the "Messiah, Son of God" (Matth. 26: 63), Jesus responds by saying, "Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter thou shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven". (Matth. 26: 64, Mark 14: 62, Luke 22: 69). Here Jesus does not affirm or reject the Messiah title, instead, he refers to the "Son of Man" mentioned by the prophet Daniel, who will come "with the clouds of heaven" (Daniel 7:13). Whether he himself will be this Son of Man to come, is not clear. But there can be no doubt that Jesus shows more concern for the coming of the Kingdom of God, than in engaging in disputes about the titles attributed to him.

3. The Word of God

Just as there are occasions of Jesus declaring his unity with God, there are as many instances where a clear distinction between Jesus and the Father is made. Citing the "abomination of desolation" (Mark 13: 14) spoken of by the prophet Daniel, Jesus states that: "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son,

but the Father" (Mark 13: 32). When someone refers to Jesus as "Good Master", Jesus responds by saying, "Why callest me thou good? there is none good but one, that is God" (Mark 10:18). In John's Gospel Jesus makes clear this distinction when he states quite categorically that, "for the Father is greater than I" (John 14: 28). These passages suggest that Jesus was not in any way co-equal with God.

It might be argued that there is evidence to support the declaration of the Nicene Creed in the opening words of St John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:1-4). This passage indicates that Jesus was pre-existent to creation, God's co-creator, and the eternal instrument of God's revelation. But is this enough to make Jesus co-substantial with God, the 'God from God, Light from Light' in the Nicene Creed?

How would the Jews living in the first century A.D. have interpreted the 'Word of God as mentioned in John's Gospel? It would not have sounded so unique, since in their own tradition there was already an example of eternal co-existence with God in the form of 'Wisdom'. Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Jesus and a well known Jewish Neoplatonist philosopher, equated Wisdom with the Word (*Logos* in Greek) of God³.

In Jewish tradition, 'Wisdom' is personified as a female figure, (*hokhma* in Hebrew and *Sophia* in Greek), who was "brought up" with God, who was with God before creation, whose "delights were with the sons of men". In Proverbs it is stated that: "I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgement: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths I was brought forth....When he prepared the heavens, I was there....Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of

³ Thomas Sheehan, "The First Coming", Marboro Books, USA, 1990, p 211

his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men. Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways... For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord" (Proverbs 8: 20-35). This description of Wisdom, as the eternal mediatrix of God's revelation and creation, bears striking resemblance to the attributes of the "Word of God" in John's Gospel.

Further evidence to support this view comes from the wider source of ancient Jewish writings. From the Wisdom of Solomon writings, part of the Apocrypha, accepted to be canonical by Roman Catholics and Orthodox churches, Wisdom is described in such words: "like a fine mist she rises from the power of God, a clear effulgence from the glory of the Almighty; so nothing defiled can enter her by stealth. She is the radiance that streams from everlasting light, the flawless mirror of the active power of God, and the image of his goodness. She is but one, yet can do all things; herself unchanging, she makes all things new; age after age she enters into holy souls, and makes them friends of God and prophets" (Wisdom 7: 25-27).

Here Wisdom is stated to periodically enter the world, and incarnate in the lives of "holy souls". Wisdom in these writings is described as the source of creation, whose "skill made all things" (Wisdom 7: 22).

On the basis of such beliefs, an elaborate myth of Wisdom was created in ancient Jewish tradition: Wisdom was first God's companion in heaven, then she became a medium for his revelation. Rejected by mankind, she returned back to dwell with God in heaven again. This myth is depicted in the writings of Enoch, part of the Jewish Pseudepigrapha composed during the last two centuries B.C., "Wisdom found no place in which she could dwell, but a dwelling place was found for her in the heavens. The Wisdom went forth to dwell with the children of the people, but she found no dwelling place. So Wisdom returned to her own place, and she settled permanently among the angels"⁴.

John's Gospel elaborates a theme already known to the Jews and does not make Jesus God's equal. The early Christians were also aware of it, as

⁴ 1 Enoch chapter 42: 1-2, quoted by T. Sheehan, *The First Coming*, p 211

apparent in the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews in which it is written, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

4. The Virgin Birth

Another piece of evidence that is sometimes used to support the belief that Jesus was of the same substance of God, "God of God", is the manner by which he was conceived by his mother Mary. How would the Jews have understood the virgin birth? Did it establish proof of Jesus as the Son of God in a physical sense?

In the Old Testament, there are several instances where prophets are born from divine intervention. The legendary births of Isaac, Jacob and Samuel were all cases where their respective mother's incapacity to give birth was healed by acts of divine intervention. In Jewish tradition, miraculous births were a distinguishing sign for someone destined to become important.

The New Testament records that the prophet John the Baptist also was conceived by an act of divine intervention. In fact when an Angel informs Mary that she will bear a child, and Mary replies that, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1: 34), the Angel cites the case of Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother, who was pregnant even though she was of "old age". The Angel says, "And behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1: 36-37). These last words echo the words addressed to Sarah, mother of Isaac, who was also barren, when she laughed about the possibility of her bearing a child. In Genesis it is recorded that God replied "Is there any thing too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18: 14). The New Testament record of the miraculous birth is entirely consistent with Old Testament tradition and was unlikely to have suggested to the Jews that Jesus was sired by God.

Another example of a miraculous birth connected with the Son of God is to be found in the story of the high priest Melchisedec mentioned in the books of Genesis (14: 18-20) and Psalms (110: 4). In the New Testament great respect is paid to Melchisedec, who is described as "priest of the Most high God" and "King of peace" (Hebrews 7: 1-2), and of whom it is written that he was, "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually" (Hebrews 7: 3). Jesus is identified to be the "priest forever after the order of Melchisedec" as prophesied in Psalms 110: 4 (cf. Hebrews 7: 17), and therefore the virgin birth of Jesus would have been accepted by the newly converted Jews to be entirely in keeping with the high rank of priesthood attributed to him.

5. Christ and the Gentiles

After the death of Jesus, his brother James led the church in Jerusalem, and Peter gave his approval to teach the Gospel to the Gentiles. But it was the apostle Paul, a Hellenistic Jewish convert, who became the chief missionary to the Gentiles. What was Paul's message to the Gentiles? Did he teach that Jesus was co-equal with God?

It is clear from the letters of Paul that he interprets the sonship of Jesus in a symbolic sense, one which is more by adoption rather than of the same substance as God. For Paul, those who received the "Spirit of God" were "sons of God". In fact Paul refers to the followers of Jesus as God's "joint heirs with Christ". He states that, "For as many are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit by adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:14-17, Gal. 4: 4-7).

Paul never stated Jesus was God, but several times he refers to him as the "image of God" (2 Col. 4:4), "the brightness of his glory, and express image of his person" (Hebrews 1: 3, cf. Col. 1: 15, 2 Cor. 4:4). He also refers to Christ as the "first born of every creature", and adds that, "For

by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence" (Col. 1: 15-18). Here, there are elements of the Wisdom myth, where Jesus is considered to be the instrument of creation. It is clear that "first born of every creature" here refers to both "pre-eminence" as well as pre-existence in time, but it is particularly his importance with respect to his God-like qualities which is emphasised. Speaking in relation to the "Father", Paul states that in Jesus "Should all fullness dwell" (Col. 1:19). This means that Jesus was considered to be a full reflection of God, while his servants, were understood to be imperfect images of God.

How did the Gentiles understand the person of Jesus? Did they understand him in the sense taught by Paul, to be the full reflection of God's image? The Gentile world was largely polytheist, and the Jewish insistence on the unity and fatherhood of God, Who historically chose the Jewish people to be His "children" was a difficult message for them to assimilate.

There are indications in the New Testament that the polytheism of the Gentiles presented a serious obstacle to their acceptance of the Christian message. From Acts 14: 6-19 the reaction of the Gentiles to the preaching of the Gospel is made clear. It describes how once Paul and Barnabas, another believer, went to Lystra in Lycaonia and they saw a man "cripple from his mother's womb". "Perceiving that he had faith to be healed" they ordered him to walk "and when the people saw what Paul had done" they said "the gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker." Then they started offering sacrifices and Paul and Barnabas rent their clothes and ran among them saying "we also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein... And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them". This passage indicates the kind of difficulties that the early Christian apostles had in spreading the Gospel to the Gentile world. Here, Paul and Barnabas had to vigorously deny being gods after healing a cripple. Not only were they

thought to be gods incarnate in human form, but they were associated with the specific deities of Jupiter and Mercurius.

The New Testament records a story concerning Herod Agrippa I, governor of Judea (41-4 A.D.), Herod the Great's grandson, who was punished by God for not denying himself to be a god (Acts 12:1-23). Herod attended the quadrennial Roman games at Caesarea, appearing in dazzling robes of silver and, addressing the people there, "made an oration unto them". The crowd were so impressed by his "royal apparel", that they said it is "a voice of a god, and not a man". Herod failed to reprove them, and as a result, received divine chastisement, "And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the Ghost".

The story of Herod illustrates how easily the pagans could acclaim that a man was a god. It also indicates how the early apostles considered it to be a fatal blasphemy for a Jew to think in these terms. The Son of God title was also apt to cause confusion. It was used for the Ptolemaic King of Egypt, son of the sun god Helios, and also for the Emperor of Rome, who from Augustus onwards bears the titles, 'Son of God', 'son of Zeus'⁵. There was even a story about Alexander the Great, who is credited as being a half-human half god hybrid. He was said to have been conceived through the god Zeus before his parents had consummated their marriage, and was known as the Son of Zeus⁶.

The beliefs of the pagan population to whom the early Christian apostles preached were characterised with a varied mixture of Greek myths and mystery cults. The old Greek mystery religions of Demeter, Dionysos and Orpheus were augmented by still others coming from the East such as the cults of Isis and Osiris from Egypt, of Cybele and Atilis from Phrygia, of Atargatis and Adonis from Syria, and later from Persia, the religion of the Aryan deity Mithra. These beliefs were expressed in the form of rites and ceremonies where the participants associated themselves with a god who

⁵ G. Vermes, "Jesus the Jew", p 199

⁶ E. P. Sanders, "The Historical Figure of Jesus". Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth (England), 1995, p 243

died or disappeared, and who then either returned to life or in some other way shared divine power with the initiates⁷.

The early Christians were not immune to the mystery cult influence, and many Gentiles who converted to the Christian message integrated it into their own myths. One such group was the Christian Gnostics, who based their beliefs on the secret sayings of Christ and produced their own versions of the recorded gospel⁸. They believed themselves to be the chosen elects for which the Gospel had come, and did not accept the authority of the churches. They linked Jesus to a variety of different forms of personal experience in other traditions and de-emphasised his appearance as a historical figure who lived and preached amongst the Jews. Some groups of Gnostics were so extreme in this respect, such as the Docetists, that they even denied that Jesus had ever appeared in human form, they maintained that Christ had been pure spirit⁹.

The early Christian leaders were at pains to eliminate Gnostic beliefs from within their own churches. There are clear signs of this in the New Testament. In the first epistle of the apostle John, it is stated: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God. And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of anti-Christ, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world" (1 John 4:1-3). Here John is providing a test by which Gnostic beliefs from within the Church can be outlawed.

6. The Council of Nicea

During the second century A.D., there emerged two schools of thought about the nature of Jesus. The church based in Alexandria began to

⁷ see T. Sheehan, *The First Coming*, p 206-209

⁸ Ian Wilson, "Jesus: The Evidence", p 24-5

⁹ *ibid.*, p 129-130

preach that Jesus was never bounded by the normal physical constraints of men. Bishop Clement of Alexandria stated that Jesus only "took food and ate it in order that we should not teach about him in a Docetic fashion"¹⁰. In the third century A.D, the Alexandrian church came much closer to a theology based upon the belief that Jesus was God incarnate. Archdeacon Athanasius, later to become the city's bishop, wrote "The Word disguised himself by appearing in a body... by the works he did in the body showed himself to be, not man, but God"¹¹.

Meanwhile, the church based at Antioch, whose jurisdiction included the birthplace of Jesus, accepted the divinity of Jesus without suggesting that he was in any way co-equal to God. Bishop Lucian of Antioch for instance (about a century after Christ), had taught that the message of Jesus was more important than the theology surrounding the nature of Jesus. By the beginning of the third century A.D, the priest Arius, taught by Lucian and excommunicated by Alexandria's Bishop, Alexander, brought the theological dispute between the two churches to a breaking point. The dispute was sufficiently intractable that Emperor Constantine was called upon to adjudicate. He decided to hold a council in Nicea to heal the divisions between the Bishops.

It might seem odd that a political leader played such an important role in what was essentially a theological issue. Constantine had not yet even converted to the Christian faith when the council of Nicea took place. So why was Constantine's authority sought on the matter? The answer might lie in the way Constantine captured Rome more than a decade earlier. According to legend, on the basis of a premonition, he had ordered his soldiers to paint the Greek letters Chi-Rho on their shields in a monogram that had been adopted by the Christians as a symbol of their belief. Most probably this was a way to obtain the support from a group on the other side of the walls of an otherwise impregnable city. In any case, from the day of his successful conquest of Rome, as is well known, Constantine became a champion of the Christian cause and greatly assisted in its growth, stopping the persecutions against the Christians. As emperor of

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p 138

¹¹ *ibid.*

the recently re-unified Roman Empire, the quarrel between the churches of Antioch and Alexandria was an important concern.

At Nicea, the two rival Christian groups fought for days on the formula to adopt as a creed for the believers, and it was Constantine who resolved the issue by taking sides with the Alexandrian church. Very few delegates at the assembly were able to directly oppose the pressure exerted by the Emperor, but later, some expressed regret at having signed the Nicene formula. A group of Bishops who attended the Council, later wrote a letter to Constantine confessing that, "We committed an impious act, O Prince, by subscribing to a blasphemy from fear of you"¹².

What prompted Constantine to support the Alexandrian view is difficult to say. But it is clear that the notion of a man being an incarnation of a god was not unfamiliar to him. The deification of a man for Constantine was nothing special. His father had already been deified, and he would be accorded the same honour after his own death.

7. A Bahá'í perspective

The Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi states that, "As to the position of Christianity, let it be stated without any hesitation or equivocation that its divine origin is unconditionally acknowledged, that the Sonship and Divinity of Jesus Christ are fearlessly asserted"¹³. At the same time, Shoghi Effendi writes, "that invisible yet rational God Who, however much we extol the divinity of His Manifestations on earth, can in no wise incarnate His infinite, His unknowable, His incorruptible and all-embracing Reality in the concrete and limited frame of a mortal being. Indeed, the God Who could so incarnate His own reality would, in the light of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, cease immediately to be God"¹⁴.

¹² *ibid.*, p 142

¹³ Shoghi Effendi, "The Promised Day has Come", Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette (USA), 1980, p 109-110

¹⁴ Shoghi Effendi, "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette (USA), 1974, p 112

If the Incarnation Doctrine is rejected, what is the Bahá'í understanding of the opening passage of John's Gospel which states that, "In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God..."? 'Abdu'l-Bahá' explains it in terms of a mirror analogy: "The Spirit and the Word mean the divine perfections that appeared in the Reality of Christ, and these perfections were with God; so the sun manifests all its glory in the mirror. For the Word does not signify the body of Christ, no, but the divine perfections manifested in Him. For Christ was like a clear mirror which was facing the Sun of Reality; and the perfections of the Sun of Reality - that is to say, its light and heat - were visible and apparent in this mirror. If we look into the mirror, we see the sun, and we say, "it is the sun"¹⁵. 'Abdu'l-Bahá goes on to state, "That is why Christ says in the Gospel, "The Father is in the Son" (John 14:11, 17:21) - that is to say, the Sun of Reality appears in the mirror"¹⁶.

These passages suggest that Christ was more than an inspired man. The perfect mirror is innately different to other objects. All objects scatter and reflect the sun's light to some extent, and indeed each object is in its own way a sign of the sun, or 'image' of the sun. The spotless mirror however, in this sense is pre-eminent among all objects. Likewise, Jesus is pre-eminent in creation, because in his life and teachings, God's image is reflected more fully than anywhere else. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that, "the perfections of Christ are called the Word because all the beings are in the condition of letters, and one letter has not complete meaning, while perfections of Christ have the power of the word because a complete meaning can be inferred from a word"¹⁷.

Another aspect of the Word of God is that it periodically incarnates in human form to spiritually regenerate mankind. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that, "Before appearing in the human form, the Word of God was in the utmost sanctity and glory, existing in perfect beauty and splendour in the height of its magnificence. When through the wisdom of God the Most High it

¹⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahá', "Some Answered Questions", Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1984, p 206

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p 207

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p 206-7

shone from the heights of glory in the world of the body..."¹⁸. In his tablet of Wisdom, Bahá'u'lláh states that the "Word of God is the cause which hath preceded the contingent world - a world which is adorned with the splendours of the Ancient of Days, yet is being renewed and regenerated at all times"¹⁹.

The Bahá'í approach to the true nature of Christ is not only consistent with the Word of God in the New Testament, but also with the Wisdom (Sophia) of the Old Testament. Bahá'u'lláh refers to a female figure as the "Maid of Heaven"²⁰ who is sent down to reflect the "beauteous image of the Almighty" in "all created things" and with whom a covenant was made from "time immemorial"²¹. There is also a striking parallel in Bahá'u'lláh's 'Tablet of the Holy Mariner' with the passage from Enoch already quoted, which describes the journey of Wisdom amongst men, her subsequent rejection and return to heaven⁴. Referring to one of the "maidens of heaven", Bahá'u'lláh writes that she "...descended with such an adorning as to illumine the heavens and all that is therein...When she reached that place she rose to her full height in the midmost heart of creation...and sought to inhale their fragrance at a time that knoweth neither beginning nor end...she found not in them that which she did desire... she then cried aloud, wailed and repaired to her own station within her most lofty mansion..."²².

In fact, from the Bahá'í perspective, all the founders of the world's major religions are incarnations of the Word of God in human form.

A brief mention here will be given about the Bahá'í view of the Virgin Birth. Shoghi Effendi writes, "on this point, as on several others, the Bahá'í Teachings are in full agreement with the doctrines of the Catholic

¹⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahá', "Some Answered Questions, p 117

¹⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, "Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", Bahá'í Publishing Trust, India, 1986, p 241

²⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, "Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", Bahá'í Publishing Trust, London, 1978, p 91, p 281, p 283

²¹ *ibid.*, p282

²² Bahá'u'lláh, from the 'Tablet of the Holy Mariner', "Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", Bahá'í Publishing Trust, India, 1986, p 716

Church. In the "Kitab-i-Iqan" (Book of Certitude)²³, and a few other Tablets unpublished, Bahá'u'lláh confirms, however indirectly, the Catholic conception of the Virgin Birth. Also, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the book "Some Answered Questions", explicitly states that "Christ found existence through the Spirit of God"²⁴ which statement necessarily implies, when viewed in light of the text, that Jesus was not the son of Joseph²⁵. This passage suggests that the Virgin Birth was in some sense, a miraculous event. Furthermore, Shoghi Effendi states that, "the possibility of miracles has never been rejected in the Teachings. Their importance, however, has been minimized"²⁶.

As already mentioned in section 4 of this paper, there are other examples of miraculous births associated with prophets and holy men in the Old and New Testament, and Jesus' fatherless birth was not unique. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá', "The honor and greatness of Christ is not due to the fact that He did not have a human father, but to His perfections, bounties and divine glory. If the greatness of Christ is His being fatherless, then Adam is greater than Christ, for He had neither father or mother"²⁷. This passage indicates that the importance of the Virgin Birth lies mainly in its spiritual symbolism. As written in the Gospel of John, "but as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). If this is true for believers, how much more so for Christ, who was the perfect "image of God" (2 Col. 4:4) and the "first born of every creature" (Col. 1:15).

²³ Bahá'u'lláh, "Kitab-i-Iqan" (Book of Certitude), Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1974, p 56

²⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá', "Some Answered Questions", chap. 12, p 63

²⁵ From a letter on behalf of the Guardian dated October 14, 1935, quoted in "Lights of Guidance", compiled by Helen Hornby, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, India, 1983, p 366-7

²⁶ *ibid.*, from a letter on behalf of the Guardian dated Dec. 31, 1937, p 366

²⁷ 'Abdu'l-Bahá', "Some Answered Questions", chap. 18, p 89

8. Conclusion

The theological debates about the nature of Jesus are still continuing, long after the Nicene Creed was signed. The issue still appears to divide Christians into separate, irreconcilable ideological groups. "The Myth of God Incarnate"²⁸, a collection of essays edited by John Hick, when first published in Britain in 1977 immediately set off a theological controversy, received hostile reviews both in the religious and secular press, and was answered within six weeks by "The Truth of God Incarnate" and later by "God Incarnate"²⁹. In addition, a call was made by the Church of England Evangelical Council that the five Anglican authors should resign their orders³⁰. So intense was the controversy that another book only two years after the first was brought out entitled, "Incarnation and Myth: The debate continued" which contained essays by the first book's authors and some of their critics³¹.

It is unlikely that more theology will resolve the issue of the great mystery of the sonship of Jesus and his divinity. On the other hand, it is Christ's life and teachings that provide the clearest 'image' of God. This meaning of the sonship of Jesus is acceptable to people from all religious traditions. It would surely have been accepted by the great Hindu saint Mahatma Ghandi, who describes Jesus in the following way, "To me he was one of the greatest teachers humanity has ever had. To his believers he was God's only begotten son. Could the fact that I do or do not accept this belief have any more or less influence in my life? Is all the grandeur of his teaching and his doctrine to be forbidden to me? I cannot believe so ...My interpretation... is that in Jesus' own life is the key to his nearness to God; that he expressed, as no other could, the spirit and will of God. It is in this sense that I see and recognise him as the son of God".³²

²⁸ John Hick, "The Myth of God Incarnate", SCM Press limited, 1977, London

²⁹ Michael Goulder, "Incarnation and Myth: The debate continued", SCM Press Limited, London, 1979, p vii

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Ian Wilson, "Jesus: The Evidence", p 153

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Bahá'í Guidelines to Healing and the Role of Homoeopathy

Dr. Mozhdeh Foo

Abstract

While the Bahá'í Writings do not advocate any particular system of healing yet Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have enunciated the fundamental principles of health and healing. The paper discusses the principles of the Homoeopathic system of medicine and compares them with those outlined in the Bahá'í Writings.

Introduction

In this paper, I am happy to introduce the friends to one of the alternative systems of therapeutics, namely, the Homoeopathic System of Healing Art, which will be covered in the first part. In the second part of my talk, I will present the principles of health and healing as enunciated in our Faith.

I will not attempt to compare directly the Homoeopathic principles with the Bahá'í guidelines, I will, however, highlight the commonalties, and leave it to the friends to consider its value, as the Universal House of Justice has clearly pointed out that "the Faith should not be associated with any particular school of medical theory or practice. It is left to each believer to decide for himself which doctors he should consult, bearing in mind the principles enunciated"¹ in the Writings.

¹ Universal House of Justice. *Letter dated 24 January 1977.*

HOMOEOPATHIC SYSTEM OF MEDICINE

History

The history of Homoeopathy begins with the discoveries of its founder, Dr. Samuel Hahnemann, a German physician (1755-1843). By the time he was 24 years old he was an accomplished Doctor. The system of Medicine then was very preliminary. Bloodletting and purging were common methods of treatment. He was soon disgusted with the prevalent system of medicine practised at that time, gave up his clinic and became a translator.

Hahnemann had an investigating and truth-seeking mind. In 1789, while translating the book of William Cullen, one of the leading physicians of the era, he was not satisfied with the reason given by Cullen for Peruvian bark (*Cinchona*)'s effectiveness in curing Malaria. Cullen had ascribed the usefulness of Peruvian bark (*Cinchona*) in treating Malaria to its bitter and astringent properties.

By nature Hahnemann was an audacious rebel, unafraid to speak his mind. He advocates audacity in his *Organon* using the Latin words, *Aude Sapere*, meaning, dare to be wise. Hahnemann objected to Cullen's reasoning and wrote a bold footnote to the effect that the efficacy of Peruvian bark must derive from some other factor because there were other mixtures and substances more bitter and astringent than cinchona, yet not effective in the treatment of malaria.

He then decided to experiment for himself to discover the reason *Cinchona* could cure Malaria. Thus he took four drachms of *Cinchona* extract twice a day, until his body responded to its toxic dose with fever, chill and other symptoms similar to malaria. Hahnemann suspected the reason this herb was beneficial in curing Malaria was because it produced paroxysms of chills and fever similar to those of the disease it was treating. The necessity for Methodical discovery of the medicinal properties of drugs was made apparent to him. He spent the next 6 years actively

experimenting on himself and his family and a small group of followers. In 1796, he wrote his first article regarding "The Law of Similars"².

He devoted the rest of his life to experimenting and developing the Philosophy as well as the Materia Medica of the Homoeopathic system of medicine. Subsequently, over 2000 medicines were proved.

Homoeopathy faced great persecution from the pharmacists and the physicians of the time. Hahnemann himself was driven from one city to another till the end of his life. Yet despite all the sufferings, Homoeopathy continued to grow and flourish. Homoeopathy is now popular in a number of countries namely, Germany, Great Britain, Scotland, France, Argentina, and India.

Sources of Homoeopathic Medicine

There are six main sources from which Homoeopathic medicines are prepared. These include:

Minerals: Copper, Gold, Silver, etc.

Plants: Greatest sources of medicines are plants.

Animals: Snakes, poison, spider, Bee, etc.

Human Beings: Parts of human beings like the hormones, bacteria grown in the intestines, diseased parts like the micro-organisms present in diseases like Tuberculosis, Pneumonia, etc.

Chemicals: Sulphuric acid, Nitric acid, etc.

Others: like X-Ray, Magnetic field, Uranium, etc.

² Hahnemann Samuel. *Organon of Medicine*, 6th edition. Translated by William Boericke. Reprint edition. New Delhi: B. Jain Publishers, 1992. Introduction.

Seven Cardinal Principles of Homoeopathy

1. Similia Similibus Curentus (Similar Cures Similar)

This is the basic underlying principle of Homoeopathy and the one from which its name is derived. According to this law, the signs and symptoms that a crude drug, when given in large, repeated doses, can cause in a healthy person, the same it can cure in disease.

2. Proving

Proving is the way in which the drug pictures are built up for each remedy and the curative properties of a drug are ascertained. The proving in Homoeopathy is not done on cats and mice or guinea-pigs but on healthy human beings, the reason being, disease manifests itself not merely by objective signs of sensory impression, but also by subjective symptoms of motor expression. We cannot record the subjective feelings of animals because they cannot express and communicate these feelings. Thus the Medicine to be proved is given in small doses, to healthy human beings (provers), until a reaction is experienced. Provers each maintain a diary in which they keep a careful record of all the symptoms developed in them, whether they affect the mind, body or emotions. After a few months of proving, all diaries are collected and the common symptoms that appeared in all provers are noted down. The most important symptoms are those that appeared in greatest number of provers.

There are also two other sources of information on drug properties namely the observances made in case of poisonings, accidental or otherwise and Clinical Observances which are the symptoms cured in patients unexpectedly taking a particular remedy. These too are noted and added to the *Materia Medica*.

3. Minimum Dose

One of the problems that Hahnemann faced was that of the dosage. Many of the substances which he used were highly toxic in their crude state and although diluting them reduced their side effects, it also, correspondingly decreased their curative powers. After much experimentation he came

across another extremely important discovery which proved to be the answer to the problem. After diluting the medicinal substance in water or alcohol, he vigorously shook the bottle containing the resulting dilution. He called this "shaking succusion". The whole process of alternately diluting and shaking the medicinal substance he called "potentisation" or "dynamization". The resulting remedy was not only freed from toxicity, but to his amazement its curative powers were actually increased, as use in clinical practice proved³.

4. Potency

The discovery that the remedies prepared by potentisation often became more powerful therapeutic agents than the original starting materials was a pure empirical observation. Remedies prepared by dilution and without succusion did not display this increasing therapeutic power. Hahnemann therefore named diluting and succusing his solutions 'potentisation', since this process increased the potency or power of the therapeutic agents.⁴

Hahnemann considered that distilled water, alcohol and lactose (milk sugar) were medicinally inert, so he diluted the medicines in these media. If the remedy was soluble in water or alcohol he mixed one part of the substance with ninety-nine parts of the liquid and submitted the dilution to a hundred vigorous succusions. In other words he banged the dilution on a leather-bound book a hundred times. The resulting dilution was called the first centesimal potency or 1c. He then mixed one drop of this dilution with ninety-nine parts of the water or alcohol and submitted it to another hundred succusions, and called it second centesimal potency or 2c. This he did up to 30 times to produce the 30c potency. This is called the centesimal scale. Today the whole process is usually carried out by machines and dilutions up to 100,000 are made.⁵

³ Garion-Hutchings Nigel and Susan. *Concise guide to Homoeopathy*. Australia: Element Books Ltd, 1993, p. 10

⁴ Gibson Sheila and Robin. *Homoeopathy for Everyone*. Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1987, p. 74

⁵ Garion-Hutchings Nigel and Susan. *Concise guide to Homoeopathy*. Australia: Element Books Ltd, 1993, p. 10

Insoluble materials are triturated (ground up) with lactose in dilutions of 1 in 10 or 1 in 100. After the sixth trituration such substances become soluble and dilution is then continued using the water/alcohol diluent.

After the sixth potency not even a molecule of the original substance is left and yet it exerts such influence which can cure a sick person quickly and without side effects.

Homoeopathic medicines are all sweet to taste and those prepared by succussion bear the smell of alcohol.

5. Single Remedy

This principle follows directly from the principle of cure by like. The Homoeopathic physician is trying to match his patient to the most like remedy, and it follows that the patient should resemble closely only one remedy at a time. The remedy may change, or in acute injuries more than one remedy may be required, but in classical Homoeopathy the remedies are administered one remedy at a time. This is logical on the grounds that the remedies were proved as a single remedy and not as mixtures, and mixtures of remedies may have effects which are different from those of their component parts.

6. Hering's law of Cure-The Law of the Directions of Cure

This was enunciated By Hahnemann's pupil, Dr. Constantine Hering, and is of practical use in deciding how a course of treatment is progressing. Hering stated that a cure should proceed: from above, downwards-from the head or upper regions of the body down towards the feet; from within, out- from the internal organs out to the joints or skin; from more important to less important organs- from the liver, heart or lung out to the joints or skin; from the present backwards in time- going back into the patient's medical history.

Hering realised that disease was the result of imbalance somewhere in the body and that if a true cure was to be effected, the imbalance had to be

corrected. He visualised it as being brought out from the deeper levels of the individual to the surface and finally dispersed altogether ⁶.

7. Repetition of Remedy

In classical Homeopathy a single dose of high potency is given to the patient and, assuming improvement, is not repeated for as long as the patient continues to improve. It is only when improvement ceases or the patient begins to deteriorate again, that the dose is repeated. The low potencies are repeated more frequently depending on the disease.

Biochemic Homoeopathy

There are twelve Biochemic Tissue Remedies, that are a complementary part of Homoeopathy. The former, along with Homoeopathy acts as the opposite blade of the scissors; in completing the curative action of the medicines. Dr. Schussler wrote the treatise on the twelve Tissue Remedies and the Homoeopathic practitioners used it and later on wrote their experience of these remedies.

Theory of Schussler's Biochemic Method

“The idea upon which Biochemic therapeutics is based is the physiological fact that both the structure and vitality of the organs of the body are dependent upon certain necessary quantities and proper apportionment of its organic constituents.

The inorganic constituents are, in a very real sense, the material basis of the organs and tissues of the body, and are absolutely essential to their integrity of structure and functional activity. According to Schussler's theory, any disturbance in the molecular motion of these cell salts in living tissues, caused by a deficiency in the requisite amount, constitutes disease, which can be rectified and the requisite equilibrium re-established by administering the same mineral salts in small quantities” ⁷.

⁶ Gibson Sheila and Robin. *Homoeopathy for Everyone*. Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1987, p. 77

⁷ Boerick & Dewey. *The Twelve Tissue Remedies of Schussler*. 6th edition. New Delhi: B. Jain Publishers, 1992, p. 15

The Constituents of the Human Organism

Blood consists of water, sugar, fat, albuminous substances, chloride of sodium, chloride of potash, fluoride of lime, silica, iron, lime, magnesia, soda and potash. The latter are combined with phosphoric, carbonic and Sulphuric acids. Thus the following 12 tissue remedies were prepared to supplement the deficiency of these constituents.

Calcarea Flourica	Kali Sulphuricum
Calcarea Phosphorica	Magnesia Phosphoricum
Calcarea Sulphurica	Natrum Muriaticum
Ferrum Phosphoricum	Natrum Phosphoricum
Kali Muriaticum	Natrum Sulphuricum
Kali Phosphoricum	Silicea

The biochemical therapeutics aid nature in her efforts to cure by supplying the natural remedies lacking in certain parts, that is, the inorganic cell-salts, and in this way corrects abnormal states of physiological chemistry.⁸

Since these medicines are given in diluted and potentised forms it will enter the blood and intercellular fluids from the mouth and oesophagus and restore disturbed function.

HEALTH AND HEALING FROM THE BAHÁ'Í PERSPECTIVE

Guidelines on Nature of Medicine

Treat Disease through Diet

While Bahá'u'lláh has strongly recommended visiting skilful physicians when sick, at the same time he has advised us to leave off medical treatment once health has been restored. Preference is to be given to

⁸ Boerick & Dewey. *The Twelve Tissue Remedies of Schussler*. 6th edition. New Delhi: B. Jain Publishers, 1992, p. 15

treatment first through diet and later through the use of single herb. He says, "Do not neglect medical treatment when it is necessary, but leave it off when health has been restored. Treat disease through diet, by preference, refraining from the use of drugs; and if you find what is required in a single herb, do not resort to a compound medication... Abstain from drugs when health is good, but administer them when necessary."⁹

Cures Which Are Not Repulsive

Cures in future should be agreeable to smell and taste of man. 'Abdu'l-Bahá enunciating this principle says, "The science of medicine is still in a condition of infancy; it has not reached maturity. But when it has reached this point, cures will be performed by things which are not repulsive to the smell and taste of man- that is to say, by aliments, fruits and vegetables which are agreeable to the taste and have an agreeable smell"¹⁰.

Biochemic Homoeopathy

Although the Bahá'í Faith is not "associated with any particular school of medical theory or practice", as explained by Shoghi Effendi yet we find in the writings a reference made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the Biochemical Homoeopathy system of medicine, as a form of food medicine.

One of the friends of Persia wrote to Shoghi Effendi and asked this question: "Is it true that 'Abdu'l-Bahá has said that biochemical homeopathy, which is a form of food medicine, is in conformity with the Bahá'í medical concept?" The beloved Guardian's reply to this question in a letter dated 25th November 1944 was as follows: "This statement is true, and the truth thereof will be revealed in the future." (The question and answer are translated from the Persian.)

⁹ Esslemont J.E. *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*. 5th edition. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980, p. 106

¹⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*. Translated by Laura C. Barney. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994, p. 257

The Universal House of Justice has also asked us to inform you that it does not wish the above statement to be circulated in isolation from the many and varied other texts in the Writings on medicine. However, you may share it with any of your friends who are interested ¹¹.

Causes of Disease

In the writings there is a great emphasis on the importance of preventing diseases. By knowing what causes disease we can prevent disease.

1. Bodily or Physical Causes of Illness

Disturbance of the elements that compose the human being.

'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "The outer, physical causal factor in disease, however, is a disturbance in balance, the proportionate equilibrium of all those elements of which the human body is composed. To illustrate: the body of man is a compound of many constituent substances, each component being present in a prescribed amount, contributing to the essential equilibrium of the whole. So long as these constituents remain in their due proportion, according to the natural balance of the whole- that is, no component suffereth a change in its natural proportionate degree and balance, no component being either augmented or decreased- there will be no physical cause for the incursion of disease.

For example, the starch component must be present to a given amount, and the sugar to a given amount. So long as each remaineth in its natural proportion to the whole, there will be no cause for the onset of disease. When, however, these constituents vary as to their natural and due amounts- that is, when they are augmented or diminished- it is certain that this will provide for the inroads of disease"¹².

¹¹ Universal House of Justice. *Letter dated 12 November 1975*

¹² 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*. 1st edition. Great Britain: W & J Mackay, 1978, pp. 152-156

2. Sins - Potent Cause of Physical Ailments

“If mankind were free from the defilements of sin and waywardness and lived according to a natural, inborn equilibrium, without following wherever their passions led, it is undeniable that disease would no longer take the ascent, nor diversify with such intensity.”¹³

“But man hath perversely continued to serve his lustful appetites, and he would not content himself with simple foods. Rather, he prepared for himself food that was compounded of many ingredients, of substances differing one from the other. With this, and with the perpetrating of vile and ignoble acts, his attention was engrossed, and he abandoned the temperament and moderation of a natural way of life. The result was the engendering of disease both violent and diverse.”¹³

Thus ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that cause of illness is related to defilements of sin and waywardness, indulgence in one’s persistent biological urges, lack of contentment with simple food and the lack of moderation. Today multitudes of people are weighed down with diseases that are the result of their indulgent nature. Alcoholism, drug abuse and freedom of sex have lead to innumerable physical and psychological diseases.

Alcohol when used chronically causes serious psychological diseases, behavioural problems, disorders of sleep, depression and nervousness. The side effects of heroin are suicidal tendencies, and bodily ailments like liver cirrhosis, pericarditis and infarction of blood.

Another social problem faced all over the world is that of freedom of sex. Venereal diseases and Aids are the serious problems which are the result of this freedom. The unwanted pregnancy especially of young girls aged 14-16 years is another serious issue in many countries of the world. Leaders and thinkers suggest solutions such as the proper use of family planning to solve these problems. They teach in schools how to use preventive measures to avoid unwanted pregnancies and Aids. What they

¹³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*. 1st edition. Great Britain: W & J Mackay, 1978, pp. 152-153

don't examine is the cause of the problem which is freedom of sex and enslavement to one's carnal desires.

3. Emotional Causes of Illness

Negative emotions and lack of spiritual characteristics can affect our health to a great extent.

Bahá'u'lláh says, "Verily the most necessary thing is contentment under all circumstances; by this one is preserved from morbid conditions and from lassitude. Yield not to grief and sorrow: they cause the greatest misery. Jealousy consumeth the body and anger doth burn the liver: avoid these two as you would a lion."¹⁴

Thus a life of moderation and spiritual orientation, with especial attention to renouncing addictive substances, the purity of diet, leading a chaste and holy life, living the life and maintaining rectitude of conduct and obedience to the laws of God for this age is been strongly recommended in the Faith to promote physical, mental and spiritual health.

Conclusion

There are many systems of medicine being practised in the world, one of which is the Homeopathic system of medicine. It must however be made clear that none of the systems prevalent in the world at present can claim to be the be-all and end all of healing. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá "the science of medicine is still in a condition of infancy; it has not reached maturity."¹⁵

Although the Biochemical system of medicine has been approved by 'Abdu'l-Bahá yet we must bear in mind that "No specific school of nutrition has been associated with Bahá'í teachings." and that "...The

¹⁴ Esslemont J.E. *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*. 5th edition. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980, p. 108

¹⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Some Answered Questions*. Translated by Laura C. Barney. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994, p. 257

Faith should not be associated with any particular school of medical theory or practice. It is left to each believer to decide for himself which doctors he should consult, bearing in mind the principles enunciated above."¹⁶

In this paper the cardinal principles of Homoeopathy and the Bahá'í guidelines on health and healing have been described. The purpose of this paper is not to prove that Homoeopathy is the only system of healing but is a possible mode of treatment that could be trusted and considered by the Bahá'ís when sick.

Human beings are created noble and spiritual beings. Therefore all activities and endeavours should increase this nobility and safeguard this spiritual reality from debasement.

A state of complete health exists and can be maintained when spiritually, emotionally and physically the individual, fully aware of his true identity, is able to function at his real potential. He must be free from enslavement and in full control of his self. To avoid enslavement of body and mind we are forbidden the use of intoxicating drinks, opium and other mind-altering drugs and have been requested by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to renounce the use of tobacco. Man can enjoy a much healthier state of being by practising moderation and altering his diet to include simpler foods.

The sociomedical implications of observing premarital chastity and fidelity in marital relationships would be a marked decrease in venereal diseases and all its subsequent complications.

It is hoped that the paper has served its purpose of familiarising the reader with the basic tenets of the Homoeopathic system of medicine and the commonalties it has with the directives in the Bahá'í Faith on health and healing.

¹⁶ Universal House of Justice. *Letter dated 24 January 1977.*

The Bahá'í Faith is a monotheistic religion that was founded in the mid-19th century in Persia. It is a synthesis of the teachings of the world's great religions, and it is based on the principle of the oneness of God and the unity of humanity.

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On the Nature of Bahá'í Communities

Check Woo Foo

Abstract

Some personal reflections on the development of Bahá'í communities in urban societies, especially the relationship between the individual believer and the local community, and that between the local community and the institutions of the Faith, in the context of achieving a significant advance in the process of entry by troops, which is the major focus of the forthcoming Four Year Plan.

Introduction

In a couple of weeks' time, the Universal House of Justice will launch a global plan of expansion and consolidation to end four years later at Ridvan 2000. In a message, dated 31 December 1996 addressed to the Bahá'ís of the World, announcing its decision, the Universal House of Justice summarized the basic requisites in the activity and development of the individual believer, the local community, and the institutions for achieving "a significant advance in the process of entry by troops".¹

Some three years ago, the House of Justice in its Ridvan message brought to the attention of the Bahá'ís of the world the critical need for a massive expansion of the Bahá'í community in the years immediately ahead.² Clear signs of "the growing receptivity of the world to Bahá'u'lláh's Message" reinforces the House's conviction that "entry by troops will

¹ Message of the Universal House of Justice dated 31 December 1995 to the Bahá'ís of the World.

² Message of the Universal House of Justice dated Ridvan 150 to the Bahá'ís of the World.

soon become an established pattern for the growth of the Faith in country after country".³ To assist the National Spiritual Assemblies and all the friends to understand, welcome, initiate and sustain this process, the Universal House of Justice enclosed a compilation and a covering statement, prepared by the Research Department, entitled "Promoting Entry by Troops".⁴

I don't think I understood it then. But I am beginning to understand it now. I have been reflecting a fair bit on the development of Bahá'í communities; and, quite naturally, the development of urban Bahá'í communities is closest to my heart. I have started examining the whole panorama of the development of the Bahá'í Faith since its inception. It is interesting to note that major developments in the Faith during the time of Baha'u'llah took place in the great cities of the world then - Tihran, Baghdad, Constantinople, Adrianople and Akka.

I begin to appreciate that we are participants in a "vast, majestic process that was set in motion at the dawn of the Adamic cycle", some six thousand years ago, "with the planting, in the soil of the divine will, of the tree of divine revelation."⁵

A Vast, Majestic Process

Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, in his second message, dated May 4, 1953, to the All-American Intercontinental Conference, described, in vivid, flowing metaphorical language, and in his usual concise manner, this vast, majestic process that has already passed through "certain stages and must needs pass through others ere it attains its final consummation."

³ Message of the Universal House of Justice dated 9 November 1993 to all National Spiritual Assemblies.

⁴ Statement and Compilation on "Promoting Entry by Troops" prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice dated October 1995.

⁵ Shoghi Effendi. Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971, pp. 153-155.

He wrote, "The first part of this process was the slow and steady growth of this tree of divine revelation, successively putting forth its branches, shoots and off-shoots, and revealing its leaves, buds and blossoms, as a direct consequence of the light and warmth imparted to it by a series of progressive dispensations associated with Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad and other Prophets, and of the vernal showers of blood shed by countless martyrs in their path."

"The second part of this process was the fruition of this tree, 'that belongeth neither to the East nor to the West,' when the Bab appeared as the perfect fruit and declared His mission in the Year Sixty (1844) in the city of Shiraz."

"The third part was the grinding of this sacred seed, of infinite preciousness and potency, in the mill of adversity, causing it to yield its oil, six years later, in the city of Tabriz (1850)."

"The fourth part was the ignition of this oil by the hand of Providence in the depths and amidst the darkness of the Siyah-Chal of Tihran a hundred years ago (1853)."

"The fifth, was the clothing of that flickering light, which had scarcely penetrated the adjoining territory of Iraq, in the lamp of revelation, after an eclipse lasting no less than ten years, in the city of Baghdad (1863)."

"The sixth, was the spread of the radiance of that light, shining with added brilliancy in its crystal globe in Adrianople (1867), and later on in the fortress town of Akka (1868-1892), to thirteen countries in the Asiatic and African continents."

"The seventh was its projection, from the Most Great Prison, in the course of the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Center of the Covenant (1892-1921), across the seas and the shedding of its illumination upon twenty sovereign states and dependencies in the American, the European, and the Australian continents."

"The eighth part of that process was the diffusion of that same light in the course of the first, and the opening years of the second, epoch of the

Formative Age of the Faith (1921-1953), over ninety-four sovereign states, dependencies and islands of the planet, as a result of the prosecution of a series of national plans, initiated by eleven national spiritual assemblies throughout the Bahá'í world, utilizing the agencies of a newly emerged, divinely appointed Administrative Order, and which has now culminated in the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh's Mission (1953)."

The ninth part of this process was the "further diffusion of that same light over one hundred and thirty-one additional territories and islands in both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, through the operation of a decade-long world spiritual crusade whose termination" coincided with the Most Great Jubilee commemorating the centenary of the declaration of Baha'u'llah in Baghdad (1963).

And since 1963, the Bahá'í world community, led by the Universal House of Justice, has initiated the tenth part of this mighty process which must witness "the penetration of that light, in the course of numerous crusades and of successive epochs of both the Formative and Golden Ages of the Faith, into all the remaining territories of the globe through the erection of the entire machinery of Bahá'u'lláh's Administrative Order in all territories, both East and West, the stage at which the light of God's triumphant Faith shining in all its power and glory will have suffused and enveloped the entire planet."

Beginning the Tenth Part

As a member of the Bahá'í world community, entering into the tenth part of this majestic process, I appreciate that the steadily evolving Faith of Baha'u'llah will have to go through "stages of obscurity, of repression, of emancipation and of recognition — stages one or another of which Bahá'í national communities in various parts of the world now find themselves in — to the stage of establishment, the stage at which the Faith of Baha'u'llah will be recognized by the civil authorities as the state religion, similar to that which Christianity entered in the years following the death of the Emperor Constantine, a stage which must later be followed by the emergence of the Bahá'í state itself, functioning, in all religious and civil

matters, in strict accordance with the laws and ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy, the Mother-Book of the Bahá'í Revelation, a stage which, in the fullness of time, will culminate in the establishment of the World Bahá'í Commonwealth, functioning in the plenitude of its powers, and which will signalize the long-awaited advent of the Christ-promised Kingdom of God on earth — the Kingdom of Baha'u'llah — mirroring however faintly upon this humble handful of dust the glories of the Abhá Kingdom.”

“This final and crowning stage in the evolution of the plan wrought by God Himself for humanity will, in turn, prove to be the signal for the birth of a world civilisation, incomparable in its range, its character and potency, in the history of mankind — a civilisation which posterity will, with one voice, acclaim as the fairest fruit of the Golden Age of the Dispensation of Baha'u'llah, and whose rich harvest will be garnered during future dispensations destined to succeed one another in the course of the five thousand century Bahá'í Cycle.”⁶

I also appreciate that the speed at which we travel this road is not totally in our control, and that the detailed itinerary has yet to be worked out, but I think we can already visualise a road map with clear milestones leading to the establishment of the Bahá'í Faith.

A Road Map to Establishment

It is evident the road to final consummation, in the Golden Age of the Faith, through the raising of the standard of the Most Great Peace, nay, even to the stage of establishment — the stage at which the Faith of Baha'u'llah will be recognized by the civil authorities as the state religion — will be long, tortuous, and narrow. The stages that the Faith will have to go through — of obscurity, of repression, of emancipation and of recognition — prior to reaching the stage of establishment will, however, probably take place during our life time or during our children's life time. As the Universal House of Justice has pointed out in the preamble to the

⁶ Shoghi Effendi. *Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971, pp. 155-156.

Four Year Plan, "there are divine deadlines to be met"⁷, and one particular deadline, as discussed below, is dead ahead.

In fact, Shoghi Effendi had stated that Bahá'í national communities in various parts of the world were already finding themselves in one of these stages or another. Clearly, the Bahá'í national community of Iran is undergoing the stage of repression, foreshadowing the trials that will soon challenge the Bahá'í world community.

Nevertheless, the Guardian has assured us that emancipation, however slow the process, of the "valiant sufferers from the galling fetters of an antiquated religious orthodoxy" will take place, that "such an emancipation, which cannot be confined to Bahá'u'lláh's native land, will, in varying measure, have its repercussions in Islamic countries, or may be even preceded by a similar phenomenon in neighbouring territories, hastening and adding fresh impetus to the bursting of the bonds that fetter the freedom of the followers of God's infant Faith."

"Such an emancipation will, in its turn, pave the way for the recognition of that Faith as an independent religion established on a basis of absolute equality with its sister religions, enjoying the unqualified protection of the civil authorities for its followers and its institutions, and fully empowered, in all matters related to personal status, to apply without reservations the laws and ordinances ordained in the Most Holy Book."⁸

In its message of Ridvan 1984 to the Bahá'ís of the World, the Universal House of Justice declared that the Bahá'í world community has emerged from obscurity.⁹ We must now act in unison with the forces unleashed by the Almighty to propel the Bahá'í world community safely through the next stage of its development.

⁷ See note 1 of this paper

⁸ Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America, 1947-1957*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970, p. 141.

⁹ Message of the Universal House of Justice dated Ridvan 1984 to the Bahá'ís of the World.

Dynamic of Crisis and Victory

Shoghi Effendi, in his message of Ridvan 1956 to the delegates of the Annual Bahá'í Conventions, while impelled to share with them his feelings of joy, of pride and of thankfulness following the triumphant termination of the second phase of the World Spiritual Crusade, warned the friends that the "repercussions have spread so far as to alarm a not inconsiderable element among the traditional and redoubtable adversaries of its courageous and consecrated prosecutors. Indeed as it has forged ahead, it has raised up new enemies intent on obstructing its forward march and on defeating its purpose." The Guardian, however, went on to say that "premonitory signs can already be discerned in far-off regions heralding the approach of the day when troops will flock to its standard, fulfilling the predictions uttered long ago by the Supreme Captain ('Abdu'l-Bahá) of its forces."

In the words of the Universal House of Justice, "this dynamic interplay of the processes of crisis and victory characterizes the development of the Faith."¹⁰ In its statement on "Promoting Entry by Troops", the House of Justice quoted the words of Shoghi Effendi that the record of the tumultuous history of the Faith demonstrates "the supreme truth that with every fresh outbreak of hostility to the Faith, whether from within or from without, a corresponding measure of outpouring grace, sustaining its defenders and confounding its adversaries, has been providentially released, communicating a fresh impulse to the onward march of the Faith, while this impetus, in its turn, would, through its manifestations, provoke fresh hostility in quarters heretofore unaware of its challenging implications."¹¹

Organic Growth

¹⁰ See note 4 of this paper

¹¹ Letter dated 31 June 1952, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly. Cited in Statement and Compilation on "Promoting Entry by Troops" prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice dated October 1995.

That "the growth of the Faith proceeds in an organic, evolutionary manner", that "it advances in vast surges, precipitated by the alternation of crisis and victory"⁴, which means its rate of growth is not necessarily uniform, is evident from Shoghi Effendi's delineation of the vast, majestic process at work in the world of humanity, as described above, and from his elucidation of how the Cause of God spread, in a letter dated 18 February 1932, written on his behalf to an individual believer, in which he likened the "state when only isolated souls are awakened "as the "beginning of spring" when "only the few, exceptionally favoured seeds will sprout" and "the quickening of whole groups and nations" as when "the season gets in its full sway, and the atmosphere gets permeated with the warmth of true springtime" and "masses of flowers will begin to appear, and a whole hillside suddenly blooms."

In his book, "On the Shoulders of Giants", Craig Loehle, recognising that the growth of the Faith is organic, draws lessons from biology to throw light on the processes affecting the spread of the Cause of God.

Putting Down Deep Roots

Citing the case of the longleaf pine, a tall majestic pine found in the American southeast, which is the longest lived of the southern pines, found growing on sandy soils where fire is frequent due to drought conditions, Loehle described a growth strategy exhibited by this tree which is indicative of the process that the Bahá'í Faith is going through right now.

He explained, "To cope with fire, the longleaf has developed a unique evolutionary response. When a seed germinates, the seedling produces a thick bundle of needles at ground level. Instead of getting taller each year as most trees do, the seedling gets thicker around each year but stays right at ground level, producing a thicker and thicker cluster of needles. This is called the grass stage."¹²

¹² Craig Loehle. *On the Shoulders of Giants*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1994, pp. 131-132.

"While in the grass stage, it is quite resistant to fire. The growing tip of the tree is close to the ground where temperatures are lowest during a fire and it is further protected by the thick cluster of green needles. When the seedling is sufficiently robust and has deep enough roots, it suddenly shoots up at the rate of three to six feet in height per year. In just a few years it is tall enough and has thick enough bark to survive most brush fires."

"The Bahá'í Faith may be said to have been in the grass stage until recently: putting down deep roots while protected by the leafy green shelter of obscurity."

During the period of quiet growth, the Faith has put down deep roots in the hearts of the believers through deepening, supplemented by the extensive body of publications and translations of the Holy Writings (at last count in 1993, the number of publishing trusts stands at 29 and the number of languages into which Bahá'u'lláh's writings have been translated at 802) and in the soils of the earth in the form of Assemblies (165 National Assemblies and 20,435 Local Assemblies) and appointed institutions (72 Counsellors and 846 Auxiliary Board Members), of Houses of Worship (7), of schools (178 academic and 488 tutorial) and radio stations (7), and of social and economic projects (1344).¹³

Having emerged from obscurity in 1984, we have left the safety of the grass stage and are vulnerable to the fires that rage around us. And like the longleaf pine, rapid growth is essential at this stage in the life of the Bahá'í community in order that we pass through it safely.

I can, therefore, understand why the Universal House of Justice in its in its Ridvan message of 1993 "drew the attention of the Bahá'í world to the critical need for a massive expansion of the Bahá'í community in the years immediately ahead."¹⁴

¹³ The Bahá'í World, 1992-93: An International Record. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre Publications, 1993.

¹⁴ See note 2 of this paper

As Loehle so aptly remarked, "To falter leaves us in a very vulnerable position. We become vulnerable to attack because we are noticed but have small numbers. We become vulnerable when our credibility is questioned as the outside world begins to expect us to put Bahá'u'lláh's teachings into practice in the life of society, even though we may not be financially or administratively ready to do so."¹⁵

Spreading Worldwide

With another analogy drawn from biology — this time an agricultural weed studied in the farm fields of South Carolina — Loehle described another process at work in the spread of the Faith.

He explained, "The weed was found to grow in numbers slowly within individual fields but to spread to distant fields as seeds riding on agricultural equipment. Upon entering a new field it would very gradually increase in that field, being apparently rare there for a long time but providing seeds to be carried to further fields. A computer model of the spatial spread of this pest led to interesting conclusions. As the weed spread in this island-hopping manner, the populations in the newly colonized fields would be very low and easy to overlook. It would go unnoticed until suddenly, after a few years, it would have occupied most fields in an entire county and overrun them. This is because each isolated population was growing exponentially but starting from very small numbers. Because the population was scattered, the numbers appeared smaller than they actually were and the true rate of growth was not evident. This type of exponential growth, based on constant dispersal to outlying areas, is exactly what we see in the progress of the Bahá'í Faith as a consequence of the plans of Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi."¹⁶

¹⁵ Craig Loehle. *On the Shoulders of Giants*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1994, pp. 132-133.

¹⁶ Craig Loehle. *On the Shoulders of Giants*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1994, pp. 133-134.

I am reminded of the directives from Shoghi Effendi in the last year of his earthly life to the friends in both India ¹⁷ and North America ¹⁸ to establish a Spiritual Assembly on a firm and enduring basis with a nucleus of about fifteen Bahá'fs in the community so that the other believers are free to disperse and teach elsewhere, and that they should consider it their duty to do so.

In fact, this same process, as directed by the Universal House of Justice, is at work in the microcosm of the virgin territory of mainland China, which called for the establishment of four hundred localities throughout the mainland and with hundred and fifty of these localities populated by fifteen local believers in the space of a few short years and under the protection of obscurity. At last count, there are already two hundred and ninety localities throughout mainland China, and thirty-five of these localities have fifteen or more local believers.

Shoghi Effendi, in a letter dated 30 June 1952 written on his behalf to a National Spiritual Assembly, has affirmed that "as the Cause spread all over the world its rate of acceleration increases, too ..." and reassured us, if we were wondering whether it is worth the enormous effort, and the expenditure of our limited resources, to establish the Faith in remote parts of the world, that "new centres in Africa, in some mysterious way, have spiritual repercussions which aid in forming new centres everywhere." ¹⁹

The Bahá'í Community Today

When the Guardian launched the World Spiritual Crusade in 1953 the Faith was still in the stage of obscurity. The crusade paved "the way for,

¹⁷ Shoghi Effendi. *Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent, 1923-1957*. Compiled and Edited by Iran Furutan Muhajir. New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995, p. 414.

¹⁸ Shoghi Effendi. *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America, 1947-1957*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970, p. 128.

¹⁹ Letter dated 30 June 1952 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly. Cited in Statement and Compilation on "Promoting Entry by Troops" prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice dated October 1995.

and constitute the prelude to, the initiation of the laborious and tremendously long process of establishing in the course of subsequent crusades in all the newly opened sovereign states, dependencies and islands of the planet, as well as in the remaining territories of the globe, the framework of the Administrative Order of the Faith, with its attendant agencies, and of eventually erecting in these territories still more pillars to share in sustaining the weight and in broadening the foundation of the Universal House of Justice."²⁰

Twelve National Spiritual Assemblies were entrusted with the execution of the crusade. By the end of the crusade in 1963, fifty-six National Spiritual Assemblies were established to elect the first Universal House of Justice. And by Ridvan 1996, the pillars of the Universal House of Justice will have totaled a hundred and seventy-nine.

According to *The Bahá'í World, 1992-1993*, the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies have risen from 3,555 in 1963 to 20,435 in 1993, and the number of localities where Bahá'ís reside stands at 120,046. Altogether, it is estimated that at least 2,112 different ethnic and tribal backgrounds are represented in the Bahá'í community. With its diffusion to 205 countries, the Bahá'í Faith, according to *Encyclopedia Britannica, 1992*, is now the second most wide-spread of the world's religions, exceeded only by Christianity. The membership of the Bahá'í world community has also increased dramatically from an estimated 408,000 in 1963 to over 5 million today.²¹

Rapid Growth

Such deep roots and worldwide spread are the necessary conditions within the Faith for rapid growth. The Bahá'í world community is ready. Therefore, I welcome this process.

²⁰ Shoghi Effendi. *Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971, p. 152.

²¹ See note 11 of this paper

Shoghi Effendi, in his directive dated July 18, 1953, during the opening year of the crusade, stressed that the "twofold task of extension and consolidation must be supplemented by continuous and strenuous efforts to increase speedily not only the number of the avowed followers of the Faith but also to swell the ranks of its active supporters who will consecrate their time, resources and energy to the effectual spread of its teachings and the multiplication of its administrative institutions."²²

This equally vital task — which is one that primarily concerns and challenges each single individual believer whatever his rank, capacity or origin — is that of "winning to the Faith fresh recruits to the slowly yet steadily advancing army of the Lord of Hosts".²³

"Such a steady flow of reinforcements is absolutely vital and is of extreme urgency, for nothing short of the vitalizing influx of new blood that will reanimate the world Bahá'í community can safeguard the prizes which, at so great a sacrifice involving the expenditure of so much time, effort and treasure, are now being won in virgin territories by Bahá'u'lláh's valiant Knights, whose privilege is to constitute the spearhead of the onrushing battalions which, in diverse theaters and in circumstances often adverse and extremely challenging, are vying with each other for the spiritual conquest of the unsundered territories and islands on the surface of the globe."²⁴

ENTRY BY TROOPS

"This flow, moreover, will presage and hasten the advent of the day which, as prophesied by Abdu'l-Baha, 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,

²² Shoghi Effendi. *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America, 1947-1957*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970, pp. 116-117.

²³ *ibid.*, p117

²⁴ *ibid.*

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 reinforce a thousandfold the numerical strength as well as the material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.”²⁵

The steady flow of new active believers to the Bahá'í community will hasten the advent of entry by troops. It is also clear what it is that must continually concern and challenge me, the individual believer, regardless of my rank, capacity or origin.

Conditions Outside the Faith

As the House of Justice has so succinctly pointed out, “the Four Year Plan’s aim at accelerating the process of entry by troops identifies a necessity” not only “at this stage in the progress of the Cause” but “in the state of human society”.²⁶

“Our work is intended not only to increase the size and consolidate the foundations of our community, but more particularly to exert a positive influence on the affairs of the entire human race.”

Viewed in this light, I should not only welcome this process, I should embrace it whole-heartedly. Since the beginning of the human race, how many can claim to have the opportunity, and certainly not due to any merit on my part, to do something that will have a positive influence on the whole of mankind.

So what are the conditions outside the Faith?

Seeing the trees of materialism growing ever taller in Singapore and the trees of spirituality barely discernible above the ground, it is difficult to

²⁵ Shoghi Effendi. *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America, 1947-1957*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970, p. 117.

²⁶ See note 1 of this paper

imagine that the forest of the world is facing imminent devastation. It is at times like this that I open the book, "Citadel of Faith", turn to page 124, and again read the passage "America Passing Through Crisis".²⁷

World Peril

Addressed to the American Bahá'í community on July 28, 1954, some nine years after the Second World War, and at a time when the North American continent was incomparable in material wealth and power, Shoghi Effendi warned that "the crass materialism, which lays excessive and ever-increasing emphasis on material well-being, forgetful of those things of the spirit on which alone a sure and stable foundation can be laid for human society ... is the chief factor in precipitating the dire ordeals and world-shaking crises that must necessarily involve the burning of cities and the spread of terror and consternation in the hearts of men. Indeed a foretaste of the devastation which this consuming fire will wreak upon the world, and with which it will lay waste the cities of the nations participating in this tragic world-engulfing contest, has been afforded by the last World War (Second World War), marking the second stage in the global havoc which humanity, forgetful of its God and heedless of the clear warnings uttered by His appointed Messenger for this day, must, alas, inevitably experience. It was this same all-pervasive, pernicious materialism against which the voice of the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant (Abdu'l-Baha) was raised, with pathetic persistence, from platform and pulpit, in His addresses to the heedless multitudes, which, on the morrow of His fateful visit to both Europe and America (1912-1913), found themselves suddenly swept into the vortex of a tempest which in its range and severity was unsurpassed in the world's history (First World War)."

I was born after the Second World War. But from what I have heard from my late mother, and from what I have read in the books and seen in the movies, it was a time of extreme difficulties and great devastation. It boggles the mind to imagine what it would be like if the Second World

²⁷ Shoghi Effendi. *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America, 1947-1957*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970, pp. 124-127.

War was only a "foretaste of the devastation which this consuming fire will wreak upon the world, and with which it will lay waste the cities of the nations participating in this tragic world-engulfing contest."

The Guardian went on to state that "the American nation ... stands, indeed, from whichever angle one observes its immediate fortunes, in grave peril. The woes and tribulations which threaten it are partly avoidable, but mostly inevitable and God-sent, for by reason of them a government and people ... will find itself purged of its anachronistic conceptions, and prepared to play a preponderating role, as foretold by Abdu'l-Baha, in the hoisting of the standard of the Lesser Peace, in the unification of mankind, and in the establishment of a world federal government on this planet. These same fiery tribulations will not only firmly weld the American nation to its sister nations in both hemispheres, but will through their cleansing effect, purge it thoroughly of the accumulated dross which ingrained racial prejudice, rampant materialism, widespread ungodliness and moral laxity have combined, in the course of successive generations, to produce, and which have prevented her thus far from assuming the role of world spiritual leadership forecast by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's unerring pen (in case we wonder whether He might have missed something) — a role which she is bound to fulfill through travail and sorrow.

Lesser Peace

Abdu'l-Baha in one of His Tablets, known as the Tablet of Seven Candles, declared that the "fifth candle is the unity of nations — a unity which in this century will be securely established, causing all peoples of the world to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland."²⁸ This is that particular divine deadline.

Of course, we are not privy to the exact timing nor the exact nature of the catastrophe that will visit humanity. But the American nation, after passing through "fiery tribulations", will find itself "prepared to play a preponderating role in hoisting the standard of the Lesser Peace", and the

²⁸ Shoghi Effendi. *The World Order of Baha'u'llah: Selected Letters*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991, p. 39.

political unification of the world, in which all nations will be "forced" into, will take place in this century.²⁹

In case I vainly imagine somehow the island of Singapore might be spared these tribulations, I wisely recall Shoghi Effendi's warning of "the devastation which this consuming fire will wreak upon the world, and with which it will lay waste the cities of the nations participating in this tragic world-engulfing contest."³⁰ In any case, I cannot help but note that the end of the century is just outside the duration of the Four Year Plan by 8 months. We are living in interesting times.

It is not difficult, however, to imagine "after mankind has suffered, ... that the people will enter the Cause of God in troops." In a letter dated 5 October 1953, written on his behalf to an individual believer, Shoghi Effendi told the believer that "the Bahá'ís see this new condition which will take place, as one on a mountain top sees the first glimpses of the dawn, before others are aware of it; and it is toward this that the Bahá'ís must work."³¹

And the Universal House of Justice, seated high on the Mountain of God, sees "the growing receptivity of the peoples of the world to Bahá'u'lláh's Message" and is convinced that "entry by troops will soon become an established pattern for the growth of the Faith in country after country."³²

Conclusion

It is clear to me that my role in the Four Year Plan is to contribute towards hastening the process of entry by troops, for I know "the longer

²⁹ Kathy Lee. *Prelude to the Lesser Peace*. New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1989, p. 86.

³⁰ See note 20 of this paper

³¹ Letter dated 5 October 1953 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer. Cited in Statement and Compilation on "Promoting Entry by Troops" prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice dated October 1995.

³² See note 1 of this paper

the Divine Physician is withheld from healing the ills of the world, the more severe will be the crises, and the more terrible the sufferings of the patient." ³³

In the next few months, soon after the launching of the Four Year Plan, I will have to do my part to initiate and sustain the process of Entry by Troops. I will be analysing the approaches to be adopted and the lines of action that I will take, which will form the second part of my report, "On The Nature of Bahá'í Communities."

³³ Helen Hornby. *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference*. New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, p. 89.

Special supplement on scholarship

EXTRACTS FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND
'ABDU'L-BAHÁ AND FROM THE LETTERS OF SHOGHI
EFFENDI AND THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

*Prepared by the Research Department of the
Universal House of Justice
February 1995*

**Compilation on scholarship
not included due to ready
availability elsewhere.**